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METAMORPHOSIS
AND DELIVERANCE
FROM THE CORPSE
IN TAOISM

Mutable, mercurial, and elusive, the Taoist Saint frolics about, appearing and then disappearing, first here and then there. Like the diver of Lieh-tzu, he follows the movement of the waves, knowing how to let himself be seized by the swell and bob up again into view between the crests. He also knows how "to rise and fall with the wind and the rain" like Ch'ih Chiang-tzu Yü.¹ One with the Formless, he can take all forms: He has mastered the art of *pien-hua*, the science of metamorphosis.

This science has numerous manifestations. The word *pien* has assumed a generic sense that includes many types of powers, such as the gift of ubiquity, the faculties of rendering oneself invisible, passing through walls, traversing great distances very rapidly, invulnerability, entering a fire and not being burned, walking on water and not drowning, knowing the future, etc. Moreover, the same powers can be used on different planes, material or spiritual, and they can be obtained either through magical practices (wherein talismans play a major role) or through meditation exercises—though the two were often closely associated. In this paper, we will present and explore some aspects of *pien-hua*.

The metamorphoses of one unique breath, of a single principle, the *pien-hua*, the million and one transformations, they are

¹ See the *Lieh-hsien chuan*, trans. M. Kaltenmark (Peking, 1953), p. 49.

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the secret itself, the mysterious dynamism of life. "*Hua* is the natural Tao, the movement of yin and yang; when non-being arises from being and being arise from non-being, there is *hua*; in the birth and death of the myriad creatures, there is *hua*."² "One yin, one yang, that is the Tao," declares the celebrated phrase from the *Hsi-tz'u*. In a similar way, it continues: "An opening and a closing, that is *pien*," describing thereby the great cosmic movements of separation and reunion of Heaven and Earth, the appearance and disappearance of the world.

The universe multiplies and renews itself only through the mechanism of transformation. The world is not the act of a creator: The appearance of new life is never anything but the transformation of an old form. "When things are exhausted, they are transformed [*pien*]," says Han K'ang-po.³ "At its limit yang reverses into yin, at its limit yin reverses into yang." "When yin wanes, yang waxes. When yang wanes, yin waxes. If the roots blossom, the branches weaken. When the branches are strong, the roots wither. This is the Tao of Heaven and Earth, the dynamism of transformation," remarks a commentator of Lao-tzu, well within the tradition of the latter.⁴ All things coming to the limit of their course reverse into their opposite or change form. This is why "tigers, deer and hares," explains Pao-p'u-tzu, the celebrated fourth-century alchemist, "live for 800 years and then their hair turns white; they change into wolves and foxes who live 500 years, and then take human form."⁵ For Lieh-tzu as well, old pears become spinach and old goats become monkeys.⁶

Aside from such abrupt reversals, everything perpetually changes, imperceptibly but surely. Lieh-tzu says:

"Turning without end, Heaven and Earth shift secretly. Who is aware of it? . . . The interval between the coming and the going is imperceptible; who is aware of it? Whatever a thing may be, its energy is not suddenly spent, its form does not suddenly decay; we are aware neither of when it reaches maturity nor of when it begins to decay. It is the same with a man's progress from birth to old age; his looks, knowledge, and bearing differ from one day to the next, his skin and nails and hair are growing at the same time as they are falling away. They do not stop as they were in childhood without

² See Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai kanwa jiten* (Tokyo, 1955-60), "*hua*," in which he cites the *Yün hui*.

³ Han K'ang-po's commentary to the *Hsi-tz'u* (Taipei, 1966), *shang*, p. 47.

⁴ Yen Tsun, *Tao-te chen-ching chih-kuei* (TT 375-77/HY 693), 10:18a, 13:18b; TT refers to the fascicle of a work in the *Tao-tsang*, the 1925-27 Shanghai reprint; HY refers to the number of a work in the Harvard-Yenching Index to the Taoist Canon, *Tao-tsang tzu-mu yin-te* (1936; reprint ed., Taipei, 1966), pp. 1-37.

⁵ Pao-p'u-tzu, Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng ed. (Shanghai, 1959), 3:8-9.

⁶ Lieh-tzu, Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng ed. (Shanghai, 1959), p. 4.

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changing. But we cannot be aware of the intervals; we must wait for their fruition before we know.⁷

And Chuang-tzu exclaims: "The life of things is a gallop, a head-long dash—with every movement they alter, with every movement they shift. What should you do and what should you not do? Everything will change of itself, that is certain!"⁸

Since everything is only *pien-hua*, since the transformations are always at work, slipping one form into another, there are no ontological separations or fundamental structural differences among beings. There is no discontinuity in nature at all. "How can one thing put a distance between itself and other things?" demands Lieh-tzu.⁹ As an old man is only a transformation of an infant, so kites become sparrow-hawks and then cuckoos, swallows become oysters and then swallows again.¹⁰ Huai-nan-tzu says the same: "At the end of 500 years, yellow dust produces gold; after 1000 years gold produces a yellow dragon."¹¹ This is the theory of the maturation of metals in the earth, held by the West as well, on which were founded the hopes of the alchemists. "Metamorphosis is the natural [movement] of Heaven and Earth; why doubt that gold or silver can be made from other objects?" asks Pao-p'u-tzu.¹²

THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE GODS AND SAINTS

People, however, are not aware of the Unity; they do not see what passes progressively from one form to another, imperceptible and tenuous. Rigid and inflexible, they see only the rupture of the form. Knowledge of the shifting unity, recovery of the "parenté enfouie qui unit toutes choses"¹³ is the mark of the Saint; recognition of *pien-hua* is the distinctive quality of spiritual knowledge. "He who knows the way [*tao*] of *pien-hua*, knows how the spirits move," declares the *Hsi-tz'u*. "To know how to change [*pien*] and how to metamorphose [*hua*] is to be spiritual [*ling*]. It is also called the Tao," echoes a Taoist commentator many centuries later.¹⁴ The Saint "acts in union with *pien-hua*"; both one and many at the same time, he "is manifested through them," according to Chuang-tzu.¹⁵ His art consists entirely of "transforming himself

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8; *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, trans. A. C. Graham (London, 1960), p. 27.

⁸ *Chuang-tzu*, Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng ed. (Shanghai, 1959), p. 259; *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York, 1968), p. 182.

⁹ *Lieh-tzu*, p. 16; trans. Graham, p. 37. See also Watson, p. 198.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4; trans. Graham, p. 21.

¹¹ *Huai-nan-tzu*, Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng ed. (Shanghai, 1959), p. 66.

¹² *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 16:17.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966), p. 63.

¹⁴ Yen Tung's commentary on the *Wu-liang tu-jen ching* (TT 38/HY 87), p. 1b.

¹⁵ *Chuang-tzu*, pp. 223 and 461.

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in accord with things," glosses his commentator.¹⁶ He knows how to assume the form of the swelling wave, to follow the rise and fall of the wind and rain (which are the atmospheric and aquatic influences, respectively, of Heaven and Earth). "It is by mastering ['riding'] *pien-hua* that one aligns oneself with all things," adds Han K'ang-po, commenting on the phrase from the *Hsi-tz'u* cited above. Now, to correspond to things is at the same time the nature of celestial action, saintly action, and the principal mode of activity of a good government. It is the secret itself of *wu-wei*, nonintervention, the action-response which does not take the initiative but "follows," knowing how to adapt itself.

As the formless Tao can be strong or weak, supple or rigid, yin or yang, obscure or brilliant,¹⁷ so "the superior man transforms, disperses and concentrates himself; his form is never constant."¹⁸ Mysteriously rooted in the Great Unity underlying all multiplicity, the cement of diversity and the source of all profusion, the Saint knows how to wed immobility and movement, permanence and change, and thus transforms himself more freely and more opportunely than all others.

"The process by which spirits are born has the void and the true One for its substance, *pien-hua* and the Not-One for its function; though the One, [the Saint] can be at rest; while at rest, he can then change [*pien*]; changed, he can then transform himself [*hua*]. The art of the Saint is born from this, the splendor of the divine issues from this. Thus the One and the Not-One are not two different things."¹⁹

In essence, to transform oneself is to correspond to all things in nature. There is no rapport between Heaven and men more essential than the teaching of the divine Truth. One at its foundation, the Truth is profuse in its expressions. Buddhism for some, Taoism for others. The Truth adapts itself to those who listen; it measures the capacity of the receptacles of their minds; it acts as a mirror for them. Each perceives only what he can, only what he is. The vision that anyone has of it is merely their own form in it. The universe is simply the multiplication of its names, creatures the infinite diversity of its nature.

¹⁶ Commentary of Ch'eng Hsüan-ying, *ibid.*, p. 461.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁸ *La divinisation de Lao tseu dans le taoïsme des Han*, trans. A. Seidel (Paris, 1969), p. 88. On Juan Chi, one of the seven sages of the Bamboo Grove, see D. Holzman, *La vie et la pensée de Hi K'ang* (Leiden, 1957), pp. 29-35.

¹⁹ Tung Ssu-ching's postface to the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang-ching* (TT 186/HY 396), p. 3a.

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The Sage is the one who articulates the Truth. Like Truth, therefore, he transforms himself. Such is the case of Lao-tzu, the Sage par excellence, who surpasses all others at self-metamorphosis. Hence, the *Book of the Metamorphoses of Lao-tzu* (*Lao-tzu pien-hua ching*) chants: Lao-tzu can "make himself brilliant or somber; sometimes present, sometimes gone, he can become large or small, coil up or stretch himself out, raise or lower himself, extend vertically or horizontally, go backwards or forwards."²⁰ We recall here the opening and closing movements of Heaven and Earth, and recognize the one who knows how to fall and rise with the rain and wind, to become a dragon or serpent. Like the diver of Lieh-tzu, "he corresponds to the circumstances, he sinks or he floats."²¹

Cosmically, the transformations of Lao-tzu are also human and concrete. They take on forms in a very rich mythology. In the course of the centuries, the Teacher of the Emperors "transforms his own body"²² in order to dispense his teaching. Appearing and disappearing in various states and with numerous identities, he leaves written teachings behind him. He was Kuang Ch'eng-tzu, the teacher of the Yellow Emperor; his name was Ch'un Cheng-tzu under the August Shen Nung, and Ch'ih Ching-tzu under the Emperor Chuan-hsü. It was he who left the *Tao-te-ching* with the guardian of the Pass, who revealed the *Cheng-i meng-wei* to Chang Tao-ling. His incarnations are numerous.²³

This figure of a Sage, bearer of a teaching, who adopts changing forms, is not an incarnation of Lao-tzu alone. The same form is adopted by the Primordial Heavenly Worthy (*Yüan-shih t'ien-tsun*), a major divinity of Taoism who, "in the course of the cosmic eras, transforming himself by adaptation, frolics and wanders about through the three worlds, pronouncing the law and saving men."²⁴

The *San-lun yüan-chih* explains, "the Saint adapts to all beings, but his essence is distinct from them; thus, in so far as his transcendent root is fixed, he is called the 'true body'; in so far as he propagates the form of the law, he is called the 'response body.'"²⁵ This is part of a general doctrine borrowed from Buddhism by the

²⁰ Siedel, p. 63. ²¹ Ibid., p. 65. ²² Ibid., p. 70. ²³ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁴ See Hsieh Yu-hsi's commentary to the *Wu-liang tu-chen ching*, 1:1b. There was a "Book of the Transformation of the Primordial Origin in Response [to Beings] and its Changes According to the Eras" (*Yüan-shih ying-pien li-hua ching*), unfortunately now lost, which must have developed with regard to the Primordial Heavenly Worthy, the major divinity of the Taoist triad of Worthies, the same theme as that of the successive forms assumed by Lao-tzu.

