

The Way of Highest Clarity

The Way of Highest Clarity

上清道

*Nature, Vision and Revelation
in Medieval China*



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*To Anne M. Oppenheim
& Michael J. Oppenheim*

There is in God (some say)
A deep, but dazzling darkness; as men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear;
O for that night! where I in him
Might live invisible and dim.

From *The Night* by Henry Vaughan (1621–1695)

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I first read the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* in the company of Darryl Sterk at the University of Toronto. He entered the text into the computer and produced a first draft of the punctuated text on which the present version is based. The critical edition of the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* was produced by Manfred Porkert (1979) and is the basis for the translation presented here. It is used with permission from the press of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.

The first draft of this manuscript was completed while on sabbatical leave at Fudan University, Shanghai. I must thank my host, Professor Fan Lizhu, for helping to arrange my stay, and to Queen's University, which provided some of the funding for my accommodation.

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Introduction

This book investigates the concepts of nature, vision and revelation within the worldview of the medieval Daoist movement known as the Way of Highest Clarity (Shangqing dao 上清道). It does so by focusing on three Daoist texts associated with that movement, which are presented in a parallel Chinese-English edition. The overall goal is to help bring this tradition to the attention of students of religion and theology and to make the case not only that this is a sophisticated and complex religious tradition in its own right, but also that it is a key element of China's religious heritage, without which it is impossible to claim any basic understanding of Chinese religions. This is a bold claim and deserves some explanation. What is so important about Highest Clarity Daoism and why is it not so well known?

Firstly, Highest Clarity Daoism, originating in the 4th century C.E., represents one of the earliest and most successful attempts to synthesize the foundational religious elements that had already appeared on China's religious scene. These included shamanism, mystical experiences, astrology, the quest for immortality, meditation practices, court ritual and Buddhist concepts of death and rebirth. The synthesis brought these various elements into a single complex system, the highest goal of which was the transfiguration of the body and its pre-mortem ascension into heaven. Should this goal not be attainable other, lesser, forms of salvation were also available to practitioners so that even if they were to die, they could safely pass through the underworld and be reborn, intact, in the heavens.

This religious system deserves careful study because of its focus on the body and the relations of bodies to the heavens and the afterlife. This is, of course, a major focus of many religious traditions. The preservation of the body into the afterlife has been the goal of pharaohs, emperors and all those who have built elaborate tombs in which carefully embalmed corpses have been preserved for millennia. Though this form of religion is not particularly in vogue in the modern world, where religions place their emphasis on "spirituality" rather than "materiality," the widespread mod-

ern practices of embalming and viewing the bodies of the deceased and a hesitation about donating organs for transplant both indicate the continuing cultural and psychological importance of the material preservation of corpses. By studying this tradition we can obtain important material for the comparative investigation of widespread human impulses that cut across a variety of cultures and traditions.

Yet Highest Clarity Daoists were not principally interested in the preservation of corpses but rather the transformation of bodies into a form suitable for a life in paradise. In this regard their ideas bear something of a resemblance to the orthodox Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. But unlike the Christian saints who did all they could on earth to fit their bodies for a resurrected, post-mortem life that would take place after the final judgment, Highest Clarity Daoists saw the afterlife as a worst-case scenario. Better still was to avoid death itself by ascending directly to a higher paradise, conceived not as a realm for the grateful dead but for the deserving living. Heaven, the celestial web of cosmic powers shifting in an eternal cycle of light and dark, day and night, *yang* and *yin*, was the place for the living, not the dead. This book thus investigates Highest Clarity Daoist theology as a unique and original set of religious ideas about life and death that will be of profound interest to any student of comparative religion and theology.

Highest Clarity Daoism also deserves study by those interested in Chinese culture and history, for it synthesized a unique combination of Chinese cultural and religious factors. In fact its religious practices cannot properly be understood except in the context of earlier Chinese ideas about the functioning of the body and its relation to wider processes in nature. In studying this form of Daoism the scholarly gaze thus engages an exquisite brocade of uniquely Chinese religious practice whose meanings can only be unraveled by careful attention to the particularities of Chinese civilization. Moreover, although Highest Clarity Daoism might appeal to the common religious motivations and existential concerns of human beings, it does so in texts couched in a rare and difficult language, even for those who are at ease with classical Chinese. Its documents are thus of high value from the point of view of linguistics and literature.

Indeed the complexity of its language is an essential characteristic of the tradition because it was, first and foremost, an esoteric tradition into which one had to be initiated through years of study and practice. It was not designed, like the five pillars of Islam, for easy and widespread prac-

tice. Nor did it seem to develop a wide lay following, as did Mahayana Buddhism, where the interaction between the community and the laity produced a rich cross-fertilization that helped Buddhism emerge as one of the most powerful religious forces in the world. Perhaps for this reason it came about the Highest Clarity Daoism no longer exists in the form that it did in the fourth century. Of course this is true for all religions. But the difference is that no-one today has quite the same claim upon this tradition as other historical forms of Daoism, as the Highest Clarity patriarchy was absorbed into the Orthodox Unity branch of Daoism in the fourteenth century and its practices were absorbed and transformed into the language of inner alchemy that continues to this day in Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真) Daoism.

This, then, gives us a clue as to why Highest Clarity Daoism is not so well known. In terms of organizational structure, it is a dead esoteric tradition. However, this does not mean that it is important only for its historical value. Although it would be perfectly possible for a historian of religion to explain Highest Clarity Daoism in terms of its role in developing and transmitting a wide array of Chinese religious concepts and practices, this book seeks rather to explain and argue for its significance in the conceptual realm of religious ideas and theologies. In doing so it treats Highest Clarity Daoism not so much as a dead tradition, but something that was, at one time, a live option within the religious imagination of human beings. This book thus pays attention to the ideas and practices of the tradition in their own terms and in terms of the comparative study of religion. It does so by focusing not on personalities and events, but on the theological concepts of the tradition and in particular the concepts of nature, vision and revelation, concepts that are familiar to a wide variety of religious traditions, but which receive a distinctive treatment in Highest Clarity Daoism.

Its concept of nature, for instance, is an expansive one that encompasses the realm of humans, earth and the heavens in a single, but complex, cosmic process of generation and decay, expansion and contraction. Its concept of revelation is founded on the central significance of religious texts transmitted by the hypostases of elemental cosmic powers. Their chief function is to unite the heavenly and earthly worlds so as to provide a means for humans to achieve salvation. The meditative practice revealed by these texts is that of inner vision, and this is the means by which humans can enter into a communicative reciprocity with the heavenly world

and thereby achieve salvation. These concepts of nature, vision and revelation point to an overarching “economy of cosmic power” in which religion provides adepts with a repertoire of practices, or “transactions,” by means of which to mediate cosmic power and negotiate their ultimate fate or destiny. Highest Clarity Daoism is a single, comprehensive religious system, but one that requires careful attention to detail to explain, not least because the details are likely unfamiliar to the contemporary Western, or even Chinese, reader.

Underlying the book’s exposition of these topics is the translation of three texts associated with Highest Clarity Daoism. The first of these texts is the hagiography of a Daoist saint, born Zhou Yishan 周義山 (80 B.C.E.–?), who eventually attained the rank of a perfected transcendent being and was granted the title “Perfected Purple Yang.”

Complementing this text is the first part of the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*, which details, among other things, two visual meditation practices that are typical of Highest Clarity Daoism. These practices, the *Method of the Nine Perfected* and the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* both explain a course of visualization that lasts the period of a year in which at various times and dates gods are to be visually actualized and prayed to. In the first form of meditation, practitioners see the gods enter the body and dwell in specific organs corresponding to the systems of circulating *qi*, or vital force. In the second, they visualize themselves ascend into heaven and obtain audiences with the highest gods of the Daoist pantheon. Thus the individual joins his body intimately and socially with the ranks of the transcendent celestial powers and, with this connection firmly sealed and recorded in the offices of the heavenly courts, finds salvation.

The third of the texts is the preface to a much longer, key Highest Clarity text, written by the late patriarch, Zhu Ziyong 朱自英 (976–1029). It constitutes a mature theological reflection on the relationship between sacred texts and the metaphysics of the Daoist cosmos.

All three texts, detailing biography, practice and theory reveal a key element of the Highest Clarity experience. Together they can be used to help explain the overall religious system: the story of an ideal Daoist life provides a vivid context for understanding the specific details of the various practices; and the insights of Zhu Ziyong reveal how the subsequent tradition came to understand these practices in metaphysical terms.

While it might seem odd to use texts from different historical periods to discuss a single religious phenomenon, this book offers an interpretation of the tradition based upon the argument that they display a theological, rather than historical, unity. This single constellation of theological ideas is thus the proper focus of the book.

From this description, the reader will be aware that my hermeneutical approach is first and foremost that of sympathy, rather than criticism. My goal is not to unmask how the religious ideas of Highest Clarity supported the patriarchal structures of Chinese society, nor to explain the transmission of religious texts in terms of the economic function of religion. It goes without saying that it is important to examine religion in terms of its impact on society and economics. I, however, am not a social scientist or an economist, but rather a scholar of religion interested in religious ideas for their own intrinsic value. My goal is thus largely imaginative, rather than social or historical: to recreate for the contemporary reader some of the principal aspects of the worldview that functioned in Highest Clarity Daoism.¹

In so doing I am motivated by an urgent moral concern for a dialogue of civilizations between China and the West in the arena of religious ideas. Religious ideas, even those originating thousands of years ago, convey core motifs and values that are relevant for understanding contemporary social forces. In the shadow of economic globalization, religions and cultures are being brought into mutual engagement in ways never previously contemplated. This requires students of culture and history to play a role in advancing a dialogue of civilizations. For such a dialogue to be real, the “other” has to be treated with understanding, which is to say occupy-

¹ For an excellent socio-historical study of the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* see Tsai (2008). Tsai’s approach to the study of medieval Chinese religion, which is by far the dominant approach among academic scholars, explores what the texts reveal about the practical functioning of Highest Clarity religion: how it adopted the traditions of earlier forms of Chinese religion and wove them into a new synthesis. Such an approach gives information principally about religion as a socio-historical phenomenon. This book, however, is concerned with the theology and spirituality of Highest Clarity religion. It is interested in developing an interpretation of the texts in which the religious ideas expressed in those texts take center stage. It is also interested in how those ideas compare with other theologies and how those ideas can be valuable in and of themselves as artifacts of human religiosity.

ing an intellectual ground that could potentially be common to both parties.

This book aims to recreate Highest Clarity Daoism as a conversation partner in the study of religious ideas. It does not aim to pronounce judgment upon it. This is quite different from the traditional understanding of the scholar as someone in an ivory tower explaining what other people mean. Understood in this more vulnerable light of dialogue, engaging with the “other,” even a dead, esoteric “other,” is a form of moral activity as well as intellectual activity. It also has the destabilizing effect of calling into question the validity of our own presuppositions. As J. J. Clarke writes:

It is rather an agonistic encounter, an engagement in which we try to enter into and thrive on differences rather than seek to obliterate them, a potentially subversive engagement, in which we are compelled to confront the assumptions, limitations and fractures in our own cultural traditions. It is thus a way of experiencing ourselves from the outside, as other; a point of departure which can lead to an enhancement of self-understanding. (Clarke 2000: 11–12)

This book does not complete the hermeneutical circle by systematically exploring the ways that Highest Clarity Daoism subverts the assumptions of modern or postmodern cultures. That is a project for another day. Rather this book aims to explore Highest Clarity Daoism imaginatively, from the inside, as a religious tradition whose practices and concepts are of intrinsic value as artifacts of human civilization and elements of the human religious spirit.

The major Western scholar who has dealt with this tradition is the late Isabelle Robinet who worked at the University of Aix-en-Provence. She, perhaps more than any other Western scholar of the Daoism, attempted to penetrate Highest Clarity Daoism from the perspective of its philosophical and religious meaning. Her major work on this subject was translated into English and published by the State University of New York Press as *Taoist Meditation* in 1993. Her more detailed two-volume investigation of specific Highest Clarity texts was published in 1984 by the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient and is available in specialized research libraries. More recently, American scholars such as Nickerson (2008) and Bokenkamp (2007) have made enormous inroads into studying the history of religions in this period. With the benefit of their work, it now

seems as though the public attention can be focused on this religious movement once again.

Despite these recent developments, the Way of Highest Clarity remains a relatively unstudied movement within a relatively unstudied religion. Part of the reason for this perhaps lies in the difficulty of engaging and interpreting the chief sources for this movement, religious scriptures that were transcribed and republished in the various editions of the Daoist Canon (*Daozang* 道藏). These texts are difficult like all Daoist texts because until very recently they have only existed in unpunctuated reprints of the 1445 Ming Dynasty Daoist Canon (*Ming Zhengtong Daozang* 明正統道藏). Since then, a more recent punctuated version has been published in Beijing, but early anecdotal reports indicate that not all scholars are happy with the result of editing and punctuating the texts. Nevertheless, having a punctuated text is an enormous advantage over a non-punctuated text and takes away much of the labor that is required in generating a reading of the text. Even with some of this labor already undertaken, the task of translating a text into English still requires considerable effort. This is true for Highest Clarity Daoist texts perhaps more than any other branch of Daoist texts because they were held in such high esoteric regard and display high literary value. The texts are valuable not simply for the instructions they convey about how to reach the heaven of Highest Clarity, but because they were considered to be written manifestations of the Dao itself and thus they were powerful and valuable simply in their own right. The result is that the texts are particularly obscure, containing a vast complexity of religious meaning within a few characters.²

² As an example of the polysemous character of Highest Clarity texts it is worthwhile recalling Edward Schafer's discussion of the Three Primes, or intermediary deities who take up residence in the body. He writes: "Three Primes (*san yüan*) is a multivalent term, but because of the belief in correspondences—the doctrine that phenomena conceal identities or harmonized alter-egos—the various 'meanings' given to the expression do not exclude each other. Primarily they are three astral deities, who may project themselves into the three great 'palaces' of the human body" (1978: 394). Here Schafer indicates that a text that refers to the Three Primes may simultaneously be indicating the three deities, the three fields of the body in which they reside, or other natural phenomena with which they might be in correspondent relation.

In order to make these texts more accessible to scholars and the general public I have chosen to present a punctuated edition of these texts along with a parallel English translation. First, a word about punctuation. The first task for the translator is to choose how to punctuate the text, deciding where sentences begin and end. As an example of the choices required in punctuating the text, it is instructive to compare my translation of the preface to the *Perfected Scripture of the Great Grotto* with a small fragment that appears in Isabelle Robinet's *Taoist Meditation* (1993: 16). Robinet's translation runs as follows: "The *Ta-tung* ... causes a propitious Wind to blow and guides the dance within the void. Suddenly (*bu*) the respiration disperses the form of the ten thousand things..." My translation reads: "... whirling an auspicious wind, drumming and dancing. In midst of nothing, suddenly there is breathing in and out, which scatters the myriad spirits on their way." The basic difference between the two translations comes from how to punctuate the text. Robinet chose to end the first sentence after the words "within the void" (*wu zhong* 無中). I, on the other hand, chose to end the sentence immediately before those two characters. I did so because I considered that those two characters ought to be paired with the next four characters "suddenly there is breathing in and out" (*xu you huxi* 歘有呼吸) to form a single phrase "In the midst of nothing, suddenly there is breathing in and out" (*wu zhong xu you huxi* 無中歘有呼吸). However, it is highly likely that a good case could be made for either of these ways of punctuating the text and, consequently, the specific translations that ensue therefrom.

The reader will inevitably discover that I have sacrificed much poetry on the altar of meaning, and the result is probably a mediocre version that is neither as poetic as the original, yet at times both infuriatingly literal and maddeningly imprecise. I have opted for this unsatisfying middle ground because the reader who has some knowledge of classical Chinese will be able to see how I have made the choices that I have made. My goal here is that these translations will not serve as the last word on Highest Clarity Daoism but will allow the student of classical Chinese to embark on the journey towards reading Highest Clarity Daoist texts. By showing how I have translated and interpreted these texts, I hope that other scholars will be tempted to produce more and better versions of these and other texts. In this way, the field will gain a valuable advanced pedagogical tool and, in the long run, scientific knowledge about Highest Clarity Daoism will be advanced.

A word about the translation of some key terms: the term Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清) may be familiar to some readers as Highest Purity or Supreme Purity. I find the term “purity” unsatisfying because it connotes a whole wealth of meanings in the English language that derive from Biblical concepts of purity and holiness. The concept of purity is furthermore a well-developed category in anthropology and relates to concepts of contagion and disease. None of these meanings are clearly present in Highest Clarity Daoism. Although there are occasional references to the adept’s purifying himself from the turbidity of the world, the sense here is that this turbidity does not constitute a moral contamination that is preventing his ascension to heaven, but rather that the turbidity of the world clouds the adept’s vision. In fact, the adept relies on the penetrating clarity of his faculty of inner vision in order to ascend to heaven. Thus it seems more accurate to translate the Chinese term *qing* 清 as “clarity” rather than “purity.” The second advantage here is that the English word “pure” is now freed up to translate the Chinese character *su* 素 without fear of confusion. A common translation for this latter term is usually “simple,” but this does not always have a positive meaning in English and the alternative translation of “unadorned” is perhaps too unwieldy for frequent use.

From this the reader will also learn that I have taken the approach of translating as much as possible in a straightforward English style even though the texts themselves do not readily lend themselves to this type of translation. In fact a very strong argument could be made for translating obscure Chinese characters with obscure English words in order to convey something of the feeling that the text might have even to someone who reads Classical Chinese. Indeed this is a major approach to translation that has been taken in Daoist Studies. Its chief exponent was the late Edward Schafer, who employed a rich and florid vocabulary of polysyllabic words to convey, quite brilliantly, the flavor of the Chinese original.³ I, however, have chosen a different tactic. In the translations them-

³ See, for example, his translation of the glorious description of Lady Wei that appears in her hagiography: “Empyrean phosphor, glistening high; / Round eye-lenses doubly lit; / Phoenix frame and dragon bone; / Brain colored as jewel-planetoids; / Five viscera of purple webbings; / Heart holding feathered scripts.” (*A Bag of Pearls from the Three Grottos* Sandong zhu’ang 三洞珠囊 8. 22b; trans. Schafer 1977: 230). The use of obscure words such as “empyrean,” “viscera,” or “planetoids” gives a wonderfully archaic and poetic feel to the text.

selves, I have attempted to forge a slightly more concrete and down-to-earth vocabulary because my overall view of Highest Clarity Daoism is that it is a tradition rooted in concrete bodily experience rather than vague mysticism or abstract theology.⁴ It would, indeed, be a mistake to take the high literary value of its texts as indicating some sort of intellectualism. Rather, in Highest Clarity Daoism, the phrases are obscure and complex because they are attempting to convey something of the highly complex somatic experience. It should never be forgotten that this is a tradition that revolved concretely around the bodies of its followers.

I have, however, supplemented the translations with footnotes and commentary expanding and, perhaps, complicating the translations, perhaps even to the extent of making something that appears straightforward on the surface more obscure in the commentary. Indeed the complex and often paradoxical relationship between obscurity and clarity is one of the chief philosophical concerns that underlie the revelations, a theme discussed more extensively in chapter four.

The titles of Chinese texts are generally given in English. The first time a text is mentioned, the Hanyu pinyin and Chinese characters are also given. The titles of texts from the Daoist Canon generally follow the standard translations established in Schipper and Verellen (2004). A complete list of texts from the Daoist Canon, with Chinese characters and *Hanyu pinyin* transliteration, can be found in the bibliography.

Readers who are not interested in the details of translating classical Chinese, will, I trust, benefit from these translations too, because they will be able to see the raw materials, at least in English version, upon which I have based my analysis and drawn my conclusions. None of these texts has been translated into English before. Only the first has been translated into a Western language, but it is published in a book not easily available. Without such translations, knowledge of Daoism will remain the province of a small handful of elite scholars who have been fortunate enough to spend many years of their life learning classical Chinese. Daoism is a vast, prodigious, yet obscure religion, and it requires an army of scholars

⁴ For this reason I have chosen to translate *Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經 as the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, rather than the *Scripture of Great Profundity*. Both are equally valid, with “grotto” emphasizing the concrete, locative character of the text, and “profundity” expressing the abstract, mystical character of the text. See also footnote 6 on page 37.

to decode it. Such scholars will not be produced unless there is a more widespread public appetite for learning about it and until there are more students wishing to enroll in college courses about Chinese religions. This will only come about when more texts are translated into English.

The one ethical dilemma here is that all of the texts translated in this book are esoteric texts that were never supposed to have been published beyond the circuit of initiates. The texts contain explicit warnings that they should not be widely circulated nor, presumably, translated into English. The fact that these are historical texts—collected and published in China for five hundred years yet not the sacred preserve of a living sect—gives the contemporary translator some license in this regard: I do not believe that I am causing offense to any extant religious group by divulging these texts here. On the other hand, my regard for the texts behooves me to disclaim responsibility for any misfortune that may befall those who take up this book. The translations here have been provided for intellectual rather than practical, purposes, and I do not advise anyone to take up Daoist practices of any kind except under the supervision of an experienced Daoist master. Gentle reader, you have been warned.

1. The Way of Highest Clarity

The Way of Highest Clarity flourished for a thousand years in medieval China from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. It was a distinct branch of the Daoist religion formed around its own scriptural revelation transmitted under the authority of a lineage of forty-five patriarchs. Although it no longer exists in any overt institutional form, its practices were absorbed into the mainstream Daoist traditions that continue to this day. It thus constitutes an important link between the earliest organized religious traditions that emerged in the latter Han (25–220) and the modern forms of Daoism that were developed from the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) onwards.

It originated in a series of revelations from a variety of “perfected persons,” former human beings who had been transfigured into powerful celestial gods. The revelations from these gods were written down in texts which describe lush celestial paradises inhabited by a vast panoply of divine personages served by “jade maidens” and “lads,” and who live a life of sumptuous luxury and ease. The texts also explain that the way to this Heaven of Highest Clarity consists in repeating the process by which these perfected beings were revealed in the first place: namely, by mentally visualizing their descent from heaven and their entry into the body of the individual. This can occur at the specific times and places when the vast and obscure operations of the cosmos make this contact possible.

Through this process of visualization, the transformative powers of the gods are once again revealed, and the body of the adept is transfigured into the same type of perfected being who revealed these celestial worlds in the first place. The adept’s body then avoids death completely and, while still alive but in a transfigured state, ascends to heaven in broad daylight, leaving behind no earthly token. Those who do not manage to achieve this transfiguration die but, through the intervention of perfected

beings, may be reborn in paradise as “immortals.”¹ Such persons obtain a position within the celestial hierarchy inferior to that of the perfected beings, but nonetheless avoid much of the trauma experienced by those condemned to a post-mortem existence in the underworld. Those unfortunates are tortured, tried and punished by sadistic officials in the three bureaux of heaven, earth and water in order to work off the accumulated guilt of their misdeeds, and they are separated from their friends and family. Such a fate is to be avoided at all costs.²

HISTORY

By the time the Way of Highest Clarity reached the beginning of its full flourishing in the 5th century, it had already had a long, but relatively obscure history. The person responsible for bringing the Way of Highest Clarity out of this obscurity was Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), the ninth patriarch of the tradition. He was principally responsible for gathering together the various scriptures that had been revealed by the Highest Clarity perfected beings and compiling some of them, probably in 499, into a text known as the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真告; DZ 1016).³

In that text he states: “The scriptures of Highest Clarity appeared in 364 in the East Jin dynasty. Lady Wei of Southern Sacred Mountain, known as the Purple Vacuity Primal Lord, descended from Heaven and bestowed these texts upon Yang Xi [330–386], a secretary in the household of Situ Wang. Yang Xi wrote down these scriptures in the *Li* script. He later gave them to Officer Xu Mi [303–373] and Xu’s son, Hui [341–ca.

¹ The precise meaning of the term immortal (*xian* 先) is widely contested among different movements and historical periods within the Daoist tradition. In the Highest Clarity texts under discussion in this book, the term has a specific meaning in terms of the ranking of various classes of “immortals” within the celestial realms, and is always considered inferior to the “perfected person” (*zhenren* 真人).

² Unlike the Celestial Masters tradition, which specified in great detail the functioning of the underworld, many Highest Clarity texts do not tend to focus on this, preferring instead to emphasize the benefits of a life in paradise (see Robinet 1984: 1.66). A detailed discussion of the evolution of ideas concerning the afterlife in early medieval China, and their relationship to Buddhist concepts of death and rebirth, can be found in Bokenkamp (2007).

³ Two excellent discussions of the *Zhen'gao* can be found in Strickmann (1977) and Bokenkamp (2007).

370]” (Yu 2000: 306). The first order of business is thus to explain this chain of transmission.

According to the *Biography of Lady Wei of the Southern Sacred Mountain* (*Nanyue furen zhuan* 南嶽魏夫人傳; Robinet 1984: 2. C11) Wei Huacun 魏華存 (252–334) was born in Shandong province and was initiated into the Way of the Celestial Masters at the age of 48, eventually attaining the rank of libationer (*jijiu* 祭酒). Her teachers instructed her in the methods of becoming a perfected being but at first she was unable to do so, only achieving the rank of earth immortal, having undergone a “corpse liberation” leaving behind a sword as a token of her body. As an earthly immortal, however, she practiced the methods of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* and eventually ascended into heaven as a celestial immortal (Robinet 2000). She was granted the rank and title of Lady Wei of the Southern Sacred Mountain, Mt. Heng 衡山 in Hunan province, which subsequently became an important pilgrimage site where she was venerated (see Schafer 1977). She also came to be regarded as the first patriarch or, more correctly, matriarch, of the Highest Clarity lineage.

In the time following her death and before her first appearance to Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–386) in 364, other perfected beings began appearing in visions to other Daoist adepts. Hua Qiao 華僑, for instance, was said to have received a visit from the perfected beings Lord Pei 裴 and Lord Zhou 周, the result of which was the *Esoteric Biography of the Purple Perfected Yang*. One Yang Quan 羊權, moreover, received a visit from a goddess in 359 who recited the poems that open Tao Hongjing’s *Declarations of the Perfected* (Robinet 1984: 1.110). Just as Lady Wei was not the first person to attain perfection, so also Yang Xi was not the first person to receive a revelation from perfected beings. Nevertheless, the Highest Clarity revelations were in large number derived from the appearances of Lady Wei to Yang Xi in the mid 360s.

Yang Xi was a retainer in the wealthy Xu 許 household which had moved from the north of China to the south around 185. Yang was, in essence, a religious visionary—someone with the ability to gain access to the celestial realms and have audiences with perfected deities (Robinet 1984: 1.108). He recorded what he saw and heard in these visions and received texts from perfected beings, which constituted the core of the Highest Clarity revelations. He is regarded as the second patriarch of the way of Highest Clarity.

Xu Mi 許謐 collected Yang's revelations and kept them largely within the Xu family. He is also regarded as a patriarch of the tradition, the third.⁴ Some time before his death in 373, his short-lived son Xu Hui 許翮 (341–370) became the fourth patriarch. Xu Hui retired to Mt. Mao 茅山 close to present-day Nanjing, which became the operational base and, later, center of pilgrimage of the Highest Clarity tradition.⁵ By the year 400, Yang Xi's revelations had become more widespread and it was possible, for the first time, to speak of Highest Clarity as a tradition that was more than simply a family affair.

In terms of the social setting of this early religious movement, we know that the development of the Way of Highest Clarity was tied to important political questions. After the fall of Luoyang 洛陽 in 311, families from the north of China moved south bringing with them the faith of the Celestial Masters. They regarded the spirit cults of southern China as a kind of common or "profane" religion (Strickmann 1977: 7). Religious strife accompanied the new political reality and, by converting to Daoism, the Xu family allied themselves with the Imperial faction. As the tradition developed it achieved a synthesis of practices derived from southern Chinese spirit mediums and the theology of northern Chinese Daoism. The religious tradition that emerged from this synthesis was to "transcend and transform both the indigenous and imported traditions" (Strickmann 1977: 9). The *Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* reveals how this process of "transcending and transforming" the various extant traditions took place.

By the 5th century of the Common Era, therefore, the Way of Highest Clarity became what we could legitimately call a fully-fledged religious tradition. Xu Huangmin 許黃民 (361–429), grandson of the third patriarch, moved to Zhejiang province and transmitted the texts to the Ma 馬 and Du 杜 families. However, his son and one Wang Lingqi 王靈其 also

⁴ At this early stage the title of patriarch, retrospectively applied to Xu Mi, should not be taken to indicate that he was in charge of a large religious institution. In Highest Clarity ecclesiology the essential element of being the patriarch was to be the guardian of the scriptures, which in the time of Xu Mi did not circulate beyond the Xu family. Nevertheless because of the extended nature of the Chinese family, it is possible that these scriptures received a wider following that might be imagined by the English concept of a "family tradition."

⁵ For this reason, the Highest Clarity tradition is sometimes known as the Maoshan, or Mt. Mao, tradition.

obtained the texts and made money by crafting forgeries and selling them to others. By now the reputation of the scriptures had become more widespread throughout southern China. The problem was that some of the scriptures were authentic and others forgeries. From an institutional perspective the integrity of the tradition depended on being able to establish the authenticity of the texts. The patriarch, as guardian of the scriptures, held authority only insofar as the scriptures were regarded as authentic.

The task of the subsequent patriarchs was thus to ensure their authority by compiling the authentic revelations and distinguishing them from the forgeries. Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–477) the seventh patriarch established the Monastery of Venerating Emptiness (Chongxu guan 崇虛觀) where he collected Highest Clarity scriptures. Around the same time, Gu Huan 顧歡 (420/8–483/91) attempted to distinguish the authentic texts from the forgeries and compiled them into a compendium called *Traces of the Perfected* (*Zhenji jing* 真迹經), which no longer exists (Robinet 1984: 1.110). Only the ninth patriarch, Tao Hongjing, compiled Yang Xi's revelations into the scriptures that exist today. Although Tao had been destined for a career in government, he retired to Mt. Mao in 492, where he oversaw the operations of the monastery and compiled the *Declarations of the Perfected*, his "official record" of Highest Clarity texts. There is no doubt that later scholars edited and elaborated Tao's versions of the Highest Clarity texts, while other texts also came to be regarded as important Highest Clarity scriptures. Still, the lineage coalesced and prospered around his version of Yang Xi's recordings. In that regard, although he officially is the ninth patriarch, he was really the first patriarch of the tradition as it became widespread and influential across China.

Once this was done or at least accepted, under Tao Hongjing, Highest Clarity entered the mainstream of Daoist society. Although proscribed at times during the sixth century due to Buddhist influence at the imperial court, Daoism flourished overall. Under the Tang dynasty (618–906), the imperial court witnessed the flourishing of a number of Highest Clarity Daoists, including the eleventh patriarch, Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735) who was eulogized by Empress Wu 武后 (625–705; Kirkland 1986).⁶ By this point, Highest Clarity Daoists developed new texts, in-

⁶ Sima Chengzhen's *magnum opus*, "Sitting in Oblivion" (*Zuowang lun* 坐忘論) has been translated by Livia Kohn (1987).

cluding systematic theologies, alchemical works and even poetry. Influenced by the original revelations and maintaining theological and institutional unity with them, these texts operated in a social world far removed from that of Yang Xi. Other patriarchs continued to be influential at court, such as Zhu Ziying, the 23rd patriarch and author of the preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* translated below. The last patriarch was the 45th patriarch Liu Dabin 劉大彬 (fl. 1317–1328).

ANTHROPOLOGY

Medieval Daoists relied on a conception of the human body that was closely related to the traditions of medicine and alchemy as they emerged in the latter Han dynasty. Beyond that their view of the body goes back to early ideas of vital force (*qi* 氣) and seminal fluid (*jing* 精). The basic model here is that life consists of the circulation of vital forces through the body. These circuits include breathing, the flow of blood through arteries and veins and the passage of *qi* through meridians and organs. So long as these fundamental fluids continue to circulate, the body is healthy.⁷ Whenever the flow is blocked or destabilized, disease and symptoms result. Disease comes about through the penetration of noxious forces into the body, either the result of natural phenomena, the work of demons, or eating too much or too little of the wrong kind of food.

This view of the body as a self-regulating cybernetic system also functioned as a template for understanding other parallel systems. Early Chinese political theorists, for instance, understood the operations of the state by analogy with the body. Just as the health of the body depends on the free flow of the various fluids, so also the health of the state depends on the free circulation of power and knowledge among the various ranks of government. Such a view is revealed in the 3rd century document known as the *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü* (*Lüshi chungiu* 呂失春秋):

Human beings have 360 joints, nine bodily openings and five yin and six yang systems of function. In the flesh tightness is desirable; in the blood vessels free flow is desirable; in the sinews and

⁷ Fluid mechanics distinguishes between two types of material: fluids, which response to stress by flowing; and solids, which respond to stress by being deformed. In this technical sense, therefore, the body is a combination of solid and fluid materials. Health is maintained when the fluids (including air, blood and *qi*) can flow, and the solids (bones and flesh) can remain free from deformity.

bones solidity is desirable; in the operations of the heart and mind harmony is desirable; in the essential *Qi* regular motion is desirable. When [these desiderata] are realized, illness has nowhere to abide, and there is nothing from which pathology can develop. When illness lasts and pathology develops, it is because the essential *Qi* has become static. ...

States too have their stases. When the ruler's virtue does not flow freely [i.e., if he does not appoint good officials to keep him and his subjects in touch] and the wishes of his people do not reach him, a hundred pathologies arise in concert and a myriad catastrophes swarm in. The cruelty of those above and those below toward each other arises from this. The reason that the sage kings valued heroic retainers and faithful ministers is that they dared to speak directly, breaking through such stases. (Sivin 1995: 6).

The author thus argues that the “virtue” of the ruler is, in a sense, a type of fluid that circulates throughout the state. The term “virtue” (*de* 德) here connotes both a moral force and a charismatic power. The practical implication is that it is not sufficient for the emperor to remain detached from the people, virtuous though he might be. Rather his “virtue” needs to flow so it can be sufficiently “virtuous.” This means the deployment of officials throughout the empire, who are able to carry the emperor's moral authority to the people and feed back the responses of the people to the court. Of these two directions, the latter is the harder one to get right. The sage kings of old employed retainers unafraid to speak the truth who conveyed the necessary feedback to the political center. In this way the cycle would be complete and the emperor could remain in power. The paradox at the heart of this is that maintaining the status quo depends upon an inner dynamism. When stasis sets in, decay is inevitable. This is as true for the state as it is for the body.

The analogy between body and state developed in ever more complex and sophisticated theories. Further “systems theories” of the body appeared, examining all the possible correspondences between diet, climate and the functioning of the internal organs. These new theories did not dispense with the earlier analogy between the state and the body but in fact built upon it. But whereas previously the body had been the analogy for the understanding of the state, now the state became the analogy for understanding the body. The classic expression of this is to be found in the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic, Simple Questions* (*Huangdi neijing suwen* 黃帝內經素問):

The cardiac system is the office of the monarch: consciousness issues from it. The pulmonary system is the office of the ministers; oversight and supervision issue from it. The hepatic system is the office of the General; planning issues from it. The gall bladder system is the office of the rectifiers; decisions issue from it ... [and so on for the twelve systems of body functions associated with internal organs]. It will not do for these twelve offices to lose their coordination. (Sivin 1995: 7)

In this view each organ of the body is a microsystem in charge of one aspect of the overall functioning; each microsystem is understood in analogy with the various offices of the state. Health, moreover, results from the smooth coordination between all these various systems.

Layered over this analogical worldview is a belief in the principle of correspondence, or reciprocity (*ganying* 感應), between various dimensions of the cosmos. In the analogical imagination, cause and effect can be explained by analogy with other comparable systems: just as blocked arteries lead to a heart attack, so also a lack of feedback destabilizes the power center of the state. In the correspondence worldview, however, the relationship between A and B is connected to the relationship between X and Y via a synchronic correspondence. The result is that a transformation in the A–B sequence entails a corresponding transformation in the X–Y sequence. Bodies and other systems are not merely analogies for understanding each other but also connected in a relationship of cause and effect. If the emperor is not doing a good job, this will be manifest in earthquakes, rare astrological phenomena or illness. Correspondingly, sickness in the body may be the result of some transformation in the surrounding environment.⁸

This principle of correlativity between cosmic phenomena is important for Highest Clarity Daoism because Highest Clarity takes as a presupposition that the various systems of the body have ideally to be synchronized with those of the cosmos, especially the cycles of the sun and the moon. This worldview is manifested most commonly in terms of the “five

⁸ Nowadays many people believe that environment is a factor in the health of the body, but this is notoriously hard to prove in the cold scientific terms of cause and effect. Often the best understanding that can be achieved is a statistical correlation that indicates a high degree of probability in favor of some kind of cause and effect relationship, but without being able to explain exactly how or why. Systems theory is an attempt to overcome this deficiency in linear models of causality.

phase” theory, in which the generative cycle of the five elements (earth generates wood, which generates fire, which generates metal, which generates water) are correlated with five directions, five seasons, five colors, five organs of the body and many more categories. In such a correlative worldview the various categories (directions, or seasons) are correlated with each other in a single inter-related cosmos. Thus spring is correlated with the color green, the phase wood and the direction east: all these indicate the beginning of life, or the possibility of flourishing. Conversely, winter is correlated with the color black, the phase water and to the direction north: all these indicated death, or the end of a cycle.

This correlative cosmology leads to the possibility of a religious imagination quite different from the one that developed in the West. The Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are essentially analogical religions: their scriptures provide the myths, the parables and the stories that are analogies for understanding human life. Their religious imagination is a narrative imagination, with the various stories performed in rituals and expounded in sermons, providing meaning for the narrative of individual lives. Conversely, the religion of Highest Clarity is essentially a correlative religion: its scriptures provide the clues as to the correspondences between the heavens, the earth and the human body. It does not aim to explain the “meaning of life” but rather aims to transform life by exploiting the various correspondences between the systems of the body, the earth and the heavens.⁹

By this point, it should be clear that from the Chinese perspective the body can be understood as a system of dynamic fluids that operate in correlation with the cycles of the seasons, the sun and the moon. This is, in fact, the standard anthropology of the body that operates in traditional Chinese medicine. What is different in Daoist religion is that a theological layer is added to these various cycles by incorporating gods into the understanding of how the body functions. The *locus classicus* for this theological view of the body is the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing* 黃庭經), a key document that helped pave the way for the Way of

⁹ This is not to suggest that West Asian religions are devoid of correlative imagination, or that Highest Clarity Daoism is devoid of the analogical imagination. Rather it is to suggest that these two traditions have their own distinct emphases when it comes to the function of the religious imagination.

Highest Clarity.¹⁰ Just as in the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* the heart is to be understood as the office of the monarch, in this text, the various organs of the body are to be understood as courts, that is, official residences. These official residences are not the residences of ordinary mortals but of deities, body-gods envisioned through the power of the body's inner light.

Consider, for example, how the *Yellow Court Scripture of Inner Luminance* (*Huangting neijing jing* 黃庭內景經; DZ 331) discusses the heart:

The palace of the heart system is a lotus canopy
Under which the lad, from the family of Cinnabar Prime,
Governs and presides over cold and heat and harmonizes the
healthy circulation [of blood].
He wears flying robes of cinnabar brocade and cloaks himself in
jade gauze.
With a golden hand bell and a pearly sash he dwells in tranquility,
Regulating blood and managing destiny [so that] my body will
not wither.

In this view the heart presides over the circulation of the blood in the body. This is similar to the earlier notion in the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* that “the cardiac system is the office of the monarch: consciousness issues from it.” The key difference here is that presiding over the circulation of the blood is not simply an abstract “analogical monarch” but in fact a very specific deity, namely, the “lad from the family of Cinnabar Prime.” He ensures that the “cold” and “hot” (*yin* and *yang*, systolic and diastolic) process of circulating blood is harmonious and healthy. By dint of the inner luminance of the body, moreover, this lad can be visualized wearing court dress and carrying symbols of authority (the bell and

¹⁰ The text exists in two versions, a more detailed and complex inner (esoteric) version, the *Supreme Yellow Court Jade Scripture of Inner Luminance* 太上黃庭內景玉經 (DZ 331), and a simpler, shorter outer (exoteric) version, the *Supreme Yellow Court Jade Scripture of Outer Luminance* 太上黃庭外景玉經 (DZ 332). Scholars have debated the relationship of these two versions to each other. Robinet (1993: 56) suggests that the outer version may have been an edited version for non-initiates. Schipper (1975a) suggests that the inner version represents a complexification of the earlier outer version. The present discussion makes reference to the inner version because it more closely resembles the output of the Highest Clarity movement than the more popular and simple text of the outer version.

the sash). To the existing Chinese medical anthropology, the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* thus adds a specifically religious dimension, that of understanding the functioning of the body in terms of the activity of specific gods who inhabit the various organs. This is important because through this link to the gods Highest Clarity Daoists are able to forge connections between human life and the cosmic power of the Dao. This link is not simply an analogical link but a correlative link. Just as the functioning of the body transforms in correlation with the various rhythms of the earth, so also the functioning of the body can be transformed by correspondence with the heavens. This opened up a whole new wealth of possibilities within the “biospirituality” of Chinese Daoism. To see how this works it is helpful to begin from the opposite end of the problem, for the key to understanding how the body is connected to the gods lies in understanding the specific nature of the gods within the theology of Highest Clarity.

THEOLOGY

In Highest Clarity theology,¹¹ it is possible to distinguish three realms and three classes of persons within the vast and mysterious operations of the Dao: the earth, populated by humans, terrestrial immortals, demons, ghosts and spirits; the underworld, populated by the earthly (*yin*) spirits of the departed; and the heavens, populated by high gods and various classes of transcendent beings. These three realms, moreover, are interconnected and have somewhat permeable boundaries. The function of Highest Clarity religion is basically to negotiate these boundaries for the benefit of the individual.

¹¹ The term “theology” is always controversial when applied beyond the boundaries of the Abrahamic religious traditions. If theology is construed as a body of intellectual discourse about the nature of gods, then there is little evidence of theological activity amongst Highest Clarity Daoists. Mostly their writings concerned the practice of their religion rather than intellectual reflection upon it. Despite this, Highest Clarity Daoists clearly had a theology, understood as a worldview in which gods and other constellations of spiritual power play key roles. The aim of this book is, in part, to discover what that theology was, that is to say, to expose and clarify the ideas that Highest Clarity Daoists held about the nature and function of spiritual beings. This requires excavating beneath the surface of the texts to discover the absolute theological presuppositions that ground the discourse and the practices of the Way of Highest Clarity.

These negotiations can be understood as transactions within an overall economy of cosmic power. Each transaction brings about a change within the various dispositions of power in the cosmos. When ghosts and demons travel on earth bringing chaos and havoc in their wake, they can be exorcised by recourse to the superior power of celestial deities. When humans die they are at the mercy of officials in the underworld who conduct elaborate inquisitions to determine the appropriate punishment for sins committed during their lifetime. Such officials can be overruled by recourse to the superior power of celestial deities, a chief concern documented in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (see Bokenkamp 2007). Living humans are spiritual beings whose vitality depends upon the power of life-giving forces within the body over deathly, maleficent forces, both of which are endowed at conception and developed in the womb. Such vital power can, once again, be ensured by recourse to the superior power of celestial deities. Even better, the body can be radically transfigured into a vehicle of light capable of ascending to the stars and living on high in the celestial realms. Such a transfiguration can also be engineered by recourse to the superior power of celestial deities. One's social status in such a transfigured state depends also on the fate of one's ancestors and relatives some of whom could be languishing in the underworld. They may be liberated from there and reborn as heavenly immortals. Such a transaction may likewise be achieved by recourse to those same higher powers. In all these cases, the religion of Highest Clarity functions as a transaction or an exchange of power designed to achieve the adept's ends by reconfiguring the operations of the cosmos.

It should be noted, however, that these ends are not the petty goals of ordinary men and women: fame, wealth and social status. Nor are they the ethical goals of "civilized" Confucian society: ensuring the prosperity of the community, the maintenance of patriarchal order and the fertility of animals and crops. They are, rather, wholly spiritual goals, focused on the ultimate concern of human existence: life itself, as well as how to ensure life, the fullness of life and the eternity of life for oneself and one's family.

This description of the religious goals of Highest Clarity Daoism may well have parallels in many other religious traditions. What makes Highest Clarity a thoroughly Daoist tradition, however, is that life is defined as the potential for transformation. Life does not mean the preservation of the status quo, or "immortality," understood as deathlessness. Life

means the relentless possibility for radical creativity, a concept articulated in chapter 25 of *The Way and Its Power* (*Daode jing* 道德經) in the phrase “The Dao follows its own spontaneity” (*dao fa ziran* 道法自然). This chapter of the foundational scripture of Daoism articulates a basic Daoist cosmology and cryptically explains the relationship between humans, earth and heaven as follows: “Humans follow the earth / the earth follows the heavens / the heavens follow the Dao / the Dao follows its own spontaneity.” Unlike the other dimensions of the cosmos, the Dao itself does not have any external guiding principle. The Dao is boundless, creative, spontaneous, and free simply to become whatever it becomes. The corollary to this abstract cosmic principle is the concept of *de* 德, normally translated as “virtue” or “power,” and which represents the force of the Dao when concretely embodied in the individual. One filled with such “cosmic power” is described like a child, full of raw potential, capable of anything and impervious to injury (ch. 55). Such a child contains within himself the full wealth of unrealized possibilities that an old man can only dream of.

The inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (3rd c. B.C.E.) develop a different vocabulary to imagine a life free of circumscription. The first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* speaks of “free and easy wandering,” of fish that turn into birds, of Liezi who “rode the wind” but who could have achieved so much more if only he had “wandered through the boundless.” With this symbolism *Zhuangzi* links together the life of the individual with the transformative powers of the cosmos, daring the individual to transcend the conventional strictures of routine society and to explore the boundless possibility that freedom can entail. Such a freedom is not only denominated positively (free to travel) but also negatively (freedom from convention). This negative emphasis is summed up as follows: “The perfected person has no self; the holy man has no merit; the sage has no fame” (ch. 1). In each of these three cases, the concepts of self (or ego), merit and fame are viewed negatively because of their dampening effect on the inner life of the Daoist. When people concern themselves with the preservation of some external concept of their self, or some external goal such as merit or reputation, this inevitably entails a corresponding diminution in the creative possibilities available to the inner life.

The Highest Clarity tradition, therefore, goes back to the tradition of Laozi and *Zhuangzi* and like them focuses on the concept of “potential” or “cosmic power.” Like the *Zhuangzi*, moreover, it images this power in

concrete ways related to travel: Highest Clarity texts speak of journeying up the mountains, through secret networks of caves, riding up into the heavens, circling through the stars, or traveling through the immense “inner space” of one’s own body. The goal is to return to the root of the Dao, to embrace cosmic power and to become a radically transfigured being. In true Daoist fashion, moreover, adepts reach this goal elliptically through indirect transactions with intermediaries, the perfected. Thus the perfected beings whom the tradition came to glorify were not those who simply disappeared from earth never to be seen again but ones whose transfigured state enabled them to be a constant medium between heaven and earth, conduits of transformative power, appearing, disappearing, shifting and shaping themselves.

In order to understand more concretely how this fundamental theological framework appears in Highest Clarity, it is necessary to examine some of the Chinese vocabulary used within its scriptures. This vocabulary needs to be explained carefully because the English terms that are conventionally used in translation carry nuances of meaning that are not always present in the Chinese.

The first concept that needs to be explained is that of *ling* 靈 which is conventionally translated as “numen” or “numinous power.” “Numen” is a term that derives from the Latin *numen* (plural *numina*) whose root meaning is “a nod of the head.” The term was used to mean a manifestation of the power of a god. In Roman times the word *numen* thus never appeared on its own and only with the accompanying name of a divinity, such as “the *numen* of Jupiter” (Schilling 2005: 6753). However, scholars in the nineteenth century began to use *numen* in a slightly different way, relating it semantically to the Polynesian term *mana*, defined as “an autonomous impersonal force.” According to Schilling (2005) this reconceptualization of the term was not linguistically justified. Nonetheless, the term *numen* has conventionally been used to translated the Chinese term *ling* in this sense.

In the Highest Clarity scriptures *numen* never refers to a personal deity or a specific force within the cosmos.¹² Rather it remains always elusive carrying with it the meaning of “undifferentiated cosmic power” or “the raw

¹² Unlike the Latin term, which was usually in the form of a noun and accompanied by a name (the *numen* of X), the Chinese term most frequently appears as an adjective, referring to the “numinous” or “mystical” quality of something else.

capacity for transformation.” Such a power must, by definition, be mysterious (*xuan* 玄) because it does not have any specific form or shape. Highest Clarity religion, as noted above, is built around transactions of this fundamental cosmic power. The problem is that so long as this power remains infinite and indefinable, it is by definition inaccessible to human beings. Something is therefore necessary to bridge the finitude of the human condition with the infinite depth of the numinous power of the Dao itself. Such a bridge is to be found in the spiritual realm, the realm in which the transactions of cosmic power concretely take place.

Shen 神, a term conventionally translated as “spirit” or “spirits,” is the essential concept for understanding the transactions of cosmic power. *Shen* relates to an intermediary realm between the human body and the unfathomable cosmic forces of the Dao. Spirits are never “ultimate realities” for Highest Clarity Daoists, only intermediaries between the person and the cosmos. As such the spiritual realm comprises two aspects, namely, the gods in the heavens and the spirits in the body. The basic “spiritual” content of the Highest Clarity revelations is how the various religious transactions forge effective connections between these two dimensions.

Broadly speaking, the term *shen* is used to refer to a specific configuration of cosmic power. Thus whereas *numen* is used to refer to undifferentiated and therefore mysterious power, “spirit” is used to refer to a configuration or specific form of cosmic power that may be named and made accessible to human beings. Such configurations of power are known basically as “spirits” (*shen*) and are envisaged as being located in specific places within the heavens or in the body, the various “grottos” which are understood simultaneously as grotto heavens in the sky, mountain grottos on earth and grotto chambers within the body. Spirits are thus the principal intermediaries between the Highest Clarity adept and the cosmic power of transformation, traveling freely between these various dimensions of existence.

To make matters slightly complicated, however, Highest Clarity texts generally restrict the term *shen* to the aspect of the spirits that resides in the body. Conversely, spirits who are basically envisaged as maintaining their principal residence in the heavens are most frequently referred to by their titles as “Imperial Lords” (Dijun 帝君), which indicates that they have a specific power or ability in a specific area, or authority over a specific domain in the cosmos. Generally, this book refers to such beings as

“gods.” The point of the Highest Clarity revelations, however, is that the “gods” of the heavens can become the “spirits” in the body, and it would be wrong to try to create some fundamental distinction between “gods” and “spirits.” Both are part and parcel of the same spiritual realm, which is understood as a realm of communicative transaction between the body and the Dao. Of these various Imperial Lords, perhaps the most significant is the Imperial Lord of Great Subtlety (Taiwei dijun 太微帝君), who dwells in the Palace of Great Subtlety (Taiwei gong 太微宮) and has the power to confer upon the Highest Clarity adept the title of “perfected person.”

The second aspect of this “spiritual realm” is, then, the various groups of spirits who are visualized as having the power to transform the body from within. These spirits are the Three Primes (Sanyuan 三元), the Five Spirits (Wushen 五神), the Eight Effulgences (Bajing 八景) and the Nine Perfected (Jiuzhen 九真). Each Highest Clarity text stresses a different scheme for relating the body to the heavens, and in the texts examined in this book all four of these schemes are in evidence. The Three Primes are visualized in the grotto-chamber in the brain; they are also each coordinated with the three cinnabar fields (*dantian* 丹田) of the body. The Five Spirits are coordinated with the five directions (the four cardinal points plus the center) and the three cinnabar fields, plus the left and right of the body. The Eight Effulgences are correlated with the eight nodes of the solar year (the two equinoxes, two solstices and the intermediary points). They are also replicated three times, each associated with the three cinnabar fields, producing a group of twenty-four spirits. The Nine Perfected are associated with the nine months of gestation and the nine vital areas of the body. The net effect is that the revelations of Highest Clarity developed a complex pantheon with various schemes for relating these gods to the body.

In addition to this basic array of deities, there is one more class of “spirit.” These are the gods who were already known about in Chinese religions and who were incorporated into the Highest Clarity. These include the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwang mu 西王母),¹³ who rules

¹³ In the Highest Clarity pantheon, the Queen Mother of the West was given a new and exalted title: Primal Mistress and Grand Realized One of the Nine Numina of the Tortoise Platform of White Jade (*Baiyu guitai jiu ling taizhen yuanyun* 白玉龜台九靈太真金母元君; Schafer 1978: 390).

over an immortal paradise to the west of China; the Controller of Destinies (Siming 司命) who fixes the times of people's deaths; and the Jade Sovereign (Yuhuang 玉皇) who presides over the various realms of heaven. In addition to these deities we can also list two hypostases of the abstract cosmic processes of *yin* and *yang*. These are the Mystery Mother (Xuanmu 玄母) and the Primordial Father (Yuanfu 元父), the ancient progenitors of human life (Robinet 1984: 1.129).

Since the point of this complex pantheon and its various correlations with the body easily gets lost in the details, it is perhaps worth reiterating that the goal of all of the Highest Clarity revelations is to give the adept a deeper, fuller and richer grasp of the transformative powers of the cosmos. This is envisaged as ascending into heaven in broad daylight as a perfected immortal, the ultimate transaction of cosmic power between the adept and the Dao. This is achieved by enabling the deities to transfigure the vital processes of the body of the adept. The goal is life: a spiritual, embodied life open to the possibility of constant transformation.

RELIGION

Given these contours of Highest Clarity theology and anthropology it is inevitable that the themes of travel and vision should rise to the fore in the various methods and practices that constitute the religious practice of the Highest Clarity Daoists. The overall goal of the religion is to communicate: to interpenetrate and knit together the celestial spirit world with the inner body world. This is achieved by effectively fusing together the motifs of travel and vision into a form of meditation that bears a strong resemblance to the practices of spirit mediums. Within the broad category of spirit mediums in Chinese religions, it is possible to distinguish two separate movements. One is where the spirit enters into the body of the human, taking over his voice, and communicating through him either orally or through the use of a planchette or other writing device. The other is where the human's spirit leaves his body and goes on an ecstatic flight into the spirit world and communicates with the spirits there.¹⁴ Both of these elements are present within the Highest Clarity

¹⁴ The classic exposition of this latter form of spiritual communication is in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭), a region in southern China, attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340–278 B.C.E.; see Hawkes 1959). Of particular interest here is the poem entitled *The Far-Off Journey* (*Yuanyou* 遠遊), which describes the journey of the adept

tradition. In the former case, spirits are envisioned as descending from the sky to enter into the body; in the latter case, the adept visualizes himself ascending into the sky in the company of the spirits. Unlike the usual tradition of spirit mediums, however, the product of this encounter is not an ad-hoc message from the spirit world about a specific topic, but rather a religious scripture to be copied down and transmitted to those qualified to receive it.

