

Female Alchemy

Transformation of a Gendered Body

Elena Valussi

What aspect of the body constitutes a woman's potential capacities, and what part articulates her oppression?

—Zillah Eisenstein, *The Female Body and the Law*

A mechanistic understanding of the body is harmful to feminist theory because it deprives women's bodies of agency by reducing the body to a passive object, seen as a tool or instrument of an intentional will rather than a locus of power and resistance.

—Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*

Introduction

Female alchemy (*nüdan* 女丹) is a textual tradition of Daoist meditation and physiological exercises for women that emerged in China in the seventeenth century and developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ It is part and parcel of the much older inner alchemy (*neidan* 内丹) tradition, which advocates the possibility of achieving immortality through the progressive refinement of the body, aided by meditation, breathing, visualization, and massage exercises. Differently from *neidan*, though, *nüdan* adapts its theory and practice specifically to the female body. *Neidan* emerged in China in the Song dynasty (960–1279), and, until the emergence of *nüdan* much later on, it was considered a genderless practice, available to men and

women alike, though there was, for social and historical reasons, much less participation by women. The first individual *nüdan* texts started appearing at the end of the Ming dynasty, and the first full-fledged collections appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

With the advent of *nüdan* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *neidan* was immediately given a gender valence and called, in *nüdan* manuals, *nandan* 男丹 (male alchemy). The introduction of *nüdan* as a category then marks a necessity to create a female sphere of activities in this field, where the woman is the central actor. The reasons for this new necessity, and the impetus for change behind it, are at the basis of this chapter.

Specifically, I entertain these questions: What can the *nüdan* tradition tell us about the interaction between power and subservience in gender relations? What does this tradition reveal about the level of agency Chinese women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had over their bodies, in their world, and in society? Was *nüdan* tailored to women's bodies in order to satisfy the needs of a specific historical time, or was its emergence a response to women's desires and demands? I answer these questions by looking at the way this tradition is presented in the prefaces to the texts as well as by the way the female body is presented in the texts themselves. I argue that the appearance of *nüdan* reveals interesting aspects of the power relations between men and women, and that this relationship is displayed before us in the texts of the *nüdan* tradition through the description of female and male bodies, their differences and similarities. What we find is often parallel to what emerges in other contemporary writings about and by women, both religious and literary; however, with *nüdan* we are given a different perspective, because it combines in a unique way women's spirituality and their physical structure. I believe that the emergence of *nüdan* in this period denotes simultaneously the necessity of creating a female sphere of activities in this field, where the woman was the central actor, as well as a spiritual modality for women that would be safe and controllable. On a deeper level, however, *nüdan* texts and practices reflect Qing pervasive anxieties over women's public religious activities and their desire to contain them.

What defines a *nüdan* text? A *nüdan* text describes a woman's quest for achieving immortality through physical and mental transformation. This transformation is brought about by following a standard sequence of practices that include breathing exercises, internal visualizations, self-massage, mental concentration, and the suppression of emotions. This process is very similar in its structure to the non-gender-specific process of realization in *neidan* texts, which proceeds from *jing* 精 (essence/semen) to *qi* 氣, from *qi* to *shen* 神 (spirit), and from *shen* to *xuwu* 虛無 (vacuity). Female alchemy,

though, uses a very specific technical language referring to body parts and processes inherent to the female body. The three main stages of the practice are transforming blood (*xue* 血) into *qi*, transforming *qi* into spirit, and transforming spirit into vacuity. While the second and third stages are very similar to the parallel ones in standard *neidan* practice, the first is very different, because the primary element to be transformed into energy is blood, not essence. This first stage is also called “refining the form of the Great Yin” (*taiyin lianxing* 太陰煉形), as opposed to what is referred to as the male practice of refining the *qi* of the great Yang (*taiyang lianqi* 太陽煉氣). The blood that the texts refer to, and the main element to be transformed, is menstrual blood; in *nüdan* texts, it is often referred to as the Red Dragon (*chilong* 赤龍).

The physical starting point for female practice is also different. Women start from the Sea of Blood (*xuehai* 血海), three and a half inches below the navel, which is not to be confused with the lower *dantian* 丹田, where the male practice begins. The Sea of Blood is the reservoir where the menstrual blood gathers before the transformation takes place. In *nüdan*, blood is considered to be the most fundamental element of the female body. It is an element that pervades a woman in different guises; it gathers in the Sea of Blood, ascends to the breasts as breast milk, and descends and flows out of the body as menstrual blood. It is through the loss of menstrual blood that female energies are depleted. This depletion is what is to be counteracted by alchemical practice, through the practice called Beheading the Red Dragon (*zhan chilong* 斬赤龍). The process of transformation involves breathing exercises and massaging the breasts (*rufang* 乳房). The breasts, and especially the point between the breasts (*ruxi* 乳溪), are an essential locus and passage of this transformation.²

Once a woman has transformed her bloody constitution, her breasts will shrink, her body will stop shedding menstrual blood, her structure will become more like a man's, and her practice will continue like that of a man. The male body and male practice are assumed to be the standard on which female practice models itself, in the same way that both males and females strive to produce a pure yang (and not, in the case of women, a pure yin) body. Issues including the necessity for women to transform blood, which is a polluting substance in many traditions including the Chinese; the necessity to gradually eliminate obvious female outer sexual attributes; and the fact the female body will resemble more and more a male body by the end of the practice all invite a discussion of gender identity, gender imbalance, and societal and cultural influence on religious practice in these texts.³

Different from *neidan*, then, which was practiced mainly by men but was never only directed at men, *nüdan*, from its inception, is thus eminently

“female.” It describes the female body as inherently different from the male body, and thus it proposes physiological exercises, inner visualizations, and self-massages that are closely tailored specifically to the female body, its processes, its loci, and its fluids. The process is also very much tuned into the specificity of “female” health issues (menstrual blockages, problems caused by menopause, stagnation). The goal of female practice, as in standard alchemical practice, is to refine one’s constitution, reclaiming the energies with which one is endowed at birth and which get depleted as one grows old, in this way delaying or deleting the hour of death. In these texts, for the first time, we see a detailed description of men and women’s inherently different structures. This gives a solid base to the claim for a gender-differentiated alchemical theory, which in turn allows for different practices.

