Taoist song of rootless tree: annotation and translation

Jianan Liu
International Education College of Zhejiang University, China
plainchanter@163.com

Introduction

Taoism is a native religion in China. It was established by Zhang Daoling (張道陵) in the East Han dynasty (22-220). The ultimate aim of Taoism is attaining Tao and becoming immortal. Its doctrines and mystic techniques of cultivation are based on realizing this supreme target.

In the long-term of its development, various Taoist schools have emerged throughout the country. Among them, The Complete Truth and The One Orthodox are most prominent.

Zhang Sanfeng, a famous Taoist priest in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), is a successor and grand master of The Complete Truth school. He is also the founder of Wudang school, a branch of The Complete Truth. Setting up his temple in Wudang Mountain, Hubei province, Zhang inherited and expanded the conception of combining three-religions-in-one (三教合一) and the techniques of double-sided cultivation (性命双修) advocated by The Complete Truth school. The core of combining-three religions-in-one is that both the origin and ultimate target of the three religions, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism are unanimous. They are void, emptiness and vacancy. The core of double-sided cultivation is that the practitioners should cultivate themselves not only physically but also spiritually.

The most important is that, by making use of the form of poetry and popular characters, Zhang Sanfeng, extensively and intensively, transformed abstruse and obscure Taoist scriptures and cultivation methods into Taoist songs. This is his masterpiece twenty-four-stances Taoist Song of Rootless Tree. In the songs, Zhang simply and explicitly explained the doctrine of Taoism and the techniques of both spiritual and physical cultivations. These songs are more easily understood and memorized by common people and practitioners. So, the Taoist Song of Rootless Tree is the greatest contribution Zhang Sanfeng made to Taoism.

Annotation and Translation

無根樹道情
wú ɡēn shù dào qíng

Taoist Song of Rootless Tree

(一)
(yī)
1

1無根樹道情 The original text is lacking from The complete works of Sanfeng. Taiwan: Xinwenfeng Publishing Company, 1978. 道情 is a tune with fixed form and rhythm sung by Taoist priests when spreading Taoism.
無根樹，花正微，貪戀榮華誰肯休？
wú gēn shù，huā zhèng wēi，tān liàn róng huá shuí kěn xiǔ？

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so slight.
Lusting for splendor and glory,
Who would cease to be captivated?

浮生事，苦海舟，蕩去漂來不自由。
fú shēng shì，kǔ hǎi zhōu，dàng qu piāo lái bù zì yóu。
The floating life of ordinary persons,
Like a boat on the sea of bitterness.
Drifting about aimlessly,
It can never be at liberty.

無岸無邊難泊系，常在魚龍險處游。
wú àn wú biān nán bó xì，chánɡ zài yú lónɡ xiǎn chù yóu。
With no bounds and no shore,
It is impossible to moor.
Sailing with sharks and sea serpents,
The voyage is constantly treacherous.

肯回首，是岸頭，莫待風波壞了舟。
kěn huí shǒu，shì àn tóu，mò dài fēng bō huài le zhōu。
If you are willing to repent,
Then salvation will arise.
Do not wait for your boat,
To be wrecked by wind and waves.

Commentary

Without roots, trees would die out and flowers would thrive up. The trees imply human body and flowers imply human soul. The grand master advised common people to extricate themselves from fame and fortune, and pick up cultivation without delay.

（二）
（èr）
2

無根樹，花正微，樹老重新接嫩枝。
wú gēn shù，huā zhèng wēi，shù lǎo chóng xīn jiē nèn zhī。
Rootless tree,
Its flowers so slight.
With a scion grafted,
The aging tree will rejuvenate.

梅寄柳，桑接梨，傳與修真作樣兒。
méi jì liǔ，sāng jiē lí，chuán yǔ xiū zhēn zuò yàng ér。

Cultura Oriental, v. 2, n. 2, p. 73-95, jul.-dez. 2015
On willow plum grafted,
To pear mulberry joined.
They are good metaphors,
Imparted to the practitioners.

