

Article

The Living Dead: An Interpretation of the Metaphor of Death in Daoist Inner Alchemy

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Abstract: This article explores the metaphor of death in Qing 清 Dynasty Daoist inner alchemy (*neidan* 内丹) scriptures, which require practitioners to consider themselves dead or living dead, and argues that this metaphor of death can be traced back to the connotation of the “living dead” proposed by the founder of Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen* 全真), Wang Chongyang 王重陽, in the Jin 金 Dynasty, who demonstrated his desire for the return of Dao by digging a grave for himself and referring to himself as a living dead man. In addition, this paper also analyzes the psychological connotations represented by the living dead, pointing out that it contains a profound theme of death and rebirth.

Keywords: Daoist inner alchemy; the living dead; psychology; suicide; rebirth

1. Introduction

Daoism, a religion centered on the Dao and the belief in the existence of immortals, was born in China during the Eastern Han Dynasty and has evolved from a folk religion to one of China’s official religions, with a history of 2000 to 3000 years. Daoism believes that the Dao is the source of all things in the universe and the law of nature and that the most remarkable function of the Dao is birth (*sheng* 生). Therefore, Daoism values the lives of creatures and advocates that they should not be arbitrarily harmed, just as it values the lives of human beings. It is written in the *Scripture of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) that those who died were lowly, while those who lived were precious 喪者為賤, 生者為貴 (Wang 1979, p. 309).

The Daoist system of deities comprises two distinct categories: gods and immortals. The term “gods” is used to refer to supernatural beings that are believed to have existed before the birth of the universe. The Celestial Worthy of Original Commencement (*Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊), the Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao Tianzun* 靈寶天尊), the Celestial Worthy of the Way and Its Virtue (*Daode Tianzun* 道德天尊), and the Queen Mother of the West (*Xiwang Mu* 西王母) are examples of such deities. Immortals are those who have attained deific status by applying Daoist cultivation methods. Daoists espouse the view that immortals personify the Dao and represent truth, goodness, and beauty. In addition to their immense magical abilities, these deities are said to oversee human affairs, intervening to protect humanity from adversity and misfortune.

Daoism holds that individuals can attain immortality through their endeavours. In the development of Daoism, there are numerous methods through which mortals may achieve immortality. These include exhaling and inhaling¹ (*tuna* 吐納), maintaining Oneness² (*shouyi* 守一), chanting (*songjing* 誦經), sitting in oblivion³ (*zuowang* 坐忘), outer alchemy⁴ (*waidan* 外丹), and Embryonic breathing⁵ (*taixi* 胎息). During the late Tang 唐 Dynasty, a novel Daoist practice emerged: inner alchemy (*neidan* 内丹). It synthesized the disparate methodologies of Daoism that preceded the Tang Dynasty, thereby establishing a distinctive cultivation system. Inner alchemy is the principle by which Daoists borrow the theory and terminology of external alchemy to elaborate on their cultivation. They use the human body as the laboratory; the heart and kidneys as the Tripod furnace; the



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essence (*jing* 精) of the human body, pneuma (*qi* 炁), and spirit (*shen* 神) as the medicine; and the intention to breathe as the fire, refining the elixir inside the human body to seek immortality and become an immortal (Hao 1994, p. 7). Generally speaking, there are three stages in the process of cultivating inner alchemy, the first of which is “refining essence into pneuma” (*lianjing huaqi* 煉精化氣). The remaining two steps are “refining pneuma into spirit” (*lianqi huashen* 煉氣化神) and “refining spirit and reverting to Emptiness” (*lian-shen huanxu* 煉神還虛). Upon completing the cultivation process, an embryo of saintliness (*shengtai* 聖胎) is formed, which leads to the realization of the Dao and the attainment of immortality. This culminates in fulfilling the highest spiritual aspirations that the cultivators have pursued throughout their lives.

However, for a religion that places such a high value on human life and focuses so much on enabling individual lives to achieve immortality, Daoism records many metaphors of death in its *neidan* scriptures, allowing practitioners to see themselves as “living dead” or “dead person”. What do these death metaphors in *neidan* scriptures mean? What is the significance of death metaphors for practitioners? How do the death metaphors reflect the psychological characteristics of the cultivators? The following sections will address the issues mentioned above and combine them with pertinent psychological theories, thereby providing a more detailed explanation of the death metaphor in Daoist inner alchemy.

2. Metaphors of Death in the *Neidan* Scriptures

Let us consider the case of a reader who wishes to peruse the *neidan* scriptures of the Qing 清 dynasty. In this case, the reader may find many metaphors about death recorded in the scriptures. This is evidenced in the *Poem on the Rules and Precepts for Female Cultivators of the Great Daoist Priest in purple* (*Zhiyi dadaojun nüxiu rumen guijie shi* 紫衣大道君女修入門規戒詩), which is recorded in the *Kunyuan* 坤元 scripture: “It is challenging for married women who aspire to practice *neidan* to relinquish their children due to their strong emotional bond with them. Even in the context of a happy married life and a positive relationship, a woman may still experience difficulties if she does not view herself as having already died”. 身邊兒女棄拋難, 真個牽纏連肺肝。婚嫁兩全情未已, 除非自作死人看 (Dong and Sheng 2012, p. 203). Their children and husbands represent a primary emotional investment for married women who wish to engage in inner alchemy. The only means of abandoning these relationships is to view oneself as deceased, effectively severing the most significant emotional bonds.

The *Twelve Rules for the Practice of Daoist Priestess of Guanghua Emperor* (*Guanghua dadi kundao xiuxing shi'er ze* 廣化大帝坤道修行十二則) were recorded as follows: “One should forget emotions and thoughts, not leave a trace of disturbance in the mortal world, and treat himself as if dead during meditation. All joys, sorrows, and pleasures are irrelevant to him; the mind should not concern itself with daily affairs. One should devote all attention to cultivation and maintain a state of meditation throughout the day”. 忘情絕念, 不留塵緣, 一絲擾亂, 靜中視己如死, 一切喜怒哀樂, 無關係於我, 將身事家務, 拋去弗問, 惟知修道, 心不外馳, 一心不二, 日在道中 (Dong and Sheng 2012, pp. 199–200). This entails a state of emotional detachment and the absence of worldly attachments. One should be free from disturbances and engage in inner calm during meditation. In this way, one can achieve a state of calmness where external circumstances, including emotions, do not affect one’s inner state. This also implies a detachment from the affairs of daily life, including personal matters, family responsibilities, and external concerns. The practice of Daoism encourages a single-minded focus on the path of spiritual cultivation, which should be the primary focus of one’s attention.