A Brief History of *nüdan* Texts

It is necessary here to include a very brief look at the historical emergence and development of *nüdan* into a full-fledged tradition parallel to *neidan* by the nineteenth century.⁴ The beginning stage of *nüdan* text production is exemplified by texts written by the physicians Fu Shan 傅山 (1606–1684) and Cao Heng 曹珩 (fl. 1632). The general readership of such compendia might include other male physicians as well as readers interested in immortality techniques. These texts do not reflect a self-aware *nüdan* tradition, nor did they target a specifically female readership.⁵

The mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century represents the second stage of the *nüdan* text tradition, when such texts surfaced in different parts of the country, mainly during spirit-writing séances. Within the context of spirit-writing cults, there emerges a more coherent portrayal of the tradition; together with the emergence of chastity and proper female behavior, these are central to the writings. Examples include short texts in Liu Yiming’s 劉一明 (1734–1821) and Min Yide’s 閔一得 (1758–1836) larger *neidan* collections as well as the first *nüdan* collection, titled *Nüjindan fayao* 女金丹法要 (Essential Methods for the Female Golden Elixir, 1813), received and edited by Fu Jinquan 傅金銓 (fl. 1820).⁶

In the 1906 collection *Nüdan hebian* 女丹合編 (Collection of Female Alchemy), edited by He Longxiang 賀龍驤 (fl. 1906) in Chengdu, we see the emergence of the authority of the editor and its preeminence over the authorities of the spirits who had transmitted the texts in the previous phase.⁷ During this third stage of the *nüdan* tradition, preexisting texts were

reorganized more “rationally” and “inconsistencies” were deleted; the original message behind the production of these texts and their divine origin was reshaped dramatically to serve different ideologies. This is even more evident in the 1936 collection *Nüzi daoxue xiacongshu wuzhong* 女子道學小叢書五種 (Small Encyclopedia in Five Books on the Female Learning of the Dao), edited by Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧 (1880–1969), who uses *nüdan* as a tool for female self-strengthening in the face of foreign invasion.⁸

The fourth stage spans the 1980s and 1990s, and the texts have been republished and used as medical self-help tools in which religious origins are completely deleted. These publications are to be seen in the context of a general resurgence of publications on *qigong*, medicine, and self-help books. Examples are the *Nüdan jicui* 女丹集萃 (Selection of the Best Texts on Female Alchemy), published in 1989,⁹ and the *Nüdan hebian xuanzhu* 女丹合編選注 (Annotated Selections from the *Nüdan hebian*), published in Chengdu in 1991.¹⁰ The first publication includes an introduction by the main editor of the series, the well-known Daoist scholar Tao Bingfu. The book is a collection of excerpts from various *nüdan* texts and collections, and in the introduction Tao attempts to streamline the process for the target audience of *qigong* practitioners. The term used for the practice is, interestingly, not *nüdan* (female alchemy) but *nüzi liangong* (practice for women), a term less tied to religion and more to physical well-being. The second publication is a reprinting of selected passages from the *Nüdan hebian*, edited and annotated by two physicians. In the introduction to this publication, as in the previous one, the term *nüdan* is never mentioned. Instead, the authors prefer to present this practice as *nüzi qigong* (*qigong* for women), which also sidelines the religious elements.

The fifth stage has become apparent in the last decade, as temples and Daoist practitioners have rediscovered their religious and spiritual valence, which were eliminated in the 1930s, and have reappropriated this tradition as a spiritual one.

The Rise of *nüdan* and Its Social Context

Before the mid-nineteenth century, even though most if not all of those who could afford alchemical practice had always been men, *neidan* texts had never clearly differentiated their practitioners. By stating this difference, and acknowledging that what had been written before that time was therefore mainly directed to men, writers of female alchemy texts formed

and at the same time satisfied the need for a tradition of female alchemy. Why was there the need for such a tradition, after centuries of nongendered alchemical treatises?

From a purely social point of view, practice was always easier for men than for women. The Daoist alchemical practices required years of study and training; access to separate, quiet, and purified quarters set in a specific wooded landscape; the presence of helpers for the critical times of trance and of masters to follow and indicate the right way; freedom from familial and social ties to pursue these activities; and money or sponsors to set up this whole organization.¹¹ The sociohistorical reality often made it difficult for women to be active participants in such practices. Thus, even though nongendered in principle, in practice inner alchemy had been, since its full-fledged development in the Song, a mainly male domain, written and performed by males. By the late eighteenth century, women had begun to be mentioned in alchemical texts but mostly as tools to be used, as cauldrons in male practices, or as colleagues in “dual cultivation.”¹²

The late imperial period, when *nüdan* flourished, has been described by many as a period of heightened awareness toward female proper behavior, of increased focus on female chastity, and generally a period delineated by much stricter rules about male-female relationships. Scholars have discussed several aspects of this changed attitude toward women. Janet Theiss has analyzed the emergence of a cult of female chastity, with a sharp increase in the construction of commemorative arches in honor of chaste widows and women.¹³ Weijing Lu has rendered this inquiry into female chastity more complex by explaining the Faithful Maiden cult, in which young women whose fiancés had died either committed suicide or decided to live chastly ever after, as an active and engaged choice on the part of women who wanted to be remembered as moral heroes.¹⁴ Susan Mann has discussed the greater degree of segregation of the inner quarters, which she interprets as an attempt to preserve a changing social order through the regulation of women’s activities, bodies, and fertility. Maram Epstein has analyzed works of fiction and found examples of literati nostalgia for a cosmic order between the genders, in a period of great social and political disorder and instability.¹⁵

