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## Female Alchemy and Paratext: How to Read *nüdan* in a Historical Context

The paratext is a fringe of the printed text, which in reality controls one's whole reading of a text.

Philippe Lejeune

The palimpsest is a written document, typically on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased writing still visible.

George Bornstein

Prefaces provide the text's intention and interpretation.

Gerard Genette

Paratext, palimpsest, and preface are terms that I use in this paper to discuss and analyze the phenomenon of *nüdan* 女丹 (female alchemy), a strand of the Daoist inner alchemical tradition solely directed to women that emerged and developed in China in the Qing period (1644–1911).<sup>1</sup> Individual texts of female alchemy appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the first collections appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Initially, free-standing *nüdan* texts were found in medical or *neidan* 內丹 (inner alchemy) collections, and mentions of *nüdan* practice, too, were found in *neidan* texts. As the tradition grew and matured during the nineteenth century, whole collections of such texts began to be made. The normal fashion was to include several whole *nüdan* texts of different provenance with prefaces that addressed a female audience. In the twentieth century, earlier free-standing texts and texts extracted from nineteenth-century collections were again reorganized and reprinted by different editors in separate

<sup>1</sup> While there are mentions of female practice prior to this date, I will discuss below why I do not take them into consideration. The three epigraphs at the opening of this article are from, respectively, Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), quoted in Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997), p. 2; George Bornstein, in Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams, eds., *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor: U. Michigan P., 1993), Introduction, p. 1; and Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 196.

collections, the latest reprints dating to the 1990s. Thus the body of work under consideration here is not just one individual text, nor an individual unchanging collection of texts, nor, for that matter, various texts by one individual author, normally the object of paratextual analyses. Instead, we are looking at a tradition whose texts have been rearranged and shifted in succeeding collections edited by different editors through time.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I wish to follow this complex editorial history in order to unveil related changes of a historical, social, and political nature. In so doing, I will be particularly concerned with paratext, which for the purposes of this article will mean the prefaces, postfaces, various editorial comments, titles, as well as, when relevant, physical features of the texts and collections.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL UTILITY OF PARATEXT

In order to fully comprehend the content of the *nūdan* tradition, it is necessary to look at its historical constructedness. While scholars have highlighted the powerful role of the reader in interpreting creatively the text they are reading,<sup>4</sup> Kai-Wing Chow, in his important study of the culture of publishing in early-modern China, emphasizes the role of “reading protocols embedded in textual structures that the authors, editors, and publishers employed to present the text in its printed form.”<sup>5</sup> Chow adds that “it is hardly possible to read a text independently of its paratextual, generic, discursive and political context.”<sup>6</sup> In this article I will also concentrate on the importance of the paratext.

Many scholars of China have successfully analyzed the paratext as an essential element in the social and historical understanding of

<sup>2</sup> The term “collection” is used here in a general way. (OED: A number of objects collected or gathered together, viewed as a whole; a group of things collected and arranged: in a general sense, e.g., of extracts, historical or literary materials.) This usage is dictated by the nature and number of the primary materials that I deal with: several different compilations of texts, each with a unique internal structure and coherence over a large span of time. Each is a collection of disparate texts of different dates, with diverse origins; sometimes extracted from previous compilations, sometimes derived by the spirit-writing activities of the editor, and sometimes a combination of the two. The criteria for the unity of a particular collection are provided mainly in the editor’s preface.

<sup>3</sup> Gerard Genette defines the paratext as follows: “the paratext denotes part of the physical medium of a text – title page, preface, postscript, fonts, spatial structure, comments, and intertextual references”; quoted in Kai Wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2004), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U. California P., 1984), pp. 45–49.

<sup>5</sup> Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

texts, and looked at its use to construct and contest authority, promote cultural values, articulate self-identity, and target or influence readership. Ellen Widmer, in her analysis of several Anhui publishers in the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties describes how the paratext was used to target certain sections of the reading public, as well as to influence readers in their reading and purchasing patterns. She describes their use of indexes, glosses, commentaries, and advertisement as “marvels of tailoring around imagined readers.”<sup>7</sup> In the medical field, Marta Hanson, in her doctoral dissertation, has shown how Jiangnan editors of medical treatises used prefaces to articulate a new medical tradition (*wenbing* 温病), while Yi-li Wu, in her study of the Bamboo Grove monastery tradition of gynecology, has shown how issues of legitimacy, authority, and morality, as well as access to a female public, were negotiated in the prefaces to their treatises.<sup>8</sup> In the religious field, Catherine Bell has highlighted the importance of the textual medium and format as active agents of change in the shaping of a Taoist liturgical tradition, and she has analyzed in detail the relationship between the act of printing religious texts and the diffusion of religious ideas.<sup>9</sup>

All of these works look at prefaces and paratext to understand the historical context of one specific era. In this article I want to expand this point of view. By focusing on *nüdan* prefaces and paratextual materials from several eras, I propose to look at a tradition in motion. By looking at editions of *nüdan* texts from different eras, we get differing perceptions of what this tradition is, what purpose it serves, what audience it is directed to in each period, and how it changes over time. The aim of this paper is to show how a very homogeneous body of texts has been successfully presented to the public – especially the female public – at different times, carrying dramatically different messages, through interventions on the paratext by succeeding authors/editors.

This study of *nüdan* is possible because the emergence of *nüdan* texts in the seventeenth century coincided with an expansion of paratextual materials in texts published from the late-Ming onwards. Again, in Chow’s words “The expansion of paratext in the form of an increase in

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Widmer, “The Huangduzhai of Hangzhou and Suzhou: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Publishing,” *HJAS* 56.1 (1996), p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Marta Hanson, “Inventing a Tradition in Chinese Medicine: From Universal Canon to Local Medical Knowledge in South China, The Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1997). Yi-li Wu, “The Bamboo Grove Monastery and Popular Gynecology in Qing China,” *Late Imperial China* 21.1 (2000), pp. 41–76.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Bell, “Ritualization of Text and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy,” *History of Religions* 27.4 (1988), pp. 366–92.

the number of prefaces, reading guides, references and commentaries, and in the length of the appellation of the contributor and the length of the title of the book expanded the semantic field of the book, creating more points of intervention in the process of reading.”<sup>10</sup> This increase in paratextual materials is directly linked to an expansion of the reading public. As Ann McLaren has highlighted, from the mid-Ming onwards and especially from the seventeenth century, there occurred a definite change in the reading public from the “learned classes” to a heterogeneous group including “officials, literati, collectors among the class of nouveau riches, members of the laity, common people, the relatively unlearned, and even the all-inclusive “people of the empire 天下之人,” or “people of the four classes 四民.”<sup>11</sup> This shift, brought about by developments in print technology, by the preexisting manuscript culture as well as by an increase in the commercialization of the economy, legitimized an increase in publications and conceptualized a “target readership.”<sup>12</sup> This target readership, shifting with historical changes, is addressed first and foremost in prefaces and paratextual materials. The emphasis on the paratext therefore, while used to disseminate the author/editor’s intellectual’s agenda, reflects the culture of the period.

### *Reading Public*

But to what public were the *nüdan* materials directed? We will see that the gender as well as the composition of the reading public for these texts shifted with historical, social and cultural changes. I try to discuss this issue within each historical period. However, in general it is clear that there was a shift from a target readership that is genderless to one that is increasingly female. This development seems to match McLaren’s observation that while in the mid-Ming women were still not directly addressed as a public, by the mid-Qing they had emerged as part of the reading public. However, a clear hierarchy of reading had by then solidified, whereby the female readership was perceived as still unlearned.<sup>13</sup> While in the prefatory material of early *nüdan* texts women are not directly addressed, in prefaces to *nüdan* texts and collections from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1990s, women are increasingly and explicitly the target audience. At the same time, the

<sup>10</sup> Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Ann E. McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China,” in Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai Wing Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2005), p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

idea that women needed more reading guidance and easier, clearer texts became consistent and ubiquitous, and is often given as one of the *raisons d'être* for the texts and collections analyzed here.

### *Authorship*

The expansion of the reading public and of the paratext identified by many scholars in the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasty and onwards is concomitant with an increase in the power of the author/editor over the printed text. Many scholars of Chinese vernacular literature have noted that, in the mid- to late-Ming, authorship was not a prominent element of the novel. In the words of Robert Hegel, it “became relevant sometime after the novel had become a popular literary form.”<sup>14</sup> McLaren states that, “in their frontispieces, ‘authors’ often declared themselves simply compilers, editors, or reshapers of earlier material. ... texts were in an important sense ‘authorless’ and thus open to ‘authoring’ by other hands.”<sup>15</sup> This description applies very well to religious writing from the same period and later. Many of the texts surveyed below were, at least initially, a product of spirit-writing, making the issue of authorship or compilation all the more complicated. The authorship of *nüdan* texts is often confusing: these texts first emerged in the late-seventeenth century and in the early-eighteenth century in different parts of China mostly within the genre of spirit-writing, the understanding being that they were transmitted by gods or immortals to humans at local altars. Their authorship was thus already fragmented between the god or goddess who transmitted them, the medium who transcribed them, and the audience who asked the god/dess for instructions. The editors, often the mediums themselves, then had to “translate” the immortal’s message into understandable form, as well as define it by collating it into coherent texts and collections. The boundaries between author and editor were therefore porous. Because of this, texts that had already been part of earlier compilations could be readily used by different editors in their collections.<sup>16</sup> The role of the editor was paramount: he defined the meaning of the text by the context into which he inserted it, especially – but not only – by the preface that he wrote for the whole collection as well as that for the individual text. Even in the late Qing, when spirit-written

<sup>14</sup> Robert Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1998), p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics,” p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> This is very evident when we look at the way individual texts appear in subsequent collections.

transmission was no longer favored, editors still had control over the structure and the meaning of their collections through other types of paratextual interventions.

*What Is nüdan?*

The unifying feature of the texts was not authorship but content, and this content is *nüdan*. But what defines a *nüdan* text? A *nüdan* text describes a woman's quest for immortality achieved through physical and mental transformation. This transformation is brought about by following a standard sequence of practices that include breathing exercises, internal visualizations, self-massage, mental concentration, and the suppression of emotions. This process, while very similar in its structure to the nongender-specific process of realization in *neidan*, uses a very specific technical language referring to body-parts and processes inherent to the female body. The three main stages of the practice are transforming blood (*xue* 血) into *qi* 氣, transforming *qi* into spirit (*shen* 神), and transforming spirit into vacuity (*xuwu* 虛無). While the second and third stages are very similar to the parallel ones in standard *neidan* practice, the first is very different, because the primary element to be transformed into energy is blood, and not *jing* 精 (semen or essence). This first stage is also called "the refining of the form of the Great Yin" (*taiyin lianxing* 太陰煉形). The blood that the texts refer to, and the main element to be transformed, is menstrual blood; in *nüdan* texts, it is often referred to as the Red Dragon (*chilong* 赤龍).<sup>17</sup> The reservoir where the menstrual blood gathers, before the transformation takes place, is called the Sea of Blood 血海, and the process of transformation mainly involves breathing exercises and massaging the breasts 乳房. Once a woman has transformed her bloody constitution, her breasts will shrink, her body will stop shedding menstrual blood, her structure will become more like a man's, and her practice will continue like that of a man. The male body and male practice are assumed to be the standard practice on which female practice models itself, in the same way as both males and females strive to produce a pure Yang (and not a Pure Yin in the case of women) body. Issues concerning the necessity for women to transform blood, a polluting substance in many traditions including the Chinese, the necessity to gradually eliminate obvious female outer sexual attributes, and the fact the female body will resemble more and more a male body by the end of the practice, all invite a discussion of gender identity, gender imbalance, and soci-

<sup>17</sup> Also *honglong* 紅龍 or *chimai* 赤脈 (red channel).

etal and cultural influence on religious practice in these texts. While this discussion cannot be developed here, these issues have been fully addressed in other arenas.<sup>18</sup>

Another essential element of *nüdan* texts and collection is the presence of large sections that do not discuss practice, but behavior and feelings. Women are instructed in detail on how to perform properly in public and private, on how to combine their desire to practice with their familial and social duties, as well as on what the best psychological disposition would be prior to the practice. Most of the texts surveyed are homogeneous and consistent in content, in the use of technical terms, in the stages indicated as necessary to achieve transformation and, ultimately, immortality.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, the aim of this paper is to discuss the different ways in which this homogeneous content has been presented at different historical times.