The *Eight Chapters on the Words and Secrets of the Inner Alchemy for women as dictated by the Fifth Imperial Aunt of Mysterious and Virginity* (*Xuanzhen wu huanggu nüdan fayan mijue bazhang* 玄貞五皇姑女丹法言秘訣八章) reads: “Adhering strictly to the precepts is essential in the initial stage of the practice. This entails purifying the mind, severing all ties with worldly concerns, eradicating delusional thoughts, focusing on the Dao, and adopting the mindset of a deceased person. Starting from the initial steps according to

the secret word methods taught by the Master concerning the cultivation”.入門嚴守規誡,必先清心寡欲,割絕塵緣掃去妄念,心心在道,視己若死,無一掛念,依定口訣,從頭做去 (Tao 1989, pp. 385–86). The *Poem on the Precepts of Female Cultivation of the Fifth Imperial Aunt of Mysterious and Virginity* (*Xuanzhen wuhuang gu nüxiu guijie shi* 玄貞五皇姑女修規戒詩) also has the same record: “The seven passions and six desires are born out of feelings; cutting them off depends on the wisdom of the sword. It takes a deep insight and understanding of the nature of oneself and one’s family, and then no one exists in the world who has died as I have”. 七情六欲感中生,斬斷全憑慧劍真。要把身家都看破,世間無我死中人 (Dong and Sheng 2012, p. 205).

The practitioner sees themselves as dead or living dead, a process of “suicide”. In the field of psychopathology, the complex and sensitive phenomenon of suicide is often seen as a concentration of several negative, unhealthy, and profoundly harmful factors. It is an extreme way of ending an individual’s life and an outward expression of their long-term struggle, pain, and despair in the inner world. From a psychological point of view, suicidal behavior is often caused by profound psychological disturbances, such as major depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mental disorders, which are like invisible shackles that bind a person’s thinking and emotions, making it difficult for him or her to see the hope and color of life. From a sociological perspective, there are several reasons why suicide usually occurs. Firstly, it is an act driven by unbearable psychological pain. The primary motivation for individuals who commit suicide is to find relief from unbearable psychological distress, including feelings of helplessness, despair, grief, and abandonment. Secondly, cognitive narrow-mindedness is a contributing factor. The cognitive states most commonly observed in individuals with suicidal ideation include rigid thinking, generalization, and short-sightedness. These states are also considered to be the most dangerous mental states. Thirdly, there is a lack of adaptability. Those who are suicidal typically perceive themselves as being exceedingly weak and incapable of coping with external challenges. The presence of symptoms such as anxiety disorders and schizophrenia evidences this. Fourthly, there are attacks on the self. In the event of a relationship being rejected, a marriage failing, or a job not working out, the suicidal individual tends to internalize these traumatic events of rejection and subsequently directs their anger and attacks towards themselves (Wang et al. 2006, p. 105). Suicide as an extreme consequence of these mental health problems reflects not only the patient’s sense of powerlessness and avoidance of the current situation but also his or her profound frustration in the face of life’s pressures, interpersonal conflicts, and identity crises. Once this frustration accumulates to a certain degree, it can lead individuals to develop strong self-denial and despair and to consider suicide as the only way out of their current difficulties. Thus, suicide is not only an extreme denial of life but also a warning of a severe imbalance in an individual’s state of mental health.

Psychoanalysis, especially the theory of Sigmund Freud, has also studied the phenomenon of suicide in depth. According to Freud, there is a self-destructive impulse in human beings, the “death impulse”, which is opposed to the “life impulse”. From a psychoanalytic perspective, suicide is seen as an extreme manifestation of this death impulse within the individual. It is usually closely related to internal psychological conflicts, painful emotions that cannot be dealt with. Individuals may choose suicide as a means of escaping from the reality of their predicament due to their inability to reconcile the conflict between the ego, id, and superego. This explanation focuses on the psychodynamic processes within the individual and sees suicide as the result of the passive drives of internal conflicts and desires.

However, in the practice of religious cultivation, practitioners actively choose to “commit suicide”, not out of a desire to escape or an inability to cope with inner conflicts, but rather in a quest for a higher spiritual realm and a passion for self-improvement. This process often requires great courage and determination, and through practices such as meditation, prayer, and introspection, the old mental structure and behavioral patterns are gradually weakened until a state of transcendence and integration into a higher state

of consciousness is achieved. In this transformation, the cultivators achieve spiritual rebirth and a deeper understanding and appreciation of life.

Thus, although both psychoanalysis and religious cultivation address the psychological dynamics within the individual in exploring the phenomenon of suicide, they have very different starting points, purposes, and paths of practice. While psychoanalysis focuses more on uncovering and understanding the psychological mechanisms behind suicide, religious practice emphasizes spiritual rebirth and transcendence through active spiritual transformation. Suicide in the context of religious practice is not an extreme denial of life nor a warning of an unbalanced state of mental health but rather an inner transformation that an individual can undergo in the pursuit of spiritual ascension.

Daoism has a deep understanding of death. Laozi 老子 regarded death as the inevitable process of change in the universe. He emphasized the relativity of life and death, arguing that where there is life, there must be death, which is the law of the universe in a continuous cycle. In the face of death, Laozi demonstrated a natural and open-minded attitude, believing that death was the ultimate goal of life and that although it could not be avoided, spiritual transcendence and immortality could be achieved through conformity to nature and contentment. He proposed that “Those who die but do not perish are long-lived in spirit” (*si'er buwangzhe shou* 死而不亡者壽) (Chen 2003, p. 201). That is, the body dies, but the spirit is immortal, which is true longevity. Zhuangzi 莊子, on the other hand, further developed Laozi’s concept of life and death, which he regarded as nothing more than the gathering and dispersing of *qi*, a manifestation of natural phenomena. He believed that death was the beginning of life; that life and death were like the recurring cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter; and that, therefore, one should neither be ecstatic about life nor mourn death. For Zhuangzi, death is nothing more than the return of life to nature, another form of existence (Chen 2016, p. 525). Daoism has also incorporated the tenets of profound insight into the nature of individual existence and the veracity of the universe as espoused by Laozi and Zhuangzi. Nevertheless, in contrast to the transcendence of life and death, Daoism places greater emphasis on the transcendence of death. Consequently, it has devised numerous methods to circumvent the demise of the physical body, thereby pursuing physical and spiritual immortality.