自古神仙栽接法，人老原来有药医。

This grafting method of immortal,
Has existed since time immemorial.
For human being’s senility,
There is a cure originally.

访名师，问方儿，下手速修犹太遲。

Seek a wise master,
To inquire about the formula.
Even if you start cultivation with haste,
You would still be too late.

Commentary
Old people should not abandon themselves to despair. If practising essence, breath and spirit perfectly, they can still regain youthful appearance.

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so verdant.
Immortals accompanied by the flowers and liquor,
From ancient to the present.

Feasts of wine and meat,
Houses of sensual pleasure.
Enjoy meat dishes whenever,
But never commit lewdness whatever.

Indulgence in sensuality,
Will lose the treasure of longevity.
Wine and meat only pass through the intestines,  
It is in the heart where Tao remains.  

打開門， 說與君， 無酒無花道不成。  
dā kāi mén， shuō yǔ jūn， wú jiǔ wú huā dào bù chéng。  

Get to the point,  
To tell you the secret.  
Without flowers and liquor,  
Tao can never be achieved.  

Commentary  
*Only if they are not burdened with sex and tied to liquor and meat, the practitioners can obtain Tao.*  

(四)  
(sì)  
4  

無根樹， 花正孤， 借問陰陽得類無？  
wú gēn shù， huā zhèng gū， jiè wèn yīn yáng dé lèi wú？  

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so solitary.  
May I ask whether or not,  
Yin and Yang matched properly?  

雌雞卵， 雞抱雛， 背了陰陽造化爐。  
cí jī luǎn， nán bào chú， bèi le yīn yáng zào huà lú。  

An unfertilized egg from hen,  
Will never hatch into a chicken.  
Otherwise it will violate the law of gestation,  
And never occur in the furnace of creation.  

女子無夫為怨女， 男子無妻是曠夫。  
nǚ zǐ wú fū wéi yuàn nǚ， nán zǐ wú qī shì kuàng fū。  

A woman becomes a spinster,  
If there is no man to marry her.  
A man turns into a bachelor,  
If he has no wife to live together.  

嘆迷徒， 太模糊， 靜坐孤修氣轉枯。  
tàn mí tú， tài mó hu； jìng zuò gū xiū qì zhuǎn kū。  

Bemoan the foolish disciples,  

---  

2 陰陽 is a philosophical concept established in ancient China. Yin and Yang is the origin of the physical universe. They are unified and opposite to each other. The theory of Taoism is based on the conception of Yin and Yang.  
3 造化爐 is the platform for gestating Yin and Yang.  
4 靜坐孤修 is a Taoist school advocating single-sided cultivation. It is opposed to double-sided cultivation.
They are so confused and careless.  
Their Qi turns dry in meditation,  
When they practice single-sided cultivation.

Commentary  
*Single-sided cultivation is a road to sure death. Only double-sided cultivation can attain the right fruit.*

(五)  
(wǔ)  
5

無根樹，花正偏，離了陰陽道不全。  
wú gēn shù，huā zhèng piān，lí le yīn yáng dào bù quán。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers are off-center.  
Tao will not be complete,  
If Yin and Yang are separated.

金隔木，汞隔鉛，陽寡陰孤各一邊。  
jīn ɡé mù，ɡǒnɡ ɡé qiān，yánɡ ɡuǎ yīn ɡū ɡè yī biān。

Metal segregated from wood,  
Mercury separated from lead.  
Single Yang here and lonely Yin there,  
Reside apart to each other.

世上陰陽男配女，生子生孫代代傳。  
shì shànɡ yīn yánɡ nán pèi nǚ，shēnɡ zǐ shēnɡ sūn dài dài chuán。

The Yin and Yang principle expressed in the human world,  
Man and woman are naturally paired.  
They foster children and grandchildren,  
Continuously from generation to generation.

