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Master Wu

In 1990, the Daoist master Wu Baolin entered the United States, accompanied by a mysterious companion: an item held in secrecy for centuries, something considered a genuine wonder of the world. A thousand-year-old sword dating back to the Tang dynasty, fully charged with actuated human potential. Along with the sword, Master Wu brought with him the mysteries and techniques of a spiritual practice steeped in Daoism (Taoism), the indigenous higher religion of China. A mystical system of shamanic heritage aimed at combining Heaven, Earth, and Humanity into one.

In 1999, Master Wu decided to reveal the knowledge of the sword's existence to the outside world. He then taught a small circle of students the inner records of the White Cloud Temple (Baiyun guan) in Beijing with the intent to compile a volume on the basis of his lectures. In the preceding years, he had already taught the secret internal sword practice connected to several disciples. His teacher had given him compelling instructions that, after formally beginning to teach this method, he must write a book and only then advance more teachings. This book fulfills these instructions. It intends to present the teachings in the original style of the oral tradition, reflecting the mindset and worldview of Daoism as well as its role in the natural universe: the teachings are circular, ideas are touched and built upon in layers, left open in the end, so people can come to their own understanding through personal experience and, most importantly, through practice. It also hopes to share a compelling part of its history, folklore, and technique, it becoming an open invitation to glimpse inside the halls, chambers, and libraries of a Chinese history less known.

The primary depository for Daoist knowledge for the last thousand years is the northern school of Complete Reality (Complete Perfection; Quanzhen), with headquarters at the White Cloud Temple and also of the Dragon Gate lineage (Longmen pai), established under the Yuan dynasty (13th c.). The monastery trains disciples in three main subjects of study: 1) Esoteric Healing Exercises (Qigong), 2) Martial Arts (Gongfa), and 3) the *Yijing* (Book of Changes). Among the many forms of martial arts taught, there is also a sword form in 108 movements called Eight Immortals' Revolving Sword (Baxian zhuanjian). It is highly valued, second only to

Laozi's Nine Palaces Microcosmic Orbit Qigong and Five Centers Facing Heaven Qigong, solar and lunar sets respectively.

This sword sequence initially consisted of eight martial postures related to each of the eight immortals, i.e., 64 moves. Not all of them originate in actual sword practice but also include other weapons, systems, and tools borrowed and modified to allow the use of the sword. For example, the crippled immortal Li Tieguai used an iron cane to walk and defend himself. Han Xiangzi carried a magical bamboo flute which he played skillfully and employed to remedy energetic imbalances of the earth as outlined in theory of Feng Shui. The lady immortal He Xiangnu trained in martial arts with a fan—considered part of the sword family and thus easier to convert. Beyond the original 64 movements, 44 further moves go back to the only sword purist of the group, Lü Dongbin—making the total 108 with Lü's contribution at the center.

While still in its embryonic stages, the Eight Immortals sword outline was handed over to Lü Dongbin's finest student, Wang Chongyang (1113-1170), the founder of the Complete Reality school. He structured and organized the entire set, partially responsible for converting the diverse techniques into sword practice. In doing so, he also added various encrypted, esoteric diagrams and configurations, hoping to open passages into the spiritual realms of esoteric meditation to make sword intention easier to exercise. Although he studied briefly with the seven other immortals to learn their array of martial arts, he studied primarily with Lü Dongbin and became the master of a strict sword regimen.

In 1167, after completing the task of blending the Eight Immortals sword practice in a cave for two years, Wang Chongyang, on the 9th day of the 9th lunar month, took an oath to popularize and teach this practice throughout the world. Because of his sincere devotion and capacity, Lü Dongbin gave him his blessings. The day of the vows has since become a Daoist holiday called Double Yang, symbolizing pure heaven and also Wang's Daoist name. It is still celebrated in honor of Lü Dongbin, Wang Chongyang, and the sun as the source of pure heavenly potency.

Since these beginnings, the Longmen branch has produced one or seven major disciples. Among the seven, only one can be chosen to serve as leader of the next generation and be responsible for the transmission and enforcement of the spiritual teachings. The inaugural ceremony of transmission involves the passing on of a rare sword—the symbol of an uninterrupted succession through the ages. It is bestowed upon one carefully chosen initiate who serves as its official guardian.