During *neidan* cultivation, cultivators sit quietly cross-legged on a futon, imagining themselves as the living dead, and enter a meditative state. This act is part of a religious ritual. In religious ceremonies of death and rebirth, “death” is a temporary return to chaos. The symbolism conveyed by the ritual suggests that the individual participating in the ceremony has acquired a different way of being, a spiritual way of being, and has become a new person since, in the ancients’ view, if one state could not be eradicated, it was impossible to enter another (Eliade 1958, p. 60). These rituals follow a classic pattern: “mystical death of the initiand, followed by a new, spiritual birth” (Eliade 1958, p. 113). In Christianity, baptism symbolizes the believer’s emptiness and rebirth before Christ. During baptism, the catechumen is completely immersed or doused with water, representing their letting go of their old self and accepting Christ’s salvation, thus gaining new life. Baptism is not only an affirmation of the believer’s faith but also a profound allegory of death and rebirth on a spiritual level. Also in this category is our example of Wang Chongyang 王重陽 digging a grave for himself in the next section.

In inner alchemy, the practitioner sees themselves as dead; that is, they have mentally given up their attachment to the secular world and are in a state where they are physically alive but have spiritually transcended the secular world and have been reborn. In this case, “death” is even more symbolic because it symbolizes its opposite, “rebirth”. *The Principles of Balanced Cultivation of Inner Nature (xing 性) and Vital Force (ming 命) (Xingming guizhi 性命圭旨)* states: “Cultivate the mind to be a guest of everlasting existence, and refine the inner nature as if one were living dead”. 修心要作長生客，煉性當如活死人 (Z. G. Yin 2013, p. 90). This elucidates the rationale behind the principle of cultivation, espoused in the *neidan* scriptures, which permits practitioners to perceive themselves as a “living dead” individual. This is undertaken for “cultivating inner nature (*lianxin* 煉心)”. The purpose

of *lianxin* is to restore “precelestial spirit” (*xiantian zhi shen* 先天之神), also called original spirit (*yuanshen* 元神), that the individual has lost.

Inner alchemy espouses the tenet of nurturing both “inner nature” (*xing* 性) and “vital force” (*ming* 命). In this context, *ming* denotes the essence and *qi* 炁, whereas *xing* signifies spirit (*shen* 神). The concepts of essence, pneuma, and spirit are three of the primary tenets shared by Daoism, often referred to as the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶), and are associated with the “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian* 先天) and “posterior to Heaven”⁶ (*houtian* 後天) states. The concept of essence is understood to exist in two distinct forms: “precelestial essence” (*xiantian zhi jing* 先天之精) and “postcelestial essence” (*houtian zhi jing* 後天之精). Similarly, pneuma exists as “precelestial pneuma” (*xiantian zhi qi* 先天之炁) and “postcelestial pneuma” (*houtian zhi qi* 後天之氣). Spirit includes “precelestial spirit” (*xiantian zhi shen* 先天之神) and “postcelestial spirit” (*houtian zhi shen* 後天之神). When an individual is conceived and grows in the womb, its essence is *xiantian*. When the mother gives birth, the baby’s umbilical cord is cut, and he breathes with his lungs; postcelestial essence gradually replaces his precelestial essence as he grows older. The postcelestial essence, derived from desire, is produced and stored in the kidneys. Postcelestial pneuma refers to the pneuma that the individual breathes with the lungs. Postcelestial spirit refers to the individual whose divine consciousness is polluted by material desires during the growth of life and loses its original nature. *Neidan* believes that cultivation is the restoration of the precelestial essence, the precelestial pneuma, and the precelestial spirit, so it has a critical attitude towards the *houtian* of essence, pneuma, and spirit.

Daoism believes that the properties of all things can be summarized as *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, that *yin* and *yang* can be interdependent and transform into each other, and that life and death can also transform into each other. The precelestial attribute is *yang*, and the postcelestial attribute is *yin*. According to the cultivation idea of *neidan*, only through the death of the human heart, which is greedy for material life, can the precelestial spirit be revealed. Through the crisis of death, the individual can abandon the old self and enter a new level, the precelestial spirit, which is the reversion of the individual who has fallen into the realm of *houtian* to the realm of *xiantian*. The record of the *Quotes from the Immortal Danyang* (*Danyang zhenren yulu* 丹陽真人語錄) states the following: “Precelestial spirit can only live when the human heart dies, just as the *yang* flourishes and the *yin* perishes.” 心死則神活，陽盛則陰消 (Ma 2005, p. 243). The same account is also found in the *Golden Flower Directly Pointed Out the Correct Way to Cultivate the Inner Alchemy for Women* (*Jinhua Zhizhi nügong zhengfa* 金華直指女功正法): “To know that all things now live as if they were dead, then you must realize that it is necessary to revive the precelestial spirit who has died”. 要知萬物生皆死，須悟元神死復生 (Dong 2019, p. 298). Behind the practitioner’s psychological impulse to commit suicide is the desire for transformation; the only way to achieve the possibility of transformation from the precelestial to the postcelestial can be through a death crisis. Letting the mind dwell in a state of clarity is called “the living dead” in *neidan* scriptures, which is the mode of growth in an individual’s life set by inner alchemy.

3. The Death Metaphor Is Derived from Wang Chongyang’s “Living Dead” Archetype

In the early stages of the development of inner alchemy, there were no metaphors of death in its scriptures, such as the *Token for the Agreement of the Three According to the Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易參同契) written by Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 of the Eastern Han 東漢 Dynasty and the *Folios on Awakening to Perfection* (*Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇) by Zhang Boduan 張伯端 of the Northern Song 南宋 Dynasty, and so on. This situation continued until the Jin 金 Dynasty, when Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1112–1170), the founder of Quanzhen⁷ (Complete Perfection 全真), not only repeatedly referred to himself as the “living dead” in his poems but also physically built a tomb for himself.