At the same time, though, this is also a period that saw a boom in the printing industry, especially in the area of books for and about women. These ranged from family handbooks to tales of women’s exemplary lives, from orthodox writings on female proper behavior to sentimental romances and to books on female alchemy. There was also a flourishing of women writers, whose collected works started to appear in print¹⁶ as well as an increased participation of women in cultic activities outside the home, which

was strongly criticized by a part of the Confucian elite.¹⁷ The stricter rules described previously and the harsh criticism are part of a normative stance, but as Dorothy Ko pointed out in her study of Chinese women in the seventeenth century, the reality on the ground might have been quite different. According to her study, traditional women were, in different and very creative ways, negotiating with a restrictive Confucian ideology, “crafting a space from within the prevailing gender system that gave them meaning, solace and dignity.”¹⁸

With the increasing availability of written texts in most households, the spread of literacy to women of higher classes, and women’s increasingly active involvement in religious activities, we could read the birth of this tradition as a welcome development that takes into account the differences of the female physiology from the male and the different social needs of women. We could read it as a development that followed what was happening in the Chinese medical field where women’s medicine (*fuke* 婦科)—with its attention to problems of gestation, pregnancy, postpartum, and menstrual regularity—was already well established.¹⁹ We could read it as a response to a request from women who, since they were very active in other cultural areas, had a desire to follow a spiritual path tailored for them. However, if we pay attention to the historical moment in which this tradition emerged, and to the discourse elaborated on in the prefaces, we could also read it as a way to forcibly divide men and women practitioners and to confine women and their practice to the safety of the home; this would eliminate the need for women to seek spiritual instruction outside the home and in the company of men, as this was perceived to be problematic.²⁰

The *nüdan* Discourse and the Patriarchal Tradition

Prefaces to female alchemy texts and collections are very important in understanding the reasons for the emergence of this tradition and the rationale behind it. In the prefaces, the male editors clearly articulate a need for this tradition. In the prefaces to two important collections published almost one hundred years apart by two influential male editors—the *Nüdan hebian*, collected by He Longxiang, and the *Nüjindan fayao*, collected by Fu Jinquan—this is how it is explained:

There are heaven and earth and then there are men and women. Of men, many attain immortality; of women, few attain

immortality. Why? Because men can wander and look for the Dao, whereas for women it is difficult to leave home and find a master. Alchemical books for men are very numerous, but alchemical books for women are few and far between and are not transmitted. Seven or eight men out of ten can read and understand a written text, but only one or two out of a hundred women can.

有天地即有男女，男子成仙者多，女子成仙者少。何也？蓋男子可以遊方訪道，女子難以出門求師。男丹經汗牛充棟，隨地可購；女丹經零星散漫，無有專書。男能識字解義者十有七八，女能識字解義者百難一二。²¹

Finding a master is very difficult. Men can go and seek fortune [to meet a master] with affinity for ten thousand *li*, but for women, leaving the inner chamber by just half a step is very difficult.

然得師甚難。蓋男可尋緣萬里，女則跬步難離閨闥故也。²²

There is a revealing insistence on the same set of themes in every preface: texts for women are lacking, and as a consequence very few women who want to practice inner alchemy are able to realize their desire. Being always confined in the inner quarters, they have no chance to meet teachers and have no discernment between good and bad teachers, or right and wrong practices. In this situation, the writers say, what could be better than a practice with which, without leaving home, the young girl can transform her *qi*, the old lady can ward off illnesses, and the widow can maintain her chastity?

These prefaces aim at presenting *nüdan* as a safe, controllable, and manageable female practice, one that would not take women away from home or expose them to improper influences. But are the editors of these books responding to a real need expressed by women who could not leave the home, who could read only simple books, and who were tired of having to apply non-gender-specific techniques to their bodies? And is the reality of the female condition in this period the one expressed in the prefaces? Is this a normative document, in fact a worried response to activities deemed dangerous in which women were already engaging?

Looking again, a little more information can be gleaned from the prefaces; we start to understand that there are different categories of women

involved. Indeed, it is misleading to generalize about the category “Chinese women.”²³ According to He’s preface, this collection was created as a direct response to a request by female members of his family, first among them his mother, who wanted to know more about the female way to immortality but had no means to find out by herself because of her lack of experience and of access to the outside world. Here is how He himself describes the genesis of the collection:

This (*nüdan*) is what my mother delighted in for almost thirty years without growing weary of it. After this, my elder brother’s wife, my niece, my wife, my daughter, and many aunts and cousins of our clan continue to delight in it. If you talk about instructions and injunctions, they understand, but if you ask about the practice, then they are uncertain. My mother was sad about this. She ordered that I put my body and mind into [solving this problem].

此家慈所以樂此幾三十年不倦也。厥後，吾嫂，吾姪女，吾妾，吾女，吾族親諸姑伯姊相繼樂此者，甚不乏人。言戒言定，亦有進境，而叩其命工，則茫然。家慈憂之，命吾放下身心。²⁴

In the same introduction, though, we also find a list of behaviors, criticized by He, in which other (less responsible?) women engaged. The list offers us a glimpse into a diverse and lively world of spirituality for women. One part lists wrong behaviors caused by ignorance of the correct way to practice:

There are those who do not discriminate between Qian 乾 and Kun 坤²⁵ and do not know that there are differences between female alchemy and male alchemy. There are those who know alchemical books for men but do not know that there are books for women. There are those who are converted to the Buddhist faith; they chant sutras and refine their inner nature but do not know that the crucial idea of the formulae for female alchemy is that you start from physiological practices. There are those who are converted to the mysterious way but still wrongly point at the male *qi* cavity, one *cun* and three *fen* below the navel, as the female mysterious pass. There are those who return and enter the “hall of goodness” but only know about fasting, revering the spirits, chanting the sutras, worshipping the Buddha, and

releasing captive animals; they do meritorious acts in order to invite good fortune and to avoid problems, but they do not know that for women the most important and pressing need is to behead the red dragon.

