



Fifteen Essays

to

ESTABLISH THE TEACHING

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# **Fifteen Essays to Establish the Teaching**

*Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun* 重陽立教十五論

A Founding Text of Complete Reality Taoism

by Wang Chongyang 王重陽

(1113–70)

Translated from the original Chinese

by Fabrizio Pregadio

Golden Elixir Press

This ebook is excerpted from:

*Taoist Internal Alchemy: An Anthology of Neidan Texts*

by Fabrizio Pregadio (Golden Elixir Press, 2019)

Golden Elixir Press

Mountain View, CA

[www.goldenelixir.com](http://www.goldenelixir.com)

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*Cover : Wang Chongyang.*

## INTRODUCTION

Wang Chongyang was the founder of the Northern Lineage (Beizong) of Neidan, or Internal Alchemy. Also known as Wang Zhe, he apparently led a rather turbulent life until 1159, when he is said to have met Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin (two illustrious Taoist immortals, related to several Neidan lineages) and to have become an ascetic. From 1167, he began preaching with his followers in the northeastern province of Shandong. In the strict sense, the Northern Lineage consists of Wang Chongyang and his seven main disciples, among whom Qiu Chuji (1148–1227) is the most important for the later history of Neidan.

The Northern lineage is the original nucleus of Quanzhen (Complete Reality), which continued to develop and is in the present day, with Tianshi dao (Way of the Celestial Masters), one of the two main branches of Taoism, headquartered in the Baiyun guan (Abbey of the White Cloud) in Beijing. Within Neidan, the Northern Lineage is especially important for its teachings on inner Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*), on the equivalence between inner Nature and the Golden Elixir, and on the practice of “clarity and quiescence” (*qingjing*).

*Xing* (Nature) and *ming* (Existence) are two of the main terms in Neidan. *Xing* can be understood and translated as “nature,” in the sense of “human nature,” “inner nature,” or “inborn nature.” *Ming* is in several respects a more complex concept. In addition to the literal translations as “order, command, mandate,” this term means “destiny,” “fate,” “existence,” and has also been understood as “vital force.”

As we read in the present text, “Nature and Existence are the root and foundation of self-cultivation.” In another work, Wang Chongyang states that “the original True Nature is called Golden Elixir,” and that “the only important things are the words ‘clarity and quiescence,’ which are found within one’s heart. Nothing else is a practice of self-cultivation.”<sup>1</sup> These and several other statements, some of which reveal a clear relation to Buddhism, reflect the main

points of distinction between the Northern and the Southern lineages of Neidan.

While there are reasons to doubt that the *Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun*, which combines doctrinal teachings and advice on lifestyle, is actually Wang Chongyang's own work, it is nevertheless deemed to be an original Beizong/Quanzhen document. The text is entirely translated below. Section numbers and titles are found in the original Chinese.

## LIVING IN A CLOISTER

All those who leave their families should first seek shelter in a cloister. A cloister is a dwelling place on which one can rely. When there is a place on which one can rely, the mind gradually attains peace. When Breath (*qi* ) and Spirit are in harmony and at ease, one enters the True Way.

In anything you do, you should not strain yourself: if you strain yourself, this will decrease your Breath. But you should not be motionless: if you are motionless, your Breath and blood will become stagnant. It is essential that movement and quiescence are balanced: only then can you embrace constancy and be secure in all circumstances. This is the way to reside in peace.

## WANDERING IN THE CLOUDS

There are two ways of traveling. One way is to look at mountains and rivers, beautiful sceneries, and the red and green colors of flowers and plants. Some enjoy bustling and lively towns and cities, others admire the buildings and pavilions of temples and monasteries; some visit friends at random, others are absorbed in clothes and food. Those who are like this may travel ten thousand miles but will only exert and wear out themselves. They may see all the sights in the world, but their minds will be confused and their energy will wane. They are people who travel in vain.