According to historical records, Wang Chongyang was born into a wealthy family who not only read many poems and books but also excelled in the practice of martial arts. In his youth, like most scholars, Wang Chongyang pursued merit, hoping to become an official

through the imperial examinations of the time so that he could realize his dream of maintaining the state properly and making everything peaceful. However, due to the constant wars and turbulent social environment, Wang Chongyang had to work as a minor official to collect taxes on alcohol, and he was very disappointed with his career development. When he was 48, he met two people with disheveled hair who wore felt clothes. Wang Chongyang was deeply impressed by the temperament of these two people, he was amazed and went up to greet them, and they taught him the recipe for cultivating inner alchemy. As for who exactly the two people were that Wang Chongyang met, it is widely believed by Daoists that they were Zhong Liquan 鐘離權 and Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, two immortals who had achieved success in practicing internal alchemy. After meeting them, Wang Chongyang began the path to becoming an immortal through the cultivation of *neidan*. As he persisted in his cultivation, his realization of the Dao deepened, and he was deeply impressed by the ease with which life passed, so he accelerated his training. To achieve freedom of body and mind without any attachment to his family, Wang Chongyang, after much deliberation, decided to leave his wife and give his young daughter to her in-laws, with whom she had a marriage contract. He also undertook a series of surprising actions, such as begging for food in the city, sleeping on ice, and lying in the snow (Zao 2004, p. 14). His behavior was so irrational that people called him Haifeng 害風 (wild and crazy). The word “Haifeng” is a vernacular term for a person suffering from insanity (Yue 1998, p. 1262), commonly known as a lunatic.

The most incredible thing is that in the first year of Dading 大定 (1161), Wang Chongyang dug a cave in Nanshi 南時 Village, Zhongnan 終南 County, to live for the sake of his cultivation. He called the cave the “Tomb of the Living Dead” and set up a wooden tombstone in front of his grave with the inscription “Spirit of Wang Haifeng” (*Wang Haifeng zhimu* 王害風之墓)⁸. This kind of behavior by Wang Chongyang has some profound meanings. On one hand, he wants to tell people that Wang Chongyang has died as a mortal, and when he emerges from the tomb, he is no longer a human being. On the other hand, the tomb of the living dead could create an isolated environment conducive to the practice of *neidan*. It is well known that humans are animals that live in groups. However, inner alchemy requires the practitioner to stay away from human society, endure loneliness, and have a heart like dead ashes to better enter the state of meditation. Wang Chongyang only lived in the tomb for about two years before filling it.

From 1160 to 1163, he lived in a self-made tomb called the “Tomb of the Living Dead” (*huosi ren mu* 活死人墓). During his stay at the tomb, Wang Chongyang composed thirty verses of “Tomb of the Living Dead Presented to Ning Bogong” (*Huosi ren mu zeng Ning Bogong* 活死人墓贈甯伯功) as a gift to a friend named Ning Bogong 甯伯功, of which the third verse reads “The living dead, the living dead, I am talking to you today about causality (*yinyuan* 因緣); death alone in the grave is a good story, the couple is still in love, even if they are buried in the same grave after a hundred years, in the end, they will just turn into dust.” 活死人兮活死人，與公今日說因緣。墓中獨死真佳話，並枕同棺悉做塵 (Dong et al. 2013, p. 110). The meaning of this poem is that Wang Chongyang 王重陽 has realized the causality of his life; from the point of view of the living dead, marital love is like dust and mist, like an illusion, but also empty. Another example is his fifth poem to Ning Bogong: “The Living Dead, the Living Dead. It is a good thing to know the truth about death while you are alive. The silence in the grave is empty and peaceful. It is possible to ignore the right and wrong of the mortal world”. 活死人兮活死人，活中得死是良因。墓中閑寂真虛靜，隔斷凡間世上塵 (Dong et al. 2013, p. 110). This poem says that death is boundless emptiness, the ultimate silence. The highest ideal of a Daoist practitioner is often to reach the realm of emptiness and peace, meaning that all distractions, such as desires and rational thoughts, should be dispelled to achieve peace and purity of the soul. Such a state of mind is characterized by being free from awareness of oneself and the outside world and free from any urges or desires. Since ancient times, many people have lived in seclusion in the mountains or practiced in temples to avoid contact with people, but how can all this

compare with the absolute silence of being in a tomb? Is a tomb, completely cut off from the world, not the ideal place to cultivate seclusion?

Wang Chongyang decided to dig a grave for himself while he was still alive and lived in it for more than two years. This behavior was indeed a symbol of “suicide”. So why did he symbolically end his life by being buried in the ground instead of in some other way?

Interestingly, the choice of an ordinary person to end his or her physical life in a variety of ways is considered in psychoanalysis to have a specific symbolic meaning. The psychoanalyst Menninger provides insight into the symbolic meaning of an individual’s decision to end his or her life and the psychological state it reflects in the present. After analyzing numerous cases of suicide, he pointed out that the common belief that suicide is due to an individual’s escape from physical illness, shame, poverty, etc., is too simplistic and that suicide is a complex act, not a simple, episodic, independent, impulsive act (Menninger 1988, p. 14). The inner feelings of a suicidal person change dramatically, and the internal urge to commit suicide has unconscious motives. There is a symbolic meaning to the way a suicidal person ends their life, such as clinging to a red-hot stove as a form of self-mutilation, but this action also involves a strong feeling of being loved, a feeling of inner coldness and indifference to the world, which the suicidal person hopes will culminate in a final destructive satisfaction. Suicide by crucifixion is similar to the crucifixion of Jesus, and drowning is associated with the suicidal person’s longing to return to a life of undisturbed bliss in the womb (Menninger 1988, pp. 45–46). It follows that the superficial phenomenon of individual suicide is to promote the destruction of the body in various ways, such as choosing to end life by jumping into the sea, drowning, or being buried alive, which could be the individual’s urge to return to the mother’s “womb”, where human life originates.

Although Wang Chongyang’s act of digging a grave for himself and the symbolic analysis of patient suicide in psychoanalysis both touch on the profound issues of life and death, they show very different styles in terms of the motives behind them, their symbolic meanings, and the consequences they bring. Wang Chongyang’s act carries profound philosophical and religious implications. This behavior is not out of despair or escape but stems from a profound exploration and understanding of the essence of life and the mysteries of the universe. Wang Chongyang called himself a “living dead man”, which was not only a complete rejection of worldly strife but also a search for the deeper meaning of life. By digging graves and living in them, he strongly expresses his transcendence and insight into the cycle of life and death and, at the same time, uses this opportunity to purify and cultivate his body and mind to attain a transcendent and holy state. For him, the grave is not a symbol of death but a starting point to a higher realm of life and an essential medium for him to achieve spiritual sublimation and self-transcendence.