²⁵ *San-lun yüan-chih* (TT 704/HY 1033), pp. 13b-14a.

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Taoists about the beginning of the T'ang, to which we can only briefly allude. The Tao, the Supreme Truth, dons different "bodies" according to its function. There exist, therefore, "metamorphic bodies" (*hua-shen*) which are "bodily traces" (*chi-shen*), in distinction to the "true body" (*chen-shen*). Specific divinities are considered to be the manifestations of these response bodies or these metamorphic bodies, of which the true body is the Tao.²⁶

The gods, however, do not metamorphose only for didactic reasons, that is, according to the needs of the teaching they must expound. They also follow the course of natural changes. Lao-tzu changes form according to the hours of the day.²⁷ The *T'ai-tan yin-shu* is said to be the book of *T'ai-i*, the Supreme One and "master of transformations"; even he "transforms himself into the four directions."²⁸ Consequently, he has four different names: "his name changes with the four seasons; to live eternally by following the temporal periods, this is called fusion and transformation [*hun-hua*]. He is not limited to only one name, and thus, there is truly the book of the Supreme Tao which leads to the true spirit."²⁹ He is always numerous, but protected from dispersion by the grace of the One.

The *Book of the Metamorphoses of the Primordial Origin* (abbreviated, *Yüan-shih pien-hua ching*)³⁰ is devoted to describing the different appearances assumed by the divinities in the course of the seasons and to assisting the adept in recovering their "true form" in the midst of their metamorphoses. "The Most High and all the Saints change their form and transform their light; all are modified according to the four seasons, following the cycles, adapting to the natural law; moving with the transformations, they do not suffer a term of old age and death; transforming themselves infinitely, they live eternally. This is what is meant when it is said, 'the Tao does not have a constant name.'"³¹

On one hand, the capacity for life is linked to the powers of metamorphosis, cyclical renewal according to the rhythms of

²⁶ Thus, for example, the response body of the Tao is the Primordial Heavenly Worthies; the metamorphic bodies are the three Heavenly Lords (T'ien, Ling, and Shen Pao chün), another Taoist triad. See *I-ch'ieh Tao-ching yin-i miao-men yu-ch'i* (TT 760/HY 1115), preface.

²⁷ Seidel, p. 97.

²⁸ *T'ai-tan yin-shu* (TT 1030/HY 1319), pp. 13b and 20b. This text is one of the basic works of the Mao Shan sect and dates from the revelations made to the patriarch of the sect in the fourth century.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3a.

³⁰ *Yüan-shih pien-hua pao-chen shang ching* (TT 1047-48/HY 1382). This is also an important text of the Mao Shan sect.

³¹ *Ibid.*, *shang*, p. 9a.

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nature. On the other, the adept is invited to recover the "true form" of the divinity. Thus he turns to "The Supreme Method for Seeking the Immortality of the Five Emperors of the Five Peaks, Wherein One Meditates on the Transformations and on the True Form." This is a type of manual which enables the adept to penetrate the five sacred mountains of Taoism by providing a diagnosis of his spiritual state: If he sees colored breaths, he will know by their hue whether it is a heavenly official charged to protect him, divinities who have come to test him, or a demon who wants to attack him, and he will thus be aware of his chances of success. But if he sees the "true form" of the Emperor of the mountain into which he is preparing to enter, he is assured of finding immortality.³² This recalls a famous talismanic text called *The True Form of the Five Mountains* which enables the adept to enter the mountains without fear of hostile spirits. The true form only appears to the Taoist worthy of seeing it.

The total spiritual life of the Saint is in many ways simply a process of *p'ien-hua*. The divinities which dwell within him, those who presided over his formation and who animate his subtle body, are only a transformation of the nine souls of the Lord, which, in the beginning, were the Nine Celestial Breaths or the Nine Original Heavens. Through a series of transformations, one month after another, they gave life to the embryo, and through nine transformations they became the nine divinities of the Palace of the Brain. The adept must, therefore, recover the mechanism of these transformations: Starting from the yearly anniversary of his conception, he relives the development of this embryo on a divine and cosmic plane by concentrating on these heavenly breaths—which are, at the same time, in direct correspondence to a corporal organ, a sacred spot on the body, and a star. By this exercise, the organs so vivified are made "sublime" and transmuted into mystical organs of gold and jade. These are the nine transmutations of "cinnabar-nine," or "nine times-transmuted" cinnabar.³³

Another exercise involves envisioning the Lord Emperor, the *T'ai-i*, and four other major divinities, unite and blend so as to be

³² *T'ai-shang chiu-ch'ih pan-fu wu-ti nei-chen ching* (TT 1029/HY 1318), pp. 2b-6a.

³³ See the exercise entitled "The Cinnabar Nine [-Times Transmuted], which Unties the Knots," in *Shang-ch'ing chiu-tan sheng-hua t'ai-ching chung-chi ching* (TT 1043/HY 1371), pp. 16b to the end. This is another important text of the Mao Shan sect; chap. 29 of the *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* (hereafter YCCC), pp. 4a-5b, gives a summarized account.

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transformed into One Great Spirit (*i ta shen*), one of the nine primordial Heavens. In the form of colored breaths, he will also lodge within an essential organ of the body so as to provide it with eternal life. Moreover, by means of this process, the adept attempts to return to the origin of the transformations which gave him life (*hua-ch'eng*, which formed him by "transformation"), starting with these primordial and superior spirits.³⁴

When meditating, the adept is in the process of effecting transmutations. He can cause colored breaths to appear, and sometimes these breaths are transformed into divinities. Born of the void by transformation (*hua-sheng*) within the heavenly spheres, in contrast to terrestrial beings who are "born of an embryo" (*t'ai-sheng*), these divinities metamorphose themselves in front of the adept. They become breaths or infants or ladies fully adorned and surrounded by followers. Thus, "the Nine Lords fuse, and the one hundred spirits are metamorphosed within,"³⁵ or "the Great One is transformed into the realms of the Three Perfections."³⁶ There may also take place "the metamorphosis of the One Female and the Lord Emperor into a male-female."³⁷

The colored breaths are condensed and metamorphosed; they are knotted together and transformed. The fluctuating visions endlessly shift from one into another; they are generated, take shape, and are reshaped through a coalescing of time, and transformed by unification.

The adept advances through several stages in his exercises: First, his attention flits from each passing form to each new one; then he progresses to fluid visions which he can collect and deploy; eventually, he has the skill to transform the mutable divinities dwelling within him. Thus he gradually learns to disclose the single true form of the self within the manifested forms and to make these forms return to the Divine which is the One. ("Returning is the way of the Tao," said Lao-tzu; the words *chuan* and *huei* are often synonyms for transformation.) "The Nine Breaths are the transformations of the Lord Emperor in whom they are united. Transformed, they become nine; these are the Nine Palaces which, fusing together, make only One."³⁸ "To make the light return, is

³⁴ *T'ai-shang chiu-chen chung-ching* (TT 1042/HY 1366), pp. 3a-8b. This text is considered to be one of the most important of the Mao Shan movement. A summarized version of this exercise appears in YCCC, 30:5b-9b, 52:1a-4a.

³⁵ *T'ai-tan yin-shu*, p. 43a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29b.

³⁷ *Tz'u-i ching* (TT 1025/HY 1302), p. 3b. This text appears to bring together a set of ancient methods well known to the Mao Shan sect.

³⁸ *T'ai-tan yin-shu*, p. 4a.

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to blend everything (the adept and the gods of his visions) through ten thousand metamorphoses.”³⁹

The adept, however, is never engulfed; he also knows how to redescend with the rain, to recreate the differences, the glittering of variegated forms, and the multiplication of the gods in his body. He knows the art of metamorphosis—that which plunges his essence into Identity and Difference, that which, infinite, is never reducible to the One or to the Many.

MAGICAL METAMORPHOSES

The art of *pien-hua* is also practiced in the world, outside of the meditation chamber. The Taoist has the power to metamorphose both himself and other objects. The expression *pien-hua* denotes a great number of extraordinary powers that the Taoists shared with magicians, who were also versed in the arts of long life. Popular imagination has so often confused magicians and Taoists that one can no longer in fact be very precise about how or when they were distinguished.

Lieh-tzu compares the science of the magician to that of nature. The magician works by means of “creative mutations” (*tsao-hua*), producing the alterations of yin and yang. “His work is mysterious, his action profound; surely, [they] are difficult to probe, difficult to exhaust.” The magician “relies upon the appearance of things” (*yin-hsing*) (in contrast, probably, to nature which works on cosmic forces); “his work is obvious, his action superficial; after being brought forth, they disappear.” This is the art which “probes the science of numbers and masters that of changes”; it is called the science of metamorphoses (*hua*) and of magic (*huan*, illusion). “When you know,” says the Sage, “that there is no difference at all between life and death, then I will be able to teach you magic.”

Lao Ch’eng-tzu, to whom the philosopher Yin Wen handed down this teaching, meditated on these words for three months. He was then able to appear and disappear at will, to invert the course of the seasons, to call up thunder in winter and make running things fly.⁴⁰

In a very different form, Pao-p’u-tzu expresses the same idea: “The nature of lead is to be white, if it is tinted red, it becomes cinnabar. The nature of cinnabar is to be red; if it is tinted white, it becomes lead. Clouds, rain, fog and snow are all conditions of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24a.