For those living after the original Highest Clarity revelations, the goal of the meditations is not to be a medium for new revelations. Yang Xi's revelations provide a wealth of material to help the adept forge connections with the spirit world, with the goal of transfiguring his body and ascending to the stars. Yang Xi thus reveals a path, or pathways, to the heavens, and that task of the adept is to follow in his footsteps. The adepts are not, it seems, expected to record what they see and experience in the way that Yang Xi did. Rather the experience alone of encountering the gods through inner vision is in and of itself sufficient to begin the process of transformation. In fact, merely having a copy of one of Yang Xi's texts goes some way to starting that process, one reason why the texts were jealously guarded. It seems that the very act of visualizing and engaging the celestial world contains within itself the possibility for transformation, because the spirits are by definition configurations of cosmic power.

But because the powers of spirits are configured in specific ways, not all spirits can be expected to be effective in all circumstances. Thus the texts reveal not simply the mechanism for visualizing the deities but also the dates and times that the visualization can take place and the place within the body that the encounter will focus on. When the systems of the body, its organs and gods, as well as the cycles of the seasons and the orbit of the stars and the planets are all brought into alignment, then and only then can the visualization have the transformative power that the texts promise. The Highest Clarity adept thus seeks out the specific configurations of the various dimensions of the cosmos that will enable the specific configurations of the cosmic power vested in the gods to be unlocked. The religion is about communication, and communication is the key to transfiguration.

up into the heavens. As he journeys towards the stars his body undergoes a spiritual transformation.

2. Nature

Of the three categories under discussion in these opening chapters, only the present one requires some prior justification. The reason for this is that whereas the topics of vision and revelation are explicitly addressed in the Highest Clarity texts themselves, the topic of nature is not. Highest Clarity Daoists did not write lengthy disquisitions extolling the virtues of nature, nor was Highest Clarity Daoism a type of “pagan” tradition that venerated streams and mountains as gods.¹ Nor were Highest Clarity Daoists “environmentalists,” or people who cared about nature as a problem ethical or otherwise.

The topic of nature, then, is not explicitly significant within Highest Clarity texts, and nearly everything that is discussed in the present chapter has to be more or less inferred from the texts rather than directly analyzed within them. In spite of this, the Highest Clarity concept of nature is vitally significant for the contemporary person who is attempting to interpret those texts. The reason for this is that the underlying concept of nature in Highest Clarity texts is so different from the modern scientific view that it would be impossible for the modern person to understand properly the religious concepts of vision and revelation without first grasping the underlying framework of nature that they depend upon. Although the compilers of Highest Clarity texts did not spend any time explaining what nature was and how it functioned, this was not because it was unimportant. Rather, they could assume that their audience understood and shared their basic presuppositions about the ordering of the natural world. Moreover, the specific revelations only make sense in the context of that shared presupposition. Thus before we get to discussing

¹ In fact Highest Clarity Daoists seem to have avoided incorporating any of the traditional nature gods into their pantheon. Since Highest Clarity Daoism emerged in the milieu of the Southern Celestial Masters tradition, it is only to be expected that it should reflect some of the anti-nature concepts of this apocalyptic tradition. This anti-nature stance is most revealed in the *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* (*Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律; DZ 790), which viewed the natural world as harboring a wealth of evil spirits such as sprites associated with hills, trees, rocks, tigers, snakes and foxes (see Nickerson 2000).

what specifically these texts have to say, it is necessary to have some understanding of the shared background that the texts presuppose in their audience.

There is a second, related, reason why it is important to start by looking at nature. This is because the vocabulary used to translate the key concepts of Highest Clarity theology into English is, of necessity, a religious vocabulary that has developed within the Christian tradition. The concepts of meditation, vision, gods and revelation are not of themselves neutral terms but carry with them deep sediments of meaning from two millennia of Christian (and post-Christian) history. In fact, when translated into English, the picture painted by the Highest Clarity scriptures bears some remarkable similarities to Western religious traditions.

Yet, in order to be clear about what similarities and comparisons are legitimate when the texts speak of gods and revelations it is necessary first of all to understand that the fundamental background to these concepts in the Highest Clarity tradition is radically different than anything that emerged in the Abrahamic religious traditions. Already from the basic discussion of gods and spirits in the previous chapter, it will be clear to the student of comparative religions that the gods and spirits discussed in Highest Clarity texts fulfill quite distinct roles when compared to divine beings in other religious traditions. Similarly, although this book has already broached the concept of revelation, it will be clear to anyone with a passing familiarity with Islam that this is not the same process as the revelation of the Koran. Now although these types of comparisons are very interesting, comparison is not the focus of this book. But in order to make sure that these terms are being interpreted by the reader within the same kind of context and framework in which they were created in medieval China, it is important first of all to have that context and framework firmly in place.

The way to do so is to focus on a concept not explicitly thematized as being of religious significance in the texts yet which is at the same time vital for them. Such a concept is nature. Nature, one might say, is the background to religion. To be precise, the shared web of understanding of how the natural world operates functions as the backdrop on top of which and in dialogue with which, religions layer their concepts of the supernatural and the afterlife. Those religious concepts can only make sense in the context of a shared cultural understanding of how nature and natural life function. Religions differ from each other precisely insofar as

their concepts of nature differ, for each religion must respond to the human experience of nature as it is expressed in that particular culture. When that cultural view changes, as has happened in modernity with the development of science, so also has the modern understanding of religion changed.² Thus in order to reduce the possibility of eliding the Western religious connotations of gods and revelations with those of medieval China, it is helpful to focus first of all on the Highest Clarity concept of nature.

NATURAL SPACES

Highest Clarity Daoism reveals a confidence in the absolutely formal and regular nature of nature, that is, a faith in the Dao itself as a single generative principle within the cosmos. This principle of the singular Dao guarantees the ultimate unity of the universe, ensuring that the whole of nature conforms to a singular overarching pattern, envisaged as the binary cadence of *yin* and *yang*. But along with this principle of unity, Highest Clarity Daoism also points towards the multiplicity within nature. Here one can discern the idea of hierarchies of power within the natural order. For although there is a singular *dao*, one underlying rhythmic pattern to which the cosmos dances, there are a multiplicity of powers within the cosmos.

The Highest Clarity view of nature builds on earlier alchemical understandings of nature in which the earth was seen as harboring rare substances and minerals that could aid the adept in his quest for immortality. Highest Clarity texts do nothing to reject this view, but argue that focusing on the properties of rare natural substances can only lead to the prolongation of one's ordinary life, a state known as "earthly immortality" (*dixian* 地仙). The Highest Clarity adept, however, wished to transcend this earthbound state and be transformed at the very least into a "flying

² When people say that religion and science are opposed to each other, what they in fact mean is that religion and science, insofar as they understand these concepts, present opposing views of the natural world. Many people, rightly or wrongly, understand science as proposing a view of nature that by definition precludes the possibility of any being transcending nature. For this reason they regard science and theological belief to be incompatible. On the other hand, since "spirituality" is a more elusive concept than "god," and does not so readily clash with the scientific view of nature, moderns are content to accept the possibility of "spirituality" as compatible with their overall understanding of nature.

immortal” (*feixian* 飛仙) and, ideally, a “perfected person” (*zhenren* 真人).

One important pedagogical function of the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* is thus to indicate the relationship between these various classes of perfection and the corresponding values of nature. Early in his spiritual journey, Zhou Ziyang 周紫陽 (Perfected Purple Yang), meets a certain Huang Tai 黃泰, who turns out to be the Immortal of the Southern Sacred Mountain. Huang Tai teaches Zhou about the arts of longevity and provides him with a secret recipe to help destroy the three death-bringers (*sanchong* 三蟲), worms that live in the body disturbing the vital organs. The recipe involves seven ingredients compounded and concocted in an elaborate process. After receiving this method, however, Huang Tai goes on to warn Zhou as follows:

My Daoist arts can only be taught to an Earth Immortal who is delivered from his corpse, but they are not what a [future] perfected person such as yourself should study. I, however, am only a Middle Rank Immortal and not worthy to be your teacher. (p. 126)³

The message is clear. While the earth is infused with rare substances that can, with suitable training, be concocted into marvelous elixirs of immortality, they will never bring about the more radical transfiguration of the body for which Zhou Ziyang was destined. Such a transfiguration cannot take place on the basis of the ordinary (though rare) material substances that are to be found within the earth, but only on the basis of a correspondence with the celestial realms. Such a correspondence requires Zhou Ziyang to enter into a wholly different mode of spiritual training, one that is focused on encounters with divine powers in the hidden spaces of the earth and the body.

In fact the ordinary world turns out to be full of such hidden places, and Zhou’s increasingly intense spiritual engagement with the transformative powers of the cosmos is thematized most clearly in terms of the various spaces, that is to say, empty spaces, which he visits throughout his quest for transformation. Although Zhou’s hagiography begins as a conventional narration of someone’s life, as it progresses, it transforms in style from a spiritual narrative more towards what could be called a “cartogra-

³ Excerpts from texts translated in chapters five to seven are referenced by the page number in this book. See there for details of the original text and quotation.

phy of cultivation.” Zhou’s progress is peripatetic: it involves travel through China’s sacred mountains. For example, in the central section of the text, he visits a series of twenty-four mountains (see pp. 131 ff.). In each location he receives a new teaching and makes progress along the Way. The text details each location, the master he encounters and the text he receives:

Next he climbed Mt. Taihua. He met Master Redpine of the Southern Sacred Mountain and received the *Book of the Highest Mystery Perfected Lord*.

Next he climbed Mt. Taiming. He met the Lord of the City of the Nine Elder Immortals and received the *Four Methods of Perfection of [Absorbing] Yellow Water and Moon Blossom*.

Next he went to Mt. Heli. He met the Sovereign Person and received the *Perfect Scripture of the Eight Pure Ones* [also known as the] *Supreme High Hidden Book*. (p. 143)

The importance of mountains as locations of the sacred is well known throughout the Daoist tradition. Zhang Daoling, the founder of the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道), the first formalized Daoist religious movement) received his first Daoist revelation on Mt. Heming 鶴鳴山 in present-day Sichuan province, in 142 C.E.

He heard that the people of Shu were very pure and generous and could easily be taught; moreover there were many famous mountains in Shu. So he entered Shu with his disciples and dwelt on Mt. Heming where he composed twenty-four volumes of Daoist writings. He then concentrated his spirit and refined his will and suddenly there were heavenly beings descending with a thousand chariots, ten thousand riders and golden carriages with feathery canopies drawn by countless dragons on the outside and tigers on the inside. One was called the Archivist; another, the Child of the Eastern Sea. They then gave Ling the newly emerged Way of the Covenant of Orthodox Unity. (“Biography of Zhang Daoling” in *Biographies of Spirit Immortals*; see Campamy 2002: 350)

From this revelation on Mt. Heming began the organized religious movement that we know today as Daoism.

As the tradition developed, it began to formalize the relationship between mountains and the revelation of sacred texts. The Daoist literatus Ge Hong (283–343) explained that

all noted mountains and the Five Marchmounts [the Five Sacred Mountains] harbor books of this sort, but they are hidden in

stone chambers and inaccessible places. When one who is fit to receive the Dao enters the mountain and meditates on them with utmost sincerity, the mountain spirits will respond by opening the mountain, allowing him to see them. (*The Master who Embraces Simplicity, Inner Chapters; Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 19/336 quoted in Campany 2001: 134)

Mountains are important because they are the residences of spirits and libraries of scriptures.⁴ Consequently, many of these mountains are the locations for Daoist temples (*guan* 觀) or altars (*tan* 壇), or serve as homes for recluses and hermits. This is consistent across the Daoist tradition and a common feature of many religious traditions.⁵

In Daoist traditions in general, mountains are important in the context of the overall geography of the natural world. The earth functions as a supportive, biological matrix that delivers water, the vital biological fluid, so as to support life. Water is created in the mountains and distributed through the rivers. When water flows evenly and steadily, this is conducive to life. When water flows too much or too little, this is conducive to death. The landscape (in Chinese, literally, “mountains and streams” *shanshui* 山水) stores processes and distributes water through the network of mountains and streams.

This understanding of the function of mountains within the “ecosystem” of the landscape closely parallels the Daoist understanding of the body in which, like mountains, the various organs store and process vital force,

⁴ The association between mountain grottos and sacred libraries was formalized when the Daoist scriptures first came to be compiled by Lu Xiuqing (406-77). Lu arranged them into three subdivisions that he termed grottos: the Grotto of Mystery, the Grotto of Perfection and the Grotto of Spirit. These grottos were “grotto heavens,” the repositories of the original texts, presided over by deities, who had transmitted them to earth at various times and places. These three grottos were located in the three major heavens, Jade Clarity, Highest Clarity and Great Clarity, each divided into twelve sub-heavens, making thirty-six in total.

⁵ From the perspective of the comparative study of religion, various explanations for this have been offered, ranging from the mountain being the source of rivers, and therefore fertility, to the mountain functioning as a sacred center, or *axis mundi* connecting the mundane world to the sacred world (see Eliade 1969). Even for the non-initiate, mountains can be the sites of important spiritual experiences. As Diana Eck (2005: 6213) writes, “For the pilgrim who is not an adept, a shaman, or an initiate, the mountaintop still affords ecstatic vision. In the words of the great Chinese mountain poet Hanshan, ‘High, high from the summit of the peak, / Whatever way I look, no limit in sight’” (Hanshan 1970: 46).

which is distributed via the meridians. In Highest Clarity Daoism it becomes readily apparent that mountains are significant not for their majestic size, or from the view one could get from the top, but because of their analogy with the vital organs of the body. In fact the religious significance of mountains derives from the empty spaces inside them, known in Chinese as grottos or caverns (*dong* 洞). Thomas Hahn offers a wonderfully vivid description of mountain caves which connects them to the workings of the body:

Despite a singular solidity, their physical permeability in terms of air- and water-flow reflects the inner workings of the human body. Blood equals water; air equals breath. Spermatic liquids form pools; walls constitute shapes like inner organs or viscera. (Hahn 2000: 695)

A further connection between mountain grottos and body spaces can be seen in the term “grotto-chamber” (*dongfang* 洞房), which, in Highest Clarity Daoism refers to one of the nine “palaces” or residences of gods within the brain, in this case the residence of three deities, the White Prime Lord, Lord Wuying and the Yellow Venerable Lord (Robinet 1993: 128). They are the three deities responsible for Zhou Ziyang’s ascension to the rank of Perfected Person, whom he successfully envisions internally at the culmination of his tour of China’s sacred mountains. Zhou’s biography thus links together the grottos of the sacred mountains with the grottos inside his head.

The *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* thus reveals a steady interiorization of the spiritual journey. Zhou starts out with recipes for elixirs of immortality, then moves to travel through mountains, then finally attains the rank of perfected person when he realizes the internal visualization of gods within the grotto-spaces of his own body.

This emphasis on the traveling through the internal “grottos” of the body is explicitly revealed in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*. Here the focus is not on traveling to different geographic locations to meet gods, but rather on visualizing different gods residing in different “grottos” within the body, in accordance with specific “temporal locations” marked by the conjunction of the various cyclical rhythms of the stars, the sun and the moon. Take for example number three of the *Methods of the Nine Perfected*:

In the fourth month, on your fate day and in the fourth month on the *jiawu* and *dingmao* days, at the *si* hours (9 a.m. to 11 a.m.),

the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity combine and generate a great spirit. (p. 179)

In this case the particular conjunction of lunar time (the month), the solar time (the hour of the day) and the sexagenary cycle of ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches combine to indicate a specific hour in which the various spiritual powers merge and enter the body.

A similar emphasis can be seen in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* also contained in the same scripture. The first of these saying begins as follows: “On the first day of spring and the *jiazi* and *yichou* days of the first month, in the early morning look to the north” (p. 201). The techniques here are based firstly on the cycle of the earth around the sun, which in the Chinese calendar is divided into eight solar nodes, corresponding to the two solstices, two equinoxes and the four mid-points between them. The text combines this solar calendar with the lunar calendar, the sexagenary cycle and the time of day, to indicate a specific moment when the adept is to face in a specific direction and visualize a specific deity.

In these two examples, the particular conjunction of natural cycles indicates, in effect, the temporal equivalent of Zhou Ziyang’s geographic wanderings. Whereas Zhou Ziyang locates specific mountain grottos to visualize the gods, here the adept is to locate specific temporal spaces. Similarly these visualizations occur not in mountain grottos, but in the spaces within the body.

This points to another significant characteristic of grottos (whether in the head or in mountains): the fact that the term *dong* 洞, meaning grotto, functions in much Highest Clarity Daoist literature as a substitute term for its close homophone *tong* 通, which means to connect, penetrate or pervade.⁶ Grottos are thus “connections” or empty spaces where the heavenly world and the earthly world come into correspondence.⁷ Highest Clarity Daoists thus take the conventional Chinese view of mountains

⁶ For this reason the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* (*Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經) might equally be translated as the *Perfect Scripture of Great Pervasion*, or even *Book of Great Profundity* (Robinet 1993: 97).

⁷ At the beginning of her monograph on Highest Clarity Daoism, Isabelle Robinet quotes a poem of Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher of science, the opening line of which is “Immensity is within ourselves” (Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, trans. Maria Jolas; quoted in Robinet 1993: v). This sentiment is one with which Highest Clarity Daoists would clearly have concurred.

and grottos as sources of life-giving water and extend it to view mountains as sources of divine revelation. Similarly they take the conventional Chinese medicine view of organs linking together the circuits of vital force within the body and extended it to view the organs as conduits to the divine forces of the heavenly spirits.

Grottos and organs are thus not simply conduits for the transmission of the vital forces of the body and the landscape, but locations of correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly realms. Take for example the following stanza from the first *Method of the Nine Perfected*. Here the adept is making an invocation to the Lord of Celestial Essence whom he has visualized coming to sit in his heart. With the visualization in place, the adept prays:

May your mouth spit out purple blossom,
To nourish my heart and concentrate my spirit.
As my crimson organ spontaneously becomes alive,
May I become a soaring immortal. (p. 173)

What is apparent here is that the communication between the god and the adept is a kind of liquid penetration. The god is pouring out purple saliva which is flowing around the adept's heart. This communication, effected via fluids, forms the basis of the adept's prayer to become an immortal. The visualization is thus not so much about the specific nature of the god, or even the nature of the "purple blossom" but about enabling a transaction of divine power in the form of purple saliva from the mouth of the god into the heart of the adept. In effect the adept's visualization has opened a channel for the communication of divine force.

The correlation of external geological space and internal physiological space is typical of the Daoist approach to nature in which natural images are replicated and reformulated across a multitude of dimensions and categories of life. Daoist hermeneutics seems capable of reaching across seemingly disparate worlds and mapping layers of meaning over and against and on top of each other. All this is with the aim of comprehending the multivalent, transfigurative character of the natural world, a world of continuous transformation. The use of the term "grotto" for the term "penetration" moreover indicates that there is nothing ultimately discrete within the Daoist world. There exists within the natural world a capacity for intense mutual penetration and correspondence. This capacity, however, is hidden deep within the interiority of things. "The way to ascend to the heavens in broad daylight" is paradoxically to be attained

through the practice of internal meditation in darkness and shadow. The grotto, that is to say, the interior space, is the location for transformative communication between the earthly and celestial realms. The grotto is dark and mysterious, but paradoxically a repository of revelations and enlightenments. Grottos, both occipital and speleological, form the spaces for transfigurative communication symbolized in encounters with perfected beings and their sacred texts.

Yet although the natural world seems ripe with potential for spiritual encounters, the reality is that such places and moments are extremely rare. My argument here is that the rarity of these phenomena does not mean for the Highest Clarity Daoist that they are in any way unnatural, just unusual. This is a fine but important difference; a failure to grasp the difference frequently is a stumbling block for those who have difficulty understanding the connection between so-called religious Daoism and philosophical Daoism. Such people view philosophical Daoism as supporting a kind of natural philosophy, whereas, to them, religious Daoism seems to support a kind of magical philosophy, a world of unnatural transformations. This is nowhere more in evidence than in the attitude towards death. Whereas Zhuangzi, for instance, seems to take the mystical high ground in the face of his wife's death, "religious" Daoists seem to want to cheat death, or change life into something "unnatural." This chapter has already made the argument that Highest Clarity Daoism supports a faith in the fundamentals of natural law. Yet if this is the case, how could it be that seemingly "unnatural" acts such as ascension and transfiguration should be the object of the religious quest?

The answer to these questions lies in understanding the Daoist philosophy of nature as both spontaneously transforming and also hierarchical. This is an unusual combination of views. The easier of these two elements to grasp is the concept of spontaneous transformation (*ziran* 自然). Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this is in the story in the *Zhuangzi* of Ziyu, who in his old age, became so hunched over that his abdomen was higher than his head.

"Do you resent it?" asked Master Ssu.

"Why no, what would I resent? If the process continues, perhaps in time he'll transform my left arm into a rooster. In that case I'll keep watch on the night. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my right arm into a crossbow pellet and I'll shoot down an owl for roasting. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my buttocks into

cartwheels. Then, with my spirit for a horse, I'll climb up and go for a ride. What need will I ever have for a carriage again?

"I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the 'freeing of the bound.' There are those who cannot free themselves, because they are bound by things. But nothing can ever win against Heaven—that's the way it's always been. What would I have to resent?" (Trans. Watson 1996: 80–81)

It is tempting to read this story as advocating a kind of stoic response to the vicissitudes of fate, focusing on Ziyu's statement that "neither sorrow nor joy can touch you." But the story is saying far more than this. It is not simply advocating detachment in the face of transformation; rather it is celebrating the fact that transformation is the underlying principle of nature. To live in accordance with the Dao means to live in accord with the transformation of things, and to recognize that the very possibility of life is also the very possibility of radical change. This is different from the stoic who remains detached in the face of not being able to obtain what he desires. Although the stoic has every reason to dislike change, he manages to rise above it. But when Zisu asks, "Do you dislike it?" Ziyu replies, "No, why should I?" The Daoist is thus different from the stoic because he does not desire things to stay the same. Rather he positively recognizes and celebrates the mutability of things.

This view of nature as constant transformation links together the early Daoist texts, the development of alchemy and Highest Clarity Daoism. The essential difference to be found in Highest Clarity Daoism is that its practitioners focus on what they view as the particularly rare and unusual instances of transformation. Moreover they have faith that the revelations from the heaven of Highest Clarity constitute "true" or "perfect" methods for achieving these seemingly impossible transformations. But it would be a mistake to see these revelations as in some way "unnatural" for they share in the same philosophy of nature as the raw power of transformation as we find in the *Zhuangzi* and also *The Way and Its Power*. The gods, and the methods they reveal, are not "supernatural" in the sense of existing beyond the laws of nature. Rather they are to be understood as embodying even more powerfully and perfectly the same transformative capacities that Daoists such as Zhuangzi saw latent throughout the natural world. What is different is that the Highest Clar-

ity gods and methods are secret and rare. The revelations from the gods are abnormal, in the sense of being rare occurrences that not everyone gets to see or understand. But their rarity does not make them unnatural. Rather, in the view of the tradition, it makes them marvelous.

This then points toward another key element in the Highest Clarity understanding of nature. Nature is not thought of as “democratic” or “flat” but rather as consisting of hierarchies of power arranged in a pyramid, so that the most powerful entities and processes are also the rarest. Many things in nature are common and ordinary, but some things in nature are rare and marvelous. Both partake in the same creative possibilities for transformation, but they partake in it unevenly. This is why there is difference within the creative order of the natural world.

This also explains why Highest Clarity Daoism is an esoteric tradition, preserving as much as possible the details of its revelations within the narrow circle of initiates. The methods must be kept secret, because nature itself is secretive, keeping hidden the details of its creative spaces and profound connections in the interiority of its mountain grottos and bodily cavities. This element of secrecy and its connection to the revelation of sacred texts is explained in further detail in chapter four. For now, however, it is important to see this emphasis on esotericism as a consequence of the hidden possibilities for transformation that are contained within the uneven, hierarchical distribution of power within the natural world. No power within the Highest Clarity universe is “supernatural.” Cosmic powers may be invisible, hidden, or celestial, but they do not stand outside of the ordinary creative processes with which we are familiar in everyday life. They are simply rarer and more marvelous.

At the top of this natural hierarchy, literally and figuratively, are the heavens stretched out like a canopy rotating around a central axis. This axis is known as the supreme ridgepole (*taiji* 太機), an *axis mundi* connecting the cosmic zenith located at the pole star, all the way down to the underworld, envisaged as somewhere underground in the north. The heavens are conceived as the residences of gods, that is, the stars of the night sky, or constellated patterns of cosmic power. These stars, along with the sun and the moon, are connected to the earthly world in that they mark out the time and the seasons through their various interlocking revolutions. They are also connected to the human world through fate (*ming* 命), understood as the particular dispositions of cosmic power that govern one’s birth and death. At the moment and place of birth the stars,

that is to say the cosmic gods, are aligned in a certain way, thus disposing the cosmos in a certain way toward that individual. Although the heavenly bodies move in a constant way, the seemingly infinite complexity of their interactions produces the infinite variety of particularity and difference in terms of human life on earth. There is no evidence that Highest Clarity Daoists ever viewed the infinite variety of life as the result of chance. It is always the natural product of the regular, but complex, interaction of the various systems of cosmic power.

The Way of Highest Clarity thus regards humans as living in a space between the biological process of earth and the constellated spiritual powers of the heavens. Within the hierarchy of the cosmos, humans rank above the animal world, but below the heavenly world. But because natural law is understood as a law of transformation, Highest Clarity Daoists believe that it is possible to change one's fundamental nature in an act of cosmic transfiguration and, as it were, metamorphose from one's earthly status to that of a celestial being. Again it is important to understand that although this involves transcending the ordinary givenness of human life in a literal and metaphorical ascension to the stars, this is not, strictly speaking, a supernatural process, because the heavens are governed by the same laws of nature as every other part of the created order. Bodily ascension, though rare and wondrous, is understood as a wholly natural transformation of the body that is open to anyone who had been initiated into the scriptures and who has the dedication to pursue the methods they detail.

NATURAL GODS

To understand more precisely how the tradition regarded the celestial realm of gods and spirits as the part of the natural, rather than supernatural, realm, it is necessary to examine the theology of Highest Clarity in more detail. The key point here is that whereas in the Western traditions, the world of gods and heavens is understood as being supernatural, that is to say, beyond the normal operation of the laws of nature, in Highest Clarity Daoism, this is not the case: both gods and humans are subject to the same universal law, the pattern of the Dao. In the classical Abrahamic faiths, the reverse is the case. God is transcendent. Nature exists in the way that it does because of God, whether nature is understood as the divine "Word" of the Torah, the *logos* of Johannine theology,

or in terms of the natural philosophy of Islamic scholasticism. In Daoism, the opposite is true.

Nature, or to be more precise, human observation of natural processes, provides the template for the theological imagination. Consequently there can be no absolute disjunction between the processes of earth and the processes of the heavens. The gods are significant because they embody the fundamental abstractions of natural processes even better than human beings.⁸

But the second consequence of this (to Western thought) inverted view of the relationship between theology and nature, is that personality is not a strong feature of Highest Clarity Daoist gods. Although the tradition has many anthropomorphic gods, these gods are not to be explained in terms of their histories and actions, as are the various gods of the Hebrew scriptures or Greek mythology. In the European and West Asian religious traditions what becomes important about the various gods is their (all-too-human) characteristics: gods are important precisely for the personal qualities that they embody. Gods are loving, just, merciful, wise, faithful, jealous, capricious, powerful, or treacherous. In short they are analogous to human beings, and though they may have superhuman powers they retain entirely human personalities. But in Highest Clarity Daoism, my argument is that gods are important not because of their analogy to humans but because of their analogy to nature. In particular, the impersonality and impassivity of nature are the gods' most powerful attributes, and the higher up the pantheon, the more abstract, impassive and inhuman the gods become. Gods are important not because they are loving or kind, but because, as instantiations of the Dao, they are com-

⁸ This helps explain why Daoism never developed a strong creation narrative similar to the narratives of Genesis or Gilgamesh. There was no need to explain how the gods created the natural world, because it was impossible to conceive of the gods as existing outside or beyond those natural processes. For this reason many people speak of the Dao, that is to say, the ultimate creative process of the cosmos, as being an immanent, rather than a transcendent process, and offer a sharp contrast with the transcendent deity of the Western traditions. Strictly speaking, however, the language of transcendence and immanence cannot be applied to the Daoist cosmos because such a language automatically implies the possibility of something existing outside or beyond the natural world. Even to say that the Dao is immanent in nature implies necessarily the difference between the Dao and nature, and such a view could never be entertained within the conceptual vocabulary of Daoism.

pelled to follow inexorably the fundamental laws or patterns of the cosmos.

To explain this argument requires investigating the connection between religious ritual and natural law in Highest Clarity Daoism. Here it is important to distinguish two distinct religious strains that are evident in the tradition: that of the bureaucratic theological tradition and that of the personal religious encounter. Highest Clarity Daoism combines these two emphases. The initial revelations of gods as described by Yang Xi are often described in intimate terms like that of a marriage. However, as the tradition developed, the influence of the bureaucratic tradition of formal encounters with the gods came to the fore. The Highest Clarity texts discussed in this book clearly imagine ritual encounters with their gods as formal, bureaucratic encounters, rather than personal, intimate unions. Here is a typical example from the *Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center's Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*:

On the day Spring Begins and the *jia[zi]* and *yi[chou]* days of the first month, in the early morning look to the north. There will be purple, green and white clouds, which are the Three Pure Feathered Clouds of the Supreme Three Pure Ladies. At this time the Three Primes take the eight-bearer chariot, ascending to visit the Supreme Emperor of Heaven. Following them you will see the three-colored clouds. At this time you must visualize in your mind knocking your head to the floor and striking yourself. Visualize in your mind making four double bows, [then] present yourself and beg as follows:

“A certain great-grandson has a degree of love for the Way and its Power and has cultivated the [Way of] the Nine Perfected, purified his five spirits and has also brought about the perception of the Imperial Lord of Heaven. Let it be recorded today that he has had an auspicious encounter with the Three Prime Lords while out on their travels and pleads to be granted the service of a chariot. He prays for the satisfaction of his desires.”

If you see the carriages of the Prime Lords three times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight and will have no further need of visual meditation. Whatever [you desire] will be granted. Practicing the Eight [Secret Sayings of the] Dao's words of blessing and obeisance are also like this. This is what is known as the Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao. Only those who possess an immortal register should hear about it. (p. 201)

There are many interesting elements in this passage that are commented on in detail in the translation, but for the present purposes it is important to focus on the parallels with courtly ritual. The ultimate goal of this encounter is ascending to immortality in broad daylight. This is achieved by being sent a “chariot” of clouds from heaven which will take the adept back into the skies. The chariot is sent after a visual encounter with a high-ranking deity who has the power to send the clouds. It involves submitting before him, making a petition couched in formal court language and having the details of the encounter officially recorded. Many passages in the Highest Clarity Daoist texts evoke similar courtly themes to this. Daoist adepts present petitions to the gods as one might do to an emperor. The gods are addressed respectfully by their titles, as one might address an official from whom one sought a favor. The gods are imagined wearing courtly dress, living in luxurious palaces, waited on by servant boys and girls. Highest Clarity Daoists also symbolize immortality in terms of being ennobled by the court and presented with letters of title to that effect.

From this analysis it might seem more obvious to interpret the heaven of Highest Clarity by analogy with the imperial court, the gods by analogy with emperors, and the religious ritual by analogy with courtly ritual. If all this were true, then it would make more sense to say that the world of Highest Clarity is an eminently human world, a personal and social world, rather than a world of natural law and cosmic forces. In fact this is precisely the stumbling block that many interpreters of Daoism have had to deal with in attempting to see the connection between the natural philosophy of *The Way and Its Power* and the bureaucratic, legalistic and godly world of Daoist religion. In my analysis, what is at stake in this question is how one understands the gods. If the gods are like human beings, and the religious communications like personal correspondence, then it is indeed difficult to connect Highest Clarity Daoism with the natural philosophy of *The Way and Its Power*. However, it is my argument here that Highest Clarity Daoism is indeed directly linked to the natural philosophy of *The Way and Its Power* through the Daoist bureaucratic theological tradition and that, as the tradition matured and developed beyond the original revelations in southern China, the gods came to be understood more by analogy with natural forces than human personalities.

This is not to discount the absolutely significant role played by intimate encounters with personal gods, such as those described in the *Declarations of the Perfected*. Clearly such personal encounters aided in the advancing of individual causes with regards to the afterlife and can be understood proximately in social and personal terms. However, my argument here is that an equally important strand of Highest Clarity practices envisages encounters with gods in an impersonal way that is concerned with bringing about the full flourishing of the cosmos. In the practices detailed in the texts in this book, the thoroughly personal and social relationships established between humans and the gods serve an altogether metaphysical and cosmic purpose that transcends the mundane concerns of the living and the dead.⁹

Consider, first of all, the purpose of the ritual, namely being assumed bodily into heaven. This is conceived as an act within the realm of the natural world, though it involves a radical transfiguration of nature, that is to say reconfiguring nature so as to achieve some ultimate transformation. This process of natural transfiguration bears a close connection to the alchemical tradition, which sought physical immortality through the refining and ingestion of natural substances. Note further that ascension is not a reward for moral activity: heaven is not a place where the good are rewarded for their virtuous actions.

Ascension here is granted as a result of engaging and petitioning the gods of heaven who live in the starry sky above to be admitted into their fold. In short the text couches the transfiguration of nature in the form and language of the court. To put it another way, the process of ascension should not be understood as a “natural” metaphor for some transformation within the social realm. That would be a thoroughly modern Durkheimian misreading of what the Highest Clarity adepts envisage they are doing.¹⁰ Rather, for the Highest Clarity adept, the courtly im-

⁹ Readers who are interested to learn more about the social world of Highest Clarity religion should consult Bokenkamp (2007).

¹⁰ To explain this concept further it might also be useful to make a distinction between Daoist and Confucian ritual. The ritual of the Confucian court is bound up in the importance of convention. For Confucian ritual theorists, such as Xunzi, what is important about the world of human civilization is its pure conventionality. Humans manage their interactions through language and culture in ways that are wholly arbitrary and independent of their natural forces and inclinations. Xunzi most clearly argued this when he observed that rain falls independently of whether humans pray

agery is the metaphorical element in this ritual; the deeper reality to which it points is the transfiguration of nature. Nature is not a symbol for some deeper social or spiritual reality; rather the courtly imagery is the symbolic vehicle for the transformation of natural reality.¹¹

Thus while Highest Clarity ritual is proximately concerned with the social, legal and political ordering of the conventional world, it also aims towards a higher religiosity. This higher religiosity is based on engaging the seemingly implacable forces of nature that govern the fundamental horizons of human existence, namely the processes of birth and death. And while the ritual formulas for engaging with these processes bear a strong resemblance to the court ritual of the Confucian state, the ultimate goal is clearly Daoist, rather than Confucian, for the whole panoply of ritual is directed towards human interaction with the powers of nature.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider more carefully the courtly way in which the gods are described. Although the description of the gods can be quite detailed—riding chariots, trailing clouds and wearing various brocade vestments—nothing of this description is in any way personal. Rather, it all related to official function: these gods are not personalities but bureaucrats. Similarly the courtly ritual is not a personal encounter but rather a form of official correspondence. Gods are not addressed by their name, nor do they have any personal dwelling or personal characteristics. They are addressed by their title, in their official residence, wearing official vestments, about matters to do with their official function. It matters not in the slightest who they actually are, if indeed these gods

for it or not. That is to say, the world of religion and ritual are, in his view, absolutely distinct from the laws of nature. In this regard his views are similar to the Deists of early modern Europe who argued that the providence and goodness of deity lies not in the biblical god's intervention in human salvation history, but in his providential ordering of the laws of the universe so as to facilitate the overall flourishing of the human enterprise. In Xunzi's view, therefore, religious and courtly ritual is important not because it influences the heavens to be more disposed to the specific needs of human beings, but because of its effect in knitting together human societies in ways that are, overall, productive. In this regard, his view may be compared to that of Durkheim, for whom the ultimate object of religion is not any putative god or gods but rather society itself.

¹¹ The supplementary question that this raises is why did the practitioners of Highest Clarity deem it necessary to construct and imagine their ultimate religious goal in these terms? The answer must be sought in the social-historical reality of the world of Highest Clarity practitioners.

have any individuality to them. The only thing that matters is their official capacity.

Here the connection to nature becomes even more evident, for what distinguishes the function of someone in an official capacity and someone in a personal capacity is that the bureaucrat is compelled by his official nature to function in accord with the laws of the bureaucratic system of which he is an element. Without the system he has no official capacity at all; in such a case he would simply be an "ordinary person." But what gives the bureaucrat his power is that that he is not acting as an "ordinary person" but rather he subsumes his personality within his official function, thus becoming ideally "faceless."

Highest Clarity adepts do not generally call on the gods by their personal names, or pray to them as one's "heavenly father," but address them by their official title: "Imperial Lord" or "Supreme Unity." Whereas an important element of devotional religions is the intimate encounter between the adept and the god, calling the god by name, seeing his or her face and entering into a relationship based on love, this is precisely the opposite of what this bureaucratic aspect of Highest Clarity religion desires. The last thing that an adept wants is for the gods to exercise their power as a result of personal grace and favor. Should the gods start acting on the basis of whim or individual personality, the universe would become entirely capricious, and the religion would be indistinguishable from popular Chinese religion where people pray for good fortune in the gambling house. Yes, the gods are imagined as superhuman beings, but they are largely understood as impersonal, faceless and dispassionate superhuman beings who, unlike the wholly personal Buddhist bodhisattvas, do not operate on the basis of sympathy or compassion with the suffering of mortal humans.

Consider more closely the way in which the adept in this passage prays for the "satisfaction of his desires." He does not ask the god for mercy or for some kind of special treatment. He simply asks the god to recognize that he has done what is required of him. He has cultivated his person, purified his spirit and visualized the gods. The basis of his request is thus that he is officially qualified and legally entitled to achieve immortality. The purpose of the petition is thus not to beg the god for mercy, but to recognize and validate the legitimacy of the petitioner's actions. The god has no choice in this matter inasmuch as he is discharging his official function as a celestial bureaucrat. He has to comply with the request be-

cause it is made in accordance with what is legally required. But unlike the earthly bureaucrat who is carrying out the law that is the expressed will of the sovereign or, in a democracy, the expressed will of the people, the celestial bureaucrat is carrying out the law of the Dao. This law is not the expression of divine will but simply the law of nature, understood as the economy of cosmic power that governs the transactions between Daoist adepts and the heavens.

This points to another fundamental distinction between Chinese and West Asian theology. In the West Asian theological system, the god of the Bible and the Koran expresses his divine power through his will. In the Torah, the Biblical god chooses to be the god of the Israelites just because he decides to choose them and not others, and issues laws that the Israelites have to comply with in return for being the chosen people. In the Koran, similarly, humans must submit to the divine will as expressed in the revelation to the Prophet precisely because it is the expression of the divine will. There appears, however, to be no such possibility for voluntarism in Highest Clarity Daoist theology.¹² There is a law, but no lawgiver; and there is a creation, but no creator. Thus in such a system, although gods may have the appearance of humans and may act in ways that bear a formal correspondence to human actions, the underlying principle that governs these gods is not personality or humanity but rather impersonality and the natural law of the cosmic economy.

As already noted, this “impersonality” does not describe the whole range of human-divine encounters within the Highest Clarity tradition.¹³ Highest Clarity Daoism emerged as a synthesis of southern Chinese spirit-medium religion with Daoist visions of nature and bureaucracy and thus incorporates many different kinds of theological approaches. However, in this historical religious synthesis the impersonal bureaucratic tradition played the dominant role, and the intimate encounters of spirit-

¹² Indeed, if possessing a personal will is a requirement for the definition of godhood, then in Highest Clarity Daoism we are not dealing with gods at all, and the word “theology” cannot apply. However, this strongly personalist and voluntarist reading of deity is not the only way to read gods in general, or the Abrahamic god in particular. The difference, however, is that while voluntarism is a legitimate theological option in West Asian theologies, it is not at all in Highest Clarity Daoist theology.

¹³ For a discussion of Highest Clarity spirituality that more clearly falls within the rubric of intimate spiritual encounters, see Kroll (1996) and Bokenkamp (1996).

mediums such as Yang Xi with Highest Clarity goddesses were not spiritual ends in themselves. By the time of Zhu Ziyong's preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, the tradition had become firmly located within the impersonal metaphysics of the Dao.

Highest Clarity Daoists thus employ the rich web of courtly ritual and legalistic language in order to address themselves to and effect some transfiguration within, the vital power of the cosmos. To do so requires first of all conceiving of the vital power of the cosmos as functioning according to some law or principle and, secondly, that that principle must contain within itself the notion of correspondence or reciprocity between the human world and the cosmos. The latter principle establishes the possibility of effective engagement with the ultimate forces of the universe—that they are in some way disposed to respond to human activity. The former principle establishes the possibility of some kind of formulaic, systematic engagement with these forces of the cosmos, rather than the *ad hoc* activities of unstructured popular religion.

These two principles form the condition for the possibility of Highest Clarity religious ritual, that is to say, universal formulas for effective correspondence with the divine. Ritual prescribes the basic formula or template for correspondence between the adept and the god, a correspondence conceived as a formal encounter. The formality, or formulaic nature, of ritual is key because it ensures that the personality of the individual and, indeed, the personality of the god are entirely irrelevant to the process of spiritual transformation. Again, this is exactly the opposite of the “personal spirituality” of the modern West, in which the personal beliefs and moral feelings of the individual are key to the successful religious life. But in Highest Clarity Daoism, individual belief and feeling are subsumed under the systematic, equalizing power of ritual formulas. The precise nature of these rituals is considered in the next chapters, but for now the focus is on what this reveals about the concept of nature.

The Highest Clarity view of “natural ritual” points towards a view of nature not as a collection of objects, but rather as a collection of powers who extended their influence through a variety of pathways or “daos.” To return to the earlier discussion of fluids and solids, Daoists generally hold fluids to be the foundation of nature, which operates according to the binary rhythm of *yin* and *yang*, a view that goes back to the Zhou dynasty *Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易). The basic principle of *yin* and *yang* is that of an eternal, immutable correspondence, which is exactly the same pre-

supposition for imagining religious rituals as pathways of fluid communication between the various elements of the cosmos. But how exactly are *yin* and *yang* understood as key phases within the fluidity of nature? A treatise on *yin* and *yang* in the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic, Simple Questions* helps to explain these categories:

Heaven arose out of the accumulation of yang; the earth arose out of the accumulation of yin. Yin is tranquility, yang is agitation; yang creates, yin stimulates development; yang kills, yin stores. Yang transforms influences, yin completes form. (Unschuld 1985: 283)

This extract demonstrates that *yin* and *yang* are not understood either as objects, or, indeed, as forces, but as modes of activity. When the text describes *yang* as “agitation,” and *yin* as “tranquility” it means that when considering the dynamics of action there are always two modes: activity, which means extending influence or power outwards; and tranquility, which means receiving external influences and absorbing them internally. Tranquility here does not mean that nothing is going on; rather it means that no external projection of force is happening. When something is in its *yin* mode it is “completing form,” which means it is absorbing and processing the external influence that it has received.

When a stone is thrown into a pond, the water first exhibits activity as it responds to the stone with waves. This is *yang*. As time passes, however, turbulence subsides and the water gradually returns to its normal state. This is *yin*. Another way of thinking about this is in terms of breathing. *Yang* is exhaling, or expiration; *yin* is in inhaling, or inspiration. The nature of *yang* (expiration) is thus to transform something else, whereas the nature of *yin* (inspiration) is to receive and store form. When *yang* and *yin* are put together then we begin to see nature as a dynamic process in which influence or power is constantly being extended outwards and absorbed internally. The result of this constant processing or exchanging of power is what we call nature, that is, the fluid world of change. Nature is thus conceived as correspondence and transformation, just like the ritual exchanges of bureaucratic Daoism.

Since nature is thus the visible result of the constant dynamic of exchange, this immediately makes it clear why correspondence is so important in the Highest Clarity Daoist world. Without correspondence—the mechanism of extending influence and being influenced—there can be no dynamism; without dynamism, there can be no life. And from this

definition it follows that life can only be understood as transformation, the constant exercise of power between correspondent “entities” and the transformation of those “entities” by this process of correspondence.

Furthermore, for the Highest Clarity adept, the significance of nature does not lie in any particular form that it has achieved, that is to say, any particular “entity” but rather in the spaces in between forms, that is to say the channels of influence and media of exchange that make the dynamism of nature possible. In other words, the spaces between things make this correspondence and transformation possible. Without space, there would simply be inert matter, or “dead stuff.” With space, there can be the possibility of correspondence, interaction and transformation.

ABSENT NATURE

Investigating the philosophy of nature in Highest Clarity Daoism thus takes us from the ordinary phenomenal world through the hidden conduits of communication to the heart of the transformative power of the cosmos, to the Way itself. A theme repeated throughout the texts of Highest Clarity is the importance of emptiness, or empty space, as the location of creative transformation. Take, for example, the sermon that Zhou preached when he received his title:

The [part of] heaven [where there is] nothing is called space. The [part of] the mountain [where there is] nothing is called a grotto. The [part of the] human [body where there is] nothing is called a [grotto] chamber. The empty spaces in the mountains and organs of the body are called grotto courts. The empty spaces in human heads are called grotto chambers. This is how the perfected take up residence in the heavens, the mountains and human beings. When they enter the place of nothingness, a grain of rice could contain Mt. Penglai and embrace the sixfold harmony [of the cosmos], yet heaven and earth would not be able to contain them.
(p. 152)

This sermon demonstrates that the nature of space and the relationship between nothingness and emptiness constitute the chief pre-occupation of the newly perfected person. Whereas Buddhist metaphysics conceives of emptiness in terms of ontology and psychology, it is clear that this Daoist metaphysical teaching dwells on the existential, locative nature of space. The spaces of the heavens, the mountains and the body are all alike. They partake in the same character of nothingness (*wu* 無) which is

precisely what enables them to be places of residence (*chu* 處) for the perfected.

Zhou Ziyang's progress along the Way, therefore, is an encounter with nothingness, which takes place in emptiness. The spaces in the mountains enable him to encounter the teachers who reveal texts to him. The spaces in the body enable him to visualize the gods of his body. The nature of this Daoist nothingness or empty space is that it transcends all place, or as the text puts it, "a grain of rice could contain Mt. Penglai and embrace the six harmonies, yet heaven and earth would not be able to contain it." Empty space is thus a space of connection, enabling the communicative reciprocity between the various dimensions of the universe and consequently the transformation of things.

This understanding of the creative significance of empty space is corroborated in the *Preface to the Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. Although the majority of this text can be read as a philosophical reflection on the correlation between the Way and the revelation of scriptures, the opening stanzas begin by considering the significance of absence and nonbeing:

Now, the Way is born from nonbeing, secretly harboring a multitude of numinous powers, which no-one can fathom. Spirits condense in the void, marvelously transforming in myriad ways without bounds. In the darkest depths, there is an essence, serene and stable, which shines out light. This great mystery is infinite, reaching across the void, preserving stillness. This is called the "Great Grotto." (p. 213)

Zhu Ziyang, the Highest Clarity patriarch who composed this preface, here defines the Way in terms of three key elements: nonbeing (*wu* 無), emptiness (*xu* 虛) and mystery (*xuan* 玄). It is important to understand these key images. All three refer in some way to the idea of absence that Zhu Ziyang holds to be at the center of things.

The concept of the absence of being is familiar throughout Daoism and can be traced back as far as *The Way and Its Power*. Chapter eleven offers the most familiar and fullest description of this nonbeing:

Thirty spokes are united in one hub.
It is in its [space of] emptiness,
where the usefulness of the cart is.

Clay is heated and a pot is made.

It is in its [space of] emptiness,
where the usefulness of the pot is.

Doors and windows are chiseled out.
It is in its [spaces of] emptiness,
where the usefulness of a room is. (Moeller 2007: 27)

These images all point to a relationship between the empty space and its enclosing object. The object depends on the empty space for its form and, thereby, its “usefulness.” The insight offered by Hans-Georg Moeller, however, is that this “structural blueprint” depends on the concept of enclosure, something that surrounds the emptiness. This then points us figuratively towards the concept of rotation. The form surrounds, that is, revolves metaphorically and literally around the empty space that it encloses. This concept is clearest in the image of the wheel, with its spoke rotating around an “empty” hub, but it is also true in terms of the pot, which one can imagine being spun on a potter’s wheel and also by extension the walls of the room “rotating” around the empty space.

Moeller is drawing on the insight of the Chinese scholar, Pang Pu 庞朴 (1995), into the genesis of the cosmological term *xuan* 玄 conventionally translated as “mystery” or “darkness.” Pang argues that this term originally referred to a “whirling,” as one can see pictographically in the Chinese character. This came subsequently to mean a “deep or dark mystery” when it was used to describe the downward spiraling of water. Putting these two insights together, we can begin to see that the root image of the Dao is thus something like a downward swirling void, around which things come into being.

Returning to Zhu Ziyong’s metaphysical pronouncements, we can detect this “swirling void” in three dimensions. Firstly, the Dao itself is understood as the ontological predication of being on the swirling void of non-being. All the beings that exist depend for the existence on the ontological absence (*wu* 無) on which they are predicated.

Secondly, this ontological absence entails a locative emptiness (*xu* 虛), that is to say, the concrete form of empty spaces throughout the universe. In Highest Clarity Daoism these “empty spaces” are understood as conduits for spiritual powers. Spirits reside in these “vacuums,” which is to say that the hidden powers of the cosmos exercise their transformative capacity in these interstitial spaces, the various “emptinesses” of caverns in nature and cavities in the brain. Without these empty spaces, spiritual

transformation and creativity could not take place; there would simply be inert matter.

Thirdly, this relationship between being and nonbeing, between presence and absence, is understood as the “great mystery” (*taixuan* 太玄) or “vast cosmic swirling” of the Dao. This combination of stillness and splendor, darkness and light, is, for Zhu Ziyong, summed up in the term Great Grotto or “Vast Pervasion.” The “vast pervasion” is the one no/thing that unites all forms together: all beings are predicated on the same nonbeing; all presences are predicated on the same absence; all forms are predicated on the same emptiness. Emptiness pervades all beings, uniting them in the one “great mystery,” the abysmal, swirling, metaphysical absence of the Dao itself. This, then, is the hollow root of nature, the empty source in which all beings partake, continuously communicating power and effecting transformation among the myriad creatures of the cosmos.

3. Vision

This chapter focuses on the religious significance of inner vision in Highest Clarity Daoism. It examines the visualization techniques that are presented in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* and the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*.

The *Esoteric Biography of Purple Perfected Yang* contains a spiritual quest, in which the protagonist, Zhou Ziyang, eventually brings about a vision of all three of the Prime Lords: the White Prime Lord, Lord Wuying and the Yellow Venerable Lord. As a consequence he receives the title and status of a Perfected Person. The previous chapter discussed this quest in terms of Zhou's progress through China's mountains, eventually arriving at the culminating vision in the "Empty Mountain" (Kongshan 空山).

Zhou's spiritual journey, however, can also be analyzed in terms of the mode of vision that he practices as much as the objects, or gods, that he manages to visualize. As Zhou makes spiritual progress, he practices more and more subtle techniques of visualization. While the *Biography* does not explain in detail what those techniques were, it gives a fine picture of how they are effective in one person's life. Conversely, the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* provides detailed instructions how to practice the visualizations, but does not give an overall picture of their effect upon a person. By analyzing each text in terms of the other, we can develop a fuller picture of the process of transformation in an ideal Highest Clarity Daoist life. Together, the two texts demonstrate that practitioners developed a repertoire of visualization techniques that rival the (much later) practices of Tibetan Buddhism in their sophistication and complexity. They integrate a bureaucratic view of the heavenly pantheon with mystical experience, aesthetic beauty, metaphysical speculation and the alchemy of the body into an overall experience of spiritual transfiguration.

A HIERARCHY OF VISION

The chief spiritual innovation of Highest Clarity Daoists was to formulate a distinct hierarchy of various forms of visual meditation as religious practice. This hierarchy operates along two tracks. The first track distinguishes between different modes of vision, ranging from dreams (*meng* 夢), to visual perception (*jian* 見), inner sight (*neishi* 內視) and finally transfigurative visualization (*cun* 存). Each of these different modes of vision matches, on the second parallel track, a different object of vision, ranging from demons through Daoist immortals to the highest gods of the pantheon. The more sophisticated the adept's mode of vision, the higher ranked within the pantheon its object. The assumption is that the most powerful spiritual forces in the cosmos are the most obscure and require the greatest subtlety to see.

Conversely, once the adept has managed to engage in a visual encounter with one of these high-ranking deities, he is able to appropriate some of the deity's spiritual power and bring about a transfiguration of his own body into that of a perfected being. A key feature of the Highest Clarity revelations is to specify the precise details associated with becoming a perfected person in terms of the technique known as transfigurative visualization (*cun* 存). Other modes of spiritual vision are valuable but only as intermediate steps. This is amply demonstrated in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, which shows the various methods of visual meditation in a hierarchical order, culminating with that of transfigurative visualization. It is thus worthwhile reviewing the way the biography arranges the other types of spiritual vision into a hierarchy.

The biography opens with a preface which aims to show how the text came to be recorded by Hua Qiao 華僑, a Daoist who served in the Xu household but was eventually replaced by Yang Xi. His story begins with a dream:

All of a sudden he saw in a dream a horde of demonic spirits. He was wandering around with them, drinking and eating. Qiao got completely drunk on the wine that the demons were drinking with him. When he returned home he threw up everything that he had drunk and eaten. (p. 107)

Through this unwanted vision, Hua Qiao comes increasingly under the spell of the demons. This first encounter is clearly disturbing enough, entailing a violent physiological reaction, but as time progresses, the demons compel Qiao to introduce them to more and more talented people.