### *Stages*

The period of time that I survey spans the middle of the seventeenth century and the 1990s. I am aware that, in the course of surveying the development of a tradition over such a long span of time one is bound to overlook important details and make generalizations. However, I feel that the overall view of this tradition in motion will be of some use to readers.

We can divide the time into four broad stages exemplified here by one or two texts or one or two whole collections:

1. *Hints of paratext*: A beginning stage of *nüdan* text production where the paratext is only hinted at because there still is no self-aware *nüdan* tradition and no specific target readership. This stage is exemplified by texts by physicians Fu Shan 傅山 (1606–1684) and Cao Heng 曹珩 (ca. 1632). The general readership of such compendia might include other male physicians as well as readers interested in immortality techniques.

<sup>18</sup> See Elena Valussi, “Beheading the Red Dragon: A History of Female Inner Alchemy in China,” Ph.D. diss. (University of London, 2003), chap. 4, which describes in detail the physiological processes of transformation. Chapter 5 discusses issues of body gender and religion in late-imperial China. Valussi’s forthcoming, “The *Nüdan hebian* (Collection of Female Alchemy), Its Editor and His Women,” *Nannü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 10.2 (2008), and “Blood, Tigers, Dragons: The Physiology of Transcendence for Women,” *IASTAM, Journal of Asian Medicine* 4.1 (2008), discuss some of these issues.

<sup>19</sup> The sequence of the stages in the *nüdan* refinement process is modeled on processes already well defined within inner alchemy, or *neidan*. *Neidan* differs from *nüdan* in that it does not address one gender in particular; therefore its terminology is not gender specific. While *nüdan* borrows its structure from *neidan*, its physiological processes are clearly concerned just with women.

2. *Chastity, authority, authorship*: This emerges when *nüdan* texts surface in different parts of the country mainly during spirit-writing seances (1750–1850). We see an expansion of the paratext and a more coherent portrayal of the tradition, still within the context of spirit-writing cults. It includes short texts in Liu Yiming’s 劉一明 (1734–1821) and Min Yide’s 閔一得 (1758–1836) larger *neidan* collections as well as the first *nüdan* collection, titled *Nüjindan fayao* 女金丹法要 (*Essential Methods for the Female Golden Elixir*, 1813), received and edited by Fu Jinqian 傅金銓 (fl. 1820).
3. *The authority of the editor*: Here, the authority of the editors becomes preeminent, the preexisting texts are reorganized more “rationally,” and “inconsistencies” are deleted; in this stage the original message behind the production of these texts and their divine origin is reshaped dramatically to serve different ideologies. This is well exemplified in the 1906 collection *Nüdan hebian* 女丹合編 (*Collection of Female Alchemy*) edited by He Longxiang 賀龍驤 (fl. 1906) and in the 1936 collection *Nüzi daoxue xiao congshu wuzhong* 女子道學小叢書五種 (*Small Encyclopedia in Five Books on the Female Learning of the Dao*) edited by Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧 (1880–1969).
4. *Modern times*: The fourth stage spans the 1980s and 1990s, and the texts have been republished and used as medical self-help tools in which religious origins are completely deleted.

A fifth stage has become apparent in the last decade, as temples and Daoist practitioners have rediscovered their religious and spiritual valence, all but eliminated since the 1930s, and have reappropriated this tradition as a spiritual one. I will not tackle this last development, because it is ongoing. Of course, in the fluid process of a changing tradition there are no fixed stages; these divisions help us to focus on peaks of change, where the process has taken the tradition in a very recognizably different place. Each one of these peaks is exemplified by one or more texts or collections.

The messages conveyed during these different stages vary enormously. They go from promoting health, to being moralistic, nationalistic, tools for women’s liberation, or as part of female self-healing practices. This happens because the same pool of texts is appropriated by different genres of texts as well as influenced by different social and historical developments. However, these differing results have not been achieved by interventions on the texts themselves, but rather through the use of different editorial interventions on the paratext. These strategies include the replacement of earlier prefaces with new ones, the deleting of information about the place and mode of origin of the texts, the changing of titles, and the rearranging, excision and exchange of texts within the collections.

I shall analyze the intentions of editors in manipulating the paratext, the social and cultural context in which these texts emerge, and the audience that the editors were trying to reach and influence. I also reveal the indefinite and contingent nature of each of these texts and collections, if looked at in historical perspective. None of them was definitive, fixed, or stable; they were and are not ahistorical or trans-historical; they were manipulated to serve different historical and social purposes, situations, and sanctions. Looking at them in this perspective will allow us not only to see the process of transformation, but also to recognize traces of earlier meanings and intentions in newer editions.<sup>20</sup>

#### STAGE 1: HINTS OF PARATEXT

This section examines the earliest *nüdan* texts, which present the beginning of a coherent formulation of the *nüdan* process.<sup>21</sup> Of the earliest texts that are clearly composed solely for the benefit of women and exhibit the technical language and contents of *nüdan*, two were published by physicians, one as part of a medical collection, and the other as an appendix to a Daoist collection. They are both very short,

<sup>20</sup> This article is also offered as a way to address a lacuna in the scholarship on Daoism, especially in mainland China, where paratext is often not taken into consideration, and moreover often physically deleted, as deemed non essential to the understanding of text.

<sup>21</sup> While such texts first appear in the 17th c., there are scattered mentions of physiological practices for women in texts from the 13th c. onwards. These early texts, however, while already displaying some terminology that would become standard in later *nüdan* works, will not be taken into consideration in this survey because they are merely a mention of practices about which we still know very little, often in a context of comparison with a much more detailed male practice. *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑑 (*A Comprehensive Mirror on Successive Generations of Perfected Transcendents Who Embody the Dao*), *Daozang* 道藏 (*Daoist Canon*) HY 296, by Zhao Daoyi 趙道一 (fl. 1294–1307), contains hagiographic accounts of Daoist women, mostly from the Song dynasty; see *j.* 55, p. 2a. Wang Chongyang's 王重陽 (1112–1170) *Chongyang zhenren jinguan yusuo jue* 重陽真人金關玉鎖訣 (*Formulae of the Golden Pass and Jade Lock of the Realised Chongyang*) (*Daozang* HY 1148) makes several mentions of female practice, e.g., pp. 10b, 16a, 20a. *Daoshu* 道樞 (*The Pivot of the Dao*; *Daozang* HY 1011), a 12th-c. anthology of earlier texts of inner alchemy, also includes a mention of female practice; see “Chongzhen pian,” p. 1a. Also, episode 106 of *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* 純陽帝君神化妙通紀 (*Annals of the Wondrous Communications and Divine Transformations of the Sovereign Lord Chunyang*; *Daozang* HY 305), a collection of legends of Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, tells of a 16-year-old girl who, to escape her parent's plan to marry her, hides on a mountain. There she meets an old man who tells her: “I will slay your Red Dragon.” Finally, an extremely important example comes in Xue Shi's 薛式 (d. 1191) commentary to *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (*Book of Awakening to Reality*) titled *Wuzhen pian sanzhu* 悟真篇三注 (*Three Commentaries to the Book of Awakening to Reality*; *Daozang* HY 142), where both the massage of the breasts and refinement of the form are mentioned. A full discussion of these early texts is in Valussi, “Behheading the Red Dragon,” pp. 70–76. It is difficult to learn about the actual communities of practitioners behind the fleeting mentions in these early texts; therefore any meaningful sociological study and comparison to later texts and practices would be hard. The early chapter of the history of female practices needs to be researched in much more detail.

especially if looked at in the context of the compilations in which they were inserted. While they state in clear terms the existence of a way to self-refinement for women, and are the beginning of an expanding field of interest in female meditation techniques, the general prefaces to the collections do not specifically refer to female alchemy, nor do they offer information about their goals, their intended audience, or the perceived place and importance of *nüdan*.

“Nügong quebing” 女功卻病 (“Women’s Practices for Repelling Illnesses”) is a section in the work *Baosheng miyao* 保生祕要 (*Essential Secrets for Conserving Life*) written by the physician Cao Heng in 1632.<sup>22</sup> It is comprised of three texts for curing common women’s problems, like blood congestion, pre- and post-natal problems, menstrual irregularity, and so on, through meditation practices.<sup>23</sup> The first of these resembles the practice described in later female alchemy. Here is an excerpt:

As for women’s true refinement, it is always necessary to gather the *qi* within the breasts. As for the circulation (of the *qi*), it is also necessary to concentrate the strength there. (In this way) it will be possible to slay the Red Dragon. Practice the art of “refining the form of great one” (*Taiyi[yin] lianxing*) and study the inner chamber books that describe the “mysterious.”<sup>24</sup>

The breasts, the Red Dragon and *Taiyi(yin) lianxing* are fundamental to the theory of *nüdan* as it is described in *nüdan* manuals from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards.

*Duan hong long* 斷紅龍 (*Beheading the Red Dragon*) was received by Fu Shan, a well-known physician who specialized in gynecology.<sup>25</sup> It is not part of Fu’s work on female illnesses, but is found in the appendix to a collection of Daoist texts called *Shangcheng xiudao mishu sizhong*

<sup>22</sup> Cao Heng, sobriquet Yuanbai 元白, hao Yuyu daoren 俞俞道人 and Yuyuzi 俞俞子, was from Xin’an 新安 in Anhui. His life and writings are described in Liu Xun “Essential Secrets for Conserving Life: Meditative Regimens for Self-Healing in the Late Ming. The Case of Cao Heng,” paper presented at the 2000 International Symposium: “Medicine in China: Health Techniques and Social History,” Fondation Hugot, Paris. *Baosheng miyao* was written in 1632 and is collected in *Dao yuan yi qi* 道原一氣 (*Unitary qi of the Dao’s Origin*), 1634; see Tao Bingfu 陶秉福, ed., *Dao yuan yi qi* (Beijing: Beijing Shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990), pp. 371–520.

<sup>23</sup> Only the first of these three texts in fact describes a practice close to *nüdan*. The other two describe practices that have no resemblance to *nüdan*.

<sup>24</sup> *Nügong quebing*, introduction, p. 1a, in *Baosheng miyao*. Later *nüdan* texts consistently use the reading “Taiyin lianxing 太陰煉形” (“refining the form of the great yin”). This is the only text in which *yi* is found instead of *yin*. It may be a misplaced character, derived from the fact that Taiyi 太一 is a well-known Daoist god. It may also be a genuine reference to that god. I am inclined to think of it as a misplaced character, as 陰 is directly related to women and blood, the center of the discussion in the paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> Fu Shan was from Yangqu 陽曲 in Shanxi 山西. His most famous work on female illnesses is *Fu Qingzhu nü ke* 傅青主女科 (*Fu Qingzhu’s Medicine for Women*). A recent study is that of

上乘修道秘書四種 (*Four Secret Volumes on the Unsurpassable Cultivation of the Dao*), which he allegedly received through spirit-writing from Danting zhenren 丹亭真人 (Perfected Man in the Cinnabar Pavilion) or Lü Danting 呂丹亭.<sup>26</sup> *Duan hong long* calls our attention, right in the title, to the Red Dragon and to the need to slay it. We read that: “The perfected man (Lü) said”:

All those who practice refinement for female perfection, must first ... sit until the *qi* within the body circulates freely. One day before the menstruation, at the hours of *zi* and *wu* (midnight and noon), start the practice. At midnight, put a robe on and sit with the legs crossed, with the two hands holding firmly to the sides of the ribs. After (the *qi*) has ascended and descended within the body a few times, press the left heel against the vagina and the rectum, clench the teeth, close firmly the eyes, shrug the shoulders, and lift up with great strength, thinking of the two red channels of *qi* that rise from the womb through the *weilü* 尾閭 pass and the three passes [*weilü*, *jiaji* 夾脊, *yuzhen* 玉枕], ascend to the *niwan* 泥丸,<sup>27</sup> descend to the root of the tongue, and pour into the two breasts. In this manner, practice this continuously until the body is warm and then stop. Then use a white silk kerchief and insert it into the vagina to compare the quantity (of blood) to last month’s and to see if there is any. Again, like before, (use) the circulation (of the *qi*) to scatter the blood and *qi* in order to avoid illnesses. In less than a hundred days (the period) will be cut by itself.<sup>28</sup>

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He Gaomin 何高民 and He Xiaoming 何小明, eds., *Fu Qingzhu nü ke jiaoshi* 傅青主女科校釋 (Beijing: Zhongyi guji chubanshe, 1992). Also, see *He Gaomin jiaokao zhushi* 何高民校考注釋, a title in the series *Fu Shan yixue zhuzuo yanjiu congshu* 傅山醫學著作研究叢書 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 5. See also Xiao Jingshun 肖進順, ed., *Fu Qingzhu nü ke xinjie* 傅青主女科新解 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1997); trans. Yang Shou-zhong and Liu Da Wei, *Fu Qing-zhu’s Gynecology* (Boulder: Blue Poppy Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> We only know Lü through the texts Fu received and as collected in Xiao Tianshi 蕭天石, ed., *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 (Taipei Xindian; Ziyou chubanshe, 1976), no. 12.2. This is the first of 4 works that Fu received from Lü; the other three are published in *Danting zhenren chuandao miji: Fu Qingzhu shoulu miben* 丹亭真人傳道密集, 傅青主手錄秘本, in *Daozang jinghua* 13.5.