⁴⁰ *Lieh-tzu*, pp. 33–34; trans. Graham, p. 65.

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Heaven and Earth [of Nature]; with drugs, one can make something from them which appears no different from the real thing.”⁴¹

Magic is a reproduction of the natural process. It is conceived as a mimesis, a production and not a pretense; it produces a living form, not a copy. The difference between magical and natural processes is that, above all, the effect of the former is superficial and unstable.

Taoist texts contain magical recipes and numerous examples of magical powers as depicted by hagiographers. For example, Huang Ch'u-p'ing transformed his sheep into stones so as not to be disturbed in his study of the Tao.⁴² The *Hsien-yüan pien-chu* tells how Wang T'an received “the art of hiding his light and transforming his body.” Dared by someone to metamorphose himself, he took the form of a tree, but the other fellow seized an axe. Wang immediately transformed himself into a stone, but the other lit a fire (in the theory of the five elements, fire prevails over minerals). After turning himself into bubbling water and so on, Wang T'an finally achieved the upper hand by adopting the appearance of a corpse—the man fled immediately.⁴³

The alchemist, Pao-p'u-tzu, mentions some methods which make it possible “to change one's form and transform one's appearance.” They are generally acquired by the ingestion of drugs or talismans. (The Taoist Canon preserves such talismans as, for example, those which enable one to change sex).⁴⁴ Whoever possesses this art can make a river appear from a drop of water or a mountain rise up from a pinch of earth (the case is reported in the account of the Seven Sages of Huai-nan⁴⁵); he can make forests spring up from only a single grain and obtain fruits already ripe. Smiling, he can become a woman; grimacing, he becomes an old man; squatting, he returns to infancy.⁴⁶ Thus, it appears that in these procedures the magician accelerates the natural process of transformation: “With the aid of wood, he obtains wood; with the aid of stone, he obtains stone.”⁴⁷ He has recourse to exterior props of the same nature as the object he wishes to obtain. From a gesture, from a

⁴¹ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 6:71.

⁴² YCCC, 109:3a-b.

⁴³ *Hsien-yüan pien-chu* (TT 329-330/HY 596), *chung*, pp. 12a-b.

⁴⁴ *Yüan-shih wu-lao ch'ih-shu yü-p'ien chen-wen t'ien-shu ching* (TT 26/HY 22), *chung*, pp. 2b-3a. There is another example in the *Tung-chen shang-ch'ing shen-chou ch'i-chuan ch'i-pien wu-t'ien ching* (TT 1030/HY 1320; abbreviated *Shen-chou ching*), p. 23b.

⁴⁵ YCCC, 109:23b.

⁴⁶ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 19:98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 15:68.

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seed, he obtains the mature and complete appearance: Imitating a woman, he takes on the appearance of one; with a piece of wood, he generates a forest; drawing a river, water springs forth.

Other procedures also clearly reveal magical practices. There is, for example, the strange recipe which instructs one to mix the blood of a white tiger killed on the third day of the third moon with the blood of a camel and sprinkle the mixture on a plant which should be replanted seven times. This plant will then yield a drug that enables the adept to "change his form and transform his appearance, to soar and to sink at will."⁴⁸

The mystic, on the other hand, has recourse to completely internal processes: In order to change into light, he visualizes the sun in the right eye and the moon in the left. He then sees them unite, a divine young boy appearing in the sun and a celestial maiden in the moon; he himself merges with them and, transformed into light, is able to soar aloft. By a very similar process he can turn into a dragon, fire, clouds, water, etc.⁴⁹ T'ao Hung-ching (432–536) mentions the procedures for changing into a sun, a cloud, jade or a dragon—procedures which pose a question as to the relationship between functional and manipulatory alchemy, magic and mystical meditation. T'ao refers to the *Ling-shu tzu-wen* which is actually found in the Taoist Canon as one of the texts revealed to the Mao Shan sect. The methods set forth in this work are all similar to the one we will describe below. First of all, it is necessary to secure an elixir composed of fourteen ingredients, called "The Efflorescent Yellow Water of the Moon" (*huang-shui yüeh-hua*). After further cooking, it becomes "The Jade Essence of the Billowing Waves" (*hui-shui yü-ching*), a mild and sweetened liqueur that forms pearls as large as eggs. He who swallows them is transformed into the sun and lifted up to the Shang Ch'ing Heaven. If they are planted in the earth and watered with the same elixir, they will produce the "Bronze-ringed Tree" (*huan-kang shu*), whose fruit changes into clouds and causes the person who eats them to float aloft to the supreme Ultimate. By beginning the whole operation again with the fruit, one obtains the "Red Tree with White Fruit" (*hung-shu pai-tzu*), similar to pears, with the power to effect one's transformation into jade and ascension to the *T'ai-wei* Heaven.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 19:98. For a summary of other processes, see Ngo Van Xuyet, *Divination, magie et politique en Chine* (Paris, 1976), p. 302.

⁴⁹ *Shen-chou ching*, pp. 12b–13a. This text is also an important work of the Mao Shan sect.

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Now, these elixirs and trees of life are found elsewhere in the texts of this same sect, with the same names, but in a different context. "The Efflorescent Yellow Water of the Moon" is the essence of the moon which nourishes the adept while meditating on this astral body. Within his mouth it is transformed into a liqueur as yellow as gold and tasting of honey. "The Jade Essence of the Billowing Waves" also tastes like honey and is similar to white jade. The Three Ladies of Simplicity (*San su yüan chüan*) exhale it when the adept invokes them in his meditations. They feed it to their sons, mouth-to-mouth, and then to the adept himself. The essence gives the appearance of jade or gold to all who ingest it. The fruit of the "Bronze-ringed Tree" and the white fruits of the "Red Tree" are related to a divine liqueur in the Heavenly Palace. Moreover, a "ringed-tree" (*huan-shu*) also grows in the Heavenly Palace of the Eastern Caverns.

Whether they are obtained from alchemical manipulations, presented by divinities who appear in meditation, or self-generating in the throat of the adept, these liqueurs are always described in a similar fashion. Gold or orange in color, often brilliant as jade, tasting of honey, taking a form round like a pearl, pill, or egg—these fruits of immortality are compared and often related to peaches, pears, or jujubes and their nectars.

On reading T'ao Hung-ching's source, one is left with the impression that what is described as a process of metamorphosis is in fact a technique of ecstasy or the means to obtain immortality: The adept becomes like the sun, like a cloud or jade, and rises to the heavens. It appears that this transformation may be only the means for this flight, that is, the form that the adept assumes so that he can ascend to the heaven.⁵⁰

UBIQUITY (*fen-hsing*)

The mastery of *pian-hua*, the conquest of mobility with unity, is connected to the common Taoist theme of "traversing great distances," ecstatic journeys similar to those of shamans. The Saint who knows how to transform himself is freed from corporal attachments and liberated from temporal-spatial bonds. He can

⁵⁰ See *Chen-kao* (TT 637-40/HY 1010), chap. 5, p. 3b, which refers to the *Ling-shu tzu-wen* (TT 120/HY 255). The *Hui-shui yü-ching* is found in the *Tz'u-i ching* (TT 1025/HY 1302), pp. 52a-53b. The fruits of the *huan-kang* tree and the red tree with white fruits are mentioned in the *Tzu-tu yen-kuang shen yüan-pien ching* (TT 1030/HY 1321), p. 9b. In his article on "The Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," (in *Facets of Taoism*, ed. Anna Seidel and Holmes Welch [New Haven, Conn., 1979], pp. 121-86), Michel Strickman discusses these elixirs and their alchemical preparation at length.

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travel a thousand miles in a moment, fly like a bird, cross the seas, etc.

Just as he knows how to disappear for centuries only to reappear once again, he also knows how to be present in many places at one time. He possesses the gift of ubiquity, *fen-hsing*, which literally means to divide the body into many parts. Once again, it is a skill shared with the magicians. The Taoist often has great fun with it, and the hagiographers enjoy telling us how Tso Tz'u, about to be seized and imprisoned on the orders of Ts'ao Ts'ao, multiplied himself so that they no longer knew which Tso Tz'u to arrest.⁵¹ Just as Ko Hsüan, while receiving guests, was simultaneously present in the room, on the doorstep to greet them, and at the riverside peacefully fishing, likewise the Taoist's mundane activities do not distract him from the major occupation of all Taoists—dreaming alongside running water.⁵²

There are many methods for obtaining the faculty of ubiquity. Pao-p'u-tzu explains that it is necessary to concentrate on the body, to see it divide into three persons, which are then multiplied into ten, all duplicates of oneself.⁵³ The *Tao-shu* alludes to a method of the "ancients" that enables you to divide the body by gazing at your shadow in the sun or your reflection in a mirror or in water.⁵⁴

The Taoist encyclopedia, *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien*, sets forth three similar methods, all of which involve the creation of a human simulacrum (*ying-jen*) by means of mental concentration. Such figures, only several inches tall, can pass through walls and ascend to the heavens. They are substitutes for the Taoist himself, acting as representatives for him so as to roam the heavens and secure beneficial influences for him. They infuse these influences into the adept's body where they proceed to the major organs.⁵⁵ Other exercises consist of envisioning oneself, or one's *hun* soul in its distinctive state, entering the Palace of the Supreme Ultimate (*T'ai-chi*),⁵⁶ or ascending to the sky in the company of the three divinities of the fields of cinnabar,⁵⁷ or else fusing with the Supreme

⁵¹ An account of Tso Tz'u is found among the biographies of magicians in the *Hou Han shu* and has been translated by Ngo Van Xuyet, p. 139; another account is in the YCCC, 85:166–18b.

⁵² *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 18:93.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Tao-shu* (TT 643/HY 1011), 19:5b–7a.

⁵⁵ YCCC, 35:4a–5a.

⁵⁶ *T'ai-tan yin-shu*, p. 16a.