順為凡，逆為仙，只在中間顛倒顛。  
shùn wéi fán，nì wéi xiān，zhǐ zài zhōnɡ jiān diān dǎo diān。

Cultivating from head to tail makes mortals,  
And inverse practice produces immortals.  
The secret to success,  
Only lies in the method of reverse.

Commentary  
*The secret of cultivation is combining Yin and Yang. And only inverter practice produces immortals.*

(六)

汞鉛 Mercury corresponds to Yin and lead corresponds to Yang in inner-elixir cultivation.
Rootless tree,
Its flowers so new.
They grow in the Kun position,
And Kun is referred to person.

Pick the flowers for wearing,
And pluck the stamen.
Layer upon layer,
The buds display rich-colored spring.

Ordinary people fail to understand,
The doctrine flowers have implied.
Each mysterious formula,
Is worth ten thousand pieces gold.

Borrow the flower’s name,
To create the elixir’s form.
In Qiao Yao Song,
None of the words is wrong.

**Commentary**

*People all dream of becoming immortal. But without mastering the mystic techniques of cultivation, nobody can succeed.*

---

7

坤方 is a trigram of the Eight Trigrams, containing the meaning of earth. Here it is referred to the soil for growing metaphorical flowers.

敲爻 is referred to Song of Qiao Yao, a poem written by Lü Dongbin, a famous Taoist priest in the Tang Dynasty.

粉團 corresponds to beautiful women or prostitutes.
Rootless tree,
Its flowers so flourishing.
Compared with beauties’ looks,
They are more appealing.

Guard against distracting thoughts and desires,
As if capering moneys and galloping horses.
Put on a frosty face,
Which you have by birth.

Draw the double-edged sword,
Carved with a black dragon mold.
Gather the fresh flowers at the top of wall,
None shall be left unplucked.

Avail yourself of the sails and wind,
And return with a full load.
Who would travel pass the mountain of treasure,
Only with emptied hand.

Commentary
The practitioners should seize the opportunity and stop dillydallying.

Rootless tree,
Its flowers are fluttering.
There are regular intervals,
For the flowers withering and re-blooming.

When the lead flowers appear,
And the *Gui* is over.
The branches in the west garden.
Will be covered with flowers as ever.

對月才經收拾去，又向朝陽補衲衣。

Not long after you pick up the mess,
Under the light of the moon.
Once again you mend the robes,
Towards the sun at dawn.

這玄機，世罕知，須共神仙仔細推。

This mystery of fate,
Rarely known to the commons.
You should inquire about,
Attentively with the immortals.

**Commentary**

*The mystery of cultivation is advancing Yang in the morning, retreating Yin in the evening and controlling fire-phasing properly.*

無根樹，花正開，偃月爐中摘下來。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers are open.
Pick them off,
From the furnace of crescent moon.

延年壽，滅病災，好接良朋備法財。

Prolong your years,
Minimize disease and misfortune.
Then go to make good friends,
And prepare money for cultivation.

從此可成天上寶，一任群迷笑我呆。

By following this principle,
The heavenly treasure is obtainable.

---

11 偃月爐 refers to the place refining the elixir.
12 法財 refers to the money cost for the cultivation.
Let the masses stay disoriented,
Laugh at me and consider me stupid.

勸賢才，莫販乖，不遇名師莫強猜。
quàn xián cái，mò mài guāi，bù yù míng shī mò qiáng cāi。

Exhort the virtuous talents,
Not to show off your cleverness.
Do not endeavor to conjecture,
Until you meet a wise master.

Commentary
To obtain the true meaning of Tao, you should consult the masters. With the doctrine of Tao, you are in a position to wipe out diseases, avoid disasters and extend your life.

(十)
(shí)
10

無根樹，花正圓，結果收成滋味全。
wú gēn shù，huā zhènɡ yuán，jié ɡuǒ shōu chéng zī wèi quán。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so round.
The fruit is harvested,
And it tastes perfect.

如朱橘，似彈丸，護守提防莫放閑。
rú zhū jú，sì dàn wán，hù shǒu tí fáng mò fàng xián。

Its color as red as orange,
And the form as round as a pellet.
Do not stand idly,
But protect it carefully.