<sup>27</sup> The *weilü* pass is located in the area of the coccyx, the *jiaji* pass in the area of the lumbar spine, and the *yuzhen* pass at the base of the skull. These are standard gateways for the circulation of *qi* during what, in *neidan* and in contemporary *qigong* sources, is called the small circulation 小周天. Once the *qi* has ascended through the passes, it reaches *niwan*, a point at the top of the head. From there, it descends through the front of the body, reaches the coccyx and rises through the spine again. This circulation process is repeated several times and its aim is the refinement of the *qi*. In this passage, the difference from standard *neidan* and *qigong* circulation practices is the definition of the womb and of the breasts as *loci* of refinement.

<sup>28</sup> *Duan honglong* 斷紅龍, p. 2b, in *Shangcheng xiudao mishu si zhong* 上乘修道秘書四種, in *Daozang jinghua* 12.2.

Both Cao Heng and Fu Shan were physicians as well as Daoists; both were interested in alchemy and authored alchemical texts aside from their work on female alchemy.<sup>29</sup> The two texts display a clear focus on curing female illnesses as a prerequisite to serious engagement in meditation practices, an important element in later full-fledged texts. The detailed descriptions of bodily responses to the practice, something that was not evident in prior mentions of female practices, is clear here and would also become common in later texts.

The textual context of these two works does not provide many clues as to how these specifically female practices were implemented and whom they were directed to. Because they are found in the context of a medical tradition, and, especially in the case of Cao Heng, in the context of healing practices for women, we can infer that they would supplement healing techniques for women's ailments, especially those involving problems with blood. However, prefaces to the two general works do, in different ways, discuss at great length the importance of immortality techniques in eliminating illnesses, restoring health and prolonging life, and, in the case of Fu Shan, the *Duan Honglong* was in fact received by Fu from an immortal. Thus, despite the fact that they come from a medical milieu, these texts are best interpreted as describing a path to immortality for women. Prefaces, post-faces and editorial interventions do not suggest in any way that they were requested or inspired by women, written by women, transmitted by female immortals, or used by women to instruct other women, as is more obviously the case in later *nüdan* texts and collections. As female alchemy becomes a more established phenomenon, prefaces to whole collections would provide more clues as to the circumstances of their production and use.

#### STAGE 2: CHASTITY, AUTHORITY, AUTHORSHIP

During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries there were several important examples of female alchemical materials. They are mostly the product of spirit-writing *séances* during which a divinity transmitted their teachings to a medium, who transcribed them for an audience of believers. The reasons why the tradition shifted from a medical milieu to a religious one are still to be fully investigated, but the ubiquity of this mode of textual transmission, together with a strong focus on chastity, moral behavior, and a growing involvement

<sup>29</sup> *Baosheng miyao* and *Daoyuan yiqi* by Cao Heng (see n. 22, above) both describe alchemical techniques; *Shangcheng xiudao mishu si zhong*, received by Fu Shan, contains alchemical treatises.

of women in religious traditions in this period are all key issues to take into consideration. Scholars who have studied spirit-writing cults in depth concur that they developed in a period of chaos and lack of central authority, and that they mostly disseminate conservative messages, moral exhortations, Confucian values, and virtues, invoking a moral order not found in the increasingly shifting, mobile and uncertain society in which they were living.<sup>30</sup>

Through these texts and collections received by spirit-writing, a clear *nüdan* tradition emerged, backed by the authority of the immortals, and exhibiting some common themes. First and foremost was the perceived dearth of texts for women, with the resulting consequence that women had less access than men to a path to immortality. A dangerous corollary to this lack of instructions was that women would end up choosing wrong, heterodox (usually sexual) paths. This corollary may in fact be one of the main reasons for the development of this tradition, since it is only in this period that a perceived lack of instruction for women strikes the authors and editors of *nüdan* materials as negative (there is some evidence that women had performed the non-gendered version of immortality practices from time immemorial). A second theme, closely related to the first one, is a growing attention to female morality and proper behavior. This theme emerges not only in the content of the prefaces, but is also brought forward by the space devoted in some collections to behavioral instructions for women, at the expense of practical instructions. This development was certainly influenced by a growing concern for female chastity and by the construction of stricter boundaries for proper female behavior that appeared in China at this time.<sup>31</sup> The high Qing reveals increasingly stringent standards for women's behavior in the public space, especially as it relates to religious practices such as pilgrimages, worship of specific female deities, and associations with female healers and "quacks."<sup>32</sup> A third theme is the need to establish an authority for this tradition. This was done by creating a lineage of female immortals responsible for the

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Overmeyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1999), introduction and pp. 226–29; Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1991), introduction. Graeme Lang and Lars Ragvald "Spirit-Writing and the Development of Chinese Cults" in *Sociology of Religion* 59. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 309–28.

<sup>31</sup> For a masterful discussion of the increasing interest in chastity and proper female behavior, see Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth Century China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2004).

<sup>32</sup> This theme is investigated by Kenneth Pomeranz in Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, eds., "Power, Gender and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan," in

message of *nüdan*. Authority was also established by the very means of receiving texts from immortals through spirit-writing.

The first two *nüdan* works to be surveyed here are found in Daoist compilations by two Longmen Daoist masters, Liu Yiming and Min Yide, while the third one is the first full-fledged collection of female alchemy, collected in Sichuan by a local religious leader, Fu Jinquan.

### *Liu Yiming*

Liu Yiming, Longmen patriarch of the eleventh generation, was one of the most important Daoists of the northwest area, being active throughout Shanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia.<sup>33</sup> One of Liu's most famous writings, *Xiuzhen biannan* 修真辯難 (*Discriminating Difficult Points in the Cultivation of Perfection*) was published in 1798,<sup>34</sup> and purports to record a conversation between Liu and a disciple that took place in Shanxi in 1782. The text is set in a common question-and-answer format and its aim, as described in the preface by Liu Yiming, is to explain clearly issues relating to practices of refinement of the body that were not normally addressed in other alchemical books. Liu also seeks to explain complicated metaphors used in previous Daoist texts about immortality techniques.<sup>35</sup> Questions 91 to 95 (out of 120) center on female alchemy. They probably pose the most frequently asked questions about *nüdan* in that period and therefore elucidate the major themes that were perceived to pertain to *nüdan*. In composing and responding to these questions, Liu follows the general goal of the whole composition: simplification. I only translate the questions here:

91: It was asked: As for the beginning place for the practice of men and women, how are they differentiated?

92: It was asked: When women refine their form 形, do they not subdue the *qi*?

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*Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997). The idea of pilgrimages as unfit activities for elite women is reiterated in many writings; see Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-century Fiction: T'ai Shan and the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*," *TP* 77 (1991), and "Women Pilgrims to T'ai Shan: Some Pages from a Seventeenth-century Novel," in Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yu, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1992).

<sup>33</sup> Information about Liu Yiming's life is scattered in various sources, but according to *Jin-xian zhi* 金縣志 (*Gazetteer for Jin County*) he was born in the Shanxi town of Quwo 曲沃. His *hao* were Wuyuanzi 悟元子, Su Buzi 素樸子, and Beihe sanren 被褐散人; *Jin-xian zhi* (Qing edn.), j. 13.

<sup>34</sup> In *Daoshu shier zhong* 道書十二種 (*Twelve Books on the Dao*), ji 7 of 1819 (rpt. based on 1880 edn.; Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyi yao chubanshe, 1990); also in Hu Daojing 胡道靜 et al., comps., *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1992-1994), vol. 8, pp. 467-92.

<sup>35</sup> *Xiuzhen biannan*, preface, pp. 2a-b; in *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 8, p. 468.

93. It was asked: The Dao does not differentiate between men and women. Why do they have differences (in practice?)

94. It was asked: How do you cut the Red Channel?

95. It was asked: Once the golden elixir has been achieved, if you swallow it and gulp it down, women will turn into men, and old people will turn into young. Is this so or not?<sup>36</sup>

The issues here pertain to physical as well as cosmological differences between men and women, and how the practice follows those differences. Within a text aiming at simplifying the whole of *neidan* practices, the fact that only five questions out of 120 are devoted to female practice reveals that, while this is an established tradition, it is still considered minor compared to the standard *neidan* practice.

*Nüdan* appears again in another of Liu Yiming's works, *Huixin waiji* 會心外集 (*Collection of Meetings of Minds*), a collection of poems and sayings intended to spark a breakthrough, an awakening to the Dao within the mind of the practitioner. Here we find the long poem "Nüdan fa" 女丹法 ("Methods for Female Alchemy"), written in sixty 7-character verses.<sup>37</sup> In it, we recognize all the elements that usually characterize *nüdan* prose, such as the different processes of self-refinement of men and women: the refinement of *qi* of the Great Yang (*taiyang lianqi* 太陽煉氣) for males and the refinement of the form of the Great Yin (*taiyin lianxing* 太陰煉形) for females; the practice of "beheading the Red Dragon 斬赤龍," or stopping the menses; the changes in the female body that accompany the practice, namely the shrinking of the breasts resulting in the resemblance of the female body to the male. As in the above example from *Xiuzhen biannan*, the language is simple, but the maturity of the discourse is evident. All the central elements that characterize full-fledged *nüdan* techniques are present and are discussed with great ease.

Liu does not discuss *nüdan* separately from *neidan* in the general prefaces to either of the works mentioned above. The five questions appear in the context of a much longer discussion of the process of nongendered self-perfection, and the *nüdan* poem appears in the context of a collection of poems aimed at illumination; both works are by one of the leading authors of inner alchemical texts of the time. The fact that women are mentioned separately from men in these works

<sup>36</sup> *Xiuzhen biannan*, j. shang, pp. 34b-36a. In *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 8, pp. 486-87.

<sup>37</sup> In *Huixin waiji* 會心外集 (*Second Part of the Collection of Meetings of Minds*), in *Daoshu shier zhong*, ji 9. *Huixin ji* is divided into *nei* 內 and *wai* 外 and is dated 1801. *Nüdanfa* is in the second *juan* of the *wai* section, pp. 6a-7a; in *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 8, pp. 691-92.

is an indication that their process of self-perfection had by then been standardized as different from that of males; however, it is also an indication that it was not yet a separate tradition.

### *Min Yide*

The next examples are two *nüdan* texts in *Gu shu yinlou cangshu* 古書隱樓藏書 (*Texts Stored in the Hidden Pavilion of Ancient Books*) in twenty-eight *juan*, collected by Min Yide.<sup>38</sup> Like Liu Yiming, Min Yide was a Daoist Longmen patriarch of the eleventh generation.<sup>39</sup> After a life of travel in search of Daoist teachings, Min retired to live in seclusion on Mount Jin'gai 金蓋山 in Jiangsu for the last forty years of his life and there he died in 1836.<sup>40</sup> During his years on Mount Jin'gai, he compiled *Jin'gai xindeng* 金蓋心燈 (*The Heart-lamp from Mount Jin'gai*) in 8 *juan*,<sup>41</sup> and *Gu shu yinlou cangshu*. The first is a series of biographies of the Longmen Daoist school, while the second includes two texts on female alchemy – *Niwan Li zushi nüzong shuangxiu baofa* 泥丸李祖師女宗雙修寶筏 (*Precious Raft on Paired Cultivation of Women by Master Li Niwan*; n.d.),<sup>42</sup> and *Xiwangmu nüxiu zhengtú shize* 西王母女修正途十則 (*Xiwangmu's Ten Precepts on the Proper Female Path*) transmitted to Min Yide in 1799, just one year after Liu Yiming's *Xiuzhen biannan*.<sup>43</sup> Both texts were received through spirit-writing, transmitted from Xiwangmu and from Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, respectively.<sup>44</sup> *Nüxiu zhengtú* has a preface

<sup>38</sup> *Gu shu yinlou cangshu* (Wuxing: Jingai Chunyang gong cangban, 1834).