有籠統乾坤，不知與男丹有別者。有知男丹經，而不知有女丹經者。有皈依佛門，唸佛修性，而不知點女丹訣竅以修命者。有皈依玄門，以男子臍下一寸三分中之炁穴誤指為女玄關者。有歸入善堂，祇知吃齋敬神，唸經拜佛，放生行善，邀福免禍，而不知女子修行以斬赤龍為急務者。²⁶

Other women are hindered in their spiritual progress by social, economical, or family problems and cannot devote enough time and effort to the practice:

There are those who desire to practice keeping their chastity, but they are obstructed by relatives of their natal family. There are those who wish to keep faithful to the rules in practicing, but they are not accepted by relatives of their husband's family.

有願守貞修行，而為娘家眷屬阻擾者。有願守節修行，而不見容於婆家眷屬者。²⁷

Another part lists wrong behaviors that seem to be caused not by ignorance or strife but by sheer (and shrewd) will:

There are those who secretly attract good girls to serve as human cauldrons (sexual tools), as they serve as the intermediary, the result being that they lose their name and integrity. There are those good women who are seduced by [male] sexual practitioners and willing to serve as cauldrons in order to attain immortality, but they soon lose their name and integrity. There are those (women) who go on pilgrimage, enter temples, and casually seek instructions from Buddhist and Daoist monks or male teachers of charitable families, ending up planting the seed of passion. There are those Buddhist and Daoist nuns and female teachers of charitable families, . . . they use the techniques of talismanic emblems, incantatory seals, spirit water, spirit swords, spirit blows, stepping on constellations, scorched cinnabar, ingesting

medicines, circulating them in the four directions, disclosing them to women, and using the Dao to collect riches.

有暗引良女作人爐鼎，已作黃婆，因而自敗名節者。有良女爲御女家所惑，甘作爐鼎，以求成仙，繼而敗名節者。有朝山入廟，亂投僧道或善門男師，種下情根者。有尼姑道姑及善門師...以符章，咒印，神水，神劍，神打，步斗，燒丹，服餌之術，周流四方，開示女流，借道歛財者。²⁸

So there were women who were asking the lead male member of the family to provide useful information about the “correct” way to practice, like those in He Longxiang’s family. But there were also “ignorant” women who were practicing whatever came their way and those who found themselves too tied to familial obligations and gave up the practice. There were women who cast aside doubts of impropriety, willfully participated in sexual unions with the aim of reaching immortality, and enjoyed it too. There were women, nuns or lay, who freely participated in pilgrimages and were thus chastised as promiscuous. There were even those women who made money on the ignorance of other women. Some of these behaviors might belong to women who were “crafting a space,” in Ko’s words, within the Confucian system, but some others were in clear defiance of it.

In the introduction to the *Nüdan hebian*, we also find a revealing discussion of the general age and family situation of the women targeted by the editors of these collections:

As for those wives whose personal affairs are still unfinished,²⁹ do not by any means transmit [the teaching to them] foolishly; you only ought to advise them to cultivate inner nature and cut desires, to be filial to their mother-in-law, and to respect their husbands.

婦人事未了，切勿妄傳，只宜勸伊養性，寡慾，孝姑，敬夫。³⁰

From this and other excerpts it is clear that women were encouraged to wait until they had performed their Confucian duties before taking up *nüdan*, to be faithful to their husband and fulfill their desire for offspring, and to respect and support their mother-in-law. This indicates that women were in general encouraged to take up the practice of *nüdan* (which would require chastity and eliminate their menstrual period) only after having fulfilled

their duties to the patrilinear family—therefore, in their middle and old age. This is in part confirmed by the fact that menopause and its effects on the practice is discussed at length in these texts, thus suggesting that the problems of menopausal and post-menopausal women were preeminent.

Female Physiology and Its Transformations

As mentioned previously, this tradition, more than *neidan*, focuses specifically on the physiology of the female body, its fluids, its organs, and its transformations. Paramount attention is given to blood, seen both as the main source of vitality in the body and as menstrual blood, which, because it is discarded every month, leads to depletion of that very vitality. The following is a detailed description of the essential elements of female physiology according to *nüdan* texts and how *nüdan* practice will transform these bodily differences.

The Transformation of Blood

When a female is still young, and the heavenly water fills the measure of one *jin*, the authentic original *qi* of the elixir field is sufficient³¹ and ascends toward the origin of blood to produce blood. At this point, the yang reaches its apogee and transforms into yin and the turbid flux that flows outside the body.

當其少也，天癸滿一斤之數，丹田真元之氣足，上升血元生血。陽極變陰，化濁經而流形於外。³²

After beheading the red dragon, the woman's body will change into that of an adolescent, and the yin, turbid blood, will naturally cease to flow downward. She will then be able to escape death and enter life.

女子赤龍斬，則變爲童體，而陰濁之血自不下行，可以出死，可以入生。³³

For Chinese medicine, concerns about the female body, female health, sickness, and treatment revolved around the idea that blood, as its energetic basis, flows around the body, is discharged through menstruation, feeds the unborn child, and transforms into breast milk. With this in mind, any cure was approached as an intervention on a woman's inherent

depletion and coldness, as well as a way to promote blood flow and avert its congestion. For female alchemy this consideration of health was just the starting point of a radical transformation that still had blood as its main actor. In *nüdan* theory and practice, blood did not just need to be corrected and supported in its flow, but in addition to keeping its role as the energetic base of a woman, blood needed to be further transformed into a finer and more ethereal substance in order not to be dispersed anymore through menstruation, childbirth, or lactation. This ethereal substance would be the basis of the immortal embryo and not the basis for a healthy reproductive life. So a woman needs to treasure her blood and not allow it to flow outside the body. This, however, can be challenging, as is described in this quotation:

When a girl is young, . . . she has a little bit of the “first menses” hidden inside the vagina; it is like a star or pearl; it is the great treasure from the before-heaven stage stored above the Kun abdomen. Its seat is within the Central Yellow region. If she knows to purify her nature, not to watch licentious plays, and not to hear licentious poems; . . . if in her actions she follows the rules of womanly behavior and is at ease in her tranquility, then this “thing” . . . will become the primal one and will not transform into the Red Pearl, will not become the heavenly water. This is unlike common women, who do not know this; they have a child-like nature and like to move about, to play and have fun, to jump and run. Invariably, this will cause their *qi* to move and their heart/mind to be agitated; their vitalities will become internally confused and their true *qi* will be unstable. Then, this star-like heavenly treasure will melt, will be hot like fire, and will forcefully open the door and descend, rushing through the vagina and coming out. The world calls this heavenly water.