學些草木收頭法，復命歸根返本原。
xué xiē cǎo mù shōu tóu fǎ，fù mìnɡ ɡuī ɡēn fǎn běn yuán。

Regard our bodies as grass and trees,
Learn some laws of natural circulation.
Revert to the primal status,
To restore life and return to the origin.

選靈地，結道庵，會合先天了大還⑩。
xuǎn línɡ dì，jié dào ān，huì hé xiān tiān le dà hái。

Select a sacred place,
And build a Taoist temple.
To realize the great cyclically transformed elixir,

⑩大還 refers to the great cyclically transformed elixir.
You should combine the postnatal with primordial.

**Commentary**

*On the basis of cyclically transformed elixir, the practitioners should refine great elixir before they turn into immortals.*

(十一)
(shí yī)
11

無根樹，花正亨，說到無根卻有根。
wu gēn shù，huā zhèng hēng，shuō dào wú gēn què yǒu gēn。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so prosperous.
The tree is said to be rootless,
Actually it has.

三才14是，二五15精，天地交時萬物生。
sān cái qiào，èr wǔ jīnɡ，tiān dì jiāo shí wàn wù shēnɡ。

The secret of three ternary materials,
And the theory of double five elements.
When the heaven and the earth copulated,
All beings were created.

日月交時寒暑順，男女交時孕始成。
rì yuè jiāo shí hán shǔ shùn，nán nǚ jiāo shí yùn shǐ chéng。

When the sun and the moon copulate,
Winter and summer take their turns.
When man and woman mate,
The procedure of pregnancy begins.

甚分明，說與君，猶恐相逢認不真。
shèn fēn míng，shuō yǔ jūn，yóu kǒnɡ xiānɡ féng rèn bù zhēn。

What I have explained,
Is quite understandable.
Yet I am still afraid,
It is not so recognizable.

**Commentary**

*The cinnabar field is the place for copulation between Yin and Yang, and the origin of essence, breath and spirit.*

(十二)
(shí èr)
12

---

14 三才 is referred to essence, breath and spirit, three materials for cultivation.
15 二五 is implied to Yang and Yin respectively according to the theory of China’s five elements.
無根樹，花正佳，對景忘情玩月華。
wú gēn shù，huā zhèng jiā，duì jǐng wàng qíng wán yuè huá。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so excellent.
Emotionally facing the scenery,
Lustily you enjoy the moonlight.

金精16旺，耀眼花，莫在園中錯揀瓜。
jīn jīnɡ wànɡ，yào yǎn huā，mò zài yuán zhōnɡ cuò jiǎn ɡuā。
The golden essence is thriving,
The flowers are dazzling.
Do not pick the wrong melon
From the west garden.

五金八石17皆為假，萬草千方總是差。
wǔ jīn bā shí jiē wéi jiǎ，wàn cǎo qiān fānɡ zǒnɡ shì chà。
Five metals and eight stones,
They are completely false.
Thousands of herbs and recipes,
They are entirely erroneous.

金蝦蟆，玉老鴉18，認得真時是作家。
jīn há má，yù lǔo yā，rèn dé zhēn shí shì zuò jiā。
The golden toad,
And the jade crow.
If you can make them out,
You are really an old hand.

Commentary
Only by recognizing the true and false doctrine, the practitioners can obtain the essence of Tao.

(十三)
(shí sān)
13

無根樹，花正多，遍地開時隔愛河。
wú gēn shù，huā zhèng duō，biàn dì kāi shí gé ài hé。
Rootless tree,
Its flowers abundant.

16 金精 is implied to Yang.
17 五金八石 refers to all the materials for refining outer elixir. The five metals are copper, gold, silver, iron, lead and tin. The eight stones are cinnabar, realgar, sulfur (kongqing), orpiment, mica, azurite, niter, halite.
18 金蝦蟆，玉老鴉 golden toad corresponds to Yin and jade crow corresponds to Yang.
Across the passion river,
They are blooming everywhere.