<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of the Qing, Wang Changhyue 王常月 (?–1680), the 7th Longmen patriarch and abbot of the Baiyun 白雲 monastery in Beijing, began an aggressive policy of spreading ordinations throughout the country. Many of his disciples established ordination platforms and settled temples on mountains 開山; and many branches of the Longmen school began to sprout; each of the local centers established a lineage of patriarchs. While Min Yide was part of the lineage in Jiangnan, Liu Yiming was part of the lineage in Gansu; this is why both are eleventh-generation patriarchs.

<sup>40</sup> Biographies of Min Yide are found in the *Min Lanyun xiansheng zhuan* 閔懶雲先生傳 (*Life of Mister Min Lazy Clouds*), in *Jin'gai xindeng* 金蓋心燈 (*The Heart-lamp from Mount Jin'gai*), last *juan*, *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 31, pp. 369–71, and in *Di shiyi dai Min dazongshi zhuan* 第十一代閔大宗師傳 (*Life of the Great Master Min of the Eleventh Generation*), *j. xia* of *Longmen zhengzong jueyun benzhi daotong xinzhuan* 龍門正宗覺雲本支道統新傳 (*Succession from Master to Pupil of the Orthodoxy of the Dao from the Root-Branch of "Discovering the Clouds" of the Proper Lineage of the Longmen*), in *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 31, pp. 469–71. See also Qing Xitai 卿希泰, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao* 中國道教 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1995), vol. 4, pp. 116–17. For Min's life in detail, see Monica Esposito, *La porte du dragon: L'école Longmen du mont Jingai et ses pratiques alchimiques d'après le Daozang xubian*, Ph.D. diss. (Université Paris 7, 1993), pp. 127–35; also idem, "Min Yide," in Fabrizio Pregadio, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (London: Curzon Press, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 31, pp. 158–372.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, pp. 540–46.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, pp. 533–40.

<sup>44</sup> Many of the texts reviewed in this article have their origin in a spirit-writing séance. Spirit-writing became extremely popular and widespread in the 18th c., and female alchemy texts are just one area in which we see this development.

written by Lü Dongbin, the first preface solely dedicated to a work of female alchemy. By reading through it, we gather information about the intended goals for this text, which are here stated clearly:

Master Pure Yang (Lü Dongbin) vows to save all sentient beings. He already has annotated the *Elixir Script of the Nine Emperors* as a bridge to immortality for men. But he cannot bear to sit and observe women who have a predestined life. Those who simply cherish the thought of the Dao do not obtain the real transmission, wrongly enter devious paths and fall prey to the amusement of ghosts. Therefore, in the year *yiwei* (1799), in the first month of the winter, on the first day of the new moon, I descended to the multicolored luminous palace, and responding to the Immortal Sun Bu'er, earnestly transmitted the oral instructions of Xiwangmu to Original Princess Wei (Wei Huacun). The original name (of the text), "Great Alchemical Instructions for Women" ("Nü da jindan jue" 女大金丹訣) clarifies its content. The history of this book goes through the veritable women Wei (Huacun), He (Xiangu), Ma (gu), Fan (Yunqiao) and Feng (Xiangu) who carried the correct transmission. After a few hundred years, the true transmission had gone wrong and had scattered. Errors through transmission resulted in more errors. I was deeply concerned about it. Therefore I commanded the Immortal Sun Bu'er to abridge and edit it meticulously, to collect it, and to transmit it to the world, in order to continue the lineage of perfected women, and so that the immortals could keep the transmission clean of inferior materials.<sup>45</sup>

The stated goals of the Immortal are: 1. to provide women with texts that will help them find the correct path, 2. to deter them from entering devious paths, 3. to provide a lineage for this tradition.

It is the first time these goals are stated so clearly, and subsequently they remained prominent in prefaces in *nüdan* collections, whether penned by immortals or mortals. It seems important here to pause and stress the fact that there is a slight change from previous presentations of *nüdan* texts. This text is not just provided for the health and self-realization of women (which has been determined to be different from that of men), or to clarify the steps of the practice, but also to deter women from following "devious" paths. What were the "devious" practices that women were following? While this is not clearly explained in this preface, from other prefaces we learn that these "devious" prac-

<sup>45</sup> *Xiwangmu nüxiu zhengtū shize*, preface, pp. 1a-b. This passage only appears in the preface reprinted in *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 10, p. 533.

tices involved sexual unions. A new element seems to be appearing – a preoccupation with female morality. This preoccupation would lead to ever more prominent insertion of behavioral instructions into later *nü-dan* collections.<sup>46</sup> Behavioral instructions and a general preoccupation with morality is certainly a function of the genre of all spirit-written materials, which were very often directed at women as a powerful didactic tool. That *nüdan* texts arose in this particular milieu would seem not to be coincidental.

Another aim of the preface is the establishment of a lineage of female transmission. The female immortals mentioned (Wei Huacun 魏華存, Jinlian nü 金蓮女, He Xiangü 何仙姑, Magu 麻姑, Fan Yunqiao 樊雲翹, Feng Xiangü 鳳仙姑, and Sun Buer 孫不二) had never before been grouped together in a lineage within the Daoist tradition. In fact, female immortals were rarely included in Daoist lineage lines at all. We see here an attempt, replicated later in prefaces to other texts, sometimes with different female immortals, to give the female alchemy tradition an authority it did not previously have, the authority that comes with age and the connection with a line of immortals.

Together with the attempt at lineage construction, the preface itself achieves the goal of granting authority to the text. A preface by an immortal gives an aura of immortality to the text itself, which, congealed from celestial vapors, becomes instantly ageless and faultless. In the case of such a young tradition as female alchemy, this issue and the need for validation were even more apparent.

#### *The First Collection: Nüjindan fayao*

Spirit-writing, behavioral instructions, and lineage construction are also central in *Nüjindan fayao*, which as mentioned was the first full-fledged collection devoted to female alchemy, collated by Fu Jinquan in 1813.<sup>47</sup> Fu was born in Jinxi 金谿, Jiangxi. He traveled extensively throughout Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, and Fujian, before finally settling in Baxian 巴縣, Sichuan, in 1817. There, more specifically in Qianzhong 黔中, on the southeast border of Sichuan not far from Chongqing, he “opened an altar for transmission 開壇,” the Jishantang 積善堂. In Sichuan, at a close relative’s publishing house called Shanchengtang 善成堂, he printed his main collection of works, titled

<sup>46</sup> The most relevant example is *Nüjindan fayao*, collected and edited by Fu Jinquan, described in detail below.

<sup>47</sup> In *Zangwai daoshu*, vol. 11, pp. 512–41. The woodblocks are medium size; there is no punctuation.

*Jiyizi zhengdao mishu shiqi zhong* 濟一子證道秘書十七種 (*Jiyizi's Seventeen Secret Books on the Verification of the Dao*), which includes *Nüjindan fayao*. *Nüjindan fayao* is composed of six texts, all received through spirit-writing, some of them received by Fu at the above-mentioned Jishantang, others collected by him from earlier spirit-written sources.<sup>48</sup>

While the date of Fu's preface to *Nüjindan fayao* is 1813, at least two of the texts included in it have earlier dates. *Kunning miaojing* 坤寧妙經 (*Wondrous Scripture on Kun's Peace*) has a preface dated 1743;<sup>49</sup> it was received at an altar in Sichuan very near the Jishantang. This may indicate how Fu gained access to it. *Qingjing yuanjun Kunyuanjing* 清靜元君坤元經 (*Scripture on the Origin of Kun by the Pure and Quiet Princess of the Origin*),<sup>50</sup> on the other hand, is a text whose earliest appearance is within an edition of *Lüzu quanshu* 呂祖全書 (*Complete Works of Master Lü* [Lü Dongbin]),<sup>51</sup> which bears a preface describing how it was collated from spirit-written sources in 1680 and engraved in 1683.<sup>52</sup> Throughout his career, Fu Jinqian was very devoted to Lü Dongbin, claiming to have received several texts from him.<sup>53</sup> Most probably he had access to *Lüzu quanshu*.

Most of the texts included in *Nüjindan fayao* have prefaces by the immortals who transmitted them, and there is also a general preface by Fu. Here is an excerpt:

Since early times perfected women have been many, (but) their methods of refinement have not been recorded in books. In this era they are rarely heard of. Women practice for three years, while for men nine years is necessary [to reach perfection]. Even though as a daily practice it is quite easy, finding a master is very difficult. Men can go a thousand *li* to seek fortune [and a master with affinity], but for women, leaving the inner chamber by just half a step is very difficult. There are thousands of chap-

<sup>48</sup> Information on Fu Jinqian's life is gathered from the fifth chapter of the 1939 local gazetteer of Ba county *Baxian zhi* 巴縣志, and from prefaces to his works. We should note the importance of Lü Dongbin in the transmission of texts of female alchemy. Lü is one of the few male immortals to figure prominently in the transmission of female alchemy texts.

<sup>49</sup> *Nüjindan fayao*, pp. 6a–31a.

<sup>50</sup> *Nüjindan fayao*, pp. 36a–39b; rpt. *Zangwai daoshu* 7, pp. 357–59.

<sup>51</sup> *Lüzu quanshu* was engraved by Liu Junyi 劉君一 (Liu Kechen 劉柯臣) in 1683 and printed by Meng Qizhong 孟秋中 in 1744; rpt. *Zangwai daoshu* 7, pp. 51–530. For a fuller description of the textual history of this text, see Valussi, "Beheading the Red Dragon," pp. 138–41.

<sup>52</sup> *Lüzu quanshu*, xu 序 (Preface); *Zangwai daoshu* 7, pp. 51–52.

<sup>53</sup> Fu attributed to Lü several of the texts included in *Jiyizi zhengdao mishu shiqi zhong*. Fu also compiled *Lüzu wupian zhu* 呂祖五篇注 (*Commentary on the Five Chapters of Master Lü*), prefaced 1823. It is included in *Jiyizi zhengdao mishu shiqi zhong*; rpt. *Zangwai daoshu* 11, pp. 720–43.

ters of alchemical treatises, but they do not list or include female practice. So I have put together this book. Even though I have not yet exhausted this objective, *Kunyuan jing* is already finished and complete. I wish to delete from this book all the superficialities and unveil its marvelous wonders, just like when the whales ingest all the sea-water and uncover the coral. If you repeat out loud the way of the people, this is exactly the root of the way of the immortals. Refining the body is the beginning of the attainment of perfection. It is necessary to act with virtue and without misbehavior. In any case, among immortals there are differences; even though women keep virtue within their breast, are bashful and truthful to their husbands, even if they have a strong will and practice sedulously, they are still harboring wanton desires. For this reason I have respectfully put together this collection, so that the way through the clouds and the heavenly ladder for perfected women of future generations and the meditation and fasting of the mind could be recorded and heard. (So that) meeting the people in the sky (immortals) would not be far (for women), the methods and instructions are in this way made clear.<sup>54</sup>

The preface has highlighted four points:

1. Women in his age do not have access to alchemical works specifically directed to them.
2. While women's path may be quicker than men's, because of the lack of written instructions or access to teachers, few women achieve perfection.
3. Women, despite their honesty and willingness to succeed in the process of perfection, have a harder time than men due to their emotional makeup, which is prone to desires.
4. This work is directed to all women who are serious in their pursuit of alchemical refinement.

At the end of the whole collection is a postscript written by Lingyangzi 靈陽子, sobriquet for the female immortal He Xian gu.<sup>55</sup> In it, the principal message is the significance and importance of devoting the whole work to the perfection of women, and that women had been eagerly waiting for such a work.<sup>56</sup> The paucity of works for women is stressed by both Fu and He Xian gu as the *raison d'être* of the collec-

<sup>54</sup> *Nüjindan fayao*, pp. 1a-b.

<sup>55</sup> He Xian gu is often associated with texts of female alchemy. She appears in many cases together with the Immortal Lü Dongbin, who is credited with having saved her from a life as a prostitute.

<sup>56</sup> *Nüjindan fayao*, j. xia, pp. 19a-b.

tion. The mention of incorrect practices is reminiscent of Lü Dongbin's preface to *Nüxiu zhengtu*, described above. The messages coming from mortal and immortal mouths are remarkably similar in tone and content.