蓋言女子 . . . 時當年少 . . . 於斯時也, 自有一點初經含於內牝, 如星如珠, 乃是先天至寶, 藏於坤腹之上, 位在中黃之中. 女子斯時, 若知潔性, 不看淫戲, 不聽淫詞, . . . 動循內則, 靜則釋如, 則此一物, . . . 便成元一, 不變赤珠, 不化天癸. 無如凡女無知, 童性喜動, 或隨嬉戲, 或逐跳奔, 不無氣動心搖, 精神內亂, 真氣不固. 則此星星天寶, 油然融化, 其熱如火, 奪門而下, 破扉而出, 舉世名曰天癸.³⁴

Women are described as at the mercy of the powerful force of their own menstrual blood. This is related to the very nature of women, “child-like,”

full of energy and desire and thus, though not explicitly mentioned, unable to control themselves emotionally and, therefore, morally.

The Transformation of Female Sexuality and Desire

As hinted at in the previous quotation, women need to conquer their emotions and sexuality in order to succeed in their spiritual transformation. As is well known, one of the concerns raised by allowing women to leave the home, participate in pilgrimages, and meet with (male) teachers is women's unbridled sexuality. Sexuality and desire are not only a problem when women attend outside gatherings but also during practice itself. Thus, women are not only aroused by their contact with male teachers, but sexuality seems to get in the way of their personal practice too. In fact, a serious obstacle against the successful completion of the practice, even when alone in the safety of the inner quarters, is sexual desire. The *Nüjindan* 女金丹 (Female Golden Elixir) reads:

A woman's inner nature and feelings are easily unsettled; as soon as she covets sex, then the fire of her desire will burn her body, and the feelings will be hard to control. If she does not have a husband to follow her desire, she will inevitably engage in shameful conduct. Even if this does not cause her to lose her chastity, as soon as her heart/mind moves, the fire will take over her whole body, and her vitalities will no longer be preserved inside.

婦女之性情易蕩，一貪淫事，則慾火焚身，情難自禁。無夫以遂其欲，必有喪廉之行。即使不至失身，淫心一動，火逼一身，精氣已不存於中矣。³⁵

The *Xiwangmu nüxiu zhengtū shize* by Min Yide also describes in detail the sexual feelings that might arise during practice, especially when it focuses on the area of the genitals:

As for the infant's palace (uterus), the body feels a gust of warm *qi* encircling it; at this time, it is particularly important to lock the "gate of the spring" (vagina) and not allow it to relax. If you obtain a feeling of pleasure, you should mostly fear the arising of random thoughts; there might be a slight feeling of passion, which will lead to a sensation of numbness throughout the whole

body. If you do not realize that you ought immediately to curb the emotions, this is where the immortal and mortal ways part.

若夫子宮體得一陣熱氣盤旋,此時泉扉更宜緊閉,莫教放鬆。得有逸趣,最忌念起,稍有戀情,便致遍體酥麻。非惟急宜定情,仙凡從此兩分。³⁶

Min's notes on the text are even more specific:

When we talk about the necessity to “lock,” we cannot be vague about the meaning. If the gate is locked but relaxed ever so slightly, the true *qi* will leak out from it. . . . At this time, inside the gate there will be an extraordinary ticklish sensation, and after having gone through the “lifting and locking,” then in the “feminine” (female genitals) you will have a feeling of great pleasure. If you do not curb this feeling, then this will definitely lead to a sensation of numbness throughout the body, and you will enter the “sea of feelings.” Even though you desire to stop these feelings, you might not be able to.

言當緊閉,不可大意。扉閉稍鬆,真氣扉洩. . . . 蓋以其時,扉內必有非凡震癢,再經提閉,則此牝內必得非常逸趣。不加定情,必致遍體酥麻,溜入情海,雖欲定情,恐不及矣。³⁷

Since female practice does involve focusing on the genital area, the previous text warns women about letting feelings of sexual desire overcome the practice. The female body is not only ruled by blood but by its own desires.

Body Transformation and Sex Change

Thus the aim of practice is to transform the female body and to go beyond the elements like blood, excessive desire, and bodily functions that keep it linked to the earth. Through *nüdan* practice the female body is transformed and loses its more visible sexual characteristics: the breasts shrink, the menstrual period is reabsorbed and does not flow anymore. There are more subtle changes too. Sexual desire is overcome, and the body feels lighter. This change is summed up in this way in the texts:

When the female red channel has been cut, then her body will change and look like a male body; then the yin and turbid blood

will naturally not travel downward. She will be able to escape death and enter life.

女子赤脈斬，則變為男體，而陰濁之血自不下行，可以出死，可以入生。³⁸

Intention is focused on the breasts, left and right revolving thirty-six times in each direction. The lips [are sealed] above and below, the teeth clench firmly, and the nostrils are closed tightly. Use internal breathing. On the breasts, with the palms of your hands, massage seventy-two times each side, first slowly and then more urgently, first lightly and then strongly. In a hundred days the work will be completed, and they will acquire the form of walnuts.

意注兩乳，左右各旋三十六次。唇門上下，牙齒咬住，鼻孔關閉，用內呼吸。在乳房內，以兩手心，各左右揉，七十二次。先緩後急，先輕後重。百日工全，成核桃形。³⁹

Tranquil and quiet, pure and peaceful, nurture inner nature and feelings.

The way of women indeed has complete virtue and is not light.

Concentrate often on the breasts and on the sea of blood, in this way the form will shrink and unite with the *taiyin*.