The reason for this is that they want to obtain power over these people, thus gaining their insight and wisdom; however this has the dreadful consequence of causing some of these people to die.

This story sets the stage for the subsequent *Esoteric Biography* because it raises the possibility that dreams, or alternate modes of vision, function as a kind of interface between the spirit world and the human world. In this case, Hua Qiao's first dream is a literal inversion of the ideal. Demons from the underworld invade his consciousness, taking over his will and commanding him to work for them. Their arrival is sudden and unexpected, suggesting that it could happen to anyone. As a result he is effectively enslaved by the demons, which results in mayhem and death around him. In contrast to this, the techniques of visualization revealed in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* portray Highest Clarity visualizations as a conscious, disciplined and timely fusion of the spirit and human worlds, resulting in the orderly transformation of the body.

Eventually Hua Qiao seeks professional Daoist help and manages to get out of the demons' grasp. Later in life he has another dream, this time, of the two Daoists Zhou and Pei, who instruct him in Daoist arts. The text explains that Zhou wrote his own biography, but Pei did not finish his, hence we have the biography of Zhou Ziyang (Perfected Purple Yang) but not of Pei. This second dream is clearly a more positive story than the first, in that Zhou and Pei instruct him in their life stories and in various Daoist texts, but it is clearly not the highest or most ideal form of Daoist vision. It mirrors the events of the earlier story in that Zhou and Pei appear unexpectedly to Hua Qiao. The latter seems not to be in control of this situation either—there is no suggestion that he does something to deliberately provoke the vision of Zhou and Pei. Nevertheless, in contrast to the earlier wholly negative invasion of his mind by terrestrial demonic powers, this time he is graced with the appearance of celestial beings and receives positive teachings.

This mini-biography presents dreams as a type of vision in which spiritual forces command the attention of the individual. These spiritual forces could be demonic or benign, but in either case the individual is at the mercy of the spirits he sees. The cautionary aspect of the tale not only explains how Hua Qiao came to record the biography of the Purple Perfected Yang, but also sets the stage for the main story of Zhou Ziyang's transformation. It suggests that in dreams, humans are not in charge of their consciousness and are thus susceptible in a very normal sense to vis-

ual encounters with alternate dimensions of reality within the cosmic hierarchy. It suggests that these visual encounters are real, that they possess some kind of efficacy or power and can function positively or negatively, depending on who gains access to the individual's consciousness. The Highest Clarity revelations, by contrast, seek to place the individual Daoist in the spiritual driving seat, so to speak. They seek to engender visions of deities at specific times and places under the control of the adept. Intentional vision is like a dream in that it opens up access to the spiritual world with a concrete transformative effect upon the subject, but is unlike a dream in that the subject is in control of the vision and does not appear as a character in a sequence of events under the direction of a third party.

The *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* then presents Zhou's gradual steps towards sharpening his power of effective, intentional vision. The first step lies in recognizing hidden signs within the ordinary world. For Zhou this involves learning to recognize his first teacher, Huang Tai, through the appearance of his eyes:

Each time that Lord Zhou had heard of methods of immortals, he had been told that immortals' pupils were square; though Huang Tai's external appearance was threadbare, his eyes were square and his face bright. (p. 114)

Before going into the specific details, it is possible to make a general observation that those who achieve any level of success along the Way of Highest Clarity have in some way to disguise what they have achieved. Huang Tai does not look like a distinguished person in terms of his clothing or his status, yet Zhou Ziyang learns to look beyond these to discern some unadvertised spiritual quality. Note however, that this spiritual quality is not totally internal. Highest Clarity Daoists do not believe that spirituality is wholly an inner, intangible, non-material reality. Rather, Huang Tai's spirituality can be physically observed in his shining face and square eyes.

Moreover, as Zhou Ziyang makes progress along his Daoist path, he too changes his physical appearance, even to the point of rendering visible his internal organs. Though it would be correct to say that Highest Clarity Daoist transformation is an internal transformation, this does not mean that it has no external consequences. Rather it seems to mean that the external consequences have to be disguised. The biography of the Central Yellow Venerable Lord at the beginning of the *Central Scripture of the*

Nine Perfected makes a similar comment in a more abstract way: “He was disguised by purity and hidden by subtlety.” This suggests that his pure or simple appearance (*su* 素) functions as a kind of cloak that kept him hidden, or at least prevented his being recognized by ordinary people.

The consequence of this Highest Clarity principle is that the first step along the path of visualization is to learn how to see the things that are spiritually significant and how to avoid being distracted by things that are not. This theme of learning to discriminate should not be confused with classical Indian theories of discrimination between phenomenal existence and ultimate reality. The Daoist goal is not to disclose the full glory of essential reality that lies somehow hidden beneath the veil of surface appearances, but rather the recognition that perfection and subtlety are ineluctably linked together. It is thus in the nature of gods, sages and perfected beings to be unobvious.

The social consequences of this view are clear. Daoists who focus increasingly upon the subtle and the hidden do not fit into conventional society organized around the public manifestation of propriety in social relationships. To the consternation of his father, the young Zhou got up early in the morning to absorb the dawn *qi*. The text says:

His father considered this strange and asked him what kind of activity he practiced. Lord Zhou remained kneeling for a long time, then replied: “I, Yishan, deep in my heart love the splendor of the sunlight and its eternal radiance. This is the only reason why I worship it. (p. 111)

Even worse than this strange activity, the young Zhou disdains the visit of an important official who is said to have some knowledge of Daoism. To have a high official visit one’s house would be a great honor for the family, but Zhou does not come out to meet the man. Finally his father forces him to greet the distinguished visitor, but when he attempts to engage Zhou in conversation about the Dao, the latter refuses to participate in a dialogue. This implies that the high official is not a genuine seeker of the Dao. He is someone who has achieved high distinction according to the conventional way of viewing things—but from Zhou’s perspective he is not even worth speaking to.

The third type of unconventional behavior is that Zhou distributes alms to the poor anonymously. As the text puts it, he “privately accumulated good merit and bestowed acts of loving kindness” on the local population. The emphasis on virtue in the early stages of Zhou’s career is sig-

nificant precisely because it is irrelevant in the later stages of his career. It seems that a moral disposition is regarded as an essential foundation for an aspiring Daoist, but only so long as he is an aspirant. This can be explained by considering that the concept of morality on view here is one that disdains the outward display of wealth. Thus Zhou is not so much being a virtuous person as being a secretive person. To be more precise, his virtue lies in his secrecy: he refuses to talk to the high official; and he refuses to let people know that he was distributing his wealth. In these latter two cases, Zhou is developing his powers of secrecy, learning to deprecate the outward appearance of others and, conversely, to disguise his outward appearance. By learning to “disappear,” he makes his first steps towards seeing Daoist teachers.

The “virtue” practiced by the young Daoist is thus not the conventional virtue associated with Confucian China or official society, based on the reciprocal relationships between the various ranks of society. Rather he is practicing the Daoist virtues of secrecy and subtlety. This relationship between external appearance and internal meditation is made clear in the following summary of his behavior: “He had no truck with fame, but engaged in subtle meditations” (p. 111). Here the text construes fame or reputation (*ming* 名) as the opposite of subtlety (*wei* 微). The difference between the two is that former makes clear its significance on the outside, whereas the latter keeps its significance hidden on the inside. Progress along the Highest Clarity hierarchy of vision requires a decreasing emphasis on the outward reputation and an increasing focus on the inner subtlety.

In the *Esoteric Biography of Purple Perfected Yang*, this involves visiting various mountain grottos, meeting gods and receiving texts. The term used is the standard Chinese word meaning “see” or “perceive” (*jian* 見). By emphasizing this act of perception, the text implicitly acknowledges a fundamental aspect of gods and other spiritual beings, namely that they are normally invisible. While this aspect of the spirits might seem obvious and shared by most religious traditions, Highest Clarity Daoists take it to be not simply an interesting characteristic of deity but a defining mark. There is a deep theological reason why the spirit realm should also be an invisible realm: the inverse relationship between power and visibility. “The more powerful, the less visible,” is clearly a fundamental axiom or absolute presupposition of Highest Clarity theology.

Consequently Highest Clarity spirituality has everything to do with the immensely difficult task of making gods visible. As Zhou travels through mountains he manages to seek out and perceive various gods. At each stage he receives some Daoist text, a symbol of his successful “revelation” or “discovery” of the god. But as the text makes clear, even though Zhou is able to “perceive” these various gods, this is insufficient to bring about his transformation into a perfected person. The final stage of his journey requires a higher form of vision, a paradoxical form known as inner vision (*neishi* 內視).

Inner vision refers to the visual perception of the inner workings of one’s body. It is the hallmark of Highest Clarity meditation techniques and fuses together the visual perception of invisible deities with the alchemical tradition and the bureaucratic tradition. The basic premise is that gods may be visualized inhabiting the internal “grotto chambers” of the brain. The effect of this visual perception is either explained alchemically, in terms of stimulating a corresponding transformation within the organs of the body, or bureaucratically, in terms of elevating the rank of the adept within the celestial pantheon. In either case the result is the same: the adept’s body is transfigured, and he ascends to heaven as a perfected person. Below, this chapter examines in detail the methods of visualization and the alchemical and the bureaucratic forms of ascension. First, however, it is important to explain the general characteristics of this type of “inner vision.”

At the culmination of his journey, Zhou is advised to “go back and look inside [his] own grotto chamber” (p. 148). This formula expresses a significant contrast with the type of visualization that he engaged in earlier. Previously he was traveling through mountains and viewing gods in the “grotto chambers” inside mountains. Now he is supposed to “return” and look within his own grotto chamber. This indicates a change in focus from some kind of external visual perception to something that requires returning within oneself and focusing on what is internal rather than external. Zhou heeds these instructions and “closed his eyes and looked inside himself for a good while long” (p. 148). Clearly this type of inner observation does not occur through the eyes. It is an imaginative observation, akin to dreaming in that it takes place within oneself rather than externally, but in which the adept is fully conscious and fully in command of his faculties.

The Highest Clarity scriptures, in particular the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*, detail various techniques for this type of inner vision of gods within the grotto chambers of the brain. They also introduce a technical term for this inner vision, which needs to be carefully explained. The term is “transfigurative visualization” (*cun* 存).¹ In the scriptures that are being discussed in this book, this term makes an early appearance in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* in the following sentence: “He had no truck with fame, but engaged in subtle meditations and inevitably stimulated [the gods] he visualized” (p. 111).

The final phrase indicates an important characteristic of “visualization” that sets it apart from the other types of perception that have already been discussed. Visualization does not simply record an observation of something, but rather brings it about. It intentionally causes the object of vision to appear before the mind’s eye. The consequence, in this particular case, is that Zhou “inevitably stimulated” (*bi gan* 必感) whatever he visualized, which means that he not only brought the god into vision but also had some sensible effect upon it. The Chinese term “stimulate” or “affect” (*gan* 感) is part of the binome *ganying* 感應 which indicates relationship of stimulus and response or correspondence between two things. Zhou is not only successful in bringing about the vision of the god but also in entering into a relationship of correspondence or cause and effect with the god.

¹ In the translations, this term is simply translated as “visualize.” However, as Schafer (1978: 387) notes: “Here *ts’un* [*cun*] is used as a transitive verb, taking the divine being whose appearance is desired as its object. It would be inadequate to translate this word as ‘visualize’: the adept’s efforts produce more than a mental picture. The word means ‘to make sensibly present,’ ‘to give existence to’—almost ‘to materialize.’ Schafer generally translates the term as “actualize,” emphasizing the concrete quality of the visualization. Although Schafer is absolutely right to recognize the inadequacy of the word “visualize” to translate the technical term, I have chosen to retain the word because it emphasizes the visual nature of Highest Clarity meditation in a way that “actualize” cannot. Moreover, the term “actualize” give the impression that the power to cause gods to appear lies entirely within the will of the individual adept whereas the texts under discussion here indicate that this power arises as a result of the particular disposition of the cosmos. The adept cannot simply bring about the visualization of the gods whenever he or she chooses. Rather, this can only take place at certain times or facing certain directions.

Why should visualization entail an effect beyond the act of observation itself? A clue to this can be found later in the same text. In the story of Huang Tai, there is a discussion of the technique of visualizing the Three Ones, also known as the Three Primes, at the eight nodes of the solar year. This technique is explained in detail in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*. In the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, however, the technique is simply summarized in the following sentence: “At each of the eight nodes of the solar year, visualize them [i.e., the Three Ones]. On the one hand you will then eliminate myriad harms; on the other hand your body will be indestructible” (p. 117).

This sentence indicates in greater detail the consequences of visualization (*cun* 存),² namely, to protect the body from harm and make it indestructible. Visualization is thus something more than the mere perception of subtle phenomena. It is, in fact, an act that brings about a specific consequence or effect. Visualization does not simply observe; it involves the practitioner in a relationship of cause and effect or stimulus and response with the object visualized. Since in this case the object of vision is a spirit or god, that is to say, a specific configuration of cosmic power, the act of visualization is more than simple passive observation, but rather engages the god in a creative relationship. Visualizing the deity is thus not the same thing as observing or perceiving it. It is a transaction within the economy of cosmic power, the success of which may be confirmed by the experience of transformation within the body.

TRANSFIGURATIVE VISION

The type of vision advocated in the Highest Clarity texts can thus be defined as “transfigurative visualization.” The term “transfiguration” denotes the transformation of the appearance of something into a higher or more spiritual state. It is a cross-cultural phenomenon and is an appropriate category for describing the process of transformation brought about by Highest Clarity visualization. This section aims to analyze the nature of transfiguration in the texts under examination and to provide a theoretic-

² Its root meaning is something like “to be located” or “to be present” in some specific place. In modern Chinese it commonly appears in the binome *cunzai* 存在 which means “to exist.”

cal understanding of why visualization is thought to entail the transfigurations described in these texts.

The specific form of transfiguration that is of interest to Highest Clarity Daoists is the transfiguration that entails the ascension of the adept into the heaven of Highest Clarity. Such an ascension is thought to be possible only for the adept who is in a transfigured state. Before examining the details, it is helpful to place the concept of transfiguration within the broader theme of transformation, which is a hallmark of Daoist cultivation in general. Daoist hagiographies are in general replete with such moments of transformation as the adept makes progress along the way. The *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* is no different. Early in his life, before attaining the transfigured state of a perfected person, Zhou began to experience various changes in his body. The first type of change falls generally within the category of “superhuman” powers:

Within five years he could see beyond a thousand *li*, his body became so light that he could [jump] over ten *zhang* and walk five hundred *li* per day. He could make himself visible or invisible, present when seated and disappeared when standing. (p. 130)

The type of transformation in the first sentence is relatively mundane. Having telescopic vision and being able to travel vast distances in a short space of time is basically an extension of the ordinary capacities of human beings and does not constitute a fundamental violation of the laws of nature. On the other hand, making oneself invisible appears to be a more serious violation of the general conditions of human existence. In Highest Clarity Daoism, however, visibility and invisibility are not such straightforward categories. The hallmark of the tradition seems to be that these categories are in fact fluid, or at the very least susceptible to manipulation by the seasoned adept.

Zhou is becoming experienced in the manipulation of these categories, shifting the way others perceive him and the way he is able to perceive others. Although from a modern Western perspective there seems to be a fundamental difference between having extra-powerful vision on the one hand and being able to make oneself invisible on the other, this is not apparently the case for the Highest Clarity Daoist. Both types of activity represent Zhou’s gradual diffusion of the conventional boundaries that separate humans from their environment.

In effect, Zhou is becoming a more “translucent” being, someone with less rigid boundaries between self and world. In a more “dissolved” state, it would be simple for Zhou to see or travel across vast distances. Zhou’s superhuman powers thus do not represent a total violation of the fundamental ontology of the Highest Clarity universe; they are emphatically not regarded as “magic.” Rather they are an indication that the assumptions made by human beings about the fundamental ontology of nature are in fact directly correlated to their visual capacities. Whereas Western theologians debate the existence of gods, Highest Clarity Daoists debate their appearance: where, when, how and to whom they became visible.

This intriguing emphasis on translucence is even woven into the alchemical tradition as it appears in Zhou’s biography. When he follows an alchemical recipe designed to kill the three death-bringing worms in the body, the practical result is that his skin becomes less opaque and more transparent: “He swallowed the *shu*-herbs for five years and his body produced a glossy sheen so that it was possible to see right through to his five organs” (p. 123). This story further emphasizes light and vision in the fact that the herbs have to be dried in sunlight, and Zhou has to face the rising sun when he takes the pills that he has concocted. Although this story is more clearly reminiscent of Ge Hong’s *Biographies of Spirit Immortals* who seek immortality and transcendence via natural products, the emphasis on sunlight makes it clearly valuable to Highest Clarity Daoists. From these early episodes in Zhou’s life, therefore, it is clear that the tradition values connections between transfiguration, light and vision.

This connection is more fully revealed in Zhou’s biography when he becomes a more advanced practitioner and sets his sights not merely on physical immortality, but rather on the transfiguration of his body and his ascension to the rank of perfected person. This indicates a correlation between the hierarchy of vision and the hierarchy of transformation:

If you see the White Prime Lord then you will manage to become a Lower Perfected of three thousand years. If you are able to see Lord Wuying then you will become a ten thousand year old middle perfected. If you are able to see the Yellow Venerable Lord then you will reach toward equality with heaven and become an upper perfected whose name is listed in the Golden Terrace. (p. 148)

This passage indicates that the rank that the adept can expect to achieve in the heaven of Highest Clarity is directly related to the title of the dei-

ties that he is able to perceive. It assumes that the very act of perceiving a higher-ranking deity entails a higher degree of transformation and thus a higher status within the heavenly realm. Ordinary mortals who are unable to see these deities will be excluded from a majestic afterlife. Those who manage to see these gods will be rewarded with a higher status, such as “upper perfected” rather than “middle perfected,” and also a longer life of “ten thousand years” rather than “three thousand years.” This indicates that the transformation envisaged in Highest Clarity Daoism is not simply about status within the heavenly realm. Status is also accompanied by material benefits, here described as the length of years that one could expect.³

VISUAL DETAIL

Being able to see the gods is evidently the key to bringing about an experience of transfiguration in Highest Clarity Daoism. From this principle it follows that the scriptures are, in part, devoted to describing what these gods look like so that the adept can be sure of recognizing them. Here is a typical description of a god from the *Esoteric Biography of Purple Perfected Yang*:

The White Prime Lord was dressed in a brocade of cinnabar and jade and a padded cloak of cloud-like gauze. He radiated white light, vermilion inside, [like] streams of radiance reaching into the sky. He projected his glorious spirits as mystical yellow [light] pervading the void. On his waist he wore the Badge of Supreme Numinous Essence; he was girded with the Writ of Mystery Prime for Scattering Demons; on his head he wore the Creation Headdress for Summoning Dragons. (p. 147)

This description emphasizes in poetic language the luxury of the White Prime Lord’s vestments together with the symbols of his office. The overall impression is that the White Prime Lord is a high official dressed in rich fabrics, a powerful being who has all the symbols appropriate to his status. However, it is also important to understand the distinctive characteristics of this description. First of all, one must note the emphasis on light. If Zhou Ziyang manages to achieve the translucence of his

³ Note also that this is further evidence that the transfigured state of the Daoist perfected is not a total negation of the natural world. The perfected person is not, in fact, eternally immortal. Rather he is described as existing in a rarefied state for a very, very long time. Nothing, it seems, can transcend the Dao.

skin, the White Prime Lord is clearly in a far higher category of being. The passage describes him as someone who was not merely transparent, but also positively luminous, radiating light upward to the sky and downward to the spirits in the body. He is a god whose luminescent being pervades the void, connecting the heavens and the body. His radiance also demonstrates his connectivity. Just as light has the quality of being emitted from one place towards another, so also this god seems to extend his being to connect with the various dimensions of the cosmos.

Accompanying this emphasis on light is a description of various colors. The Highest Clarity world is a polychromatic world, where the colors serve not only as embellishments to the visions, adding a quality of richness to the emphasis on light, but also as distinguishing markers. Various gods are associated with various colors and this aids in their recognition. Of the texts examined in this book, the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*, part of the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* is perhaps the most emphatic about colors associated with various deities who are envisaged at different times of the year. Here is an example, from the *Fourth Secret Saying*:

There will be red, white and azure clouds, which are the three Pure Clouds of the Fusang Imperial Lord. At this time the Fusang Imperial Lord rides the carriage of the shining eightfold path, ascending to visit the Palace of Supreme Subtlety. (p. 204)

Here the three colors of the clouds serve to mark the appearance of the Fusang Imperial Lord. On other occasions, different colored clouds are associated with different gods. The colors thus help to identify the god in question and serve to teach the adept what to look for, as well as, presumably, to confirm to the adept that he is being successful in his vision.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that the luxury of the gods' vestments is described in ways that are visually compelling and refer to light. One could take the phrase "a brocade of cinnabar and jade" simply to mean a cloth that is rare and precious, but that would be to ignore the particular qualities of cinnabar and jade. Cinnabar is precious not simply because it is one of the base materials for concocting an elixir of immortality, but also because of its distinctive deep red color. Similarly, jade is precious not only because it is rare, but because of its hue and luster. The brocade cloth that the White Prime Lord is wearing is thus luxurious because of its sheen and its color, which again are important as visual clues for the adept. None of these descriptions conveys the sense of smell or touch.

Rarely do they mention sound. These descriptions are principally visual descriptions, both the result of visions and thus the guide to successful future visions.

METHODS OF VISUALIZATION

Having surveyed some general characteristics of Highest Clarity visualization, it is necessary to examine in detail the methods of visualization contained in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*. The text contains two complementary methods, the *Method of Nine Perfected* and the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*. The objective of both these methods is the transfiguration of the body into that of a perfected person. The overall program of these methods is the sequential visualization of deities over the period of a year.

The texts indicate when and how to see the deities, describing their appearance and title. But the texts have one basic difference. The *Method of the Nine Perfected* explains the effects of seeing the deity in alchemical terms: visualizing the deity causes a transformation to occur within the various organs of the body. The consequence at the end of the series of nine “perfections” is that either the adept will have already ascended into heaven, or upon death he will suffer no trauma in the underworld and instead be reborn as a perfected person. The *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*, by contrast, explains the effect of visualization in more courtly terms. The god who is visualized is in fact an intermediary deity who takes the adept to see a more senior deity. While in the presence of the senior deity, the adept is able to make a formal petition to be transformed into a perfected person. When the adept has made all the correct petitions, his case is approved and the title granted. At this point a chariot appears take him into heaven.

One important feature of both these methods is that of following the correct sequence, which entails coordinating with the calendar. A key element of the methods lies in revealing on which days and at which times the adept should perform the visualization and, in the case of the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*, which direction the adept should be facing to visualize the deity. The significant cycles are the solar and lunar cycles. The methods make reference to specific days within particular months, which in the Chinese calendar, involves corresponding with the actual waxing and waning of the moon. The methods also make reference to the twenty-four nodes of the year, which is a different cycle altogether, based

on the solar calendar. By calculating and coordinating these various cycles the adept thus arrives at the particular temporal conjunctions that enable the visualization to take place. This emphasis on coordinating with the calendar suggests once again that the visualization is a technique that involves harmony with the cycles of the natural world. The gods to be visualized do not completely transcend the processes of the material world, existing in some thoroughly abstract eternity, but rather operate synchronously with it.

The importance of coordinating the various cycles and directions gives a clue as to the way that visualization functions. Visualization is not just about the singular effort of the adept: the adept cannot compel the deity to appear simply by intending him in his mind's eye. Rather it seems that when the various cycles of the cosmos are in alignment the adept has a rare window of opportunity to visualize the deity, and when he does so the deity cooperates by performing whatever actions are necessary to help the adept achieve his goal of perfection. This is reminiscent of the discussion in the previous chapter, which argued that the Daoist universe could not be divided into "natural" and "supernatural" but rather "common" and "uncommon." In this case also, the act of visualizing the deities is clearly something special, but not transcendent or supernatural. It may happen in the ordinary course of events but only when the various cycles of the cosmos fully cooperate and the adept sincerely intends it. At such moments the adept has the opportunity in effect to make a request and at such moments the cosmos is disposed to reciprocate.

The two tables on the following pages summarize the correlations that are specified in the *Method of the Nine Perfected* and the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*.

Table of Correlations for the *Method of the Nine Perfected*

Month	Day ⁴	Time	Organ	Title	Qi color
1	<i>Jiazi, Jiaxu</i>	dawn	Heart	Great Lord of Celestial Essence	Purple
3	<i>Bingshen</i>	7–9 a.m.	Joints	Great Lord of Enduring Jade	White
4	<i>Bingwu, Dingmao</i>	9–11 a.m.	Fluids	Great Lord of Primordial Birth	Yellow
6	<i>Jiachen, Wuyin</i>	noon	Liver	Great Lord of Green Radiance	Green
7	Three, <i>Gengwu</i>	9–11 a.m.	Spleen	Great Lord of Nourishing Radiance	Green
8	Fifteen, <i>Gengshen</i>	3–5 p.m.	Lungs	Great Lord of Upper Prime	Five- colored
9	Nineteen <i>Wuxu</i>	5–7 p.m.	Kidneys	Great Lord of Mystery Yang	Blue
10	Twenty- two, <i>Xinsi</i>	noon	Gall bladder	Great Lord Bearing Luminescence	Five- colored
11	Twenty- eight, <i>Bingzi</i>	9–11 a.m.	Head	Ancestral Lord of Imperial Glory	Purple

⁴ The dates are generally, though not always, given according to the sexagenary cycle designated by the binomial combination known as the heavenly stems and earthly branches.

Table of Correlations for the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*

Date, Time	Direction	Colors	Intermediary Deity	Final Deity
Spring Begins, Early Morning	North	Purple Green White	Three Primes	Supreme Emperor of Heaven
Vernal Equinox, Midnight	Northeast	Azure Black Yellow	Heavenly Lord of Great Subtlety	Highest Jade Emperor
Summer Begins, Dawn	Northwest	Purple Azure Yellow	Perfected Person of the Inner Palace attached to the Lord of Highest Perfection in the Supreme Ultimate	Purple Subtlety Palace
Summer Solstice, Dawn	Southeast	Red White Azure	Fusang Imperial Lord	Supreme Subtlety Palace
Autumn Begins, Dawn	West	White Red Purple	Imperial White Lord attached to the Supreme Perfected Person	High Perfected One of the Mystery Emperor in the Jade Heaven
Autumn Equinox, Dawn	South	Purple Red Yellow	Highest Imperial Red Lord attached to the Highest Perfected Person of the South Pole	Lady of the Nine Numinous Powers
Winter Begins, Dawn	Southwest	Green Purple Azure	Lord Imperial Patriarch attached to the Highest Clarity Perfected Person	Jade Emperor of the Highest Nine Heavens
Winter Solstice, Dawn	East	Vermilion Turquoise Yellow	Highest Perfected Person of Great Vacuity attached to the Jade Concubine of the Great Empyrean	Great Subtlety Heavenly Lord

The Highest Clarity visualization practices build on the ancient Chinese theoretical foundation of correlation and reciprocity. The act of visualization at the right time and in the right place functions as a kind of stimulus (*gan* 感) to which there is corresponding response (*ying* 應). In this way the visualization is a two-way process or, in fact, a reciprocal transaction between the adept and the deity. The adept does not just “see” the god who is simply sitting there waiting to be seen, but rather the adept visually actualizes (*cun* 存) the specific correspondence that the cycles of the cosmos make possible at those specific moments. The act of visualization takes advantage of the possibilities for reciprocal communication (*tong* 通) that seem to be opened up when, like the combination lock of a safe, all the cycles come into marvelous alignment with each other.

Considered in this light, visualization is thus about unity, rather than difference. While the complex cycles of the natural order produce the stunning variety of difference and transformation within the cosmos, it is also the very same cycles that offer the possibility of connecting the various dimensions within the natural realm. At such moments of connection the adept can see, that is, be visually united with, the higher dimensions of the cosmos that are normally hidden from him.

The Method of the Nine Perfected

The *Method of the Nine Perfected* is a sequence of nine visualizations that takes place over a year and is a classic method of Highest Clarity Daoism. Each of the nine sequences is roughly similar to each other and begins by explaining the date and time on which the visualization is to occur. At this specific time, “the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity merge into one great spirit,” which takes up residence in a particular organ of the body. This newly-formed “great spirit” is one of the nine perfected who would, should the adept die, ensure that he is preserved properly and transformed into a perfected person in the underworld. Each of these spirits has a particular title (*hao* 號) and a “courtesy title” (*zi* 字). The adept is to take advantage of the conjunction of these various cycles to visualize the deity. On each of the nine occasions, the adept has to close his eyes, “look inside and visualize” (*neishi cun* 內視存) the deity emitting *qi* of a specific color which coils around the organ with which it is correlated. This signals that the visual transaction is now taking place and the god is enabling the specific organ to be regenerated. Below is the set of instructions that comprises the first of these methods.

The first month, on your fate day, the *jiazi* day and the *jiaxu* day at dawn the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity merge together into one great spirit which rests in your heart. His title is the Lord of Celestial Essence, his courtesy title Highest Hero of Soaring Birth and his appearance is like an infant immediately after birth. On this day at dawn, enter your oratory, clasp your hands together on your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Look inside and visualize the Lord of Celestial Essence sitting in your heart. He is called a great spirit. Make him spew forth purple *qi* to coil thickly around your heart in nine layers of *qi*. It rushes up into the Mud Pill. Inner and outer [dimensions] are as one. (p. 173)

From this set of instructions we can make some important observations about Highest Clarity visualization practice. First of all, the visualization comprises two elements. The first involves coordinating with the cycles of the cosmos. This indicates that part of the visualization process lies outside the control of the adept. But when the time is right, the adept is able to bring about the visualization of the spirit in his body. Visualization thus has a dual, or reciprocal character to it, partly involving the functioning of the cosmos and partly involving the intention of the individual. Both these elements are fused together in the visualization practice. Once the spirit is present in the heart, the adept moves to the stage of “experiential confirmation” by instructing the spirit to “spew forth purple *qi*.” At this point it is clear that the adept is to take charge of the visualization process. He is not simply a passive observer, but an active participant in this visual transaction. The result of this transaction is the experience of *qi* rushing up from the heart into the Mud Pill, the cinnabar field in the head. The transaction is also a mystical one, in which “inner and outer are as one” indicating a unitive fusion between the inner body of the adept and the higher powers of the cosmos. This again may be understood in terms of the “transparency” of the adept to the cosmic context in which he is located.

At the end of this visualization phase, the text tells the adept to “clack your teeth nine times” and “swallow saliva nine times” before reciting a prayer. The clacking of teeth and swallowing of saliva is not simply a ritual function but is connected to the experiential dimension of this visualization; it serves to indicate that Highest Clarity Daoists do not understand visualization as a purely imaginative spiritual process, but rather one that is connected into the longer Chinese tradition of *qi* cultivation practices.

The prayer at the end summarizes the visualization process and makes a final petition:

Great Lord of Celestial Essence,
 Highest Hero of Soaring Birth,
 Imperial Lord, transform inside me,
 Come and visit my heart.

Your body is wrapped in vermilion garb;
 Your head is covered with a crimson cap.
 On your left you wear the dragon script;
 On your right you carry the tiger writing.

Harmonize my essence with the threefold path,
 Unite my spirit with the Upper Prime.
 To the Five Numinous I offer a talisman,
 With the Imperial [Lord] may I be equal.

May your mouth spit out purple blossom,
 To nourish my heart and concentrate my spirit.
 As my crimson organ spontaneously becomes alive,
 May I become a soaring immortal. (p. 173)

The first two stanzas of the prayer identify the perfected spirit by title, courtesy title, vestments and symbols of celestial authority. The final two stanzas indicate the result that the adept hopes the visualization will achieve. This entails three concrete steps: (1) offering a talisman and achieving equality with the spirits of Highest Clarity; (2) regenerating the organs of the adept; and (3) achieving ascension. All three are stages required in the process of transfiguration.

The language of talismans and equality evokes the tradition of using a talisman, or a tally, to identify the bearer as someone who is to be matched up with another person. A talisman is one half of a contract with the spirit world and implies that the bearer is entitled to a particular privilege from the spirits. Here the adept offers a talisman which puts him on an equal footing with the spirits. This language indicates that the visual transfiguration can be understood as raising the adept to an equal status with the spirit realm. The adept is calling on and activating the reciprocal relationship that exists between the heavenly world and the human world.

Once the adept has established his “right to equality” with the spirit world, he is entitled to achieve the physical regeneration of his vital organs. This is necessary because the process of transfiguration is not simply

a spiritual process but rather, in keeping with the broader Daoist tradition, a bodily process too. The process here is similar to the process of inner alchemy that became dominant in Complete Perfection Daoism, in which the adept generates an “immortal embryo,” in effect a subtle vehicle for his person. The language here is not clearly that of creating an embryo, though it may well indicate that. The alternative reading is that the adept is expecting his own vital organs to be restored, rather than creating a parallel embryo. Whichever interpretation is correct, it is clear that the adept expects this process to achieve some biospiritual transformation in which his vital organs were transfigured and thus rendered capable for the final stage in the process.

This final stage is that of ascension to heaven, or becoming a “flying immortal.” This term is to be understood literally for there is no indication that Highest Clarity Daoists conceive of heaven as a metaphorical place. Heaven literally means the sky and in particular the starry web of lights in the night sky. Within this premodern cosmology, it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that the Daoist envisaged the transformation of his body as something that would literally enable him to ascend in his transfigured state into the heavenly realm. In effect he would be obtaining a body fit for residence in the stars, rather than for being interred in the ground. All of this is to be achieved by visualizing the deity at the right time and thereby invoking the spiritual reciprocity that connects the outer space of the heavens with the inner space of the body.

Visualizing the Three Primes

An alternate technique for visualization appears in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* and in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*: “visualizing the Three Primes.” At the eight nodes of the solar year the Highest Clarity adept may visualize the Three Primes emerging from their position in the heavens, joining him and taking him up into the sky. The *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* has a basic summary of this technique:

Upper Prime operates at Spring Begins; he comes from the Eastern Dipper and returns. Middle Prime operates at the Summer Begins; he comes from the Southern Dipper and returns. Lower Prime operates at Winter Begins; he comes from the Northern Dipper and returns. The three energies ascend on high; visualize them also in the body. The coming and going of each one corresponds to the four nodes of the solar year. This method is so rare,

its operation so vast, its application so near at hand! Such long life it gives! (p. 128)

Later in the same text, the teaching of Juanzi 涓子 to Su Lin 蘇林 presents a slightly fuller description:

You should offer prayers to the Three Ones in the Dipper on the [eight] nodes of the solar [year]. If you do this for twenty years, you will see the Three Ones. When you can see them you will have long life and become an immortal. If your family has the Three Ones, then they will have long life and will never be extinguished. If you are able to visualize the Three Ones, your name will be placed on a jade tablet. If you are able to visualize [them in] the Grotto Chamber, your vision will correspond with heaven. If you are able to visualize the Three Primes, on high you will become a perfected immortal. The Imperial Lord Goldtower of the Sovereign Heaven of Highest Clarity can ride his swift dragon chariot through the clouds and circumnavigate the nine heavens because of this practice of [visualizing] the Perfected Ones of the Three Primes in the Grotto Chamber. (p. 157)

This indicates that the Three Ones reside in the Dipper and emerge on the eight nodes of the solar year. It envisages the process of transfiguration as having one's name "placed on a jade tablet" and mastering a vision that will "correspond with heaven" (*yu tian xiangwang* 與天相望). The concept of having one's name inscribed in "jade tablets" or other equally elaborate records in the celestial registry points to the bureaucratic tradition in which ascension to heaven is only possible upon proper registration with the relevant celestial bureau. The concept of "corresponding with heaven" indicates the idea of attaining a unity or equality with the heavenly realm. Unlike the *Method of the Nine Perfected*, however, there is no mention of the process of transfiguration as an alchemical process within the body. Rather, the language is thoroughly celestial, emphasizing the power of Lord Goldtower, now a perfected person of Highest Clarity, who rides through the skies on a chariot pulled by dragons.

In the texts discussed here, the details of visualizing the Three Primes are expressed in two complementary ways. First of all, the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* offers a comprehensive description of this method in terms of the life of Zhou Ziyang. Secondly, the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* offers a comprehensive, systematic program for how this method of visualization is to be carried out over the period of a year.

The method of visualizing the Three Primes is the culminating spiritual transformation in Zhou Ziyang's life. The Three Primes appear under their formal titles, White Prime Lord, Lord Wuying and Yellow Venerable Lord, and are described in elaborate detail. Through their visualization Zhou Ziyang ultimately receives the writ appointing him to his celestial title, "Perfected Purple Yang." The method of visualizing the Three Primes is thus a way of making a connection to the highest realms. The Three Prime Lords are not themselves the ones who bestow the title on Zhou, but function as intermediaries, enabling him to ascend to heaven where he visits the Palace of Great Tenuity. The final transaction takes place there.⁵

The intermediary function of this type of visualization is made even more explicit in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*. The table of correlations (p. 71 above) summarizes the titles of the intermediary deities and the final deities with which the adept is connected. As the table makes clear, only the first of these eight methods names the Three Prime Lords as the intermediaries, but the figure of three is repeated throughout the visualizations in the form of the three colors of clouds which trail the intermediary deities as they ascend to heaven. The reason for visualizing the intermediary deities is so that they can transport the adept in their chariots up to the higher reaches of heaven so that the adept can present a petition to a high god. In the case of the first method, the adept visualizes the Three Primes ascending to visit the Supreme Emperor of Heaven. The instructions continue as follows:

At this time you must visualize in your mind knocking your head to the floor and striking yourself. Visualize in your mind making four double bows, [then] present yourself and beg as follows:

"A certain great-grandson has a degree of love for the Way and its Power and has cultivated the [Way of] the Nine Perfected, purified his five spirits and has also brought about the perception of the Imperial Lord of Heaven. Let it be recorded today that he has had an auspicious encounter with the Three Prime Lords while out on their travels and pleads to be granted the service of a chariot. He prays for the satisfaction of his desires."

⁵ Though not explicitly recorded in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, the deity who confers the title on him in the Palace of Great Subtlety is presumably the Imperial Lord of Great Subtlety, who is the older brother of the Yellow Venerable Lord. The full biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord is recorded in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (p. 164).

Here, then, the method of visualization takes on a new form. It is not sufficient that the adept visualizes the deity in question and makes a petition to him. Now he has to visualize himself in the presence of the Imperial Lord of Heaven performing the courtly ritual associated with visiting a distinguished personage and making a petition. Note however, that a key element of the petition lies in demonstrating the adept's expertise at visualization. In a remarkable fusion of bureaucratic theology and visual meditation, he petitions the god to formally recognize the validity of his visualization of the Three Primes. In this case it seems that it is not enough simply to have been successful in meditation, it is also necessary that the relevant celestial bureaucrats officially record the fact.

The passage advises that it is necessary to perform this method three times:

If you see the carriages of the [Three] Prime Lords three times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight and will have no further need of visual meditation (*bu xu fu tuo cunsi* 不須復他存思).

The adept will have no need for visual meditation once he is finally successful in achieving his objective of becoming a transfigured being with the rank of a Highest Clarity perfected person. This emphatic recognition that visual meditation is only ever an intermediary function recalls the central themes of transfiguration and translucence that have repeatedly surfaced in this analysis. Visualization is concerned with dissolving boundaries, overcoming difference, transforming the body and transcending ordinary finitudes of time and space. It is effective, in the Highest Clarity world, because it is built into the fabric of the cosmos, which is shot through with empty spaces where visual connections may be made.

As powerful as this technique purports to be, the above text recognizes that visualization is only ever temporary. This meditative technique is not about passively observing the ultimate reality of the cosmos, but about actively transforming its transitory phenomena. It is not really the objective function of a scientific mind, but an imaginative act of faith where envisioning what ought to be the case functions as a point of transition between the real and the ideal. Just as the Highest Clarity gods inhabit the interstitial spaces of mountain grottos and bodily cavities, so also the adept sees in and through these twilight spaces to visualize realities as yet unreal. Religion is a transaction, an exchange of cosmic power within the

cosmos so as to bring about the desired goal of the adept. As soon as it has achieved its purpose, it is no longer necessary.

4. Revelation

Along with nature and vision, revelation is a key concept of Highest Clarity Daoism. Drawing on existing understandings of revelation within Daoism and, more broadly, what has been termed the “southern” tradition in Chinese religions (see Strickmann 1981), it forged them into a synthesis with unique characteristics and emphases.

Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), one of the leading intellectuals in medieval Daoism, emphasized the concept of divine revelation. In his biography of Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the first Celestial Master, Ge Hong glosses over the details of Zhang’s meditative activities, and focuses simply on the result: a visit from a panoply of divine beings and the bestowal of the Covenant of Orthodox Unity, by the divinized Laozi. From his account it is not clear what form exactly this covenant took, though later in the text Ge Hong is clear about the results, which were that Zhang Daoling was able to heal the sick and attract a large following. The basic pattern that this text reveals remains unchanged into the Highest Clarity movement: through effort on the part of the individual it is possible to be granted an audience with a divine being, the result of which is the bestowal of spiritual authority and cosmic power upon the adept. The spiritual authority is accompanied by the bestowal of ranks, titles, texts and other insignia. The cosmic power is evident in the biospiritual transfiguration that these insignia symbolize. This, then, is the general concept of revelation which forms the parameters within which Highest Clarity Daoism works.

Before examining the specific features of that revelation, it is worthwhile pausing to consider some of the fundamental assumptions that the general concept of revelation entails. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to examining how these general concepts are specified within the Highest Clarity revelations. It is important to consider some of the general assumptions, or “absolute presuppositions” about the theology of the Highest Clarity Daoist revelation because these reveal important features about the overall worldview. These general features within the topogra-

phy, so to speak, of Highest Clarity Daoism are in many respects common to many traditions within the general human religious experience.

First, the concept of revelation implies from the beginning a complementary concept of mystery. If there is something to be revealed, then by definition before its revelation it must have been secret or hidden or, in a word, mysterious. Highest Clarity Daoism, in fact, takes this element of mystery to be the foundation from which revelation takes place. That is to say, “mystery” (*xuan* 玄) is not simply the complement of revelation, but is, in fact, its foundation or origin. The concept of mystery was examined in terms of nature and metaphysics in chapter two. Mystery was likened to the empty spaces that form the inside, so to speak, of the spiritually significant locations within the natural realm and the human body. Just as nature is seen to be a metaphysical expression of the creative function of the mystical power of the cosmos, so also the texts and revelations of the Highest Clarity tradition can be examined as literary expressions of that same mystical, creative power.

The second general concept of revelation, then, is that of religious revelations as sacred communications, different in some fundamental way, from ordinary human communications. The argument here is that the religious significance of revelation does not exclusively lie in the content of the message that is transmitted but also in the way in which the transmission takes place. In order to understand the significance of religious revelations from a theological perspective it is important to consider the formal nature of the message as much as its pragmatic content. The religious significance of the Koran, for instance, cannot be summed up solely in the meaning of the words, but relies also on the fact that Muslims believe the Archangel Gabriel dictated it in a beautiful language to an illiterate man. The form of transmission and its pragmatic meaning are inextricably linked in Muslim theology. Thus in terms of the present study, while the previous chapter examined the more practical aspects of Highest Clarity scriptures, such as when and how to perform various visualization methods, this chapter will consider the overall form and communicative structure of those same texts. The theory advanced here is that religious scriptures (*jing* 經) have a formal structure and process of transmission that is in itself religiously significant. This sacred process, more so than the actual content, marks out Highest Clarity religious texts as sacred.

Closely linked to this movement from mystery to revelation is the idea of an inherently hierarchical disclosure of knowledge. A revelation implies that one person discloses to another person a mystery, some piece of information of which that person was previously unaware. Before the revelation, the revealer occupies a higher epistemological position than the person to whom the revelation is given. Paradoxically, however, while the process of revelation implies a hierarchy of knowledge over ignorance, the effect of the revelation is to collapse that hierarchy uniting both parties in an equal knowledge. A revelation is thus a gift, or an act of gracious enlightenment on the part of the one who possesses the knowledge to the one who does not and brings about an equality of relationship between the two. In order to understand Highest Clarity revelations it will be necessary to examine how they implicitly constructed and deconstructed these hierarchies of knowledge.

The fourth and final general concept of revelation that this chapter will examine is the idea of a revelation as the personalization of sacred knowledge. As the previous chapters have documented, the Highest Clarity tradition focuses on dissolving the boundaries between the heavenly and the earthly realms. Scriptures reveal methods for humans to transform themselves into some more divinized state of being. But the corollary of this is equally important. Revelation implies that gods must descend to the level of the humans in order to communicate with them. While it is only natural for humans to focus on the latter part of this process, nevertheless, revelation does imply the “descent” of the gods just as much as the “ascent” of humans.

One important feature of this descent is the personalization of the gods. Whereas the creative mystery of the cosmos is by definition unfathomable and unattainable, the very concept of specific revelations implies the transformation of this raw creative power into some personalized form. Since communication is inherently the transmission of meaning from one mind to another, for gods to communicate they must become personalized, that is they must condescend to speak in words, transforming their lofty sentiments into forms that mere mortals can grasp. Thus in many religions there is a distinction to be made between an absolute cosmic god and an intermediary deity whose chief function is to communicate “down below.” This can be seen in West African religions where the high creator god is rarely the object of people’s religious life; instead ordinary people deal with an intermediate level of deities who have

authority over specific areas in people's lives. Similar comparisons can be made in many religions where intermediary deities or quasi-divine spiritual beings such as angels translate the abstruse thoughts of the divine mind into words that the human brain can grasp.

Intriguingly, Highest Clarity Daoists take this element of "personalization" and "descent" quite literally, envisioning the gods as resident in the bodies of the practitioners. Revelation is not simply a spiritual or cognitive process, but a material, somatic process too.

REVELATION AND MYSTERY

The most paradoxical aspect of revelation lies in its relationship to mystery, a relationship that is well developed in the Highest Clarity tradition and forms the theological heart of Zhu Ziyong's preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, translated in chapter seven. The main function of this preface is to explain, albeit in rather mystical language, how the scripture came into existence. To do so, he has to start with cosmology. He writes:

In midst of nothing, suddenly there is breathing in and out, dispersing the myriad spirits on their way, moving them to the utmost, then returning them to stillness. It is shadowy and indistinct, [yet] it encloses the marvelous phenomena of the Imperial [Lord] and [Supreme] Unity. This is called the "blending of the whirlwind."¹ It forms the common root of the stem of Heaven and Earth and the source of the creative power of emperors and sages. (p. 213)

Here Zhu Ziyong is offering his definition of the key Highest Clarity concept, found in the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, known as the "blending of the whirlwind" (*huifeng hunhe* 迴風混合). In his understanding this "whirlwind" represents the fullness of the creative process by which the spirits are flung outwards, filling the void with their presence and then returning to a state of inaction. But as Zhu continues with his description, it becomes less clear that he is making metaphysical pro-

¹ The previous paragraph explained the "great grotto" as the swirling emptiness of the cosmos that connects all forms together. Similarly this paragraph has described the parallel process within the body whereby through the centrifugal force of the "whirlwind" the adept invokes the various spirits of the cosmos gathering them within his body.

nouncements and more evident that he is also referring to a spiritual process that can be grasped by human beings.

The next sentence focuses on the body of the Highest Clarity practitioner: “in the nothingness, suddenly there is breathing in and out” (*wu zhong xu you huxi* 無中歔有呼吸). Thus the “whirlwind” also refers to the ecstatic state in which the spirits can “enclose the wondrous phenomena of Imperial Unity.” The “myriad spirits” in Highest Clarity Daoism normally refer to the spirits that reside in the body rather than the abstract spiritual forces of the cosmos. At this point, Zhu seems to be indicating that just as the creation of the cosmos involves a swirling expansion and contraction at the macrocosm level, so also at the microcosm level there is a spiritual process by which human creatures can grasp the “source of this creative power” (*zaohua zhi yuan* 造化之原).

The way Zhu Ziyong describes this process makes use of the famous phrase in ch. 21 of *The Way and Its Power* in which the Way is described as “shadowy and indistinct” (*huanghu* 恍惚). In the context of this passage, however, this phrase can also be seen as referring to the body of the practitioner who is “in a trance” (*huanghu* 恍惚), a phrase that denotes an alternate state of consciousness and recalls the shamanic overtones in the previous sentence in which the multitude of cosmic spirits are “whirling an auspicious wind, drumming and dancing” (*yun xiang feng er gu wu* 運祥風而鼓舞).²

It is important to remember that Zhu is writing in an allusive way that leaves the subject of these statements deliberately unclear. Zhu’s imagery thus manages to embrace several possible interpretations all at the same time. He is combining the shamanic imagery of drumming and dancing to induce an entranced state with the cosmic imagery of expanding and contracting in a swirling revolution around a metaphysical abyss, and with the Highest Clarity notion of body spirits who “enclose the marvelous phenomena” of the high gods. All of this he describes as the “blending of the whirlwind” which can be understood as a process of creation, revelation and salvation: it is creation in that it is the foundational process of the cosmos; it is revelation in that it describes the ecstatic state in which visions of gods can take place; it is salvation in that it is the source of “transformative power” for emperors and sages. But of these three as-

² See also note 10 on page 214 for more detail on this phrase.

pects of the “whirlwind” Zhu was most interested in the aspect of revelation. The context for these pronouncements is, after all, the preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. His goal is to explain how this scripture came into being, and he is locating the scripture firmly in the cosmic processes of creation and transformation. Ultimately, revelation is for him the same process as creation and salvation. The creation of the scriptures is not to be considered in any way supplementary to the creation of the universe: they were part and parcel of the same “whirlwind” process.

Thus Zhu begins the next section of his preface with the following statement:

Thus the thirty-nine Imperial Sovereigns of the heaven of Highest Clarity circulate as perfected ones and shine down to enter the thirty-nine portals of the body. Thereupon, each [perfected one], penetrating through the portal, composes one [of the thirty-nine] sections of the scripture. Its language is profound and abstruse and by using it one can draw in a hundred spirits and summon perfected cosmic forces. This is called “congratulatory clouds opening the gate of life” and “auspicious vapors blocking the portals of death.”

The term “thus” (*gu* 故) here indicates a logical connection between this section and the preceding section. The metaphysical description of the whirlwind, the breathing in and out and the drumming and the dancing is the means by which the thirty-nine Imperial Sovereigns enter the body and compose (*zhu* 著) the sections of the scriptures. By this point it is evident that the subject of the text as a whole has transitioned from discussing the origins of the cosmos to the origins of scriptures.

Zhu Ziyong is claiming that the ultimate authority of scriptures lies with the Dao itself, the cosmic process of creation and transformation, and that this Dao is accessible to human beings through a process of revelation. Revelation thus means the transformation of the ultimate cosmic forces into the Chinese characters of the text. At this point it is important to be clear about how this transformation takes place.³ Zhu describes the composition of this particular scripture as being a process that takes place “through the door which it [each spirit] had penetrated” (*you qi suo guan zhi hu* 由其所貫之戶) a phrase that refers to the way in which the

³ It would be equally plausible to describe this as an act of transfiguration, parallel to the way in which the adept’s body was transformed into a light being.

perfected spirits of the Imperial Sovereigns establish communication with the human who physically recorded the scripture in Chinese characters.

The root meaning of the term *guan* 貫, translated above as “penetrated,” is a string of coins. The phrase evokes the concept of linking things together by means of their empty spaces.⁴ This metaphor indicates that revelation depends on emptiness for the process of transmission, whereby the threads of scriptures string gods and humans together through their empty spaces. The consequence of this is evident in the next sentence: “Its language is profound and abstruse and by using it one can draw in a hundred spirits (*ling kuo baishen* 領括百神) and summon perfected cosmic forces (*zhao zhen pifei* 招真辟非).” Since the scriptures are the threads that link the human spiritual world with cosmic powers they are also the means by which humans have access to those forces and can issue commands to them. Thus the relationship between cosmic mystery and spiritual revelation is a reciprocal one. Although mystery must cosmologically precede the revelations of the spirits, the act of revelation has the effect of negating this antecedence, thus permitting the Daoist to enter into a state of equality or unitive fusion with those prior cosmological powers.

In this sense, therefore, it is true to say that the Highest Clarity revelations and the revelations of mass religions such as Christianity and Islam share a common goal which is to overcome the difference between divine knowledge and human knowledge. However, Highest Clarity Daoists construe this relationship in a unique way. In Theravada Buddhism, say, the quest for perfection can be construed as a process of “enlightenment” in which the status of the individual “believer” is gradually transformed from someone who lives in darkest ignorance to someone whose path is shining clear. If this general characterization of many forms of religion holds true, then in this one regard Highest Clarity Daoism is fundamentally different. Revelation does not entail enlightenment: rather it entailed entering more profoundly into the abstruse mystery of things.

A first clue to thinking about this can be seen in the fact that many religious revelations distill the most religiously significant element of their message into a basic quantum of knowledge that they freely make avail-

⁴ Chinese coins traditionally had a hole in the middle and so could be strung together in bundles of ten, hundred or a thousand.

able to the masses: “God loves you,” or “Life is suffering,” or “There is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet.” Each of these “nuggets of information” encapsulates the basic “revelation” on which Christianity, Buddhism or Islam is based. By contrast, in Highest Clarity Daoism there is no “basic message” that can transform the individual’s life should he or she understand it. Rather, as the first line of *The Way and Its Power* says, “The way that can be told is not the constant way; the name that can be named is not the constant name.” The key message here is a paradox: that there is no single, ultimate key message. Rather, ultimate knowledge is irreducibly obscure, revelations are irreducibly mysterious and the further one travels along the path of knowledge, the more one dwells in the land of mystery. Paradoxically, therefore, although the Highest Clarity revelations convey practical information that enables the adept to make progress up the hierarchy, the more one progresses, the more one dwells in obscurity.