Some of the individual texts in *Nüjindan fayao* also have prefaces by the immortals who transmitted them, and describe the reasons for and the process of transmission, as well as the audience gathered for the event. In them, too, there is a remarkable homogeneity in the reasons given for the production of such texts. In the preface to *Kunning miaojing* 坤寧妙經 (*Wondrous Scripture on Female Tranquility*),<sup>57</sup> the Pure and Veritable Daoist nun of cheerful conduct and wondrous permutations (Qingzhen nüdaoguan xingxing miaohua zhenren 清真女道冠興行妙化真人), says:

Surely there is no lack of women, but they are forced into devious paths. ... In my travels on the border between Shu and Min (in Sichuan), it was common not to be able to practice with women practitioners; even though there are well-educated women (interested in this path), they do not go out to obtain a master in order to ascend to immortality and attain sagehood.<sup>58</sup>

Here, the unstable emotional makeup of women mentioned in the previous preface is more directly connected by the woman writer to the hazard of being involved in incorrect and dangerous practices, and these dangers are linked by her to the difficulty for women to obtain proper instruction.

*Nüdan shijue* 女丹詩訣 (*Poetic Formulae on Female Alchemy*) bears a preface attributed to Chongyangzi 重陽子 (Wang Chongyang 王重陽) that explains that, since transmission of texts for women is very rare, the gods on high were asked to send down instructions for female practitioners, which they did in the form of poems.<sup>59</sup> Immortals are called upon by humans to quickly produce instructions that would be clear and correct.

The issue of criticizing incorrect practices is also made prominent by the amount of space in *Nüjindan fayao* devoted to moral injunctions for women, about fifty percent of it being taken up by a discussion of proper behavior. In the collection, some texts are solely devoted to this, while others discuss behavior and practice at the same time. This

<sup>57</sup> *Kunning miaojing*, in *Nüjindan fayao*, j. shang, pp. 6a–31a (dated 1743).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6a.

<sup>59</sup> *Nüdan shijue*, in *Nüjindan fayao*, j. xia, pp. 7a, 19b. The poems are titled “Xinggongshi” 性功詩 (“Poems on the Practice of Inner Nature”).

indicates a growing preoccupation not only with external influences (bad teachers), but also with women's preferred choices for heterodox practices. It went hand-in-hand with the development of a cult of female chastity that reached its height at this time.<sup>60</sup>

### STAGE 3: THE AUTHORITY OF THE EDITOR

#### *Nüdan hebian*

In Chengdu in 1906, He Longxiang (*juren* 1891), a Daoist and Confucian scholar, published a new collection.<sup>61</sup> It was made in the context of printing a much larger Daoist collection titled *Chongkan Daozang jiyao* 重刊道藏集要 (*Republication of the Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon*),<sup>62</sup> sponsored by an influential Daoist temple in Chengdu, the Er xian'an 二仙庵. This large Daoist collection was aimed at printing important Daoist texts written after the last version of the Daoist Canon (*Daozang* 道藏) was published in the Ming dynasty. He Longxiang was responsible for the editing of the whole *Chongkan dao zang jiyao* as well as for the much smaller *Nüdan hebian*, considered an addendum to the larger collection.<sup>63</sup> The abbot of the Er xian'an, Yan Yonghe 閻永和, and Peng Hanran 彭翰然, an influential donor from Xinjin 新津, a few miles south of Chengdu, helped He in the editing process.<sup>64</sup> Because of the nature and importance of *Chongkan dao zang jiyao*, it was printed from large woodblocks and with elegantly carved characters. As

<sup>60</sup> The increasing pressure for female chastity is well documented in Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*.

<sup>61</sup> He Longxiang, style name Jingxuan 靜軒, was from Jingyan 井研, Sichuan. He became a provincial graduate (*juren*) in 1891; further information is in *Guangxu Jingyan zhi* 光緒井研志, j. 13, p. 36a, and *Guangxu Jingyan zhi*, j. 23, sect. "Shizu," *biao* 7, p. 6b. References to his writings can be found in *Guangxu Jingyan zhi*, j. 13, sect. "Yiwenzhi," pt. 3, pp. 35b–38a, and 5, p. 22a.

<sup>62</sup> This collection, which was initially published in 1700, went through a series of republications, for the last of which He was main editor. His revised and expanded edition of *Daozang jiyao* was called *Chongkan Daozang jiyao* 重刊道藏集要 (*Republication of the Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon*), printed at the Erxian an 二仙庵, a Daoist monastery in Chengdu. The history of earlier compilations of the *Daozang jiyao* is very complex; for a discussion of its genesis, see Fabrizio Pregadio, "Daozang jiyao (*Essentials of the Daoist Canon*): An Introduction and Catalogue," unpublished article. See also *Chongkan Daozang jiyao*, preface, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> The fifth and last *juan* of the table of contents of *Daozang jiyao* is called "Daozang jiyao xubian zimu" 道藏輯要續編子目 ("Index to the supplement to the Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon"), and at pp. 57a–69a is He Longxiang's preface to *Nüdan hebian* and its table of contents. The whole collection, though, was published by He separately but in the same year and at the same location. For a comprehensive history of *Nüdan Hebian*, see Valussi, "The *Nüdan Hebian*."

<sup>64</sup> See *Chongkan Daozang jiyao*, preface, p. 1, for further information on these editors' efforts in publishing it.

its complement, *Nüdan hebian* had the same features, and it contained fourteen *nüdan* texts.

*Nüdan hebian* was printed just after the time of the Boxer uprising, and this event is directly linked to the creation of its first text, “Nannü dangong yitong bian” 男女丹功異同辨 (“Differences and Similarities in the Alchemical Work of Men and Women”).

As the female author Yan Zehuan 顏澤環 explains in her preface, the primary motive for her relocation to Emei Mountain in Sichuan (where she first became interested in *nüdan* and wrote her text) was to escape the troubles caused by the Boxers. Even though the Boxer Rebellion took place mostly in north China, the anti-foreign sentiments that were at its base surfaced all over China. Sichuan was not immune. Various records show that this area was also plagued by unrest directed at both foreigners and Chinese Catholics. This unrest derived from sectarian movements that had been very active in Sichuan in previous decades and that had often gathered around spirit-writing altars of a kind similar to Fu Jinquan’s.<sup>65</sup> However, He Longxiang was not part of these sectarian movements in the same way that his predecessor Fu Jinquan had been. In fact, and this is a great shift from previous Daoist writers, he was not at all personally connected to a religious community or altar.

The difference between the collections of Fu Jinquan and He Longxiang is evident first and foremost when comparing their actual material layouts. While Fu’s collection was printed from smaller woodblocks, with less elegant characters and on cheap paper, as mentioned above, the size of the woodblocks used to print *Nüdan hebian* was large and its style more elegant. This was expressive of the status emanating from the parallel, and much larger, *Chongkan Daozang jiyao* project, as well as from the importance of the large temple complex Er xian’an and of the status of its publisher, He Longxiang, and his collaborators. *Nüdan hebian* is also the first collection to include an image of a woman meditating.

The structure of the collection and He Longxiang’s preface to it also display the emergence of new rhetorical strategies. Lineages, spirit-writing, and the authority of the immortals became secondary by this phase of development of the *nüdan* tradition, while other earlier issues remained predominant. For example, He Longxiang still explained the

<sup>65</sup> Kristin Stapleton “County Administration in late Qing Sichuan: Conflicting Models of Rural Policing,” *Late Imperial China* 18.1 (1997), p. 100; Victor Purcell, *The Boxer Uprising* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1963), p. 122; Judith Wyman “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-Foreignism: Chongqing, 1870–1900,” *Late Imperial China* 18.2 (1997), pp. 86–122.

importance of his collection as a powerful tool against the incorrect practices that women were exposed to, and he still lamented the lack of instruction for female perfection. Differently from previous authors and editors, though, he was very concerned about clarity and simplicity. In this context, right in the preface to the collection, he offered a simple and effective description of male and female bodies, as well as a list of all the wrong practices women should avoid.

The contents of the collection are a selection of previously published and already available materials that He recovered during a stay on Mount Emei in Sichuan. Thus, they were not directly transmitted to He by a divinity through spirit-writing.<sup>66</sup> This too marks an important change. The editor is no longer the conveyor of the immortal message, or the medium between the audience and the immortal, as was the case with Fu Jinquan; instead he is the main actor. He does not need the authority of the immortal in order to lend weight to his work. This is equally true when we look at the issue of lineages: He Longxiang does not stress the importance of female immortals in the creation of the texts as did other texts and collections before his.

It is also worth addressing the issue of readership here. In his long preface, He Longxiang mentions that the impetus behind his decision to publish *Nüdan hebian* came in great part from his own female family members. Already aware of *nüdan* practices through previous texts and collections, they wanted a different presentation for the already available instructions.<sup>67</sup> Clarity, simplicity, and directness were apparently their main concerns. This is the first time that an explicitly and self-consciously female constituency was deemed responsible for the publication of a *nüdan* text. We could read this as a proof of a higher level of agency on the part of women on what was published for them and how. However, the fact that a group of women in He's family is aware of *nüdan* texts but needs them to be collated in more coherent and clearer form by him can also be interpreted in a different way. These women, in what Ann McLaren calls the "hierarchy of reading," may have been perceived as being part of a group of "emerging literacy," dependent on He Longxiang for their full understanding of the *nüdan* message.<sup>68</sup>

He's drive towards simplification is described most clearly in the postface, where he discusses the works that he included and those he

<sup>66</sup> Many of the texts in fact come from *Nüjindan fayao*.

<sup>67</sup> This is mentioned by He in his preface to *Nüdan hebian*, p. 6a.

<sup>68</sup> McLaren, "Constructing New Reading Publics," p. 162.

left out. After listing several female alchemy texts, some of which had been published in Fu Jinquan's *Nüjindan fayao*, he adds:

Even though all of these belong to the superior Dao, they do not make clear the instructions and crucial points for beginners. Therefore I have not selected them to be printed (in *Nüdan hebian*)<sup>69</sup>

He Longxiang, who lived and worked not very far away from where *Nüjindan fayao* had been received nearly a hundred years earlier, reprinted about half of the texts from that collection and added others from different regional traditions, all of which had also been transmitted by spirit-writing. As noted above, his choice of texts reveals a clear preference for practical instructions at the expense of moral injunctions.

He's preface is the most structured and informative in the whole corpus of *nüdan*. In it, he discusses neither spirit-writing nor the nature and origin of the texts he reprinted. He does not overtly mention any immortal's role in text production (he did, however, maintain the immortal's prefaces where they existed). There was no more pressing need for a validation of a tradition with an established history. A different kind of validation, though, came from the authority of the editor himself, who presented the practice with clarity, knowledge and vision.

About one third of the preface is concerned with a detailed explanation of the structure of the male and female bodies, their inner workings, and their final approaches to immortality. This had never been done before in any preface to a female alchemy work. Men and women are described first and foremost from a cosmological point of view, and paired with concepts like Yin and Yang, the trigrams Qian and Kun, Kan and Li. The preface then proceeds to describe in detail male and female bodily parts, fluids and energies. It continues by giving details on the different techniques men and women use to refine those energies and fluids, and ends by emphasizing similarities rather than differences:

Just as the man is yang, and yang is clear, so the woman is yin, and yin is impure. The male nature is hard, the female nature is soft. A man's feelings are excitable, a woman's feelings are tranquil; male thoughts are mixed, female thoughts are pure.

The man is fundamentally in movement, and movement facilitates the loss of *qi*; the woman is fundamentally quiet, and quietness facilitates the accumulation of *qi*. The man is associated with the trigram *Li* and, like the sun, he can complete a whole circuit

<sup>69</sup>*Nüdan hebian*, postface.

of the heavens in one year; the woman is associated with the trigram *Kan* and, like the moon, she can complete a whole circuit of the heavens in one month. For a man, *qi* is difficult to subdue; for a woman, *qi* is easy to subdue.

These are the differences concerning innate nature.

The man has a knot inside the windpipe (i.e., Adam's apple), the woman does not. The male breasts do not produce liquids and are small; the female breasts produce liquids and are big. A man's foundation is convex (*tu* 凸); a woman's foundation is concave (*ao* 凹). In the man [the convex organ] is called the essence chamber (*jingshi* 精室); in the woman [the concave organ] is called the infant's palace (*zigong* 子宮). In men the vital force is located in the *qi* cavity (*qixue* 氣穴); in women the vital force is located between the breasts. In the man, generative power<sup>70</sup> is located in the pelvis; in the woman, generative power originates from the blood. In the man [the generative power] is the essence, its color is white and its name is white tiger (*baihu* 白虎); in the woman it is the blood, its color is red and its name is red dragon (*chilong*). As for male essence, it is yin within yang; as for female blood, it is yang within yin. The power of male essence is more than sufficient; the power of female blood is insufficient.

