

## 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 (张道陵) 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 gēn shù dào qíng

*Taoist Song of Rootless Tree*<sup>1</sup>

(一)

(yī)

1

---

<sup>1</sup>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，花正幽，貪戀榮華誰肯休？  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng yōu , tān liàn róng huá shuí kěn xiū ?

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so secluded.  
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 qù piāo lái bú 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 , cháng zài yú lóng 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 。

On willow plum grafted,  
To pear mulberry joined.  
They are good metaphors,  
Imparted to the practitioners.

自古神仙栽接法， 人老原來有藥醫。  
zì gǔ shén xiān zāi jiē fǎ , rén lǎo yuán lái yǒu yào yī 。

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

訪名師， 問方兒， 下手速修猶太遲。  
fǎng míng shī , wèn fāng ér , xià shǒu sù xiū yóu tài chí 。

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.*

( 三 )  
( sān )  
3

無根樹， 花正青， 花酒神仙古到今。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng qīng , huā jiǔ shén xiān gǔ dào jīn 。

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

煙花寨， 酒肉林， 不斷葷腥不犯淫。  
yān huā zhài , jiǔ ròu lín , bú duàn hūn xīng bú fàn yín 。

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

犯淫喪失長生寶， 酒肉穿腸道在心。  
fàn yín sàng shī cháng shēng bǎo , jiǔ ròu chuān cháng dào zài xīn 。

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。  
dǎ 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<sup>2</sup>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， 難抱雛， 背了陰陽造化爐<sup>3</sup>。  
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<sup>4</sup>氣轉枯。  
tàn mí tú , tài mó hu ; jìng zuò gū xiū qì zhuǎn kū 。

Bemoan the foolish disciples,

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 造化爐 is the platform for gestating Yin and Yang.

<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup>，陽寡陰孤各一邊。  
jīn gé mù , gǒng gé qiān , yáng guǎ yīn gū gè yì 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 shàng yīn yáng nán pèi nǚ , shēng zǐ shēng 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 zhōng 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 inversive practice produces immortals.*

(六)

---

<sup>5</sup> 汞鉛 Mercury corresponds to Yin and lead corresponds to Yang in inner-elixir cultivation.

( liù )  
6

無根樹，花正新，產在坤方<sup>6</sup>坤是人。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng xīn , chǎn zài kūn fāng kūn shì rén 。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so new.  
They grow in the Kun position,  
And Kun is referred to person.

摘花戴，采花心，花蕊層層艷麗春。  
zhāi huā dài , cǎi huā xīn , huā ruǐ céng céng yàn lì chūn 。

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

時人不達花中理，一訣天機值萬金。  
shí rén bù dá huā zhōng lǐ , yì jué tiān jī zhí wàn jīn 。

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

借花名，說花身，句句敲爻<sup>7</sup>說得真。  
jiè huā míng , shuō huā shēn , jù jù qiāo yáo shuō dé zhēn 。

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.*

( 七 )  
( qī )  
7

無根樹，花正繁，美貌嬌容賽粉團<sup>8</sup>。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng fán , měi mào jiāo róng sài fěn tuán 。

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 敲爻 is referred to Song of Qiao Yao, a poem written by Lǚ Dongbin 吕洞宾, a famous Taoist priest in the Tang Dynasty.

<sup>8</sup> 粉團 corresponds to beautiful women or prostitutes.

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so flourishing.  
Compared with beauties' looks,  
They are more appealing.

防猿馬，劣更頑，掛起娘生鐵面顏。  
fáng yuán mǎ , liè gèng wán , guà qǐ niáng shēng tiě miàn yán 。

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

提出青龍真寶劍，摘盡牆頭朵朵鮮。  
tí chū qīng lóng zhēn bǎo jiàn , zhāi jìn qiáng tóu duǒ duǒ xiān 。

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.

趁風帆，滿載還，怎肯空行過寶山。  
chèn fēng fān , mǎn zǎi hái , zěn kěn kōng xíng guò bǎo shān 。

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.*

(八)  
(bā)  
8

無根樹，花正飛，卸了重開有定期。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng fēi , xiè le zhòng kāi yǒu dìng qī 。

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

鉛花現，癸<sup>9</sup>盡時，依舊西園<sup>10</sup>花滿枝。  
qiān huā xiàn , guǐ jìn shí , yī jiù xī yuán huā mǎn zhī 。

When the lead flowers appear,

---

<sup>9</sup> 癸 corresponds to Yin. The original meaning is female's menstrual blood (gui water).

<sup>10</sup> 西園 corresponds here to the earth or soil.