In terms of relics and possessions, the sword that Master Wu brought to the U.S. is of vast significance for the White Cloud Temple and its lineage. Said to have belonged to the immortal Lü Dongbin himself, its scabbard shows the names Lü Dongbin, Wang Chongyang, and Qiu Chuji

(1148-1227), the Baiyun guan founder. It is called the Sword of Pure Yang, and its present guardian is Master Wu.

Called to the Dao

In 1958, when Wu Baolin was four years old, a grave illness threatened his life. The diagnosis was an advanced case of “white water,” a noxious disease of the blood which had almost run its course, so that Little Wu had only two weeks to live. Despite hailing from one of China’s most prominent medical families going back seven generations and despite using all available medical resources in Beijing, his affliction was incurable. Early one morning, out of desperation, his mother left him outside the front gate of the White Cloud Temple hoping that the monks of the temple would work one of their well-known miracles.

At sunrise, the monks found Little Wu outside the southern gate. Taking notice of his high fever and weakened constitution, they promptly reported his condition to the head abbot, Master Du Xinling. He evaluated the situation and responded to the boy’s symptoms and treated him with acupuncture, medicinal herbs, and external qigong, using his own internal power to eliminate the negative properties from Wu’s bloodstream while replenishing the boy’s vital life-force (*qi*) and stabilize his fragile state.

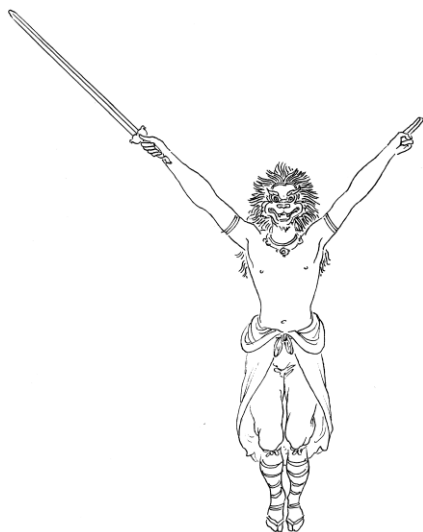
In addition to these treatments, Master Du also submerged the youngster in a barrel of dry herbs specifically known for the cleansing and rejuvenation of blood. This treatment over several weeks allowed Little Wu’s pores to breathe in the essence of the herbs’ healing power. Master Du encouraged him to rest, saying, “Sleep Wuweizi, sleep.” *Wuweizi* means “nonaction” and is one of the key qualities of the Daoist sage. The term eventually became Master Wu’s Daoist name. In addition, Master Du frequently swept the blade of an old weathered sword along Little Wu’s body, thereby to eliminate malevolence from the child’s aura. Over two months, this treatment succeeded in delivering Master Wu from the imminent danger of death.

A year later, Wu Baolin had recovered completely. Blessed with a new lease on life, he was discharged from the monastery and sent home to his parents. It had never been a mystery whose boy he was. The Wu family rejoiced in the wonder of his survival and homecoming and continued to show their appreciation to the monastery with regular, generous donations.

However, after a short time at home, Little Wu suffered a frightening relapse. His parents ushered him back to the monastery as fast as they could, then witnessed the strangest thing: the moment they entered the temple gates, his fever broke and he reverted back to normal. Still, the abbot suggested that the child stay for a few days of observation and rest to be sure he was medically sound. This sequence repeated several more times, Little

Wu getting sick at home and healthy in the monastery. Eventually the masters realized that this was a sign from heaven and that he was destined to become a Daoist monk. He was duly entered into the monastic ranks and began the specialized training which had saved his life.

Immersed in his monastic upbringing, Wuweizi's childhood was soon filled with miraculous events and amazing Daoist stories. From an early age, he learned the martial arts, beginning his training with the Eight Immortals' Revolving Sword, a favorite practice of his teacher. Every night he would practice in the open courtyard next to his cell, repeating the age-old sword movements to strengthen his body and boost his immune system. He also marveled at the legendary tales of the Eight Immortals, matching each set of movements, thus supplementing and expanding his understanding of the martial tradition.



The Magical Sword

One day, Master Du Xinling took Little Wu to an old stone tablet in a corner of the monastery grounds. Its inscription contained a long poem about the legendary relationship between Lü Dongbin and his magical sword. It reads:

I, the Immortal Lü Dongbin carve this stone tablet with my magical sword.

I have practiced and cultivated between mountains and rivers for 49 years.

In all those years the sword has never left my sight.

When I slept, the sword was my pillow

When I walked, the sword watched my back.
 We shared every meal together and
 When I used the lavatory,
 The sword never touched the ground.
 We are inseparable.

