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Editors' Preface

Internal alchemy (*neidan*) is the culmination of several millennia of Daoist cultivation and transformation practices—physical, meditative, and alchemical. It combines numerous techniques and intricate philosophical concepts into a complex system, geared to allow adepts to refine accessible, tangible body energy into highly spiritual forms while awakening and activating subtle powers and connecting to ultimate reality. Perceiving the body as an intricate network of energy channels and centers, pervaded by flowing subtle vibrations, they utilize sexual energy as the starting point of their exploration and soon come to see themselves as layered levels of body-mind dimensions that grow increasingly finer and eventually merge with the divine.

This vision, which may be generically called “body energetics,” is also present in Indian Kundalini yoga and Western Hermeticism. In many ways it matches the quantum physics understanding of the universe as consisting of fine particles that are simultaneously energetic waves. According to this, all matter is made up of vibrating energy and energy fields which change their state very rapidly and are constantly oscillating, arising and dissolving. Reality is thus not a combination of solid entities but an interlocking web of energy fields that each pulsate at their own rate. These interlocking fields of vibration—described in Daoism as patterns of *qi*-flow—can come into harmony with each other and mutually support and increase their amplitude. They can also interfere with each other and create disturbances; or they can be modified, refined, and transfigured into subtler and more divine levels.

The goal of internal alchemy is to identify, control, modify, and eventually transform subtle energies as they are present in the human bodymind. As scientists in biology and medicine increasingly come to see the body as an energetic system, a “living matrix” made up of bioelectricity and bioenergy, it has an important contribution to make. *Neidan* can inspire and guide theory and practice in rapidly developing new fields, such as energy medicine and energy psychology. The only obstacle to integrating millennia of traditional Daoist knowledge and experimentation into the modern discourse is the lack of accessible presentations on the subject.

This is changing with this volume. When the editors and several contributors met at the Third International Daoist Conference on “Cultivation in Theory and Practice,” held in an ancient monastery on a Bavarian island in May 2005, they were amazed at the large number of excellent presentations on internal alchemy, most by recent graduates who had made this important aspect of the Daoist tradition the focus of their dissertations.

Getting together in the course of the conference, we realized that the time had come to integrate internal alchemy into the modern discourse on body energetics. Finally, there was enough scholarly information available to create an introductory volume that combined a presentation of basic *neidan* concepts

with solid historical and doctrinal studies as well as with examinations of later developments and a comparison with cultivation systems in other cultures. Agreeing to pursue the project, we decided to meet again in a specialized workshop on the subject, with the goal of compiling such a work.

The workshop became a reality a year later, in 2006. Sponsored by Three Pines Press, it was held at a New Mexico mountain retreat over Labor Day weekend. The generous support of the Hong Kong Taoist Association made it possible to invite scholars from both the U.S. and China. In addition to many of the presenters in this volume, supporting participants included David Capco, Caryn Diel, Louis Komjathy, Wang Li, and Zhang Qin as well as Tong Wai-Hop and Andrew Law from Hong Kong. Everybody participated in a vigorous discussion of the various papers that had been prepared and distributed ahead of time. They identified key issues and contributed significantly to the specific vision of this volume, which consists of four main sections.

The first focuses on the overall system. It begins with an overview of the different cultivation methods that contributed to the complexity of internal alchemy by Livia Kohn, long-time scholar of medieval Daoism and professor emerita of Boston University. A specialist of immortality concepts and practices, she has most recently edited *Daoist Body Cultivation* (2006) and authored *Chinese Healing Exercises* (2008). Next comes a detailed examination of *neidan* body concepts with numerous charts and an explanation of key terminology by Sara Neswald, a graduate of McGill University and assistant professor at Mingchuan University in Taipei. Her dissertation focuses on the *Nüdan hebian* (Combined Collection on Female Alchemy), a key document of the Qing dynasty which she is currently translating in full. Third in this section is a substantial outline of the history of internal alchemy with a focus on distinguishing the major schools and tendencies. This is by Zhang Guangbao, a graduate of Beijing University who now serves as a research fellow at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. He has authored numerous books and articles on the subject, including the standard volume *Tang Song neidan daojiao* (2001) and the recent *Jin Yuan Quanzhen jiao xin yanjiu* (2007).