These are the differences concerning Form and Structure.

A man first refines the root origin 本元 (*benyuan*), and only subsequently does he refine the form 形質 (*xingzhi*); a woman, instead, needs to refine her form first, and only then can she refine the root origin. The male yang leaks downward, whereas the female yang moves upward. When a man has completed the practice and the seminal essence does not drip away any more, this is called "subduing the white tiger." When a woman has completed the practice and the menstrual flow does not drip away anymore, this is called "Beheading the red dragon." In the man, seminal essence moves against the current and he becomes immortal; in the woman, blood moves upwards, ascending towards the heart's cavity. ... The masculine practice is called "refining the *qi* of the supreme Yang," the feminine practice is called "refining the blood of the supreme Yin."<sup>71</sup> For the man we speak of "Embryo" (*tai*

<sup>70</sup> I translate *shen* (kidneys) here as "generative power." In Chinese medicine the system of the kidneys includes the genital apparatus and is therefore the seat of generative power.

<sup>71</sup> A detailed description of this method, which involves breathing exercises and regular massage of the breasts, visualization of lights throughout the body, formation of the immortal embryo, and the final manifestation of the spirit, is given in several texts found in *Nüdan*

胎); for the woman, we speak of “Growing” (*xi* 息).<sup>72</sup> When the man has subdued the white tiger, the stem (*jing* 莖, i.e., the penis) will retract and become similar to that of a young boy; when the woman has beheaded the red dragon, the breasts will retract and become similar to those of a male body. The man progresses slowly at the moment of the manifestation of the spirit, and he is slow in achieving the Dao; the woman progresses fast at the moment of the manifestation of the spirit, and she is also fast in attaining the Dao. A man can ascend [to Heaven] on his own; a woman needs to await salvation. Men must meditate facing the wall;<sup>73</sup> women who succeed in going back to emptiness are very few. The man will become an authentic man; the woman will become a lord of the origin. These are the differences concerning the methods of practice.

We can say that, as for the principles that regulate Innate Nature and Vital Force, there are no differences [between men and women]. I advise the female adepts first to find out points of contiguity where there are differences, and only then to discover the differences hidden where there is similarity. In most cases, however, the contrasts are to be found before the beheading of the Red Dragon, whereas the major analogies emerge after the beheading of the Dragon. These are irrefutable and immortal arguments.<sup>74</sup>

This section of the preface would become a standard in the way the male and female bodies are described and understood in *nüdan*.

Another section of the preface is concerned with unorthodox practices. He Longxiang was the first to describe in detail the wrong practices that women might perform if they did not practice *nüdan*:

There are those who mistakenly take part in heterodox sects and do not know the correct way. ... Others are lured into lewd chambers. There are those who secretly attract good girls to serve as human cauldrons, as they serve as the Yellow Dame (*huang po*

*hebian*: see *Qiaoyang jing nügong xiulian* 樵陽經女功修煉 (*Female Refinement according to the Scripture of Qiaoyang*), p. 1a; *Nüjindan* 女金丹 (*Female Golden Elixir*), j. xia, p. 23a; *Nüdan cuoyao* 女丹撮要 (*A Synopsis of Female Alchemy*), p. 2b. The three versions are almost identical. This preface uses information from all of these texts and streamlines them.

<sup>72</sup> A man must focus on visualizing an embryo forming inside his body, while a woman must concentrate on her breathing (since it will not be hard for her to visualize the embryo forming inside her body).

<sup>73</sup> The practice of “meditating facing a wall” refers to the legend of Bodhidharma, said to have spent nine years at the Shaolin Temple (Henan) meditating facing a wall after cutting his own eyelids to avoid falling asleep.

<sup>74</sup> *Nüdan hebian*, preface, pp. 4a–5b. Also translated in Valussi, “The *Nüdan Hebian*.”

黃婆),<sup>75</sup> the result being that they lose their name and integrity. There are those good women who do what palace ladies like to do; they enjoy serving as cauldrons in order to seek the achievement of immortality, (but they just) continue to lose their name and integrity. There are those (women) who go on pilgrimage, enter temples and throw themselves in a disorderly manner at Buddhist and Daoist monks; others plant the seed of passion into male teachers of good schools.<sup>76</sup>

This passage is reminiscent of the moralistic attitude towards women's activities in the religious public sphere identified in previous collections. However, while previous editors were careful to offer their texts to women as a safe tool to be practiced inside the home, He Longxiang saw women taking a more active role in the seeking of instruction. This utterance comes right at the beginning of his preface:

Supposing that there were alchemical books for women to be transmitted, and women could read and understand them, and furthermore, that they were able to leave home at their convenience to seek a master and find the Dao, then the number of women seeking immortality would exceed that of men.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, in his preface as well as in his restructuring of the *nüdan* tradition, He Longxiang downplayed but did not completely erase the role of spirit-writing and the authority of immortals; he painted a remarkable picture of the differences between male and female bodies; he offered clear and practical explanations of how the practice worked and what the dangers of incorrect practices were; and he lamented the dearth of texts for female practice. His collection became the standard for future collections, and is still printed in China today as the basis of contemporary *nüdan* practice.<sup>78</sup>

The suggestion that women might be able to find their own way of practicing, as well as their own masters, ushers in issues raised in another fundamental *nüdan* collection, that titled *Nuzi dao xue xiao cong shu wuzhong* 女子道學小叢書五種 (*Five Types of Small Encyclopedias on the*

<sup>75</sup> The term Yellow Dame has multiple meanings. At a cosmological level, it aids the shifting of the yang unbroken line from the trigram *kan* to the trigram *li*, thereby re-forming the pure yang, *qian* trigram. But this service can be understood in very practical terms: in the case above, the Yellow Dame is the person who aids the two practitioners during a religious sexual joining (during which the aim is still to produce pure yang by shifting internal yang from the woman to the man).

<sup>76</sup> *Nüdan hebian*, preface, p. 3a.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1a.

<sup>78</sup> This collection is still printed at the Er Xian'an from the original woodblocks. Contemporary practitioners interviewed often identified this collection as their main starting point for their practice.

*Female Learning of the Dao*), edited by Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧 (1880–1969) in 1936.

*Chen Yingning*

As had already been true with *Nüjindan fayao* and *Nüdan hebian*, with Chen Yingning's *Nüzi daoxue xiao congshu wuzhong*, *nüdan* would become a vehicle to express anxieties about the social and political order, and the resulting implications about stability and prosperity. While the previous two collections focused on authority, female chastity, and the proper behavior of women, in this collection there was a shift to concern for national survival, modernization, and science. In particular, Chen's presentation of *nüdan* was influenced by the Japanese invasion, as well as by cultural shifts, such as new perceptions of gender relations, the women's rights movement,<sup>79</sup> the anti-superstition campaign, his interest in science, and new philological trends.

Chen was an intellectual who had a great impact on the reorganization and diffusion of alchemical texts and notions in the Republican period. Originally from Huaining 懷寧 in Anhui and hailing from a literati family, he obtained his *xiucai* degree at the age of fifteen. After traveling extensively throughout China as a Daoist practitioner, in 1912 he eventually settled in Shanghai at the Daoist abbey Baiyunguan 白云觀. He was a Daoist practitioner as well as an editor of Daoist journals. Through his influential editing of *Yangshan banyuekan* 揚善半月刊 (*Bimonthly on Uplifting the Good*) from 1933 to 1937 and *Xiandao yuebao* 仙道月報 (*Monthly on the Way of Immortality*) from 1939 to 1941, Chen made efforts to disclose to a wider public the "secret techniques" of inner alchemy, calling it *xianxue* 仙學, "the study of immortality."

As aptly described by Xun Liu in his dissertation on Chen Yingning, the period from the late-nineteenth century to the 1930s saw a revival of religious communities in the face of government suppression. The revival was also fueled by a need for "personal and cultural self-definition," and a newfound interest in China's past, as well as the full awakening of Chinese nationalism in the wake of the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. At the same time, Western technological and scientific advances were inspiring Chinese intellectuals to try new theories.<sup>80</sup> Chen was reinterpreting the *neidan* tradition to fit contemporary spiritual needs, something that stressed the role of inner alchemy as an

<sup>79</sup> See Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong, eds., *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), especially the introduction by Christina Kelley Gilmartin.

<sup>80</sup> See Xun Liu, "In Search of Immortality: Daoist Inner Alchemy in Early Twentieth Century China," Ph.D. diss. (University of Southern California, 2001), pp. 367–68.

integral part of the wider Chinese heritage, but which was perceived to need reviving in the face of Western cultural and political invasion as well as Japan's physical invasion. This effort was intended to help national strengthening and progress. For this reason Chen tried to make *neidan*'s notions available to as wide a public as possible.<sup>81</sup> The importance of promoting a scientific approach to the investigation of the national cultural heritage was a recurrent theme in Chen Yingning's writings.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned above, Chen was also influenced by the attention given to the role women would play in a new society. Many of the reformers and political revolutionaries of this period believed that, in the words of Kristina Gilmartin: "the cause of women's emancipation was potentially beneficial to the quest for modernity, because it would facilitate the emergence of a modern-minded citizenry in place of docile subjects."<sup>83</sup> This attitude would have a profound influence on how women were instructed in using the techniques of *nüdan*; the goal was not any more to keep morality intact, but to foster independence and productivity.

In order to change the message of *nüdan* so dramatically, Chen's work, both in *Nüzi daoixue xiaocong shu wuzhong* and in several articles in his magazines, was, again, one of reinterpretation. He reinterpreted and annotated the preexisting *nüdan* canon according to his own ideas about Daoism and *xianxue*. Such work occurred mainly, as we have seen with previous collections, in the realm of the paratext. *Nüzi daoixue xiaocong shu* is completely composed of texts selected from earlier collections, mainly from *Nüjindan fayao* and *Nüdan hebian*; it includes no new material. What is new is the presentation.

In the material structure there are interesting changes: the woodblocks used for printing are much smaller in size than those carved for *Nüdan hebian*, giving the final product the size of a pocket book that

<sup>81</sup> There was a similar "nationalistic" movement forming at the same time to keep the study and practice of traditional Chinese medicine alive. See Ralph C. Croizier, *Traditional Medicine in Modern China: Science, Nationalism, and the Tensions of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1968). A contemporary of Chen and a man with a very similar view of the Chinese heritage and its need to meet the challenges of Western science and culture was Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874–1952), who worked to reorganize knowledge in areas of medicine, Buddhism, and inner alchemy. On Ding's part in reviving the Chinese heritage, see Bridie Andrews, "The Making of Modern Chinese Medicine, 1895–1937," Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge University, 1996), pp. 111–33.

<sup>82</sup> Very similar issues of anxiety over national weakness as well as fascination with western scientific methods are exemplified, e.g., by the sudden interest in a French hormone pill against spermatorrhea advertised widely in the 1930s; see Hugh Shapiro, "The Puzzle of Spermatorrhea in Republican China," *Positions* 6.3 (1998), pp. 551–96.

<sup>83</sup> Gilmartin, introduction, in Lan et al., eds., *Women in Republican China*, p. 12.

could easily be carried around. The characters are less elegant; there are no dividing lines on the page but punctuation marks are introduced for easier reading. Also new are Chen's lengthy prefaces for each text as well as his annotations to the texts, which not only help the modern reader to understand them better, but also reveal much of Chen's intellectual agenda.