In contrast, the symbolic analysis of patient suicide in psychoanalysis focuses more on the individual’s inner conflict and struggle. From a psychoanalytic perspective, suicidal behavior is often seen as an extreme way of coping when individuals are faced with unbearable psychological pain and inner conflict. These pains and struggles may arise from a variety of factors, such as childhood experiences, social pressures, and interpersonal relationships, and suicide becomes a symbolic expression of both an escape from these pains and conflicts and a declaration of despair at one’s inability to change the status quo. In psychoanalysis, suicidal behavior is not only the end of life but also an extreme release of the individual’s deepest unmet needs, unresolved conflicts, and repressed emotions.

In Daoism, Wang Chongyang’s act of digging his own grave also belongs to a religious ceremony with themes of death and rebirth. Death is necessary for the beginning of the spiritual life, and its function must be understood in terms of what it prepares for, which is the birth into a higher form of being (Eliade 1958, p. xiv). The grave represents the death of his old self, and the act reverses the conception and birth of a new life form from the mother as if returning to the womb. In the essence of Daoist practice, this act and psychology of returning life to its mother is fundamentally the practitioner’s desire to return to Dao, the essence that gives birth to all things in the universe. Wang Chongyang’s “suicide”

is only a spiritual one. The analysis of his psychological motivation for his “suicide” is also his longing to return to the source of life. However, the difference from ordinary suicides is that it is the desire to return to the Dao. According to Daoism, that which gives life to all things and brings them to perfection is called Dao. Dao is the “mother” of all things; it represents the way life works and the primordial unity from which all phenomena originate and to which they all eventually return. Various Daoist practices are aimed at “obtaining” or “attaining” Dao, and a person who has fulfilled the spiritual life is commonly referred to as someone who has Dao. Furthermore, Daoists generally use the term Dao to refer to the deepest and purest essence, which is universal and timeless. Still, they can only be realized through Daoist practice as set out in a particular oral or written tradition. The same is true of *neidan*, one of the Daoist practices, which is also based on the use of specific methods to enable the cultivator to attain the Dao through this principle of reversibility.

4. The Living Dead and the Blackening Stage in Alchemy

In ancient times, alchemy was a specific set of methods for transforming some base metals into gold and preparing for immortality. It was not only about the art of transforming base elements into precious metals but also about a deeper understanding of the natural world and the specific practice of seeking to transform matter through mystical means and to gain divine knowledge to achieve immortality.

However, alchemy is not culturally particular to any one person or country. It has a history of at least 2500 years in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Persia, India, the Korean peninsula, ancient Greece, and Rome. It can be briefly categorized as Chinese alchemy, ancient Greek alchemy, Arabic alchemy, and European alchemy. Alchemy, as a method of transforming base metals into gold, a way to immortalize the spirit of the individual, is the result of the fusion of many civilizations and many peoples (Meng 1993; Zhang 1989). Although the manifestations, practices, and paths of alchemy vary from country to country due to differences in the level of civilization and cultural development throughout the world, they all ultimately share the same path to supreme wisdom and spiritual advancement. Specifically, the similarities are as follows.

On one hand, alchemy uses the language of “magic”. The heritage of alchemy has strict rules, it stipulates that only those with high morals, excellent wisdom, pure souls, and so on can engage in alchemy. Also, alchemists should share their alchemical skills, knowledge, and achievements with others and prevent the arbitrary disclosure of alchemical technology from being punished by supernatural beings. In the language of alchemy, the names of the individual substances are no longer the objects referred to in common sense. Sometimes, the metals are replaced by symbols or other words, as in the case of the seven metals associated with each of the seven planets and the seven days of the week, as in the case of gold, which is the precious metal that comes from the sun and is therefore represented in a perfect circle. Sometimes, lead is used for the pale and lethargic deity associated with agriculture, depicted with an hourglass on his head and a curved hand. Copper is shown as the rose of Venus rising from the sea (D. Xu 2006, pp. 108–10). In addition, alchemical texts use visual imagery to explain the alchemical process. For example, the crow symbolizes decay. The ostrich represents calcination, the immortal bird represents the philosopher’s stone, and the garden often serves as a metaphor for the alchemist’s laboratory. In the Daoist inner alchemy scriptures, there are many metaphors to describe some of the terms used in the process of cultivation, such as using Original Spirit for the beautiful girl, female, wife, me, mercury, and sand and using precelestial pneuma as a metaphor for babies, male, husband, gold, and lead. There are many metaphors, so many that people do not know what it is talking about. However, to be able to see through the many metaphors without being confused by their appearances and achieve “enlightenment through metaphors (*yiyu wuzheng* 以喻悟證)” is the fundamental goal (Z. Xu 1990, p. 12).

On the other hand, the integration of the universe with the small universe of the human body is seamless. Alchemists believed that the human body, as a microcosm, was

copied from the universe and, therefore, possessed all the structures of the universe. The flasks, crucibles, and other instruments used for experimentation were a link between the human body as a microcosm and the universe. The reaction in the small universe follows the shared mechanism of all things in heaven and earth and the law of creation of all things since the primitive chaos. In this way, alchemy produces gold and elixirs of immortality, makes itself equal to the gods, and changes the universe for the better. The Daoist external elixir art is to refine the golden elixir with quality and image. Still, the essence of the golden elixir art is to condense time and space in the elixir furnace, simulate the law of cosmic evolution, and burn the golden elixir in material form in the form of inversion. This kind of golden pill is, in fact, the materialized form of *Dao*. *Neidan* also believes that the human body is a small universe. Its basic principle is based on the theory that heaven and man are the same, which holds that the human body is a miniature universe. As long as the principle of regression is followed, that is, returning to the state of “posterior to Heaven” from “prior to Heaven”, the human body will be able to regress to the original state of the universe and thus be restored to the ultimate entity of the *Dao* and realize oneness with the *Dao*.

