

## Return of the Sacred: Dual Cultivation in the *Jindan Zhenchuan* 金丹真傳

What is sexual alchemy? Scholars usually divide internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) into two main strands: solo and dual (or sexual) alchemy. While solo alchemy is well understood, the methods and nature of sexual alchemy remain unclear. The number of treatises on sexual alchemy is limited, they are usually written in a complex metaphorical language and often discuss no specific self-cultivation methods. In this article, I explore one of the major treatises of this tradition, *Jindan Zhenchuan* 金丹真傳, written during the late-Ming period. I show that dual cultivation is only one aspect of the self-cultivation path that this treatise describes. It asserts that a person loses vital power after puberty and becomes unable to emulate the ebb and flow of yin and yang. He, therefore, loses contact with the sacred and has no chance to achieve immortality by himself. The text maintains that a practitioner must rely on other people's help – dual cultivation partners, community, and even divine beings—to transform his body and mind, return to the Dao, restore the sacred in his life, and achieve immortality.

The *Jindan zhenchuan*, first published in 1615, was compiled by the Ming alchemist Sun Ruzhong 孫汝忠 (b.1575, fl.1616) who recorded the teaching of his father Sun Jiaoluan 孫教鸞 (1505-1610). The treatise contains the alleged teaching of Sun Jiaoluan, and three commentaries by Sun Ruzhong, Zhang Chonglie 張崇烈, and Li Kan 李堪 (n. d.). It also includes several short essays on the theory and practice of internal alchemy (Mozi 2020, 8).

At the beginning of the Qing period, the treatise drew the attention of several scholar-officials. Scholars consider two high-ranking officials, Qiu Zhaoao 仇兆鰲 and Tao Susi 陶素耜 belonging to Sun's lineage. Qiu was also a disciple of prominent Confucian thinker Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695). Famous Qing alchemist Li Xiyue claimed to be a disciple of a member of this lineage (Huo 2008, 42-45; Putuanzi 2014, 78; Wang Shiping 2013).

However, the *Jindan zhenchuan* remained a relatively unknown and secondary work until another Qing alchemist Fu Jinquan included it in his collection of internal alchemy treatises and published it. This publication boosted the popularity of the treatise, and by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was already well known and widely practiced. We can see the influence of the *Jindan zhenchuan* in the writings of the imminent late-Qing reformer and alchemist Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842-1922), who often mentions the scripture and discusses alchemists who cultivated the method it promulgates (Lai 2018).

The *Jindan zhenchuan* is arguably the most important treatise of the dual-cultivation tradition, and it clearly explains why one needs to rely on dual cultivation practice to achieve immortality. Internal alchemy hinges on emulating the ebb and flow of yin and yang: A solo practitioner replicates it using his essence, *qi*, and spirit. The *Jindan zhenchuan* describes this process as an interaction between blood and qi. The interaction between mother's blood and father's qi gives birth to a child, while the blood and qi inside a child's body spur his development and growth. After puberty, one becomes deficient in blood and qi and cannot replicate the ebb and flow of yin and yang. Having no enough vital strength, one is also losing contact with the force of creation and transformation.

Because of this reason, the *Jindan zhenchuan* maintains that one can achieve immortality only with other's people help. It is the theoretical fundament of sexual alchemy as one is supposed to replenish the virtual force with the help of sexual partners. However, the method that the treatise describes is much more complex and nuanced than simple sexual practice.

The method consists of two main elements. One of the essential passages of the texts reads:

補之之時，神交體不交，氣交形不交。雖交以不交，卻將彼血氣用法收來，與我精神兩相湊，而凝結為一。

When replenishing them [blood and qi], the spirit copulates, but the flesh does not; the qi copulates, but the physical form does not. Although one copulates, it is as if he does not copulate. Rather, take the other's blood and qi, gather it by means of the

method and merge it with your essence and spirit so that they will coalesce into oneness. (ZWDS 11:863.1b, see Wile 1992, 158)

The first element of the method is sometimes called “sex at a distance.” According to it, an adept replenishes the qi and blood with the help of a partner while having no physical intercourse. The *Jindan zhenchuan* maintains then one can do with the help of an instrument known as *tuoyue* 橐籥. In Daoist literature, *tuoyue* usually refers to breath that emulates the ebb and flow of yin and yang. However, for the authors of the *Jindan zhenchuan*, it is a physical instrument that allows practitioners to exchange qi and blood without having physical contact (Putuan zi 2014).