⁵⁷ This exercise must have been well known and rather important since there are many versions of it in the Canon, particularly in the *Su-ling ching* (TT 1026/HY

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One who has assumed the appearance of the adept himself. It may even be the adept who enters into the Supreme One.⁵⁸

In their exercises, the Taoists "divide their bodies into a thousand persons, pace the void and go where they will." They "divide their breaths and expand their bodies,"⁵⁹ or "divide their light into a thousand bodies."⁶⁰

One exercise consists of mentally training oneself to see as far as the limits of the universe. In one direction after another, the adept envisions the plants, animals, and inhabitants of the regions at the edge of the world, complete to their last detail. This is called "making the five directions present."⁶¹ Another exercise instructs the adept to envisage his body, spirit, and respiration as gradually increasing and becoming as vast as the Great Void (*T'ai-hsü*). Then he must imagine that he is the moon, illuminating first the room, then the city, and eventually the whole country, extending into the ten directions.⁶² For Pao-p'u-tzu as well, the Saint's powers of metamorphosis include "while seated, seeing as far as the eight poles."⁶³ This refers to the ability to spread oneself over the entire earth, to float freely and be omnipresent—all impressions experienced during ecstasy. Thus the Taoist puts the wisdom of Lao-tzu into practice, "without going out of his door, he knows the whole world."⁶⁴ Like Chuang-tzu, "free and floating, he is without end like the four directions and has no limit."⁶⁵ "The four seas cannot contain his body."⁶⁶

With the gift of ubiquity, magicians can merely pass through closed doors and windows, or be in several places at one time. Mystics, however, "leave being so as to enter into non-being"; no longer limited, they are present everywhere.

1303), pp. 38a-49, a text held in great esteem by T'ao Hung-ching. For other versions, see *Wu-tou san-yüan chen-i ching k'ou-chüeh* and the following paragraph in chap. 49 of the YCCC; *Chün-ch'üeh ti-chün wu-tou san-i t'u-chüeh* (TT 534/HY 764); *Hsüan-wei miao-ching* (TT 31/HY 60); *Wu-chung chüeh* (TT 60/HY 140), *chung*, pp. 2a-4b.

⁵⁸ There are numerous exercises wherein the adept visualizes himself within the *T'ai-i* and becomes identical with it; e.g., see the *T'ai-tan yin-shu*, pp. 29a-30a, 31a-32b, 38b-43a, etc.

⁵⁹ *Yüan-shih pien-hua pao-chen shang-ching, shang*, p. 11b.

⁶⁰ *Shen-chou ching*, p. 21b.

⁶¹ *Tzu-tu yen-kuang shen yüan-pien ching*, pp. 2b-7a; *Pao-shen ch'i-chü ching* (TT 1027/HY 1308), p. 8b. This exercise is summarized in the *Chen-kao*, 9:5a-b, and in the *Teng-chen yin-chüeh, chung*, pp. 4b-5a, and the *Shang-ch'ing san-chen chih-yao yü-chüeh* (TT 193/HY 422).

⁶² *Tao-shu*, chap. 14, pp. 4a-12b.

⁶³ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 19:98.

⁶⁴ *Tao-te-ching*, chap. 47.

⁶⁵ *Chuang-tzu*, p. 258; trans. Watson, p. 181.

⁶⁶ YCCC, 84:8a.

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INVISIBILITY (*yin-hsing*)

Capricious, ethereal, and enigmatic, the Taoist vanishes or fades away only to reappear elsewhere or at another time. He does not die but retires to another region, hides himself, or flies away. He has mastered the art of invisibility, one of the most important manifestations of *p'ien-hua*.

This science was already known to the magicians of the first century, for we can see a "rebel sorcerer" teach the people the art of "self-concealment" (*mien-ni fa*).⁶⁷ The *Huang-t'ing ching*, one of the most famous Taoist scriptures, alludes to this power. The "Book of the Eight Methods for Hiding in the Earth" (*Yin-ti pa-shu ching*) explains how to disappear when danger menaces: You must turn to the Northeast in the spring, watch for a purple cloud which changes into a unicorn, and then, reciting a particular formula, swallow a talisman. An adept who was sufficiently trained could then make himself a type of bank with a lump of earth taken from the Northeast and disappear. Thus, there are eight modes of metamorphosis correlated with the eight divisions of the year (the solstices, equinoxes, and the first day of each season) and to the eight directions. Rather than a unicorn, therefore, it may sometimes be necessary to visualize a dragon, a hare, or a phoenix, etc.⁶⁸ Here again we see that metamorphosis is linked to temporal changes and spatial directions.

"The human body is naturally visible," explains Pao-p'u-tzu, "and there are methods for rendering it invisible; spirits and demons are naturally invisible, and there are procedures for making them visible."⁶⁹ It is by virtue of this principle, he adds, that metamorphosis is possible: Here we touch on a notion of metamorphosis which no longer involves making something appear which already exists potentially but, rather, making something appear which concomitantly exists in another form. This other form is often the "true form."

It is the true form of the Primordial Heavenly Worthy that the adept learns to discern in the midst of his ephemeral apparitions. It is the true form of the Truth, One in the absolute and many in its expressions, that one must learn how to recover in the teachings. To do so is to leave aside the letter of the doctrine in order to

⁶⁷ See Ngo Van Xuyet, p. 49.

⁶⁸ *Yin-ti pa-shu ching* (TT 1039/HY 1348). These exercises are also presented under the same title in chap. 53 of the YCCC, pp. 8b-13b. The *Huang-t'ing nei-ching ching* alludes to it in chap. 25.

⁶⁹ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 16:71.

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experience the spirit of it, just as one leaves the boat after having crossed the river. More concretely even, it is the true form of a demon that is reflected in a mirror raised to its face.⁷⁰ Likewise, when the *yang-sui* mirrors are exposed to the sun they make the fire of the sky appear—they concretize it. The *fang-chu* mirrors catch the heavenly dew when exposed to the moon—they precipitate it. There are also mirrors which reveal the future;⁷¹ still others will make divinities appear.⁷² They render the invisible visible by virtue of their brilliance. The mental mirror can do the same: either through the Saint's simple "illuminating" gaze, frequently nourished by starry vapors, those divine lights which make the eyes keener and so increase the Saint's lighting power, his capacity to represent himself on the celestial plane or to reflect himself in the divine light.

To make something appear, reveal it, or give it form, is to make visible that which naturally exists in an invisible state. People themselves exist naturally in a visible state, concrete and solid, the state of coagulation. The Saint knows how to make himself invisible because he knows how to recover his subtle, ethereal state. He knows that he is only a "knot" of the Primordial Breath, a "concretization" of the Nine Original Breaths (or the three first Breaths). By virtue of his ability to return to the origin, he knows how to "untangle" the coagulation of these Breaths, to recover an empyreal form and disappear, "to ascend with the smoke." Taking refuge in the Tao, he is no longer perceptible. "[He will] hide far back along the skein without beginnings, and roam where the myriad things end and begin. . . . The Sage hides himself in Heaven."⁷³

Let us pause for a moment longer on this art of disappearing, for its meaning is quite complex.

First of all, to disappear is also to escape notice. The ideal of the Taoist is to blend into nature or simply to remain hidden among men. The Saint "becomes wood when he enters a forest, becomes water when he lies in water."⁷⁴ This is how he adapts himself, it is how the diver of Lieh-tzu becomes one body with the water, and it is why the birds were not frightened of Chieh-tzu T'ui.⁷⁵ The ideal

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17:77. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15:69.

⁷² See M. Kaltenmark, "Les miroirs magiques," *Mélanges offerts à P. Demiéville*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1974), pp. 151-66.

⁷³ *Lieh-tzu*, p. 16; trans. Graham, p. 38; and *Chuang-tzu*, chap. 19, p. 180; trans. Watson, p. 198.

⁷⁴ *Chiu-chen chung-ching chiang-sheng shen-tan chüeh* (TT 1042/HY 1366), p. 14b.

⁷⁵ *Lieh-hsien chuan* (n. 1 above), trans. Kaltenmark, p. 86.

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Saint, a hidden recluse, "covers up his traces." He removes the distinctions between classes of things. Recall that for Chuang-tzu distinctions are the act of the narrow mind; for the Taoist Saint there is only unity with Heaven and Earth.⁷⁶

"He hides himself in heaven," says Lieh-tzu. Certain methods provide the secret for this, others the way "to conceal oneself in the earth." One text tells how to "metamorphosize oneself seven times and dance in Heaven"; another how to "absorb the efflorescences of the stars so as to hide in the sky"; and yet another, on the other hand, reveals the way to "hide oneself in the earth." The art of "ascending to heaven in broad daylight" corresponds to that of "descending into the earth in broad daylight."⁷⁷ In Taoist sacred cosmology, the subterranean world and the heavenly worlds communicate; through the lower paradises under the earth, one proceeds to the heavenly regions. Thus, disappearing into the sky or into the earth are two complementary processes, as are the arts of rising with the wind and falling with the rain.

The Taoist can "slip away and hide in the sun and in the moon" or he can "hide by withdrawing into the three luminaries [sun, moon and stars]." One of the texts in the Taoist Canon bears the subtitle "The Book for Hiding in the Moon and Disappearing into the Sun" or, elsewhere, "The Book for Hiding in the Sky and Disappearing into the Moon"; it reveals a method for absorbing the rays of the sun and moon.⁷⁸ The Taoist hides within light, but when he retreats into the earth, "the sun and moon are without light, neither people nor demons can perceive him."⁷⁹

The complementary of Heaven and Earth is duplicated in the dialectic of light and shadow: One method simultaneously advocates "returning to the luminosity of the heavenly bodies" and "returning to the obscure."⁸⁰ A well-known meditational technique for disappearing, which the *Chen-kao* tells us was practiced at the beginning of the third century by Tu Hsieh, is called "The Method for Preserving the White and the Black," inspired by a phrase from Lao-tzu: "Know the white and preserve

⁷⁶ See *Chuang-tzu*, chap. 2.

⁷⁷ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 17:78; trans. Ngo Van Xuyet, p. 192.

⁷⁸ *Huang-ch'i yang-ching san-tao shun-hsing ching* (TT 27/HY 33). It gives itself the first subtitle, but many other works refer to it by the second (see, for example, *Chen-kao*, 5:2; *Pa-su chen-ching fu-shih jih-yüeh huang-hua chüeh* (TT 1028/HY 1312), p. 4b; *Ch'ing-yao tzu-shu ching* (TT 1026/HY 1304), p. 9a.; and other examples).

⁷⁹ *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 17:78; trans. Ngo Van Xuyet, p. 192.

⁸⁰ *Yin-ti pa-shu ching, shang*, the seventh method. The same text is in chap. 53 of the YCCC, p. 12b.