Before proceeding to examine the function of revelation with respect to this cosmic hierarchy, however, there is one further aspect of the relationship between revelation and mystery that needs to be elucidated. This aspect has already been alluded to above and relates to the way in which Highest Clarity scriptures are both precisely detailed and also maddeningly obscure. Zhu Ziyong was not wrong when he referred to the language of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* as profound and abstruse (*you’ao* 幽奧) and indeed this is true of all Highest Clarity revealed scriptures. All of them use highly metaphorical imagery, rare Chinese characters and approach their subject matter in an elliptical fashion. Inasmuch as they described with precise detail the appearance of the gods, at the same time they seemed to make it as difficult as possible to know what those precise visual clues refer to.

An example of the difficult language in these scriptures can be found in an extract from the Biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*:

He sent forth [cosmic] sounds in elegant waves, and condensed clear [*qi*] in a clear and swirling liquid. [Amid] strange sounds and faint echoes, clouds converged in eightfold layers, as he played [in the realm of] Great Beginning.

He focused his mind on lofty emblems, subtly traversed the ten directions and sought out spirits in [the realm of] Abstruse Prime.

He gathered the whirlwind and stirred the infinitesimal, submerging himself in purity and hiding in subtlety. (p. 164)

The text here is using rarified language that is explained in more detail in the translation in chapter six. The question here is why were Highest Clarity scriptures so obscure if they were emblems of the gracious revelation of celestial powers? Ought they not to have been simple and accessible, offering a straightforward path towards spiritual progress? The answer to this question lies in understanding the implicitly hierarchical concept of the spiral or the swirling abyss that was explained in chapter two as the basis of the natural metaphysics of the Highest Clarity Daoist world. Simply put, cosmic power functions in direct proportion to obscurity. The closer to the heart of the Dao a god or a text is, the greater its transfigurative power and also its obscurity and rarity. Moreover, the dazzling radiance of the gods described in Highest Clarity Daoist texts depends for its effectiveness on the contrast with the obscurity of their surroundings. Gods are described like stars, as points of light interrupting an otherwise dismal darkness. Thus the brilliant detail with which the gods are described when they are visualized in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* and other Highest Clarity texts is also accompanied by many references to the darkness and void of their surroundings.

In terms of the biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, this contrast between the revelation and mystery appears in how obscure language functions rhetorically to build up an ever more mysterious impression of the Lord's activities. Having built up this crescendo of obscurity, the text then announces in plain and simple language that the Lord received the scriptures, put them into practice and became a perfected being. The climax, that of receiving the scriptures and becoming transfigured, depends both in terms of literature and cosmology on the increasing obscurity of the previous stanzas. It is this "deep but dazzling darkness" on which the mystery of revelation depends as its antecedent, background and complement.

SACRED SCRIPTURES

This second section moves to examine the formal structure of Highest Clarity revelations and argues that their status as sacred scriptures (*jing* 經) is evident in their formal structure just as much as their pragmatic content. The most important factor is that the scriptures contain within themselves the formal authentication of their pragmatic content, explain-

ing how they came into existence and how they came to be transmitted in their present form. They then proceed to reveal techniques that enable the adept to ascend to some transfigured state. The scriptures thus comprise a circular movement, from the heavens to the adept and back from the adept to the heavens. In this aspect of their formal structure they thus imitate the creative process of the cosmos whereby the Dao swirls outwards generating the myriad creatures in a process of extension and at the same time drives downwards in an ever deeper abyss of “intension” or intensification. The form of the texts reflects the creative tension between the outer and the inner; it marks them specifically as sacred texts, threading from the highest reaches of the heavens to the deepest spaces of the body and back again.

The previous section offered a glimpse of this formal movement in the way Zhu Ziyong connects the creative power of the cosmos to the revelation of scriptures through gods entering the body. He then goes on to make this more explicit by explaining how the scripture came to be transmitted. Ultimately the text is said to have originated in the primal forces of the cosmos, but then it has to establish a chain of transmission through celestial beings, the gods of the Highest Clarity pantheon who were the bureaucratic instantiations of these cosmic forces.

According to the text, the origins can be traced back to the Queen Mother of the West who received the way from the Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning. The text was engraved in heaven, with a “numinous reflection” (*lingjing* 靈鏡) formed of characters ten feet tall in a mountain grotto.⁵ This “reflection,” threaded through the emptiness of the cavern, is connected to the human realm.

This implies that through visual meditation in the empty spaces of the body an adept can come to visualize the characters of the text and record them.⁶ What most marks the scripture as sacred, however, is the form in

⁵ The concept of a “numinous reflection” is usually associated with Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao* 靈寶) Daoism. It seems here that Zhu Ziyong, writing centuries after the original Highest Clarity revelations has appropriated this term to help explain the theology of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*.

⁶ This in fact fits with the way in which the visionary Yang Xi is said to have transmitted the key corpus of Highest Clarity scriptures. In her discussion of the religious function of Yang Xi, Robinet (1984) argues forcefully that it would be wrong to think of Yang Xi simply as a medium who transcribed the teachings of the gods. Rather Yang Xi is to be regarded as someone who, by dint of meditative visu-

which it was transmitted. Zhu Ziyong does not emphasize here the fact that the text reveals methods for the adept to ascend to the highest reaches of heaven, but rather its provenance and mode of transmission. The text is religiously significant because it is a cosmic thread that weaves the textures of the human body into the fabric of the cosmos. The fact that the scripture was transmitted in this way thus constitutes the guarantee that the adept who practices the methods revealed in the text will ultimately be successful.

For this reason all three texts that are under investigation in this book contain a preface that explains their origin. The *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* claims to have been written by Hua Qiao, who, it will be recalled, met the Perfected Purple Yang in a dream. The *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* begins with the hagiography of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center which, as was discussed above, culminates in his receiving the scripture in question. These accounts of transmission are not simply attempts to emphasize the importance or rarity of the methods contained in the text but are integral aspects of the formal structure of the texts without which they could not be considered as revealed scriptures (*jing* 經).⁷

If this argument is correct, then it follows that the efficacy of the texts does not solely rely on the correct practice of the methods. Rather the mere existence of the texts in fact reflects the cosmic power from which they originate. Thus while the significance of an ordinary text lies solely

alization, gained a vision of the gods and their scriptures and thus was in the position of being able to record them.

⁷ This does not mean that there are no literary devices within the texts to emphasize their importance. In fact, Zhu Ziyong's preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* goes on to record a second method of transmission for this scripture. In this alternate transmission, the Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning gave the scripture to the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, the most significant intermediary deity in the Highest Clarity pantheon. Curiously, however, Zhu Ziyong notes that although the Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning's motive in so doing was "to enable the teaching to be conferred upon the lower regions" (*shi jiaoshou xiafang* 使教授下方), the Yellow Venerable Lord did not in fact do this, and thus the scripture came to be kept hidden from the earthly realms. Zhu is here alluding to the extremely precious nature of the scripture: it is a rare treasure because although the Heavenly King gave express instructions for it to be transmitted, in fact this did not happen. Including this "dead-end" account serves chiefly to highlight the text's rarity and hence its value.

in its intellectual meaning, the significance of a Highest Clarity revealed text is evident in other ways.

A first indication of this lies in the description of Perfected Purple Yang's encounter with the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center in his *Esoteric Biography*. The *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* first makes an appearance in the text when Zhou ascends Mt. Song 嵩, the central of the five sacred mountains of China and residence of the Yellow Venerable Lord (hence the inclusion of the term "Central" in his title). Below is Zhou's vision of the Yellow Venerable Lord's residence:

Spirit tigers flanked the entrance to the grotto. Numinous predators guarded the Taishi peak. The servants on the left were Young Lads of Clear Perfection; the servants on the right were Jade Maidens of Supreme Harmony; there were over a hundred of each. They were offering cups of spirit wine, chanting the thirty-nine chapters of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, reciting the twenty-four chapters of the *Marvelous Scripture from [the Palace of] Vast Possessions* and performing the twenty-one tunes of the Supreme Purity Numinous Power. In the central court were Azure Waisted Jade Maidens holding Mystery Jade Southern Lighting lamps, scattering blossoms and lighting incense; they were attending to the Yellow Venerable Lord. (p. 135)

In this extract the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* is significant in terms of its function in the courtly ritual that is on display. The jade maidens and young lads are reciting the scripture as part of their service towards the Yellow Venerable Lord. Again, this points to the significance of the text for something other than its pragmatic meaning. Its spiritual power is being evoked by chanting and in so doing serves to glorify the Yellow Venerable Lord.

A further indication of the non-pragmatic value of Highest Clarity texts comes at the end of Zhu Ziyong's preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. He wrote:

If, however, you possess this scripture but do not get to study it, the Heavenly Imperial Lord of Supreme Subtlety will expunge your death certificate and, beginning from when you received the scripture, will establish [your] register of perfection. When you first begin a purification retreat, he will transfer your records to the Supreme Ultimate, inscribe your name in Eastern Blossom and send a report about you to the Supreme [Imperial Lord]. You will be registered and enfeoffed in Turtle Terrace, and ten thousand spirits and a thousand numinous powers will call you the

Great Man of Nine Mysteries. Your position will be that of Immortal Earl of Great Clarity.

Here Zhu Ziying is indicating two different relationships between the adept and the text: the first is that of “possession” (*you* 有), the second that of “studying” or “reading” (*du* 讀). Zhu is claiming that simply possessing the scripture will have the function of enabling the adept to be transferred, *post mortem*, to the celestial realms and receive a heavenly title. This again is a further indication that the sacredness of the text lies outside its content. Of course studying the text and putting it into practice would enable the adept to achieve an *ante mortem* ascension into heaven and a correspondingly higher status, but the cosmic power of the text does not lie solely in its being put into practice by the adept. Rather some residue of transfigurative possibility seems to exist in the text itself, presumably by virtue of its transmission. Again this is a further indication that the sacred character of the text does not lie solely in its pragmatic content.

This function of the text develops and extends an earlier Daoist conception of sacred texts as talismans (*fu* 符). As Isabel Robinet explains (1993: 21), Daoist talismans bear an affinity with imperial seals (*yin* 印) that authenticate the bearer’s royal power, said to have been handed down from the mythical sage-kings of old. A talisman thus functions as a seal between humans and deities and recalls the reciprocal or covenantal relationship established through the revelation of sacred texts from the celestial realm to the human realm. The possession of talismans, therefore, protects the bearer by advertising that the bearer is in a covenantal relationship with a powerful cosmic being.

Highest Clarity scriptures extend this notion of the protective power of a talisman by claiming that the possession of the sacred text has not merely the power of protection from harm but also the power to transform the body of the adept after death. This implies that the transmission of texts plays an active cosmic role in enabling the transformative processes of the universe to take place. Zhu Ziying makes this role explicit when he describes the scripture as follows:

This text is the *Emblem of The High Imperial Way*, the *Marvelous Purple Dawn Volume*, [and thereby] regulates the destiny of the [various] ranks within the nine heavens and invokes the numinous powers of the five Imperial [Lords]. (p. 220)

In this sentence the text itself is given a specific sacred function, that of regulating destinies and invoking numinous powers. The text is thus imagined like a god, a specific configuration of raw cosmic power. Moreover, the practical effect of the transmission of this text is to establish a reciprocal connection between the highest reaches of the cosmos and the interiority of the human body:

It moves primal energy to the individual's personal vital force, connects the transforming existence [of the cosmos] to the mystery gate [in the body] and links the creative powers [of the Dao] to the production of marvels [in the phenomenal world]. It is the pure and dazzling web, which shines through the clouds. (p. 230)

The transmission of the scripture is thus about “moving” or “transporting” (*yun* 運) the primal forces of the cosmos to the individual body and forging connections (*tong* 通) between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Its sacred role does not merely lie in practicing the methods that it prescribes, but is a consequence of the very revelation of the text in the first place. The process of revelation in and of itself establishes a reciprocal relationship, like a covenant or a talisman, which binds the recipient of the revelation to the heaven of Highest Clarity.

This reciprocity is evident, argues Robinet, in the notion that as humans recite the texts, which are traces of the originals in the heavens, deities echo in response; moreover texts are said to be written in a double or mirror script or in two colors (1993: 27–8). Zhu Ziyong bears this out when he claims that the received text of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* is a “numinous reflection” of the original that is “engraved in the Northern Prime Heaven” (*ke Beiyuantian zhong* 刻北元天中; p. 219). As the text goes on to indicate, the consequence of this process of establishing a “numinous reflection” accessible by humans was to forge the link between “primal energy” (*pifei* 辟非)⁸ and the “life forces” (*mingliang* 明梁) of individual humans. Thus the act of revelation and the form of transmission are themselves essential constituents of the function of the scripture, which is to enable the adept to ascend to heaven.

This does not discount the pragmatic content of the texts. Returning to the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, although Zhou has his first

⁸ Pifei is glossed as the “original *qi* born above the nine heavens” (*yuanqi sheng yu jiutian zhi shang* 元氣生于九天之上) in *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* (*Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤; DZ 1032 j. 8).

“encounter” with the text in his first glimpse of the Yellow Venerable Lord, his ascension to perfection only comes about when he is formally transmitted the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*:

Lord Zhou then returned to ascend Everlasting Mountain. Inside the stone chamber he undertook a ritual purification and meditated on the Dao. When he had again done this for a further ninety years, Lord Baiyuan and Lord Wuying and the Yellow Venerable Lord forthwith transmitted to him the thirty-nine chapters of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. There were twenty-one jade lads and twenty-one jade maidens who were all in attendance, continuously burning incense. He studied the book at night and accumulated eleven years [doing so].

After this he rode through the clouds on a dragon-pulled chariot and ascended to heaven in broad daylight. He visited the Palace of Great Subtlety and received the document that appointed him as the Perfected Purple Yang.

As this extract and Zhu Ziyi's preface make clear, merely receiving the book, while in itself more than a great honor, is not sufficient to attain the formal title and status of “perfected.” This requires actively studying and practicing its methods. From the text above it will be seen that it takes Zhou eleven years before he finally ascends to heaven and is granted the title of “perfected.”

HIERARCHIES OF KNOWLEDGE

The notion of “studying” a text in order to make progress on the path to perfection raises the question of theory of knowledge that is implicit in Highest Clarity texts. Based on the three texts under discussion here, it is clear that Highest Clarity theology envisages knowledge in hierarchical terms, and it is further apparent that Highest Clarity knowledge has two intriguing characteristics: it is locative, in the sense of being tied to particular locations, rather than universal; and it is esoteric, in that it is only comprehensible by and transmissible to certain rare individuals.

To say that knowledge is hierarchical means first of all that knowledge can be distinguished by its quality. Not all knowledge is the same. Some knowledge has a deeper value or a higher purpose than other knowledge. In the hierarchy of Highest Clarity Daoism, the more valuable the knowledge, the fewer the people who know it. Highest Clarity Daoism, as a religious system, therefore, trades in highly valuable information. From a religious perspective this makes the tradition completely different

from a mass, popular religion such as evangelical Christianity, in which divine revelation is considered to be equally accessible by all people, and great efforts are made to make the message of the religion widely accessible.

By contrast, Highest Clarity revelations construe the most fundamental, vital and significant pieces of knowledge to be the most hidden, rare and inaccessible. In terms of the sociology of knowledge, therefore, Highest Clarity Daoism is less like a mass religion and more like theoretical physics: anyone can understand Newtonian mechanics because it resonates with our basic mental intuitions about how the world functions; but the Newtonian model breaks down at the quantum level, and the more one delves into the fundamental structures of the universe, the stranger it becomes until finally it can be grasped only in the highly abstract and rarified language of pure mathematics and linguistic paradoxes. The deeper one delves, the stranger things become, getting more complex and more mysterious rather than more simple and more basic. Further knowledge does not in fact yield enlightenment, that is to say, clarification, but rather deeper mystery. As much as one might like to believe that the universe operates according to basic principles that can be grasped by anyone, the Highest Clarity revelations imply otherwise.⁹

The reason for this “hierarchy of knowledge” in which progress is measured not by enlightenment but by mystery lies in the hierarchical view of nature that was explored in chapter two. If the Dao itself is imaged as a swirling abyss of mystery (*xuan* 玄) then it follows that the closer one gets towards the very center, the deeper, more abstract, the more “vacuous” the understanding one has.

Another way of thinking about this comes from emphasizing the locative quality of knowledge in the Highest Clarity tradition. In this view knowledge is not universally true or false, but instead connected to location. This idea can be seen in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* when Zhou travels from mountain to mountain, in each place encountering a deity and receiving a scripture. Specific revelations occur in specific places and the specific meditative practices revealed in those texts are ideally to be undertaken in association with specific geographic con-

⁹ Of course this analogy breaks down when one considers that theoretical physics is in principle comprehensible by anyone who can devote their attention to the subject, whereas the revelations of Highest Clarity were kept deliberately secret.

texts.¹⁰ To this day, Daoist monasteries located on various sacred mountains maintain traditions of practice and ordination that vary from place to place. This emphasis on locative knowledge is no accident. Even in its very name, the Daoist tradition is associated with knowing “the way” rather than the “truth” (see Graham 1989: 3). Far from being an abstract philosophical question, Highest Clarity Daoists take this to be a concrete, locative question: the “Way to Highest Clarity” depends on where and when you are physically located.

The emphasis on location is also an extension of the concepts of “disposition” and “alignment.” Progress along the Daoist path is made not by applying a universal principle or formula to any given situation, but rather by harmonizing the specific patterns in specific places to enable a specific moment of transfiguration to take place. Daoist scriptures such as the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* thus revealed the comings and goings of the gods, saying what happened where and when so that the adept can put himself in the right location to take advantage of the particular constellation of cosmic forces that happens to be occurring at that particular time.

In the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, Zhou’s travels through mountains reveal a hierarchy of space and a hierarchy of knowledge. As Zhou makes progress, he enters increasingly rare spaces and acquired increasingly profound texts, gaining at the very end the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* and a vision of the Three Lords in the “empty grotto” of his own brain. In Highest Clarity terminology, then, the highest knowledge is the most profound and mysterious and is revealed only in the rarest of empty spaces. Highest Clarity Daoism is thus not a “catholic” religion claiming a universal and eternal validity, nor is it formulated

¹⁰ The association between mountain grottos and sacred libraries was formalized when the Daoist scriptures first came to be compiled by Lu Xiujing (406-77). Liu arranged them into three subdivisions that he termed grottos: the Grotto of Mystery, the Grotto of Perfection and the Grotto of Spirit. These grottos were the repositories of the original texts, presided over by deities, who had transmitted them to earth at various times and places. These three grottos moreover corresponded to the three major heavens, Jade Clarity, Highest Clarity and Great Clarity, each divided into twelve sub-heavens, making thirty-six in total. The grottos, as libraries, thus represent the chief means of communication and locations of transformative revelation from the celestial to the earthy realms.

around abstract principles or laws that are to be applied in all circumstances. Rather it seems to say that the gods are in the details, that salvation depends on bringing the adept into conformity with the specific contours of his cosmological context and taking advantage of the specific disposition of things.

Given this emphasis on the locative nature of knowledge, it also follows that Highest Clarity Daoism is an esoteric tradition, guarding knowledge within the circle of initiates and generally preventing outsiders from gaining access to this knowledge. Indeed the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* seems to hold the view that knowledge of the gods and methods revealed in scriptures should be revealed only to those individuals who are qualified to receive it. Qualification, moreover, was expressed as something that was foreordained:

Your name, [however], is in the golden book in the palace of Fangzhu. Your destiny is published in the Azure Register. Your “gold pavilion jade name” is already fixed by the celestial officials.
(p. 126)

Here Huang Tai is explaining to Zhou Ziyang why he is not worthy to be his teacher. Although he is at that moment more advanced in his cultivation of the Dao, he recognizes better than Zhou that Zhou is destined for greater things. Moreover, when Zhou Ziyang eventually receives his title and gives his first sermon, he refers to “all those who are suited to obtain the way of the immortals” (*zhu ying de xiandao* 諸應得仙道). The phrase conversely implies that some people are *not* suited to obtaining the way of the immortals. The texts do not offer any theoretical explanation as to why some people are “destined” or “suited” to achieve high status in the afterlife and others are not. Rather, they take it as an absolute presupposition that some people inevitably are destined for the Daoist path and other people are not.

The most important consequence of this esoteric aspect of the Highest Clarity revelations is that it severs any fundamental connection between public morality and salvation. The concept of salvation or ascension that operates in these texts completely transcends the moral questions of the human life. Therefore questions of morality do not play any fundamental role in the status of the adept in the afterlife. On the other hand, this does not imply that Highest Clarity Daoists officially supported immorality of any sort. Rather the reverse was the case. Precisely because the path to transfiguration takes place outside of any fundamental moral

framework, its adepts were warned to guard against any appearance of immorality. The *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* is most explicit about this:

Putting this path into practice should not cause people to give any offense in terms of footwear and also headdress and clothing. They should frequently wear fresh footwear and wash their clothes. In following this path, they must not break any laws or taboos. (p. 208)

Of course the appearance of such a prohibition only makes it more likely that Highest Clarity Daoists did in fact appear to flout the conventions of ordinary society. Just as they regarded themselves as the privileged possessors of esoteric knowledge handed down in sacred revelations, so also must this have tempted some to consider themselves in some way above the law, or beyond conventional morality. At the very least, as the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* notes, Daoists do not fit in well with conventional society. Such a statement is thus further evidence that Highest Clarity Daoists do not see social ethics as having any intrinsic connection to ascension.

Secondly, this emphasis on esoteric knowledge raises the question of why some people are destined to ascend to the stars and others are not. If salvation does not depend on morality, is it simply the result of some fortuitous connection? The only clue to answering this question lies in considering the prohibitions against further revelation of the text to others. Zhu Ziying writes:

The treasured secrets of the Heavenly Perfected of Highest Clarity should certainly be handed on only to those who will become perfected persons: only those who have a gold pavilion jade name in the heaven of Great Mystery; [those who have] a precious inscription in purple lettering; those who possess a secret register from the Three Primes of being joined to the dawn-star; or those who have a writ in yellow characters in the Cinnabar Tower. (p. 230)

Coupled with the evidence from the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* it can be concluded that the responsibility for the transmission of scripture lies with those who possess it, and that possessing the knowledge of the scriptures also enables them to know the status of others. The text implies that the way to learn about the status of others is to make an inquiry in the appropriate department of the celestial bureaucracy. Checking the records would reveal whose names were listed in the appropriate registers of birth and death. Revelation of the scriptures thus

entails not only the possession of esoteric knowledge for one's own salvation, but also the means to make inquiries about others. It seems, therefore, that an inherent element in the esoteric knowledge contained in the Highest Clarity revelations is also knowledge about how to continue the transmission of the scriptures. By putting the scriptures into practice, the adept thus gains insight into how and to whom to pass on the knowledge.

DIVINE MEDIATORS

This then raises the final question of this chapter: how did the scriptures come to be revealed in the first place? It is already clear that it occurred through intermediary deities—not so rarified that they were the purely abstract forms of the Dao but gods who could assume quasi-human form and thus enter into intercourse with mortals. In this way the original celestial scriptures, which existed as the pure fabric of the Dao, were themselves transfigured into human meanings and transcribed into Chinese characters. The previous chapter examined how humans could attain a vision of the celestial deities and ascend to heaven. But how were the deities able to descend to the human level?

In all three texts, the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center plays the key role in mediating between the celestial and earthly realms. His biography opens the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* and he appears there as the younger brother of the Heavenly Imperial Lord in the Palace of Supreme Great Subtlety. He has a mystical experience, receives the *Scripture of the Nine Perfected*, then becomes one of the four perfected of the Great Ultimate:

The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center stands on the left and possesses the pendant of Dragon Mystery writing and the talisman of spirit-tiger. On his belt he has a bell of flowing gold. In his hands he holds a scepter with purple feathers. On his head he wears a scarf of golden essence. Sometimes he also wears the morning blossom cap. [His chariot] is drawn by flying dragons and he rides the clouds of the Three Pure Ladies. (p. 168)

In this description he wears insignia similar to the nine perfected who are to be visualized in the *Method of the Nine Perfected*. From this we can see that the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center himself receives the text and became a perfected, using the same methods that the text reveals. Having become a perfected person he then goes on to reveal his own scripture, the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*. In this text he explains how

perfected deities such as himself, can function as intermediaries, bringing the adept up to the heavens to have an audience with a powerful lord.

Similarly, in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center is one of the three lords who are ultimately responsible for guiding Zhou in his journey, being visualized by him and transmitting to him the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. These three lords were the Prime Lords (San yuanjun 三元君), sons of the Three Pure Ones (Sansu 三素) or Three Ladies of Simplicity (Sansu yuanjun 三素元君), female deities, associated with three colors (purple, yellow and white) and three cinnabar fields of the body (upper, middle and lower, respectively; see Robinet 1993: 124–127). In the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*, their sons inhabit the three grotto chambers in the brain. In the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*, the Three Primes—it is not always clear here whether this term refers to the Three Prime Lords or the Three Pure Ones—function as intermediary deities enabling the adept to fly up to heaven for an audience with a powerful deity.

The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center thus belongs to a tradition in which three intermediary deities connect the empty spaces of the body to the heavens through feathery chariots that sail through the clouds. The important point here is that in the Highest Clarity tradition, this also makes the Venerable Lord a revealer of scripture. In this regard, the act of revelation is the same as the act of salvation, and transmitting esoteric revelations is the key to bringing the body into connection with the heavens. Whereas other Daoist traditions emphasize the importance of biospiritual cultivation exercises similar in some regards to Highest Clarity practices, this was the first Daoist tradition to align the cultivation of the Dao so completely with the revelation of sacred scriptures. The perfected deities who enable the Highest Clarity practitioner to ascend to heaven are also the deities who transmitted the scriptures in the first place.

This then gives us a further clue as to the nature of “perfection” that is sought by Highest Clarity Daoists. It turns out that “perfection” is quite the wrong sort of word to use to describe these spiritual beings because it implies something final or complete. But as we have seen already, the story of the Central Yellow Lord does not end with his becoming a perfected. He goes on to reveal the *Method of the Nine Perfected* and to create his own scripture, the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*. So also, the Perfected Purple Yang does not disappear into the ether when he becomes a

perfected, but appears in a vision to Hua Qiao to relate his life's story. To be a perfected, then, is in no way to be finished. It is to become a perfect medium and translucent conduit between the celestial and the human worlds. Perfection, it would seem, points back towards the fundamental concept of the grotto (*dong* 洞) which connects (*tong* 通) the inner spaces of the body with the outer spaces of the heavens. The perfected thus do not achieve a final resting place in the heavens, but rather achieve the perfect embodiment of the relentless creative capacities of the Dao. As such they became key figures in the ongoing processes of revelation and transfiguration. To be a perfected, then, is to be one who travels fluidly through the empty spaces of nature and the nonbeing of the Dao.

5. The Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang

The preface to the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* (*Ziyang zhenren neizhuan* 紫陽真人內傳) indicates that it was dictated by the perfected person himself to Hua Qiao, an important figure in the early history of the Way of Highest Clarity. Hua Qiao was a spirit medium in the service of the Xu family to whom various scriptures were revealed by perfected beings. Yang Xi, however, replaced him in this role after he committed the crime of divulging these esoteric texts to the non-initiated (Robinet 1981: 124). This text is unusual, therefore, because it occupies an intermediary position between the early hagiographic texts of Ge Hong and the official Highest Clarity hagiographies compiled by Tao Hongjing. It is crucial for understanding the development of Highest Clarity because it demonstrates how the tradition incorporated earlier texts and practices into a new synthesis, and takes pains to distinguish Zhou's high degree of perfection from the inferior levels achieved by previous Daoist immortals.

There are three extant versions of this text: the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* (*Ziyang zhenren neizhuan* 紫陽真人內傳; DZ 303), the *Esoteric Biography of Lord Zhou, the Perfected Purple Yang* (*Ziyang zhenren Zhoujun neizhuan* 紫陽真人周君內傳, found in *Yunji qiqian* 106/8a–15b) and the biography of Zhou Yishan 周義山 in the *Comprehensive Examination of Successive Generations of Perfected and Immortals who Embodied the Dao* (*Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑒; DZ 296). The text below follows Porkert's reconstruction of the text, based on these three recensions.

SYNOPSIS

The scripture is a religious biography of Perfected Purple Yang,¹ born Zhou Yishan 周義山 in 80 B.C.E. As a young man he practices the daily salutation of the sun and soaks up the dawn light. When his father catches him in the act and inquires as to the type of cult that he is practicing, Zhou replies: “I, Yishan, deep in my heart love the splendor of the sunlight and its constant radiance. This is the only reason why I worship it” (p. 111).

The hagiography records how Zhou as a young man is full of virtue but also reclusive, making donations to the poor anonymously and refusing to have dealings with the regional officials in his father’s circle. Instead, Zhou recognizes his first Daoist figure in the person of Huang Tai 黃泰, a local artisan, who turns out to be Zhou’s first Daoist master. His real name is Su Lin 蘇林 and his title is the Immortal of the Central Sacred Mountain (Zhongyue xianren 中嶽仙人). Su Lin relates his autobiography, how he learned the Dao from a middle-rank immortal (*zhongxianren* 中仙人) and obtained the methods of an earthly immortal (*dixianren* 地仙人). This enabled him to soar over the mountains and acquire longevity, but eventually he retreated to the mortal world and took up the life of a shoemaker. At the end of Su Lin’s speech, he transmits to Zhou a recipe for destroying the three demonic worms (*sanchong* 三蟲) that infest the mortal body. The recipe involves compounding herbs, stewing them in a liquid and drying the mixture in the sunlight until all the liquid has evaporated. According to Su Lin, the method will enable Zhou to extend his years and stave off death, but will not raise him to the rank of a flying immortal (*feixian* 飛仙).

Zhou does as he was told and after five years his body becomes so luminous and transparent that one can see his internal organs. He then returns to Su Lin to seek the method of becoming a flying immortal. Su Lin then describes the various ranks within the celestial hierarchy but admits that he only ever attained the rank of earthly immortal. Su Lin

¹ The terms “Purple” and “Yang” both refer to the radiance from the sun: Zhou’s earliest Daoist practice was absorbing the energy from the dawn light. The name “Purple Yang” was later adopted by the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真) master Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (988–1082), author of the *Treatise on Awakening to Reality* (*Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇) and thus remained an important Daoist title even after the decline of the Way of Highest Clarity.

recognizes, however, that Zhou is destined for greater things and prophecies that he will one day be venerated as a perfected person. Su Lin thus declines to continue as his teacher.

Zhou continues his own practice for a further five years until he obtains the limits of superhuman powers, able to see and stride across vast distances and make himself visible or invisible at will. Then he sets out on a tour of China's famous mountains in search of Daoist masters who will be able to guide him to higher levels.² Zhou's journey begins at Mt. Song (Songshan 嵩山), the mountain that corresponds to the center in Chinese correlative cosmology. There he meets the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center (Zhongyang huanglao jun 中央黃老君) who questions him about the figures that he has encountered in his internal meditations. The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center then tells him that he must learn to visualize Lord Wuying (Wuying jun 無英君) in addition to the White Prime Lord (Baiyuan jun 白元君) in order to ascend to the rank of Perfected. Since Zhou has not yet achieved this, the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center sends him off on an extended pilgrimage across twenty-four of China's famous mountains. Zhou wanders from mountain to mountain. The biography details each location, the master he encounters and the text he receives.

In this process he encounters a wide variety of Daoist masters and amasses a treasury of Daoist revealed scriptures, recipes and talismans, but fails to encounter Lord Wuying. Finally Zhou ascends Empty Mountain (Kongshan 空山) and in a grotto there has a vision of the Yellow Venerable Lord flanked by Lord Wuying and the White Prime Lord. The Yellow Venerable Lord tells Zhou, "You should look back in your own grotto chamber." This move to the highest level of internal

² The concept of a tour through sacred mountains did not originate with Zhou Ziyang, but can also be found in the *Inner Chapters of the Master who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇; trans. Ware 1966) and perhaps can be traced back to the even earlier concept of an inspection tour (Bumbacher; pers. comm.). King Mu (976-922 B.C.E.) famously conducted an inspection tour of the Western regions of his kingdom. Still today in Chinese religious festivals, gods are taken out of their temples and paraded through the community. All these seem to indicate that the concept of the tour is not simply a matter of inspecting or gaining knowledge but also about subduing or pacifying the areas, bringing them under the authority of the visitor. The tour is thus another example of a transaction within the overall economy of cosmic power. In the case of Zhou, this results in being granted more esoteric texts and higher and higher status.

visualization thus marks the beginning of the final stage in Zhou's spiritual journey.

Zhou returns to Everlasting Mountain where he meditates for ninety years before being presented with the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* (*Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經; DZ 6), the supreme text of the Way of Highest Clarity. He practices the text for eleven years, served by twenty-one jade maidens and twenty-one jade lads, before finally ascending to the Palace of Great Subtlety (Taiwei gong 太微宮) to receive a decree granting him the title Perfected Purple Yang. (The term Purple Yang is the name of the palace where he took up residence, along with seven other Perfected).

The biography concludes with a sermon by the Perfected Purple Yang containing an explanation of the mysteries of Shangqing Daoist cultivation. The text ends with a typical warning not to divulge the words of the Perfected to the uninitiated, or to those who are merely *flâneurs* along the Way.

PREFACE

周裴二真敘

Preface Regarding the Two Perfected Persons, Zhou and Pei.³

江乘令晉陵華僑世奉俗神。忽夢見群鬼神與之遊行飲食。群鬼所與僑共飲酒僑亦至醉。還家輒吐所飲噉之物。

Hua Qiao of Jinling,⁴ the magistrate of Jiangcheng, had venerated the common gods all his life.⁵ All of a sudden he saw in a dream a horde of demonic spirits.⁶ He was wandering around with them, drinking and eating. Qiao got completely drunk on the wine, which the demons were drinking with him. When he returned home he threw up everything that he had drunk and eaten.

³ Although the preface is concerned with two Daoist perfected, Zhou and Pei, the text itself contains only the biography of Lord Zhou. The non-existence of Pei's biography is explained later on in the preface. However, Lord Pei does play a significant role in other Highest Clarity texts. In the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真告), for example, Lord Pei reveals the biography of one Huang Ziyang who received a text from Sima Jizhu (who appears on page 142 as one of Zhou's instructors) and eventually ascended to heaven (see Bumbacher 2000: 386). This indicates that Pei, like Zhou, played an important role in connecting the Highest Clarity revelations to earlier traditions. He also revealed important Highest Clarity texts including the *Scripture of Precious Spirits* (*Baoshen jing* 寶神經; Robinet 1984: 1.55). A full biography of Lord Pei is to be found in the *Biography of Lord Pei, Perfected Clear Numen* (*Qingling zhenren Peijun* 清靈真人裴君; in *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* [*Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤] DZ 1032; synopsis in Robinet 1984: 2. C8 and Robinet 2000).

⁴ Hua's relationship with the Xu family was full of intrigue. Although Hua Qiao took instruction from Li Dong 李東, the Xu family libationer, his biography in the *Declarations of the Perfected* indicated that his pursuit of the Dao was erratic and incomplete. Notoriously, he and Hua Qi 華騎, possibly his father, ended up being punished in the underworld for having committed the crime of divulging the mysteries of the Dao to the uninitiated (Strickmann 1981: 155). The present text, however, does not paint Hua Qiao in such a negative light.

⁵ The term "common gods" (*sushen* 俗神) indicates from the very beginning of this biography that we are dealing with a religious phenomenon that considered itself in some way extraordinary. Although in some eras of Chinese history, and in some areas of China, Daoism strongly overlaps with local traditions, absorbing its gods and functioning in essence as the local popular religion, the perspective here is quite different. The text is making the claim that following the Dao is to follow a religious path far superior to the popular religion of the common people. This her-

數年諸鬼遂課限
僑舉才。僑不得
已。先後所舉十
餘人皆至死亡。
鬼以僑所舉得才
有知人之識。限
課轉多。若小稽
違便彈治之。僑
自懼必為諸鬼所
困，於是背俗入
道。

詣祭酒丹陽許治
受奉道之法。群
鬼各便消散，不
復來往。

For a number of years various demons insisted that Qiao present talented people to them. Qiao had no choice but comply. One by one, those whom he had presented—more than ten people—all met their deaths. The demons obtained the talents, which Qiao had presented [to them] and came to possess the intelligence of sages. Their demands multiplied. If there was any small delay or disobedience, they caught him out and punished him. Qiao feared there was no way out of the demons' trap, and thereupon turned his back upon the common [world] and entered the Way.⁷

He visited the libationer⁸ Officer Xu in the Danyang [commandery],⁹ and received instruction from him in the methods of serving the Dao. The horde of demons each then dispersed and had nothing more to do with him.¹⁰

alds themes of esotericism, mystery, and celestial hierarchy that will become apparent later in the biography.

⁶ Demonic spirits (*guishen* 鬼神) are spirits in that they are specific configurations of spiritual power, but they are demonic in that they are not conducive to the goals of prosperity, longevity, or spiritual transformation. Here their main activity seems to be killing people and then taking over their bodies.

⁷ Hua Qiao's experience of the common world and the common gods has been fraught with violence and threats of violence. The phrase "entering the Dao" (*ru dao* 入道) suggests a distinctive break with the common world, and entering into a new realm of experience.

⁸ In the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道), Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the first celestial master established a system of libationers (*jijiu* 祭酒) who were charged with providing religious and administrative services within the twenty-four districts under his control. In particular he established a system for curing people of illness by means of the confession of sins. The sick person withdrew into an oratory (*jingshi* 靜室) to ponder his offenses while a libationer officiated at a communal recital of *The Way and Its Power* and a ceremony for controlling evil. The ceremony involved writing out the list of offenses and the person's name in triplicate and transmitting the document to the three bureaux of heaven, earth and water by exposing or burning one copy, burying one copy and submerging one copy in water (see Hendrischke 2000).

奉道數年，忽夢見二人年可五十。容儀衣服非常。後遂二人見或一月三十日。時時往來僑家靖11室中，唯僑得見。一人性周，一人性裴。裴雅重才理，非僑所申。周似不如此。二人先後教授僑經書。書皆與五千文相參。多說道家戒行，養性命事，亦有讖緯。所受二人經書皆隱密不宣。周自作傳，裴作未成。裴作樂序，及周傳如別。

After practicing the Dao for several years, he saw in a dream two people about fifty years old. Their appearance and clothing were unusual. Afterwards, the two men appeared probably for thirty days out of every month, frequently visiting to the Qiao family oratory,¹² but only Qiao was able to see them.¹³ One man was surnamed Zhou; the other was surnamed Pei. Pei was refined and talented, which did not make Qiao comfortable. Zhou seemed different. The two men in turn instructed Qiao and conferred scriptures upon him. All the writings were connected to the *Five Thousand Character Text*.¹⁴ They spoke mostly about Daoist precepts and practices, and cultivating one's nature and destiny, and there were also some apocryphal texts.¹⁵ All the scriptures and texts that he received from the two men were secret and unpublished. Zhou wrote his own biography, [but] Pei has not yet finished [his].¹⁶ Pei wrote a rhymed preface, which is separate from Zhou's biography.

⁹ Danyang was a commandery in Jiangsu and a center of Daoist activity. It was home to the alchemist Ge Hong, the Xu family and Tao Hongjing (Porkert 1979: 3). It is located between present-day Nanjing and Shanghai.

¹⁰ In addition to the power to heal, libationers were also vested with authority to exorcise demons. Texts such as the *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* (*Nüqing guilü*) contained rich descriptions of the names and functions of demons. Knowledge of the names enabled the Daoist master to control them (see Nickerson 2000).

¹¹ Read 靖 as 靜.

¹² Note here the contrast between the first appearance of the demons in a dream with the more structured teachings given by the two perfected persons who appear in the oratory.

¹³ The fact that only Qiao was able to see the two men is indicative of their high status and Qiao's efforts at practicing the Dao for many years.

¹⁴ The *Five Thousand Character Text* (*Wuqian wen* 五千文) is a traditional epithet for *The Way and Its Power* (*Daode jing* 道得經) since it contains about five thousand Chinese characters.

THE ESOTERIC BIOGRAPHY OF
PERFECTED PURPLE YANG

紫陽真人內傳

紫陽真人本性周諱義山字季通。汝陰人也，漢丞相勃七世之孫，以冠族播流世居貴官。

祖父玄漢昭帝元鳳元年為青州刺史。父祕為范陽令時始生焉。父後積秩累遷官至陳留刺史。君時年十六隨從在郡。始讀孝經論語遇易。

The Perfected Purple Yang originally had the surname Zhou, the given name Yishan, and the courtesy title Jitong. He was a man of Ruyin, and a seventh generation descendant of Counselor-in-Chief Bo of the Han dynasty. He belonged to an illustrious and widely-known family that for generations had held high office.

His grandfather Xuan became the Regional Inspector of Qingzhou in the first year of the Yuanfeng reign period of Emperor Zhao of the Han.¹⁷ When his father, Mi, was magistrate of Fanyang, Lord Zhou was born there. Subsequently his father accumulated further honors and moved office many times, reaching the official rank of Regional Inspector of Chenliu.¹⁸ When Lord Zhou was sixteen he followed [his father] through the prefecture. He began to read the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes*.¹⁹

¹⁵ The term “apocryphal texts” (*chenwei* 讖緯) refers to new texts that circulated in the later Han dynasty, and which were appended to classical texts to give them greater authority. These texts were associated with a group of people known as “magico-technicians” or magical practitioners (*fangshi* 方士; lit. “masters of methods”), who were concerned with interpreting signs and omens in relation to changes in dynastic authority (see Despeux 2000). The fact that they are mentioned in the same sentence as unpublished, *i.e.*, esoteric, scriptures (*jing* 經) suggests that those who subsequently circulated this biography held the tradition of the magico-technicians in high regard.

¹⁶ This explains why Pei’s biography is not contained in this text. Although Zhou and Pei both appeared to Hua Qiao, only Zhou transmitted his biography to him.

¹⁷ 80 B.C.E.

¹⁸ Magistrates were posted away from their hometowns so as to preclude any corruption and were moved frequently to prevent similarly strong ties from forming.

¹⁹ These three texts are all associated with the Confucian tradition and indicate that Zhou was well on his way to a career in government service, following in the family tradition.

為人沈重，少於言笑，喜怒不形於色。好獨坐靜處，不結名好，然精思微密，所存必感。常以平旦之後，日出之前，正東向立。漱口嚥液服氣百數，向日再拜。旦旦如此，為之經年。

父怪而問之所行何等事。君長跪對曰：「義山中心好此日光長景之暉，是以拜之耳。」

In his behavior towards others he was sincere and rarely made jokes. His countenance did not express [any signs of] joy or anger.²⁰ He was fond of sitting [in meditation] on his own in quiet places. He had no truck with fame, but engaged in subtle meditations and invariably stimulated [the gods] he visualized.²¹ As a rule, right after first light and before the sun had come up, he stood facing due east. He rinsed his mouth, swallowed saliva, absorbed [the solar] *qi* one hundred times and made a double bow to the sun. He did this dawn after dawn for a number of years.²²

His father thought this was odd and asked him what kind of activity it was.²³ Lord Zhou made a full-length genuflection then replied: “I, Yishan, deep in my heart love the splendor of the sunlight and its eternal radiance. This is the only reason why I bow before it.”

²⁰ The lack of external expression on the countenance indicates a deep internal calm.

²¹ That is to say, Lord Zhou was successful in getting the gods to respond to his visualization practices.

²² Here Zhou is practicing absorbing the *qi* of the sun, a practice that is described in detail in various Highest Clarity Scripture. The *Scripture on Absorbing the Yellow Qi and the Yang Essence* (*Huangqi yangjing jing* 黃氣陽精經; DZ 33), for instance, states that “The purple breath (of the sun) accumulates and descends to cover (the adept’s) body. He believes that he is within the light of the sun. Sunlight surrounds his body and he rises up to the Palace of Universal Yang” (Robinet 1993: 199). Zhou’s biography, however, gives no indication here that Zhou used this practice to ascend to the sun; it indicates, rather, that this practice was something that Zhou instinctively loved and probably learned on his own.

²³ The fact that his father considered this practice strange indicates that by this age Zhou was clearly deviating from the establishment path that would have set him on his way towards a career in the government. Zhou’s father, despite his high position, has no knowledge of the type of Daoist practice.

至月朔旦之日輒遊行市及閭闔陋巷之中。見貧乏飢餓之人鮮，衣與之。時時登步名山，喟然悲嘆。或入石室之中，歡然獨笑。時陳流大儒名士聞君盛德體性沉美，咸往詣焉。君輒稱疾，不見賓客。

On the first day of the month, he always went wandering in the market, through the neighborhood and alleyways.²⁴ When he saw the poor and starving masses, he gave them [his own] clothing. From time to time, he climbed famous mountains, where he let out deep sighs.²⁵ Sometimes he entered stone chambers [in the mountain] and laughed for joy on his own.²⁶ At this time the great scholars and officials of Chenliu heard that Lord Zhou was full of virtue, with a profound and admirable character. They frequently paid him a visit, but Lord Zhou always said he was ill and could not receive visitors.²⁷

²⁴ The reference to the first day of the month indicates that Zhou's practice of wandering through the town is coordinated with the cycles of the moon. This can be read as a complement to the activity of absorbing the solar energies

²⁵ Here the biography is establishing a motivation for Lord Zhou's Daoist path. He is so distressed at the sorrow of the world that he can only seek consolation in the mountains, that is to say, the uninhabited or uncultivated spaces within the landscape, relatively free from human society.

²⁶ The stone chamber refers to caves or places within the mountain where Daoists could engage in meditation. Zhou's experience of meditation, which results in ecstatic laughter, is contrasted with his experience of human society, which results in unhappiness.

²⁷ Zhou's reluctance to have any intercourse with society underscores his increasing dissatisfaction with conventional life and his increasing focus on the inner life. Of course, refusing to meet distinguished visitors proved highly embarrassing to his father. The difference between conventional life and the Daoist life thus becomes clear: conventional society is concerned with reputation, or fame, whereas Daoists consider reputation to be an "external" attribute, and something that is basically irrelevant to the "internal" life.

漢侍中蔡咸陳流高士亦頗知道。聞君德行，數往詣。君每辭疾不欲見之。父乃大怪，怒責督切，使出逼。不得已，逐出相見。咸大發請問及論神仙之道，變化之事。君乃凝默內閉，斂神虛靜，頷而和之，一不答也。

是歲大旱，陳留大荒，斗米千錢。路多飢民，君乃傾財竭家以濟其困。陰而行之，人亦不知，是君之慈施也。對萬物如臨赤子，斯積善德仁愛之施矣。

Cai Xian, a Han dynasty high official in Chenliu, also knew something about the Way. He had heard of Lord Zhou's virtuous practices and came to visit [him] many times, [but] on each occasion Lord Zhou sent word that he was sick and would not see him. His father was highly surprised [at Lord Zhou's poor manners], angrily scolded him and forced him to come out. [Lord Zhou] had no choice [in the matter] and accordingly came out and received him. Cai Xian asked a great many questions and discussed the way of spirit immortals and the practices of transformation. Lord Zhou then froze still and blocked himself off internally; he gathered his spirits into a state of emptiness and purity and contained and harmonized them.²⁸ He gave not the slightest reply.

That harvest-time there was a great drought, and Chenliu suffered a great famine. A bushel of rice was worth one thousand cash, and the streets were full of starving people. Lord Zhou then disbursed all his wealth exhausting his family [coffers] in order to relieve their distress. He did this in secret, without anyone finding out. This was Lord Zhou's [way of] bestowing charity. He was, to the myriad beings, like a newborn infant.²⁹ He privately accumulated good merit and bestowed acts of loving-kindness.³⁰

²⁸ This indicates that Lord Zhou was wary of Cai Xian's questioning about spiritual matters and, by way of precaution, entered into a state of meditative stillness, completely disengaged from Cai Xian in any physical or spiritual way. This wariness about engaging with strangers is seen as a virtue in the Highest Clarity scriptures, especially where esoteric texts are concerned. Zhou's dealing with Cai Xian in this manner is to be contrasted with the fate of Hua Qiao who was punished in the underworld for divulging matters of the Dao to those who were unworthy.

²⁹ The power and innocence of infants are regarded as virtues throughout Daoist scriptures. *The Way and Its Power* 55, for instance, advocates returning to the state of a child full of undissipated potency. The virtue of apparent immaturity is also a hallmark of the Azure Lad (Qingtong 青童) an important Highest Clarity deity who later in this biography plays a role in transmitting the method of the Three Ones.

又有黃泰者寓陳留。婦兒無有，單身隻立，了無親戚，亦不知其所從來。常著故敗皮袴，角皮褶。恆賣芒履在陳留市中。

君常潛行，過市中，見泰衣束殊弊。君每曾聞仙方，說云仙人目瞳子正方，而黃泰雖復外形帶索，目方面光。密而奇之，中心猶喜。

THE REVELATION OF SU LIN

There was, moreover, a certain Huang Tai who lived in Chenliu.³¹ He had no wife or child, lived alone and was utterly without relatives. No one even knew where he came from.³² He usually wore raw hide pants and a worn-out hide coat. He was always selling straw sandals in Chenliu market.

Lord Zhou often walked incognito. When he was passing through the market, he noticed that Tai's clothes were raggedy and all in tatters. Whenever Lord Zhou had heard about the methods of immortality, he had been told that immortals' pupils were square; and although Huang Tai's external appearance was threadbare, his eyes were square and his face was bright.³³ [Lord Zhou] secretly marveled at him and in his heart he was elated.

Kroll (1985: 76) writes of the Azure Lad that his appearance "is not calculated immediately to inspire reverence: he has rather 'the semblance of an immature babe.' But his childish features belie his great age. He has attained a state of perpetual juvenescence, in which, for him, the vivifying power of *yang* is always accrescent." The fact that Zhou is described as an infant is to be regarded as an honor.

³⁰ The fact that Zhou was undertaking acts of charity in private indicates that he did so out of a pure motivation and was not at all concerned with gaining a reputation as a moral citizen. From the Daoist ethical perspective, acts of charity that serve to inflate the donor's ego or reputation could only be counterproductive.

³¹ As the subsequent text makes clear, Huang Tai is also known as Su Lin, an important Daoist immortal whose hagiography, attributed to Perfected Purple Yang, appears in the *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* 104.1a-4b. It recounts that Su Lin was born in Qushui 曲水 (in present day Jiangsu province) and studied under Qin Gao, whom Perfected Purple Yang meets in his travels through China's mountains, and under Juanzi whose teaching appears at the end of this biography. The text is here establishing a line of transmission from Qin Gao and Juanzi, through Su Lin, to our protagonist.

³² The fact that Huang Tai was not in any way connected into the familial structures of conventional life meant that he had absolutely no social status. His shoddy appearance was further evidence of this.

³³ These are the only visible signs of Huang Tai's Daoist practice.

還歸數，使人買芒履，因而金銀錢帛著其物中，陰而與之。數數行如此，非一。黃泰遂詣君，君見迎而拜之，將入靜屋。乃是中嶽仙人。泰曰：

「聞君好道，隱德流行，用思微妙，誠感於我。是以相詣。吾是中嶽仙人蘇林子玄也。本衛人，靈公末年生。少好道德，受學於琴先生。琴先生見授鍊身消災之道術。」

When he returned home, he sent someone to buy straw sandals [from Huang Tai] and through him placed [gifts of] gold, silver cash or silks among [Huang Tai's] things. He did things like this many times, not just the once. As a result, Huang Tai came to visit Lord Zhou. Lord Zhou bowed down in welcome and led him into his meditation chamber. In fact he was the Immortal of the Central Sacred Mountain.³⁴ [Huang] Tai said:

“I have heard that you love the Way, practice virtue in secret and think about subtle and wondrous [phenomena]. This genuinely moves me, which is why I am paying you a visit. I am Su 蘇 Lin, with the courtesy title Child Mystery, the Immortal of the Central Sacred Mountain.³⁵ I am originally from Wei, born in the last year of Duke Ling [544 B.C.E.].³⁶ From a young age I loved the way and its power and I received instruction from Master Qin.³⁷ He handed on to me Daoist arts of refining the body and eliminating disasters.”

³⁴ Thus begins Zhou's connection to a tradition of Daoist revelations that are focused on the central of the five sacred mountains. His Daoist teaching commences with Huang Tai, and culminates with the revelation of the Yellow Venerable Lord, who is the perfected of the central mountain, a rank far higher than that of “immortal.”

³⁵ Here the mysterious person begins the first element of his revelation, namely revealing his personal name, style name, and official title. His style name “Child Mystery” refers to two virtues that Daoist sages possess: youthful vigor, and a familiarity with the profound mysteries of the Dao.

³⁶ The state of Wei during the Warring States period covered an area that straddles the border of present-day Henan and Hebei provinces.

³⁷ Master Qin is identified by Porkert (1979: 30) as Qin Gao 琴高 whose biography is featured in the *Biographies of Immortals* (*Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 DZ 294; trans. Kaltenmark 1953). Qin Gao was said to have been a musician who practiced the recipes of Juanzi (see below), and traveled through China for over two hundred years. Later he entered the waters of the Tang river, and ordered his disciples to fast while they waited for him. Eventually he emerged before his disciples on the back of a red carp. He stayed among his disciples for over a month before disappearing once more into the waters (Kaltenmark 1953: 104-108). One of his most important disci-

「後又遇仇公。仇公乃見教以服氣之法，還神守魂之事。吾行之甚驗，大得其益。仇公見告，云術識盡此，不能使子白日升天，上為真官也。致吾於涓子。涓子者中仙人也。守之彌年見教守三一之法。」

“Later on I met Duke Chou.³⁸ From Duke Chou I received instruction in the methods of *qi* absorption and the practices of returning the spirits and preserving the spirit souls. I became very successful at these practices and obtained great benefits from them. Duke Chou [then] advised me, ‘My knowledge of these practices is limited to these [which I have taught you]. They will not enable you to ascend to heaven in broad daylight and to become a perfected official on high.’ He sent me to Juanzi.³⁹ Juanzi was a middle-rank immortal. I served under him for a full year and received from him the method of preserving the Three Ones.”⁴⁰

ples was Su Lin, the first teacher of Perfected Purple Yang (see Su Lin’s biography in *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* 104.1a–4b; Robinet 1984: 2.C.6).

