Table of Contents

Introduction

This collection of three essays and five translations on the Song Daoist saint and immortal Chen Tuan goes back to work done over about a decade, from 1978 to 1990. It began with my dissertation (*Leben und Legende des Chen Tuan*, 1981), which focused on questions of legend development and the problem of what "immortality" meant as a religious ideal in the Song dynasty.

Later I supplemented this work with materials on Chen Tuan as a physiognomist. I'd been aware of this role of his while writing my dissertation but could only access it when I went to Taiwan later. There I picked up the physiognomic handbook *Shenxian quanbian*, both in a Ming-dynasty manuscript (from the National Library) and in a modern paperback reprint. I then wrote about both this book and the *Fengjian*, a physiognomic manual closely linked with Chen Tuan, in articles which were published in *Asian Folklore Studies* (1986, 1988)

Following this, I prepared a volume for *Taoist Resources* (2.1) on Chen Tuan, scheduled to coincide with the thousandth anniversary of his "immortal transformation" in 989. It contains an English summary of the results of my dissertation on legend development and a translation of his official *Songshi* biography, as well as Li Yuanguo's study of Chen Tuan as an *Yijing* philosopher, Terry Russell's examination of Chen Tuan in Japan, and Teri Takehiro's translation of a Ming work on inner alchemical soul-travels known as "sleep."

Working along, I wrote various presentations and made translations of materials that never were integrated into any published work. These materials I would no like to make accessible in digital form on E-Dao. They consist of three discussions and five translations.

The three discussions summarize my dissertation in English and present materials discussed in the article on Chen Tuan as physiognomist. They are not mere reprints, although they pick up the same materials, but add additional reflections and integrate more recent studies into the discussion.

They are especially useful for students who wish to know about Chen Tuan's legends and his role at the Song court but do not read German.

The five translations have, for the most part, not been published previously. The first is the complete and amply annotated rendition of Chen Tuan's life according to the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, a key source for the dissertation, but not translated there. The second is the literary rendition of Chen Tuan's vita in the *Taihua xiyi zhi*, which is translated into German as an appendix of the dissertation. The third, the physiognomic treatise *Fengjian*, appears in *Asian Folklore Studies*, 1988. The last two, *Mayi daozhe zhengyi xinfa* and *Yin Zhenjun huandan gezhu*, are poems closely associated with Chen Tuan and appear here for the first time. They are not annotated and may sound quite obscure, especially since they deal with Song-dynasty *Yijing* thought and inner alchemy.

All these translations should be of some use to students interested in Chen Tuan or different aspects of Song culture. They are not polished but may help as a starting or reference point for scholars—and will certainly do more good on E-Dao than they will ever in my files at home.

Discussion 1: The Immortal and his Legend

The Song dynasty was in many ways a new beginning for the Chinese state and culture. The traditional system of the Tang had been destroyed over two centuries, and the ancient social hierarchies and even the customs of daily life had undergone erosion and would never again be the same (see Ebrey and Gregory 1993). Central Asian influence pervaded larger portions of life during the Tang and emerged even more dominant in the Song. The Chinese began to sit on chairs and build furniture (see Kuhn 1987), wear high collars, enact dramas, and engage more in landscape painting. At the same time, the various northern tribes continued to expand their area of power. The flight from Kaifeng to Hangzhou in 1225 and the Mongol conquest of the entire country were long-prepared events whose cultural and societal forebears can be traced back over centuries.

The Song stood at a watershed of Chinese history, witnessing a new beginning in Chinese culture. Instead of turning to Tang models, they looked towards the Han and before, focusing again on the works of the ancients. Neo-Confucianism, the leading school of thought in China since the Song, arose through new interpretations of the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Book of Changes*. Newly organized forms of Buddhism and Daoism began to take shape, inspired by collective efforts that led to major comprehensive canons of these traditions. The first integrated histories of China were written, such as the *Zizhi tongjian*, which also had religious counterparts (see Schmidt-Glintzer 1986; Kohn 1998). Similarly literature and art were inspired by old models and the distant past was increasingly recaptured in what might almost be called a possession with history. The Song saw not only enthusiastic collections of ancient objects, but also the first forgeries of antique bronzes and paintings in Chinese history.