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the black.”⁸¹ It enjoins the visualization of three colored breaths, one for each field of cinnabar: black for the brain, white for the heart, and yellow for below the navel. These breaths change into fire, embracing the viscera and the whole body, both inside and out. The result enables the adept to disappear and self-multiply.⁸²

To be a Saint is, at the same time, to radiate light and to hide this light; it is, moreover, a return to the original darkness. “Conceal your light,” recommends Lao-tzu. To disappear is, in fact, “to hide one’s light” or “extinguish one’s light.” It is to veil one’s Truth, to cloak one’s transcendence. Through his exercises, the Saint has become luminous. He is vermilion, resplendent, radiating an aura; he “extends his light ten thousand feet, illuminating dark spaces by themselves.”⁸³ He is light; indeed, the character *ching*, light, often doubles for “body.” To hide is to be like the common, it is, therefore, “to store his light” (*tsang-ching*), an expression that means “to disappear.”

A more attentive reading of the texts, however, convinces us that the phenomenon is even more complex. The Saint also hides his shadow (*ying*). The expression *yin*, “to conceal,” is sometimes associated with the two words for light, *ching* or *kuang*, and sometimes with *ying*, shadow: One conceals his shadow or his light, and thus one appears or disappears.⁸⁴ It is said that Lao-tzu can “make himself brilliant or dark, now disappearing, now present.”⁸⁵ One of the powers promised to the diligent adept involves, according to a common saying, “sitting, he is present; standing, he disappears.” The faculty of becoming invisible is constantly associated with reappearing; it is the double of that which enables one to radiate from afar, to extend one’s light, to give it rein, as discussed above. One evades the world by disappearing but also by

⁸¹ *Tao-te-ching*, chap. 28.

⁸² See *Chen-kao*, 10:2a–b, 13:13b–15a; *Teng-chen yin-chüeh*, *chung*, pp. 20b–21b; YCCC, 53:15b, and its least altered version in *Wu-chung chüeh* (TT 60/HY 140), *chung*, pp. 15b–16a; *T’ai-ping yü-lan* (hereafter TPYL), chap. 664, p. 4a; YCCC, 111:2b.

⁸³ *Pao-p’u-tzu*, 19:98.8.

⁸⁴ Indeed, the character *ching*, light, is so often used for *ying*, shadow, that it is sometimes difficult to know whether *ching* is referring to light or shadow. However, the shadow-light dialectic is no less clear or frequently expressed. Moreover, the word *kuang*, light, sometimes substitutes for *ying* in these expressions (see, in particular the expressions: *fen-ying wei-kuang* or *ni-ying tsang-kuang*, in the *Shen-chou ching* [n. 44 above], pp. 20b, 21a) and thus makes it clear that it is a question of *ching* in the sense of “light.” See also M. Strickmann (n. 50 above), p. 158, wherein the author calls attention to the phrase *ou-ying*, “to unite their lights,” which was used to describe the spiritual union of the visionary Yang Hsi and a jade maiden, as distinct from *ho-ch’i*, “to unite their breaths,” which designated the sexual practices of the Celestial Master sect.

⁸⁵ *Lao-tzu pien-hua ching*, trans. Seidel, p. 63.

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becoming "fluid light"⁸⁶ which spreads all over the earth, by "giving rein to one's light."

This latter expression evokes those exercises mentioned above, wherein the adept attempts to see as far as the ends of the earth. The text concludes with the following: "Consider that your two eyes radiate a single light which is like liquid fire and as brilliant as the stars; glowing red, it extends for ten thousand miles. The mountains, marshes, rivers, thickets and forests of the four directions are all resplendent with its light."⁸⁷ Another exercise is entitled "The Method for Dissolving, Releasing One's Light and Hiding in the Heavens through 10,000 Transformations."⁸⁸ There is also "The Method for Leaving Existence and Entering Non-existence, To Free Oneself from the Body and Escape by Transformation into a Luminous Liquid." In reciting the accompanying formula the adept seeks to "transform his body, expand his breaths, divide his shadow and make himself into light." Practiced for seven years, this method enables the adept to "transform the body into seventy-two lights," to "disappear and appear, to be visible or hidden."⁸⁹

Chang Heng distinguishes between the hidden light, which is "contained shadow" (*han-ying*) and comparable to the moon, and visible or exterior light, such as the sun.⁹⁰ Huai-nan-tzu is even more explicit: "The square [Earth] presides over the hidden; the round [Heaven] presides over the manifest. The manifest is an exhalation of breath, that is why fire is exteriorized light. The hidden is unreleased breath; that is why water is interiorized light. That which exhales the breath is the expansion of that which contains the breath; it is transformation. When the universal breath of Heaven stirs, there is wind; when the contained breath of Earth is in harmony with it, there is rain."⁹¹ The *Tao-shu*, a T'ang work, takes up this theme again in the same way: "Deployment and opening are characteristics of the yang breath. It is exteriorized and it is the *hun* soul [yang] of the sun. Coiled and

⁸⁶ There is a "Method for Becoming Fluid Light" in the *Shen-chou ching*, p. 20a. *Fan-ching*, "to make one's light float," is considered a synonym for *tsung-shen*, "to give rein to one's body" (or "to release one's body"), by Hsieh Yu-hsi, a commentator on the *Tu-jen ching* (3:14b). The latter expression appears to have the same sense as *tsung-ching*, "to release one's light," which turns up constantly in the Mao Shan texts. It provides an example of a case in which the term *ching*, "light," seems to be synonymous with "body" in these texts.

⁸⁷ *Tzu-tu yen-kuang shen yüan-pien ching*, p. 6b.

⁸⁸ YCCC, 30:10a.

⁸⁹ *Shen-chou ching*, pp. 20a-21a.

⁹⁰ *Ling-hsien fu*; see Seidel (n. 18 above), p. 128.

⁹¹ *Huai-nan-tzu* (n. 11 above), 3:3b.

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closed are the characteristics of the yin breath. It is interiorized and it is the *p'o* soul [*yin*] of the moon and the true essence of water." This statement recalls the phrase from the *Hsi-tz'u* cited above: "An opening and a closing, that is *pien*."⁹² A work devoted to magical mirrors begins by explaining that "the interior light of water and metal [*yin* substances] makes yang appear by virtue of yin." Thus, it adds, one can multiply oneself and make demons appear.⁹³

Taoist meditations on the Big Dipper supply an interesting confirmation of this distinction between the forces of contraction (*yin*) and of expansion (*yang*) as well as their relation to the faculties of appearing and disappearing.

This constellation, according to the Taoists, is formed by seven visible stars and two invisible ones, the latter being visible only to immortals. Moreover, this arrangement of stars is surrounded by another group of nine which cast a "light that does not shine." They are inhabited by feminine divinities, consorts of the gods who reside in the first group of visible stars. These invisible divinities from the "black stars" are invoked in many of the exercises designed to confer the power of invisibility.⁹⁴ Furthermore, they have names which clearly indicate their function, such as: "[She who] hides by transformation and escapes into the Origin"; "[She who] conceals her radiance and hides her light"; "[She who] changes her body and transforms her radiance"; "[She who] hides her traces and disperses her form," etc. These divinities are "The Nine Yin of the Lord Emperor," one of the supreme deities of Taoism. As counterparts to the nine subterranean obscurities, they assist in the techniques of transformation and multiplication, of "fading into the eight directions," and of "hiding one's body and enclosing one's light." The adept makes them fuse in meditation through an ecstatic vision of a child who is called "Impermanence" (*Wu-ch'ang*), and whose personal name is "Metamorphosis" (*Pien-hua*). He carries the sun on his head, the moon in his mouth, and the Big Dipper in his hands—all attributes of a supreme divinity.

⁹² *Tao-shu* (n. 54 above), 23:3b.

⁹³ *T'ai-shang ming-chien chen-ching* (TT 876/HY 1198), p. 1a; YCCC, 48:1a.

⁹⁴ For the feminine divinities of the Big Dipper, see I. Robinet, "Randonnées extatiques des taoïstes dans les astres," *Momumenta serica*, vol. 32 (1979), pp. 250–51. On the exercises which lead to invisibility through the intercession of these divinities, see the exercise entitled "Chiu-chen ti-chün chiu-yin hun-ho tsung-ching wan-hua yin-t'ien chüeh," (there are various titles) in *Chiu-chen chung-ching Chiang-sheng shen-tan chüeh*, pp. 11b–14b; *Ho-t'u nei-hsüan ching* (TT 1040/HY 1356), *hsia*, p. 14a; YCCC, 31:10a to end; *Hua-hsing yin-ching teng-sheng pao-hsien shang-ching* (TT 1040/HY 1358), pp. 3b–4b, summary.

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He inflames the body of the adept.⁹⁵ The *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* states that one of the stars of the Big Dipper, "Mysterious Obscurity," presides over metamorphoses.⁹⁶ A gloss makes this more precise by referring to "the shifting lights of the seven heavenly bodies"—that is to say, the stars of the Big Dipper are also called the "seven transformations."⁹⁷

The "dance in the sky" is linked not only to *pien-hua* but also directly to the Big Dipper. "To step on the pattern" (*pu-wang*) of the constellation or take "flying steps" (*fei-pu*) is to tread the stars of the Big Dipper by imitating "the steps of Yü," a ritual dance.⁹⁸

To hide oneself in the black light of the heavenly bodies and to dance in the sky are one and the same thing.

DELIVERANCE FROM THE CORPSE (*shih-chieh*)

This "dance in the sky" brings us to the theme of the ecstatic journey. Analysis of the expression *pien-hua* and the techniques of metamorphosis have led us to ecstasy—traditionally conceived by the Taoists as an unrestrained, heavenly vagabondage or a frolicsome, celestial dance—and from there to deliverance.

The binome *pien-hua*, or either one of its terms, is often associated with the word *chieh*, deliverance: One is "delivered from the body and transformed by escaping" (*shih-chieh tun-pien*).⁹⁹ Compounds which combine *pien* or *pien-hua* with *tun*, to escape, are common. One example is encountered in the title, "The Method for Disappearing by Slipping Away and Transforming Oneself," and in the title of the technique for "disappearing by escaping and transforming one's light."¹⁰⁰

In the first century, the *Shih chi* already alludes to "deliverance from the body which is dissolved and transformed." The gloss suggests that it is a matter of *shih-chieh*, or deliverance from the corpse.¹⁰¹ The expression "to transform and escape" (*hua-tun*) designates, according to the *Chen-kao*, a superior method of *shih-*

⁹⁵ Robinet.

⁹⁶ TPYL, 665:3b.

⁹⁷ *Tz'u-i ching*, p. 3a.