The text then describes the sword's power to fly:

Simply state a name, an address,
 Or present an article belonging to an evil doer—
 And off the sword will fly banishing them forever.
 After severing the assailant's head,
 It will shape change a green dragon and
 Return carrying the cut-off head in its mouth.

The inscription furthermore explains that Lü Dongbin's mind, body, and spirit are melded into the body of the sword: they form a single entity. After 49 years of intense practice, the immortal faced the portal of transfiguration. On the day of Mid-Autumn Festival, the 15th of the 8th month, he fused his every cell into his sword's molecular structure. Some say, he flew up into the heavens riding a dragon; others claim he became the sword itself.

Having shown this extraordinary stele to Young Wu, Master Du told him his own story. At that time he was the ancestral descendant of the Dragon Gate lineage and the last abbot of the White Cloud Temple to be appointed before the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). A master of high merit at the Purple Cloud Temple (Zixia gong) on Mount Wudang, he received this appointment after a stringent selection process in the 1930s from the Daoist Association at the time. His promotion to abbot forced him to leave the southern headquarters of the Complete Reality school, where he had lived most of his life. His main task was to reestablish the missing components of energetic cultivation which had been gradually diluted in the north. He thus became the leading authority of the wondrous sword of Immortal Lü, commanding an amazing level of intimate knowledge of the sword's power. He then shared an important event with Master Wu:

In 1945, Fengtai village on the western outskirts of Beijing was threatened by two gigantic serpents disporting an insatiable appetite for destruction. The pythons consumed humans and destroyed structures on a steady rampage. The locals called in the military, but their weapons had little or no impact on the predators. Government efforts could do little except contain the creatures inside the city limits. When the news reached the White Cloud Temple, droves of people flooded the gates to send prayers for relief.

The precious sword of Lü Dongbin was placed on the shrine of Qiu Chuji, guarded by sixteen monks, active in daily rotation. Master Du came before it, writing out and then reading a talismanic prayer that entreated the

sword to alleviate the emergency. This activated the sword's powers, and people were allowed to pray in its presence. Without any other outside influence visible, each prayer led to the spontaneous twirl of the sword and scabbard. Monks kept count of every rotation and noted 365 over a three-day period.

On the evening of the third day, a majestic rainstorm moved over the monastery. A tremendous force of electricity exploded, rending the skies with thunder, lightning, and a heavy downpour. An intense bolt of lightning struck, reaching into Qiu's shrine and touching the sword. The guardian monks turned in alarm, frightened by the sudden intrusion of light: they saw the precious sword unsheathe from its scabbard and soar into the night air. This occurred at 7 p.m.

The monks immediately reported this to their superiors who ordered them to stand fast and hold their position. Nine hours later, at 4 a.m., a swift wind moved through the shrine, followed by the clashing metallic sound of the sword sheathing itself back into its scabbard. On the ground were scattered traces of blood. Later that morning, news came from Fengtai village that the two giant serpents had been slaughtered mysteriously in the darkest hours of the night: the sword had killed the monsters. The story made it into the Beijing newspapers; it is just one of many actual events Master Du experienced during his possession of the immortal sword.

The Cultural Revolution

In the 1960s, Master Wu Baolin had his own encounter with the extraordinary sword. He was in his teens when the Cultural Revolution led to the persecution of religion; it was called antiquated and superstitious thinking, a mind poison no longer needed by modern society. Many Daoists and Buddhists were imprisoned or executed, often after being taken to the south for sentencing. Much a target, Master Du fled the monastery to avoid detainment by the authorities. Leaving Lü Dongbin's sword in the care of Master Wu as his youngest and most unassuming student, he plotted his escape route and set a time and place to meet. The young acolyte would travel west from Beijing to Shanxi and there redeliver the sword to his teacher—using all means necessary.

At the appointed departure time, Master Wu disguised himself, then wrapped the sword and fastened it at a vertical angle along his spine. He had to pass through many checkpoints, manned by Red Guards who had sectioned off the country and only opened after presenting authorized passes and proper identification. Wu traveled smoothly until he came to the last checkpoint, where he was denied entry into Shanxi, his papers not being valid for this province but only allowing him free movements in his birth

district. Nervous and uneasy, he stood immobilized at the barrier, the words of his teacher echoing in his mind: “using all means necessary.”