The second way is to look for the principles of one's Nature and Existence,<sup>2</sup> climbing perilous high mountains to seek the subtle and the mysterious, tirelessly searching for enlightened masters, crossing stormy waters of distant rivers, never weary of inquiring about the Dao. When there is agreement at a single sentence,<sup>3</sup> a radiance comes forth from within; one understands the great matter of life and death and becomes a person of complete realization. Those who are like this are true "travelers in the clouds."<sup>4</sup>

## **STUDYING FROM BOOKS**

In the Way of studying from books, you should not confound your eyes by pursuing the words. You should, instead, extract the meaning and accord with it in your heart. Then put the book aside and investigate the meaning in order to extract the principles. Then put aside the principles in order to extract the true import. When you have been able to extract the true import, you can absorb it in your mind.

After a long time, the radiance of the mind will naturally overflow and the spirit of wisdom will leap; you will comprehend everything and understand everything. If you arrive to this point, you should foster it. Do not be in a rush, or you will lose hold of your inner nature and life.

If you do not thoroughly understand the meanings of books, and you just want to read and memorize a large quantity of things in order to have discussions with other people and show off your expertise, this will be of no advantage for your practice and will harm your life force. You may read many books, but what is the advantage with regard to the Dao?

When you have understood the meaning of a book, you can deeply store it within you.

## COMPOUNDING HERBAL MEDICINES

Herbal medicines embody the finest breaths (*qi* ) of mountains and rivers, the pure essences (*jing* ) of plants and trees. Some are warm, others cold: they can serve to supplement or to drain. Some are thick, others thin: they can be used externally or internally.

Those who become skilled in their study enliven the other people's inner natures and lives; the mindless healers, instead, only damage the other people's bodies. Those who study the Dao should be competent in this: without this competence, there is no way to assist the Dao. However, one should not become attached to this pursuit, as this would cause harm to one's hidden merit. Coveting wealth and property outside causes a loss in the cultivation of Reality within. Not only would this be a source of faults in this life, it would also cause retribution in future lives. My advanced disciples should carefully reflect on this.

## ON BUILDING

A reed-thatched hut or a grass-thatched hut is needed to protect the body: spending the night outdoor or sleeping in a field is an affront to the Sun and the Moon. Sumptuous mansions and high buildings, instead, are not fit for a superior person. How could a large palace or a tall residence be the livelihood of a person of the Way?

Cutting down trees breaks the flow of the fluids in the Earth's vessels, just as asking for goods or money when giving teachings on the Dao takes away from the people's blood vessels.<sup>5</sup> If you only cultivate your outward operation and do not cultivate your inner practice, it is like painting a cake to satisfy hunger or collecting snow to serve as provisions. You spend much effort vainly, and at the end there is no result.

Those who have determination should hasten to seek the precious palaces within themselves: one may incessantly repair and restore the vermilion towers outside one's body, but sooner or later they will collapse. An intelligent person should examine this closely and in detail.

## JOINING COMPANIONS IN THE DAO

The people of the Way join together as companions. They do so in the first place because they want to assist one another in sickness and disease: "If you die, I will bury you; if I die, you will bury me."

However, you should first select someone and then join that person as a companion; you should not first join some companions and then select one person. You should not be attached to one another; if you are, it would bind your hearts. But you should neither be unattached; if you are, your feelings would be disjoined. Between attachment and unattachment, you should take a middle course.

There are three kinds of people that one should join and three other kinds that one should not join. The first three are those with an enlightened mind, wisdom, and determination. The other three are those who are not enlightened and are attached to the external phenomena; those who lack wisdom and whose nature is foolish and turbid; and those who lack determination and always cause annoyances.

When you establish yourself in a spiritual community, always depend on your mind and your determination. Do not follow other people's emotions and do not rely on appearances. Only choose the wise ones. This is the superior method.

## SITTING

“Sitting” does not mean sitting with the body upright and the eyes closed. That is false sitting.

