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# Introduction

This book makes the self-cultivation of Chinese internal alchemy available to everyone. It is a practice simpler, easier, more comfortable, and more effective than Indian yoga, Daoist meditation, or Buddhist insight. Its practice provides excellent health in a short period of time as well as a new understanding of life and world, leading to an overall improvement of the quality of life.

Chinese alchemy divides into the two areas of external (*waidan* 外丹) and internal (*internal alchemy* 内丹). The former is a form of early chemistry and as such can be easily understood, while the latter is an esoteric system and thus tends to be shrouded in mystery. Over the past century, many scholars have attempted to interpret it, using different academic categories, including philosophy, psychology, physiology, biochemistry, and qigong 氣功. It is still not clear, however, whether any of them really came close to explaining it, as none of them have provided a fully satisfactory explanation.

I would, therefore, like to start from another angle. Avoiding predetermined academic categories, I propose to dive right into an outline of its basic concepts while providing simple and satisfactory explanations, then follow those up with detailed and easily accessible instructions on how to practice.

When people hear of internal alchemy, they think it is just a kind of ancient lore, a dead subject, something that exists only in the reference shelves of the library and has nothing to do with our lives. However, it is in fact a very practical subject, based on the physical training of adepts and the enhanced states of life they experience. Practicing its methods, everyone can gain numerous benefits, including freedom from disease, an extended life expectancy, increased wisdom, and more.

## Connection to Science

This book is entitled *Internal Alchemy for Everyone*, indicating that it presents the system in an easily understandable way. It not only describes internal alchemy as a theory, but also makes it available through experimental verification and wide application. Interpreting its concepts, I in-

voke the terms of evolutionary theory, because the approaches of both are similar. The theory of evolution is that the human body and mind took many millions of years to evolve into what it is today. Compared to other animals, human beings have high intelligence, the result of this long period of evolution. Based on evolutionary theory, we expect the people of the future to have even larger brains, higher intelligence, and longer life expectancy—a vision that results in pictures of them as aliens with large heads. This vision of human evolution is highly relevant to internal alchemy, since its practice enhances human capabilities—physical, mental, and spiritual.

Modern science has contributed greatly to the expansion of human knowledge; however, the unknown still far exceeds the known. Historically, adepts of internal alchemy carefully observed the changes in human life and discovered that there is a cosmic, vital energy called *qi* 氣 in the body that controls survival and lasts beyond death. By expanding and transforming this energy, people can evolve more rapidly. This cosmic power or vital energy appears in the form of gas in the body, activated at several points, most notably the Compass Center (*guizhong* 規中). When the yang spirit (*yangshen* 陽神) enters it, the original substance of the human being is formed into a newly evolving entity, which alchemists call the holy fetus (*shengtai* 聖胎).

Its composition and development are different from the sexual creation of children, since it comes about due to a process of self-insemination and asexual reproduction. Because men do not have a womb, it grows in the Compass Center for ten months, then moves to the brain for nine years. This feature also holds true for women who have a womb. The holy fetus as based on cosmic energy will developed and grow in the brain for nine years, which is why the brain gets larger and manifests aspects similar to those occurring during the rapid evolution of the human race. The theory may sound incredible, but in many ways it is compatible with science and biology.

Over the last several thousands years, Chinese adepts have actively practiced both by themselves and in religious communities. Even today, they follow their masters and work according to the methods recorded in the classics, practicing every day. Although each person is different, most people have similar results: they live longer, are free from disease, and become wiser. As this study shows, adepts who successfully practice and develop the holy fetus evolve rapidly. Their heads become larger and their wisdom grows substantially; they can understand others by

mere thought and without words, even the members of other species. Their vision and hearing are much more acute than those of ordinary people, and some even develop supersensory powers.

However, not every practitioner successfully grows the holy fetus, only those of high moral standing who practice rigorously. Morals here have little to do with ancient Chinese ethics; rather, they indicate the importance of internal purity. A lack of ethics means the commitment of even minor misdeeds, which, buried deeply in the subconscious, turn into practice barriers. In addition, there are also people unsuited for internal alchemy, and some may experience various problems in the process. To attain basic health and long life, a hundred days of first-stage practice is the simplest, easiest, and most effective way, suitable for everyone.

In terms of human evolution, internal alchemy can contribute much to a better understanding and more rapid development. There is no reason that knowledge going back a thousand years is not worth learning. When acupuncture was first introduced to the West, it proved efficacious, yet people did not know why. It worked on the basis of the ancient Chinese theory of energy conduits and meridians, without any modern scientific concepts, terminology, or precise instruments. Still, its theory was thorough and profound. The holy fetus is just like that: it is not an empty theory or metaphor. Although the overall success rate of internal alchemy is unknown, for over a thousand years many practitioners managed to gain great benefits. To me, it is both immensely practical and consistent with modern science and with what we know of the human body-mind, even if some of its concepts are still beyond modern scientific knowledge.