One of the main changes Chen implemented had to do with spirit-writing. He deleted all the information pertaining to the spirit-written nature of the texts he was republishing, including prefaces, postfaces, and immortal's names in the titles. Furthermore, in the newly written prefaces to all the texts included, he complained about people "who write alchemical texts but conceal their name, and instead falsely use the names of divinities like Lü Dongbin or He Xian gu, claiming that they sent down their writing through spirit transmission."<sup>84</sup> He called this an "empty" device, and strongly criticized it. Whereas one hundred years earlier the relationship with a divinity gave these text a supernatural authority, a relationship like this was now seen by Chen as useless superstition, detracting from their value. In describing *Nüdan shize* 女丹十則 (*Ten Precepts of Female Alchemy*), Chen says:

This text does not bear the name of its author. The old title is "Jinhuashan xiangyi gumu" 金華山香逸古母 ("The Ancient Mother of Fragrance and Leisure from Mount Jinhua"). This kind of title is superficial and crude. The author of this text did not want to use his real name, but why did he need to falsely make up a god's name? For this reason I have excised it (the title).<sup>85</sup>

In the general introduction to his collection, Chen states that, in order to elevate China's Daoist tradition, he had deleted everything that he deemed "superstitious (*mixin* 迷信)."<sup>86</sup> The use of the category is interesting here; it ties into the development of an anti-superstition campaign directed against popular religion, which had its roots at the turn of the century but which was in full swing by the time of Chen's writing.<sup>87</sup> Prasenjit Duara describes the shift from the term *xie* 邪 to the term *mixin* in this context:

However, it is to be noted that where the Confucian worldview spoke of elements of this realm as *xie*, commonly translated as het-

<sup>84</sup> Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧, *Nüzi daoxue xiao congshu wu zhong* 女子道學小叢書五種, *shang ce, zhong* 2, pp. 3a-4b, pref. dated June, 1935.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, *zhong* 3, p. 3b.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, *zhong* 1, pp. 1b-2a.

<sup>87</sup> On the origins and the development of the anti-superstition campaign, see Vincent Gossaert, "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?" *Journal of Asian Studies* 65-2 (2006), pp. 307-36; Prasenjit Duara, "Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity:

erodoxy, and implying an undesirable but alternative set of beliefs, the pejorative and trivializing neologism *mixin* (superstition), by which the entire realm of popular religion was now characterized, brought with it a much more absolutizing distinction between the scientific and the primitive.<sup>88</sup>

Chen also seems less interested than earlier editors in discussing the moral aspect of women's practice. While he too warned against dangerous alternative practices, he did not criticize sexual practices as immoral, but rather as possibly physically harmful. Morality was furthermore downplayed by his choice not to reproduce many of the sections on proper female behavior and Confucian virtues present in texts from previous collections.<sup>89</sup>

The importance of promoting a scientific approach to the investigation of the national cultural heritage was also evident in Chen's reorganizing of the *nüdan* tradition. One example of his interest in replacing the authority of immortals with logic, health promotion, and a painstaking philological approach is *Nü Gong Zhengfa* 女功正法 (*Proper Methods for Female Practice*). This is an abridged version of a text titled *Zengbu jinhua zhizhi nü Gong Zhengfa* 增補金華直指女功正法 (*Augmented Direct Instructions of the Golden Flower on the Proper Methods for Female Practice*). It was originally received by spirit-writing in 1880 and was attributed to the female immortal He Xian gu. Chen not only deleted the preface by the immortal Lü Dongbin and the attribution to He Xian gu, as well as chapters on morality and Confucian behavior from the complete collection, but he also added a chapter that explained in detail possible illnesses arising from a wrong practice ("first cure any menstruation illnesses 先治經病").

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The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China," *JAS* 50 (1991), pp. 67–83, and Rebecca Nedostup, "Religion, Superstition, and Governing Society in Nationalist China," Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 2001). This campaign not only severely criticized popular religion, but also actively attempted to and often succeeded in confiscating property belonging to religious organizations, temples and associations, turning the buildings into schools and the revenue into the state coffers. Duara, "Knowledge and Power," p. 176: "In its zeal to eradicate superstition and establish a modern society, the Yuan [Shikai] administration sought to systematically dismantle the institutional foundations of popular religion. Its success in appropriating temples and temple property in the first phase was considerable."

<sup>88</sup> Duara, "Knowledge and Power," p. 76.

<sup>89</sup> For example, from the *Kunning miaojing* he deleted sections titled: "Thinking about Mistakes" 思過, "To Be Sincere and Filial" 誠孝, "Constancy and Chastity" 節烈, "Discussing 'Quiescence'" 說靜, and "To Serve the Gods" 奉神. In a different text, *Nü Gong Zhengfa* 女功正法 (*Proper Methods for Female Practice*), Chen deleted a section on rules of conduct 持戒, which included mainly Confucian rules on filiality, respect and ritual, as well as a chapter on collecting good deeds 積功.

Chen heavily intervened in the structure of the texts, not on the contents, and applied the newly discovered tools of textual research to his efforts. In the preface to the entire collection, he described how he arrived at the final product through careful comparison of different editions:

The first text in this collection is *Kunning miaojing* 坤寧妙經 (*Wondrous Scripture on Kun's Peace*). I collected woodblock prints, manuscripts, as well as house-stored versions of the text, six in all. Among them, there were great dissimilarities in the language. (In counting) errors in words and phrases, the fingers were not enough. Therefore, I compared the superior and inferior elements of the six kinds of texts, choosing the good ones and adopting them, from beginning to end.<sup>90</sup>

Following the same approach, Chen also deleted any redundancies and repetitions and what he called “empty phrases 空言.”<sup>91</sup>

Chen also advised the readers to use their own judgment in reading. For example, he criticizes the author of *Nannü dangong yitong bian* 男女丹功異同辨 (*Differences and Similarities in the Alchemical Work of Men and Women*) for not having a linear theory of *nüdan*, and just pasting together quotations from “good” texts and “bad” texts:

In each hand-copied book there are good and bad parts; therefore, occasionally there are contradictions in its theory. So the language is rather superfluous and confusing. Despite the fact that I have slightly deleted and revised the text, I could not but maintain its original meaning. The students need to use their own knowledge in distinguishing it when looking at it.<sup>92</sup>

This statement betrays Chen's different approach compared with previous editors, a difference also clear in his regular exchanges on these topics on the pages of *Yangshan banyuekan* and *Xiandao yuebao*.<sup>93</sup>

The wholesale embrace of the anti-superstition language, the criticism of the “false” immortal origin of the texts, the logical reorganiza-

<sup>90</sup> *Nüzi dao xue xiao congshu*, *shang ce*, *zhong* 1, p. 4b. Unfortunately several editions for each of these texts no longer exist.

<sup>91</sup> E.g., he deleted most of the tenth precept from *Nüdan shize*; *Nüzi dao xue xiao congshu*, *shang ce*, *zhong* 3, p. 17b. This process is reminiscent of contemporary efforts of other Chinese scholars, like Ding Fubao, with his work on Chinese medicine and on Buddhism, to use textual research to arrive at versions of texts closer to their originals. This effort is directly connected to the Qing dynasty movement for evidential scholarship, or *kaozheng*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, *xia ce*, *zhong* 4, pp. 3a–b.

<sup>93</sup> See especially his interesting exchange with female reader and *neidan* practitioner Lü Bichen, in Hong Jianlin 洪建林, ed., *Daojia yangsheng miku* 道家養生秘庫 (Dalian: Dalian chubanshe, 1991), pp. 270–77.

tion and the involvement of the reader in the process of making sense of the information in the texts is relevant: it betrays a change in the expected audience for these texts. Chen, in several instances, explains that he had to edit, delete, reorganize and re-compact these texts because they were often redundant, repetitive, disorderly and illogical. We know from studies of popular texts and their audiences that reading was often perceived as a discontinuous process that dismembers texts; in particular, texts intended for the widest audiences were organized in brief and disjointed sequences and were intentionally repetitive, apparently in order to be more deeply fixed in the memory of people with limited experience of long narratives.<sup>94</sup> This is certainly a good description of earlier *nüdan* texts. Chen's attempt to shift from this kind of repetitive and discontinuous narrative to a narrative that is cleaned of illogical, insignificant parts and of repetitions, presumes an audience with a different level of understanding of text, an audience that can follow a long narrative and does not need repetitions or short integral sequences in order to retain information. This audience, which could also understand the detailed descriptions of the editing process in Chen's prefaces, and was called upon to interpret the texts, is obviously more literate and, at least in Chen's view, less prone to approve of or accept the textual origin of the tradition as lodged with immortals.

While the intended audience of *nüdan* literature had often been primarily women, the kind of women targeted with this collection was different, for example, from the ones targeted by He Longxiang's *Nüdan hebian*. The deletion of moral instructions and Confucian tenets from the texts already betrayed an ideological shift, away from traditional gender ideology. Chen made his aim even clearer in a commentary to the *Nannü dangong yitong bian*. This was a text collected by the historical woman Yan Zehuan and first published in the *Nüdan hebian*. In discussing the contents of this collection, he criticised Yan for repeating the idea that women (but not men), once they completed the practice, still need to await summons by the spirits in the skies (a standard step in traditional *nüdan* practice). Chen described this as an example of gender bias that went against the message he believed *nüdan* should carry. In his mind, *nüdan* was a tool for women's emancipation.<sup>95</sup> This feeling is mirrored in his responses to female readers of his journals. For example, in one of his answers, he says:

<sup>94</sup> One example of this approach to the study of texts and reading is Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980).

<sup>95</sup> *Nüzi dao xue xiao congshu, xia ce, zhong* 4, pp. 3a–5b.

From the perspective of the immortals, men and women's requirements are equal. Therefore, in terms of the common practice of gender bias, it is a human construct, not a natural (law).<sup>96</sup>

Not only did Chen present *nüdan* in a different light from his predecessors collected in *Nuzi daoxue xiaocongshu*, he also discussed the tradition openly and at length with some of the readers of his journals, predominantly well-educated women. Apart from gender balance, he addressed issues such as the lineage of different schools of *nüdan*, attempting to reconstruct a consistent historical background for it;<sup>97</sup> the different physiological effects the practice would have on women of different ages, and whether there were variations that applied to them; the troubles of supporting oneself financially during the practice; and even such mundane issues as diet, location for the practice, and where to buy books. Chen also addressed the thorny issue of sexual techniques, and concluded, differently from all the Daoist intellectuals who dealt with *nüdan* before him, that both paired (sexual) and solo techniques had their positive and negative sides; the issue was to be decided only by the practitioners themselves.<sup>98</sup>

Through his editing, his careful prefaces and his exchanges of letters, Chen's ideas in regard to *nüdan* are manifest, reflecting the profound social changes both on his part and on that of his audience. In 200 years, *nüdan* had gone from being a gender specific health promoting practice, to a way to immortality for women, to an antidote for women's excessive involvement in outside activities (specifically religious sexual practices), to an empowering tool for women who were just discovering their new place and space in society. Again, this shift was achieved with very little modification to the content of the texts under discussion, which continued to describe the practice in the same terms.

#### STAGE 4: MODERN TIMES (1980-1990)

The years between 1936 and the 1980s were a hiatus in the history of *nüdan*. World war, civil war, and the Cultural Revolution gave intellectuals more pressing concerns than *nüdan*.<sup>99</sup> However, in the 1980s,

<sup>96</sup> *Daojia yangsheng miku*, p. 245.

<sup>97</sup> See for example his detailed list of *nüdan* lineages, the historicity of which is not possible to verify. He describes different lineages of female alchemy in a response to a female reader of his journal, Zhu Changya 朱昌亞; *Daojia yangsheng miku*, pp. 237-38.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 254, 262.

<sup>99</sup> There is one exception. Over several years between the late-1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Xiao Tianshi, a Hunan native who acquired several Daoist scriptures while in Sichuan between 1944-48, moved to Taiwan. There he published a collection of them called *Daozang jinghua* (see n. 26, above). Vol. 5.5 reprints Fu Jinquan's collection in its entirety without modification.

with the resurgence of publication in every field of social, historical and scientific inquiry, *neidan* and *nüdan* publications resurfaced as well.

According to my own general survey of mainland Chinese publications from that period, books on *neidan* started reappearing in the second part of the 1980s. However, many of the texts that we would now categorize as *neidan* texts, were then published under the general category of *qigong* 氣功. For example, a work titled *Qigong yangsheng congshu* 氣功養生叢書 (*Collectanea of Texts on Qigong and Longevity Techniques*), a series of twenty-nine volumes published on different dates between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, is in fact a comprehensive chronologically arranged collection of Daoist texts on *yangsheng* 養生 and inner alchemy. Moreover, Daoist scholars like Li Yuanguo 李遠國 published studies on Daoism and *neidan*, prefacing them with the word *qigong*.<sup>100</sup> Another series, called *Zhongguo qigong guji congshu* 中國氣功古籍叢書 (*Collectanea of Ancient Texts on Chinese Qigong*), is comprised of three books, all of which reprint *neidan* texts.<sup>101</sup> There are several reasons for this. First of all this period saw a great interest in *qigong* that swept over China, and any book with *qigong* in its title would sell well.<sup>102</sup> Second, scholars of *neidan* were still not comfortable using religious terminology in their publications, preferring to remain within the more “scientific” realm in which *qigong* was catalogued. Most *qigong* publications of the 1980s and 1990s have titles like: “*qigong* and science,” “*qigong* and medicine,” “*qigong* and sports,” or “the scientific (or medical) foundations of *qigong*.” Publishing *neidan* texts within this category was safe as well as profitable.<sup>103</sup>

There were only two collections of specifically *nüdan* texts published at this time. The issues that are predominant in their prefaces revolve, once again, around the perception of a lack of such instructions

<sup>100</sup> *Zhongguo daojiao qigong yangsheng dacheng* 中國道教氣功養生大全 (Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1992) is an encyclopedia of Daoist inner alchemical knowledge; *Daojiao qigong yangshengxue* 道教氣功養生學 (Chengdu: Sichuan sheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1988), treats the history of *neidan*.