There are many dimensions to the Song's relationship with its immediate and more distant past. The key to understanding it lies in the opposing aims of feeling new and at the same time old, of needing models of the past and yet

doing something that has no direct forerunner anywhere. One solution was to go back ever farther into the depths of history; another, maybe more fascinating, involves the creation of new patriarchs and new models. The early Song and the tenth century in particular was a great time for new developments, new visions, and new organization. But even as early as the late tenth and early eleventh century, the need for justification of all this newness began to be felt. People who had helped establish certain aspects of Song culture, whether in fact newly created or actually based on earlier models, became patriarchs and founders to be venerated over the ages. The transformation of a creative person into a worthy sage in many instances took the shape of the development of a legend or, to be more precise, a personal or saints-legend.

Saints and Saints-Legends

A saint in the most general terms is a person who embodies certain ideals of a religion or philosophy. The saints-legend is the story that tells of this embodiment and usually consists of a heavy mixture of motifs taken from myths and folktales with legends in a narrower sense. Folklorists define the difference between the two by pointing out that myth and folktales contain a great distance in time and in rank between the teller and the story, while legends are always close to the narrator (Dundes 1971: 23).

To narrow the definition further, all legends develop around a definite kernel or nucleus which tends to be present in the minds of the listeners as, for example, a certain place or a specific person. The origin of a legend is found in a personal experience which is memorized and transmitted orally. After a few generations the story becomes a legend of memory. Once embellished with traditional or newly found popular motifs, the story becomes a *fabulate*, now including certain beliefs and references to other parts of folk culture (Sydow 1969: 71; Dorson 1977: 17).

Beyond that legends, especially religious legends, are nourished in a "network of living belief and practical needs" (Degh 1969: 379). In this respect they are similar to the rumor, alive only as long as are the wishes and fears that cause it to come into being in the first place. While religious legends usually relate a supernatural event, such as miraculous healings or encounters with ghosts, saints-legends are always tied closely to a specific person.

In many cases saints-legends, since they tend to be fixated in typology and are solidly anchored in the belief structure of the religion, are studied separately from legends in general. One may say that the study of saints-legends is of

concern to a variety of fields: folklore, religious studies, theology, and literature all have their share in the discussion (Rosenfeld 1972: 8). Although there is a general consensus that saints-legends in terms of their origin are related to legends in general and therefore can be considered as one specific form of legend, there is no unity of opinion as regards the question whether saints-legends are necessarily bound to one or another literary format. Instead of giving a formal, literary definition of saints-legends, the tendency is to characterize them in terms of their religious constitution and relevancy in the religious context. In Western scholarship, however, these theoretical efforts have been largely limited to Christian materials.

The origin of saints-legends begins with the veneration of the major deity of the religion and the personal actualization of episodes taken from the sacred life (Rosenfeld 1972: 5). In Christianity, the prototype of a saints-legend is the life of Christ. The function of the narrative is then to reveal mundane existence as a part of an overall transcendent world, to show the mutual interrelation between the individual life of the saint and the overall sacred cosmos. The gradual process of legendary growth around the remembered nucleus leads first to a "short-term" legend, which is a story told shortly after the death of the individual and largely in terms of actual memory, and later to a "long-term" legend, that is to say, a story embellished with typical motifs at certain decisive points though which process the original memory, the historical nucleus, becomes secondary to a more widely acceptable general story which enforces the underlying belief structure of the religion (Rosenfeld 1972: 12). The two phases of legend development are also described as the "saint's vita," an account of the person's life strictly limited to facts, and as the actual "saints-legend" which includes classical motifs and miraculous incidents (Rosenfeld 1972: 25).