難攀拆， 怎奈何， 步步行行龍虎窩。
nán pān chāi， zěn nài hé， bù bù háng háng lóng hǔ wō。

Here and there,
There are dens of dragon and tiger.
One is unable,
To pick up the flower.

采得黃花歸洞去， 紫府題名永不磨。
cǎi dé huáng huā ɡuī dònɡ qù， zǐ  fǔ tí mínɡ yǒnɡ bù mó。

When yellow flower is picked,
Bring it to the cavern.
While the golden alchemy is made,
Your fame will be everlasting.

笑呵呵， 白云阿， 準備天梯上大羅。
xiào hē hē， bái yún ā， zhǔn bèi tiān tī shànɡ dà luó。

Happily and cheerfully you smile,
Leisurely and carefree as if in the cloud.
A tall ladder you have taken,
To become an immortal in the Heaven.

Commentary
Common people are tied up by fame and fortune. They are also tied down by love and passions. Only martial hero without worldly desire can attain the essence of Tao and become immortal.

（十 四）
（shí sì）
14

無根樹， 花正香， 鉛鼎溫溫現寶光。
wú ɡēn shù， huā zhènɡ xiānɡ， qiān dǐnɡ wēn wēn xiàn bǎo guān。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so fragrant.
When the lead is formed in the tripod,
The light of treasure will pop out.

金橋上， 望曲江， 月里分明見太陽。
jīn qiáo shànɡ， wànɡ qǔ jiānɡ， yuè lǐ fēnínɡ jiàn tài yánɡ。

Standing on the bridge of gold,
You could see the river water.
In the moon light,
You could find the sun bright.

吞服烏肝並兔髓，
換盡塵埃舊肚腸。

Swallow crow’s black liver,
And eat hare’s white brain.
Remove the dirt from your stomach,
And reserve the essence in your intestine.

名利場，恩愛鄉，再不回頭空自忙。

If pursue fame and fortune,
Or seek wine and woman.
In the ending,
Your efforts will come into nothing.

Commentary
Yang is produced from Yin. So, it is imperative to spit out the stale and take in the new. This is a way to cultivate for immortals.

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so bright.
Mercury and lead,
Smelted in the tripod.

臨爐際，汞現前，采取全憑渡法船。

Standing by the tripod,
And facing the mercury and lead.
Only master the smelting method,
You can pick up the elixir.

匠手高強牢把舵，一任洪波海底翻。

A skilled master,
Operate tightly the rudder.

20 鳥肝兔髓 the liver of crow corresponds to Yang and the brain of hare corresponds to Yin.
21 符火 符 refers to the signal of Yin and 火 refers to Yang.
No matter how severely,
The sea waves flutter.

過 三 關，透泥丸，早把通身九竅穿。
quò sān guān，tòu ní wán，zǎo bā tōnɡ shēn jiǔ qiào chuān。

Force three passes,
And enter into the Niwan Palace.
When the nine apertures enlightened,
The cultivation has succeeded.

Commentary
The grand master summed up the way of refining inner elixir in three processes: crossing three passes, penetrating Niwan Palace and nine apertures.

（十 六）
（shí liù）
16

無根樹，花正濃，認取真鉛正祖宗。
wú ɡēn shù，huā zhènɡ nónɡ，rèn qǔ zhēn qiān zhènɡ zǔ zōnɡ。

Rootless tree,
Its fragrance is stronger.
Try to acquire the true lead,
The authentic product.

精氣神，一鼎烹，女轉成男老變童。
jīnɡ qìshén，yī dǐnɡ pēnɡ，nǚ zhuǎn chénɡ nán lǎo biàn tónɡ。

When essence, breath and spirit,
Coagulate together in the tripod.
The female will turn as strong as male,
And the old as young as child.

欲 向 西 方 擒 白 虎，先 往 東 家 伏 青 龍。
yù xiànɡ xī fānɡ qín bái hǔ，xiān wǎnɡ dōnɡ jiā fú qīnɡ lónɡ。

The white tiger of west,
And the black dragon of east.
If you desire to catch the tiger,
You have to tame the dragon first.