Recent research on out-of-body and near-death experiences has revealed much about the mystery of life. When a spirit or soul is felt to float above the body in the near-death state, this closely echoes what internal alchemists describe as the holy fetus leaving the body. Once fully matured, the holy fetus breaks through the top of the head, then looks down on the physical body, which appears as if dead. Practitioners can control whether the fetus reenters or leaves the body forever, which places them in marked contrast to Western patients. In addition, the holy fetus may develop supernatural powers and ascend to the immortals.

## *Internal Practice*

Although internal alchemy forms part of Daoism, this does not mean that only Daoists can practice it. Daoism goes back several thousands of years, developing from the careful observation of nature by ancient masters. Its philosophy was first formulated by Laozi 老子 (ca. 500 BCE), the ancient thinker whose vision stands at its root. In his wake, many Chinese masters have reflected on nature and its laws, prominently considering issues of health and longevity as well as the attainment of eternal life. Therefore, many wise men in traditional China pursued the practice of internal alchemy. The modern quest for better health and an increased life expectancy has much in common with their key concerns, however much they work with different concepts and paradigms.

It is important to understand the major concepts and key theories that underlie internal alchemy as well as verify their value in actual practice. Theories must have a practical application, otherwise they are just empty words. Ideally, once a theory is activated in experience, it should be easily verifiable as well as offer benefits to humanity. As a result, internal alchemists tend to emphasize that practice is more important than theory. Most practitioners do not start with the intention to create a holy fetus, but undertake self-cultivation to attain health and longevity. For this, practicing the methods of Stage One for a hundred days should suffice—that is, if one is of average health. People in very good health may not even take that long, while those in ill health may need longer.

This book describes the practices in great detail, providing several model schedules for daily practice and precise instructions regarding location, clothes, food, sleeping arrangements, and more. Everyone can attain excellent health if they practice properly. However, higher-level practices of Stages Two to Four are not equally suitable for all. Their pursuit and attainment depend on individual qualifications and dedication.

Generally, the practice offers the following benefits:

1. Increased longevity. People today are getting older than those of the past, mainly due to advances in medicine and fewer wars of mass destruction. Still, the human life span, the natural limitation of human life, commonly set at 120 years, is not actually lengthened despite this being an ancient dream of humanity. Ancient Chinese alchemists managed to attain very long lives by experimenting with their bodies.

Applying their techniques, I believe, it is possible to extend human life by 5 to 50 percent, depending on the degree, quality, and length of individual practice.

2. Freedom from disease. All people hope that they do not get sick, but for most this is impossible. Even just catching a common cold, they are cast down and in misery. Internal alchemy allows us to realize a lifetime free from disease, establishing a level of immunity and resistance quite different from that in ordinary people, one that holds firm even during sudden temperature changes or extreme weather conditions.

3. Healing. Severe diseases, of course, require medical treatment, but internal alchemy allows the easy healing or alleviation of minor and/or chronic conditions. Its effect is obvious.

4. Perfect body. Not only will internal alchemy help to bring the body back to its natural level of health, but it also corrects any irregularities, like being too fat or too thin. Also, other common physical issues disappear, such as lack of strength or insomnia.

5. Increase in wisdom. Both mental concentration and precision in thinking improve greatly through the practice. Memory, intelligence, learning capability, and analytical powers all grow substantially.

6. Reversal of entropy. Once practitioners attain a high level, several features of reversal tend to appear. They include:

A. White hair turns black or recovers its original color.

B. Hair falls out and grows back completely.

C. Any reduced hearing or eyesight is restored.

D. Lost teeth grow again in their original place.

E. One attains a childlike complexion and look upon reaching the stage of the holy fetus.

F. At the same stage, with dedicated and continuous practice, the body becomes light while retaining its original size; the size of the head may even increase.

G. Upon completion of the holy fetus, one attains various supernatural and supersensory powers. All these features may seem impossible, but they are commonly described in ancient Chinese alchemical records and manuals.

7. Profound understanding. Upon reaching a high level of attainment, practitioners gain deep insight into the inherent veracity of religions and the mysteries of the universe. Many have frequent mystical experiences and can directly experience the truth of sacred texts, intimately perceiving the great mysteries of life.

8. Eternal life. The holy fetus, after being nurtured to maturity over a period of nine years, eventually breaks through the top of the adept's head to enter the cosmic spheres, where it enjoys a permanence beyond life and death, possibly opting for rebirth in yet another physical body as it pleases.