The decisive part of the definition is that the saints-legend presents the sacred as an actualized reality of life, that it describes human life as an active part of a specific underlying belief structure. A typical saints-legend cannot be properly understood without this background in religous worldview. "The world order of the saints-legend is identical with the order of the religious belief" (Kayser 1936: 122). Despite this cultural delimitation, numerous motifs typical for Christian legends are also found in ancient Greece and Rome and can be detected in other religions too (see Günter 1949). In the descriptions of the lives of religious founders one finds similar characteristics, as for instance homelessness, supernatural occurrences at birth and death, as well as various natural phenomena used to emphasize the particular meaning of the person's

life (Mensching 1955: 315). Nevertheless, the particular way in which the life of the saint is described and embellished always remains solidly embedded in the peculiarities of the respective underlying religion.

Sage, Immortal, Founder, Patriarch

The Chinese case presents the problem that various traditions within Chinese history use the raw material of a saintly life in their own specific way. There is no one organized and unified religion of China, although there is an integrated "religious system of China," to use DeGroot's fortunate description, rather than several "religions" (DeGroot 1892). Yet for the study of legends, the problem arises that there is no one founder after whom all saintly lives are shaped, there is no one creation myth that is reenacted in the stories about the extraordinary man, there is no one unified church organization that judges what is properly saintly and what is not. The Chinese have no formal beatification process, no—however strange it may sound—official bureaucratic procedure to certify the qualities of a pan-Chinese saint, although there certainly are ways and means to officially recognize persons of valuable example within given traditions.[1]

The result of this is that any exemplary life, such as Chen Tuan's, is used and developed to various purposes by all major Chinese traditions, the official or Confucian, the organized religious or Daoist and Buddhist, and the popular or folkloristic. Certain professional groups or philosophical schools, moreover, have their own interests in a powerful patriarch and lay claim to the sacred life. They each have particular ideas what saintly qualities should look like and shape their model accordingly. The result is not one type of saint that would be valid for all Chinese, but a number of different models of saintliness: the Confucian sage, the Daoist immortal, the Buddhist patriarch, the founder of certain schools, the hero of the popular tale, the patron of various arts and crafts. In their own ways they are all saints and do all undergo the process of transformation from a real living person to an embodiment of the relevant belief structure. Yet in their concrete definitions, in their shaped personalities, the various saintly stylizations are all different, if not actually incompatible.

In all cases a heavy dose of religious conviction is needed to effect a successful transformation. This conviction in the various stages of legend development

---

[1] There is, for example, a well-mapped process of establishing the rank and official title of popular deities (see Hansen 1990). Also, the Daoist tradition has undertaken quite organized efforts to integrate and delimitate their model patriarchs (see Reiter 1988).

takes the form of selected pieces of Chinese mythology, themes that underlie the myth-making process in China, as well as distinct motifs that help illustrate and clarify the specific myth intended.[1] The saint, in whatever guise, becomes the living example of a mythological theme. Various religious and symbolic actions either done to him or by him become motifs for the creation of a full-fledged myth, the conglomerate of the stylization, moreover, expresses the specific needs and concerns of the period and the interest group in question.

On this background, the situation concerning the Song dynasty saint Chen Tuan is most complex. Born at a time when the search for models and new patriarchs was about to begin, his secluded and yet active life was turned into various forms of saintliness by different traditions. As founding sage he helped to legitimate the beginning dynasty and was cast after the mythological theme of the imperial adviser by the Confucian tradition. This theme, studied extensively by Chan Hok-lam,[2] in turn is closely related to the theme of the transformations of Laozi, who appeared again and again as the "teacher of dynasties" in the early stages of human history (see Seidel 1969; Yoshioka 1959). Chen Tuan as guest of the emperors of the mid-tenth century therefore serrves the role of Confucian imperial adviser and fulfills the Daoist ideal of the descending sage who helps the dynasty.