The second element of the method is spirit cultivation. The treatise maintains that an adept unifies his essence and spirit with the blood and spirit of his partners. Qiu Zhaoao explains what it practically means. According to the alchemical theory, an alchemist unifies the trigram Li with the trigram Kan and restores the trigram Qian. Li usually represents one’s spirit and Kan’s essence and qi, one’s body. Qiu notes that Li still embodies the spirit in dual cultivation practice, while Kan symbolizes the blood and qi of partners (Zhiji zi 2011, 519). In other words, a practitioner cultivates spirit by himself, but relies on others to imitate the physical element of practice that *Jindan zhenchuan* understands as the circulation of blood and qi.

The path to immortality described in the scripture consists of several well-defined stages. The text divides it into nine states, but we can distinguish the three main stages of the practice. First, a practitioner replenishes his qi and blood with the help of partners who use *tuoyue* to transfer their vital energy into the body of an adept. Partners are usually young girls, but it seems that it could be young boys also. Although they are sometimes referred to as “sexual partners,” no sexual intercourse takes place. We can call this part of self-cultivation a dual self-cultivation.

The second stage of the practice is much more complex, and I refer to it as communal cultivation. A practitioner continues to relay to partners, but he also requires the help of a community that includes three companions (呂 lu) and “yellow dame,” the term that arguably refers to a female mediator. A practitioner continues

to exchange the qi and blood with partners. However, he is supposed to do it according to the right rhythm that follows the cosmogonic patterns described by the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing*. A practitioner himself focuses on his spirit and enters into deep mediation. He became unable to control and even to pay attention to all that happens outside him. During the meditation, he refines his spirit, forms the golden elixir, and nourishes it. From this perspective, his self-cultivation is very similar to that of the proponents of solo practice. However, he still needs the help of the community and partners that spurs the interaction between blood and qi, thus emulating the ebb and flow of yin and yang.

This part of the practice finishes with something that looks like an actual ritual. The text defines this step of practice as “reversing the elixir” (還丹 *huandan*). It is the crucial stage of the practice when the sacred embryo is born, and a practitioner starts to live an immortal life. According to the text, a ritual master (whose identity is unclear) takes a “tiger” and a “tiger,” and they together walk around an altar according to cosmogonic rules using the “step of Yu” (禹步 *Yu bu*), a method widely used in Daoist rituals. “A ritual master” could be a companion or a practitioner himself – we do not know exactly. What is essential is that the practice of ritualized interactions transformed into a full-fledged ritual. The physiological practice of replenishing blood and qi became a pure ritualistic endeavor. Thus, the sacred return to the life of an adept.

An adept became even closer to the sacred after his yang-spirit leaves the body. In these last stages of the practice, an adept continues to rely on other’s help. In this case, however, “others” are gods and immortals themselves. They help a practitioner purify and strengthen his yang-spirit, merge it with Heaven, and become a member of the community of immortals. The practice is completed with an adept’s participation in a banquet at the Jade lake (瑤池 *yaochi*), the dwelling of the Queen Mother of the West (西王母 *Xiwangmu*).

The *Jingdan zhenchuan* divides the “practice” into nine stages. However, the last part of it could not be called a “practice” at all – visiting a Jade lake is a religious

inspiration but not actual “practice.” Therefore, this text is not just a set of practical instructions on sexual cultivation. It is a kind of religious manifest that shows how one can transform his ordinary life and body and restore the sacred to his life. The so-called “sexual cultivation” is not sexual, as it does not involve any physical intercourse. It is also an expression of the primary idea of the religious path of the treatise – an individual human is too weak to return the sacred to his life and achieve immortality. Religious practice requires community -- the community of assistants, companions, and even gods. The *Jindan zhenchuan* is a description of religious practice that combines alchemical cultivation and community help and gives hope for a practitioner to transform himself into a divine being.

### Abbreviations

ZWDS—Zangwai daoshu 藏外道書 (Daoist Texts outside the Canon),36 vols.1992-1994. Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe.

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