Color is vital to alchemists; it is a visible sign of the state of matter, even though it could be said that it is the state of matter itself. During alchemy, the alchemical substance in the instrument will undergo a series of color changes, reflecting the change in the state of matter. It is the evidence of the philosopher’s stone’s birth and the substance’s transformation that occurs. Alchemy is divided into three stages: blackening, whitening, and reddening. Specifically, blackening, also known as dyeing black and creating dead matter, is the fusion of four base metals, copper, iron, lead, and tin, with the appropriate addition of sulfur during the heating process to cause metamorphosis, whereby the metals or substances are brought together as one. The result is a dull black mass as chaotic as the universe’s creation. Whitening usually involves using substances such as arsenic or mercury combined with the blackened chaotic substance through enzymes or silver seeds. In the alchemist’s conception, this step symbolizes the harmonious fusion of masculine and feminine metals, like the union of a man and a woman drawn together by a mysterious force of attraction. This step finally transforms the black substance into a white alloy with the spiritual properties of silver. Concerning reddening, the alchemists believed that the fermentation at this stage transformed the gold into golden violet, a fermented dye that could turn metal into gold.

The spiritualization of matter and the materialization of spirit is a fundamental tenet of alchemy across different cultural contexts. At its most basic level, alchemy transforms base metals into gold through chemical processes. However, the alchemical process by which metallic substances suffer, die and are reborn into another way of being, that is, transformation, is also in keeping with the religious pattern symbolized by death and rebirth (Eliade 1958, p. 123). The distillation and purification of base metals in alchemy is a process of perfection through death and resurrection, symbolizing the soul’s perfection of the person practicing alchemy through death and resurrection. Ordinary metals represent the “self” that has not yet been raised to consciousness. At the same time, gold represents the higher “self” due to its natural properties of not being easily corrupted and shining forever (D. Xu 2006, p. 2). In this context, the alchemist’s spirit undergoes a series of transformations, ultimately reaching a state of gold that symbolizes eternity and perfection.

The psychological connotations of the blackening stage of alchemy coincide with the psychological requirements of the living dead in *neidan* in two main ways (L. Yin 2015, pp. 122–23). For one thing, “death” is closely related to vitality. In many alchemical texts, the black primordial substance is often closely associated with death and rebirth. This black color was seen as the initial state of chaos or was revered by alchemists as the first primordial substance, containing the potential to create everything. Many alchemists regarded the products of the blackening stage as a tangible manifestation of this primordial substance, which was believed to be capable of giving birth to any desired substance. The unity of opposites, the union of *yin* and *yang*, and the fusion of metals were all rooted in a

central idea: the “death” of base metals and the “rebirth” of higher-quality metals. In alchemical symbolism, the blackening process is often represented by images of death, such as decapitation or the dodo, emphasizing the passing of the old form and the need for rebirth. Similarly, the spiritual dimension of the human being undergoes a similar process of death and rebirth. Spiritual “death” is seen as a prerequisite for rebirth, and completing this process signals the fulfillment of the individual’s ideal of immortality. Although *neidan*’s emphasis on “the living dead” is motivated by the need to cultivate the practitioner’s inner nature, this state of mind also leads to a certain degree of change in their body. It believes that the individual’s heart will stop projecting outwards and focus inwards and explore, eventually reaching a state of immortality. If the individual’s mind is constantly greedy for the material life of the outside world, then his mind cannot dwell in the present moment, an act that harms life. *Neidan* holds that individuals covet fame and beauty, save money and goods excessively, and so on, thinking that this is the way to survive, but this is the root of what drives the death of life.⁹ A person who does not covet unethical benefits will not be happy with gain or sad with loss but will always be at peace with himself. He will use the moral principles of a gentleman to benefit others, alleviate suffering, honor life, restrain selfish desires, discipline himself, and follow the ways of nature so as not to harm himself. As *The Yellow Emperor’s Scripture of the Hidden Contracts* records (*Huangdi yinfu jing* 黃帝陰符經), “The living is the root of the dead, and the dead are the root of the living” 生者死之根，死者生之根 (Emperor 2013, p. 9). Inner alchemy points out that the “root” refers to the heart and kidneys in the human body, with the heart being the root of the spirit and the kidneys the root of the pneuma. The “death” of the heart allows the spirit to return to a state of stillness, and the “death” of the kidneys allows the precelestial essence to stop transforming into postcelestial essence and flow out of the genitals, meaning that this vital essence no longer acts to reproduce the individual’s offspring but returns the essence to replenish the brain (*huanjing bunao* 還精補腦), making the practitioner’s body healthier and less likely to age.

For another, individuals are susceptible to unconscious intrusions within themselves. After studying alchemy, Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, believed that the experiment of true alchemy was not to transform base metals into gold but to focus on the spiritual value represented by the metal and the question of spiritual transformation involving the individual through psychological projection and symbolic methods. He analyzed alchemy from a psychological point of view, arguing that it could guide people to understand the nature of the spirit and promote spiritual growth, transformation, and improvement (Jung 1980, pp. 475–83). Alchemy unites opposites and creates a third entity with a harmonious essence. In alchemy, the hermaphrodite symbolizes the union of mercury and sulfur, represents the marriage of the king and the queen. The union of masculine and feminine, body and soul, light and darkness, the union of these opposites gives birth to a “third”, and this fusion of opposites is symbolized by the androgynous, a bisexual combination that transcends gender. It is worth noting that androgyny does not represent the ultimate goal of alchemy, the Philosopher’s Stone, but rather the transitional state before its birth. The hermaphrodite symbolizes the union of the masculine and the feminine, sulfur and mercury, because alchemy is at sublimation and condensation, and the Stone of the Philosopher is about to be born. Jung saw this alchemical process of combining symbolic opposites as mirroring the process of combining opposites in the individual mind. He points out that in contrast to the three stages of alchemy, combining opposites in the mind can also be divided into three phases. First and foremost is the attainment of mental union, a process that involves the withdrawal of the soul from the body and its connection to the spirit, followed by the symbolic entry of the body into a state of death due to the absence of the soul. The subsequent attainment of a highly spiritualized psychological state is called the state of blackening (Jung 1970, p. 465). The second stage is the union of the spirit with the body, and the soul that has been united with the spirit rejoins the body and produces a new personality, whitening (Jung 1970, pp. 467–68). The third stage is the unification of an entirely new personality resulting from the union of spirit, soul, and body

with a unified world, achieving the unity of the individual and the universe, corresponding to the reddening stage of alchemy (Jung 1970, pp. 533–53). From the point of view of Jung's theory of psychological alchemy, in the darkening stage, the soul detaches itself from the physical body with lust and greed and unites with the spirit, which is the stage of dealing with the unconscious in the mind through meditation. The separation of the soul from the body is the death of the body and its world of existence, and this voluntary death is only symbolic. The mind adopts a contemptuous attitude towards the sensual and material world and no longer projects into the external world. Through introspection, it examines its inner desires and motives and then discovers the dark side of its personality. In the face of the corresponding series of psychological and emotional problems caused by the dark side of the personality, the individual is completely exposed to an ego that is no longer hidden by his fantasies, childish ideas, and defects hidden by habit, which will conflict with the original simple state of nature, leading to the disintegration of the old personality and the shattering of illusions. People are often unable to face the uncovered reality, and for these shadows, even the slightest realization of these shadows can cause severe psychological confusion in the individual. When a negative attitude is adopted to deal with the dark side of the personality, the individual loses the courage to live, and this leads to his death. (L. Yin 2015, pp. 116–18).