類 相 同，好 用 功，外 藥 通 時 內 藥 通。

22 三關 refers to the three processes of refining essence, breath and spirit.
23 泥丸 corresponds to Niwan Palace, the central position of human brain.
24 九竅 refers to nine apertures of human body, including eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, anus and urethra.
25 精氣神 (Jing,Qi and Shen) are three basic elements for constituting human body and life. They are also three materials for Taoist cultivation.
26 青龍白虎 black dragon corresponds to Yang and white tiger corresponds to Yin.
27 外藥內藥 外藥 corresponds to breath and 内藥 to spirit, in inner elixir cultivation.
lèi xiāng tóng, hǎo yòng ɡōnɡ, wài yào tōnɡ shì nèi yào tōnɡ。

Birds of a feather flock together,  
The internal and external medicine unified.  
To obtain the true lead,  
You have to practice still harder.

Commentary

The grand master warned that, before refining the great elixir, one should cultivate small elixir first.

（十 七）
（shí qī）
17

无根树，花正娇，天应星兮地应潮。  
wú ɡēn shù，huā zhènɡ jiāo，tiān yīng xīnɡ xī dì yīnɡ cháo。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so delicate.  
The sky conforms to the stars,  
And the earth complies with the tides.

屠龙剑，缚虎絳，运转天罡28斡斗杓29。  
tú lónɡ jiàn，fù hǔ tāo，yùn zhuǎn tiān ɡānɡ wò dǒu biāo。

The dragon subdued with sword,  
The tiger tamed with belt.  
And the Plow is turned,  
By the handle of the Dipper.

锻炼一炉真日月，扫尽三千六百条30。  
duàn liàn yī lú zhēn rì yuè，sǎo jìn sān qiān liù bǎi tiáo。

When the sun and moon integrated,  
The elixir is smelted.  
At this moment,  
All the heretical sects swept.

步云霄，任逍遥，罪垢凡塵一笔消。  
bù yún xiāo，rèn xiāo yáo，zuì ɡòu fán chén yī bǐ xiāo。

Walk into the Heavens,  
And enjoy yourself as you please.  
When the doctrine is realized,  
All the crimes are deleted.

Commentary

28 天罡 refers to the Big Dipper.  
29 斗杓 refers to the three stars at the handle of the Big Dipper.  
30 三千六百條 refers to all the heretical sects against Taoism.
Only by controlling the fire-phasing of refining the great elixir, the practitioners can obtain Tao and remove all crimes.

(十八)
( shí bā )
18

無根樹， 花正高， 海浪滔天月弄潮。
wú gēn shù， huā zhèng gāo， hǎi làng tāo tiān yuè nòng cháo。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so high.
The sea waves dash to the sky,
And the moon plays the water of tide.

銀河路， 透九霄， 槳影橫空泊斗梢。
yín hé lù， tòu jiǔ xiāo， chá yǐng héng kōng bó dòu shāo。
The Milky Way leads to the Heavens,
Nobody can easily cross.
Only take the immortal’s vessel,
One can pass through the Heaven River.

摸著織女支機石， 踏遍牛郎31駕鵲橋。
mō zhe zhī nǚ zhī jī shí， tà biàn niú lánɡ jià què qiáo。
Herd-boy and Weaving-girl form a couple,
They are separated by the Heaven River.
Only when the Magpie Bridge erected,
Can they reunite to each other.

入仙曹， 膽氣豪， 盜得瑤池王母32桃。
rù xiān cáo， dǎn qì háo， dào dé yáo chí wáng mǔ táo。
Entering into the fairyland,
With courage inspired.
One is brave to pilfer,
The peach of Queen Mother of West.

Commentary
Without Magpie Bridge, the Herd-boy can never meet Weaving-girl. The copulation of Yin and Yang depends on the way of refining the elixir.