Master Wu made his decision. Without receiving permission, he took a deep breath and darted through the checkpoint, sprinting past the guards as fast as he could. As far as he remembers, there were no verbal warnings; only the sound of guns being fired and bullets whizzing through the air near his head. He thought he would drop dead any moment. The guards continued to shoot their rifles with the intent to kill him, firing several rounds at his fleeting silhouette. Then, however, Lü Dongbin’s sword began to shift. It literally jumped several inches out of its scabbard, jolting his body and shielding the back of his head. The flying bullets ricocheted off the blade, pinging into another orbit. He never looked back, hearing only the sound of his breathing until the sword pushed its way back down into the scabbard, resealing itself at the hilt.

Later Master Du achieved the highest level of perfection in Daoist *qi* cultivation, earning him the title “Elder of Purple Radiance” (*Ziyang dao Zhang*). He achieved the high age of 116 years before undergoing immortal transformation—at high noon and in front of over 200 witnesses, including government officials. His entire being dissolved into a red nimbus of smoke and light, then flew up, straight as an arrow, directly to the ninth level of the sun. A delicate sweet, delightful scent filled the area for many hours. So perfect was his exodus that not a single hair, fingernail, or other organic remnant remained. This level of transformation into a rainbow body has only happened seven times in all of Daoist history.



On the eve of his transformation, Master Du first privately, then also in public, bestowed onto Master Wu—his disciple for over twenty years—the celestial seat of the Dragon Gate lineage. He had thoroughly trained him in

the Daoist arts, pouring many ancient secrets into him, like from one teapot into another. Master Wu thus became the 17th generation Dragon Gate lineage holder. This appointment was sealed with his reception of the magical sword, now his to look after.

In the U.S.

After immigrating to the United States in 1990, Master Wu encountered many more manifestations of the sword's potency. One time, a blackbird perched on a telephone pole near his home in Southern California, crowing loudly. In Chinese culture, the crow is likened to a soldier and usually perceived as an ill omen; just seeing or hearing it is considered bad fortune. Master Wu politely asked the bird to move on. It did so, but only for a brief time before returning to the same place.

He had always had a strong curiosity, which on occasion led him into trouble. That day he wondered what effect the sword would have on the bird. He decided to remove it from the red silk cloth in which it was stored, walked outside with it in hand and pointed its tip directly at the obnoxious crow. He only meant to scare the bird; instead, he watched it fall to its death! It happened so fast that he could not retract the sword in time. Once again he realized that the sword was not a simple object to wave around freely.

His teacher warned him many times of the sword's powers and potential dangers. Once he told him that for miles around it there would be no signs of insects. Of course, Master Wu had to experience this for himself. He got the chance when ants infested his kitchen. To avoid killing the colony, he brought the sword out and set it in the center of the house. Soon thereafter, the ants dispersed, never to return.

For a time the sword was stored in a safety deposit box in the U.S. and withdrawn only once a year, during the Mid-Autumn Festival. Master Wu would then pay his respects to Immortal Lü and his teacher, Master Du, following a thousand-year tradition and honoring the most auspicious period for the White Cloud Temple. He also made offerings to the sword itself, providing ripe fruit and high-quality moon cakes, and took it on a moonlight drive. Riding in the back seat, the sword would absorb the essence of the moon's magnetic energy to restore its spirit. Once, while doing this, Master Wu turned around to look at the sword, sensing an overwhelming sadness. Its *qi* conveyed unhappiness, and it began to crack, its blade covered with a heavy black tarnish. In the face of this rapid deterioration, Master Wu spoke to it, assuring it that he would soon return it to its rightful home. At these words, the sword perked up and once again began to shine. It was this emotional exchange that prompted Master Wu to return the sword to China.

Seeing the precious sword under normal circumstances, it is not much to look: at first glance it looks old and dingy. Some may consider it worthless, but its blade is still so sharp it can split a hair. It weighs 600 grams and has the tendency to become heavier when stowed for a long time. The scabbard originally had thirteen jewels, but some have been lost over the centuries. In addition, when appropriately honored, the sword has an ethereal body and radiates a glow. In complete darkness, it becomes pure white light as if it were the moon itself. Based on his own experience, Master Wu believes that the precious sword is Lü Dongbin himself, immortalized.

In a conversation with two antique collectors from Taiwan, Master Wu casually mentioned having the precious sword in his possession. They were intrigued by the possibility of owning such a rare and historic artifact. Sight unseen, they offered him 35 million dollars, but Master Wu replied: "Maybe I will let you look at it for that." They all had a good laugh. However, to him this was no joke.