In Daoism, the practitioner sees himself as the living dead, meditating cross-legged in a quiet room, unconcerned with worldly affairs and abandoning mental projections of external things. The psychological state of the individual at this time is one of despair and abandonment of the outer world, and their minds will have various mixed thoughts rise and fall, all kinds of desires and fantasies intertwined in the inner heart. At this time, it is necessary to maintain the state of the heart as immovable, the heart of these illusions to be aware of but without being involved. As Hu (2009, p. 38) points out, the doctrine of *neidan* is precisely a systematic project of gradually recognizing oneself, developing and perfecting the self, and changing into a natural person by cultivating the practitioner's inner nature and vital force. An actual person is highly open in life, completely free in mind, and has attained the realm of Dao, which is pure and free of falsity. The blackening stage of alchemy is chaotic, dark, crazy, and frustrating, yet it is very important and inevitable. It contains all the potential and seeds of future development and is the starting point for transformation. From the point of view of psychological transformation, both the "living dead" and the blackening stage of alchemy represent a breaking down and reshaping of the old self and old perceptions. They share a transition process from confusion and darkness to gradual clarity and light. In this process, individuals must face and overcome their inner fears, desires, and conflicts to achieve self-transcendence and spiritual sublimation. For cultivators, *neidan* requires practitioners to achieve sufficient inner peace and emotional stability in meditation and that they do not have the emotions, cognitive styles, and thinking patterns of seculars, which makes it possible for them to transcend and become immortals. This living-dead mentality of cultivators allows them to quickly enter into an unconscious inner world not controlled by the conscious mind during meditation. A practitioner who has unconsciously repressed pathological factors will unconsciously release them at certain stages of the meditation process, causing hallucinations, a variety of psychological disorders or perversions, or even loss of self-control of behavior. Especially for female practitioners, women may experience some hallucinations during meditation. The psychological messages in the subconscious mind that are not allowed by the conscious mind will also rise to the conscious level to be recognized and understood by the individual, as recorded in the ancient classic of inner alchemy, the *Kun-yuan Scripture*: "However, when a woman practices *neidan*, there are many kinds of tests the devil puts on her, which she must be sufficiently aware of, along with the appropriate ways to deal with them". 然女子用靜工之時，魔考最多，要爾自知自解 (Dong and Sheng 2012, p. 214). In contemporary parlance, the "devil's test" refers to the phenomenon of the conscious mind perceiving subconscious contents of a negative or malevolent nature. 胡孚琛 Hu (2009, pp. 754–59) believes that the female practice of inner alchemy will usu-

ally repress to the inner depths of non-conformity to social norms, ethics, and morals, as well as other subtle psychological stimulation, which is not consciously aware of the evil thoughts and desires, captured by consciousness, it will be presented in the form of hallucinations, and at this time, specific methods of *neidan* practice should be used to make the hallucinations extinguished.

5. Conclusions

After exploring the metaphor of death in Daoism's *neidan* scriptures, it is not difficult to realize that this religious practice and cultivation concept is an interpretation of the path of individual spiritual growth and transcendence. The imagery of the "living dead" requires the practitioner to abandon worldly attachments and desires in meditation completely and to regard themselves as "dead", a process that is essentially the ultimate embodiment of cultivating inner nature, aiming to awaken precelestial spirit of the individual through the symbolic experience of death, which has long been lost so that it can be freed from the shackles of the earthly world and be reborn. This ritual transformation of "death and rebirth" is not only a sublimation of one's cultivation level but also a bridge to a deeper understanding of the essence of life and the truth of the universe. Wang Chongyang's concept of the "living dead", as well as his act of building a tomb for himself, is a deep yearning to return to the Dao. The imagery of the living dead profoundly and deeply affected later generations of Daoist priests. This practice enriched the connotation of *neidan* training and provided practitioners with a specific path to spiritual transcendence and inner awakening.

Comparing the imagery of the living dead to the stages of blackening in alchemy, the allegorical meaning of the two at the psychological level coincides. Whether it is the blackening of metal melted to the extreme in the fire or a practitioner's attainment of transcendence of the material world through the cultivation of the living dead, they both symbolize a process of metamorphosis from death to rebirth, from the lower to the higher. The metal in blackening symbolizes the cohesion of primordial life force, while the cultivation of the living dead withdraws the individual's attention from the external world and focuses on the awakening and strengthening of the inner spirit; both emphasize the stimulation of inner potential and the sublimation of life force. Furthermore, the practitioner's mind is subject to the intrusion of unconscious content of a negative nature. This occurs because when attention is no longer focused on the external world, the internal world of the individual's mind tends to occupy a greater proportion of the individual's attention. As a result, the conscious mind is unable to exert control over the unconscious, and this manifests as unconscious content in the form of hallucinations. This necessitates that they confront themselves with sincerity and courage, acknowledging the darker aspects of their psychological realm as integral to the transformation process.

In modern society, the concept of the living dead is equally enlightening. In fast-paced, stressful modern life, people are often bound by material desires and external evaluations, neglecting their inner needs and the construction of the spiritual world. The image of the living dead reminds us that only through self-reflection and inner cultivation can we truly realize freedom of mind and spiritual growth. It encourages us to learn to draw strength from within when facing life's challenges and to cope with external changes through inner transformation to achieve a state of harmony between the inner and outer worlds and peace of mind.