The second major section deals with specific doctrines and practices in the formative phase of internal alchemy during the Song dynasty. Here we have a philosophical examination of the key concepts of inner nature, destiny, and mind as formulated in the Southern School. The author is Lu Xichen, a graduate of Hunan Normal University who currently directs the Institute of Religion at Central South University in Changsha and also serves on the faculty of the Chinese Daoist College. She has written many books and articles, focusing on an in-depth philosophical and psychological exploration of the tradition. Her presentation is followed by a detailed study of the final stages of the *neidan* process, the emergence of the spirit embryo through the top of the head, by Stephen Eskildsen, a graduate of the University of British Columbia and associate professor at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga. He is the author of two important volumes, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* (1998) and *The Teach-*

ings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters (2004). Last but not least in this part is an examination of the role of internal alchemy in ritual practice, notably the important Song method of the Thunder Rites, by Shin-yi Chao who also graduated from the University of British Columbia and now serves as assistant professor at Rutgers University in Camden. Her main focus is the deity Xuanwu, Dark Warrior, and the legends and rituals surrounding him.

The third major section of the volume concentrates on later developments during the Ming, Qing, and contemporary periods, especially as related to women. Here we have first a study of duo-cultivation practice, an adaptation of sexual techniques into internal refinement that necessitated specific social and physical settings. The presentation is by Liu Xun, a graduate of the University of Southern California who now teaches at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. His dissertation on the life and career of Chen Yingning (1880-1969) and the transformation of Daoist practice in early 20th-century Shanghai is in press with the Asia Center of Harvard University under the title *Daoist Modern*. His current research focuses on the social and cultural history of Complete Perfection institutions in central China.

The next contribution in this section is an introduction to women's alchemy which emerged powerfully during the Qing dynasty and involved new techniques as well as detailed formulations of how women's bodies are different from men's and necessitate unique methods. The author is Elena Valussi, a graduate of the School for Oriental and African Studies at the University of London who now teaches at Columbia College in Chicago. Her dissertation (2003) was the first English study on women's alchemy; her work has appeared in various scholarly journals. This is followed by a report on the understanding of Daoism and its practices among graduates of the elite Daoist women's academy on Nanyue in Hunan, founded in 2005 and representative of the new dimensions Daoism is about to enter. The work represents field research undertaken by Robin R. Wang, a graduate of Beijing University who now serves as philosophy professor and director of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. She is the author of *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* (2003) and *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization* (2004) and conducts active fieldwork on Daoist mountains.

The final part of the volume is dedicated to modern adaptations and comparative perspectives. It begins with an insightful examination of *neidan* as transformed by transmission into a Western and specifically American context. Its author is Michael Winn, founder of Healing Tao University in the Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina. The editor and co-author, with Mantak Chia, of seven books on internal alchemy, he is also the producer of ten Daoist *neidan* home study courses in audio and video format and in great demand as a teacher all over the world. Next we have a survey of the complex theoretical system and practical techniques of the Indian counterpart of internal alchemy, Kundalini yoga by Stuart Sovatsky, a graduate of Princeton University and long-term practitioner and teacher of the system. He is also the author of *Eros*,

Consciousness and Kundalini, which focuses on celibate practices, and of *Your Perfect Lips*, a poetic rendition of Indian *pariyanga* erotic yoga in a modern context. The volume concludes with an analytical and comparative description of Western alchemy and its philosophical foundation in Hermeticism by Althea Northage-Orr, a Hermetic initiate and priestess since 1973 who served as the spiritual director of the Hermetic Order of Chicago for many years. Also a practicing acupuncturist and inspired herbalist who grows all of her own materials and is in the process of compiling an herbal encyclopedia, she not only teaches Hermeticism but has been involved in the practice of Daoist women's alchemy for the past ten years.

Taken together, the volume presents internal alchemy in many different dimensions and from a variety of different perspectives in its endeavor to raise awareness of this important tradition among humanities scholars and scientists alike. We hope that, thanks to the unfailing efforts of the contributors and the generous support of the Hong Kong Taoist Association, this book will open a door for many to a world so far shrouded in mystery.