⁹⁸ For the walk on the Big Dipper and its "black stars," as well as the relation between transformation and the North, see Robinet.

⁹⁹ TPYL, 664:3a.

¹⁰⁰ Commentary of the *Huang-t'ing nei-ching ching* in YCCC, 12:6a; and the commentary on the *Wen-ch'ang ta-tung hsien-ching* (TT 52/HY 103), 5:11b.

¹⁰¹ *Shih chi*, chap. 28; see E. Chavannes, trans. *Mémoires historiques*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1967), p. 436.

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chieh.¹⁰² Hence, it is natural to believe that *shih-chieh* is, in fact, very similar to *pien-hua*.

The term *shih-chieh* has been variously and often poorly translated. The most faithful translation is that of Maspero: "délivrance du cadavre." Faithful, but ambiguous: It is not the corpse which is delivered, as the French could be read, but the spirit which is delivered from the corpse. It disencumbers itself "without loosening either the clothing or the belt." The adept is an "Immortal who has slipped out of his belt in midday." He "moults like a cicada," or "like a snake"; he is even said to abandon his bones like the dragons whose remains are found in the mountains.¹⁰³ In its primary sense, the term *chieh* means, "to moult," "to quarter," "to expel an affliction."

Shih-chieh is a form of deliverance for "inferior saints," suitable for those who do not know how to refine their body sufficiently so as to release their spirit at the same time. Such are "those men of the world who have not rendered their bones and flesh immortal,"¹⁰⁴ who "have not enough breath and too much flesh."¹⁰⁵ "Although they can disappear, their mundane desires have not been stifled."¹⁰⁶ "At the moment when their spirit goes forth," it is also explained, "their body is unable to depart," or "their corpse is unable to transform itself at the same time as their spirit"—because "they are not perfectly worthy."¹⁰⁷

The forms of *shih-chieh* are quite varied; in its broadest sense, the term sometimes simply denotes disappearance, "to depart on a journey through foreign lands."¹⁰⁸ More often, however, it designates a type of disappearance that leaves a trace behind. The body is sometimes cut in two while still alive or may even remain whole but without its bones; sometimes the hair will remain or the corpse will stay as fresh as if it were still alive. In other cases, on the contrary, the coffin is either empty or contains only a staff, a sword, or a sandal—all objects which characterize the figure of the

¹⁰² *Chen-kao*, 12:10b. This text also uses the expression *t'o hua tun pien* (to simulate transformation and hide by metamorphosizing). When explaining *shih-chieh*, the *Tao-tien lun* (TT 764/HY 1122), 2:9b, states that there is a "transformation of the body [which permits one] to hide."

¹⁰³ See Kaltenmark, "Les miroirs magiques" (n. 72 above), p. 45, who cites the *Hou Han shu*. For the expression, "an immortal who slips out of his belt," see *Chen-kao*, 10:5a; and *Wu-shang pi-yao* (hereafter, WSPY) (TT 777/HY 1130), 87:6a.

¹⁰⁴ Li Shao-wei's commentary on the *Tu-jen ching*, 1:24b.

¹⁰⁵ YCCC, 109:10b.

¹⁰⁶ TPYL, 664:3a.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 664:1a and 4b.

¹⁰⁸ YCCC, 85:3a.

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Taoist and thus symbolize him. Cases in which the adept revives are also considered to be instances of *shih-chieh*.¹⁰⁹

A relationship with the faculty of metamorphosis is clearly observable when the texts speak of the "transformation which delivers" (*chieh-hua*): The adept "mimics death"; "transforms his body into sandals"; "substitutes his body and changes his form"; "gives his body the appearance of sandals or a staff"; or "transforms himself into a staff."¹¹⁰ *Shih-chieh*, in fact, consists of "transformation by hiding oneself and metamorphosing to be freed."¹¹¹ The expressions which designate the faculty of metamorphosis and the faculty for *shih-chieh* often overlap. In some way, *shih-chieh* is halfway between "journeying" and metamorphosis. One text recommends it when one wishes to "slip away and escape to the famous peaks, to settle into the caverns of a high mountain, or to contemplate the metamorphoses in all seasons."¹¹² The *Chen-kao* clearly states that the expression *hua-tun*, to escape by transformation, designates a method of *shih-chieh*.¹¹³ "To hide by returning to the three luminaries and to sink into the earth in midday"¹¹⁴ designate forms of *pien-hua*, as we have seen, as well as the act of deliverance from the corpse. All types of *pien-hua* require a material support, and *shih-chieh* generally involved, it is explained, "going away by making use of a material object."¹¹⁵ In certain cases, the adept himself observes his own body at the moment when he abandons it: This is very close to ubiquity as well as to the shaman's experience of seeing himself as a skeleton.¹¹⁶

However, there is an essential difference between simple *pien-hua* and *shih-chieh*: We have seen Wang T'an simulate death. There are other stories where death is also feigned yet nothing is said in them of *shih-chieh*. *Pien-hua* is a trick of magic, or a power received or conquered by the mystic, which he can put to use in the course of his life. *Shih-chieh* is practiced at the end of life: It is a form of deliverance. The adept who has recourse to it henceforth lives among the spirits. He generally becomes an assistant of the subterranean officials (*ti-hsia chu*). Or he may reside in the

¹⁰⁹ The explanations are given in almost the same way in *Chen-kao*, 4:15b-17a, and in TPYL, 664:2a.

¹¹⁰ For example, Li Shao-wei's commentary on the *Tu-jen ching*, 1:24b; *Chen-kao*, 14:2b.

¹¹¹ TPYL, 664:5a.

¹¹² YCCC, 84:6b.

¹¹³ *Chen-kao*, 12:10b.

¹¹⁴ YCCC, 85:1b.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85:4b.

¹¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), p. 62.

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mountains and roam about the five sacred peaks. He can return to live among people simply by changing his name.¹¹⁷

The procedures which culminate in *shih-chieh* are different from those which effect metamorphosis. It is sometimes sufficient simply to possess certain sacred texts; virtuous activities may also provide access to it. The most widespread methods, however, are those which appeal to magical processes or drugs, such as nine-times transmuted cinnabar or talismans,¹¹⁸ the most specific of which seems to be "The Metallic Light and Essence of Mineral."¹¹⁹ A distinction is made between *shih-chieh* performed during the day, which is superior, and the inferior performance of it at night. If done at dawn or dusk, it confers the title of Governor of the Underworld.

All the texts agree in their evaluation that liberation by the sword, *chien-chieh*, is the most noble method of deliverance.

This technique requires either a "simple sword" or a "magical sword." The former is inferior to the latter, and does not permit one to "return to one's old village." The creation of a magical sword, in turn, necessitates a complete ritual. It must be conducted in a secluded spot according to very precise calculations. The sword is coated with a drug and overlaid with red inscriptions. The adept then takes it with him to bed, embracing it. The result is a vision of the Supreme One (*T'ai-i*) on his heavenly horse, "yellow and leaping like a stag, composed of auspicious light." He has come seeking the adept. The latter mounts the horse, and the sword which he holds in his arms is transformed into a corpse. He puts on the clothes that the Supreme One was wearing and dresses the sword in his own. The horse then strides through the void, taking him wherever he wishes. This form of *shih-chieh* enables you "to return to your old village under another name," since the subterranean officials no longer have any hold on those who have performed it. By this method, one can rise to the rank of "Realized Being of the Great Ultimate." Moreover, one can fly aloft in broad daylight without leaving any mortal remains behind as in those methods "wherein one sloughs the body off."¹²⁰ To fly off into the open sky or to mount a chariot drawn by dragons is always a mark of the most elevated degree of sanctity.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Chen-kao*, 13:2a; YCCC, 85:15a; *Tao-chiao i shu* (TT 762-63/HY 1121), 1:15a.

¹¹⁸ *Chen-kao*, 4:16b; 14:17a.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14:6b, 12b; YCCC, 84:1a.

¹²⁰ *Chen-kao*, 4:17a; YCCC, 84:8b; WSPY, 87:4b.

¹²¹ For "deliverance by the sword," see TPYL 665; YCCC 85:1a-2a, 84:4b-6b; WSPY, 84. TPYL, chap. 665, distinguishes between the method transmitted by

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In fact, the sword, which alone remains in the coffin, will fly away at the end of some 500 years—it is associated with the dragon. At this point, it takes on the appearance of a horse, which brings to mind the role played by this animal in ecstatic shamanic journeys.¹²² Furthermore, it is necessary to note that in China the dragon and the horse have the same nature. Granet has shown that the swords have a tendency to change into dragons,¹²³ as we have seen here. The Yellow Emperor flew off on a dragon after practicing deliverance by the sword.¹²⁴ The coffin of Ti K'u, which contained only a sword, is said to have resounded with the clamor of dragons.¹²⁵

Ping-chieh, or deliverance by a military weapon, is the liberation of those who have been executed, such as the famous Hsi K'ang, or Tso Tz'u, who continued to be seen in Ching Chou despite the fact that Ts'ao Ts'ao was in possession of his head and the rest of his body had disappeared.¹²⁶

However, it seems that this form of *shih-chieh* implies a preliminary ingestion of drugs. The *Chen-kao* states, in fact, that Luan Pa, whom the *Han shu* records as having died in prison, performed "deliverance by the divine pill."¹²⁷ The *Chen-kao* also relates that Ssu-ma Chi-chu had absorbed some pills before his head and feet were cut off; it gives this case as an example of "*ping-chieh* by divine pill."¹²⁸ It appears, though, that in certain cases the pill is

Yin Ch'ang-sheng to Pao Ching and a superior method which enables the adept to fly away. Yin Ch'ang-sheng, disciple of Ma Ming-sheng, wrote within an alchemical tradition similar to that of Tso Tz'u, Ko Hsüan, and Ko Hung. Pao Ching had transmitted the *San-huang wen* to Ko Hung (YCCC, 8:5b-6a). Thus, this inferior method of liberation from the corpse was part of a popular alchemical and magical (the use of charms) milieu which characterizes the *Pao-p'u-tzu*, and which the Mao Shan sect partially inherited and subsequently developed and refined. This is confirmed by the fact that this method of liberation from the corpse is dependent on a talisman (the *Ling-pao t'ai-hsüan yin-sheng fu*), which is found in the *Wu-fu hsü* (2:25a-b), that is to say, in the *Ling-pao* scripture cited by Pao-p'u-tzu (17:78, corresponding to *Wu-fu hsü* [TT 183/HY 388], 3:8b-9a; *Pao-p'u-tzu* 18:92-93 corresponds to *Wu-fu hsü* 3:22b-23a). This chapter of the TPYL is nothing other than the *Shih-ching chin-kuang ching*; now, this *ching* is one that was revealed on Mao Shan, but which had already circulated in an earlier Taoist milieu. The *Shen-hsien chuan*, chap. 10, records that it was transmitted by the Lord P'ei (honored by the Mao Shan sect) to Tai Meng. We have here another example of the many links and matrices which connect the Mao Shan sect with anterior currents and which will be the subject of my next study.