幽閒貞靜養性情，婦道克全德匪輕。
乳房血海常留意，將形收斂合太陰。⁴⁰

Menstrual blood and the breasts are the most outwardly visible signs of gender difference between male and female bodies, and through practice the woman is working to delete these signs of difference in order to come closer to an ideal body able to achieve transcendence. The language used to describe this transformation reveals underlying ideas about what constitutes a “realized” body. The female body becomes increasingly like that of a male, losing the menstrual period and some outer sexual attributes. However, in *neidan*, the male practitioner, too, considerably transforms his body:

If you transform the menses into *qi* then the breasts will shrink and be like those of a man, and the period will not leak any

longer. Likewise, in a male who has refined his semen into *qi*, the yin root (penis) will shrink and be like that of a boy and the semen will not leak any longer.

返經成炁, 則乳縮如男子, 而經自不漏. 若男子則煉精化炁, 陰根縮如童子, 而精自不漏.⁴¹

Does the female body really change into a male body? This question is directly asked by a practitioner to the Longmen master Liu Yiming, who refers in this way to the changes that take place in the bodies of *nüdan* practitioners:

It was asked: Once the golden elixir has been achieved, if you swallow it and gulp it down, women will turn into men, and old people will turn into young. Is this so or not?

He answered: This is talking about its principle, not about its form. After women complete the Dao, they peel away all yin, and they transform themselves into a pure yang body; this is the same as men achieving the Dao. Therefore it is said: “Women change into men.” [In the same way], the old, once they have achieved the Dao and returned to the before-Heaven stage, complete their yang pure body, which is the same as that of a youth in full bloom. Therefore it is said: “The old reverts to young.” It is not talking about changing its illusory image (physical body).

問曰: 金丹成就, 吞而服之, 女轉成男, 老變為童. 此事有否?
答曰: 此言其理, 不言其形. 女子成道以後, 剝盡群陰, 變為春陽之體, 與男子成道相同. 故曰女轉成男. 老者成道以後, 復還先天, 成其春陽之體, 與童子圓滿相同. 故曰: 老變為童. 非言其變幻像也.⁴²

The previous passage seems to indicate that the issue is not so much that of sex change but more that of a shedding, on the part of a woman, of all her womanly characteristics, which are inherently yin, leaving her with a body that is pure yang. The man has to undergo a similar metamorphosis, resulting in a body of pure yang. But there is a difference. Since a man starts the practice with a body that is mostly yang, he does not need to change his outer image so dramatically as the woman. The woman is required to lose her femininity, all the characteristics that identify her as a woman and reach a yang bodily form, widely identified as an idealized male bodily form.

Cosmological Transformations: Yin and Yang, Kun 坤 and Qian 乾, and Kan 坎 and Li 離

Thus, while the ultimate goal is the same for men and women, women still need to practice differently, due to the nature of their constitutions. While there is ample discussion of bodily functions, there is also a linking of these functions to a higher cosmological order that involves changes of yin and yang, Qian and Kun, and Kan and Li:

Just as the man is yang, and yang is pure, the woman is yin, and yin is impure. Male nature is hard, while female nature is soft. . . . The man is associated with the trigram Li and, like the sun, he can complete a whole circuit of the Heavens in one year. The woman is associated with the trigram Kan and, like the moon, she can complete a whole circuit of the Heavens in one month.

如男屬陽，陽則清；女屬陰，陰則濁。男性剛，女性柔。 . . . 男爲離，如日，一年一週天。女爲坎，如月，一月一週天。⁴³

While Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ are the absolute male and female symbols before creation starts (*xiantian* 先天), one step further, after creation (*houtian* 後天), man and woman are associated with the *Yijing* trigrams Li ☲ and Kan ☵. The male structure is likened to that of the trigram Li, yang outside and yin inside, and the female structure to that of the trigram Kan, yin outside and yang inside. Kan and Li are closely related to Qian and Kun; they are the result of the very joining of those two principles. Once Qian and Kun join, their internal lines exchange, and pure yang and pure yin are mixed to produce Kan and Li. The aim of the practice, in *nüdan* as well as in *neidan*, is always to reconstruct the pure yang, to reposition the yang line within Kan into Li, thus re-forming Qian, reestablishing the original cosmic order of heaven, and producing the elixir. This aim is attained by transforming both Kan and Li into Qian.

Role Reversal: Da Zhangfu 大丈夫

However, the gender distinctions do not seem to end here. Once the female body has been transformed and the blood refined, the woman, working harder than a man to achieve the same result, has completed an extremely hard process. If she concludes this difficult stage, she is often praised as “man-inside-the-woman”:

If it is a case of a man-in-the-woman (extraordinary woman) and she follows the masters' oral sayings to practice the [method of] "the great yin refines the form," in the course of three to five years she will be able to complete the Dao. Her method saves even more energy than the male [method]. But the man-inside-the-woman is the most difficult thing to obtain. Those most difficult to find are women who are strong and brilliant; they have to surpass men's strength by a hundred times, and only then can they resolve matters. For those women whose strength is equal to men's, it is not possible in thousands of millions.

果是女中丈夫，得師口訣，行大陰煉形法，三五年間即可成道。其法更男子省力。但女中丈夫最不易得。不易得者，女子剛烈，須過男子百倍之力者，方能濟事。若與男子等力者，萬萬不能。⁴⁴

The notion of exceptionality in women and its link to maleness is not new in religious writings involving women. Both Miriam Levering and Beata Grant, in their studies of Song and Qing dynasty female religious figures, discuss the rhetoric that grows around female religious figures who do indeed achieve a prominent place in society and have a fulfilling religious career.⁴⁵ Levering approaches the question of gender equality vis-à-vis enlightenment. The Song masters whose writings she analyzes all share the view that, in the perspective of enlightenment, gender is unimportant. Yet, if we look more closely, we are presented with a very subtle double rhetoric. On the one hand, the Chan tradition is clear on the overall doctrinal question of whether maleness or femaleness is relevant to the project of becoming enlightened; on the other, there is a use of gender-linked terms to refer to qualities needed for enlightenment that is revealing: the message is that only an exceptional woman can expect to attain enlightenment.⁴⁶

The specific gender-linked term to which Levering alludes is the definition of "hero" or "great man" (*da zhangfu*). This term clearly conveys the idea of "manliness," as opposed to "womanliness,"⁴⁷ but it is used in the texts that Levering analyzes to refer to the women who attain enlightenment.⁴⁸ The need for a woman to have male psychological characteristics, to be a *da zhangfu*, a great hero, in her pursuit of enlightenment, is clear in most of the texts analyzed by Levering, by Grant, and by me. There is no possibility of being a great heroine, of being a woman and excelling in womanly characteristics and at the same time being considered enlightened;

“this tradition does not allow women’s characteristics and language to have an equal influence on its expressive forms.”⁴⁹

As noted earlier, when a woman achieves her religious goal, she transcends all differences and is not a woman anymore. In a parallel way, men, too, transcend gender differences, once they have completed their training. But while male characteristics are the model for transcendence, the category “woman” is still used to indicate a being incapable of transcendence.