<sup>101</sup> The first one, *Pingdian Wu-Liu xianzong* 評點伍柳仙宗, published in 1989, is a collection of texts by Wu Shouyang and Liu Huayang, preeminent Qing writers on *neidan*. The second, *Nüdan jicui* 女丹集萃, also published in 1989, is a *nüdan* collection. The third, *Dao yuan yi qi* (1990) is a collection by the Ming physician Cao Heng (see n. 22, above). It includes mostly *neidan* materials, as well as one of the first *nüdan* texts.

<sup>102</sup> Both the immense appeal and diffusion of *qigong* practices in the 80s and early 90s and the following crackdown in 1999 due to the anti-cult campaign directly aimed at the Falungong movement are detailed in Nancy C. Chen, “Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns,” in Daniel Overmeyer, ed., *Religion in China Today*, The China Quarterly Special Issues, NS 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2003).

<sup>103</sup> For more discussion on how this period sees the fast proliferation of publishing and of profit-driven media, see Zha Jianying’s *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers Are Transforming a Culture* (New York: New Press 1995).

for women and an emphasis on structural and linguistic simplicity. Also, these prefaces reveal a complete deletion of the religious nature of the tradition, both in their language and in the excision of origins or lineages. While women were still assumed to be unable to read complex texts, the targeted readership was among those involved in the *qigong* movement or those interested in self-help medicine.

The first collection, published in 1989, is part of the *Zhongguo qigong guji congshu* series mentioned above. Its title is *Nüdan jicui* 女丹集萃 (*Selection of the Best Texts on Female Alchemy*) and is composed of excerpts from all of the texts and collections surveyed above, including texts previously written, received, or collected by Liu Yiming, Min Yide, Fu Jinquan, He Longxiang, and others. The introduction was penned by a well-known Daoist scholar, Tao Bingfu 陶秉福, the general editor of the series. It is remarkable that many of the concerns voiced in all the previous prefaces, from 1799 until 1936, are reiterated here. The prefaces note, for instance, the dearth of books for women: “Historically, there have been very few books on female meditation, and there are even fewer in this historical moment.” They stress the need for separate instructions for women: “Separate instruction is important, given the different bodily setup of men and women. However, there are still similarities in the practice, especially in the latter part of it.” They focus on practice: “The parts that deal with the theory and behavior have been excised.” They emphasize readability: “Because many of the texts reproduced were first published in the Qing or Republican period, the language may be quite difficult to understand, therefore it has been edited and changed to fit an audience of people with an elementary degree.” And they delete redundancies.<sup>104</sup>

Tao Bingfu also gives a concise rendition of the process of the practice, conveniently divided into five stages, with each stage further divided into substages. He does this on the basis of the contents of the texts. However, none of the texts themselves has such a clear organization or subdivision, and the editor explains that his aim was to make the practice available to as many women as possible, avoiding the likelihood that over-complicated and hazy texts would scare practitioners away.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, the word *qigong*, which is part of the title of the series, is never used inside the book. However, the way to describe the

<sup>104</sup> The previous sentences all come from Tao Bingfu, ed., *Nüdan jicui* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989), preface, pp. 1–2.

<sup>105</sup> *Nüdan jicui*, preface, pp. 2–12. The process of simplification of texts for the readers is not just a prerogative of this *nüdan* collection; Tao gives informative and clarifying prefaces in the other two volumes.

female practice is not *nüdan*, but *nüzi liangong* 女子練功 (women's practice), a term unrelated to the Daoist religious tradition.

The second collection of *nüdan* texts from this time is *Nüdan hebian xuanzhu* 女丹合編選注 (*Annotated Selections from Nüdan hebian*), published in Chengdu in 1991 but with a preface dated 1989; it is an abridged version of *Nüdan hebian* by He Longxiang, discussed above, and was edited and annotated by two physicians, Qiu Xiaopo 邱小波 and Jiang Hong 蔣紅. In the preface, the term *nüdan* is never mentioned. Instead, the editors define the contents of the book as “female *qigong* 女子氣功.”<sup>106</sup> They stress the book's importance in the context of the rising interest in *qigong* throughout China, and among women in particular. They felt a need to provide a manual that would cater specifically to women's physiology and psychology. Spirituality and immortality are never mentioned. The reasons for the publication are said to have been to provide republication of a manual for women's practice, of which there were very few, and to provide women with gender-specific instructions for avoiding medical problems.<sup>107</sup>

He Longxiang's original *Nüdan hebian* preface is left intact, but issues of female behavior, incorrect practices, and the dangers of wandering freely outside of the house, as well as the final goal of immortality, all mentioned by He, are not discussed in the editor's preface to the abridged version. It would seem that science had rendered them irrelevant and obsolete.

As a selection of texts from *Nüdan hebian*, it is interesting to note, through absences and rearrangements, what the editors did select and why – in other words, the agenda. Of the fourteen *Nüdan hebian* texts, only six are reprinted. They are the longest, most comprehensive, and clearest of the texts. Of those left out, two (*Pangmen lu* 旁門錄 [*Record of the Heterodox Schools*] and *Pangmen xiaoshu xiaoyin* 旁門小術小引 [*Small Guide to the Minor Techniques of Heterodox Schools*]) deal with heterodox (mainly sexual) practices that women could be exposed to if they do not follow *nüdan*. Two more (*Nüdan shiji qian bian* 女丹詩集前編 [*Collection of Poems on Female Alchemy, First Section*] and *Nüdan shiji hou bian* 女丹詩集後編 [*Collection of Poems on Female Alchemy, Last Section*]) collect poems by different female immortals preceded by their hagiographies.

<sup>106</sup> There is a whole school of *nüzi qigong*, based in Beidaihe, China. Liu Yafei, daughter of Liu Guizhen, described by some as the founder of modern *qigong*, travels the world teaching the latter technique, which is based on writings like those surveyed in this article. However, she is very careful to describe it as a health technique, not a religious practice.

<sup>107</sup> Qiu Xiaopo 邱小波 and Jiang Hong 蔣紅, eds., *Nüdan hebian xuanzhu* (Shanghai: Shanghai fanyi chubanshe, 1991), preface.

Yet another, *Nüdan huijie* 女丹彙解 (*Collection of Explanations on Female Alchemy*), does not discuss practice at all but is a collection of moralistic sayings by Buddhas and immortals.<sup>108</sup> In all cases, the texts were apparently deemed not relevant to the modern audience. On the one hand, heterodox practices are no longer an issue, obviating moralistic injunctions against them; on the other hand, poems and hagiographies do not directly discuss the practice, the main concern of *qigong* practitioners.

Simplicity, a recurrent issue in most of the manuals surveyed, is still deemed to be of central importance. The texts are not presented in the forms of photocopies of the original edition, as in the case of *Nüdan Jicui*, described above, but rather are reprinted in simplified characters, punctuated, with annotations throughout. Reaching the widest audience with the simplest message was obviously a concern still resounding in 1991.

Finally, the origin of all of these texts – spirit-writing – is not even mentioned. In 1906 He Longxiang had not discussed spirit-writing but did retain the immortal’s prefaces. Chen Yingning, in 1936, rejected what he regarded as a fantasy simply designed to augment the authority of the *nüdan* texts. In *Nüdan hebian xuanzhu* the prefaces are deleted, with no mention of them or of the supposed origin of the texts. The need for the authority given by an immortal’s transmission as well as a female immortal’s lineage is no longer felt. The initial goal of achieving immortality has been replaced by the more mundane aim of remaining healthy.

Before concluding, it would be worthwhile to consider one final, and important, publication of the modern period, namely, *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (*Daoist Books Outside the Daoist Canon*). This is a collection in thirty-six volumes of all Daoist texts not included in the *Daozang*.<sup>109</sup> *Zangwai daoshu* reprints many *nüdan* texts, but the editorial team often deleted prefaces and postfaces, as well as information about publication date and location, images, and lists of donors, which often appear on the first and last pages of a work. This is a general policy applied to most of the texts selected for inclusion, and betrays the belief that only text is important. This elevates the text from the particularity of its milieu to the “universality” of the message it contains. This approach is common when reprinting Daoist texts, which are believed to be a product of divinities, so the earthly circumstances of their transmis-

<sup>108</sup> Of the other three unreprinted texts, two of them – *Nannü dangong yitong bian* and *Nüdan cuoyao* – are mostly collections of sayings already present in the other texts; another, *Kunjue*, is very short.

<sup>109</sup> See n. 34, above.

sion are not deemed worthy of inspection and speculation. However, such an approach presents the Daoist tradition in a nonhistorical context and makes it harder for historians to trace the history of a tradition like *nüdan*.

#### CONCLUSION

Focusing on paratextual materials such as prefaces, postfaces, and titles, as I have done in this paper, forces us to ask about the boundaries of texts. Where does a text begin and where does it end? To what extent are these elements part of a text? Does eliminating or manipulating them change the text so much that it is not the same any more? In the above examples, as prefaces were replaced or simply deleted, titles modified, commentaries added or subtracted, author's names excised, I hope to have demonstrated the integral role of the paratextual material in forming the inherent meaning of a text. To change the elements of the paratext changes the nature, meaning, and message of the text itself.

This brings up the issue of the "original" text. As one collection follows another, as one editor eliminates elements of previous collections and adds new ones, as the palimpsest is continually reinscribed, can we talk about an "original," "correct," "scholarly," or "complete" text? We can speak of Fu Jinquan's collection, of He Longxiang's collection, of Chen Yingning's collection, or of the modern reprints. Each is a slice of text, influenced by its editor's intentions and beliefs, as well as by social and historical pressures. Each is a reflection of its age. Any text, or group of texts, is unstable and indeterminate, historically and materially, and we can only understand its contents in their historical context. As Ralph Williams has said "we should think of works and editions in particular, as 'tranches de texte,' and not as stable entities that stand rigid to their own transmission and to our own inspection and response."<sup>110</sup> To look at *nüdan* solely from the point of view of one of these publications, frozen in time and space, would be to miss the different perspectives from which the tradition has been viewed, the different roles it has served, and the different possibilities that have arisen from it. The questions we need to ask of these different editions is not which is the original, but what is their aim, what is their use, and what can we learn, through them, about contemporary ideas of womanhood, femininity, society, and politics. Prefaces, images, names of

<sup>110</sup> Ralph Williams, "I Shall Be Spoken," in Bornstein and Williams, eds., *Palimpsest*, p. 51.

donors, locations, and names of printing houses tell us a story not included in the text itself, but a story we need to know.

In the case of *nüdan*, the story starts in the seventeenth century with the identification of the female body as different from the male body in its approach to transcendence (as well as in its relationship to health and illness). This identification developed in the eighteenth century into a full-fledged discourse of female transformation. By the nineteenth century, it was joined by a whole set of moral and behavioral instructions, clearly influenced by the intense attention to female chastity at the time. While *nüdan* originated with solid ties to the supernatural world, collections in the twentieth century downplayed divinities. A certain text might be re-presented in a context quite different from that of its first reception, and thus its relationship with a divinity and its immortal, transcendent nature can be seen as contingent. Transcendence becomes erased simply by erasing the immortal's preface, changing the title, and eliminating details about origins. Other elements become important at different times: the role of the editor in presenting the tradition clearly and simply; the role of science and logic in validating and transforming it into a tool not only of women's self-perfection but also self-assertion; political and societal pressures in erasing the religious component. In the 1980s and 1990s, as *nüdan* was perceived as belonging to the realm to science, medicine, and health, the ties to immortal origins, as well as the goal of immortality itself, vanished. *Nüdan's* meaning and message were thus radically transformed.