In true sitting, during the twelve [double] hours, whether you are standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, and in all states of movement or quiescence, your mind should be like Mount Tai: motionless and unshaken. Shut the four gates—eyes, ears, mouth, and nose—and do not let any external condition enter. If there is even the slightest thought of movement and quiescence, it cannot be called “sitting in quiescence.”

Those who can do this may dwell with their bodies in the world of dust, but their names are already recorded among the ranks of the Immortals. They do not need to call on far-away people, as they are worthies and sages within themselves. In one hundred years, when their work is completed,<sup>6</sup> they will shed their shells and ascend to Reality. When they achieve the pill of the Elixir, their Spirit will roam throughout the eight poles.

## SUBDUIING THE MIND

With regard to the Way of the mind, if it is constantly deep and profound, the mind does not move. Inchoate and silent, it does not see the external things; dim and obscure, it is neither inside nor outside. There is not even the slightest thought. This is the stable mind, and it does not need to be subdued.

If, instead, the mind is aroused by complying with the phenomena, it becomes disturbed and deranged as it looks for heads and tails. This is the confused mind, and it should quickly be brought to an end. You should not indulge in it, as it spoils your way (*dao* ) and your virtue (*de* ), and it damages your Nature (*xing* ) and your Existence (*ming* ).<sup>7</sup> In standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, constantly strive to subdue it: hearing and seeing, knowing and perceiving are sources of sickness and trouble.

## REFINING ONE'S NATURE

Regulating one's Nature (*xing* ) is like tuning the string of a zither: if it is too tight it will snap, if it is too loose it will not respond. When tightness and looseness are balanced, the zither can be tuned. It is also like casting a sword: too much steel will cause it to break, too much tin will cause it to bend. When steel and tin are balanced, the sword can be cast.

If you embody these two methods when you tune and refine your Nature, it will be wondrous of its own.

## **MATCHING THE FIVE BREATHS**

The Five Breaths gather in the Central Palace, the Three Origins collect in the sinciput. The Green Dragon emits a red mist, the White Tiger exhales a black smoke. The ten thousand spirits arrange themselves in rows, and the hundred channels flow and stream. Cinnabar and its Powder will be brilliant and shining, Lead and Mercury will coagulate and be clear. The body may still depend on the human world, but the spirit already roams in the heavens above.

## MERGING NATURE AND EXISTENCE

Nature (*xing* ) is Spirit, Existence (*ming* ) is Breath.<sup>8</sup> When Nature meets Existence, it is like a bird finding the wind: it soars lightly, saving strength and succeeding with ease. As the *Yinfu jing* (Book of the Hidden Agreement) says, “The command of birds lies in Breath.”<sup>9</sup> Those who cultivate Reality should comprehend this, but should not divulge it to inferior persons; the spirits would otherwise send down their reproof.

Nature and Existence are the root and foundation of self-cultivation: they should be refined with attention and care.

## THE WAY OF THE SAGES

In order to enter the Way of the sages, one should work hard and be determined for several years, accumulating merit and piling up practice. Only then can the wise and the worthy enter the Way of the sages.

Then you may dwell in an ordinary house, but your inner Nature will fill Heaven and Earth.<sup>10</sup> The host of sages throughout Heaven will silently protect you, and the Immortal Lords of the Great Ultimate will obscurely surround you. Your name will be recorded in the Purple Prefecture (Zifu) and you will attain the rank of Immortal. Your bodily form will temporarily dwell in the dust, but your mind will be already enlightened beyond all things.

## **TRANSCENDING THE THREE WORLDS**

The worlds of Desire, of Form, and of Formlessness are the Three Worlds. When the mind forgets pondering and thinking, it transcends the world of Desire; when it forgets all phenomena, it transcends the world of Form; when it is not attached to the vision of Emptiness, it transcends the world of Formlessness.

When you leave these Three Worlds, Spirit dwells in the village of the immortals and the sages, and inner Nature resides in the realm of Jade Clarity.