A woman wishing to pursue a religious path needs to show proof of her manliness before getting to the stage where sex and gender differentiations are no longer valid. Even when she has reached that level, she will still be praised in terms of “male” achievements or will be asked to change her form to a male form. Whoever cannot master realization will be called “a woman,” since this category is inherently lacking.

Conclusion

In traditional Chinese correlative thinking, the cosmos is divided into the complementary and interdependent forces of yin and yang. Many describe the vision of the cosmological body in Daoist texts as composed equally of yin and yang elements. Roger Ames has described the Daoist ideal as well as the Daoist person as truly androgynous, “a person in whom the masculine and feminine gender traits are integrated in some harmonious and balanced relationship.”⁵⁰ Whether or not one agrees with this description of a Daoist “person” (Is he/she initially a man or a woman? What is their position in society?), the question is even more complicated when it comes to inner alchemy. It seems clear, especially when this process of continuous interaction is applied to internal alchemy, and even more so to female alchemy, that the goal to be reached, the meta-order, is yang in quality, and that the interactions of yin and yang are there to produce and support the final goal, the yang body.⁵¹ In this sense men, who possess a naturally yang nature, are more equipped than women to access that meta-order. Thus there is an inherent deficiency in women and a difficulty in the practice that is made very explicit in *nüdan* texts, due to the physical, psychological, and emotional makeup of a woman. The model for that meta-order, as is quite evident in the discourse of sex change and of the great hero, is the male body and the male character. Thus how are we to interpret the language describing sex change, the praise of women who have achieved enlightenment as extraordinary men, the suggestion that, by refining the yin parts of their bodies, they have reached a yang meta-order

equated with maleness, albeit a refined maleness? Surely the female body is a vessel for transformation. But is it also a locus of power and resistance? And what are we to make of the supposed “higher level” beyond sex and gender differentiation? In *nüdan*, the female body is indeed a vessel for transformation but cannot be seen as a locus of power and resistance, or even as a distinct alternative to male transformation. Female transformation is not ultimately seen as different from that of men; the achievements of men and women are equated. However, while at the same time eliminating the distinctiveness of women’s transformation, true equality beyond sex and gender differentiation is never really achieved.

I find that texts of female alchemy reveal much about contemporary gender notions, the understanding of the female body, and the social tension between men and women in late imperial China. The tension between stricter rules and a growing demand for space for women’s activities, the anxieties with respect to a changing order and the responses to these anxieties, as well as the varied and creative ways to adapt to it and find a space in which to operate, are at the basis of the emergence of *nüdan* as a textual tradition. By reducing the female to a body that has to be drained, the writers reveal their fears of pollution; by producing a literature that can be used in the inner chambers, they do the same thing on a different level, containing the dangers of women from spilling over into the male world. By expecting women to conform to the male practice once they are rid of their turbid constitutions, they invalidate their initial aim to create a truly “female” alchemy. And while claiming equality, the final achievement is always described in masculine terms.

Notes

1. We know of *nüdan* because the texts that describe its practices have been resurfacing in China over the past twenty years. This resurfacing is not only true for *nüdan* but also for most religious and spiritual texts and practices that lay dormant during the period between the 1940s and the 1980s in China. For a thorough discussion of the emergence of *nüdan*, see Elena Valussi, “Female Alchemy: An Introduction,” in Livia Kohn and Robin Wang, eds., *Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2008), 141–62; and Valussi, “Female Alchemy and Paratext: How to Read *nüdan* in a Historical Context,” *Asia Major* 21.2 (2008): 153–93.

2. This process of transformation is described in many *nüdan* texts. The most concise account is found in the preface to the *Nüdan hebian*, penned by He Longxiang and translated in its entirety in Valussi, “Female Alchemy,” 152–55.

3. See, for example, Emily Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in M. Wolf and R. Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 193–214; Maurice Bloch, "Death, Women and Power," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Perry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 211–30; and Cordia Chu, "Menstrual Beliefs and Practices of Chinese Women," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 17.1 (1980): 39–55.

4. I have described this process in more detail in "Female Alchemy and Paratext," 153–93.

5. Fu Shan, *Duan honglong* 斷紅龍 (received from Danting zhenren 丹亭真人), in *Shangcheng xiudao mishu sizhong* 上乘修道秘書四種, *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 ed. (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1993), 12.2; Cao Heng, *Nügong quebing* 女功卻病, in *Baosheng miyao* 保生祕要, in Tao Bingfu 陶秉福, ed., *Daoyuan yiqi* 道原一氣 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990), 371–520.

6. Liu Yiming wrote about female alchemy in his *Xiuzhen biannan* 修真辯難, in *Daoshu shi'er zhong* 道書十二種, ji 7, in Hu Daojing 胡道靜 et al., comps., *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1992–1994), vol. 8, 467–92. Liu Yiming also wrote about female alchemy in the *Huixin waiji* 會心外集 (Collection of Meetings of Minds, 1801), in *Daoshushi'er zhong*, ji 9, *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 8, 691–92. Min Yide collected two texts on female alchemy, the *Niwan Li zushi nüzong shuangxiu baofa* 泥丸李祖師女宗雙修寶筏 and *Xiawangmu nüxiu zhengtú shize* 西王母女修正途十則 (1799), in *Gushu yinlou cangshu* 古書隱樓藏書 (Wuxing: Jingai Chunyang gong cangban, 1834). Fu Jinqian, *Nüjindan fayao* (1813), in *Daoshu yiguan zhenji yijianlu*, reprint, *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 11, 512–41.