¹²² Eliade, p. 325.

¹²³ Marcel Granet, *Danses et légendes dans la Chine ancienne* (Paris, 1959), p. 499.

¹²⁴ *Lieh-hsien chuan*, trans. Kaltenmark, pp. 50-51; YCCC, 85:8a-b, 84:2a.

¹²⁵ YCCC, 84:2a; *Chen-kao*, 14:18a.

¹²⁶ Concerning Hsi K'ang, see Li Shao-wei's commentary, 1:24b; for Tso Tz'u, see YCCC, 85:17a-18b, and *Pao-p'u-tzu*, 12:55.

¹²⁷ *Chen-kao*, 14:18b.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14:12b-13a.

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sufficient: the *Chien-ching*¹²⁹ explains that if you absorb a pill with water, and go to bed holding a staff, you will take on the appearance of being mortally wounded.

Ping-chieh is paired with *wen-chieh*, or "peaceful deliverance," wherein the body is replaced by sandals or a staff. Max Kaltenmark has shown that the magical sandals of the Taoists are birds; they enable him to soar aloft and fly away themselves, like the sword, after a number of years.¹³⁰ The staff also plays a role similar to that of the sword. It should contain five knots, on each of which it is necessary to inscribe a talisman corresponding to the five emperors of the five directions. The two extremities should bear a Heavenly talisman on the upper end and an Earthly one on the lower end. This magical or consecrated staff gives one the power to summon celestial spirits when it is pointed toward the sky or make terrestrial demons appear when it is pointed toward the ground.¹³¹

There are also types of *shih-chieh* by water and by fire. Kaltenmark has shown how the Taoist who is burned alive seems to fly away in the form of a bird, and he has also pointed out the link between this form of deliverance and the sacrifice of the potter.¹³² In certain cases, like that of Ts'ai Ching,¹³³ it is the body itself of the Taoist which emits the fire engulfing him. His bones are burned and all that remains is the skin. This is very close to certain meditation exercises which very often terminate with a flamboyant apotheosis in which the adept sees himself consumed in the form of ashes.

In the case of *shih-chieh* by water, the body of a drowned person is saved by a compassionate divinity, though everyone else believes him to be dead: "On the outside it is said that he drowned; on the inside, in truth, he is secretly saved."¹³⁴ During the Han, Hsin Hsüan-tzu drowned himself, but the Queen Mother of the West and the Emperor of the North took pity on him and ordered the subterranean officials to "seize his body and return his soul." The *Chen-kao*, however, expresses some reserve in regard to Hsin's deliverance, for according to it, his body was not resuscitated nor

¹²⁹ YCCC, 85:1b; TPYL, 665.

¹³⁰ *Lieh-hsien chuan*, trans. Kaltenmark, p. 40, 52.

¹³¹ YCCC, 84:9a-10a. This method is explained in the *Yüan-shih wu-lao ch'ih-shu yü-pien chen-wen t'ien-shu ching*, shang, p. 39b. The talismans to be drawn on the staff are shown there, chung, p. 3a.

¹³² *Lieh-hsien chuan*, trans. Kaltenmark, pp. 40, 45, and 89.

¹³³ *Shen-hsien chuan*, in YCCC, 109:11a-b.

¹³⁴ YCCC, 84:11a.

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does Hsin live among the immortals, since he had only faith and not works.¹³⁵

“Purification by the Supreme Yin” is also considered to be part of the process of *shih-chieh*: The body remains alive and is restored after one hundred years, or else it rots but is revived by the ministrations of the divinities who have watched over it. The Supreme Yin is thus considered to be the crucible wherein the body is purified through dissolution.¹³⁶ This idea is quite old as there is a clear allusion to it in the *Hsiang Erh*, a commentary on the *Tao-te-ching* which can be attributed to Chang Lu (end of the second century): “The Supreme Yin is the accumulation of Tao [?], the Palace of the purification of the body. . . . When one simulates death [an expression denoting *shih-chieh*], one passes through the Supreme Yin and lives again; it is as if one is dead but without any danger. Common people cannot accumulate good acts; when they die, it is real death and they go to dwell among the subterranean officials.”¹³⁷ The Supreme Yin is also conceived to be a womb, since at the time of the winter solstice, yang is contained within it, preparing to be reborn.

The *Chiu-chen chung-ching*, a Mao Shan text of the fourth century, explains that if one practices this method of the Nine Perfect Ones and has not yet ascended to the sky, then it is necessary “to veil your light, assume a common appearance and abruptly enter into the Supreme Yin. The body will pass by the Three Officials (of the Underworld), but they cannot hurt you. Then the Nine Perfect Ones will summon the *p'o* soul and the Supreme One will receive the *hun* soul. The flesh will not rot, the five viscera will not decay and you will be able both to die and to live, to be yin and yang, to leave the void and enter into non-being, to live in Heaven as well as on Earth. . . . If you practice the method of the Nine Perfect Ones . . . and pass through the Supreme Yin, the body and bones will not rot and you will be revived.” The adept will find himself outside of the coffin as if he had slept for one night.¹³⁸

This form of *shih-chieh* is related to that used by Chao Ch'eng-tzu, who absorbed “five stones” according to a ritual which is preserved in the *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* and the *Tz'u-i ching*.¹³⁹ This

¹³⁵ Ibid., 10b; *Chen-kao*, 16:6b-7a.

¹³⁶ *Chen-kao* 4:16a; YCCC 86:5a, which cites the *Chen-kao*.

¹³⁷ Jao Tsung-yi, *Lao-tzu Hsiang Erh chu-chiao chien* (Hong Kong, 1956), p. 22.

¹³⁸ *Chiu-chen chung-ching*, shang, pp. 9b-10b.

¹³⁹ YCCC, 86:1a-4b and *Tz'u-i ching*, pp. 53b-55a, both of which cite the *Chen-sheng wu-tsang chüeh*, which is also cited in WSPY, 87:6a.

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ritual consists of swallowing five pills while bowing to each of the five emperors of the five directions. These pills are re-formed within the viscera as stones which block the orifices of the organs (through which mortal breath passes, according to the *Ta-tung chen-ching*). From the viscera there then emanate efflorescences of five colors, recalling the practices for absorbing the subtle vapors of the five spatial points. The viscera, which are the concrete expression of these cosmic essences within the human body, are then vitalized by this absorption. Chao Ch'eng-tzu's viscera remained very much alive for several years after his death. Five or six years later, a man walking in the evening on the mountain saw Chao's corpse in a stone chamber: "The flesh was rotting, the bones remained; moreover, the five viscera could be seen in the stomach living on their own, as, apparently, were the blood and humors which flowed through them and circulated in the interior."¹⁴⁰ In the five viscera, the man saw the five stones, and it was to these that he attributed the marvelous power of maintaining the life of these organs. He seized the stones and swallowed them. However, when it came time to revive Chao Ch'eng-tzu, these stones flew out of the stomach of the thief and returned to the corpse. The man subsequently fell ill and, taking fright, went back to the scene of his crime. There he saw Chao Ch'eng-tzu aglow with a "light of jade," surrounded by five old men who were incarnations of the magical stones.

This story is reminiscent of a formula which constantly crops up in the incantational prayers recited at the end of Taoist exercises, according to which the adept asks that "his viscera live eternally" (*wu-tsang ch'ang-sheng*) or "spontaneously" (*tzu-sheng*) or "exhale an efflorescence" (*sheng-hua*). An understanding of the nature and function of the viscera in Taoism can shed some light on this story. The viscera are the nodal organs of the body, the living points which directly establish a fundamental correspondence between the human being and the essential cosmic forces which are symbolized or concretized as the planets on the celestial plane, the five sacred mountains on the terrestrial plane, and the five elements on the cosmic plane. The viscera are the points by which the whole body is in relation to the cosmos. They are also, for a commentator on the *Huang-t'ing nei-ching ching*, the "inner lights," that is, the counterparts to the "exterior lights" which are the heavenly bodies and the clouds.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ See *Chen-kao*, 4:16b; YCCC, 86:12a-13a; WSPY, 87:11a-12b.

¹⁴¹ YCCC, 11:9b-10a.

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It appears that in some cases of *shih-chieh* at least, the purification of the body, which could not be completed by the adept, is activated by the exercises he practiced during his life. One part of the body becomes perfectly pure and regenerated, such as bones of jade (leaving the body without bones), or the viscera continue to live. The gods who dwelled in the body during life will then watch over it after death. The Supreme Yin completes the purification.

When the body is transformed by the sword, the latter flies off into the sky after a certain amount of time. The reason for this could be the same. There is the notion of an imperfect purification which is carried on after death in the *Chen-kao* when it explains that the adept becomes a "governor of the underworld" by practicing *shih-chieh*, rising to the superior rank of "terrestrial immortal" after 280 years.¹⁴² In this way, the names of people who performed *shih-chieh* are found among the inhabitants of the most elevated heavens, although it is made clear that such a mode of liberation advances the adept only to the lower ranks of sanctity.¹⁴³ Likewise, there are cases in which *shih-chieh* is achieved through the merits of ancestors which bear fruit many generations later. In such instances, it is necessary to leave a leg bone as an offering to the underworld, and probably because the purification effected by an intermediary is not perfect.¹⁴⁴

Michel Strickmann suggests that in certain cases *shih-chieh* could be a ritual suicide.¹⁴⁵ As such, it may be understood as a way of escaping periods of trouble. Analogous to their propensity to disappear if their lives were threatened (and if they had not yet successfully transmuted cinnabar) or to the manner in which they took refuge in the mountains to preserve their tranquility, particularly when political troubles shook the land, the Taoists practiced *shih-chieh* when external conditions were not favorable to the smooth perusal of their regimens. Thus, they became *ti-hsien*, living as immortals in the mountains or in the underworld, and could continue their spiritual research in peace. For example, an immortal gave to Pao Ching a method for performing deliverance from the corpse, announcing to him the impending rising of Su Chün, and Ko Hsüan resorted to *shih-chieh* to escape the oppression of Emperor Wu.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, according to Strickmann,

¹⁴² *Chen-kao*, 16:12a-b; see also, TPYL, 665:6a.