## *Outline of the Book*

Describing these various features, this book divides into two parts. The first part (chs. 1-7) outlines the overall theory and general principles of internal alchemy, providing a necessary foundation that everyone should read, even if they are mainly interested in experience. The second part (chs. 8-14) focuses on practice, describing each stage in the order of procedure, including ample references to the classics. If you really want to dedicate yourself to everyday practice, you must follow the list of rules since misguided or ignorant practice may have serious consequences.

More specifically, the section on theory presents the development of internal alchemy in ancient China as well as its ultimate purpose. Previous studies have tended to see this as the pursuit of health and longevity, but I think that its core goal is transcendent life. In this context, I outline the historical development of internal alchemy, beginning with Laozi, the ancient thinker at the root of Daoism, exploring what exactly the relationship is between his thought and the world of internal alchemy. After that, I focus on two highly important representatives of internal alchemy, Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 (fl. 2nd c. CE) and Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?-1082), briefly outlining their main ideas.

Next, I present the basic concepts of internal alchemy, which also form part of Daoist thought, expressing them largely in modern terms to make understanding easier. Among all the concepts, the most important is the idea of the holy fetus, often also called the immortal embryo. Holy in this context obviously stands opposite to ordinary, but how exactly is this fetus holy? How does it differ from the embryo of regular pregnancy? How can a male get pregnant with it? These and other questions are discussed in detail, as well as the theories and visions of immortality, the ultimate result of creating a perfect holy fetus.

The part on practice first dispenses with the erroneous notion that the purpose of internal alchemy is to make the physical body eternal.

This is blatantly wrong, mainly because, even if we managed to double our average life expectancy or increase the biological human life span, a time would still come when we have to face death. The highest goal of Daoist practice is the attainment of immortality, which is more a spiritual and less a physical state. Its end result is the true person or perfected (*zhenren* 真人), an eternal being refined on the basis of the human body.

To practice successfully, adepts must fulfill all sorts of conditions, lest they cause damage to their body. Quite a few people completely have realized the ultimate goal, as ancient documents attest. I present these, detailing their successes while also emphasizing various potential hazards and danger. Also, the practice comes in distinct steps and stages, each manifesting in different states of body and mind. Once this is understood, the system becomes simple, clear, and easy to pursue.

All this leads to a new vision and more precise definition of internal alchemy in modern terms and concepts as well as the confirmation that it presents a great way to increase the speed of human evolution. Based on many decades of practice, I can attest that the human body has supernatural powers beyond the wildest imagination of ordinary people. These normally would take ten thousand or more years of natural evolution to develop, but internal alchemy brings them into our grasp here and now.

## *Practicalities*

Any study of internal alchemy faces numerous difficulties, beginning with the esoteric nature of the sources and the highly specialized, technical language of the texts. Original sources are hard to understand, even for the Chinese. Not only is Classical Chinese a highly complex and sophisticated language, but its writing was restricted to the upper classes and learned communities who delighted in esoteric concepts and obscure formulations, using each character both with precision and ambiguity, enriched by context and content.

Beyond this, internal alchemy is not a unified system but consists of numerous schools, each with its own take on things. Their members relied heavily on oral transmission within trusted master-disciple lineages. Masters, moreover, feared that their essential concepts and core theories might fall into the wrong hands or would not be passed on properly to later generations, and thus used written documents only as supplement-

tary aids, often expressing themselves in poetry. It is not that they liked to write poetry, but verse, rhythmic and often rhymed, had several advantages. It was easy to memorize and recite, lent itself to partial or impressionistic expressions of content that only initiates and advanced disciples could understand, and was simple to copy and hand down.

Working within this framework, my goal is to clarify internal alchemy for Western readers, hoping to offer them a new, scientific perspective and thus a better overall understanding. I also wish to present both theory and practice in equal measure, giving detailed descriptions of the latter. Internal alchemy needs to be experienced to be understood, involving actual practice as much as scientific validation in addition to theoretical appreciation. This, moreover, also necessitates a good grasp of Daoism and its relation to the alchemical tradition.

To ensure that anybody can understand internal alchemy, I have endeavored to keep concepts simple and straightforward, taming more abstruse ideas and focusing more strongly on general notions. This made it necessary to exclude quite a few of the more difficult and complicated aspects and to minimize the use of philosophical terms. Over the last several millennia, thinkers of internal alchemy have developed numerous philosophical concepts and terminologies. While it is certainly of value to understand them within their particular theoretical systems, this is neither the only nor the best or easiest approach. It is much better to work with them on the basis of practice. For this reason, this book, unlike some studies, does not present much philosophical discussion, but focuses on the most fundamental and original level of alchemical thought.

Throughout, I rely heavily on traditional texts and original sources. I cite numerous passages from the scriptures, allowing readers to see just how alchemists work with the written word, and especially with poetry. My goal is to let primary sources speak directly to modern readers. In contrast, I do not dwell extensively on the history of internal alchemy, but refer to other relevant studies for more information.