(十九)
( shí jiǔ )
19

32 王母 refers to the Queen Mother of the West, a mythological figure and beautiful immortal.
無根樹，花正奇，月裡栽培片晌時。
wú gēn shù, huā zhèng qí, yuè lǐ zāi péi piàn shǎng shí.

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so splendid.
They have grown up,
In a moment.

Commentary

The copulation between Yin and Yang produces the great elixir. With the great elixir, one is in a position to prolong his life and become immortal.

33 玄珠 is implied to the primordial breath.
34 閻王 refers to Yama, King of Hell.
挐云手，步云梯，采取先天第一技。
nà yún shòu，bù yún tí，cǎi qǔ xiān tiān dì yī jì。
Seize the cloud,
And climb the ladder.
To find the fairy flower,
And pick up the first.

飲酒戴花神氣爽，笑煞仙翁醉似泥。
yǐn jiǔ dài huā shén qì shuǎnɡ，xiào shà xiān wēng zuì sì ní。
Drinking fairy liquor,
And wearing fairy flower,
To enjoy pleasure,
And fall into drunken stupor.

托心知，謹護持，惟恐爐中火候飛。
tuō xīn zhī，jǐn hù chí，wéi kǒnɡ lú zhōnɡ huǒ hòu fēi。
Keep a clear mind,
And carefully look after.
When controlling the fire-phasing of the tripod,
On the way to smelt.

Commentary
At the moment of refining elixir, the practitioners should control the fire-phasing and avoid mistakes.

（二十一）
（èr shí yī）
21

無根樹，花正黃，產在中央戊已鄉。
wú ɡēn shù，huā zhènɡ huánɡ，chǎn zài zhōnɡ yānɡ wù yǐ xiānɡ。
Rootless tree,
Its flowers so pure.
The true elixir appears at the center,
The place where Yin and Yang copulate.

東家女，西舍郎，配合夫妻入洞房。
dōnɡ jiā nǚ，xī shè láng，pèi hé fū qī rù dòng fānɡ。
The woman of the east neighbor,
And the man of the west.
They get married,
And enter into the bridal chamber.

35戊己鄉 戊 is the fifth of the ten Heavenly Stems and 己 is the sixth of the ten Heavenly Stems. Here it corresponds to the central position.
The yellow old woman urged the new couple,
To drink more fairy liquor.
So they get drunk,
Day in and day out.

This liquor of revival,
Is made with celestial formula.
It is a magic drug,
To save a deadly patient.

Commentary

*When Yin and Yang copulate, the great elixir is produced.*

(二十二)
(èr shí èr)
22

無根樹，花正明，月魄天心逼日魂。
wú gēn shù， huā zhèng mínɡ， yuè pò tiān xīn bī rì hún。

The golden cow has black brain
And the jade hare has white liver.
Catch and cook them together,
In the same tripod.

The Yang advances at midnight.

---

36 黃婆 corresponds to the mediator between Yin and Yang.
37 醍醐 corresponds here to the great elixir. The original meaning is the essence of cow’s milk in ancient China.
38 金烏玉兔 金鳥 corresponds to Yang and 玉兔 to Yin.
39 子午 子 refers to the period of time from 11 pm to 1 am, around midnight. 午 refers to the period of time from 11 am to 1 pm, around noon.
40 沐浴 corresponds to the process of maintenance in the course of cultivation.
41 卯酉 卯 refers to the period of time from 5 am to 7 am, early morning. 酉 refers to the period of time from 5 pm to 7 pm, early evening.
And Yin recedes at noon time.
At the time of sunrise and sunset,
It is maintenance period.

守 黃 庭， 養 谷 神， 男 子 懷 胎 笑 煞 人。
shǒu huánɡ tínɡ， yǎnɡ ɡǔ shén， nán zǐ huái tāi xiào shà rén。

Keep watch the elixir furnace.
And look after the god of emptiness.
It is a joyous event,
When a man is pregnant.

Commentary
The method of refining elixir is to ascend Yang at midnight, descend Yin at noon time and maintain at the time of sunrise and sunset.