³⁸ Duke Chou is identified by Porkert (1979: 30) as a carpenter (*mugong* 木工) or perhaps better Master of Trees (*muzheng* 木正; Kaltenmark 1953: 49) during the time of King Tang (1617–1588 B.C.E.) of the Shang dynasty. The *Biographies of Immortals* describes him as a man who lived off pine resin and was endowed with exceptional longevity. He built a stone meditation chamber for himself, which eventually became his shrine, at which King Wu of the Zhou dynasty made offerings (Kaltenmark 1953: 81–82).

³⁹ More detail on the story of Juanzi is provided in the section dealing with him, beginning on page 155.

⁴⁰ The method of preserving the Three Ones is a tradition that predates the Highest Clarity revelations, and associated with Su Lin and his teacher Juanzi. The Three Ones, also known as the Three Primes, are responsible for carrying the adept up into the heavens. This is the method that Zhou seeks to put into practice. He is eventually successful in this when he visualizes the Three Prime Lords.

曰：「三一者太微之玄真，上清之元圖。一曰洞真，二曰妙經，三曰素靈。東海小童君藏之於靈景之城琳霄之屋。非有仙籍者不授矣。此書淵祕 非賢勿宣。汝有至心，故以相付。八節存之，一則消除萬害，一則形軀不敗。能守之，致雲車羽蓋，坐造風雨，激電碎磕矣。乃地仙之美術，長生之真法。」

[Juanzi] told me: “The [method of the] Three Ones [is known as] the Mystery Perfection of Great Subtlety and the Primordial Diagram of Highest Clarity.⁴¹ [The texts] are called: (1) *Grotto Perfected*; (2) *Wondrous Scriptures*; and (3) *Pure Numen*.⁴² The Young Lad of the Eastern Sea⁴³ hid these [texts] in the Jade-Mist chamber in the City of Numinous Effulgence. Except for those recorded as immortals no-one can receive them. These books are a trove of secrets and may only be divulged to the worthy. [But] you have the highest intentions,⁴⁴ and so I will transmit them to you. At each of the eight nodes of the solar year, visualize [the Three Ones].⁴⁵ On the one hand you will then eliminate myriad forms of harm; on the other hand your body will not decay. If you are able to observe [the Three Ones], a chariot of clouds with a canopy of feathers⁴⁶ will be sent; riding this you can create wind and rain and arouse lightning and thunder. This, then, is the wonderful art of earthly immortality and the true method of longevity.”

⁴¹ Great Subtlety is the name of a palace in the heaven of Highest Clarity where Zhou is eventually appointed to the rank of perfected.

⁴² As becomes clear later on in this paragraph, the method of the Three Ones entails not simply knowledge of the practices but also receiving the relevant scriptures. The method is thus a process of textual transmission, as well as a particular type of visual meditation.

⁴³ The Young Lad of the Eastern Sea is also known as the Azure Lad. He is a significant intermediary deity in Highest Clarity scriptures (see Kroll 1985).

⁴⁴ Or, a mind that is capable of the highest achievements.

⁴⁵ Juanzi thus reveals the essence of the practice of the Three Ones, which is to visualize the Three Ones at the eight nodes of the solar year. This practice is more fully explained in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* on page 199.

⁴⁶ The image here is of a carriage suitable for a dignitary but which is formed out of clouds and bird feathers. The adept thus ascends on the clouds into the heavens, an image common to many religious traditions, including the Biblical story of Elijah who was transported to heaven on a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11).

「吾因受之，得以有翔名山，往來方諸之館寢。息丹陵之丘，看望八表。得意而棲，從容以來數百年中，良為樂足樂足而思。此居泰而不復否，非順天行化與時消息之謂也。故以投身臭濁，觀化囂藹。賣履弊作，唯下是居，自謂庸庸，不能甄識朱碧於凡壤之中矣。而子猶有察真之鑑，數獲惠遺，非所悟也。欣子有尚，故來相詣君。」

“I thus received this [method] and obtained the ability to soar over famous mountains and frequent [the palace of] Fangzhu.⁴⁷ I rested on the hill of Cinnabar Mound⁴⁸ and gazed in all directions. Satisfied, I perched there and since then [I have lived] at ease for several hundred years, attaining all I wished. Resting like this in tranquility and not returning to the profane [world], was not what one would call ‘being in accord with the celestial transformations and the rhythm of the seasons.’⁴⁹ Therefore I threw myself [back] into the stinking turbidity [of the world] to observe and transform its clanging din. Selling sandals is a base occupation. I have lived [among] only the lowest [in society] and called myself a mediocre person. They cannot not recognize the pearls and jade in the common dirt. But you seem to have this insight that can spot perfection.⁵⁰ On many occasions I acquired favors and gifts without realizing where they came from. I am happy that you have this respect and thus I came to visit you.”

⁴⁷ The palace of Fangzhu is the location of the golden book that records the names of the immortals.

⁴⁸ Cinnabar mound (Danling 丹陵) is the name of the heaven of the south pole where adepts are able to be reborn (Robinet 1981: 129). The sentence implies that Su Lin has been transfigured into a terrestrial immortal.

⁴⁹ Su Lin here is displaying characteristics similar to that of a Bodhisattva: someone who has the capacity to enter nirvana, but who instead chooses to return to the world out of compassion for living beings. The fact that Su Lin is ultimately regarded as only a low form of immortal suggests here that the biography admits the validity of this kind of spiritual activity but does not regard it as the highest form of perfection.

⁵⁰ Or, “can spot the perfected.”

再拜頓首數十。
悲喜自博。膝行
而進，自陳：

「少好長生，唯
願登仙度世。風
夜靜思，願與真
人相遇，沐浴素
流，稟受奇訣。
今靈啟神降，得
接聖顏。千秋志
願，慶莫大
焉。」

[Lord Zhou] bowed twice and knocked his head several tens of times.⁵¹ Sadness and joy spread over him.⁵² He approached [Su Lin] on his knees and declared of himself:

“I have a certain love for longevity and my only desire is to climb the ranks of immortals and transcend the world. Whether windy or dark, I still my thoughts, wishing to meet with perfected ones to bathe in the pure streams and receive marvelous formulas.⁵³ Now numinous powers have opened to me and spirits have descended,⁵⁴ and I have obtained a meeting with your sagely countenance. For a thousand autumns this was my ambition and nothing could make me happier.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Knocking the head (*ketou* 頓首) is the same term as “kowitz” and indicates a ritual prostration where the supplicant gets down on his knees and touches his head to the floor.

⁵² Su Lin is overjoyed to have met Zhou, but sad perhaps that he himself has been unable to achieve the highest levels of perfection.

⁵³ “Marvelous formulas” refers to recipes or instructions for transforming the body.

⁵⁴ Lord Zhou is regarding Su Lin’s appearance as a visit from a god. But as the text later reveals, it is Su Lin who is to be regarded as the inferior of the two.

⁵⁵ This ardent declaration of Daoist ambitions indicates that Zhou is fully committed to the Daoist path, yet it leaves the impression that Zhou does not yet have an inkling of the heights of mystical experience that he is destined to scale.

「子坐吾將告子。子少知還陽，精髓不泄。又知導引，服氣吞景嚙漿。不復須陰丹內術補胎之益也。然猶三蟲未壞，三尸未死，故導引服氣不得其理。可先服制蟲細丸，以殺穀蟲。」

乃復頓頭。請乞奇要。仙人曰：

[Su Lin replied]: “Sit up and I will tell you. You know something of how to revert yang so that you do not ejaculate semen.⁵⁶ Also you know healing exercises,⁵⁷ how to take in *qi*, absorb effulgence and swallow saliva. You will obtain no further benefit from the practice of nourishing your embryo with the internal arts of the yin cinnabar.⁵⁸ It seems, however, that your three worms have not yet been destroyed and the three death-bringers have not yet died. Consequently, your healing exercises and *qi* absorption are ineffective. You should first take some small pills to control the worms and thus you will kill the grain worms.”⁵⁹

[Zhou] thereupon knocked his head again and begged [to be given] the marvelous details [of how to kill the three worms]. The immortal said:

⁵⁶ This refers to ancient gymnastic practice of not ejaculating semen but reverting it back into the body so as to enhance longevity. Later this is integrated into the Daoist inner alchemy practices where the various energies and liquids of the body become the basis for creating an immortal embryo.

⁵⁷ Literally, “guiding and pulling [the breath].” This refers to a variety of gymnastic or meditative exercises designed to promote longevity.

⁵⁸ Su Lin here is indicating that Zhou has gone as far as he can with the earthly (*yin*) practices that involve nourishing the body so as to prolong longevity.

⁵⁹ The tradition of the three death-bringing worms goes back to the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing* 黃庭經; see Robinet 2000). They are the deathly counterparts of the life-preserving gods who inhabit the three cinnabar fields (*dantian* 丹田) of the body. The worms were thought to feed off grains, thus leading to the longevity practice of abstaining from grains (*bigu* 避穀; see Arthur 2006).

「蟲有三名：一名青古，二名白姑，三名血尸，請之三蟲。在內令心煩滿，意志不開，所思不固。失食則飢，悲愁感動，精志不至，仍以飲食不節斷也。雖復斷穀，人體重滯，奄奄淡悶，所夢非真，顛倒翻錯，邪俗不除。皆由於蟲在其內搖動五臟故也。」

「殺蟲之方如復：附子五兩，麻子七升，地黃六兩，朮七兩，茱萸根大者七寸，桂四兩雲芝英五兩，凡七種。」

“The worms have three names: the first is called the Azure Ancient One; the second is called the White Lady; the third is called the Bloody Corpse. They are called the three worms. Inside [your body] they cause the heart to be troubled, the will to be undeveloped and thoughts to be unsteady. If you give up food [to reduce the worms] all that happens is that you get hungry,⁶⁰ you feel depressed and agitated; and [despite] concentrating, you cannot achieve your goal and you will still eat and drink without restraint. Even if you repeatedly abstain from grains, [all that happens is that] the human body becomes heavy and sluggish, the breath faint and suffocating; your dreams go unrealized, but are topsy-turvy and confused; and your various bad habits will not be eliminated. All of these [problems] are on account of the worms inside the body disturbing the five organs.”

“The recipe for killing the worms is as follows: five *liang* of monkshood;⁶¹ seven *sheng* of hemp;⁶² six *liang* of digitalis; seven *liang* of *shu*-herbs;⁶³ seven inches of a large cornel root; four *liang* of cassia; five *liang* of ‘cloud fungus flower;’⁶⁴ seven ingredients in total.”

⁶⁰ Or possibly it is the worms that get hungry (Porkert 1979: 42).

⁶¹ Chinese weights and measures varied geographically and historically. A *liang* 兩 is a Chinese ounce or *tael*, and is conventionally regarded as roughly equivalent to 50 grams in the metric system.

⁶² A *sheng* 升 is a measure of volume equivalent to a liter.

⁶³ Perhaps a reference to *shulu cao* 木律草 also known as *shanji* 山薊, *yangfu* 楊桴, *maji* 馬薊 or *shanmei* 山美 (s.v. *shulu cao* 木律草 in Hu 1995: 1414).

⁶⁴ “Cloud fungus flower” (*yunzhiying* 雲芝英) is a compound used in Highest Clarity elixirs based on realgar and mica (Robinet 1981: 129).

「先取菖蒲根，煮醱作酒，使清醇重美一斗半。以七種藥咬咀，內器中漬之。亦可不用咬咀。三宿乃出曝之。令燥，又取前酒汁漬之。三宿又出曝之。須酒盡乃止曝令燥。內鐵臼中擣之。下細篸令成粉。取白蜜和之。令可丸。」

“First take calamus roots, boil them and ferment them into an alcohol. Clarify the liquid, repeatedly refining it down to one and a half *dou*.⁶⁵ Chew the seven herbs and place them in a container. (It is also possible to do without chewing the herbs.) Store for three nights and then dry them in the sunlight. When they are dry, take the liquid you made earlier and place them in it. Store for three more nights then again dry them in the sunlight. You must dry them out in the sunlight until the liquid is completely evaporated. Place them in a mortar and pound them. Pass them through a fine sieve to turn them into a powder. Mix with white honey and form them into pills.”

「以平旦東向。初服二丸如小豆。漸益一丸，乃可至十餘丸也。治腹內疝，實上氣。心胸結賽，益肌膚。令體輕，有華光。盡一劑則蟲死。蟲死則三尸枯。三尸枯則自然洛矣。」

“At first light face east.⁶⁶ First take two pills about the size of small beans. Gradually increase [the dosage] one pill at a time up to about a dozen pills. This will cure indigestion in the belly and solidify your rising *qi*; it will dissolve blockages in your heart and chest,⁶⁷ benefiting your skin and flesh. This will cause your body to become light and possess a radiant glow. When the preparation is used up, the worms will be dead. When the worms are dead, the three death-bringers will wither. When the three death-bringers wither they spontaneously vanish.”

⁶⁵ Equivalent to fifteen liters.

⁶⁶ The instruction to face east at first light indicates that this recipe is affected by the time and direction of the one taking it. It is not, therefore, simply a chemical process, but something that must take into account the solar cycle. Note also that the process of refining the liquid required it to be put out to dry on in the sun. This emphasis on coordinating with the sun is a hallmark of Zhou's early practice.

⁶⁷ On the possible corruption of the Chinese characters in this sentence, see Porkert (1979: 46) who advocates reading *jie* 解 (release) for *jie* 結 (knot).

「亦可數作，不限一劑也。然後合四填丸，加曾青，黃精各一兩以斷穀。畢若導引服氣不得其理，可先服食眾草藥：苜蓿⁶⁸，茯苓，朮桂，天門冬，黃連，地黃，大黃，桃糲及皮，任擇焉。雖服此藥以得其力，不得九轉神丹金液之導，不能飛仙矣。為可延年益，不辟其死也。」

君按次為之。服食朮五年，身生光澤，徹視內見五臟。乃就仙，求飛仙要訣。仙人曰：

“You may also do this several times and not limit yourself to just one preparation. Afterwards mix into ‘quadruple-strength pills,’⁶⁹ adding one *liang* each of ‘grow-azure’ and ‘yellow-essence’ so that you may abstain from grains. When this is done, if your healing exercises and *qi* absorption do not lead to the [desired] state, you should first eat a dose of various herbs: sesame, tuckahoe, *shu*-cassia, asparagine, goldthread, digitalis, rhubarb, candied peach and the bark of peach trees. Choose from any of these. However, even if you take these herbs and gain strength from them, but do not obtain the Ninefold Transmuted Divine Elixir or the method of Liquid Gold, you will not be able to become a flying immortal. You will be able to extend your lifespan and improve your longevity, but you will not escape death.”⁷⁰

Lord Zhou undertook this method in the prescribed sequence. He swallowed the *shu*-herbs for five years and his body produced a transparent glow so that it was possible to see right through to his five organs. He then approached the immortal [Su Lin] and sought the essential formula for becoming a flying immortal. The immortal replied:

⁶⁸ The original text has 巨勝 rather than 苜蓿.

⁶⁹ A recipe for the “quadruple-strength pill” is found in part two of the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (not translated in this book) (see Robinet 1981: 129).

⁷⁰ This is a further indication that the way of the perfected was thought to far transcend the arts of longevity, which had a much longer history in China. Zhou’s goal here is to become a flying immortal (*feixian* 飛仙).

「藥有數種，仙有數品。有乘雲馳龍白日升天，與太極真人為友，拜為仙宮之主。其位可司真公，定元公，太生公及中黃大夫，九氣丈人，仙都公。此位皆上仙也。或為仙鄉，或為仙大夫。上仙之次也。遊行五嶽，或造太清，役使鬼神，中仙也。或受封一山，總領鬼神。或遊翔小有，群集清虛之宮。中仙之次也。若食穀不死。日中無影。下仙也。或白日尸解，過死太陰，然後乃下仙之次也。」

“There are numerous varieties of herbs and numerous grades of immortals.⁷¹ There are those who ride the clouds in dragon-pulled chariots and ascend to the heavens in broad daylight. They become friends with the Perfected One of the Supreme Ultimate⁷² and their status is that of masters of immortal palaces.⁷³ Their rank gives them charge over the Perfected Dukes: the Duke of Establishing the Primordial, the Duke of Supreme Genesis and the Great Official of the Yellow Center,⁷⁴ the Master of the Nine *Qi* and the Duke of the Immortal City. These are all ranked as High Immortals. Some become Immortal Ministers or become Immortal Grand Officers: these are High Immortals, Second Class. [Some] roam over the five sacred mountains, or are established in Great Clarity and employ spirits and demons as their servants: these are Middle Rank Immortals. Others receive the fiefdom of a mountain and are commanders-in-chief of demons and spirits; some roam and soar through the Heaven of Lesser Existence and assemble in crowds at the Palace of Clear Vacuity: these are Middle Rank Immortals, Second Class. Those who eat grains but do not die and cast no shadow during the day are Lower Immortals. Some are also delivered from the corpse in broad daylight and pass through Supreme Yin: afterwards [they attain the rank of] Lower Immortals, Second Class.”

⁷¹ This is a classic exposition of the various ranks of perfection within the teachings of Highest Clarity. The analogy for the ranks of the perfected lies in the “numerous varieties of herbs” in nature. Just as there is a wide variety of natural products each with various qualities and effects, so also the heavenly realms operate according to the same principle of hierarchical diversity. The lowest rank is that of “lower immortals, second class” and refers to people who die but emerge from death and are reborn into an afterlife. It is worth noting that having an afterlife, the highest goal of many religious traditions, is presented here as a worst-case scenario. Far better is to avoid the sordid business of death in the first place.

⁷² The Chinese term *taiji* 太極, translated here as “Supreme Ultimate,” later becomes one of the most important theoretical concepts in Neo-Confucian metaphysics.

「我受涓子祕要，善守三一之道，役使鬼神。受太極帝君真印，封掌名山，以得不死。亦是金闕帝君真書之首，眾妙之大訣。但吾所學少，成地仙人也。」

“I myself received the secret essentials from Juanzi and became well-versed in the way of preserving the Three Ones. I have accordingly commanded demons and spirits as my servants. I received the Perfect Seal of the Imperial Lord of the Supreme Ultimate⁷⁵ and was enfeoffed at a famous mountain. In this way I obtained [the status of someone who] does not have to die. This is also the main point of the *Perfect Text of Imperial Lord Goldtower*⁷⁶ and the great secret of all wondrous phenomena. But I only learned a few of these things and became a terrestrial immortal.”⁷⁷

ics. In Daoist cosmology, however, it has a more concrete meaning, and refers to the *axis mundi* from which is suspended the sacred canopy of the heavens, that is, the fabric of the Dao. This *axis mundi* runs from south to north, up into the heavens and terminates at the pole star, around which the constellated patterns of astral deities rotate. In this case, however, the term has a slightly different connotation, and refers to the third of four celestial hierarchies or heavens: Jade Clarity (Yuqing 玉清), Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清), Supreme Ultimate (Taiji 太機), and Great Clarity (Taiqing 太清) (Robinet 1984: 1. 132).

⁷³ Following the principle of feudal titles, each celestial rank is accompanied by the title to a domain, the highest of which are known as palaces (*gong* 宮), envisioned as the stars in the night sky.

⁷⁴ Yellow is the color associated with center, which is why the Yellow Venerable Lord is the lord of the Central Sacred Mountain.

⁷⁵ The seal is the official emblem or insignia that goes along with being granted a celestial rank and title and is the mark that the rank and title have been properly conferred.

⁷⁶ Lord Goldtower (Jinque dijun 金闕帝君) is an important intermediary deity in the Highest Clarity pantheon, and in Highest Clarity Daoism is the title given to the future incarnation of Laozi 老子, also known as the Latter Sage (Housheng 後聖), who will rule over the age to come (Robinet 2000). He is associated with the method of preserving the Three Ones. The main Highest Clarity text associated with him is the *Scripture on the Three Primordial Perfected Ones of Imperial Lord Goldtower* (*Jinque dijun sanyuan zhenyi jing* 金闕帝君三元真一經; DZ 253, trans. Anderson 1980).

⁷⁷ Su Lin has been given the rare capacity to become a perfected immortal but because he is not a good student he has not fulfilled all that he was destined for. This is perhaps another reason why he is unwilling to be Zhou's teacher.

「子名上金書於方諸之宮。命登青錄。為字所謂金閣玉名已定於天曹矣。必能乘雲馳龍，上造以紫陽太清。佩金真玉光，龍衣虎帶。拜為真人。我之道術可教陸仙尸解之人耳，非子真人所可學也。但我是中仙耳，不足以為子師。」

“Your name, [however], is in the golden book in the palace of Fangzhu. Your destiny is published in the Azure Register.⁷⁸ Your ‘gold pavilion jade name’ is already fixed in the celestial offices.⁷⁹ You will certainly be able to ride to the clouds in a dragon-pulled chariot and be established on high in the Purple Yang [heaven] of Great Clarity. You will carry the Jade Radiance talisman of Golden Perfection on your waist,⁸⁰ wear dragon robes and a tiger belt and you will be venerated as a perfected person. My Daoist arts can only be taught to an Earth Immortal who is liberated from his corpse,⁸¹ but they are not what a [future] perfected person such as yourself should study. For I am only a middle-rank immortal and unworthy to be your teacher.”⁸²

⁷⁸ The Azure Register contains the names of the immortals, in contrast to the “Black Register” which contains the names of the dead (Robinet 1981: 130).

⁷⁹ The emphasis on having one’s destiny inscribed in a book indicates the importance of the bureaucratic tradition, in which various celestial officials are charged with keeping records of birth and death, and which rank and title belong to which immortal. Huang Tai is aware that Zhou is already marked for an illustrious spiritual career, more so than Zhou.

⁸⁰ This is an important Highest Clarity talisman (Robinet 1981: 130).

⁸¹ Corpse liberation (*shijie* 尸解) was a technique that involved the adept undergoing the appearance of death but leaving a stick or a sword behind instead of a corpse. The adept in fact does not die but rather in a simulation of his death in fact transcends it. Although corpse liberation is regarded as a technique for avoiding death rather than having to go through death (Seidel 1987: 232), it is clear that it was not a highly regarded form of transcendence. Better still was to leave no trace or token of an earthly body behind.

⁸² I have translated *bu zu* 不足 as “unworthy” which seems appropriate given the emphasis placed on hierarchy and title, but the Chinese term also conveys the idea of Su Lin’s being insufficiently capable, or lacking in the necessary wherewithal to be an adequate teacher to Zhou. As Tsai (2008: 204) notes, the message here is that earlier Daoists such as Su Lin, immortalized in collections of hagiographies such as the Han dynasty *Biographies of the Immortals* (*Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, DZ 294), are clearly inferior to Zhou. Their teaching, however, is not rejected, but incorporated into the Highest Clarity tradition.

「然守一鍊神，雖非上真之道，亦是中真地仙之好事，亦能朝千山之神，攝川澤之精。吐故於七華之下，納新於三宮之上。禮乎赤子，謁守真人。恭乎嬰兒。三真者乃身宅之帝君。混二十四氣，分入太微。又分號二十四真。能善斯道於三寸之間，則三宮真人可見。見則雲車羽蓋千乘萬騎，可見而得乘御也。列名元圖，飛行上清。」

“However, preserving the one and refining the spirits, although not the way of highest perfection, is still a good practice for a terrestrial immortal or middle rank perfected. You will still be paid court by the spirits of a thousand mountains and control the essences of streams and pools.⁸³ You will expel the old [breath] beneath the seven blossoms [of the Big Dipper] and inhale the new [breath] above the three palaces [of the body].⁸⁴ You will pay respects to the Newborn Child, call upon the Perfected One and revere the [Immortal] Infant. In fact these three perfected ones⁸⁵ are the Imperial Lords of the mansions of the body. They blend with the twenty-four *qi* [of the body], and separately enter [the Palace of] Great Subtlety.⁸⁶ Moreover they are separately known as the Twenty-Four Perfected. If you can become skilled at this way in the ‘three inch’ space [of your grotto chamber], then you will be able to see the perfected ones in the three palaces [of your body]. If you can see them, then [there will appear] chariots of clouds with canopies of feathers, a thousand chariots and ten thousand mounts. If you can see them, you will be able to ride in a carriage [up to heaven]. Your name will be listed in the Book of Mystery⁸⁷ and you will fly up to Highest Clarity.”

⁸³ This means that the adept will have power over the spirits of the natural world.

⁸⁴ The “seven blossoms” refers to the seven stars of the big dipper. The three palaces may refer to the cinnabar fields of the body (see Porkert 1979: 57). Altogether the sentence is describing a breathing meditation practice.

⁸⁵ The “newborn child,” the “perfected one,” and the “immortal infant” here function as epithets for the Three Ones, or Three Primes associated with the three cinnabar fields of the body. Each of the three is in turn associated with eight “effulgences” or “luminants” (*ba jing* 八景) which are in turn coordinated with the eight nodes of the solar year, hence the resulting twenty-four *qi* of the twenty-four perfected. In other Highest Clarity texts, the eight luminants are associated with a group of nine perfected, thus resulting in seventy-two deities. The next paragraph of the text, however, makes the connection to the Three Primes more explicit.

⁸⁶ This describes a method in which the Twenty-Four Perfected fuse together with the twenty-four energies of the body (eight “luminants” each associated with

「上元用立春，從東斗來還。中元用立夏，從南斗來還。下元用立冬，從北斗來還。三氣上昇，身亦存之。日之四節，一之往反也。其法鮮矣，其實用浩矣，其事近矣，其生長矣。」

“Upper Prime operates at Spring Begins;⁸⁸ he comes from and returns to the Eastern Dipper. Middle Prime operates at the Summer Begins;⁸⁹ he comes from and returns to the Southern Dipper. Lower Prime operates at Winter Begins;⁹⁰ he comes from and returns to the Northern Dipper. [When these] three *qi* ascend on high, visualize them also in the body.⁹¹ The coming and going of each one correspond to the four nodes of the solar year. This method is so rare, its operation so vast, its application so near at hand! Such long life it gives!”

the three cinnabar fields), and separately ascend to celestial palaces. This method, similar to the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* described in the following chapter, describes an early technique to connect the energies of the body with those of the heavens.

⁸⁷ Reading *xuanlu* 玄錄 for *yuantu* 元圖 (see Robinet 1981: 130). The Book of Mystery is a name for the registers of immortality.

⁸⁸ The first of the twenty-four solar terms, corresponding to February 4-18. The correlation with the solar terms is explained in further detail in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* on page 199.

⁸⁹ The seventh of the twenty-four solar terms, corresponding to May 6-20.

⁹⁰ The nineteenth of the twenty-four solar terms, corresponding to November 7-21.

⁹¹ The command “visualize them also in the body” (*shen yi cu zhi* 身亦存之) could equally be translated “make them appear in the body” and indicates that the practice of visualization (*cun* 存) involves proactively causing the spirits to appear in the body just as they are also ascending into heaven. In this way the body of the adept is linked to the heavens through the practice of visualization.

「苟得其道，亦變形萬端，身出水火，收束虎豹，役使鬼神也。子亦復宜知此道，以漸昇進耳。今以守三一之法，靈妙小有之書二百事傳子。石菌，朱柯，若乾芝與子服之。吾道畢矣。不為試子也。」

「吾行當被玄洲召去。三十日近比者之頃當時相詣，以啟之未悟，爾自行哉。可遠索師也。」

「必欲該道，真妙窮微極素，當苦嶮試。浮遊五嶽，雖遇真人，未即授子真道也。不百餘年，雲車羽蓋，龍虎之袍，未可得也。」

“If you obtain this way you will be able to transform into myriad shapes, your body will repel water and fire, you will summon and leash tigers and leopards and command demons and spirits as your servants. It is thus fitting that you know this way so that you may gradually advance to higher levels. Now I will transmit to you the method of observing the Three Ones and the two hundred practices of the *Book of Numinous Wonders of the [realm of] Lesser Existence*. I will give you ‘stone-mushrooms,’ ‘vermilion-stalks’ and ‘like-gan-fungus’ to take. That is the end of my instruction. I will not test you.”⁹²

“I am going away to answer a summons from the Mystery Continent. After a period of thirty days, I will visit you to reveal those things that you do not yet understand and you will [then] be able to put them into practice for yourself. You may [also] go far away and inquire from [other] teachers.”

“Certainly, if you really pursue this way, this perfect marvel, infinitesimal subtlety and zenith of purity, you will have bitter and dangerous trials.⁹³ If you wander through the five sacred mountains, even though you may encounter a perfected person, he will still not hand over to you the way of the perfected right away. It will be more than a hundred years before you are able to obtain a chariot of clouds with a canopy of feathers and the dragon and tiger robe.”

⁹² Tsai (2008: 213) points out that a feature of the *Esoteric Biography* is that Lord Zhou is deemed sufficiently worthy that he has no need to be tested. This is contrast to other instances where the initiate is subjected to many physical and mental tests such as lying under a large rock or chanting scriptures without being distracted.

⁹³ This warning about experiencing arduous tests (presumably at the hands of other teachers) is to be contrasted with Su Lin’s offer to teach Zhou without requiring him to undergo testing.

君再拜授教，退齋，沐浴五香。七日七夜不寐，但危坐接手，存念至道。乃以平旦燒香，北向再拜，服此神芝。

五年之間，視千里外，身輕能超十丈，日步行五百里。能隱能彰，坐在立亡。遂巡行名山，尋索仙人。

Lord Zhou bowed twice in acknowledgment of the teaching. He retreated into ritual purification and bathed in the five fragrances.⁹⁴ For seven days and seven nights he did not sleep but sat upright with hands clasped and meditated on the supreme Way. Then at dawn he burned incense, bowed twice to the north and swallowed the divine herbs.⁹⁵

Within five years he could see beyond a thousand *li*, his body became so light that he could [jump] over ten *zhang* and walk five hundred *li* per day.⁹⁶ He could make himself visible or invisible, appear while sitting down and disappeared while standing up. He then journeyed on foot through famous mountains in search of immortals.

⁹⁴ According to the *Scripture of the Three Sovereigns* (*Sanhuang jing* 三皇經), bathing in the five aromas or fragrances (*wuxiang* 五香) involves a ritual purification using water heated by burning five different types of fragrant wood (Porkert 1979: 63). See also the purification ritual mentioned in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (footnote 28 on page 168).

⁹⁵ That is to say, he followed the recipe that Su Lin had given him for killing the three death-bringing worms. Following Su Lin's advice, he has not yet undertaken the visualization of the Three Primes. This begins when he journeys through the mountains.

⁹⁶ 1000 *li* is approximately 500km; 10 *zhang* is approximately 30m; 500 *li* is approximately 250km. The text is indicating the gradual extension of Zhou's normal human powers. He has not transcended the earthly world, but has become a kind of superhuman figure.

ZHOU ZIYANG TRAVELS THROUGH
THE MOUNTAINS

聞有欒先生者，
得道在蒙山，能
讀龍躡經。乃追
尋之，入蒙山大
洞黃庭之中。遇
羨門子乘白鹿，
執羽蓋，杖青旄
之節。侍從十餘
玉女。

He heard that there was a certain Master Luan⁹⁷ who had obtained the Way on Mt. Meng and was able to recite the *Dragon Stilts Scripture*.⁹⁸ So he sought him out and entered the Yellow Court of the Great Grotto of Mt. Meng.⁹⁹ [There] he met Xianmenzi¹⁰⁰ riding a white deer,¹⁰¹ holding a feathery canopy and grasping an azure pennant. A dozen jade maidens attended him.

⁹⁷ Possibly Luan Ba 欒巴, an immortal featured in Ge Hong's *Biographies of Spirit Immortals* (*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳; trans. Campany 2002: 252-255). Luan was a governor famous for closing down the cults of animal spirits who demanded blood sacrifices. Campany also translates his brief mention in the *History of the Latter Han* written by Fan Ye (398-446): "Luan Ba had some knowledge of arts of the Dao and could command demons and spirits, so he tore down the shrines and abolished sacrifices, cutting back and controlling the activities of illicit shamans, and from then on aberrations and anomalies quieted down on their own" (trans. Campany 2002: 255). Assuming that this identification is correct, the significance of this meeting becomes clear: the first person whom Lord Zhou sought out was someone famous for his zeal in shutting down the shamanic activities that were common in southern China. This is thus a further indication that Lord Zhou sought to distance himself from the "common gods" of southern China.

⁹⁸ This text is mentioned in library of Ge Hong but is no longer extant. There is a text in the Daoist Canon with a similar title, *The Highest Clarity Supreme Scripture of the Dragon Stilts that Open Heaven* (*Shangqing taishang kaitian longqiao jing* 上清太上開天龍躡經; DZ 1354), but it appears to be of later provenance (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 1057).

⁹⁹ The most famous Mt. Meng is in Shandong province, southeast of Jinan.

¹⁰⁰ Xianmenzi is also featured in the *Biographies of Divine Perfected* where he is described as a perfected being who lived on the Central Sacred Mountain. The *Inner Chapters of the Master who Embraces Simplicity* features a method of compounding an elixir associated with Xianmenzi. The method is similar to the recipe above for destroying the three death-bringers, and will also summon jade maidens to serve the person who ingests it (Campany 2002: 290).

¹⁰¹ Deer are generally regarded as rare and precious animals in Chinese tradition and symbols of longevity; they are not a common beast or traditional source of food as may be the case in Northern Europe or North America. The deer is also the animal associated with the kidneys, water, and the color white, the most *yin* of the five phases. This would indicate that although Xianmenzi is an immortal, he is not the

遇於黃庭，君乃拜頓首，乞長生要訣。羨門子曰：「子名在丹臺之中，何憂不仙乎。王屋清虛洞宮，大多仙人。子始學，宜登此山。乃越江河，登此何索。」

君對曰：「聞有欒先生得道此山。能讀龍躡經。故來欲見而受之耳」。

門子曰：「欒先生仙之下耳。子乃真人也。以真問仙，不亦煩乎。子遇真人，乃子之師也。中仙已下非子所學。」

When he met him in the Yellow Court, Lord Zhou bowed twice, touching his head to the ground and begged [him] for the essential formula of long life. Xianmenzi replied: "Your name is [written] in the Cinnabar Terrace: why are you worried about not becoming an immortal? In the Clear and Empty Grotto Palace of Mount Wangwu reside a great many immortals. You have begun to study and should climb that mountain.¹⁰² Still you have crossed [many] rivers and streams to climb here. What are you looking for?"¹⁰³

Lord Zhou replied: "I had heard that there is a Master Luan who obtained the Way on this mountain. He is able to recite the *Dragon Stilts Scripture*. This is the only reason why I came—because I wanted to see him and obtain [this text]."

[Xian]menzi replied: "Mr. Luan is only a lower rank immortal, whereas you will become a perfected person. Don't you think it is odd to inquire of an immortal about perfection? When you encounter a perfected, then he should be your teacher. You shouldn't study from an immortal of the middle rank or below."

most highest of immortals, who would be associated with *yang*, the color purple, the heart, and the dragon.

¹⁰² *I.e.*, Mt. Wangwu, located in the west of Henan province, near Luoyang.

¹⁰³ Note that Xianmenzi does not say, "Why do you want to talk to him?" but rather, "What do you seek by climbing here?" The implication is that the present location does not house knowledge of sufficient depth to suit Zhou's needs. Zhou's quest for a teacher is, as much as anything, about finding the right place to be taught.

乃出龍躡經以授之，三皇內文以召神靈以効百鬼。

Then he took out the *Dragon Stilts Scripture* and handed it to him, [as well as] the *Esoteric Writing of the Three Sovereigns*,¹⁰⁴ a text for summoning spirits and numinous powers and for controlling the hundred demons.

乃退齋少室山三月。乃遊登王屋山，發洞門入丹室。大遇仙人，皆披素讀經。

Next he went into reclusion for three months on Mt. Shaoshi,¹⁰⁵ after which he wandered to Mt. Wangwu, opened up the entrance to the grotto [described earlier] and entered the Cinnabar Chamber. He encountered a great many immortals, all wearing simple vestments¹⁰⁶ and reciting scriptures.

見君皆起立。有趙他子授君芝圖十六首及五行祕符，而退齋。復登王屋山，遇黃先生，受黃素神方，五帝六甲左右靈飛之書四十四訣。

When they saw Lord Zhou they all stood up. There was [one called] Zhao Tuozi¹⁰⁷ who gave Lord Zhou the *Table of the Plants of Immortality* in sixteen chapters and the *Secret Talisman of the Five Phases*.¹⁰⁸ He then went into reclusion. The next time he climbed Mt. Wangwu, he also met Master Huang and received the *Divine Method [for absorbing] Yellow Purity*¹⁰⁹ and the *Forty-four Formulas of the Book of Numinous Flight of the Five Emperors and Six Jia of the Left and Right*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ The *Esoteric Writing of the Three Sovereigns* (*Sanhuang neiwén* 三皇內文) was considered by Ge Hong to be one of the most important alchemical texts.

¹⁰⁵ One of the peaks of Mt. Song, the central of the five sacred mountains, in Henan province.

¹⁰⁶ That is to say, wearing simple or uncolored vestments, as opposed to the formal regalia that a high immortal might be expected to wear.

¹⁰⁷ Zhao Tuozi was said to have ingested “cinnamon for twenty years whereupon the soles of his feet became hairy and he could walk 500 miles a day; also he became strong enough to lift a thousand pounds” (*Inner Chapters of the Master who Embraces Simplicity*; trans. Ware 1966: 195).

¹⁰⁸ The *Secret Talisman of the Five Phases* is a Highest Clarity talisman found in the *Superior Scripture on the Emanations from the Labyrinth of Phoenix Terrace* (*Shangqing gaoshang yuchen fengtai qusu shangjing* 上清高上玉晨鳳臺曲素上經 DZ 1372), a Highest Clarity text comprising hymns and talismans, including the one mentioned here (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 168).

¹⁰⁹ Absorbing “yellow purity” refers to the practice of absorbing the rays of the moon.

乃退登幡冢山。遇上魏君，受太素傳左乙混洞東蒙之籙，右庚素文攝殺之律。

After this he withdrew and climbed Mt. Bozhong.¹¹¹ There he met Lord Shangwei¹¹² and received the *Registers of the Left Yi Hidden Grotto on Eastern [Mt.] Meng* and the *Precepts of the Right Geng Pure Statutes on Pacifying Killing [Demons]*, transmitted from [the Heaven of] Great Purity.

乃退齋三月。登嵩高山，入洞門，遇中央黃老君。遊觀丹城，潛行洞庭。合會仙人在嵩高山太室洞門之內。

Again he left and went into reclusion for three months. He climbed Mt. Songgao¹¹³ and entered the gates of a grotto [there] and met the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center. He was wandering through the Cinnabar City, passing secretly through numerous grotto courts. Then he convened an assembly of immortals within the gates of the grotto, on the Taishi peak of Mt. Songgao.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ There are two texts in the Ming dynasty Daoist Canon with similar titles: the *Highest Clarity Supreme Yellow and Pure Scripture of Forty-four Methods on Yellow Silk* (*Shangqing taishang huangsu sishisi fang jing* 上清太上黃素四四方經; DZ 1380) and the *Highest Clarity Six Jia Left and Right Talismans for Summoning the Lingfei Maidens of the Qionggong palace* (*Shangqing qionggong lingfei liujia zuoyou shangfu* 上清瓊宮靈飛六甲左右上符; DZ 84). These two talismanic texts are nearly identical and confer upon the bearer the ability to summon “traveling kitchens” or “mobile banquets” (*xingchu* 行廚). In Highest Clarity texts, the main purpose of the traveling kitchen was to assist in summoning deities to help the adept (Robinet 1984: 2.25).

¹¹¹ In Shaanxi province (Porkert 1979: 71).

¹¹² Or possibly Lord Wei. This person has not been identified. The *Biographies of Divine Perfected* mentions one Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, who is regarded there as the author of the alchemical text *The Kinship of the Three* (*Cantong qi* 參同契) (Campany 2002: 368–9).

¹¹³ Mt. Songgao, normally referred to as Mt. Song, or Songshan, is the central sacred mountain, in Henan province. This is the location of Zhou’s most significant spiritual transformations.

¹¹⁴ The text here paints a picture of an elaborate celestial realm to which Zhou has gained access, replete with cities, mansions and courts. The immortals are assembled within the gates of the Supreme Chamber grotto, paying court to the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, who is the Lord of the Central Sacred Mountain.

以紫雲為蓋，柔玉為床。鳳衣神冠。佩真執節。左帶流金之鈴，右帶八光之策。

神虎俠洞門。靈狩衛太室。左侍者清真小童，右侍者太和玉女，各百餘人。捧神醴之琬。詠大洞真經三十九章，誦大有妙經二十四章，修太上素靈二十一曲。其中庭有青腰玉女，執玄玉南震之燈，散花燒香，衛黃老君。

The [Venerable Lord's] dais was made from purple clouds, his couch from soft jade. He wore phoenix cloth and a spirit cap; girded with [the texts of] perfection, he held [a book of] statutes in his hand. He wore on the left of his belt the Pendant of Liquid Gold and on his right, the Plan of Eightfold Radiance.¹¹⁵

Spirit tigers flanked the entrance to the grotto. Numinous predators guarded the Taishi peak. The servants on the left were Young Lads of Clear Perfection; the servants on the right were Jade Maidens of Supreme Harmony; there were over a hundred of each. They were offering cups of spirit wine, chanting the thirty-nine chapters of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*,¹¹⁶ reciting the twenty-four chapters of the *Marvelous Scripture from [the Palace of] Vast Possessions*,¹¹⁷ and performing the twenty-one tunes of the Numinous Power of Supreme Purity. In the central court were Azure Waisted Jade Maidens holding Mystery Jade Southern Lightning lamps, scattering blossoms and lighting incense; they were attending to the Yellow Venerable Lord.

¹¹⁵ These are both talismans.

¹¹⁶ This text is studied in this book, and its preface is translated in chapter seven.

¹¹⁷ The *Grotto Perfection Supreme Marvelous Scripture from the Room of Pure Spirit in the Palace of Vast Possessions* (*Dongzhen taishang suling dongyuan dayou miaojing* 洞真太上素靈洞元大有妙經; DZ 1314) draws on the tradition surrounding Su Lin and Juanzi, already familiar in this hagiography, and advocates a system of meditation based on the Three Primes. This tradition predates the Highest Clarity revelations but, as this hagiography indicates, was absorbed into it. In the preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, Zhu Ziyang praises this text as one of the three "marvels of the Dao" (see footnote 20 on page 217).

黃老君巾三華九陽之巾，手彈流徽雲珠素琴，被服金光，天姿嚴峻，眼有電精，口含玉膏。

The Yellow Venerable Lord wore the cap of three-fold blossom and ninefold yang. He was strumming fluidly the tone *zhi* on a simple lute [made of] cloud-pearl,¹¹⁸ and was enveloped in a golden light. His celestial bearing was impassive and majestic; his eyes sparkled like lightning; and his mouth contained a precious ointment.¹¹⁹

君既至頓首再拜，乞長生度世。黃老君曰：「子存洞房之內，見白元君耶」。

Lord Zhou approached, touched his head to the ground, made a double bow and begged for eternal life and to transcend the world. The Yellow Venerable Lord said: “While visualizing in your grotto chamber, have you seen the White Prime Lord?”

君對曰：「實存洞房，嘗見白元君」。

Lord [Zhou] replied: “I have practiced visualization in grotto chambers and I have indeed seen the White Prime Lord.”

黃老君曰：「子道未足矣，未見無英君也。且復遊行，受諸要訣。當以上真道經授子矣。」

The Yellow Venerable Lord said: “Your way is still not [good] enough—you have not yet seen Lord Wuying.¹²⁰ So you should continue your journey [in order to] receive the essential formulas. Then I will give you the scriptures of the way to ascend to perfection.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ A type of mica (Porkert 1979: 76).

¹¹⁹ There is a Chinese medicine, Qiongyu ointment 琼玉膏, which is used for a variety of symptoms including coughs and lack of breath. It is more likely, however, that in this particular case the jade ointment refers to a mystical concoction associated with immortality. Porkert (1979: 77) makes the point that immortal embryos were thought to contain a type of mud (*ni* 泥) in their mouths, in which case, the ointment or paste in the mouth of the god is a further symbol of his status as an immortal.

¹²⁰ Zhou has seen two of the three Prime Lords in his wanderings, but for the method of the Three Primes to be fulfilled he needs to have encountered all three.

¹²¹ The phrase *Shangzhen daojing* 上真道經 could conceivably be the title to a single text, the *Daoist Scripture for Ascending to Perfection*, but since I have discovered no evidence of any text with that precise name, it seems more likely that it refers

君再拜受教，復頓頭，乞得侍接龍車為遊走之使。

Lord Zhou made a double bow and received this teaching, again touching his head to the floor. He begged to obtain the service of a dragon [-pulled] chariot for his journey.¹²²

黃老君曰：「洞房之內至精之中，有大神不可名。安出紫房，遊戲丹田，上通太微乃下洞玄。小有為白元君，大有為無英君。見白元君，下仙之事也。可壽三千年。若見無英君，乃為真也。可壽一萬年矣。可精更存之。不試子也。」

The Yellow Venerable Lord said: "In the grotto chamber, in the middle of ultimate essence, there is a great spirit who cannot be named.¹²³ Peacefully he emerges from the purple chamber and wanders to frolic in the cinnabar fields.¹²⁴ He goes up to communicate with [the Palace of] Great Subtlety and then goes down to [the realm of] Pervading Mystery.¹²⁵ In [the Palace of] Lesser Possessions he becomes the White Prime Lord and in [the Palace of] Vast Possessions he becomes the Lord Wuying. To see the White Prime Lord is the affair of lower immortals and they should attain a longevity of three thousand years. If you see Lord Wuying, then you will become a perfected person and you should attain a longevity of ten thousand years. You should concentrate and continue to visualize him; I will not test you."

generically to "Daoist scriptures of highest perfection," or, as I have translated it above "scriptures of the way to ascend to perfection."

¹²² Only the highest ranks of the perfected are summoned to heaven in a chariot pulled by dragons. Zhou is here making the type of petition that is evident in the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* (see page 199).

¹²³ The fact that this great spirit cannot be named is an indication of its power. Its function is to communicate between the body and the Palace of Great Subtlety, the highest palace where Zhou will eventually be granted the title of perfected person.

¹²⁴ This describes the spirit emerging from the grotto chamber in the brain and traveling through the three cinnabar fields of the body.

¹²⁵ Here the spirit is also understood as connecting the highest realm of the cosmos as well as the deepest realm. The former sentence and this sentence are in fact referring to the very same process but the former process is explained in terms of the microcosm of the body, and the latter process is explained in terms of the macrocosm of the heavens and the underworld.

- 君再拜受教而退。遊行天下名山大澤。
- Lord Zhou made a double bow, received this teaching and left. He wandered everywhere, to famous mountains and great lakes.
- 西登白空山。遇沙野帛先生，受太清上經。
- He traveled west and climbed Mt. Baikong, met Master Bo from Shaye and received high scriptures of Great Clarity.¹²⁶
- 退登峨嵋山，入空洞金府，遇甯先生，受太丹隱書八稟十訣。
- He left and climbed Mt. Emei.¹²⁷ He entered the Golden Residence of Pervading Emptiness, met Master Ning and received the *Eight Commandments and Ten Formulas of the Grand Cinnabar Secret Book*.¹²⁸
- 退登岷山，遇陰先生，受九赤班符。
- He left and climbed Mt. Min.¹²⁹ He met Master Yin and received the *Nine Red Speckled Talismans*.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Bo He 帛和 was an important figure in the traditions surrounding the alchemist and literatus Ge Hong. His early hagiographies also mention that he possessed Highest Clarity scriptures (Campany 2002: 136).

¹²⁷ The most famous Mt. Emei is in Sichuan province. This would fit in well with the general westward direction that Zhou is taking.

¹²⁸ This text is mentioned in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (5.3a), and a considerably altered version exists in the Ming dynasty Daoist canon in the *Grotto Perfection Mystery Scripture of the Secret Book of Great Cinnabar, from the Highest Clarity Emperor of Supreme Unity* (*Shangqing taiyi dijun taidan yinshu dongzhen xuanjing* 上清太一帝君太丹隱書洞真玄經; DZ 1330). The text describes visual meditations that involve fusion with Taiyi and the Imperial Lord (Dijun 帝君) (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 160). Master Ning is mentioned in the biography of Zi Zhu 子主 in the *Biographies of Immortals* (Kaltenmark 1953: 168) where he makes an appearance on the top of Mt. Longmei playing the lute.

¹²⁹ Mt. Min is also in Sichuan province.

¹³⁰ This is probably the *Grotto Perfection Supreme Scripture of the Nine Red Speckled Talismans and of the Five Emperors' Inner Perfection* (*Dongzhen taishang jiuchi ban fu wudi neizhen jing* 洞真九赤班符五帝內真經; DZ 1329). The text details various Highest Clarity visualization methods, and the talismans “confer on the adept the power to secure the mountains and govern the seas” (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 166). As to the identity of Master Yin, the *Biographies of Immortals* describes one Yin Sheng 陰生, a beggar in the Jiangnan region, who attracted the ire of local citizens. When eventually they arrested him and sought to kill him, he vanished, also causing the houses of his assailants to collapse, killing over ten people (Kaltenmark 1953:

- 退登岐山，遇臧延甫，受憂樂曲素訣。 He left and climbed Mt. Qi. He met Zang Yanfu and received the *Pure Formulas of the Songs of Sadness and Happiness*.¹³¹
- 辭乃登梁山，遇淮南子成，受天關三圖。 He took his leave and next climbed Mt. Liang. He met Zicheng of Huainan and received the *Three Diagrams of the Celestial Pass*.¹³²
- 乃退登牛首山，遇張子房，受太清經。 Next he left and climbed Mt. Niushou. He met Zhang Zifang and received the *Scriptures of Great Clarity*.¹³³
- 乃登九嶷山，遇李伯陽，受李氏幽經。 Next he climbed Mt. Jiuyi. He met Li Boyang and received the *Hidden Scripture of Mr. Li*.¹³⁴

158–9). However, it seems more likely that the Yin referred to here is Yin Changsheng 陰長生 mentioned in the *Biographies of Divine Perfected*, who received an alchemical text, but only took half a dose, allowing him to remain on earth and perform acts of charity (Campany 2002: 275).

¹³¹ Mt. Qi is west of Xi'an in Shaanxi province. The only other reference to Zang Yanfu is in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (14.16b). This is one of the arguments that Robinet (1984 2.C.9) makes for regarding the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* as having a rightful place within the Highest Clarity tradition.

¹³² This text, the *Highest Clarity Scripture of the Three Diagrams of the Celestial Pass* (*Shangqing tianguan santu jing* 上天關三圖經; DZ 1366) is partially translated in Kohn (1993). The text instructs the adept to visualize the stars of the Big Dipper (Beidou 北斗) so as to secure release from the embryonic bondage of death. Having visualized the appropriate star, the adept then prays to be transferred from the registers of death in Mt. Fengdu to the registers of life in the Southern Palace (see Kohn 1993: 260). Mt. Liang is also in Shaanxi province. Presumably Zicheng of Huainan refers to someone associated with the Prince of Huainan

¹³³ The *Scriptures of Great Clarity* refers to one or more texts associated with the alchemical tradition of Great Clarity (Robinet 1981: 131). Mt. Niushou is near Nanjing, the present-day capital of Jiangsu province. Zhang Zifang is the courtesy title of Zhang Liang (d. 189 B.C.E.) who planned a failed assassination attempt against the first emperor of the Qin dynasty, and after an encounter with a mysterious figure who later transformed into a yellow stone, was handed a text on military strategy. With this book, he became the strategist for Liu Bang who did succeed in overthrowing the Qin. Later Zhang retired from public life and was said to have become a Daoist practitioner. Zhang Daoling, the founder of the Way of the Celestial Masters, was a descendent of Zhang Liang. Despite this apparently significant connection to Daoist tradition, according to Robinet (1984 2.C.9), Zhang Zifang only figures in Daoist texts in the *Declarations of the Perfected* 8b4.

- 乃遊登鍾山，遇高丘子，受金丹方二十七首。 Next he traveled up Mt. Zhong. He met Master Gaoqiu and received the *Twenty-Seven Chapter Gold and Cinnabar Method*.¹³⁵
- 乃登鶴鳴山，遇陽安君，受金液丹經，九鼎神丹圖。 Next he climbed Mt. Heming. He met Lord Yang'an and received the *Scripture of the Elixir made from Liquid Gold* and the *Diagram of the Divine Nine Tripod Elixir*.¹³⁶
- 乃登猛山，遇青精先生，受黃素傳。 Next he climbed Mt. Meng. He met Master Azure Essence and received the *Commentaries written on Yellow Silk*.¹³⁷
- 乃登陸渾山，潛入伊水洞室，遇李子耳，受隱地八術。 Next he climbed Mt. Luhun. He took the hidden entrance to the Yi stream grotto-chamber and met Li Zi'er. He received the *Eight Arts for being Concealed in the Earth*.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Li Boyang is an alternate name for Laozi, the reputed author of *The Way and its Power*. On the surname Li and the style name Boyang see Company (2002: 194). Mt. Jiuyi is in Henan province.

¹³⁵ Mt. Zhong is in Jiangsu province, just east of Nanjing, and is the present location of the grand mausoleum to Sun Yat-sen. Master Gaoqiu is an immortal featured in the *Declarations of the Perfected* 5.9b.

¹³⁶ This text is mentioned in Ge Hong's *The Master who Embraces Simplicity* as a key alchemical text, the closest extant version of which may be the *Great Clarity Scripture of the Divine Elixir made from Liquid Gold* (*Taiqing jinye shendan jing* 太清金液神丹經; DZ 880). This is yet another text associated with the Great Clarity alchemical tradition, as is the nine tripod elixir text also mentioned in this paragraph. In this section of the text Zhou seems to be acquiring various texts associated with the Great Clarity tradition and is thereby assimilating that tradition within his overall spiritual journey. The implication is that those texts are helpful in Zhou's spiritual progress but are not what he is ultimately seeking. Mt. Heming, in Sichuan province, is where Zhang Daoling first received the revelation of Daoist scriptures and established the Way of the Celestial Masters in 142 C.E.

¹³⁷ Master Azure Essence, or Qingjing xiansheng, is mentioned in the *Declarations of the Perfected* as one of a number of perfected who had deliberately chosen to remain on earth and travel around forests and mountains rather than ascend directly to heaven (Company 2002: 421). This theme closely parallels that of the Buddhist bodhisattvas who vow not to enter nirvana before saving all living beings. Mt. Meng is in Henan (Porkert 1979: 88).