¹⁴³ WSPY, 84:6b-7b.

¹⁴⁴ *Chen-kao*, 16:12a; and WSPY, 87:5a; it is probably to this case that the following phrase from the YCCC (85:3a) alludes: "one foot has not been transformed."

¹⁴⁵ See Strickmann (n. 50 above), p. 132-33.

¹⁴⁶ See YCCC, 106:32b; and *Hsüan-p'in lu* (TT 558/HY 780), 2:19b-20a.

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Hsü Hui put himself to death to escape the end of the world, choosing thereby to act in anticipation of his liberation in order to take refuge in the sacred mountains, precisely the place to which advanced adepts were transported, beyond the reach of apocalypses by water and fire. But these are only some hypotheses.

This theory, however, fits very well with certain features of *shih-chieh* which liken it to an initiatory death: The body does not rot and seems to be asleep; the purification is completed, the adept is born again in an intermediary heaven from whence he continues his ascent or "returns to his own country."

TRANSFORMATION BY PURIFICATION (*lien-hua* AND *lien-pien*)

We come now to another aspect of transformation as the Taoists understood it. The *Shih chi* speaks of a "deliverance from the body which is dissolved and transformed." The expression goes back to alchemy, one of the fundamental and the most striking transformative arts practiced by both Taoists and magicians.

Both terms from the binome *pien-hua* are often linked with others, such as *hsiao*, "dissolution," which evokes alchemical processes, and particularly with *huo*, fire. The expression *lien-pien* or *lien-hua* are frequently met. The word *lien* can be written with the metal or fire radical. It is also written with the silk radical and then denotes its primary meaning: boiled silk, which evokes the contrasts of Cooked/Raw, Culture/Nature. This nuance supports the second sense of the word *lien* (with silk radical), "to practice."

The word *hua* takes on a meaning very close to that of "practice." It also means "to perfect," "to ameliorate," "to civilize." The *Shuo wen* gives *chiao* as a synonym, meaning to teach, to educate. With either the metal or fire radical, *lien* means to "purify by fire."

These are the words used when purification by the Supreme Yin is discussed. They are also employed in regard to the corpse of Hao Fu-ming which the Heavenly Emperor arranged to have protected by a large bird which extended its golden wings above the body. Surviving throughout an age of floods and then a "fire of the mountain," the body was consequently purified by water and fire. It was then resuscitated.¹⁴⁷

Though set in motion by yin—the terrestrial yin of water, the celestial yin of the stars with "black light" or the moon, the great

¹⁴⁷ YCCC, 86:5a, 5b-6b.

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subterranean yin—in order to be perfect, the purification must be completed by the operation of yang, such as in fire or the sun. This is the case not only in alchemy but also in ritual or meditation exercises. North and South, fire and water, are combined in order to perfect the work of purification. Thus, because the moon purifies its rays in the Eastern Well at the autumnal equinox, the adept will, in the course of his ablutions, recite the “Formula of the Eastern Well” in order to perform the purification by water; This ritual has its counterpart in the purification by fire, in the course of which the adept invokes the Red Emperor of the South.¹⁴⁸ In his meditation exercises, the Taoist is “transformed and purified (*lien-hua*) within the Door of Gold,” door of the Sun, and “undergoes transformation in the Palace of the South.”¹⁴⁹

The word *hua* itself is not free of a nuance implying purification by fire. The expression *huo-hua* (purification by fire) indicates cremation, in the course of which the soul was felt to ascend with the smoke to heaven. *Hua* is also the term used for burning petitions addressed to the divine powers: The message must be taken up to them with the smoke which wafts aloft. An expression such as “the breath ascends toward the Fire of the South” is glossed as: “It transforms its shape and changes its appearance.”¹⁵⁰

We come now to an area that we can only briefly describe, what Maspero has called the “smelting of breaths”—an ethereal principle—which also applies to the “smelting of humors” (*ching*)—liquid principles of the body—and to all practices of the Taoists which attempts to refine and to purify the body, to transform their humors into breath through purification, and their breaths into spirit (or into light or the Tao). This process of sublimation renders the body very light: “The flesh dissolves and bones become lightweight,”¹⁵¹ in such a way that they can “fly aloft in broad daylight.” Thus, in contrast to *shih-chieh* which assumes an imperfect purification, these methods make possible the refinement of the body as much as the spirit, and in such a way that it flies away with the soul. They grant the status of *t'ien-hsien* (Heavenly Immortals) in contrast to the *ti-hsien* (Terrestrial Immortals) or the *ti-hsia chu* (Governor of the Underworld). It is by means of this last type of process that the adept attains the

¹⁴⁸ *Tu-jen ching ta-fa* (TT 85-99/HY 219), 61:5b-6a, 8a-b; 62:4a-b; 68:11b, 13b, 18b.

¹⁴⁹ *Pa-su chen-ching fu-shih jih-yüeh huang-hua chüeh*, pp. 14b-16b. On these exercises, see Robinet (n. 94 above), pp. 189-90.

¹⁵⁰ *T'ai-tung yü-ching* (TT 18/HY 7), A:1b.

¹⁵¹ *Shang-ch'ing chiu-tan shang-hua t'ai-ching chung-chi ching*, p. 15a.

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highest heavens, while metamorphosis leads only to terrestrial immortality.¹⁵²

In the course of particular meditational exercises, the adept conducts an imaginary aut cremation. He envisions, for example, "a red breath enveloping body and everything becoming fire. The fire embraces his body; his body and the fire are no more than one substance. Inside and out, everything is light." This is called "purification [or refining: *lien*] by the sun and moon, to die and live again."¹⁵³

These visionaries aspire, in fact, to recreate for themselves a new body, subtle and pure. It must be reborn in the Heaven of the South, where "their embryo is transformed and their body changed."¹⁵⁴ They "return to the womb in the red fire" (i.e., the Court of the Palace of the Red Fire),¹⁵⁵ or in the Court of Liquid Fire, where their purified bodies radiate a jade luminescence.¹⁵⁶

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¹⁵² *Chen-kao*, 12:3a.

¹⁵³ *Su-ling ching*, p. 14b.

¹⁵⁴ *Chen-kao*, 13:7a, 10:1a.

¹⁵⁵ *Ta-tung chen-ching* (TT 16-17/HY 6), 3:15b, 4:2b, 5:16b, 6:5b.

¹⁵⁶ Yen T'ung's commentary on the *Tu-jen ching*, 2:16a, and Li Shao-wei's commentary on the same, 4:10b. See also, *Huang-ch'i yang-ching san-tao shun-hsing ching*.

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

- Chang Heng 張衡
Chang Lu 張魯
Chang Tao-ling 張道陵
Chao Ch'eng-tzu 趙成子
chen-shen 真身
Cheng-i meng-wei 正一盟威
Ch'eng Hsüan-ying 成玄英
chi-shen 跡身
chiao 教
chieh-hua 解化
Chieh-tzu T'ui 介子推
chien-chieh 劍解
chien-ching 劍經
Ch'ih-chiang tzu Yü 赤將子與
Ch'ih Ching-tzu 赤精子
ching (light) 景
ching (humors) 精
"Chiu-chen ti-chün chiu-yin
hun-ho tsung-ching wan-hua
yin-t'ien chüeh"
九真帝君九陰潛合縱景
萬化隱天訣
chuan 轉
Ch'un Cheng-tzu 春成子
fan-ching 泛景
fang-chu 方諸
fei-pu 飛步
fen-hsing 分形
fen-ying wei-kuang 分影為光
Han K'ang-po 韓康伯
han-ying 含影
Hao Fu-ming 浩敷明
ho-ch'i 合氣
Hsi K'ang 嵇康
Hsi-tz'u 繫辭
Hsiang Erh 想爾
hsiao 銷
Hsieh Yu-hsi 薛幽棲
Hsien-yüan pien-chu 仙苑編珠
Hsin Hsüan-tzu 辛玄子
hua-ch'eng 化成
hua-shen 化身
hua-sheng 化生
Huai-nan-tzu 淮南子
huan 幻
huan-kang shu 鏗剛樹
Huang Ch'u-p'ing 皇初平
huang-shui yüeh-hua 黃水月花
Huang-t'ing nei-ching ching
黃庭內景經
huei 迴
hui-shui yü-ching 徊水玉精
hun-hua 混化
hung-shu pai-tzu 赤樹白子
huo-hua 火化
i ta shen 一大神
Ko Hsüan 葛玄
Ko Hung 葛洪
kuang 光
Kuang Ch'eng-tzu 廣成子
Lao Ch'eng-tzu 老成子
Li Shao-wei 李少微
lien 鍊, 煉, 練
ling 靈
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Luan Pa 藥巴	ti-hsien 地仙
Ma Ming-sheng 馬明生	t'ien-hsien 天仙
Mao Shan 茅山	t'o hua tun pien 託化遯變
mien ni fa 緬匿法	tsang-ching 藏景
ni-ying tsang-kuang 匿景藏光	tsao-hua 造化
ou-ying 偶景	Tso Tz'u 左慈
Pao Ching 鮑靚	tsung-ching 縱景
Pao-p'u-tzu 抱朴子	tsung-shen 縱身
pien-hua 變化	Tu Hsieh 杜契
ping-chieh 兵解	tzu-sheng 自生
pu-wang 步網	Wang T'an 王探
San-huang wen 三皇文	wen-chieh 文解
San su yüan chuan 三素元君	Wu-ch'ang 無常
sheng-hua 生華	wu-tsang ch'ang-sheng 五藏常生
Shih chi 史記	wu-wei 無為
shih-chieh 尸解	yang-sui 陽燄
shih-chieh tun-pien 尸解遁變	Yen Tung 嚴東
Shuo wen 說文	yin 隱
Ssu-ma Chi-chu 司馬季生	Yin Ch'ang-sheng 陰長生
Tai Meng 戴孟	yin-hsing 隱形
T'ai-p'ing yü-lan 太平御覽	yin-hsing 因形
T'ai-hsü 太虛	Yin-ti pa-shu ching 隱地人術經
T'ai-i 太一	Yin Wen 尹文
t'ai-sheng 胎生	ying 影
Tao-tsang 道藏	Yü 禹
T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景	Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien 雲笈七籤
ti-hsia chu 地下主	
Ti K'u 帝嚳	