（二十三）
（èr shí sān）
23

無 根 樹， 花 正 紅， 摘 紅 花 一 樹 空。
wú ɡēn shù， huā zhènɡ hónɡ， zhāi hónɡ huā yī shù kōnɡ。

Rootless tree,
Its flowers so red.
When all the flowers picked,
The tree is vacant.

空 即 色， 色 即 空， 破 真 空 在 色 中。
kōnɡ jí sè， sè jí kōnɡ， shí pò zhēn kōnɡ zài sè zhōnɡ。

Nothingness is existence.
And existence is nothingness.
Try to recognize
Nothingness comes from existence.

了 了 真 空 色 相 滅， 法 相 長 存 不 落 空。
liǎo liǎo zhēn kōnɡ sè xiānɡ miè， fǎ xiānɡ zhǎnɡ cún bú luò kōnɡ。

When nihility attained,
The existence vanished.
All appearances will last forever,
They will never disappear.

號 圓 通， 稱 大 雄， 九 祖 超 升 上 九 重。
hào yuán tōnɡ， chēnɡ dà xiónɡ， jiǔ zǔ  chāo shēnɡ shànɡ jiǔ zhònɡ。

42 黃 庭 corresponds to the mid cinnabar field, the place for refining elixir.
43 谷 神 corresponds to the god of vacancy. Taoist priests believe in Pure Void
44 九 祖 is a general term of all the ancestors.
45 九 重 refers to the imperial palace of immortals.
When you achieve fame and success,
And claim to be a great hero.
The soul of your ancestors,
Would rise to the Heavens.

Commentary

Only by waiving their worldly desire, the practitioners can enter into the place of Pure Void and become immortals.

Commentary

Tao has no forms and appearances by nature. The purpose of cultivating Tao is to become immortals and enter into the place of Pure Void.

---

46 三味火 refers to essence, breath and spirit, the three materials for the cultivation.

47 太无 refers to the place of Pure Void.
Conclusion

Taoist song is one part of classical Chinese poetry. Therefore, it is characterized by fixed form and rhythm. The translator puts forward his explorative principles of translation on Taoist scriptures as follows.

1 Translation on the basis of comprehension

Without a thorough understanding of Taoist scriptures, translators might go astray from the true meanings of the original text and present wrong expressions in their translations. For example, the translator has found that the Taoist term “double-sided cultivation” is wrongly interpreted to “sexual cultivation” by some translators. Actually, the true meaning of this term is “physical and spiritual cultivation.”

In fact, translation of Taoist scriptures should be carried out with reference to the schools they belong to, the conceptions of the authors, and the various comments and interpretations. In one word, understanding comes first, translation second.

2 From poetry to poetry

Many Taoist scriptures are written in the form of verses, poems and songs. It is true that the aesthetical features of classical Chinese poetry can be hardly expressed in translation. However, the beauty of forms and rhythms owned by all the poems in different languages can be presented in translation under the condition that the true meanings of the original text are not harmed. The translator here adopts the form of four sentences for each paragraph in his translation, taking English rhythms into consideration the fullest possible.

3 A combination of metaphors and explicit expressions

Taoist scriptures are recognized as philosophical literatures as well. Some metaphors in Taoist scriptures can be transposed by a metaphrase. But many others are considered as Taoist terms, uniquely related to Taoist theory and practice. They have to be elaborated to the readers intelligibly with annotation, whereas still other metaphors should be paraphrased because they lack corresponding cultural background in target language.

Reference books*


LI, Xiyue (Qing). The complete works of Sanfeng. Taipei: Taiwan Xinwenfeng Publishing Company, 1978. 李西月（清）．三豐全書．台灣新文豐出版公司．

REN, Farong. Commentary on the Zhouyi Cantong Qi. Xi’an: The Northwest University Press, 1993. 任法融．周易参同契．西北大学出版社．

* Editorial note. The titles of the works published in Chinese were translated by the author.