¹³⁸ This text is the *Scripture of the Dao Essence of Cinnabar Effulgence [Containing] the Eight Methods for Hiding in the earth* (*Shangqing danjing daoqing yindi bashu jing*

- 乃登戎山，遇趙伯玄，受三九素語。
- Next he climbed Mt. Rong. He met Zhao Boxuan and received the *Pure Sayings of the Three and Nine*.¹³⁹
- 乃登陽洛山，遇幼陽君，受青要紫書，三五順行。
- Next he climbed Mt. Yangluo. He met Lord Youyang and received the *Purple Book of the [Celestial Emperor] of the Azure Waist*¹⁴⁰ and the *Practice of the Three and Five*.
- 乃登霍山，遇司命君，受經命青圖，上皇民籍。
- Next he climbed Mt. Huo.¹⁴¹ He met the Lord Controller of Destinies¹⁴² and received the *Azure Map for Going Through Destiny* and the *Highest Sovereign's Register of the People*.¹⁴³

上清丹景道精隱地八術經 DZ 1359). This scripture, which predates the Highest Clarity revelations, describes methods for escaping imminent physical dangers. The Yi stream is in Henan province (Porkert 1979: 89), as is Mt. Luhun, near Mt. Song.

¹³⁹ The extant version of this text, mentioned in the *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel*, is to be found in the *True Formulas of the [Heaven of] Jade Clarity Concerning the Pure Sayings of the Three [Perfected] and the Nine [Sovereigns] of the [Heaven of] Grotto Perfection* (*Dongzhen taishang sanjiu suyu yujing zhenjue* 洞真太上三九素語玉精真訣; DZ 1327) and contains oral formulas for invoking the powers of the Three Perfected and the Nine Sovereigns, with the goal of achieving immortality (Porkert 1979: 90).

¹⁴⁰ The *Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity Purple Book of the Celestial Emperor of the Azure Waist, containing the Combined Scriptures on Gathering the Golden Root* (*Dongzhen shangqing qingyao zishu jin'gen zhongjing* 洞真上清青要紫書金根眾經; DZ 1315). This Highest Clarity text, attributed to Lord Azure Lad, was at least partially revealed to Yang Xi in 365. It contains talismans to escape the apocalypse, purification methods, rituals, descriptions of paradises, and visualization practices (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 155). Mt. Yangluo is in Henan province, and was where Wei Huacun engaged in cultivation practices (Zhang and Qin 2001).

¹⁴¹ Mt. Huo, also associated with the cultivation of Lady Wei, was an “unstable place name” and experienced controversy over its actual location: “The location of Huoshan, whether the “Greater” or “Lesser” mountains of that name, was highly unstable. Michel Strickmann believed that the secret Southern Marchmount to which Lady Wei was assigned, named ‘Greater Mount Huo,’ was at Luojiang township in Fujian, and that it remained there until the fifth century. Tao Hongjing accordingly took the old mount Huo—that is, ‘Heaven’s Post Mountain’ [Tianzhu shan 天柱山] in Anhui—to be the Lesser Mount Huo” (Schafer 1977: 134).

¹⁴² The Controller of Destinies (Siming 司命) was in charge of fixing the dates and times of people’s deaths. The texts that he confers are to do with negotiating fate, or changing the time and circumstances of one’s death.

- 乃登鳥鼠山，遇墨翟子，受紫度炎光內視圖中經。
- Next he climbed Mt. Niaoshu. He met Master Mo Di and received the *Rules on Purple [Tablets] and the Central Illustrated Scripture on Blazing Light Inner Vision*.¹⁴⁴
- 乃登曜名山，遇太帝候夜神童，受金根之經。
- Next he climbed Mt. Yaoming. He met the Divine Lad [who was the] Night-Watchman of the Supreme Ruler and received the *Scripture of the Golden Root*.¹⁴⁵
- 乃登委羽山，遇司馬季主，受石精金光藏景化形。
- Next he climbed Mt. Weiyu.¹⁴⁶ He met Sima Jizhu,¹⁴⁷ and received the [*Scripture of*] *the Essence of Stones and the Light of Gold for Hiding in Effulgence and Shape-Shifting*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ The text is also mentioned as one of a number of texts received by Lord Pei. The text in the Daoist Canon which bears the same title is the *Grotto Perfection Precious Register on which are Fixed the Names of the Perfected of the Population Record of the Most High Supreme Sovereign* (*Dongzhen taishang shanghuang minji dingzhen yulu* 洞真太上上皇民籍定真玉籙; DZ 1341). The register itself is presented at the end of the extant text, most of which is occupied by an apparently unconnected Buddhist-themed sermon on repentance delivered Lord Lao to the Azure Lad (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 208).

¹⁴⁴ The *Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity Scripture containing Rules on Purple Tablets, and the Blazing Light Scripture created by Transformation from the Divine Mystery* (*Dongzhen shangqing zidu yanguang shenyuan bian jing* 洞真上清紫度炎光神元變經; DZ 1332). Master Mo Di is Mozi (ca. 490–403 B.C.E.), the philosopher who was subsequently revered by the Daoist tradition for his magical techniques. Mt. Niaoshu is in the center of Gansu province.

¹⁴⁵ Possibly the same text as DZ 1315 mentioned in footnote 140 on page 141.

¹⁴⁶ Mt. Weiyu is an important Daoist mountain located in Zhejiang province where one Liu Fenglin practiced the Dao in the rein of the Han Gaozu emperor. The Grotto of Lesser Existence on Mt. Weiyu was later regarded as one of the great grotto chambers (*Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* j. 29).

¹⁴⁷ Sima Jizhu figures in the *Biographies of Spirit Immortals* as an early alchemical practitioner, and is listed as one of those “whose corpses stank when they had quaffed the nine-cycle elixir, from whose bodies maggots streamed when they had wallowed a spatulaful of it” (Campany 2002: 256).

¹⁴⁸ The [*Scripture of*] *the Essence of Stones and the Light of Metal for Hiding in Effulgence and Shape-Shifting* does not figure in the Ming Daoist Canon, but is mentioned in the *Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel* (84.1a). The text consists of a method of forging a brilliant sword from a metal extracted from a rare stone. In an

- 乃登大庭山，遇劉子先，受七變神法。
- Next he climbed Mt. Dating. He met Liu Zixian and received the *Divine Method of Seven Changes*.¹⁴⁹
- 乃登都廣建木，遇谷希子，受黃氣之法，太空之術，陽精三道之要。
- Next he climbed to the Sacred Tree of Duguang,¹⁵⁰ met Master Gu Xi and received the essentials of the *Three Paths of the Method of Yellow Qi, the Arts of Supreme Vacuity and the Yang Essence*.¹⁵¹
- 乃登桐柏山，遇王喬，受素奏丹符。
- Next he climbed Mt. Tongbo.¹⁵² He met Wang Qiao and received the *Su Tai Cinnabar Talisman*.¹⁵³
- 乃登山，遇南嶽赤松子，受上元真君書。
- Next he climbed Mt. Taihua. He met Master Redpine of the Southern Sacred Mountain and received the *Book of the Highest Mystery Perfected Lord*.¹⁵⁴

act of “corpse deliverance” the sword replaces the practitioner’s body in the tomb; he is thus said to have “hidden” his body in the effulgence of the sword (Porkert 1979: 95).

¹⁴⁹ This method is mentioned in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (5.3a) but there is no similar title in the Ming Daoist Canon (Robinet 1981: 131). Porkert (1979: 95) regards Mt. Dating as an error for Mt. Tianting 天庭.

¹⁵⁰ The sacred tree is the symbolic center of the cosmos in shamanic rituals (Porkert 1979: 96). Gu Xi is a Daoist immortal who figures in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (Robinet 1981: 131-2).

¹⁵¹ This in fact refers to a single text, the *Highest Clarity Scripture on Following the Three Trajectories and [Absorbing] the Yellow Qi and the Yang Essence* (*Shangqing huangqi yangjing sandao shunxing jing* 上清黃氣陽精三道順行經; DZ 33; discussed in Robinet 1976). The yellow *qi* and the yang essence refer to the light of the moon and sun respectively.

¹⁵² Mt. Tongbo is a celebrated Daoist peak near Mt. Tiantai 天台山 in Zhejiang province, not to be confused with the (more widely famous) Mt. Tongbo that lies on the border between Henan and Hubei.

¹⁵³ This can be found in the *Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity [containing] Rules on Purple [Tablets], and the Blazing Light Scripture [created by] Transformation from the Divine Mystery* (*Dongzhen shangqing zidu yanguang shenyuan bian jing* 洞真上清紫度炎光神元變經; DZ 1332; Robinet 1981: 132)

¹⁵⁴ Mt. Taihua refers to Mt. Hua, the sacred mountain of the west (Porkert 1979: 97). Read mystery (*xuan* 玄) for primordial (*yuan* 元; see Schafer 1978: 389 on this common substitution). On Master Redpine see footnote 2 on page 163.

- 乃登太冥山，遇
九老仙都君，受
黃水月華四真
法。
- Next he climbed Mt. Taiming.¹⁵⁵ He met the Lord of the City of the Nine Elder Immortals and received the *Four Methods of Perfection of [Absorbing] Yellow Water and Moon Blossom*.¹⁵⁶
- 乃至合黎山，遇
皇人，受八素真
經，太上隱書。
- Next he went to Mt. Heli.¹⁵⁷ He met the Sovereign Person and received the *Perfect Scripture of the Eight Pure Ones* [also known as the] *Supreme High Hidden Book*.¹⁵⁸
- 乃登景山，遇黃
臺，萬畢先生，
受九真中經。
- Next he climbed Mt. Jing.¹⁵⁹ He met Huang Tai [aka Su Lin] and Master Wan Bi and received the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*.¹⁶⁰
- 乃登玄壘羽野，
遇玉童十人，九
氣丈人，得白羽
紫蓋，服黃水月
華法。
- Next he climbed Xuanlong Feather Field. He met ten jade lads and the Master of the Nine 瓊 and obtained a [carriage with a] purple canopy and white feathers and the *Method for Absorbing the Yellow Liquid and Moon Blossom*.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ From this point onward there is a change in the description of the locations that Zhou visits. Formerly all the places were mountains known to have physical locations. Now some of the names of the following mountains become more ambiguous and likely refer to mystical locations. Mt. Taiming, or the Mountain of Great Obscurity is probably a reference to an underworld mountain associated with the abode of the dead.

¹⁵⁶ This refers to the Highest Clarity practice of absorbing the vital energy from the moon (see Robinet 1976).

¹⁵⁷ Mt. Heli is in Gansu province.

¹⁵⁸ The *Highest Clarity Supreme Scripture of the Eight Pure Ones* (*Shangqing taishang basu zhenjing* 上清太上八素真經; DZ 426) has been studied by Eichman (1999).

¹⁵⁹ Mt. Jing, or the Mountain of Vistas, could refer to one of a number of physical mountains (Porkert 1979: 99) or could also be a reference to a state of visual meditation.

¹⁶⁰ Here, Zhou meets Su Lin / Huang Tai again, and receives the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (translated in the next chapter).

¹⁶¹ Absorbing the yellow liquid and moon blossom refers to the practices of absorbing the essence of the sun and moon. Note here that Zhou not only receives a text but a carriage for ascending to heaven.

乃到桑林，登扶廣山，遇青真小童君，受金書祕字。

Next he arrived at Mulberry Forest¹⁶² and climbed Fuguang Mountain. He met the Young Perfected Azure Lord and received the *Secret Characters of the Golden Book*.¹⁶³

乃退南行朱火，登丹陵山，遇龔仲陽，受仙忌真記。

Next he returned south, walked to Vermilion Fire and climbed Cinnabar Mound Mountain.¹⁶⁴ He met Kong Zhongyang and received the *Perfect Record of the Taboos [to be observed by] Immortals*.¹⁶⁵

乃西遊登空山，見無英君。視西郎洞房中，無英君處其左，白元君處其右，黃老君處其中。

Next he traveled west and climbed Empty Mountain¹⁶⁶ and saw Lord Wuying. He looked in the Xilang grotto chamber: Lord Wuying occupied the left, the White Prime Lord occupied the right and the Yellow Venerable Lord occupied the middle.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² The mulberry forest has strong mythological associations and has been connected to shamanic rituals, funerals and a variety of strange phenomena. For a review of these see Boileau 2002.

¹⁶³ On the Azure Lad, an important intermediary deity in Highest Clarity Daoism, see Kroll (1985). The text here is an alternative name for the *Highest Clarity Scripture on Following the Three Trajectories and [Absorbing] the Yellow Qi and the Yang Essence* (Robinet 1981: 132; see also footnote 151 on page 143).

¹⁶⁴ Cinnabar mound (Danling 丹陵) is the name of the heaven of the south pole where adepts are able to be reborn (Robinet 1981: 129). Vermilion Fire is an alternative name for the same place (Robinet 1981: 132).

¹⁶⁵ A fragment of this original text is contained in the *Numinous Text in Purple Writing from the Palace of Great Subtlety Containing a True Record of Taboos to be observed by Immortals* (*Taiwei lingshu ziwen xianji zhenji shangjing* 太微靈書紫文仙忌真記上經; DZ 179). The text contains various taboos and proscriptions against lust, alcohol, eating meat, etc. (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 152).

¹⁶⁶ The direction west is significant for it points towards Kunlun, the mountainous paradise of the immortals presided over by the Queen Mother of the West. The “empty mountain” is clearly a mystical reference and may be interpreted as referring to himself, a human body conceived as an “empty mountain” that is an outwardly solid form containing within it the empty space of the network of grottos.

¹⁶⁷ Their position in the grotto would appear to indicate their hierarchy. Lord Wuying is in the lowest position, the White Prime Lord is in the middle position, and the Yellow Venerable Lord is in the highest position. However this is exactly the opposite of what we already know. Zhou has already made contact with the Yellow

THE VISION OF THE THREE PRIME LORDS

無英君被服金精之錦，朱碧玉綾之袍。光赤朝霞，流景曜天。腰太上靈氣之章。佩九帝祛邪之策，戴翠上紫靈之冠。蓋太玄丹靈上元赤子之祖父也。左連青宮之氣，氣冠萬神，乃未有天地先自虛空而生矣。

Lord Wuying was dressed in a brocade of gold essence and a rich damask gown in vermilion and blue. His ruddy countenance was like the sun shining through the dawn clouds and dazzling the sky.¹⁶⁸ On his waist he wore the Badge of Supreme Numinous Energy; he was girded with the Plan of the Nine Emperors for Exorcising Evil;¹⁶⁹ on his head he wore the kingfisher [feathered] cap of the purple spirits on high. (For he is the paternal grandfather of the Upper Prime Newborn Child of the Cinnabar Numen in the Supreme Mystery). [As] the *qi* of the Azure Palace of the Left Annex he caps myriad spirits;¹⁷⁰ he was born from the emptiness of the void before heaven and earth existed.¹⁷¹

Venerable Lord and the White Prime Lord, but has not yet seen Lord Wuying. Indeed seeing Lord Wuying has been described as being the essential element for attaining perfection. This ranking of the three Prime Lords is confirmed in the next three paragraphs which describe the three Lords in decreasing splendor. Lord Wuying is accorded the most dazzling description, followed by the White Prime Lord and the Yellow Venerable Lord. However, this ranking of the three Prime Lords is contradicted again by the description on page 148.

¹⁶⁸ This poetic description evokes images of bright lights and rich colors. Lord Wuying is literally dazzling.

¹⁶⁹ The Lord wears on his waist the talismanic symbols of his authority. The Badge of Supreme Numinous Energy indicates that he has the authority to invoke numinous power from the highest reaches of the cosmos. The Plan of the Nine Emperors for Exorcising Evil indicates that he has the power to drive away evil spirits. The number nine indicates fullness or completion, thus the power of “nine emperors” signifies absolute power.

¹⁷⁰ The Azure Palace of the Left Annex is located in the left eye, which is the residence of the Young Azure Lord. Lord Wuying is thus described as a kind of spirit that emanates from the eyes and which caps, or dwells above the heads of, all the other spirits (see Porkert 1979: 103),

¹⁷¹ This sentence is designed to indicate that the Lord Wuying originated in the purity of nonbeing, as opposed to the lower orders of creation that originate in the more turbid admixture of *qi* and emptiness.

白元君被服丹玉之錦，雲羅重袍，白光內朱，流景參天，垂暉映神，玄黃徹虛。腰太上靈精之章。佩玄元攝魔之策。戴招龍造冠。蓋玉房雲庭上元赤子之父。右夾皓清之室朝運生者也。

The White Prime Lord was dressed in a brocade of cinnabar and jade and a padded cloak of cloud-like gauze. He radiated white light, vermilion inside, [like] streams of radiance reaching into the sky. He projected his glorious spirits as mystical yellow [light] pervading the void. On his waist he wore the Badge of Supreme Numinous Essence; he was girded with the Writ of Mystery Prime for Scattering Demons; on his head he wore the Creation Headdress for Summoning Dragons. He is the father of the Child of Upper Prime who resides in the Cloud Court of the Jade Chamber; he resides in the Right-hand Chamber of White Purity and is the Mover of Life.¹⁷²

中央黃老君是太極四真王之師老矣。上攝九天，中遊崑崙，黃闕夾其外，紫戶在其內。下與二君入洞房圓，三寸威儀真焉。

The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center is the elder master of the Four Perfected Kings of the Supreme Ultimate.¹⁷³ On high he pervades the nine heavens. In the middle he travels though Mt. Kunlun;¹⁷⁴ the yellow gateway is on the outside; the purple portal is on the inside.¹⁷⁵ Below with the two lords he enters the grotto chamber and in the three-inch space,¹⁷⁶ his majestic presence is perfected.

¹⁷² The White Prime Lord's description is nearly as radiant as that of Lord Wuying, but not quite. For instance, his badge of office is described as a "Badge of Supreme Numinous Essence" 太上靈精之章. Essence (*jing* 精) is of a lower quality than energy (*qi* 氣) thus indicating the relative inferiority of his badge as compared to Lord Wuying. Similarly, the Writ of Mystery Prime for Scattering Demons is of a lesser caliber than Lord Wuying's Plan of the Nine Emperors for Exorcising Evil. These locations are to be understood as residences of gods in the body. The "Tight-hand Chamber of White Purity," for instance, refers to the right eye (Porkert 1979: 104).

¹⁷³ Compared to the White Prime Lord and Lord Wuying, the Venerable Lord of the Center receives comparatively short shrift and is not accompanied by any radiant description here. For a suitably grand description of his appearance, consult his biography in the opening sections of the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*, beginning on page 164.

¹⁷⁴ Mt. Kunlun 崑崙 is the traditional Chinese paradise presided over by the Queen Mother of the West. Robinet (1979:133) takes it to refer here, however, to the grotto chamber, which is the residence of the Venerable Lord of the Center. In

夫至思神，見得為真人。若見白元得為下真壽三千。若見無英得為中真壽萬年。若見黃老，與天相傾，上為真人，列名金臺。

君既詣之。乃再拜頓首，乞丐上真要訣。黃老君曰：可還視子洞房中。君乃瞑目內視良久。

Now, the highest form of meditating on the spirits is managing to see and become a perfected being. If you see the White Prime Lord then you will manage to become a lower perfected [person with a longevity of] three thousand years. If you are able to see Lord Wuying then you will become a ten thousand year old middle perfected. If you are able to see the Yellow Venerable Lord then you will fall [only] with heaven¹⁷⁷ and you will become an upper perfected whose name is listed in the Golden Terrace.¹⁷⁸

Lord Zhou approached them. He made a double bow knocking his head to the ground and begged the essentials of the highest perfection. The Yellow Venerable Lord said: "Go back and look inside your own grotto chamber." The Lord then closed his eyes and looked inside himself for a good while long.

its external aspect this grotto is located on Mt. Kunlun, in the far west, to which Zhou had been heading. The chamber is described as a kind of passageway with two openings, a yellow gateway on the outside and a purple portal on the inside.

¹⁷⁵ The purple portal (*zihu* 紫戶) leads to the purple palace (*zigong* 紫宮) that is to say the palace of the gods in the brain (Robinet 1981: 133). The grotto chamber of the Yellow Venerable Lord is thus connected on the one side to the physical world of the mountain and on the inside to the brain of Lord Zhou. In this way it can be seen that the concept of the grotto chamber is one that functions as an intermediary space between the physical geography of the earth and the internal geography of the body. The theology of Highest Clarity as described in this passage can thus be described as a kind of interstitial theology, occupying the "no-space" that connects the body to the world.

¹⁷⁶ The three inch space refers to the cinnabar field in the brain, also known as the Mud Pill (*niwan* 泥丸).

¹⁷⁷ This indicates that the adept will live in heaven for as long as heaven itself. Note that this hierarchy appears to contradict the previously established hierarchy. See footnote 167 on the different schemes for ranking the three Prime lords.

¹⁷⁸ The Golden Terrace (Jintai 金臺 or Huangjin tai 黃金臺) referred originally to a terrace of gold built by King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 to draw worthy men to his court. In the literature of immortality, however, it refers to a kind of Valhalla, or abode for celestial beings, to which only the worthiest immortals are admitted

果見洞房之中有二大神：無英，白元君也。被服狀如在空山中者。黃老君笑而言曰：微乎深哉，子用意思之精也。此白日昇天之道。子還登常山，授子上真之道。

君乃還登常山。石室中齋戒念道。復積九十餘年，白元君，無英君，黃老君遂使授之大洞真經三十九篇。有玉童二十一人，玉女二十一人，皆侍直燒香。晝夜習之，積十一年。

To the east he saw that inside a grotto chamber there were two great spirits: they were Lord Wuying and the White Prime Lord. Their dress and appearance was like when they were inside the Empty Mountain. The Yellow Venerable Lord laughed and said: “so subtle and so profound is the mental concentration you employed.¹⁷⁹ This is the way to ascend to the heavens in broad daylight. Return to Everlasting Mountain¹⁸⁰ where you will be handed the Way of the Upper Perfected.”

Lord Zhou then returned to ascend Everlasting Mountain.¹⁸¹ Inside the stone chamber he undertook a ritual purification and meditated on the Dao. When he had again done this for a further ninety years, the White Prime Lord, Lord Wuying and the Yellow Venerable Lord forthwith transmitted to him the thirty-nine chapters of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*.¹⁸² There were twenty-one jade lads and twenty-one jade maidens who were all in attendance, continuously burning incense. He spent eleven years putting into practice the [methods described in the] book at night.

¹⁷⁹ The phrase “So subtle, so profound” is also repeated at the end of the *Method of the Nine Perfected* on page 192, and summarizes the virtues required to attain the rank of perfected.

¹⁸⁰ Porkert discusses the possibility that the Everlasting Mountain (Changshan 常山) refers to a physical mountain of that name. There is indeed a Mt. Chang in Zhejiang province. But since Zhou has never been to a mountain of this name, it also seems likely that “Returning to the Everlasting Mountain,” could denote a type of visualization practice. The action of “returning” or “reverting” is also a typical term in Daoist cultivation in which the adept aims to return his form to that of being close to the Dao, often imaged as being like a child full of youthful vigor. This more spiritual interpretation of the term also seems plausible given that Zhou is now being instructed in internal visualization practices within the grottos of his body, rather than in the physical grottos in mountains.

¹⁸¹ Following the previous note, it is likely that this paragraph could be plausibly interpreted as a metaphor for the internal visualization that Zhou is now employing.

遂乘雲駕龍，白日昇天。上詣太微宮，受書為紫陽真人。佩黃旄之節，八威之策。帶流金之鈴，服自然之衣。食玉醴之飴，飲金液之漿。治葛衍山金庭銅城，所謂紫陽宮也。紫陽有八真人。君處其右。

After this he rode through the clouds on a dragon-pulled chariot and ascended to heaven in broad daylight.¹⁸³ He visited the Palace of Great Subtlety¹⁸⁴ and received the document that appointed him as the Perfected Purple Yang. On his belt he wore a yellow banner and the writ of the Eight Majesties.¹⁸⁵ He wore the bell of flowing gold and a robe of spontaneity. He ate the nectar of sweet jade wine and drank the broth of liquid gold.¹⁸⁶ He ruled from the Copper Walls and the Golden Court on Mt. Geyan, also known as the Palace of Purple Yang. [The Palace of] Purple Yang has eight perfected, with Lord Zhou occupying the position on the right.

It is indeed possible that Zhou returned to a physical Mt. Chang and went into a grotto there, but the more significant aspect of this would be the internal visualization practices that he took up there.

¹⁸² The preface to this text is translated in chapter seven.

¹⁸³ This is the highest honor that can be accorded to a human, and it is the most desired way to ascend to heaven completely avoiding having to go through the underworld.

¹⁸⁴ The Palace of Great Subtlety is the residence of Supreme Unity (Taiyi 太一), a high god of the Highest Clarity pantheon.

¹⁸⁵ The “writ of the eight majesties” refers to an early talisman that was thought to give protection against tigers and leopards (Robinet 1981: 133).

¹⁸⁶ These are references to the idea that immortals do not eat material food like ordinary humans but live off precious liquids of vital energy. The *Scripture of the Yellow Court* uses terms similar to the ones here, such as “golden liqueur” (*jinli* 金醴) to describe saliva, “the nourishment of immortality during the course of meditation” (Robinet 1993: 90).

一月三登崑崙，
一朝太微帝君。
以蟠冢山為紫陽
別宮，所謂洞庭
潛宮也。蟠冢山
有洞穴，潛行通
王屋清虛小有
天，亦潛通閩風
也。

Each month he went up to Mt. Kunlun three times and had an audience with the Imperial Lord of Great Subtlety. He designated Mt. Bozhong as an alternate Palace of Great Subtlety, to be known as the Hidden Palace of the Grotto Court. On Mt. Bozhong there is a grotto cave, which is a secret passage through to the Clear Vacuity Heaven of Lesser Existence on [Mt.] Wangwu and also a secret passage through to Langfeng.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ This paragraph describes a network of secret passages that linked the various mountains from which the immortals exercised dominion over the world. As a result of Zhou's visit to the Palace of Great Subtlety, Mt Bozhong was designated as an alternate earthly counterpart to that palace, and thus a geographic location where adepts could meditate in order to gain access to the celestial realms. Langfeng is a peak of Mt. Kunlun, the Western paradise. Mt. Bozhong was featured in Zhou's travels as the place where he met Lord Wei (see page 134). Just as Zhou has been weaving a connection between the various earthly mountains through his travels across China, now this journey culminates in a network of communications between the earthly realm and the celestial realm. This indicates that one of the main functions of the perfected was to maintain or, in this case, enhance the lines of communication between the two realms. This interpretation is also confirmed by the fact that upon gaining his title, Zhou gives a sermon that explicitly connects the heavens, the earth and the body.

ZHOU ZIYANG'S TEACHING

真人曰：

「天無謂之空。山無謂之洞。人無謂之房也。山腹中空虛是謂洞庭。人頭中空虛是謂洞房。是以真人處天，處山，處人。入無間以黍米容蓬萊山，包括六合，天地不能載焉。」

The perfected one said:¹⁸⁸

“The [part of] heaven [where there is] nothing is called space. The [part of] a mountain [where there is] nothing is called a grotto. The [part of] a human [body where there is] nothing is called a [grotto] chamber.¹⁸⁹ The empty spaces in the mountains and organs of the body are called grotto courts. The empty spaces in human heads are called grotto chambers. This is how the perfected take up residence in the heavens, the mountains and human beings. When they enter the place of nothingness,¹⁹⁰ a grain of rice could contain Mt. Penglai,¹⁹¹ and embrace the sixfold harmony [of the cosmos],¹⁹² yet heaven and earth would not be able to contain them.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Note here the use of the title “perfected one” to refer to the newly transfigured state and accompanying rank and title of Zhou Ziyang.

¹⁸⁹ *I.e.*, the organs of the body.

¹⁹⁰ The phrase *ru wu jian* 入無間 also contains the more concrete meaning of “enter the empty space that lies in between things.”

¹⁹¹ Mt. Penglai is a mythical island mountain in the Yellow Sea off the east coast of China. It is the counterpart to Mt. Kunlun, the mountain paradise to the west of China, a paradise of immortals, and source of herbs of longevity. It is one of the seven mythical mountains of sacred Chinese geography (see Hahn 2000).

¹⁹² This refers to the four cardinal directions, plus up and down, thus indicating a three-dimensional picture of the cosmos.

¹⁹³ In his sermon, Zhou connects the space in the heavens to the space in the mountains and the space in the body. The perfected who literally dwell in vacuity, are thus able to forge the connections between the emptiness of outer space and the emptiness of the inner space of mountains and brains. In this no/space, all three dimensions lose their meaning, and thus, in a fractal-like image, a grain of rice seems to contain an entire mountain and at the same time be bigger than heaven and earth.

「唯精思存真，
守三宮，朝一
神，勤若念之，
必見無英，白
元，黃老在洞房
焉。雲車羽蓋既
來，便成真人。
先守三一，乃可
遊遊名山，尋西
郎洞房也。此要
言矣。」

“Only those who meditate on and visualize the perfected, preserve the three palaces,¹⁹⁴ have an audience with the one spirit,¹⁹⁵ and make an effort to meditate on them, will definitely be able to see Lord Wuying, the White Prime Lord and the Yellow Venerable Lord in their grotto chamber. The chariot of clouds with a canopy of feathers will then come and they will become perfected persons. First preserve the Three Ones, next wander to the famous mountains and search for the Xilang grotto chamber.¹⁹⁶ This, in short, is my message.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ “Preserve the three palaces” (*shou sangong* 守三宮) here refers to the practice of nourishing the three cinnabar fields in the body which are the “palaces” in which the Three Primes reside. In order to be successful in visualizing them it is necessary first of all to have done energetic practices that serve to nourish and strengthen the space in the body that they will in habit.

¹⁹⁵ “Having an audience with the one spirit” (*zhao yi shen* 朝一神) likely refers to Zhou’s audience with the Supreme Unity in the Palace of Supreme Subtlety. The point is that the three Prime Lords function as conduits to enable the adept to have an audience with the higher god who has the authority to confer the rank of perfected. See the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* (beginning on page 199) for more detailed instructions on how Highest Clarity adepts used intermediary deities gain audience with a high god.

¹⁹⁶ The Xilang grotto is where Zhou first visualized the Three Prime Lords on page 145.

¹⁹⁷ Or, “this is essentially what I have to say.” This would seem to indicate the end of Zhou’s teachings, and indeed it is the end of what he has to say about attaining perfection, but the final paragraph contains an appendix not about the way of perfection, but about the lesser way of immortality.

真人周君曰：
「諸應得仙道，
皆先百過小試
之，皆過仙人所
保舉者。乃敕三
官乞除罪名。下
太山除死籍，度
名仙府。」

The Perfected Lord Zhou said: "All those who are suited to obtain the way of the immortals¹⁹⁸ first go through a hundred small tests, but all go through [this process] being protected and supported by immortals.¹⁹⁹ Next they issue a decree to the Three Officials,²⁰⁰ requesting that their names be removed from the list of sinners. They go down [into the depths of] Mt. Tai to remove [their names from] the register of the dead and transfer their names to the Office of Immortals."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ The way of the immortals is, of course, an inferior way than the way of the perfected. As this passage makes clear "immortal" does not mean someone who does not die, but rather someone who dies and attains a rebirth or resurrection in an afterlife having the rank of Immortal (*xian* 仙).

¹⁹⁹ This indicates that the dead, even if they are protected in some way by a Daoist covenant, must be punished or tested in some way in the underworld. However, these tests are slight and they will be protected by the immortals. In the subsequent major tests they are watched over by the Perfected who determine what level of immortality they will gain when they are reborn in the afterlife.

²⁰⁰ The three officials are the officers of the bureaux of heaven, earth and water, who, in the Celestial Masters tradition, keep records of people's sins and are responsible for punishing the dead. A similar account of the travails of the underworld and punishment by the three officials is found in the supplementary instructions to the *Method of the Nine Perfected* on page 191. Robinet (1984: 1. 66) speculates that since the Three Officials are only mentioned in a vague threatening way, they were not of specific importance to the Highest Clarity tradition, functioning something like the "bogeyman" in modern Anglo-Saxon cultures. On the other hand it is also possible that since the early Highest Clarity tradition absorbed many ideas from the Celestial Masters tradition as well as the southern tradition of shamanic revelations, perhaps a vague reference was all that was needed to bring to the mind of the adept the functionings of the underworld. Bokenkamp (2007), in fact, presents a wealth of evidence of the way in which the three bureaux of the underworld functioned as a precise and profound cause for anxiety about the afterlife.

²⁰¹ Mt. Tai is the sacred mountain of the east, in the present-day Shandong province. In order for the Daoists to be rescued from the underworld their records must be transferred from the registers of death to the registers of immortality. This bureaucratic transaction is evidently handled in an underworld department located in or beneath Mt. Tai.

「仙府乃十二大試，太極真人下臨之。上過為上仙，中過為地仙，下過曰尸解。都不過者，不失尸解也。尸解地下主者耳，不得稱仙也。」

“The Office of Immortals next puts them through twenty-two major tests; the Perfected of the Supreme Ultimate descend to attend them. Those who achieve a high pass become Upper Immortals; those who achieve a medium pass become Earth Immortals; those who achieve a low pass will be liberated from their corpses in daylight. Even those who do not pass can still undergo corpse liberation. Their corpses are liberated but they only become masters of the underworld;²⁰² they do not get to be called immortals.”

THE REVELATION OF JUANZI

蘇子玄後亦被玄洲召為真命上卿。一旦於陳留乘雲車驂龍虎，侍者羽蓋而昇天也。同時多有見者。冉冉西北昇良久，雲氣覆之遂絕教。

Later on, Su Zixuan²⁰³ was also summoned to the Mystery Continent by the High Minister for the Destiny of the Perfected.²⁰⁴ One morning in Chenliu he rode a chariot of clouds pulled by dragons and tigers, with attendants and a feathered canopy and ascended into heaven. At the time, there were many people who observed this. Slowly he ascended towards the northwest and after a while the clouds [completely] enveloped him, which put an end to his teaching.

周君守三一法靈妙之言近二百事。

Lord Zhou's powerful and marvelous sayings on the method of preserving the Three Ones [contain] nearly two hundred items.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Masters of underworld domains are inferior to earth immortals who are given dominion over a mountain above the ground, and inferior still to celestial immortals who are given the fiefdom of a domain in the heavens.

²⁰³ Su Zixuan is Su Lin / Huang Tai, Zhou Ziyang's first teacher.

²⁰⁴ Su Zixuan has apparently been appointed to a position similar to that of the Controller of Destinies (Siming 司命) whose function is to keep the records of death in the underworld, here referred to as the “Mystery Continent.”

²⁰⁵ This statement about Lord Zhou appears to be an interpolation that does not apparently connect to the previous or subsequent sentences.

涓子即子玄之師。涓子似齊人，少好餌朮，接食其精，精思感天。後釣於河澤，見東海小童，語之曰：「釣得鯉者剖之」。

後果得而剖魚腹，獲金闕帝君守三元真一之法。於是遂隱於橐山。能致風雨。學道在世二千七百年。一旦告人云被太微召補仙公。遂去而不知所終矣。

Juanzi was [Su] Zixuan's teacher. Juanzi seems to have been a man from Qi;²⁰⁶ he had a certain love for longevity herbs and was always consuming their essence. Through his meditation he touched heaven.²⁰⁷ Later, when he was fishing in lakes and ponds, he saw the Young Lad of the Eastern Sea,²⁰⁸ who said to him: "If you catch a carp, cut it open."²⁰⁹

Later he did indeed catch one and cut open the fish's belly, which contained the *Supreme Lord Gold-tower's Method for Preserving the Perfected Ones of the Three Primes*.²¹⁰ Thereupon he immediately went into seclusion on Mt. Tuo²¹¹ and was able to summon the wind and rain. He studied the Dao and lived in this world for 2,700 years. One morning he announced to people that he had been summoned by the [Palace of] Great Subtlety to supplement the immortal dukes.²¹² He then left and no one knows what became of him.

²⁰⁶ The state of Qi was located in present-day Shandong.

²⁰⁷ Touching or "stimulating" heaven (*gan tian* 感天) means penetrating through to the celestial realm, and thereby obtaining some corresponding response (*ying* 應) from heaven.

²⁰⁸ Also known as the Azure Lad (Qingtong 青童).

²⁰⁹ It will be recalled from the earlier discussion between Juanzi and Su Lin on page 117 that the Young Lad of the Eastern Sea hid the method of the Three Primes "in the Jade-Mist chamber in the City of Numinous Vista."

²¹⁰ Although texts dealing with this method did not form part of the specific Highest Clarity revelations, they were held in high regard, as this and other texts indicate (Robinet 1981: 134).

²¹¹ Mt. Tuo is located in Shaanxi (Porkert 1979: 114).

²¹² The Palace of Great Subtlety, it will be remembered, is the palace of Supreme Unity, the high god who has the power to grant perfected titles. To "supplement the immortal dukes" means join the celestial realm with the rank and title of duke.

語子玄曰：「斗中三一，宜以節日祀之。為二十年，三一見矣。」

「見則長生成仙。家有三一，長生不滅。能存三一，名上玉札。能存洞房，與天相望。能存三元，上為真仙。皇天上清金闕帝君，所以乘雲迅龍周行九天者，是洞房三元真一之事也。」

[Juanzi] told [Su] Zixuan: “You should offer prayers to the Three Ones in the Dipper on the [eight] nodes of the solar [year]. If you do this for twenty years, you will see the Three Ones.”

“If you can see them you will have long life and become an immortal. If your family possesses the Three Ones,²¹³ then they will have long life and [the family line] will never be extinguished.²¹⁴ If you are able to visualize the Three Ones, your name will be placed on the jade tablet [of immortality]. If you are able to visualize [them in] the Grotto Chamber, your vision will correspond with heaven. If you are able to visualize the Three Primes,²¹⁵ you will become a perfected immortal on high. That the Imperial Lord Goldtower of the Sovereign Heaven of Highest Clarity can ride his swift dragon chariot through the clouds and circumnavigate the nine heavens is because of this practice of [visualizing] the Three Primes and the Perfected Ones in his Grotto Chamber.”

²¹³ It is not clear here what exactly “having” or “possessing” (*you* 有) the Three Ones means except that it is clearly inferior to the practice of visualizing (*cun* 存) the Three Primes which is mentioned in the next sentence.

²¹⁴ This means that individual family members will live long lives and the generation of male descendants will never be extinguished. This is one of the few indications in this text that the concept of the self extends, as in many Chinese traditions, to incorporate one’s ancestors and descendants. Most Highest Clarity texts make clear the importance of rescuing one’s ancestors from the underworld, in a practice reminiscent of the Mormon baptism of the dead (see Miller 2003: chapter 5). Xu Mi, for instance, offered prayers for his father and elder brother, asking that their sins fall on his shoulders (Robinet 1984: 1. 101).

²¹⁵ Superior to simply visualizing the Three Ones, visualizing the “Three Primes” means visualizing the Three Prime Lords in the three cinnabar fields of the body (Robinet 1981: 134).

「吾食朮精三百
年，服氣五百
年，精思六百
年，守三一三百
年，守洞房六百
年。守玄丹五百
年。」

“I have eaten the essence of longevity herbs for three hundred years; I have absorbed their *qi* for five hundred years; I have meditated for six hundred years; I have preserved the Three Ones for three hundred years; I have preserved the grotto chamber for six hundred years; and I have preserved the mystery cinnabar for five hundred years.”²¹⁶

「周遊名山，看
望八海，徊遊五
嶽。休息洞室。
樂林草之垂條，
忻鳥獸之相噉，
川瀆吐精，丘陵
蓊鬱，百物之
秀，寒暑之節。
弋釣長流，遨遊
玄瀨。靜心山
岫，念真養
氣。」

“I have wandered throughout the famous mountains, I have gazed upon the eight seas and wandered through the five sacred mountains. I have rested in grotto halls. I have delighted in the drooping fronds of vegetation and have enjoyed the call of animals, the streams gushing forth their essence, the hills lush with forests, the elegance of the hundred creatures and the rhythm of winter and summer. I have fished the long waters and roamed the mystical rapids. I have stilled my mind on mountain peaks, meditated on perfection and cultivated energy.”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ As Robinet (1981: 134-5) notes, these three phrases establish a hierarchy of practices. At the bottom is preserving the Three Ones; next is the practice of preserving the grotto chambers of the body; the highest is the practice of “mystery cinnabar” which designates the practice of visualizing deities in the palaces of the head. This is the same hierarchy of practices as detailed on page 157.

²¹⁷ This beautiful description of the delights of nature conveys the impression that Juanzi has, for 2,700 years, lived a rich and full life as an earthly immortal. Finally Juanzi has been summoned to the Palace of Great Subtlety to be given a celestial title.

「呼召六丁玉女，見衛展轉六合，無所不逮。守形思仙，二千七百餘歲。實樂中仙，不營當世。今卒被召，請從此別。」

云涓子是臨去之時，著書與子玄別。

玄丹者，泥丸也。其義出太上素靈經。守三一得為地仙，守洞房得為真人，守玄丹升太微宮也。勤而行之，自得此書。

“I have called on the six *ding* jade maidens and watched over the six harmonies unfolding and revolving: there is no place I have not reached. I have preserved my form and meditated on immortality, I am over 2,700 years old. I have experienced the happiness of being a middle-ranking immortal and of having nothing to do with the present world.²¹⁸ Now I have been urgently summoned away. Please let me take my leave from now on.”

It is said that when Juanzi was about to depart he composed a text to give to [Su] Zixuan as he took his leave.

The Mystery Cinnabar is the Mud Pill.²¹⁹ Its meaning comes from the *Supreme Purity Numinous Scripture*. If you preserve the Three Ones you will become an earthly immortal. If you preserve the grotto chamber, you will become a perfected person. If you preserve the Mystery Cinnabar, you will ascend to the Palace of Great Subtlety.²²⁰ Put this into practice and you will obtain this text.

²¹⁸ Tsai (2008: 207) notes here a trace of regret at an “old order which seems to be passing away.” Juanzi represents a tradition of immortals now having to adjust to a new dispensation in which their old status is being eclipsed and subsumed under the heaven of “Highest Clarity.”

²¹⁹ The “mystery cinnabar” is here designated as the upper cinnabar field in the head. Juanzi is saying that the way of immortality in fact involves visualizing deities in the head, rather than ingesting physical substances, which he had previously been doing.

²²⁰ This is the same hierarchy of practices as noted on the previous page. By repeatedly enshrining this hierarchy, the text imports the earlier practices, but subordinates them to the new, specifically Highest Clarity, practice involving the nine palaces of the head.

此言信矣，非賢
慎泄之真人之
言，不得見太
平。有志道而隱
者，可示此書
耳，子其慎之，
寧勿宣。

Believe these words, but take care not to divulge the words of the perfected to the uninitiated! They will not get to see [the realm of] Great Peace. You may show this text only to those who keep secret their ambition for the Way. Be cautious about this; it is better that [the text] should not be published.²²¹

²²¹ The revelation of this text ends with the request to keep it secret, or to transmit it only to those who “keep secret their ambition for the Way” (*you zhi dao er yin-zhe* 有志道而隱者). This implies that those who make a show of their ambition to become Daoists are no better than those who are totally ignorant of the way. The path to perfection is, ultimately, a revelation that leads further into mystery.

6. The Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected

The *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* is a high-ranking text associated with the Way of Highest Clarity and is attested to in numerous other texts of the movement. Its title indicates that it is a revealed scripture (*jing* 經) concerned principally with the Method of the Nine Perfected (*jiuzhen fa* 九真法), involving the visualization of nine perfected beings who are associated with a specific organ of the body and produce a colored *qi* which ascends to the Mud Pill, or cinnabar field in the head. The term “central” likely refers to the fact that the text is associated with the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, whose biography features at the beginning of the text (Robinet 1984: 2.A.5).

Its textual history has been studied by Robinet (1979; 1984) and by Kobayashi (1990) and is complex. Two contiguous texts in the Ming dynasty Daoist Canon bear its name, the *Highest Clarity Supreme Imperial Lord's Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (*Shangqing taishang dijun jiuzhen zhongjing* 上清太上帝君九真中經; DZ 1376) and the *Highest Clarity Supreme Nine Perfected Central Scripture and Divine Cinnabar Formula for Ascending to Life* (*Shangqing taishang jiuzhen zhongjing jiangsheng shengdan jue* 上清太上九真中經降生神丹訣; DZ 1377). Between the two of them, the text contains a biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, the Method of the Nine Perfected, instructions for dragon-script (*longwen* 龍文) talismans and alchemical recipes. Each text contains passages in common and also variations.¹ Robinet's textual analysis concludes that much of the text forms an authentic part of the Highest Clarity revelation, though the authenticity of the alchemical recipes contained in the second version of the texts (DZ 1377), attributed to Zhang Daoling (2nd century C.E.), the first Celestial Master, is

¹ Robinet has reconstructed the probable order of the original sections, along with a table of their inclusion in other texts and anthologies in the Daoist canon (1979: 43; 1984: 73-4).

doubtful (Robinet 1984: 2.82-83). Translated below is part one of the version of the text that is presented in DZ 1376, the part that contains the most important and authentic elements associated with the Way of Highest Clarity.

SYNOPSIS

The text has five distinct sections. It begins with a biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, explaining how the Lord ascended to heaven and was granted a copy of the *Scripture of the Nine Perfected*. This biography thus serves the dual purpose of explaining how the scripture came into being and how it was also effective in bringing about the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center's status as a perfected person. The biography concludes with a discussion of how an immortal embryo can be formed from the fusion of spirits.

This sets the stage for the *Method of the Nine Perfected* in which over the period of a year spirits fuse together nine times into one great spirit transfiguring the body of the adept and bringing about the creation of the immortal embryo. Each stage of the method is similar. The adept observes the fusion of the spirits, visualizes the great spirit spewing *qi* into his body and makes a prayer.

The third section of the text is devoted to the description of a talisman to be worn on the body at the eight nodes of the solar year. The talisman is a "dragon text" created by the Nine Perfected and describes a further visualization of the action of the Nine Perfected in the body.

The fourth section, the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* is a transmission from the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center, which focuses on the eight nodes of the solar year, times when intermediary deities can transport the adept on colored clouds to various palaces in the sky to petition to be transformed themselves into perfected persons.

The fifth and final section describes a visualization method in which two protective deities are produced from the eyes of the adept.

PREFACE

- 上清太上帝君九真
中經卷上 The Highest Clarity Supreme Lord's Central
Scripture of the Nine Perfected, Part I
- 太虛真人南嶽上仙
赤松子傳。 Transmitted by the Perfected Person of Supreme
Vacuity and High Immortal of the Southern
Peak, Master Redpine.²
- 太上帝君九真中經
內訣 The Inner Formulas of the Supreme Imperial
Lord's Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected.³

² Highest Clarity texts were revealed by perfected persons who appeared in visions to Yang Xi. The sentence here indicates that the perfected person responsible for revealing this text goes by the name of Master Redpine, one of the most ancient immortals (alleged to have lived during the time of the mythical patriarch Shen-nong) and whose biography opens the *Biographies of Immortals* (Kaltenmark 1953: 35). Immortality practices associated with Master Redpine are also recorded in the *Writings of the Prince of Huainan* (*Huainanzi* 淮南子) which allowed him to “rise to the clouds and have intimate communion with Heaven” (see Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

³ The term “inner formulas” means an esoteric revelation designed to be kept within the circle of Highest Clarity initiates.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE YELLOW
VENERABLE LORD OF THE CENTER

中央黃老君者，太上太微天帝君之弟也。以清虛上皇二年，混爾始生。日暉重曜，連光暎靈。五雲翳蓋，慶煙玄停。

年七歲仍自知長生之要，天仙之法。乃眇綸上思，欽納玄真，蕭條靈想。心棲神源，廣體八絕，握空投全。解脫於文蔚之羅，披素於空住之肆。

The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center is the younger brother of the Heavenly Imperial Lord in [the Palace of] Supreme Great Subtlety.⁴ He was born in the second year of [the reign of] the Highest sovereign of Clarity and Vacuity, at the beginning of the primal chaos.⁵ The sun was radiant and dazzling and continuously enlightened him with numinous power. Five clouds [then] formed a shady canopy [above him]; their wondrous mist was dark and stopped [its rays].⁶

When he was seven years old he spontaneously knew of the key elements of longevity [practices] and the methods of celestial immortals.⁷ Thus he had a superior understanding of subtle phenomena,⁸ respectfully absorbed [the practice of] Mystery Perfection,⁹ and reverently developed his numinous imagination.¹⁰ He rested his mind at the source of the spirits,¹¹ and widely embodied the eight limits [of the universe].¹² He embraced emptiness and submitted the whole [of himself to it].¹³ He freed himself from the trappings of civilization and luxury, wore plain clothes and lived in an empty abode.¹⁴

⁴ Great Subtlety (Taiwei 太微) is the name for the palace in the highest realm of the cosmos inhabited by Supreme Unity (Taiyi 太一).

⁵ This indicates the time at the very beginning of the universe when the primal chaos (*hundun* 混沌) was swirling and before any definite forms had taken shape.

⁶ Highest Clarity scriptures generally emphasize the importance of light, but they do so within the general cosmological context of mystery (*xuan* 玄), a term that also has the connotation of “dark,” which is the term has been translated it here. The interplay of light and darkness is thus the significant context for the birth of the lord.

⁷ Although Highest Clarity scriptures are devoted to teaching the methods of ascending to perception, still the highest form of knowledge is “spontaneous knowledge” (*zizhi* 自知), literally “self-knowledge”, *i.e.*, knowledge that does not arise from any external teaching but spontaneously wells up inside the individual.

浩洲黯深，玄波雲
峙，總轡遁遷，澄
理萬塗。

Over vast islands and dark depths, mysterious waves and cloudy cliffs, he [grasped] the reins [of his celestial chariot] and transcended the world, purifying [himself] of [its] myriad defilements.¹⁵

⁸ This phrase employs the metaphor of fine threads of fabric (*miaolun* 眇綸) to indicate the quality of the Yellow Venerable Lord's understanding. Whereas most people are only able to distinguish between things at a coarse level, the Lord's powers of perception were very finely honed.

⁹ The term "take in" or "absorb" (*na* 納) has the connotation of drawing into oneself things from outside. This makes sense considering that the object of this "drawing in" is "Mystery Perfection," an alternate name for the method of visualizing or "preserving" the Three Ones (see Su Lin's use of this term on page 117).

¹⁰ "Numinous imagination" or "thoughts of the numinous world" (*lingxiang* 靈想) indicates the capacity to consider matters of cosmic power normally hidden to the conventional mind.

¹¹ This phrase indicates that he was able to reach deep down into the spiritual depths of the cosmic abyss.

¹² In contrast to the previous phrase, which focused on the intensity of the Yellow Venerable Lord's spiritual capacities, this phrase focuses on the idea of extensive embodiment. It indicates that the Yellow Venerable Lord was so transparent to his cosmological context that he considered himself to be identical to the full reaches of the cosmos. That is to say, he made no distinction between himself and the world around him, so much so that he embodied the far limits of the universe within himself.

¹³ This indicates the final apotheosis of the Yellow Venerable Lord who "embraces emptiness" (*wo kong* 握空) and does so to the fullest extent of his being. Just as the previous phrase juxtaposed intensity and extension, so also this phrase places "empty" (*kong* 空) and "full" (*quan* 全) in complementary opposition to each other. In Daoist theology these opposites are not mutually exclusive; paradoxically each is required as the fulfillment of the other.

¹⁴ Having described the Yellow Venerable Lord's internal spiritual character, the biography now focuses on the external manifestation of this: living in simplicity and shunning the trappings of civilization.

¹⁵ This is one of the relatively rare descriptions of transcendence that portrays the world in a negative light. However it is important to bear in mind that the idea of purifying oneself from filth is here associated mostly with making things clear, rather than removing the contagion of immorality.

煥冷風於妙覺，隱
標霄以遊盤，激玄
元於天外，運九氣
於霞津。

He revolved a cooling wind around his subtle consciousness,¹⁶ and wandered [through the earth] hidden in the lofty mists. He touched the Mystery Prime beyond the heavens and circulated the nine [forms of] *qi* and the cloudy fluids.¹⁷

逸韻蘭波，凝清淳
旋，奇音冥響，雲
會八煙，理翫太
初。

He sent forth [cosmic] sounds in elegant waves, and condensed clear [*qi*] in a clear and swirling liquid. [Amid] strange sounds and faint echoes, clouds converged in eightfold layers, as he played [in the realm of] Great Beginning.¹⁸

冥心高象，希塗十
方，搜神幽元，掇
颯振毫，潛素隱
微。

He focused his mind on lofty emblems,¹⁹ subtly traversed the ten directions and sought out spirits in [the realm of] Abstruse Prime. He gathered the whirlwind and stirred the infinitesimal, submerging himself in purity and hiding in subtlety.²⁰

¹⁶ The translation of the following three paragraphs must be considered tentative at best, as they are full of esoteric language. Suffice it to say that each paragraph overall describes in symbolic terms the transformation of the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center into a perfected being.

¹⁷ “Joining the nine *qi* with the cloudy fluids” is presumably a reference to the *Method of the Nine Perfected* which involves, as the text later describes, visualizing the nine perfected spirits spitting out *qi* of various colors.

¹⁸ This paragraph aims to describe the transformation of subtle energy, or *qi*, within the body of the Yellow Venerable Lord. The first sentence describes the pattern of expansion and contraction that constitutes a full circuit of energy within the body. The second and third sentences aim to describe the mystical experience of this in audiovisual terms.

¹⁹ The lofty emblems are the constellations of stars.