7. *Nüdan hebian* (Chengdu: Erxian an 二仙庵, 1906). For a detailed history and analysis of the *Nüdan hebian*, see Elena Valussi, "Men and Women in He Longxiang's *Nüdan hebian* (Collection of Female Alchemy)," *Nan nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 10.2 (2008): 242–78.

8. *Nüzi dao xue xiaocongshu wuzhong* (Shanghai: Yihuatang, 1936).

9. Tao Bingfu, ed., *Nüdan jicui*, *Zhongguo qigong guji congshu* 中國氣功古籍叢書 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989).

10. Qiu Xiaobo 邱小波 and Jiang Hong 蔣紅, eds., *Nüdan hebian xuanzhu* (Shanghai: Shanghai fanyi chubanshe, 1991).

11. Xun Liu has discussed in detail this side of the alchemical process in traditional China and up to the Republican period in *Daoist Modern: Innovation, Lay Practice, and the Community of Inner Alchemy in Republican Shanghai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 138–47.

12. For this topic, see Xun Liu, "Numinous Father and Holy Mother: Late Ming Duo-Cultivation Practice," in Livia Kohn, ed., *Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality* (Boston: Three Pine Press, 2009).

13. Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 121–67.

14. Weijing Lu, *True to Her Word: The Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1–48.

15. Susan Mann, "Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and Wives in Mid-Ch'ing Period," in Rubie Watson and Patricia B. Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 204–30; see also Mann's *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Maram Epstein, "Engendering Order: Structure, Gender and Meaning in the Qing Novel *Jinghua yuan*," in *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles, Reviews* 18 (1996): 101–27. Francesca Bray also discusses the relationship between menstrual regularity, fertility, and ideal womanhood; see Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 317–34.

16. See Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004). On the issue of publications for and by women, see Dorothy Ko, "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women's Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (1992): 9–39; and *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 29–68.

17. Glen Dudbridge, "Women Pilgrims to T'ai Shan: Some Pages from a Seventeenth-Century Novel," in Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yu, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 39–64.

18. Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, introduction, 9.

19. Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 59–93, 134–54.

20. This need to keep women, and their bodies, safe in the home was felt in a very similar way in Europe: "Prominent male leaders in the French Revolution, for example, strenuously opposed increased female participation in public life on the grounds that women's physical nature, radically distinguished from that of men and represented most powerfully in the organs of reproduction, made them unfit for public life and better suited to the private sphere." See Thomas W. Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," *Representations* 14 (1986): 1–41.

21. *Nüdan hebian*, preface, 1a.

22. *Nüjindan fayao*, preface, 1a.

23. This has been already pointed out in the preface to the volume *Engendering China* by its editors Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatler, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene Whyte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1–26.

24. *Nüdan hebian*, introduction, 6a.

25. These two terms refer to two hexagrams of the *Yijing* 易經. Qian is formed by six unbroken lines, while Kun is formed by six broken lines; the two, respectively, also symbolize the masculine and the feminine.

26. *Nüdan hebian*, introduction, 1a.

27. *Nüdan hebian*, introduction, 1a.

28. *Nüdan hebian*, introduction, 1a.

29. Unfinished affairs refer to sexual, procreative matters.
30. Er'e shanren 二峨山人, *Nügong lianji huandan tushuo* 女功煉已還丹圖說 (*Nüdan hebian* ed.), 4b.
31. Here, elixir field means Sea of Blood, as explained in the (untranslated) previous lines.
32. *Nannü dangong yitong bian* 男女丹功異同辨, *Nüdan hebian*, 20b.
33. *Nannü dangong yitong bian*, 22a–b.
34. Min Yide, *Xiawangmu nüxiu zhengtu shize*, 4b–5a.
35. *Nüjindan* (*Nüdan hebian* ed.), 7a.
36. See *Xiawangmu nüxiu zhengtu shize*, 7a.
37. See *Xiawangmu nüxiu zhengtu shize*, 7a.
38. Liu Yiming, *Xiuzhen biannan*, 1.34b.
39. Lingyang daoren 靈陽道人, *Nügong zhengfa* 女功正法 (1880), in Chen Yingning, *Nüzi dao xue xiaocongshu wuzhong*, 10a–b.
40. *Nüdan shiji houbian* 女丹詩集後編 (*Nüdan hebian* ed.), 3a–b.
41. *Nüjindan*, 24a.
42. Li Yiming, *Xiuzhen biannan*, 1.35b–36a.
43. *Nüdan hebian*, introduction, 4a.
44. Liu Yiming, *Xiuzhen biannan*, 34b.
45. Levering, “The Dragon and the Abbess of Mo-shan: Gender and Status,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5.1 (1982): 19–36; Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition,” in José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 137–58; Levering, “Stories of Enlightened Women in Ch'an and the Chinese Buddhist Female Bodhisattva/Goddess Tradition,” in Karen L. King, ed., *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 137–76; and Grant, “Da Zhangfu: The Gendered Rhetoric of Heroism and Equality in Seventeenth-Century Chan Buddhist Discourse Records,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 10.2 (2008): 177–211.
46. Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender,” 140.
47. Levering discusses the origins and the *locus classicus* of this term in “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender,” 143–45.
48. Interestingly, this term is also used in *nüdan* texts to refer to women who master the practice.
49. Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender,” 140.
50. Roger Ames, “Taoism and the Androgynous Ideal,” in Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen, eds., *Women in China* (Youngstown: Philo Press, 1981), 21–45.
51. On this meta-order, and its practical instantiations in Chinese rituals, see P. Steven Sangren, “Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Structure of Value in Chinese Rituals,” *Modern China* 13.1, Symposium on Hegemony and Chinese Folk Ideologies, Part I (1987): 63–89.