Beyond that, Chen Tuan is a highly trained practitioner of inner alchemical meditation and ecstatic excursions. In descriptions of his so-called "sleep exercises," he therefore is shown as attaining oneness with the Dao itself and thus turned into an archetypal Daoist mystic and immortal. As *Yijing* (Book of Changes) philosopher and creator of various cosmic charts, he is moreover venerated as the original founder of certain aspects of Neo-Confucianism. As active physiognomist and possible author of an early fortune-telling manual, he is then considered the patriarch of modern standard physiognomy and author of its major textbook, the *Shenxiang quanbian*, still quite actively in use all over East Asia.

Going beyond the Song dynasty and its search for origins, Chen Tuan was also highly stylized in the popular tradition, where he appeared as the creator of certain lullabies and as a paragon of perfected sleep. During the Ming dynasty, he was even venerated as a popular deity. Famous as a spirit residing in

---

[1] For a proposal to analyze Chinese myths according to the five distinct categories of mythological themes, motifs and symbols, historical figures, specific situations and concerns, as well as message of the story in question, see Kohn 1990.

[2] See especially Chan 1968; also Chan 1961, 1973, 1974.

heaven, he would be invited to give his comments via the planchette.[1] In this function he instructed the monks of the Buddhist school of Mt. Huang-bo (Ôbaku Zen) that the year 1651 would be most auspicious for introducing their faith to Japan. They followed his instructions with great success (see Russell 1989; 1990). In addition, Chen Tuan revealed his own likeness through the planchette, an act related to popular deities' concern for the accuracy of their pictures in temples on this earth (Hansen 1990: 68). In the following he was the subject of artistic depiction many times, mentioned in practically all illustrated collections of immortals' lives. In our own century the Japanese painter Tomioka Tessai and the American-Japanese artist Clifton Karhu have honored him with portraits.[2] Stretching from the early Song well into the twentieth century, Chen Tuan is thus a multi-faceted figure with an enormous impact on Chinese culture. Although he remains somewhat elusive in strict historical terms, his legends have flourished through the ages and continue to fascinate the teller of tales, the artist and the scholar.

The present work looks at the complex figure of Chen Tuan. Other than my earlier thesis, *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan* (Knaul 1981), this collection does not make use of Chen Tuan stories to explore the structure of legend development and the interaction of different traditions in Chinese history. Rather, it begins with the theoretical distinction between mythological themes, motifs and symbols, and historical figures and situations, and shows how Chen Tuan emerges as a different person in each cultural context. Beyond that, the study accepts that the conglomerate image of Chen Tuan will always be a mixture of authentic events and mythological stylization, "mythological" defined as "aiming to embody a specific credo" in the life and work of a given figure.

The discussion of the different aspects of Chen Tuan analyzes the structure of his stylization as saint and immortal, and outlines the borderlines between history and legend, yet does not judge the legendary as less true or valuable than the historical. One immediate result of this attitude is that the study includes texts like the "Twelve Sleep Exercises," "The Hempclad Daoist's Method of the Mind," or the "Songs on Reverting the Cinnabar," which date from later centuries and have nothing to do with Chen Tuan historically.

---

[1] On the use of the planchette in Chinese religion see Chao 1942 and Jordan and Overmyer 1986.

[2] Tessai's painting, entitled "Den of the Daoist immortal Chen Xiyi," is a hanging scroll, color on paper. Dated to the year 1920, it is now in the Kiyoshi-Kojin Seichôji Temple, in Hyôgo Prefecture, Japan.

Rather than focusing on history, the study prefers completenes. This will facilitate our understanding not only of the development of one specific legend but also of the inherent complexities of mythology as actively created in all ages of Chinese culture and carried to ever new dimensions in the interaction of the various traditions.