²⁰ This paragraph focuses on the “numinous imagination” referred to earlier. The Yellow Venerable Lord’s mind is wandering high and wide away from earthly phenomena. This indicates something like an ecstatic trance, an interpretation confirmed in the next phrase in which the Lord “gathered the whirlwind and stirred up the infinitesimal.” This phrase recalls the Highest Clarity practice of the whirlwind, although the term here (*duobiao* 掇颯) is not the same as the phrase “blending of the whirlwind” (*huifeng hunhe* 徊風混合) in the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* on page 214. Although this phrase has been translated in fairly abstract terms in the text above, it is also worthwhile considering this phrase with a more concrete meaning of “picking up the wind and twisting the hair” which would indicate a whirling movement consonant with shamanistic practices. Altogether the phrase indicates that the

目豁玄元之戶，手披萬寢之庭，仰欣神匠，俯悲五難。

His eyes pierced the portals of the [realm of] Mystery Prime. His hands touched the courtyards of countless [heavenly] mansions. He looked up and enjoyed the [workmanship of the] divine craftsmen and looked down with sadness at the five sufferings [of earthly life].²¹

流浪師契，窈窕明機，濯易神穎，歸想真靈，爾乃天韻妙藹，宿會玄感。

He floated freely with his deed of authority²² through the secluded depths and bright vortices [of the cosmos]. He purified and changed his spirits and his intelligence, returning his thoughts to the numinous power of perfection. The sounds of the heavens were marvelous and rich, and he subtly matched their mysterious impulses.²³

於是大上授以帝君九真之經八道秘言之章。施修道成。受書為太極真人。

Thereupon he received from on high the Imperial Lord's *Scripture of the Nine Perfected* and the stanzas of the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*.²⁴ Putting them into practice, his cultivation of the Way was complete. Upon receiving these texts he became a Perfected of the Supreme Ultimate.²⁵

Yellow Venerable Lord entered into an ecstatic state and journeyed to the far reaches of the cosmos.

²¹ This is the continuation of the Yellow Venerable Lord's ecstatic experience. Here he has a vision of the celestial realms, complete with courtyards and dwelling for the various spirits. The depiction of the Lord looking down with compassion at the suffering of those on earth is reminiscent of the Bodhisattva tradition.

²² This is a document giving him authority over spirits.

²³ This is a more poetic way of describing the concept of "moving" or "stimulating" heaven (*gan tian* 感天), with the anticipation of receiving some response (see footnote 207 on page 156). In this case the Yellow Venerable Lord's effort is harmonizing with the subtle sounds of the cosmos, and in the next paragraph he is rewarded with the *Scripture of the Nine Perfected*.

²⁴ The biography indicates that the Venerable Lord of the Center was granted two separate texts at the same time, the *Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (presumably comprising the *Method of the Nine Perfected* and the accompanying talisman) and the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*. At some point these two texts must have been joined together with the other sections of this text to form the present *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* which, as the preface to the whole scripture indicates, was revealed by Master Redpine.

太極有四真人。中央黃老君處其左，得佩龍玄之文，神虎之符。帶流金之鈴，執紫毛之節。巾金精之巾，或扶晨華冠。駕郁華飛龍，乘三素之雲。

八道秘言曰：欲行九真之法者長齋，清室。常以三月三日，五月五日，九月九日，及本命日，用東流水沐浴五香之氣。²⁸又以甲子日夜半沐浴。畢，燒香於左右向。本命心再拜。心祝曰：

At the Supreme Ultimate there are four perfected. The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center stands on the left and possesses the pendant of Dragon Mystery writing and the talisman of the spirit-tiger. On his belt he has a bell of flowing gold. In his hands he holds a scepter with purple feathers. On his head he wears a scarf of golden essence, or sometimes a dawn blossom cap.²⁶ [His chariot] is drawn by flying dragons and he rides in the clouds of the Three Pure Ones.²⁷

The *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* says: Whoever desires to practice the methods of the Nine Perfected must practice a lengthy purification and maintain a pure oratory.²⁹ On every third day of the third month, the fifth of the fifth, the ninth of the ninth and on your fate day³⁰ use east-flowing water to bathe and cleanse yourself with the *qi* of the five fragrances. Also bathe at midnight on all *jiazi* days. When this is accomplished, burn incense to the left and right. On your fate day, make a mental double bow and in your mind recite this incantation:

²⁵ For more information on the concept of the Supreme Ultimate see footnote 72 on page 124. As the next sentence makes clear, the Venerable Lord of the Center is one of four deities attached to the Supreme Ultimate.

²⁶ This description of the Yellow Venerable Lord demonstrates that he possesses all the symbols of office appropriate to a perfected person and aids the adept in visualizing him.

²⁷ The Three Pure Ones, or Ladies of Simplicity (Sansu 三素) are the mothers of the Three Prime Lords (Robinet 1993: 101).

²⁸ This is possibly the same practice detailed in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*. See footnote 94 on page 130.

²⁹ The definition of a lengthy purification (*changzhai* 長齋) varied widely within Daoist traditions. Its early meaning in the Han dynasty referred to the period of ritual purification undertaken by the emperor before performing the state rites. During this period the emperor abstained from wine, meat and sexual intercourse. In later Daoist traditions it came to refer to the formal practice of rituals involving audiences with the gods (see Benn 2000). In this text the purification refers to the

太上高真，
九靈景精，
帝君五神，
太一歸明。
O Supreme Perfected on High,
Luminous Essence of the Nine Numinous Powers,
Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and
Supreme Unity: return, be bright!

使我飛仙，
上登紫庭，
沐浴華池，
身神澄清。
Make me into a flying immortal:
On high may I ascend the Purple Court,
And bathe in the Pool of Blossoms,
So my body and spirit may be pure and clear.

桃君守命，
帝君反嬰，
上通太虛，
五藏自生。
O Peach Lord³¹ protect my life,
Imperial Lord, restore my infancy.
On high may I penetrate the great vacuity,
And may my five organs spontaneously become
alive.³²

preparatory phase before visualizing the gods and, as the following sentences recount, involves bathing, burning incense and meditation.

³⁰ The fate day (*benming ri* 本命日) is the day of one's birth expressed according to the 60-day *tiangan dizhi* 天干地支 cycle.

³¹ Peaches are symbols of immortality. The Peach Lord is also known as one of the five spirits of the five directions. See footnote 38 on page 171.

³² The method and prayer detailed here are basically a summary of the nine methods of perfection, which involve visualizing the five spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity merging together and irradiating the body so as to regenerate the organs of the immortal embryo. But before the text goes on to spell out the details of the *Method of the Nine Perfected* it explains theory behind creating the immortal embryo.

CONCEIVING AN EMBRYO

太上曰：「夫人唯結精積氣。胎斂血黃白幽凝，丹紫合，所以凝骨，吐津散布流液。四度會化，九宮一結，五神命其形軀。太一定其符籙。忽爾而立倪，爾而成罔，爾而具脫，爾而生於是，乃九神來入安在其宮，五藏玄生立神主焉。」

The Supreme [Imperial Lord] said: "Now, people are merely concentrated essence and accumulated *qi*. In an embryo blood accumulates, yellow and white combine,³³ the ethereal and the solid [combine], cinnabar and purple [combine], [in a processes of] melding and vaporizing. In this way one's bones solidify, saliva gushes forth and the bodily fluids disperse and circulate [within the body]. The four limits [of the cosmos] converge and combine; the nine palaces [in the brain] unite as one; the five spirits are incarnated in [in the five organs] of the body. [The God of] Supreme Unity fixes the tally and register [of birth and death]. Suddenly you are established, you have form and you are whole. At this point you are born. Then the nine spirits come to stay in their palaces. The five organs mysteriously grow and the five spirits take residence there.³⁴

父母唯知生育之始我也，而不覺帝君五神來適其間也。

My father and mother only knew the first steps of how to give me life and nourishment and were unaware that the Imperial Lord and the Five Spirits were involved in the process.³⁵

³³ Yellow and white, and the other dyads in the subsequent phrases are all to be understood as the various correlates of the processes of yang and yin.

³⁴ This paragraph details the various cosmic forces that come to play in creating an immortal embryo for the subtle body that can ascend into the heavens. The basic fluids blood and *qi* begin to form according to the patterns of yin and yang, expressed here as "ethereal and solidified, cinnabar and purple, melding and vaporizing," and then the spirits take up residence in the body. Fixing the tally and register refer to the bureaucratic procedure of establishing the celestial status of the immortal embryo, undertaken by Supreme Unity in the Palace of Great Subtlety.

³⁵ This distinguishes the ordinary process of sexual reproduction with the cosmic genesis of an immortal or transfigured embryo. The next paragraphs explain the spiritual forces that go towards the transformation of the body.

人體有尊神，其居無常。出入乎上下三田，迴易陰陽，去故納新，展轉榮輪，流注元津。

The human body has venerable spirits but their residence is inconstant. They come and go among the three [cinnabar] fields—upper, middle, lower.³⁶ They revolve and change with yin and yang, leaving with the old [breath] and entering with the new. They twist and turn, flourish and move and gush forth primordial saliva.

大神虛生，內結以成一身。濯質化鍊，變景光明，非如三魂七魄。是積靈受氣，自生於人，父母者也。帝君九魂變形一時，忽為尊神。有九名號曰九真君。此太一帝君之混合，而一變也。分為上下旁適萬道。

The great spirits are born from vacuity, but within [the body of the practitioner] they combine and form into a single body. They have a pure and refined quality, transforming into brightly shining lights; there is no comparison with the three spirit-souls and seven material-souls [of the ordinary person's body].³⁷ They accumulate numinous power and receive *qi*, spontaneously generating in people. They are [the immortal person's true] father and mother. When the nine spirit-souls of the Imperial Lord change form, suddenly they become [one of nine] venerable spirits. They have nine names and are known as the nine perfected lords. They are the melding together of the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity and their transformation into one [spirit]. They divide into the upper and lower [parts of the body] and closely match its myriad paths.³⁸

³⁶ This would appear to refer to the Three Primes who are associated with the three cinnabar fields and operate according to the cycles of the solar calendar.

³⁷ This indicates that the “great spirits”, *i.e.*, the nine perfected spirits that aid in the formation of the immortal embryo, are of a different quality than the conventional ten spirits of the mortal body. Upon death the three spirit or *yang* souls and the seven material or *yin* souls would normally separate out of the body and render it lifeless. The text is making the point that in order for the body to survive death, or preferably pre-empt it, it is necessary to have a different caliber of souls animating it.

³⁸ The interpretation of this passage is aided by considering the description of the melding of the spirits in the *Method of the Nine Perfected*. The nine perfected are nine spirits who appear one at a time to regenerate the body. Each spirit is the product of the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity fusing together with the five spirits, that is, the spirits of the five directions. According to Isabel Robinet (1993: 100-101) these

子能修之，則出水入火五臟常生。長齋隱棲，以存其真。

此文一名九真內訣，一名太上飛文，一名外國放品，一名神州靈章。雖有四名，故一寶書耳。

If you are able to practice this, then whether entering water or emerging from fire, your five organs will be constantly alive.³⁹ Practice a lengthy purification retreat and dwell in obscurity in order to visualize these perfected.⁴⁰

One name of this text is *Inner Formulas of the Nine Perfected*; another name is *Supreme Highest Soaring Scripture*; another is the *Foreign Country Liberating Item*; another, *Numinous Stanzas of the Divine Continent*. Despite having four names, it is but one precious text.

five spirits are called Supreme Unity (Taiyi 太一), Wuying 無英, White Prime (Baiyuan 白元), Siming 司命 (Controller of Destinies) and Peach Lord (Taojun 桃君).

³⁹ This is because in the newly generated (or regenerated) body, the viscera are not animated by the conventional souls of the mortal body but by the “supercharged” spirits of the nine perfected.

⁴⁰ See footnote 29 on page 168 for a discussion of the “lengthy purification.”

第一真法

以正月本命日甲子
甲戌日平旦，帝
君太一五神壹共混
合，變為一大神，
在心之內。號曰天
精君，字飛生上
英，貌如嬰兒始生
之狀。是其日平
旦，當入室接手於
兩膝上，閉氣冥
目，內視存天精君
坐在心中。號曰大
神，使大神口出紫
氣，鬱然以繞我心
外九重氣，上銜泥
丸中，內外如一。
畢，因叩齒九通，
咽液九過，祝曰：

THE METHOD OF THE NINE
PERFECTED

The Method of the First Perfected

In the first month, on your fate day, the *jiazi* day,⁴¹ and the *jiaxu* day at dawn the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity merge together into one great spirit which rests in your heart. His title is the Lord of Celestial Essence,⁴² his courtesy title Highest Hero of Soaring Birth,⁴³ and his appearance is like an infant immediately after birth.⁴⁴ On this day at dawn, enter your oratory, clasp your hands together on your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Look inside and visualize the Lord of Celestial Essence sitting in your heart. He is called a great spirit.⁴⁵ Make him spew forth purple *qi*⁴⁶ to coil thickly around your heart in nine layers of *qi*.⁴⁷ It rushes up into the Mud Pill.⁴⁸ Inner and outer [dimensions] are as one. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times,⁴⁹ then recite this prayer:

⁴¹ The *jiazi* day is the first day in the sixty-day cycle of the traditional Chinese calendar.

⁴² It is important that the first of these nine perfected spirits have the title of “celestial essence” since the object of this exercise is to transform the ordinary body into one that is comprised of “celestial essence,” that is to say, one that can function in the celestial realms.

⁴³ The style name “highest hero of soaring birth” also alludes to the desired effect, namely to be reborn on high as a flying, or soaring, immortal.

⁴⁴ The appearance of the spirit is that of an infant, indicating his youth and vitality.

⁴⁵ The function of the “great spirits” (*dashen* 大神) has also been explained in the previous section (see footnote 37 on page 171).

⁴⁶ Purple is the color associated with yang, and also with the heart.

⁴⁷ The number nine signifies fullness or completion. The fact that the energy coils nine times means that it thoroughly transfigures the heart.

⁴⁸ The Mud Pill (*niwan* 泥丸) is the residence of the gods located between the eyes and three inches inside the head.

天精大君，
飛生上英，
帝君內化，
來見心中。

Great Lord of Celestial Essence,
Highest Hero of Soaring Birth,
Imperial Lord, transform inside me,
Come and visit my heart.

身披朱衣，
頭巾丹冠，
左佩龍書，
右帶虎文。

Your body is wrapped in vermilion garb,
Your head is covered with a crimson cap.
On your left you wear the [talisman of the]
dragon script;
On your right you carry the [talisman of the] tiger
writing.

和精三道，
合神上元。
五靈奉符，
與帝同全。

Harmonize my essence with the threefold path,⁵⁰
Unite my spirit with the [realm of] Upper Prime.
To the Five Numinous [directions] I offer a tal-
isman,
With the Imperial [Lord] may I be wholly identi-
cal.⁵¹

口吐紫華，
養心凝神。
赤藏自生，
得為飛仙。

May your mouth spit out purple blossom,
To nourish my heart and concentrate my spirit.⁵²
As my crimson organ⁵³ spontaneously becomes
alive,
May I become a soaring immortal.

⁴⁹ Clacking one's teeth and swallowing saliva are standard ritual practices in Daoist cultivation exercises and can be explained in terms of regulating the flow of vital forces within the body. Saliva is considered a vital fluid and the complement to sexual fluid. For more on saliva, see footnote 186 on page 150.

⁵⁰ The threefold path refers to a reference to the Three Prime Lords.

⁵¹ Offering a tally or talisman has the function of identifying the bearer as being on an equal footing as the recipient. The adept is aiming for equality or complete identity (*tongquan* 同全) with the Imperial Lord.

⁵² The image of a god spitting out purple Blossom is striking because of the intimacy and physicality of the transaction. Spiritual transfiguration is, essentially, a liquid transaction, a kind of insemination by the gods.

⁵³ *I.e.*, the heart.

華，夜半復行之，
如上法。此是帝君
五神應時自然混變
為一大神耳。所謂
觸節順生者矣。不
復待，兆存念而成
之也。

When this is done, repeat the practice at mid-
night following the same method as above. These
are the times of correspondence when the Five
Spirits and the Imperial Lord spontaneously com-
bine and form one great spirit. [These are] the so-
called periods of stimulation that match one's
birth. Do not wait any longer,⁵⁴ and you will
achieve this through visualization and meditation.

⁵⁴ The text here insists on the absolute regularity of this meditation practice in aligning one's birth with the wider processes and cycles of the cosmos, and warns against waiting an instant beyond the time signaled. The transfiguration of the body can take place according to a rational scheme because the gods themselves are rational beings operating according to the cycles of nature and not outside it.

第二真法

以三月本命日及甲申日辰時，帝君太一合會五神，混化內變為一大神。大神分形散氣，盡布在諸骨節中。號曰堅玉君。是其時也。當入室，接手於兩膝上，閉氣冥目，注心內視存堅玉君。字凝羽珠，入坐喉下胃管中。化白氣以入諸百骨節中。存大神口土白氣，以繞骨九重。內外鬱鬱如雲霧之煙也。畢，叩齒九通咽液九過，祝曰：

堅玉大君，
來入骨中。
身披素衣，
頭巾白冠。

The Method of the Second Perfected

In the third month on your fate day and the *ji-ashen* day, at the *chen* hours⁵⁵ the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity harmonize with the five spirits and merge with them inside [your body], to form one great spirit. The great spirit divides his form and disperses his *qi*, disseminating it completely in all the bones and joints. He is called Lord of Enduring Jade. These are his times. You should enter your oratory, clasp your hands together on your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Concentrate your mind and visualize inside yourself the Great Lord of Enduring Jade. His courtesy title is Condensed Feathery Pearl⁵⁶ and he enters down your throat to reside in your stomach and intestines. He transforms into white *qi* in order to enter into the hundred bones and joints. Visualize the mouth of the great spirit spitting white *qi* to coil around your bones in nine layers. Within and outside [your body], it piles up thick misty layers. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

Great Lord of Enduring Jade,
Come and enter my bones.
Your body is wrapped in plain garb,
Your head is covered with a white cap.

⁵⁵ 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. In the majority of the *Method of the Nine Perfected* the text uses the traditional counting system known as the “twelve earthly branches” to divide the day into twelve two-hour periods.

⁵⁶ Feathery indicates ascension to the celestial realms. Pearl indicates the immortal embryo.

字凝羽珠，
灌養九門。
左佩龍書，
右帶金真。

Your courtesy title is Condensed Feathery Pearl.
Pour into my nine gates⁵⁷ and nourish me.
On your left you wear the [talisman of the]
dragon script;
On your right you carry the [talisman of] golden
perfection.

口吐白氣，
固骨凝筋，
白骨不朽，
筋亦不泯。

May your mouth spit out white *qi*
To fortify my bones and strengthen my muscles,
So my white bones do not decay,
And my muscles also do not waste away.

百節生華，
使我飛仙。

May my hundred joints become alive and blossom.
Grant that I may become a soaring immortal.

畢，夜半生氣時，
複一行之。九真日
也。帝君太一五神
自然混化，立為一
大神。不復待，兆
先思存而後為結變
也。貌狀並如嬰兒
之形。九真同法
爾。此是九魂七魄
化，五神結凝，帝
君九變太一三斗。
同把符籍，定錄玄
清，使兆長生不
死，上昇仙庭者
也。

When this is done, repeat one more time at mid-
night when *qi* is being generated. These are the
days of the nine perfected. The Five Spirits, the
Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity spontaneously
combine and are established as one great spirit.
Do not wait any longer. First visualize [him] in
your mind and then he will become one and
transform. His appearance will be just like that of
a baby. The nine perfected [all] share [this] same
method. This is [how] the nine heaven souls and
the seven earth souls transform and the five spirits
condense together and the Imperial Lord trans-
forms nine times into the Three Constellations of
Supreme Unity.⁵⁸ Together [with them] present
your talisman and fix your register in [the Palace
of] Mystery Clarity. This brings you long life
without death and allows you to ascend on high to
the halls of the immortals.

⁵⁷ These are either the nine orifices of the body or, more likely, the nine palaces in the brain associated with the nine perfected.

⁵⁸ That is, the three Prime Lords.

此道幽秘，上靈所寶。非有仙籍者不得聞也。非有宿契者不得見也。聞見之者，皆應運挺生，與靈合得，故冥感吉會，拔匠幽領，天神來過，王華接兮。故九真堅心，八道悟觀矣。斯乃三元之合符，非陸行之所希也。先陳盟誓，乃得宣焉。

This path is an abstruse secret, treasured by the numinous powers on high. Those who do not have a register of immortality should not hear about it. Those who do not have an astrological contract⁵⁹ should not see it. [But] those who are able to see and hear it, will all receive good fortune, extend their lives and be harmonized with the numinous powers. Thus they will experience auspicious encounters in meditation and will be promoted to the rank of general and commander of the spirit world.⁶⁰ Heavenly spirits will come over to them and like royalty they will be greeted with blossoms. Thus the [Way of] the Nine Perfected strengthens their minds and the Eightfold Way [brings] enlightened observation. But this [involves] uniting their tally with the Three Primes;⁶¹ this is not to be hoped for by those who [engage in] worldly practices.⁶² First present your sworn contract and then you will obtain your summons [to heaven].⁶³

⁵⁹ That is, a spiritual covenant that will enable the adept to take up lodging in one of the stars, understood as the celestial residences of the spirits.

⁶⁰ Although the Highest Clarity tradition seems more concerned with establishing an afterlife or a celestial life for the adept, it draws on the idea developed in the Celestial Masters tradition that entering into a covenant with the heavenly realms entails the ability to command spirits and demons.

⁶¹ Uniting the tally with the Three Primes requires visualizing them and presenting a tally or talisman to them to verify that the adept is on an equal footing with them.

⁶² Worldly or “land-based” practices (*luxing* 陸行) cannot bring about the transfiguration of the adept into a celestial perfected being. Only those practices revealed in scriptures from the heaven of Highest Clarity by perfected beings can do so.

⁶³ Only by having a contract or a tally, that is, a bureaucratically-sanctioned covenantal relationship with the celestial world, can one bring about a summons from the Palace of Great Subtlety.

第三真法

以四月本命日，及四月甲午丁卯日，巳時，帝君太一五神混合化生大神。大神又歛爾分形，為黃氣，鬱鬱書流，入諸精血中。號曰元生君，字黃甯子玄。巳時當入室，接手兩膝上，閉氣冥目，內視存見元生君，周游一身血脈精液之中。使口吐黃氣，以纏熏孔脈之外，及一身九重，使內外並同黃氣。畢，叩齒九通，咽液九過祝曰：

元生大君，
同灌血軀。
身披黃衣，
頭巾紫芙

左佩虎錄，
右帶龍書。

羽衣上披，
威儀扶胥。

The Method of the Third Perfected

In the fourth month, on your fate day and in the fourth month on the *jiawu* and *dingmao* days, at the *si* hours,⁶⁴ the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity combine and generate a great spirit. The great spirit moreover suddenly splits his form and becomes yellow *qi*, which flows in thick clouds and enters fully into your blood and essence. His title is Lord of Primordial Birth, his courtesy title, Child Mystery of Yellow Quiet. At the *si* hours you should enter your oratory, clasp your hands together on your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Visualize inside yourself the Lord of Primordial Birth making a complete circuit of the blood vessels and the channels of vital essence throughout the whole body. Make his mouth spit out yellow *qi* and use it to bind tightly around openings in the vessels. [This should happen throughout] the whole body nine times causing [one's body to be enveloped in] yellow *qi* both inside and outside. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

Great Lord of Primordial Birth,
Flood into my bodily vessels.
Your body is wrapped in yellow garb;
Your head is covered with purple hibiscus.

On your left you wear the [talismán of the] tiger emblem;
On your right you carry the [talismán of the] dragon script.

Feathery garb is wrapped around your top.
Your awesome demeanor supports and assists [me].

⁶⁴ 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

口吐黃津，
固血鎮虛。

May your mouth spit out yellow saliva,
To strengthen my blood and guard my empty
spaces.

真氣日入，
邪氣消除，
精盈液溢，
九靈俱居。

May your perfect *qi* enter [me] daily,
Errant *qi* be eliminated,⁶⁵
So that my vital essence may overflow, my secre-
tions be superabundant,
And the nine numinous powers together take up
residence [in me].

使我飛仙，
天地同符。

Grant that I may be a soaring immortal,
And tally [my lifespan] with heaven and earth.

畢，夜半生氣時又
一施行。

When this is done, at midnight, when *qi* is being
generated, practice this one more time.

第四真法

以六月甲辰日，本
命日，戊寅日，午
時，帝君太一五神
變為一大神來，入
在肝中。號曰青明
君，字明輪童子。
至此日午時當入
接，手於兩膝上，
閉氣冥目，內視存
青明大君入坐肝
中。使口吐青氣，
以繞肝九重。畢，
卯齒九通咽液九過
祝曰：

The Method of the Fourth Perfected

In the sixth month on the *jiachen* day and on your
fate day and on the *wuyin* day, at the noon
hours,⁶⁶ the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and
Supreme Unity combine into one great spirit
which enters the liver. His title is the Lord of Az-
ure Radiance, his courtesy title, the Lad of the
Wheel of Light. When this day comes, at noon
you should enter your oratory, clasp your hands
together on your knees, keep your breath en-
closed, shut your eyes. Visualize inside yourself
the Great Lord of Azure Radiance entering to sit
in your liver. Make azure *qi* spit forth from his
mouth to coil around your liver in nine layers.
When this is done, clack your teeth nine times,
swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

⁶⁵ The character *xie* 邪 meaning errant or false, is the antonym of the character *zheng* 正 meaning correct. Although these characters can have moral connotations, the idea of “errant *qi*” is basically a medical term. False *qi* does not follow the path it should in a regular fashion thus producing the symptoms of illness.

⁶⁶ 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

青明大君，
來入我肝。
身披青衣，
頭巾翠冠。
左佩虎章，
右帶龍文。
字為童子，
寶真明輪。
口吐青氣，
養肝導神。
青藏自生，
上為天仙。
太一護精，
抱魄撿魂。
帝君奉籍，
使我得真。
畢，夜半生氣時複
一行之。

Great Lord of Azure Radiance,
Come into my liver.
Your body is wrapped in azure garb;
Your head is covered with a jade-green cap.
On your left you wear the [talisman of the] tiger
emblem;
On your right you carry the [talisman of the]
dragon writ.
Your courtesy title is “the Lad,”
“Treasure of Perfection, Wheel of Light.”
May azure *qi* gush forth from your mouth,
To nourish my liver and guide my spirit.
As my azure organ spontaneously regenerates,
On high may I become a celestial immortal.
O Supreme Unity protect my essence!
Embrace my earth souls and gather up my heaven
souls!
O Lord, I respectfully beseech you:
Grant that I may attain perfection.
When this is done, at midnight, when *qi* is being
generated, repeat one more time.

第五真法

以七月三日，及本命日，庚午日，巳時帝君太一五神混合化為一大神，在脾中。號曰號養光君，字太倉子。至此日時，兆入室，接手於兩膝上，閉氣冥目，內視注心，奇存養光君入坐脾中。使口吐綠氣，以繞脾九重。氣上澆衝泥丸中，內外洞徹鬱鬱。畢，叩齒九通咽液九過祝曰。

養光大君，
來入脾中。
上灌三元，
是為太蒼。

The Method of the Fifth Perfected

In the seventh month on the third day and on your fate day and on the *gengwu* day at the *si* hours,⁶⁷ the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity combine and generate a great spirit which dwells in your spleen. His title is the Lord of Nourishing Light, his courtesy title, the Master of the Great Storehouse.⁶⁸ When these dates and times occur, enter your oratory, touch your hands to your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Visualize inside yourself and meditate on the Lord of Nourishing Radiance entering to sit in your spleen. Make green *qi* spit forth from his mouth to coil around your spleen in nine layers. *Qi* rushes up into the Mud Pill, thoroughly and thickly penetrating inside and outside [your body]. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

Great Lord of Nourishing Radiance,
Come into my spleen.
From high you irrigate the Three Primes,⁶⁹
And it becomes the great storehouse.

⁶⁷ 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

⁶⁸ In the image of the body developed in the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic, Simple Questions* the organs of the body are understood by analogy with the functioning of the state. The heart is the emperor, the liver is the general, and the spleen functions as a storehouse or granary (see Porkert 1988). This method refers to the nourishing of the spleen, and thus it is appropriate that the style name of the perfected spirit is "Master of the Great Storehouse."

⁶⁹ The irrigation of Three Primes perhaps refers to the way the spirit emits energy to nourish the three cinnabar fields of the body. The goal here is that the perfected spirit transforms the spleen into a "great storehouse."

身披綠夜，
頭巾蓮冠。
左佩玉靈，
右帶威神。
Your body is wrapped in green garb;
Your head is covered with a lotus cap.
On your left you wear the [talisman of the] jade numen;
On your right you carry the [talisman of the] awesome spirit.

五靈秉鉞，
七電九震。
口吐綠華，
養脾滯魂。
The five numinous powers grasp their battle-axes.
Seven flashes of lightning and nine claps of thunder!
May your mouth spew forth green blossom
To nourish my spleen and envelop my spirit-soul.

黃藏自生，
上為真人。
As my yellow storehouse⁷⁰ spontaneously becomes alive,
May I become perfected person on high.

華，夜半生氣時複
一行之。
When this is done, at midnight, when *qi* is being generated, repeat this one more time.

⁷⁰ The yellow storehouse is the spleen.

第六真法

以八月十五日，及
本命日，庚申日申
時帝君太一五神混
合，化為一大神，
在肺中。號曰上元
素玉君，字梁南中
童子。至其日時
也，兆當入室，接
手於兩膝上，閉氣
冥目，內視存上元
素玉君，入坐肺
中，使口吐五色
氣，以繞肺九重，
上徹泥丸中，內外
郁然。畢，叩齒九
通，咽液九過，祝
曰：

上元大君，
滅坐肺中。
三天梁南，
靈華中童

子身披龍，
夜黃晨華。
冠右把皇，
籍帝君同輪。

太一把圖。
右執靈篇，
左佩玄書，
右帶虎文。

The Method of the Sixth Perfected

In the eighth month on the fifteenth day and on your fate day and on the *gengshen* day at the *shen* hours,⁷¹ the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity combine and generate a great spirit which dwells in your lungs. His title is the Pure Jade Lord of Upper Prime, his courtesy title, the South Central Lad of Liang. When this day and time comes, when it is auspicious, enter your oratory, touch your hands to your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Visualize inside yourself the Lord of Upper Prime Pure Jade entering to sit in your lungs. Make *qi* of the five colors spit forth from his mouth to coil around your lungs in nine layers and penetrate up into the Mud Pill. Inside and outside, [it should be] thick and bushy. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

Great Lord of Upper Prime,
Come and be born in my lungs.
South [Lad of] Liang in the Three Heavens,
Central Lad of Numinous Blossom,

Your body is wrapped in dragon garb;
Your cap is the blossom of the yellow dawn.
On your right you hold the imperial registers.
The Imperial Lord revolves together with you.

Supreme Unity holds the records [of immortality].

On your right you grasp the numinous tablets.

On your left you wear the [talisman of the] mystery book.

On your right you carry the [talisman of the] tiger writing.

⁷¹ 3 to 5 p.m.

口吐五氣。
時複一行之。

May your mouth spew forth the five [colored] *qi*.
When it is timely, repeat this once more.

第七真法

以九月十九日，及
本命日，戊戌日，
酉時帝君太一五神
混合，化為一大
神，忽爾又因分
形，為二神，分坐
散形，在兩腎中。
號曰玄陽君，字冥
先生。至此日時，
兆當入室接手於兩
膝上。冥目閉氣，
內視存玄陽君化
形，並入兩腎中。
使口吐蒼氣，以繞
腎九重，上澆泥
丸。內外郁然。
畢，叩齒九通回塗
九過，祝曰：

The Method of the Seventh Perfected

In the ninth month on the nineteenth day and on your fate day and on the *wuxu* day at the *you* hour,⁷² the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity, combine and transform into one great spirit which suddenly divides his form and becomes two spirits, which sit separately in your two kidneys. Their title is the Lords of Mystery Yang and their courtesy title, the Gentlemen of Darkness. When this day and time comes, enter your oratory and clasp your hands on your knees. Shut your eyes, keep your breath enclosed and visualize inside yourself the Lords of Mystery Yang transmuting their form and entering into your two kidneys. Make blue *qi* spit forth from their mouths to coil around your kidneys in nine layers and rush up into the Mud Pill. Inside and outside, [it should be] thick and bushy. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

玄陽帝君，
入坐腎中。

Imperial Lords of Mystery Yang,
Come and reside in my kidneys.

身披紫衣，
頭巾扶晨。
左佩龍府，
右帶鳳文。

Your bodies are wrapped in purple garb;
Your headscarves rosy as the dawn clouds.
On your left you wear the dragon talisman;
On your right you carry the phoenix writing.

冥光先生，
常在帝前。
口吐蒼華，
灌腎靈根。

O Gentlemen of Mystery Radiance,
You are constantly before the Imperial [Lord].
May your mouths spews forth blue Blossom
Pouring into my kidneys and the numinous root.

⁷² 5 to 7 p.m.

太上徘徊， 上迎帝君。 下籍書我名紳。	You revolve around the Supreme-on-High. Above, you welcome the Imperial Lord. ⁷³ Below, you record my name and title.
黑藏自生， 身為習仙。 北登玄闕， 遊行天關。	My black organ spontaneously becomes alive And my body becomes a soaring immortal. To the north I ascend to the Mystery Towers ⁷⁴ And travel through the Gate of Heaven.
高步上虛， 摧手五神。	With high steps I ascend into vacuity, Hand in hand with the five spirits.
畢，夜半生氣時， 復一行之。	When this is done, at midnight, when <i>qi</i> is being generated, repeat this one more time.

⁷³ The seventh perfected has already been described as being “constantly before the Imperial Lord.” The significance of this statement becomes apparent here when the perfected spirit greets the Imperial Lord while traveling around the highest reaches of heaven. At such a moment he is able to have the adept’s name and title inscribed in the registers of immortality. The perfected spirits all function as intermediaries, enabling the adept to ascend to heaven, but they themselves do not seem to have the power to make this happen.

⁷⁴ The Dark or Mystery Towers are the celestial counterpart to the kidneys. Thus just as the perfected spirit pours blue light into the kidneys of the adept, so also the adept visualizes himself ascending to heaven. The action of the spirit descending into the body of the adept entails a corresponding movement of the adept upwards into heaven.

第八真法

以十月，十二日，及本命日，辛巳日，午時帝君太一五神混合變，化為一大神，在膽中。號曰含景君，字北大台玄精。至其日時也，兆當入室，接手於兩膝上，閉氣冥目，內視存含景君入，坐於膽中。使口吐五色氣，繞膽九重上衝徹泥丸。雲霧內外，通市郁然也。畢，叩齒九通咽液九過，祝曰：

含景大君，
來坐膽中。
身披錦衣，
頭戴紫冠。

北台玄精，
化生靈煙。
左佩神光，
右帶玉真。
口吐五氣，
養膽強神。

上帝三命，
與我結親，
桃君記符。

The Method of the Eighth Perfected

In the tenth month on the twelfth day and on your fate day and on the *xinsi* day at noon, the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity combine and transform into one great spirit in your gall bladder. His title is the Lord Bearing Effulgence, his courtesy title, Mysterious Essence of the Northern Terrace. When this day comes and at the auspicious time, enter your oratory, touch your hands to your knees, keep your breath enclosed and shut your eyes. Visualize inside yourself the Lord Bearing Luminescence sitting in your gall bladder. Make five-colored *qi* spit forth from his mouth to coil around your gall bladder in nine layers and rush up into the Mud Pill. Like a foggy mist inside and outside [your body it should] penetrate and swirl in thick piles. When this is done, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times, then recite this prayer:

Great Lord Bearing Effulgence,
Come and reside in my gall bladder.
Your body is wrapped in brocade garb;
Your head is covered with a purple cap.

O Mysterious Essence of the Northern Terrace,
Transform and generate your numinous vapors.
On your left you wear the [talismans of the] divine light,
On your right you carry the [talismans of] jade perfection.
May your mouth spew five [colored] *qi*
To nourish my gall bladder and strengthen my bones.

May the Highest Imperial [Lord] thrice command,
To be intimately united with me,
And may the Peach Lord record the talisman.

太一七陳，
和精寶血，
理液固筋。

May the seven manifestations of Supreme Unity
Harmonize with my vital essence and precious
blood,
Order my saliva and strengthen my veins.

使我上升，
得為飛仙。
北朝虛皇，
來駟三元。

Make me to ascend on high.
Grant that I may become a soaring immortal.
May I go north and be received by the Sovereign
of Vacuity and come in a curtained carriage to the
Three Primes.

畢，夜半生氣時，
復一行之。

When this is done, at midnight, when *qi* is being
generated, repeat this one more time.

第九真法

以十一月二十八
日，及本命日，丙
子日，巳時，帝君
太一五神混合變
化，為一大神在泥
丸紫房之中。號曰
帝昌上皇君，字先
靈元宗。此神者是
帝君之父祖。故自
九化混魂，反形於
祖父，以降於上宮
也。定名仙書，解
結胞中之節，非祖
無以散化，非父無
以披根，非帝無以
正魂。故須祖父來
營定形神，以長存
也。

The Method of the Ninth Perfected

In the eleventh month on the twenty-eighth day
and on your fate day and on the *bingzi* day at the
si hours,⁷⁵ the Five Spirits, the Imperial Lord and
Supreme Unity combine and transform into one
great spirit in the purple room of your Mud Pill.
His title is the Highest sovereign Lord of Imper-
ial Glory, his courtesy title, Primordial Ancestor
of the First Numinous Power. This spirit is the
paternal ancestor of the Imperial Lord. Thus he
merges together his own nine heaven souls and he
reverts his appearance to that of the paternal an-
cestor in order to descend from the high palace.
He fixes [your] name in the book of the immor-
tality and loosens the knots [formed] in the
womb. These cannot be dissolved except by ances-
tors: only fathers can unravel your roots and
[likewise] only the Imperial [Lord] can rectify
your heaven souls.⁷⁶ Since it is necessary for your
paternal ancestors to regulate their bodies and
spirits, you may therefore [need to] practice visu-
alization for a long time.

⁷⁵ 9 to 11 a.m.

⁷⁶ Since death is caused by the embryonic knots formed at conception, the only way to undo this is, effectively, to undo the act of conception. This is obviously out-

兆每至其日時，當沐浴，燒香左右，入室平坐，接手於兩膝上，存帝昌上皇君，在泥丸紫房之中。使口吐紫氣繞頭九重。畢，又使口吐紫氣繞兩目內外九重。

畢，又使口吐紫氣繞舌九重。畢，又使口吐紫氣繞齒九重。畢，凡四九三十六繞氣使一身內外都鬱然，洞徹如日，在身內之狀也。都畢，叩齒三十六通咽液三十六過，祝曰：

帝昌祖君，
帝皇元神，
鎮守紫房，
宮在泥丸。

Each time this day and hour comes, you should take a bath and burn incense to your left and right. You should enter your oratory, kneel straight up and touch your hands to your knees. Visualize the Highest sovereign Lord of Imperial Glory in the purple room of your Mud Pill. Make him spew forth purple *qi* to coil around in your head in nine layers. When this is done make him spew forth purple *qi* again and coil it inside and outside both eyes in nine layers.

When this is done, make him spew forth purple *qi* again and coil it around your tongue in nine layers. When this is done, make him spew forth purple *qi* again and coil it around your teeth in nine layers. When this is done, the four lots of nine coils of *qi* cause your whole body inside and out to be [full of] thick and glossy [*qi*]. It penetrates thoroughly like the sun [illuminating] the appearance of the inside of your body.⁷⁷ When all this is done, clack your teeth thirty six times, swallow saliva thirty six times, then recite this prayer:

Ancestral Lord of Imperial Glory,
Primordial Spirit of Imperial Majesty,
Preserve and protect the purple [grotto] chamber,
The palace in the Mud Pill.

side the power of the individual adept to do and requires resorting back up the genetic line: “only fathers can unravel roots.” The adept is able to do this by retracing the lineage of heaven or yang souls back to the father and, ultimately, the celestial patriarch, visualized here as the Primordial Ancestor of the First Numinous Power.

⁷⁷ The translucence of the body is an image that also appears in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang*: “He swallowed the *shu*-herbs for five years and his body produced a glossy sheen so that it was possible to see right through to his five organs” (page 123).

黃闕金室， [Within] the yellow palace gates in the golden
 混為九魂。 room
 魂生萬變， May you merge into my nine heaven souls.
 乃成帝君， May they generate ten thousand transmutations
 And then become an Imperial Lord.

五神奉侍， With the five spirits in attendance,
 七氣上真。 The seven *qi* ascend to perfection.
 龍衣鳳帔， You wear dragon garb and phoenix robe,
 紫翠青緣。 Purple, blue, azure and green,

手把皇符， Your hand holds the imperial talisman,
 頭巾華冠。 Covering your head is a decorated cap,
 左佩玉瑛， On your left you wear the [talisman of the] jade
 右帶虎文。 crystal,
 On your right you carry the [talisman of the] tiger
 writing.

下坐日月， You sit beneath the sun and moon.
 口吐紫煙。 May your mouth spew forth purple vapors,
 周氣齒舌， And circulate *qi* round my teeth and tongue.
 朝溉眼脣。 In the morning may you stimulate my eyes and
 lips,

出丹入虛， Leave my cinnabar [field] and enter into vacuity.
 呼魄召魂， Call my material soul and summon my heaven
 凝精固胎， soul,
 六合長歡。 Condense my essence and strengthen my embryo.
 May there be eternal happiness throughout the
 sixfold blend [of the] universe.

上登太微， On high may I ascend to [the Palace of] Great
 列補仙官。 Subtlety
 And be ranked among the immortal officials.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ This, of course, means being ennobled by Supreme Unity as a perfected person at the Palace of Great Subtlety.

夫一年之中九真之道畢矣。周而復始，則泥丸領靈，目童明全，五臟自生，血脈保津。若身未昇登合形俱晨者，則宜翳景示俗，暫入太陰也。

身經三官者，三官不得犯也。則九真召魄，太一守骸，三元護氣，太一攝魂。骨肉不朽，五臟不隕。能死能生，能陰能陽，出虛入無，天地俱生。

是以道士清靜營形，感致九真之氣應也。三元飛精以盈虛，太一抱我屍而反質。

Supplementary Instructions

Now the Way of the Nine Perfected will be completed within a year. Begin another cycle and then the Mud Pill will command the numinous powers, the Eye-Lad will be bright and whole, the five organs spontaneously become alive and the blood and pulse preserve their moisture. If your body has not yet ascended and harmonized its form fully with the morning star, then it is fitting that you hide your effulgence and manifest a common [appearance]; and, temporarily, enter Great Yin.⁷⁹

As your body passes through the three bureaux [of the underworld], the officers should not punish [you]. Rather, the Nine Perfected will summon your earth souls, the Supreme Unity will preserve your bones, the Three Primes will protect your *qi* and Supreme Unity will assist your heaven souls. Your bones and flesh will not decay, nor will your five viscera rot [in the grave]. You can be dead or alive; you can be [in] *yin* or *yang*. You can leave vacuity and enter nonbeing and live in both heaven and earth.⁸⁰

For this reason Daoists regulate their bodies in purity and tranquility and stimulate the corresponding *qi* of the Nine Perfected. The soaring essence of the Three Primes thus fills our empty spaces.⁸¹ Supreme Unity embraces our corpses and restores our substance.

⁷⁹ Great Yin is the underworld. Those who do not manage to attain the status of perfected will have to die, hiding their natural radiance, taking on the appearance of a common person, and undergo a transition process through the underworld. The passage here is similar to the teaching of Zhou Ziyang on page 147, though here the adept manages entirely to escape being admonished by the three officials.

⁸⁰ This indicates a twilight state that is neither that of a ghost nor that of a perfected figure, but it is certainly preferable to being dead, that is to say, a de-animated corpse interred in the ground.

⁸¹ The subtle essence of the Three Primes fills the “cavities” of the adept’s body, enabling it to ascend to heaven. For this reason it is described as “soaring” or “flying”

微乎深哉，
微乎深哉。

So subtle! How profound!
So subtle! How profound!⁸²

子常修九真之道者，百神揖拜，萬鬼受事。若經太陰，則形骸不朽，五臟自生。計二十四年，更得生焉：豁爾，而寤了爾，而覺。明明憶昔日之入太陰也。似一宿之睡臥耳。悵然已在於棺槨之外。朗然已坐丘山之巔。斯迺九真之幽妙帝君之極神也。

If you constantly practice the Way of the Nine Perfected the hundred spirits will bow down to you and the myriad ghosts will be at your service. Even if you pass through the Great Yin, your body and bones will not decay and your five organs will spontaneously be regenerated. Count twenty-four years and then you will be reborn: you will be intelligent; you will be enlightened and awake. You will clearly remember the day of old when you entered the Great Yin. It will seem as though you slept but a single night. Joyously, you will already be outside your coffin. Brightly, you will already be sitting on the peaks of hills and mountains. This is [brought about by] the abstruse marvels of the Nine Perfected and the ultimate spirit of the Imperial Lord.

essence. Note also that these processes were understood to be biospiritual processes, that is, involving the physical, experiential transformation of the body. It would be a modern misreading to regard as simply metaphorical or “spiritual,” in the sense of detached from material reality.

⁸² A phrase also mentioned by the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center on page 149.

夫行此道者，欲得寡，言靜心，言不及死。正行不淫，語不及色。又欲得惜，氣養神起，居安詳，閉氣使極，吐氣使微，出虛入無，綿綿不絕。此所以帝君所棲，乃玄母之所親。可以存五神，可以念九真也。

Whoever practices this way should have humble desires, speak with a pure mind and should not talk of death. He should practice correctly without wavering and never discuss sensuous desires. Moreover he should be cautious in what he desires and then he can nourish his *qi* and arouse his spirits. He should dwell in peace and happiness; when he closes his *qi*, he should make it sublime and when he emits *qi*, he should make it subtle. He will then leave vacuity and enter into nonbeing and live forever and ever. This is where the Imperial Lord rests and what the Mystery Mother holds dear. He can do this by visualizing the five spirits and by meditating upon the nine perfected.

太上帝君九真寶符文

THE SUPREME IMPERIAL LORD'S
PRECIOUS TALISMAN OF THE NINE
PERFECTED

此符常以八節日朱書服之。

This talisman, written in vermilion characters, should always be worn on the days of the eight seasonal nodes of the solar calendar.⁸³

⁸³ The general purpose of a talisman is to bring the human and celestial worlds into alignment with each other. This talisman does so by describing the descent of the gods to take up residence in the body in accordance with the cycles of the solar and lunar calendars. This permits the body to function in perfect alignment with the celestial realm and thus be prepared to ascend into heaven as a perfected.

太極真人曰：「常當闡諷之，每致朔望旦及夜半吟詠三過，以和九魂，復帝房之氣。使人神正，邪消，百關開朗。兆善秘寶，勿得妄宣。此所謂三天龍書者也。」

The Perfected Person of Supreme Ultimate said: "As a rule, recite this in the evening and every new moon and full moon at dawn and midnight chant it three times so as to harmonize the nine heavenly spirits and restore the *qi* of the divine residence. This causes the gods in human [bodies] to become correctly aligned, misalignments to disappear and the hundred channels [in the body] to be well open.⁸⁴ You should be good at keeping this treasure secret and should not rashly divulge it. It is known as the *Dragon Book of the Three Heavens*."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ These sentences employ the medical terminology of "false" and "correct," or "aligned" and "misaligned" (see footnote 65 on page 180). The correct functioning of the body depends on the gods being correctly positioned in the various organs. This can be corrected by coordinating the body with the gods and with the solar and lunar calendars. Then harmony is restored among the cycles of earth, humans and heaven, and the function of the talisman is fulfilled.

⁸⁵ A dragon text means a text that portends imperial power. In this case the imperial power is connected to the three heavens, the heaven of Jade Clarity, Highest Clarity and Great Clarity. These prefatory remarks indicate that the talisman is not only to be written out and carried about the person, but also recited.

太上九真作龍書

帝君神庭，以身為家，天尊朱室，明堂是居。正坐太極，玄丹不邪。玄母所乘三素之輿，元父所控赤羽飛車。左御絳鸞，右轡靈鳥。一寸正方，上靈共都，丹台火闕，流暎散虛。

The Supreme Nine Perfected Create the Dragon Text

The Imperial Lord and his Spirit Court make their home in the body.⁸⁶ His residence is the Hall of Light, in the Vermilion Chamber of the Heavenly Worthy.⁸⁷ He is seated at the Supreme Ultimate and do not deviate from the Mystery Cinnabar.⁸⁸ The Mystery Mother rides the carriage of the Three Pure Ladies; the Primordial Father rides a flying chariot with red feathers. On the left [she] drives a fabulous bird down; on the right [he] reins in the numinous bird.⁸⁹ The one-inch square [cinnabar field becomes] the common city of the highest numinous powers.⁹⁰ From the cinnabar terrace and fiery watchtower radiance streams forth and vacuity is dispersed.⁹¹

⁸⁶ This refers to the celestial residence of the Imperial Lord where the various spirit officials pay him court. The action of the talisman causes this court to be transferred to the body.

⁸⁷ This sentence is simply a more specific iteration of the previous sentence. The Hall of Light is one of the nine grotto chambers in the head, just behind the forehead, though its original meaning was the “sacred retreat of the king in his role of chief astrologer” (Schafer 1978: 394).

⁸⁸ This indicates that gods are aligned with the adept and with the Supreme Ultimate, the central pole around which the celestial canopy rotates. The Mystery Cinnabar, it will be remembered, is the grotto chamber where the gods reside in the brain. In this case, the human body, the gods and the cosmos are perfectly synchronized with each other.

⁸⁹ The Mystery Mother and the Prime Father are the hypostases of *yin* and *yang*. They are here visualized descending from the sky in a paired formation in two chariots each drawn by a mythical bird. They thus function as intermediaries between the celestial realm and the body.

⁹⁰ The one-inch square is the upper cinnabar field in the head where the adept visualizes the various cosmic powers assembling as at court before the Imperial Lord.

⁹¹ This describes the experience of the adept in which light emanates from the head irradiating the various grotto chambers, the “empty spaces” of the body.

高棲太微，手把紫
錄，淵素池金醴水
玉。九氣徘徊飛華
雲躍中有大神，不
可名目。父駕元
氣，母載玄軸。巾
日精華，腰帶虎
籙。流火萬丈，眼
生龍燭。天帝秉
節，鳳衣羽。

On high [the Imperial Lord] perches in [the Palace of] Great Subtlety.⁹² His hand grasps the purple register,⁹³ and he fills deep his pure pond with golden wine and liquid jade.⁹⁴ Nine [layers of] *qi* circulate [around him] like blossom floating in clouds and in the middle is great spirit who cannot be named or seen.⁹⁵ The [Primordial] Father pilots the primordial *qi* and the [Mystery] Mother rides on the mystery chariot.⁹⁶ [The Imperial Lord]⁹⁷ wears a turban of essential blossom of sunlight and the tiger register at his waist. His eyes emit a fiery stream of dragon flames ten thousand feet long. The Heavenly Lord holds a scepter and wears clothes of phoenix feathers.⁹⁸

⁹² Having visualized the descent of the gods in to the body, the talisman is now activated and the corresponding vision of the heavens takes place. This paragraph thus describes the celestial counterpart to the previous paragraph.

⁹³ The purple register is the register of the names and titles of the perfected.

⁹⁴ The god is here circulating divine energies through his own body, in parallel to the adept.

⁹⁵ Just as in the *Method of the Nine Perfected* the various spirits joined together to produce nine perfected spirits, here the Imperial Lord circulates his energy to produce the nine *qi* of the nine perfected spirits.

⁹⁶ The Mystery Mother and Primordial Father here function as intermediaries transmitting the ninefold *qi* of the nine perfected spirits down to earth. This in fact is how the talisman is produced.

⁹⁷ Or possibly the subject is the same as the previous sentence, *i.e.*, the Prime Father and the Mystery Mother.

⁹⁸ In parallel to the previous paragraph in which the adept visualizes energy flooding through the empty spaces of his body, here the Imperial Lord sends forth "dragon flames," that is, the visual representation of cosmic power in the heavens, *i.e.*, the talisman itself. Bearing in mind the title of this section, "The Supreme Nine Perfected Create the Dragon Text" the production of dragon flames from the eyes is not simply about transmitting energy from the heavens to the adept, but it is also the method by which the "dragon text" of the talisman itself is produced. Thus the text is not simply describing the visualization of the gods entering the body, but also the production of the talisman itself. In the Highest Clarity tradition, the texts themselves are not simply the symbols of cosmic power, but in their being written in heaven and on earth constitute the actual transaction of cosmic power.

常存九真神帝所
育，乃存紫房明堂
之北，灌生續精。
防守玄谷，出入命
室，遨遊洞關，時
入中宮，上通太
元，盤桓四氣，九
星判兮。五藏堅
華，太一守魂，寢
息幽庭，役使七
神。

Continuously visualize the cultivation of the Nine Perfected Divine Lords, and then visualize the north⁹⁹ of the Hall of Light in the Purple Chamber, where a continuous stream of vital essence is being generated.¹⁰⁰ It protects and preserves the mystery valley, comes and goes through the chamber of life, leaves and enters the destiny room and wanders freely through the grottos and passes [of the body].¹⁰¹ When it is time, it enters the middle palace,¹⁰² rises to pervade the Supreme Primordial, circulates the *qi* in four [directions] and divides among the nine stars.¹⁰³ The five organs become strong and flourishing. Supreme Unity preserves the heaven souls, rests in the secluded court and dispatches the seven spirits.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ The stream of energy comes from the north because the adept is aligned with the Supreme Ultimate, the axis that connects the earth to the center of the heavens. This was envisaged to be in the north because the heavens revolve around the pole star. The Big Dipper, or *Ursa Major*, is known in Chinese as the Northern Bushel (Beidou 北斗) because it points towards the (north) pole star.

¹⁰⁰ We return here to the vision of the gods in the body. Just as the talisman was being created in the heavens by the dragon flames from the eyes of the Imperial Lord and transmitted by the Mystery Mother and Prime Father, so also in the body vital essence (*jing* 精) is being circulated through the various spaces in the body, referred to here symbolically as the “mystery valley” etc.

¹⁰¹ This describes the circulation of vital essence through the body in a process that refines it into a higher state.

¹⁰² The middle cinnabar field in the body, in the heart.

¹⁰³ Here the vital essence is visualized as pervading the entire cosmic landscape reaching out to the nine stars (seven visible and two invisible) of the Big Dipper, which are correlated with the grotto chambers in the brain and the nine perfected.

¹⁰⁴ The consequence of this dramatic circulation of energy through the body is that the body transforms into a stronger and more radiant form. Supreme Unity watches over the three heavenly, or *yang*, souls of the body, and dispatches seven spirits to watch over the seven earthly, or *yin* souls.