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Notes

- ¹ Inhaling is a unique breathing exercise derived from the ancient Chinese Daoist health maintenance practice. It requires the practitioner to expel turbid *qi* from the body while inhaling fresh air through specific breathing techniques, harmonizing *qi* and blood and strengthening the body. This practice is vital in Daoist practice and is regarded as a simple but effective way of maintaining health.
- ² Maintaining oneness is an early Daoist practice that emphasizes focusing one's intention on a particular part of the body or spiritual level to achieve oneness with the Dao.
- ³ Sitting in oblivion stresses forgetting the self through meditation to achieve spiritual forgetfulness and oneness with the Dao. In the process of *zhuowang*, the practitioner forgets his or her body and mind so that the nature is completely liberated and the mind becomes still, calm, and inactive. Realizing this realm helps improve one's spiritual state and promotes physical and mental health.
- ⁴ Outer alchemy refers to the Daoist practice of burning and refining ore medicines, such as lead and mercury, in a furnace and pot using specific methods to formulate an ingestible elixir eventually. Daoists believe this type of elixir has mystical effects, such as immortality and the creation of gold.
- ⁵ Embryonic breathing in Daoism is an advanced breathing practice that simulates the breathing of a fetus in the mother's body. In fetal breathing, the cultivator reduces or stops breathing through the mouth and nose by adjusting the breathing and relies on the body's internal breathing (*nei huxi* 內呼吸) to maintain life activities. This method stimulates the human body's potential, promotes physical and mental health, and prolongs life.
- ⁶ In inner alchemy, the concepts of "prior to Heaven" and "posterior to Heaven" are two crucial concepts that represent different states and realms and are present throughout the entire process of *neidan* cultivation. *xiantian* is often used to describe those intangible, natural, instinctive states, functional things, such as precelestial pneuma, precelestial essence, which are intangible but contain great energy. In *neidan* cultivation, these innate things are regarded as the raw materials for cultivation and the key to achieving immortality. *Houtian* is usually used by *neidan* to describe things that are tangible, man-made, and physical. For example, postcelestial pneuma and postcelestial essence are all acquired things. Although they are also necessary for life activities, they are more influenced by the acquired environment and habits than by innate things. The posterior to Heaven state represents a relatively low state. In this state, people are often plagued by acquired desires and distractions, making it challenging to achieve immortality. Therefore, an essential goal of internal alchemy is to gradually get rid of the bondage of *houtian* state and return to *xiantian* through *neidan* cultivation methods. Compared with Christianity, *xiantian* in *neidan* can be understood somewhat as the state of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In contrast, *houtian* can be understood as the state of human original sin.
- ⁷ Complete Perfection is an essential school of Daoism, which integrates Daoist philosophical thinking; emphasizes the unity of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism; promotes austerity; advocates silence and inactivity; and focuses on personal cultivation and spiritual upliftment. After its founding, Quanzhen gradually developed and grew, especially when Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227) was in charge of the sect, and its palaces and disciples spread throughout northern China. Complete Perfection had a profound influence on the history of Daoism in China and the culture, art, and philosophy of later generations.
- ⁸ The phenomenon of Wang Chongyang seeing himself as dead and living in a grave is also common in other religions. For example, in ancient Christianity, ascetics also buried themselves in graves as if they were already dead and felt the imminence of death every day, along with other means such as fasting and working naked in hunger and cold, which were their chosen means of asceticism (Chadwick 1958, p. 38). Wang Chongyang's behavior of digging graves and calling himself "the living dead" is superficially similar to the phenomenon of digging graves and seeing oneself as "the living dead" among early Christian ascetics. Still, there are significant differences between the two in terms of connotations, motivations, and cultural backgrounds. This behavior of Wang Chongyang is the actual practice of his concept of life and death. He tries to realize life and death by facing death directly and breaking people's fear and mystery of life and death. According to Wang Chongyang, the human body is only a temporary dwelling place, and the fame, fortune, glory, and wealth that accompany this mortal body are all false, which will damage life and the body and cause a loss of wisdom and intelligence. By digging graves and calling himself "the living dead", he expresses his deep understanding of the impermanence of life and death and tries to transcend the realm of death through *neidan* cultivation. This kind of behavior reflects the idea of pursuing and achieving immortality in Daoist culture, as well as Wang Chongyang's understanding and pursuit of cultivation. The behavior of early Christian ascetics reflects the redemptive and sacrificial spirit of the Christian faith. In Christian culture, asceticism is often regarded as a special form of spiritual practice in which they express their fear and devotion to God by enduring physical pain and suffering. Abstinence can help people transcend. Digging graves and considering themselves "the living dead" was an expression of their rejection of secular life and their adherence to sacred beliefs. Such behavior reflects the Christian ascetics' firmness and persistence in their faith and willingness to endure great suffering and sacrifice in their spiritual practice.
- ⁹ From the point of view of cultivating inner alchemy, it is not good for an individual's health to be addicted to wealth, beauty, and so on. As the *Tao Te Ching* 道德經 records, "The five colors may confuse the eye. The five sounds may deafen the ear. The five tastes may spoil the palate. Riding and hunting may madden the mind. Rare goods may tempt one to do evil". 五色令人目盲; 五音令人耳聾; 五味令人肉爽; 馳騁畋獵, 令人心發狂; 難得之貨, 令人行妨 (Chen 2003, p. 118). Over-indulgence in material plea-

sure is detrimental to the physical and mental health of the individual. Inner alchemy regards this as a result of the overdevelopment of the individual's postcelestial spirit, which leads to their spirit always being in the posterior to Heaven and unable to return to prior to Heaven, that is allowing the precelestial spirit to dominate the individual's mind, which is in a state of stillness, emptiness, and free from inner turmoil and uncontaminated by the materialistic consciousness. The existence and activation of the postcelestial spirit tend to interfere with the cultivator's mind, preventing them from focusing on their cultivation and affecting the effectiveness of the practice. Moreover, from the perspective of Chinese medicine, the heart controls mental activities (*xinzhū shenming* 心主神明), and the heart stores the spirit (*xinchang shen* 心藏神). When postcelestial spirit is overactive, it damages the function of the heart, leading to disharmony of the body's *qi* and blood and blockage of main and collateral channels (*jingluo* 經絡), which in turn lead to the occurrence of various diseases. For this reason, *neidan* repeatedly emphasizes that practitioners should strive to get rid of the influence of postcelestial spirit and resurrect the precelestial spirit, to maintain physical and mental harmony and health.

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