Chen Tuan in Song Sources

Strictly historical information on Chen Tuan, alias Tunan or Fuyaozi is rather scarce.[1] He was born in the later half of the ninth century in Henan.[2] Already these basic facts of name and home include a highly mythological stylization. His birthplace in Zhenyuan, for example, is identical with the birthplace of Laozi, the Lord Lao of the Daoist religion.[3] His first name Tuan, moreover, comes from the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where it is immediately followed by the combination *fuyao* of his other name. Taken together with his further appellation Tunan, a powerful picture emerges: The huge Peng bird, "beating the whirlwind" or "ascending on the whirlwind" (*tuan fuyao*), rises up ninety thousand miles, stretches across the skies and "sets its eyes to the south" (*tunan*; Watson 1968: 20). Through his place of birth as much as through the image of the mighty bird, representing the immortal at one with the Dao who uses the inherent power of the universe to ascend to greater heights, Chen Tuan is from the beginning placed in the very heart of Daoist mythology.

Back to history. Between the years 900 and 930 he spent much time wandering around famous mountains, presumably seeking instructions in various Daoist and other arts from withdrawn and learned masters. During this period he stayed for a longer while on Mount Wudang in Hunan, where he practiced Daoist techniques of meditation and gymnastics, as well as dietetics and breathing exercises. He may or may not have been instructed in practices that were later to become famous as the Wudang school of martial arts.

In 937 Chen Tuan apparently was in Sichuan where he left behind an inscription praising the Daoist meditation and breathing methods he learned

---

[1] For recent studies see the works of Li Yuanguo, Terence Russell and myself in the bibliography below.

[2] Li Yuanguo has it that Chen Tuan came originally from Sichuan, where he in fact left an inscription behind and where various traces of his stay can still be found (see Li 1984 and 1985). On the other hand, about 95% of all sources, even the most historically reliable ones, insist on Henan as his origin.

[3] For a study of the early sources on Laozi and his stylization see Seidel 1969; Kohn 1998. The development of his legend in the Six Dynasties is discussed in Kohn 1990.

from a master there. It may be assumed that he then resumed his migrations to settle eventually, probably in the early 940s, on Mount Hua in Shensi. Here he took care to restore an ancient Daoist settlement which had fallen into disrepair during the restless and destructive last years of the Tang dynasty. The Yuntai guan (Cloudterrace Monastery) due to his efforts became a flourishing center again. It was here that he spent the rest of his life—a considerable span, since he died only in 989, at the alleged age of 118 *sui*.

Between the 940s and his death in 989 he visited the imperial court three times, although, according to the legends, he met with various emperors quite a number of times: once in 956 under Zhou Shizong , then again in 976 and in 984 under Song Taizong. At the first occasion, Zhou Shizong asked him about the practice of alchemy, presumably to help increase the funds available in the imperial treasury. He replied that he knew nothing of such matters. For the year 976, only a short mention of a visit at court is made, but for 984 the sources give plenty of detail. That year Chen Tuan was awarded the official honorary title Xiyi xiansheng , "Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible," a reference to chapter 14 of the *Daode jing*. Besides these two incidents which are solidly recorded in the official dynastic records, a few other meetings with high officials can be considered strictly historical.

For example, he once gave a prophesy for Qian Ruoshui (960-1003), author of the *Taizong huangdi shilu* (Chronological Record of Emperor Taizong), stating that this high-ranking official would end his career prematurely and a long time before he expected to do so. More than that, he recognized that Zhang Yong (946-1015), although he had failed the imperial examination several times and was ready to give it all up, would succeed in hs efforts eventually and in the long run do invaluable service to the state as a civil official and subduer of rebellions.

His methods of prognostication and worldview were first of all based on his oneness with the Dao, but when he formulated them, he took frequent recourse to the philosophy of the *Yijing*. In this connection he is supposed to have formulated the famous *Taiji tu* (Diagram of the Great Ultimate) for the first time. He passed his philosophy down to Chong Fang, from whom it was transmitted to Shao Yong and later to Zhou Dunyi, entering right into the heart of Neo-Confucianism.[1]

---

[1] For a discussion of this part of Neo-Confucian philosophy and Chen Tuan's role see Fung and Bodde 1953: II/440.