子能詠之，白日登
晨，精感妙對。攝
御靈獸，山崩水
潰。呼噏響。救生
地得上昇天宿。
九真道畢。

[If] you can recite this, you will climb to the stars in broad daylight and your vital essence will stimulate a correspondence with the marvelous.¹⁰⁵ You can ride on numinous animals [through a landscape of] landslides and floods. The sound of breathing out and in will save your life on earth and you will manage to ascend to the heavenly constellations. This is the end of the way of the nine perfected.

泄，則禍邁三官。
泄，毒考罰宣。
漏，當傳仙才，審
可成就。

If you let this [text] leak out, then punishment will be meted out [to you] by the three officials.¹⁰⁶ If you let this leak out, then noxious trials and punishments will be exacted [from you]. If you do divulge this, it should [only] be transmitted to those with the capacity to become an immortal.¹⁰⁷ They will investigate it and may be successful in practicing it.

¹⁰⁵ The function of the talisman, it will be remembered, was to cause the vital essence of the adept to circulate through the body and ascend to heaven. This process is summarized in the phrase “your vital essence will stimulate a correspondence with the marvelous.” This indicates that the vital essence is perfectly synchronized with the “marvelous,” that is to say, the rare phenomena of the celestial world. In other words the adept has succeeded in creating a subtle body formed of divinely radiated vital essence that has the capacity to ascend to the stars.

¹⁰⁶ The three officials of heaven, earth and water are responsible for meting out punishment to people in the underworld. This was supposed to have been the fate of Hua Qiao.

¹⁰⁷ That is, to those people who have the talent or capacity (*cai* 才) to become an immortal. Being an immortal entails the capacity to detect whether other people also have the capacity to become immortals. The talisman is a powerful document that harbors vast cosmic power and thus the one who passes it on to another should use his powers of discrimination carefully.

中央黃老君八道祕
言章

THE YELLOW VENERABLE LORD OF
THE CENTER'S STANZAS OF THE
EIGHT SECRET SAYINGS OF THE
DAO

祕言微曰：

The secret words and subtle sayings [are as follows]:¹⁰⁸

閒心靜室，寥朗虛
真，逸想妙觀騰濯
玄人。苟誠感上會
精悟暉晨，亦將得
見丹景之氣。

Still your mind and purify your oratory, [make them] deserted, bright, empty and perfect.¹⁰⁹ Escape from thinking, [and instead] marvelously observe mysterious persons soaring [towards heaven] and glittering with light.¹¹⁰ If you sincerely sense them above you, converging vital essence and apprehending the dawn radiance, then you will also manage to observe the *qi* of the cinnabar effulgences.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ The title of this section may give the impression that this text consists of words spoken by the Yellow Venerable Lord. However the biography of the Yellow Venerable Lord indicates that the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao* originated as text that was revealed to him along with the *Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (see footnote 24 on page 167). Thus the stanzas 'belong' to the Yellow Venerable Lord.

¹⁰⁹ These four adjectives may well stand as the supreme virtues of the Highest Clarity revelations.

¹¹⁰ This indicates a transition from the process of rational thought (*xiang* 想) to that of the observation of marvels (*miaoguan* 妙觀), that is, the rare and subtle phenomena of the spirit world. Note that Zhu Ziyong, the author of the preface to the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*, took as his title "Gentleman who Observes Wonders" (*Miaoguan xiansheng* 觀妙先生; see page 212).

¹¹¹ The "cinnabar effulgences" are the eight effulgences of the body, each of which is correlated with the eight nodes of the solar year. In the following eight visualizations the eight effulgences are visualized as the chariots, which transport the adept—in the guise of an intermediary deity—up to the sky. They are referred to here as "cinnabar" effulgences because they have the capacity, like cinnabar, to become for the adept an elixir of immortality, transfiguring his body into that of a perfected person.

三素飛雲，八輦朱
輦，紫霞瓊輪，上
清浮盼。徊轡三
元，高皇秉節。靈
童攀轅，太素擁
蓋，南極臨軒。帝
君守房合景，五神
七氣續明。高暉遠
纏，冥光外縹，暎
濛蔚龍顏象燭太
虛，流逸七觀也。

[You will see] the three Pure Ladies flying through the clouds, in an eight-bearer vermilion chariot¹¹² with jade wheels made of purple clouds, floating up to Highest Clarity. Back and forth, the Three Prime Lords hold the reins and the Highest sovereign commands and regulates it.¹¹³ As numinous lads grasp onto the shafts and [maidens of] supreme purity cling onto the canopy, the carriage draws nigh towards the south pole. The Imperial Lord preserves your chamber¹¹⁴ and harmonizes the [eight] effulgences and the five spirits and seven *qi* successively become clear. High above, the stars shine bright in their distant orbits, the lights in the darkness outwardly elegant. In the sunlit mist of the deep sky, the symbol of his dragon countenance illuminates the vast emptiness of space and circulates freely his seven-fold gaze.¹¹⁵

¹¹² The vermilion chariot indicates the high status of the occupants. The *Second Secret Saying of the Dao* indicates that the eight bearers are the eight effulgences.

¹¹³ As in other descriptions of the Three Primes, their function is to mediate between the heaven of Highest Clarity and the human body. Here their mediation is envisaged as driving a chariot for the Highest sovereign between the heavenly and earthly realms.

¹¹⁴ The text shifts here to describing the transformation of energy in the body. Just as the Sovereign Lord is envisaged in the heavens above, within the body the Imperial Lord “preserves your chamber,” *i.e.*, is visualized residing in the adept’s grotto chamber. The consequence of this is that he brings the eight effulgences of the three cinnabar fields into harmony, clarifying and refining the spirits and vital forces within the body.

¹¹⁵ The symbol of the dragon countenance, that is to say the manifestation of the Imperial visage, can be interpreted as the sun itself shining forth rosy light in the dawn mists.

子勤候之，立便飛仙。雲輪忽降，則白日登晨，不煩復凝霜濯華玄腴金丹也。

一道秘言曰：

以立春日，正月甲[子]乙[丑]日清朝北望。有紫綠白雲者，是為太上三元君三素飛雲也。其時三元乘八輦之輪，上詣天皇大帝子。候見是三色雲，當心存，叩頭自搏，心存四再拜自陳乞曰：

If you diligently wait for them, you will instantly become a flying immortal. You will suddenly ascend through whirling clouds and then in broad daylight ascend to the stars and you will have no difficulty in alternately coagulating and deliquescing the golden elixir of the mystical embryo.¹¹⁶

The First Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day Spring Begins,¹¹⁷ and on the *jia[zi]* and *yi[chou]* days of the first month, in the early morning look to the north. There will be purple, green and white clouds, which are the Three Pure Feathered Clouds of the Supreme Three Pure Ladies. At this time the Three Primes take the eight-bearer chariot,¹¹⁸ ascending to visit the Supreme Emperor of Heaven.¹¹⁹ Following them you will see the three-colored clouds.¹²⁰ At this time you must visualize in your mind knocking your head to the floor and striking yourself.¹²¹ Visualize in your mind making four double bows, [then] present yourself and beg as follows:

¹¹⁶ Using terms borrowed from the alchemical tradition, the text describes the process of transfiguration by analogy with refining an elixir of immortality by repeatedly melting and coagulating the base ingredients into a pure substance to produce, in this case, an immortal embryo.

¹¹⁷ February 4, the first day of the Spring Begins (*lichun* 立春) solar term.

¹¹⁸ Literally, the eight-bearer wheel. Here it refers to the chariot formed from the eight effulgences of the body.

¹¹⁹ Recapping the image from the introductory section, the text describes the rosy dawn clouds as manifestations of the Three Pure Ladies. When translated into the more concrete imagery of the chariot, the adept then envisages them become the Three Prime Lords.

¹²⁰ This indicates the presence of the Three Pure Ladies.

¹²¹ The subject of the passage here shifts from the Three Primes to the adept. The Three Primes have ascended to heaven, but it is now the adept who makes his petition. This is a superb example of how Highest Clarity texts superimpose visual metaphors to indicate the convergence of the body and the cosmos. In this passage the dawn clouds betoken the presence of the Three Pure Ladies, which follow the chariots pulled by the Three Primes, which are formed from (or supported by) the eight effulgences of the body, which convey the adept to heaven. The adept sees the dawn light, which symbolizes the Three Primes ascending in their chariots, which in turn

曾孫某甲，少好道德，修行九真，沐浴五神，並為天帝帝君所見。記錄今日有幸遇三元君出遊，乞得侍給輪轂，任意祈祝矣。

“A certain great-grandson¹²² has a degree of love for the Way and its Power and has cultivated the [Way of] the Nine Perfected, purified his five spirits and has also brought about the perception of the Imperial Lord of Heaven.¹²³ Let it be recorded today that he has had an auspicious encounter with the Three Prime Lords while out on their travels and pleads to be granted the service of a chariot.¹²⁴ He prays for the satisfaction of his desires.”

若三見元君之輦者，則白日昇仙，不須復他存思，千百所施為也。八道所行祝拜之辭亦如此。此所謂八道秘言者矣。非有仙錄者不得聞也。

If you see the carriages of the Prime Lords three times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight and will have no further need of visual meditation. Whatever [you desire] will be granted. Practicing the Eight [Secret Sayings of the] Dao's words of blessing and obeisance is also like this. This is what is known as the Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao. Only those who possess an immortal register should hear about it.

prompts the visualization of the adept journeying upwards riding his own bodily effulgence in perfect alignment with the nodes of the solar year.

¹²² A deferential way of referring to oneself in the presence of a superior.

¹²³ The adept is requesting that a record be made of the fact that through visualization of the Three Primes he has been granted an official audience with the Supreme Emperor. This, he hopes, will be sufficient to be granted the status of a perfected person.

¹²⁴ The use of a chariot will enable the adept to ascend to perfection.

二道秘言曰：

以春分之日及[丙]寅[丁]卯日夜半東北望。有玄青黃雲者，是為太微天帝君三素雲也。其時太微天帝君乘八景之輦，上詣高上玉皇也。見者心存拜祝如上法。若四見天帝之輦者，則白日有龍駟羽蓋來見迎而昇天也。

三道秘言曰：

以立夏之日及甲子上旬戊辰巳巳之日。清旦西北。有紫青黃雲者，是為太極上真君三元內宮真人三素雲也。其時太極上真三元真人乘玄景綠輦，上詣紫微宮。心存拜如上法。若五見太極輦者，則白日昇仙。

The Second Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of the Vernal Equinox,¹²⁵ and on the *bingyin* and *dingmao* days, at midnight look to the northeast. There will be azure, black and yellow clouds, which are the Three Pure Clouds of the Heavenly Imperial Lord of Great Subtlety. At this time the Heavenly Lord of Great Subtlety rides the carriage of the eight effulgences, ascending to visit the Highest Jade Emperor. Seeing him, visualize in your mind bowing down in prayer as above. If you see carriage of the Heavenly Lord [of Great Subtlety] four times, then in broad daylight you will have a dragon-pulled carriage with a feathered canopy come to greet you and take you up to heaven.

The Third Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of Summer Begins,¹²⁶ on the *jiazi* day in the first ten-day period and the *wuchen* and *yisi* days, at dawn look to the northwest. There will be purple, azure and yellow clouds, which are the Three Pure Clouds of the Perfected Person of the Inner Palace attached to the Lord of Highest Perfection in the Supreme Ultimate. At this time the Perfected Person of the Inner Palace attached to the Lord of Highest Perfection in the Supreme Ultimate rides his mystery effulgence green carriage, ascending to visit the Palace of Purple Subtlety. [Visualize] in your mind bowing down in prayer as before. If you see the carriage of the Supreme Ultimate five times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight.

¹²⁵ February 4, the first day of the Spring Begins (*lichun* 立春) solar term.

¹²⁶ May 6, the first day of the Summer Begins (*lixia* 立夏) solar term.

四道秘言曰：

以夏至日，甲戌
[上]旬，戊寅巳卯
犯之日，清旦東南
望。有赤白青雲者
是為扶桑大帝君三
素雲也。其時扶桑
公太帝君乘光明八
道之輦，上詣太微
宮。見之心祝拜如
上法。若四見之者
則白日有雲龍見迎
而昇天也。

五道秘言曰：

以立秋之日，甲申
上旬，戊子巳丑之
日，清旦正西望。
見白赤紫雲也者，
是為太上真人天皇
白帝雲也。其時太
素上真的諦君乘脩
條玉輦，上詣玉天
玄皇高真也。子當
祝拜之乞如上法
也。若五過見之，
則白日昇仙。

The Fourth Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of the Summer Solstice,¹²⁷ and the *jiashu* day in the first ten-day period of the month—the *wuyin* and *yimao* days are inauspicious—at dawn look to the southeast. There will be red, white and azure clouds, which are the three Pure Clouds of the Fusang Imperial Lord. At this time the Fusang Imperial Lord rides the carriage of the shining eightfold path, ascending to visit the Palace of Supreme Subtlety. Observe him and [visualize] in your mind bowing down in prayer as before. If you manage to see him four times, then you will see a [chariot of] clouds [pulled by] dragons [coming] to meet you and take you up into heaven.

The Fifth Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of Autumn Begins,¹²⁸ and the *jiashen* day in the first ten-day period and the *wuzi* and *yichou* days, at dawn look due west. You will see the white, red and purple clouds, which are the [Three Pure] clouds of the Supreme Perfected Person Imperial White Lord. At this time the Great Purity and Highest Perfected Lord rides the swift striped-jade carriage, ascending to visit the High Perfected One of Jade Heaven Mystery Emperor. You should bow down in prayer as before. If you can see five times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight.

¹²⁷ June 21, the first day of the Summer Solstice (*xiazhi* 夏至) solar term.

¹²⁸ August 8, the first day of the Autumn Begins (*liqiu* 立秋) solar term.

六道秘言曰：

以秋分日，甲午
[上]旬戊戌巳亥之
日清旦南望。有素
赤黃雲者是為南極
上真人上皇赤帝君
三素雲也。其時南
極上真赤帝君乘絳
琳碧輦。上詣闕風
臺詣九靈夫人。若
見當祝拜之如上法
也。若四過見之則
白日昇仙。

七道毗言曰：

以立冬之日，及甲
辰上旬戊申巳酉之
日清旦西南望。見
綠紫青雲者，是為
上清真人帝君皇祖
三素雲也。其時上
清真人帝君皇祖乘
玄景八光輦上高上
九天玉帝子。心祝
與拜如上法也。若
四見之者則紫晨太
一君乘鳳文羽車來
迎於子白日昇晨。

The Sixth Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of Autumn Equinox,¹²⁹ and the *jiawu* day in the [first] ten-day period and the *wushu* and *yike* days, at dawn look south. There will be purple, red and yellow clouds, which are the Three Pure Feathered Clouds of the Highest Imperial Red Lord attached to the Highest Perfected Person of the South Pole. At this time the [Highest Imperial] Red Lord attached to the Highest Perfected [Person] at the South Pole rides his crimson-gemmed green jade carriage, ascending to the lofty wind terrace to meet the Lady of the Nine Numinous Powers. If you can see her, you should bow down in prayer as before. If you can see her four times, then you will ascend to immortality in broad daylight.

The Seventh Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of Winter Begins,¹³⁰ and the *jiachen* day in the first ten-day period and the *wushen* and *siyou* days, at dawn look to the southwest. You will see green, purple and azure clouds, which are the Three Pure Clouds of the Lord Imperial Patriarch of the Highest Clarity Perfected. At this time the Lord Imperial Patriarch of the Highest Clarity Perfected rides the mystery effulgence chariot of the eight lights, ascending to [visit] the Son of the Jade Emperor of the Highest Nine Heavens. [Visualize] in your mind bowing down in prayer as before. If you can see him four times, then the Lord of the Purple Star of Supreme Unity will come riding a feathered chariot with phoenix designs and welcome you to ascend to the stars in broad daylight.

¹²⁹ September 23, the first day of the Autumn Equinox (*qiufen* 秋分) solar term.

¹³⁰ November 7, the first day of the Winter Begins (*lidong* 立冬) solar term.

八道秘言曰：

以冬至之日及甲寅上旬戊午巳未之日清旦正東望。有朱碧黃雲者是為太霄玉妃太虛上真人三素雲也。其時太霄玉妃太虛上真人乘徘徊玉輦。上詣太皇宮召太微天帝君子。見是雲色者拜祝請乞如上法。若三見之者，玉皇命中黃司命乘絳龍玉車來迎於子白日昇晨。

八道秘言畢矣。

見者當心存叩頭搏頰四再拜自陳如上法。又當先沐浴燒香，以待其時，而心出望一食頃，而還室中。

The Eighth Secret Saying of the Dao:

On the day of Winter Solstice,¹³¹ and the *jiayin* day of the first ten-day period of the month and the *wuwu* and *yiwēi* days, at dawn look to the east. There will be vermilion, turquoise and yellow clouds, which are the three Pure Clouds of the Great Vacuity Highest Perfected Person attached to the Jade Courtesan in the Great Empyrean. At this time the Great Vacuity Highest Perfected Person attached to the Jade Courtesan in the Great Empyrean rides his jade carriage, ascending to visit the great imperial palace at the request of the Heavenly Lord of Great Subtlety. When you see these colored clouds, bow down in prayer as before. If you can see him three times, the Jade Sovereign will command the Yellow [Venerable Lord] of the Center and the Controller of Destinies to ride a crimson dragon jade chariot to welcome you to ascend to the stars in broad daylight.

The end of the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*.

Those who behold these things should visualize in their minds knocking their heads and striking their faces, making four double bows and presenting themselves as above. Moreover they should first purify themselves and burn incense and wait like this for the right time. And if they think to leave [their oratory] to look for a meal, they should return to their oratory.

¹³¹ December 22, the first day of the Winter Solstice (*dongzhi* 冬至) solar term.

三素雲在各自有色，色，上下相沓積，如所次說也。假令立春日見三元三素者，則紫雲在上，綠雲次之，白雲在下，共相遷也。子謹視之。上旬者謂甲子之日，初入月十日之內有甲子是也。非其日非其時而見此雲者，亦當拜祝則三倍於其日時見也。他日効於甲子矣。

凡行九真，司八道之事者，則天人衛護其形軀也。真皇守其命骨矣。夫非有仙名玉籍者幽冥，亦不以此經示之。雖復希求終不見也。

The Three Pure Ones each have their own colors, building up in an interdependent sequence from high to low. If you cause the Three Primes or the Three Pure Ones to be seen on the first day of spring, then the purple cloud will be on top, the green cloud second and the white cloud underneath, each blending into the other. Carefully observe them. In the first ten-day period of the month, the day known as the *jiazi* day is the *jiazi* day in the ten days following the appearance of the new moon.¹³² Only on this day and at this time can you see the clouds. You should also bow down in prayer and then you will see them three times on that day and time. Other days are simply [not as] effective as the *jiazi* day.

Heavenly beings will protect the bodies of all who carry out the [Way of] the Nine Perfected and undertake the practice of the Eight [Secret Sayings of the] Dao. The Perfected Emperor will defend their life and limb. This sacred text [may] only be revealed to those who possess an immortal name in the jade registers in the underworld. Although [others] may repeatedly strive for it, in the end they will not see these things.¹³³

¹³² This sentence is redundant in English as there is no way to translate the Chinese calendrical term (*xun* 旬) except as “ten-day period.”

¹³³ Other people may try to visualize the deities described in this text but they will be unsuccessful if they do not have a prior registration in the underworld.

有見之者皆玄書宿名，應為仙靈故也。施行此道者，勿令人犯其履屨，並其巾褐衣服也。履屨之類常令新鮮，巾褐衣服常令淨潔。行此道也，無犯禁忌。

All those who do see these things will have astrological names written in a mystery script and should be able to become immortal numinous powers. Putting this path into practice should not cause people to give any offense in terms of footwear and also headdress and clothing. They should frequently wear fresh footwear and wash their clothes. In following this path, they must not break any laws or taboos.¹³⁴

太素上清致帝君五神氣法

THE METHOD OF SUPREME PURITY AND HIGHEST CLARITY FOR TRANSMITTING THE *QI* OF THE IMPERIAL LORD AND THE FIVE SPIRITS¹³⁵

常以戊己日，雞鳴時閉目存東方青氣大如弦，從日中來，使氣滿入頭泥丸中。又有兩青煙復從目中出，鬱鬱然須臾變成二童子。上下衣青，如嬰兒始行狀也。

Regularly on the *wuyi* day, at cockcrow, shut your eyes and visualize great strings of azure *qi* in the east coming out from the center of the sun; it causes *qi* to fill your head and enter the Mud Pill. There will also be two lines of black mist emanating from your eyes, getting thicker and thicker like hair. As they are drawn out, they turn into two lads. Their upper and lower garments are azure and their appearance is like an infant who is [only just] beginning to walk.

¹³⁴ Given the extraordinary nature of this visualization method, the adept may be tempted to forsake the conventions of earthly life.

¹³⁵ The title of this text could equally apply to the *Method of the Nine Perfected*. In both cases the Imperial Lord and the Five Spirits (described in this text as the “solar *qi* of the five directions”) together produce perfected spirits that emit colored *qi* through the body.

左目童子名曰帝君
飛靈。右目童子名
曰太乙¹³⁶ 晨嬰，
並在我之左右，侍
龜之起居也。極使
髣髴，念之良久。
畢叩齒九通，咽液
九過，微祝曰：

東方五靈
日氣煥青。
帝君二童，
欸然已生。
旦入泥丸，
鍊腦寶形。
左變右化，
得道之名。
使我上朝，
太素紫清。

The lad from the left eye is called Imperial Lord of Flying Numinous Power. The lad from the right eye is called the Dawn Infant of Supreme Unity. The both stand to your left and right, eternally attending [your] immortal body.¹³⁷ Cause them absolutely to be like this and meditate on them for a long time. When this is over, clack your teeth nine times, swallow saliva nine times and make this silent prayer:

In the east, the solar *qi*
Of the five numinous powers burns black.
The two lads of the Imperial Lord
Have been brightly born.¹³⁸
They have entered my Mud Pill,
Refining my brain and making my body pre-
cious.¹³⁹
The left has transformed and the right changed:
I have obtained a Dao name.
May I ascend to pay court to
[The Lords of] Purple Clarity and Supreme Pu-
rity.

¹³⁶ Taiyi 太乙 is here an alternate for Taiyi 太一

¹³⁷ Literally, attending the “rising and resting of the tortoise.” The tortoise is a symbol for the immortal body. The two attendants thus watch over the immortal body the whole day long.

¹³⁸ This prayer makes clear the connection of this visualization method to the *Method of the Nine Perfected*. The two lads who protect the immortal body are described as emanating from the “solar *qi* of the five directions” and also related to the Imperial Lord. In this regard the two lads are, like the perfected spirits produced in the *Method of the Nine Perfected*, the product of the fusion of different cosmic powers. The similarity continues in that the two lads emit *qi* which coils round the adept in nine layers.

¹³⁹ In fact, as the final paragraph of this text makes clear, the two lads do not enter the Mud Pill of the adept. Rather they are visualized emitting black *qi*, which penetrates inside the adept’s body. The effect of entering the Mud Pill is to refine the brain of the adept, helping to make the body precious, that is, perfected or transfigured.

畢，極念二童子名，則百害不幹。此二童子乃玄母之魂魄，玄父之精神。故假帝君太一而名變，再以保龜魂以正龜魄。魂魄保正，則一形常生矣。

若能修之十八年，白日昇天也。存兩童子，令從目中出，使青氣忽化而生成也。存在左右，令二童子各吐青氣，以灌繞我身，洞入內外也。

When this is done, meditate deeply on the names of the two lads and then you will be immune from a hundred disasters. These two lads are in fact [formed from] the heavenly and earthly souls of the Mystery Mother and vital essence and spirits of the Mystery Father. Therefore with the help of the Imperial Lord and Supreme Unity, your name will be changed, so as once again to preserve your immortal heavenly souls and regulate your immortal earthly souls. When your heavenly and earthly souls are preserved and regulated, then your whole body can live forever.

If you can practice this for eighteen years, then you will ascend to heaven in broad daylight. Visualize these two lads, make them come out from your eyes and cause the azure *qi* to transform suddenly and be produced. Visualize them on the left and right and make the two lads each spit azure *qi*, which coils around your body, pervading inside and out.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ This last phrase is a good example of the use of the word “cavern” or “grotto” (*dong* 洞) as a substitute for the term “pervade” or “penetrate” (*tong* 通).

7. Preface to the Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto

The *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* (*Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經; DZ 6) is generally regarded as one of the most important Highest Clarity texts transmitted by perfected Lady Wei to Yang Xi in the original Highest Clarity revelations in the early 360s. The text comprises thirty-nine stanzas revealed by thirty-nine gods, who correspond to thirty-nine points in the body. Each stanza follows a standard pattern. First it names the relevant deity and describes how it can block one of the “thirty-nine gates of death *qi*” (*siqi sanshijiu men* 死炁三十九門). The adept is instructed to visualize¹ the “perfect *qi*” (*zhenqi* 真炁) of the deity blocking up the death gate and then recite a prayer. The second part of the stanza begins with a picture of that deity, usually accompanied by others, being visualized by the adept. Multicolored *qi* from the visualized deities then enters the adept’s body through the Mud Pill and the adept meditates on their names. There then follow one or two prayers to be recited by the adept while his body transforms. Each stanza ends with a talisman, a symbolic token of the fusion between the adept’s body and the spirit.

The *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto* is also significant for its preface, written by Zhu Ziyong (976–1029) and translated in full below. The preface, written some six hundred years after the initial revelation of the Highest Clarity scriptures attempts to connect the visualization practices detailed in the text with the revelation and transmission of the scriptures and with the creation of the cosmos. It does so with the image of the “whirlwind,” a mysterious cosmic process that fuses together the human

¹ The term used in this text is *zhensi* 真思 which could be translated as “perfect and think” or “realize through meditation.” It is basically a gloss on the term *cun* 存 which is used in other Highest Clarity texts.

world and the celestial world through the vast “absence” of the Great Grotto.

From a strictly historical perspective it would be difficult to bring this preface into conversation with the two previous texts studied in this book, despite the fact that it is a preface to a text that is contemporaneous with the other two. But the chief reason for including this preface in this study is that the overall goal of this study is theological, rather than historical. The preface is useful for this because it demonstrates how the specific practices of the early traditions of Highest Clarity came to be conceived in metaphysical terms that relate back as far as *The Way and Its Power*. It is thus an important clue to grasping the underlying cosmology and theology of the Way of Highest Clarity and a mature reflection on the significance of the Highest Clarity tradition as a whole. It thus helps illuminate the various concepts that have been alluded to in other forms in the *Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang* and the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected*. The interpretation of the text offered in the footnotes aims to bring out these connections to the other texts and also attempts to explain the concepts as much as is possible in a concrete, rather than abstract way, in terms of the spatial geography of Highest Clarity theology and in the tradition of revelation that derives from shamanism.

SYNOPSIS

The preface itself contains five main sections. The opening connects the scripture to the abstract cosmology of the Dao. Next it explains more concretely how the text came to be created in the heavens and then transmitted by the Queen mother of the West. The fourth section of the text explains the functioning of the text in terms of the cosmology advertised in the opening section. The final section of the text explains how the contemporary Highest Clarity adept is to make use of the text.

上清大洞真經序

茅山上清二十三
代宗師觀妙先生
朱自英述

Preface to the Highest Clarity Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto

Related by the Gentleman who Observes Marvels, Zhu Ziying, twenty-third patriarch in the Highest Clarity lineage of Mt. Mao.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WAY

夫道生於無，潛
眾靈而莫測。神
凝於虛，妙萬變
而無方。杳冥有
精，而泰定發
光。太玄無際，
而致虛守靜。是
之謂大洞者歟。

Now, the Way is born from nonbeing, secretly harboring a multitude of numinous powers, which no-one can fathom.² Spirits condense in the void, marvelously transforming in myriad ways without bounds.³ In the darkest depths, there is an essence, serene and stable, which shines out light. This great mystery is infinite, reaching across the void, preserving stillness.⁴ This is called the “Great Grotto.”

² This first sentence images the Dao as an infinitely deep pool that conceals a multiplicity of cosmic power within it. The Chinese characters translated as “secretly harboring” (*qian* 潛) and “fathom” (*ce* 測) are both written with the water radical on the left. This gives the impression that the abyss is like an infinite abyss of water, deep and murky. The translation uses nautical terms in order to convey something of the flavor of the Chinese.

³ In contrast to the numinous powers (*ling* 靈) which are described in the previous sentence as being born from nonbeing, this sentence focuses on the spirits (*shen* 神) which condense in the emptiness. It is important to understand the relationship between these two terms. The numinous powers are shadowy cosmic forces that are formed from the nonbeing of the Dao. In contrast, the spirits condense, that is, attain a definite form within the “void.” The “void” in question is not the ontological nonbeing of the numinous powers, but the rather specific empty spaces of the grottos in mountains and in the body. As a result, although the numinous powers are remote and unfathomable, the spirits by contrast have specific forms and locations (and also names). However, the function of spirits is to animate transformation within the cosmos, thus they are always “marvelous,” that is, provoking the extraordinary changes within the cosmos. Moreover, because the Dao is spontaneous, or “self-so” (*ziran* 自然) the transformations that the spirits generate are “boundless” (*wufang* 無方) and do not follow any external pattern.

⁴ The great mystery, identified in the next sentence with the great grotto, is what connects these two aspects of the process of the cosmos, namely the ontological and the locative. The swirling mystery (*xuan* 玄) reaches to the furthest limit of the empty spaces of the cosmos yet preserves the silence or solitude at the center, so that being is always predicated on nonbeing, and presence on absence. The great grotto, or great pervasion, is thus the connection between things that derives from their all being predicated on the same emptiness.

及其斂精眾神，御祖炁以徊旋，鍊神會道，運祥風而鼓舞。無中歛有呼吸，散萬神之行，動極復靜。恍惚圍帝一之妙，是之謂徊風混合者歟。為天地普植之本，帝聖造化之原。

It accumulates vital essence⁵ and gathers in the spirits, driving the ancestral *qi* round and about,⁶ refining the spirits,⁷ joining with the Way, whirling an auspicious wind and drumming and dancing.⁸ In midst of nothing, suddenly there is breathing in and out, dispersing the myriad spirits on their way, moving them to the utmost, then returning them to stillness.⁹ It is shadowy and indistinct, [yet] it encloses the marvelous phenomena of the Imperial [Lord] and [Supreme] Unity.¹⁰ This is called the “blending of the whirlwind.”¹¹ It forms the common root of the stem of Heaven and Earth and the source of the creative power of emperors and sages.¹²

⁵ The subject of this sentence is the creative process of the Dao. Yet one should not make the mistake of interpreting this paragraph in purely cosmological terms. These sentences can equally be understood as describing the experience of the Highest Clarity practitioner. Zhu Ziyong considers the relationship between the great grotto and the vital essence (*jing* 精) that is the root of inner-chemical transformation. He seems to be claiming that the function of the great grotto is to allow vital essence to be accumulated (*lian* 斂) and then refined (*lian* 鍊). The focus of the text is thus moving from the great grotto of the cosmos to its counterpart, the interior of the body.

⁶ As the *Method of the Nine Perfected* makes clear, when the spirits are visualized coming into the “empty spaces” of the various organs of the body, the result is that they emit *qi* which rotates around the body of the adept.

⁷ When the *qi* is emitted and rotates around the body, this has the effect of refining the spirits of the body, thus transforming the body into a more perfect state.

⁸ Here Zhu Ziyong uses images derived from shamanistic trance experiences to describe the experience of being filled with this revolving *qi*.

⁹ This sentence recalls the earlier sentence in which the swirling of the cosmos is described as “reaching out to the void and preserving stillness” (see footnote 4 on page 213). In this case, however, the sentence seems to describe the process by which the adept goes into a trance, expelling the spirits then recalling them back into the body.

¹⁰ This sentence recalls *The Way and its Power* ch. 21: “As a thing the way is / Shadowy (*huang* 恍) and indistinct (*hu* 惚). / Indistinct and shadowy, / Yet within it is an image; / Shadowy and indistinct, / Yet within it is a substance.” (trans. Lau 1963). Here, the words *huang* and *hu* (translated here as “shadowy” and “indistinct”) are one of a number of metaphors used within *The Way and its Power* to describe the formlessness of the Dao (Moeller 2007: 52). Yet in this particular context, it is appropriate to consider these terms as describing the experience of the practitioner as much as the process of the Way. As a binome *huanghu* can also have the meaning of

人之生也，稟氣於太極，而動靜法乎天地。肇靈於一元，而闔闢體乎陰陽。

When humans are born, they are endowed with *qi* from the Supreme Ultimate and their activity and stillness is modeled on heaven and earth. They derive their numinous powers from Unity Prime and their contractions and expansions embody *yin* and *yang*.¹³

“entranced” and could be used to describe the experience of one who is in an altered state of consciousness and whose body “encloses the marvelous phenomena” of the gods. Seen in this light, the entire passage can validly be interpreted in two ways: firstly the passage describes the continuous process of creation; secondly the passage describes how the Highest Clarity adept embodies this cosmological process within himself.

¹¹ The previous paragraph explained the “great grotto” as the swirling emptiness of the cosmos that connects all forms together. Similarly this paragraph has described the parallel process within the body whereby through the centrifugal force of the “whirlwind” the adept invokes the various spirits of the cosmos gathering them within his body.

¹² Just as the Dao is the watery abyss from which the creative power of the cosmos emerges, so also this “whirlwind” embodying of the spirits, is the source of creative transformation for human beings. In fact, says the text, they are the same thing, the “common root of the stem of heaven and earth” (*tiandi puzhi zhi ben* 天地普植之本).

¹³ This paragraph is explaining how the whirlwind and the great grotto can be the common root of creative transformation in the cosmos and in human beings. The reason is that humans are fundamentally no different than the other dimensions of the universe because they are “endowed with *qi* from the Supreme Ultimate,” the *axis mundi* of the cosmos which connects the center of earth to the center of heaven. The result of this is that humans embody exactly the same cosmic pattern of *yin* and *yang*, contraction and expansion, as the universe itself.

THE HEAVENLY ORIGIN OF THE SCRIPTURE

故上清三十九帝
皇迴真下映，入
兆身中三十九
戶。於是各由其
所貫之戶著經一
章。其辭幽奧，
以用領括百神，
招真辟非。所謂
慶雲開生門，祥
烟塞死戶者此
歟。

Thus the thirty-nine Imperial Sovereigns of the heaven of Highest Clarity circulate as perfected beings and shine down to enter the thirty-nine portals of the body.¹⁴ Thus [the thirty-nine perfected] each composed one [of the thirty-nine] sections of the scripture through the portal that they had penetrated. Their language is profound and abstruse, but by using it one can draw in a hundred spirits and summon perfected cosmic forces.¹⁵ This is called “congratulatory clouds opening the gate of life” and “auspicious vapors blocking the portals of death.”¹⁶

¹⁴ The text proper has thirty-nine chapters, revealed by thirty-nine deities who enter thirty-nine portals of the body. They can do so when they assume the form of a perfected being, since the perfected are the intermediaries between the heavenly and earthly realms. The perfected are imaged as light beings, or stars, which shine down on the body from the distant reaches of the night sky.

¹⁵ Just as the text was created by light pouring down into the bodies of its transcribers, so also the function of the text is to enable the adept to summon spiritual forces into his own body. The method of revelation is in fact the method of salvation.

¹⁶ These two phrases refer to how the thirty-nine revelations can have a salvific effect upon the adept. Using language relating to the medical tradition, the revelation of the gods brings life by opening up the vital portals of the body, and inhibits death by blocking up the portals through which noxious forces could invade the body. Thus as each of the chapters is recited, the adept is to visualize the gods descending into the body to perform these dual functions of generating life and blocking death. In a process of spiritual recursion, the recitation of the scripture invokes the content of scriptures, which is in fact the very revelation of the scriptures in the first place.

故中央黃老元素道君，總彼列聖之奧旨，集成大洞之真經，故曰三十九章經也。又有徊風帝一，高元雄一，五老雌一，是三經者，所以輔乎三十九章之尊經耳。

夫道有三奇。第一之奇，大洞真經三十九章。第二之奇，五老雌一寶經。第三之奇，素靈大有妙經。

Thus the Yellow Venerable Lord of Prime Simplicity of the Center gathered the abstruse sentiments of the ranks of sages and compiled them into the Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto,¹⁷ which is why it is called the scripture in thirty-nine chapters. In addition there is one [chapter] from the Whirlwind Imperial [Lord], one [chapter] from the Lofty Prime Male and one chapter from the Five Elders and the Female One.¹⁸ These three chapters are the only additions [to have been included in] the venerable scripture in thirty-nine chapters.

So the Way has three marvels. The first marvel is the thirty-nine chapters of the *Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto*. The second marvel is the *Precious Scripture of the Female One and the Five Elders*.¹⁹ The third marvel is the *Marvelous Scripture of the Pure Numinous in the Palace of Vast Possessions*.²⁰

¹⁷ Just as the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* was created when the Yellow Venerable Lord received both the *Method of the Nine Perfected* and the *Eight Secret Sayings of the Dao*, so also this preface reveals the Yellow Venerable Lord to be a key compiler of Highest Clarity texts and thus a key intermediary between heaven and earth.

¹⁸ In fact in Highest Clarity theology there are only thirty-six celestial realms, and therefore only thirty-six Imperial Sovereigns (Dihuang 帝皇) each of whom is responsible for one section of the text. The fact that the text has thirty-nine chapters thus requires an additional explanation.

¹⁹ The extant version of this text, *The Lofty Jade Emperor's Precious Scripture of the Female One and the Five Elders* (*Dongzhen gaoshang yudi dadong ciyi yujian wulao baojing* 洞真高上玉帝大洞雌一玉檢五老寶經; DZ 1313), contains a variety of methods which are of varying periods and degrees of authenticity. They center on visualization involving female deities in the brain (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 558).

²⁰ The *Grotto Perfection Supreme Marvelous Scripture from the Room of Pure Spirit in the Palace of Vast Possessions* (*Dongzhen taishang suling dongyuan dayou miaojing* 洞真太上素靈洞元大有妙經; DZ 1314; see footnote 117 on page 135).

故三十九章者，
乃九天之奇訣，
上元太素君金書
之首經也。

一名三天龍書，
一名九天太真道
經。此經之作，
乃自玄微十方原
始天王所運炁撰
集也。

Therefore the thirty-nine sections are in fact marvelous sayings from the nine heavens,²¹ and the first scripture in the “golden books” of the Lord of Great Purity in the Realm of Highest Mystery.

One name [for this book] is the *Dragon Book of the Three Heavens*; another name is the *Scripture of the Way of Great Perfection of the Nine Heavens*. This scripture was created by the Heavenly King of the Primordial Beginning of the Ten Directions of Mysterious Subtlety, who circulated his *qi* to compile them.²²

²¹ Each divided into four sub-realms, making thirty-six heavens in total.

²² The Heavenly King of the Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi tianwang 元始天王) is to be distinguished from the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi tianwang 元始天王), a deity who does not make an appearance in Daoism until the Way of Numinous Treasure (Lingbao dao 靈寶道; Robinet 1984: 1.127).

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE
SCRIPTURE

西王姆受道於元始天王，乃共刻北元天中錄那邪國，靈鏡人鳥之山，闍萊之岫，乃於虛室之中，聚九玄正一之炁，結而成書，字徑一丈，于今存焉。

The Queen Mother of the West received the Way from Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning and then had [the texts] collectively engraved in the Northern Prime Heaven and registered in Naxie Country, with a numinous reflection on the Mountain of Humans and Birds in the Tower Field Cavern.²³ In [this] empty chamber, the vital force of the Orthodox Unity of Nine Mysteries came together, forming calligraphy with characters ten feet tall, which still exists to this day.

元始天王又以傳上清八真中央黃老君，使教授下方，當為真人上聚三辰者焉。

The Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning moreover transmitted this to the Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center attached to the Eight Perfected Ones of Highest Clarity, enabling the teaching to be conferred upon the lower regions, so that [the people there] should become perfected persons and ascend to the three starry realms.

中央黃老君隱禁此經，世無知者。故人間地上五嶽天中，永無此經。

The Yellow Venerable Lord of the Center kept this scripture secret and in the profane realm there is no knowledge of it, so that in the human world on earth, on the five sacred mountains and in heaven, this scripture continues to be nonexistent.

²³ This indicates the dual, talismanic character of the scripture, with one copy preserved in heaven and a “numinous reflection” in an earthly grotto.

上清天真尤所寶秘，唯太玄有金閣玉名，瓊札紫簡，三元有併晨秘籙，丹臺有黃文之字，當必為真人者乃得受之爾。

The treasured secrets of the Heavenly Perfected of Highest Clarity must only be handed on to those who will become perfected persons: only those who have a gold pavilion jade name in the heaven of Great Mystery; [those who have] a precious inscription in purple lettering; those who possess a secret register from the Three Primes of being joined to the dawn-star; or those who have a writ in yellow characters in the Cinnabar Terrace.

THE COSMIC FUNCTION OF THE SCRIPTURE

是經也，上皇之道標，紫晨之妙篇，制命九天之階，徵召五帝之靈。

This text is [also known as] the *Emblem of The Highest sovereign Way* and the *Volume of the Marvelous Purple Dawn*. It regulates the destiny of the [various] ranks within the nine heavens,²⁴ and invokes the numinous powers of the five Imperial [Lords].

逸徊風之混合，凝九轉於玄精，交會雌雄，混合萬神。森羅幽鬱，瓊響太真。

It spins out the blending of the whirlwind; and condenses the mystery essence of the nine revolutions [of the heavens]. It unites male and female, and convokes the myriad spirits. Lushly wooded and rich with sound is [the Heaven of] Great Perfection.

運辟非於明梁，通易有於玄門，洞德刃以造妙，濯曜羅而映雲。太漠為靈關之炁，無刃為浩劫之年。

It brings cosmic energy down to the individual level,²⁵ connects the transforming existence [of the cosmos] to the mystery gate [in the body],²⁶ and links the creative powers [of the Dao] to the production of marvels [in the earthly world].²⁷ It is a pure and dazzling web, which shines through the clouds. [From] vast emptiness it produces the *qi* of the numinous gate and [from] uncreated nonbeing it produces years of catastrophe.²⁸

²⁴ That is to say the use of the text determines the rank that one is able to attain as a perfected being within the nine heavens.

²⁵ Literally, "it moves *pifēi* 辟非 to the bright beam 明梁." *Pifēi* is vital force that transcends the nine heavens. The bright beam is the equivalent of *pifēi* in the body.

²⁶ This is another way of saying the same as above.

巍巍神館，萬真
之淵，金房煥
赫，鬱乎上清。

It is the loftiest residence of the spirits and the deep abyss of the myriad perfected. With golden rooms, lustrous and radiant, rich indeed is [the Heaven of] Highest Clarity.²⁹

MAKING USE OF THE TEXT

其旨幽微，難可
究詳。兆能長
齋，絕志人間，
誦玉篇於曲臺，
叩瓊音以震靈，
則真人定籙於東
華。

Its implications are secret and subtle and it is hard to fathom in detail. If you can go on a lengthy purification and abstain from human contact,³⁰ recite the precious chapters on a winding terrace and stir up the numinous powers with sweet sounds of invocation, then your registration as a perfected person will be fixed in the east.

七玄更潤於紫
房，制魔王以威
神，攝五帝以衛
身，萬遍周而肉
身飛，七轉召而
司命至。

The seven mysteries will then flood the purple chamber [in your head], overpowering the demon king and thereby dominating the spirits;³¹ the five Imperial [Lords] will be knitted together so as to protect your body; always and everywhere your fleshly body will fly [up into heaven] and seven times will [the seven mysteries] call on the Controller of Destinies to appear.³²

²⁷ This is another way of saying the same as above.

²⁸ This would seem to indicate that the text has vast creative powers that could be framed either positively or negatively.

²⁹ Whereas the previous paragraph seems to be describing fairly clearly the function of the text, this paragraph seems to be giving a description of the heaven of Highest Clarity. This would indicate that in the mind of the author both the thirty-six heavens and the scriptures that descend from it are really one and the same phenomenon.

³⁰ See footnote 29 on page 168 for a discussion of the “lengthy purification.”

³¹ If one is able to use the text to invoke the celestial powers, then the spirits of the body will be brought under the authority of heaven and there will be no chance of being led astray by demons. Moreover, as the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* indicates, the five spirits will be fused together to protect and transfigure the body.

³² The controller of destinies will be summoned so that the adept can remove his name from the registers of death and be inscribed in the registers of perfection.

此大洞之奇章，
總億道而反生，
自無奇毛異質，
金骨玉名，皆不
得有妄披於靈
文，其禁悉依九
真明科。

These marvelous chapters of the great grotto sum up countless ways to revert life, [producing] from nothing marvelous hair, unusual substances, golden bones and jade names. There should be no false publication of any of these numinous texts and their knowledge should be restricted, according to the *Sworn Code of the Nine Perfected*.³³

兆當苦齋三年乃
得讀之。

If you can endure the hardship of a purification retreat for three years, then you will be able to study it.

誦詠此章，萬遍
既畢，中央黃老
道君上奏，太上
命丹鸞綠蓋之
車，九靈使者太
乙司命來迎於
子。

If you recite these chapters ten thousand times without ceasing, the Yellow Venerable Dao Lord of the Center will submit a report, the Supreme [Imperial Lord] will order a supreme cinnabar whirlwind chariot with a green canopy and the nine numinous powers will dispatch the Supreme Controller of Destinies to come and meet you.

於是五老翼軒，
八風扇羽，神雷
前驅，玉華扶
轂，乘雲駕龍，
即日升天，諸太
素三元君宮中受
書。

Thereupon the winged chariot of the five ancient ones, its feathers fanned by the eight winds, spurred on by spirits and numinous powers, will carry you into the clouds like a flying dragon and you will ascend into heaven that very same day to be granted a text in the palace of the Three Prime Lords in the [Heaven of] Great Simplicity.

是謂上登上清，
受書太極，拜為
高仙左卿者也。

This is what is meant by ascending to Highest Clarity to receive a text at the Supreme Ultimate and to be venerated as Left Officer of the High Immortals.

³³ The *Sworn Code of the Nine Perfected* 九真明科 is a Highest Clarity text that governs the rules of transmission for texts. It is contained in the *Grotto Perfection Supreme Marvelous Scripture from the Room of Pure Spirit in the Palace of Vast Possessions* (DZ 1314) and a later edition is available in the *Sworn Code of the Four Poles* (*Siji mingke* 四機明科; DZ 184; see Robinet 2000).

兆若但有此經不得讀之者，太微天帝君拔出死簡，於授經之始刊定真籙，於造齋之初度籍太極，刻名東華，關奏太上，錄封龜臺，萬神千靈自稱兆，為九玄大夫，位準太清仙伯也。

受經之格，一依九真明科，兆宜遵焉。

If, however, you possess this scripture but do not get to study it, the Heavenly Imperial Lord of [the Palace of] Supreme Subtlety will expunge your death certificate and, beginning from when you received the scripture, will establish [your] register of perfection. When you first begin a purification retreat, he will transfer your records to the Supreme Ultimate, inscribe your name in [the Palace of] Eastern Blossom and send a report about you to the Supreme [Imperial Lord]. You will be registered and enfeoffed in Turtle Terrace,³⁴ and ten thousand spirits and a thousand numinous powers will call you the Great Man of Nine Mysteries.³⁵ Your rank will be that of Immortal Earl of Great Clarity.³⁶

The rules for receiving this scripture follow completely the *Sworn Code of the Nine Perfected*. You should properly comply with them.

³⁴ The turtle is a symbol of immortality.

³⁵ Another name for Mt. Kunlun, the western paradise of the Queen Mother of the West.

³⁶ Like the other texts studied in this volume, this text ends with a description of what the adept can expect if he is not entirely successful in its practice. As always, the result is not so great as attaining the rank of perfected person, but it is better than what the ordinary mortal can expect. In this case the adept will gain the rank of Immortal Earl, rather than perfected person, and will be installed in the heaven of Great Clarity, rather than Highest Clarity.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES FROM THE DAOIST CANON

The following table lists the various Daoist texts from the Ming Daoist Canon that are mentioned in this book. The numbers below the letters DZ refer to the index to the 60-volume reprint of the Daoist Canon published in Taipei (Schipper 1975b). A complete cross-referenced index of the various compilations of Daoist texts can be found in Komjathy (2003). English translations of the titles are based on Schipper and Verellen (2004).

DZ	English	Pinyin	Chinese
6	Highest Clarity Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto	<i>Shangqing dadong zhenjing</i>	上清大洞真經
33	Highest Clarity Scripture on Following the Three Trajectories and [Absorbing] the Yellow Qi and the Yang Essence	<i>Shangqing huangqi yangjing sandao shunxing jing</i>	黃氣陽精經
84	Highest Clarity Six Jia Left and Right Talismans for Summoning the Lingfei [Maidens] of the Qionggong Palace	<i>Shangqing qionggong lingfei liujia zuoyou shangfu</i>	上清瓊宮靈飛六甲左右上符
179	Numinous Text in Purple Writing from the [Palace of] Great Subtlety [Containing] a True Record of Taboos [to be observed by] Immortals	<i>Taiwei lingshu ziwen xianji zhenji shangjing</i>	太微靈書紫文仙忌真記上經
184	Sworn ¹ Code of the Four Poles of the Great Perfected Jade Emperor	<i>Taizhen yudi siji mingke jing</i>	太真玉帝四極明科經

¹ Reading *meng* 盟 for *ming* 明 (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 192-3).

DZ	English	Pinyin	Chinese
253	Imperial Lord Goldtower's Scripture of the Perfect One of the Three Primes	<i>Jinque dijun sanyuan zhenyi jing</i>	金闕帝君 三元真一 經
294	Biographies of Immortals	<i>Liexian zhuan</i>	列仙傳
296	Comprehensive Examination of Successive Generations of Perfected and Immortals who Embodied the Dao	<i>Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian</i>	歷世真仙 體道通鑿
303	Esoteric Biography of Perfected Purple Yang	<i>Ziyang zhenren neizhuan</i>	紫陽真人 內傳
331	Supreme Yellow Court Jade Scripture of Inner Luminance	<i>Taishang huang- ting neijing yujing</i>	太上黃庭 內景玉經
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879	Highest Clarity Upper Scripture of the Golden Book with Jade Characters	<i>Shangqing jinshu yuzi shangjing</i>	上清金書 玉字上經
880	Great Clarity Scripture of the Divine Elixir [made from] Liquid Gold	<i>Taiqing jinye shendan jing</i>	太清金液 神丹經
883	Oral Instructions from the Heavenly Master on the Scripture of Great Clarity	<i>Taiqing jing tian- shi koujue</i>	太清經天 師口訣
1016	Declarations of the Perfected	<i>Zhen'gao</i>	真告
1032	Seven Bamboo Strips from a Cloudy Satchel	<i>Yunji qiqian</i>	雲笈七籤

DZ	English	Pinyin	Chinese
1313	The Lofty Jade Emperor's Precious Scripture of the Female One and the Five Elders	<i>Dongzhen gaoshang yudi dadong ciyi yujian wulao baojing</i>	洞真高上 玉帝大洞 雌一玉檢 五老寶經
1314	Grotto Perfection Supreme Marvelous Scripture from the [Room of] Pure Spirit in the [Palace of] Vast Possessions	<i>Dongzhen taishang suling dongyuan dayou miaojing</i>	洞真太上 素靈洞元 大有妙經
1315	Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity Purple Book [of the Celestial Emperor] of the Azure Waist, [containing the] Combined Scriptures on Gathering the Golden Root	<i>Dongzhen shangqing qingyao zishu jin'gen zhongjing</i>	洞真上清 青要紫書 金根眾經
1329	Grotto Perfection Supreme Scripture of the Nine Red Speckled Talismans and of the Five Emperors' Inner Perfection	<i>Dongzhen taishang jiu chi ban fu wudi neizhen jing</i>	洞真太上 九赤班符 五帝內真 經
1330	Grotto Perfection Mystery Scripture of the Secret Book of Great Cinnabar, from the Highest Clarity Emperor of Supreme Unity	<i>Shangqing taiyi dijun taidan yinshu dongzhen xuanjing</i>	上清太一 帝君太丹 隱書洞真 玄經
1331	Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity Scripture of Seven Recitations of the Divine Realm and Seven Changes for Dancing in Heaven	<i>Dongzhen shangqing shenzhou qizhuan qibian wutian jing</i>	洞真上清 神州七轉 七變舞天 經
1332	Grotto Perfection Highest Clarity [containing] Rules on Purple [Tablets] and the Blazing Light Scripture [created by] Transformation from the Divine Mystery	<i>Dongzhen shangqing zidu yanguang shenyuan bian jing</i>	洞真上清 紫度炎光 神元變經

DZ	English	Pinyin	Chinese
1341	Grotto Perfection Precious Register on which are Fixed the [Names of] the Perfected of the Population Record of the Most High Supreme Sovereign	<i>Dongzhen taishang shanghuang minji dingzhen yulu</i>	洞真太上 上皇民籍 定真玉錄
1354	The Highest Clarity Supreme Scripture of the Dragon Stilts that Open Heaven	<i>Shangqing taishang kaitian longqiao jing</i>	上清太上 開天龍蹻 經
1366	Highest Clarity Scripture of the Three Diagrams of the Heavenly Pass	<i>Shangqing tian-guan santu jing</i>	上清天關 三圖經
1372	Superior Scripture on the Emanations from the Labyrinth of Phoenix Terrace	<i>Shangqing gaoshang yuchen fengtai qusu shang-jing</i>	上清高上 玉晨鳳臺 曲素上經
1376	Highest Clarity Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected of the Supreme Imperial Lord	<i>Shangqing taishang dijun jiuzhen zhongjing</i>	上清太上 帝君九真 中經
1377	Highest Clarity Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected of the Supreme Imperial Lord and the Divine Cinnabar Formula for Ascending to Life	<i>Shangqing taishang jiuzhen zhongjing jiangsheng shendan jue</i>	上清太上 九真中經 降生神丹 訣
1380	Highest Clarity Supreme Scripture of Forty-four Methods on Yellow Silk	<i>Shangqing taishang huangsu sishisi fang jing</i>	上清太上 黃素四十 四方經
1457	Hymn of Happiness and Sadness of the Most High Yuchen	<i>Gaoshang yuchen youle zhang</i>	高上玉宸 憂樂章

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