## THE METHOD OF NOURISHING ONESELF

The dharma-body is a representation of formlessness.<sup>11</sup> It is neither emptiness nor existence, it has neither front nor back, it is neither low nor high, it is neither long nor short. When it operates, there is nothing it does not pervade; when it is stored, it is inchoate and silent and it does not leave any trace.

If you obtain this Way, you can nourish it. The more you nourish it, the more are your merits; the less you nourish it, the less are your merits. Neither desire to go back [to the Origin] nor be attached to this world: then you will leave or stay, and this will occur naturally.

## LEAVING THE ORDINARY WORLD

Leaving the ordinary world does not mean leaving it with one's body: it refers to the mind ground (*xindi* ). The body is like a lotus root, the mind is like a lotus blossom: the root is in the mud, the blossom is in the open air. For one who attains the Dao, the body is in the ordinary world, but the mind is in the realm of the sages.

Nowadays, people want to avoid death forever and leave the ordinary world. They are truly foolish: they do not understand the principle of the Dao.

I have written these fifteen essays in order to admonish the disciples of strong determination. If you examine them deeply and in all details, you will understand them.

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From the Catalogue

*The Seal of the Unity of the Three: A Study and Translation of the Cantong qi, the Source of the Taoist Way of the Golden Elixir*, by Fabrizio Pregadio.

Under an allusive poetical language teeming with images and symbols, the *Cantong qi* sets forth the teaching that gave origin to Internal Alchemy.

*Cultivating the Tao: Taoism and Internal Alchemy*, by Liu Yiming (1734–1821).

Written by one of the greatest masters of this tradition, *Cultivating the Tao* offers a comprehensive overview of the main principles of Internal Alchemy in 26 short chapters.

*Foundations of Internal Alchemy: The Taoist Practice of Neidan*, by Wang Mu.

A clear description of the practice of Internal Alchemy, based on the system of the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) with about two hundred quotations from original Taoist texts.

*Awakening to Reality: The “Regulated Verses” of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy*, by Zhang Boduan (987?–1082).

The *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) is one of best-known Taoist alchemical texts. Written in the 11th century, it describes in a poetical form the main facets of Internal Alchemy.

*Commentary on the Mirror for Compounding the Medicine: A Fourteenth-Century Work on Taoist Internal Alchemy*, by Wang Jie (?-ca. 1380).

Dating from the 10th century, the *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) describes the principles of Internal Alchemy in 20 poems. This book contains a complete translation of the text and of the commentary by Wang Jie, affiliated with the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) tradition.

[The World Upside Down: Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy](#), by Isabelle Robinet.

Four essays on Neidan translated for the first time into English. Their subjects are: (1) The alchemical principle of “inversion”; (2) The devices used by the alchemists to “manifest the authentic and absolute Tao”; (3) The role of numbers in Taoism and Internal Alchemy; (4) The meanings of the terms External Elixir and Internal Elixir.

## Notes

1. *Chongyang quanzhen ji* (Complete Reality: A Collection by Wang Chongyang), ch. 2 and 10, respectively. The expression “clarity and quiescence” (*qingjing* ) derives from the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 15.
2. On these terms, see the Introduction.
3. A single sentence, or even “a half sentence,” is said to be sufficient for transmission from master to disciple.
4. The expression “traveling in the clouds” (*yunyou* ), which also gives its title to this section, refers to the constant wandering of some Taoist and Buddhist adepts who do not have a permanent dwelling place.
5. I.e., it takes away from their means of support.
6. Or: “when their merit is completed.”
7. On these terms, see the Introduction.
8. On the terms Nature and Existence, see the Introduction.
9. According to one of several ways in which this sentence has been understood, birds are able to fly because they can control (*zhi* , i.e., “be in command of”) the *qi* (“breath”) of the clouds.
10. Lit., “will fill Qian ☰ and Kun ☷,” the trigrams that represent Heaven and Earth.
11. In Buddhism, the *dharma-body* (*dharmakāya* ) is the true and unmanifested body of the Buddha. Several Neidan masters use this term to mean the equally true, unmanifested, and immortal body of each person.