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。  
duì yuè cái jīng shōu shì qù , yòu xiàng zhāo yáng bǔ nà yī 。

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。  
zhè xuán jī , shì hǎn zhī , xū gòng shén xiān zǐ xì tuī 。

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.*

( 九 )  
( jiǔ )  
9

80

無根樹， 花正開， 偃月爐<sup>11</sup>中摘下來。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng kāi , yǎn yuè lú zhōng zhāi xià lái 。

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<sup>12</sup>。  
yán nián shòu , miè bìng zāi , hǎo jiē liáng péng bèi fǎ cái 。

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。  
cóng cǐ kě chéng tiān shàng bǎo , yí rèn qún mí xiào wǒ dāi 。

By following this principle,  
The heavenly treasure is obtainable.

<sup>11</sup> 偃月爐 refers to the place refining the elixir.

<sup>12</sup> 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，莫賣乖，不遇名師莫強猜。  
quàn xián cái , mò mài guāi , bú 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 zhèng yuán , jié guǒ 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 dī fang 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 mìng guī gēn 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<sup>13</sup>。  
xuǎn líng 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,

---

<sup>13</sup> 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。  
wú 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<sup>14</sup>竅，二五<sup>15</sup>精，天地交時萬物生。  
sān cái qiào , èr wǔ jīng , tiān dì jiāo shí wàn wù shēng 。

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 kǒng xiāng 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

<sup>14</sup> 三才 is referred to essence, breath and spirit, three materials for cultivation.

<sup>15</sup> 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<sup>16</sup>旺， 耀眼花， 莫在園中錯揀瓜。  
jīn jīng wàng , yào yǎn huā , mò zài yuán zhōng cuò jiǎn guā 。

The golden essence is thriving,  
The flowers are dazzling.  
Do not pick the wrong melon  
From the west garden.

五金八石<sup>17</sup>皆為假， 萬草千方總是差。  
wǔ jīn bā shí jiē wéi jiǎ , wàn cǎo qiān fāng zǒng 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<sup>18</sup>， 認得真時是作家。  
jīn há má , yù lǎo 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.

<sup>16</sup> 金精 is implied to Yang.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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 guī dòng qù , zǐ fǔ tí míng yǒng 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<sup>19</sup>。  
xiào hē hē , bái yún ā , zhǔn bèi tiān tī shàng 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 gēn shù , huā zhèng xiāng , qiān dǐng wēn wēn xiàn bǎo guāng 。

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 shàng , wàng qǔ jiāng , yuè lǐ fēn míng jiàn tài yáng 。

Standing on the bridge of gold,  
You could see the river water.

<sup>19</sup> 大羅 refers to Daluo Palace, a residence for the immortals.

In the moon light,  
You could find the sun bright.

吞服烏肝并兔髓<sup>20</sup>，換盡塵埃舊肚腸。  
tūn fú wū gān bìng tù suǐ , huàn jìn chén āi jiù dù cháng 。

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。  
míng lì chǎng , ēn ài xiāng , zài bù huí tóu kōng zì máng 。

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.*

(十五)  
(shí wǔ)  
15

無根樹，花正鮮，符火<sup>21</sup>相煎汞與鉛。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng xiān , fú huǒ xiāng jiān gǒng yǔ qiān 。

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。  
lín lú jì , gǒng xiàn qián , cǎi qǔ quán píng dù fǎ chuán 。

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。  
jiàng shǒu gāo qiáng láo bǎ duò , yí rèn hóng bō hǎi dǐ fān 。

A skilled master,  
Operate tightly the rudder.

<sup>20</sup> 烏肝兔髓 the liver of crow corresponds to Yang and the brain of hare corresponds to Yin.

<sup>21</sup> 符火 refers to the signal of Yin and 火 refers to Yang.

No matter how severely,  
The sea waves flutter.

過三關<sup>22</sup>，透泥丸<sup>23</sup>，早把通身九竅<sup>24</sup>穿。  
guò sān guān , tòu ní wán , zǎo bǎ tōng shēn jiù 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 gēn shù , huā zhèng nóng , rèn qǔ zhēn qiān zhèng zǔ zong 。

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

精氣神<sup>25</sup>，一鼎烹，女轉成男老變童。  
jīng qì shén , yì dǐng pēng , nǚ zhuǎn chéng nán lǎo biàn tóng 。

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<sup>26</sup>。  
yù xiàng xī fāng qín bái hǔ , xiān wǎng dōng jiā fú qīng lóng 。

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<sup>27</sup>。

<sup>22</sup> 三關 refers to the three processes of refining essence, breath and spirit.

<sup>23</sup> 泥丸 corresponds to Niwan Palace, the central position of human brain.

<sup>24</sup> 九竅 refers to nine apertures of human body, including eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, anus and urethra.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 青龍白虎 black dragon corresponds to Yang and white tiger corresponds to Yin.

<sup>27</sup> 外藥內藥 外藥 corresponds to breath and 內藥 to spirit, in inner elixir cultivation.

lèi xiāng tóng , hǎo yòng gōng , wài yào tōng shí nèi yào tōng 。

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

無 根 樹 , 花 正 嬌 , 天 應 星 兮 地 應 潮 。

wú gēn shù , huā zhèng jiāo , tiān yīng xīng xī dì yīng cháo 。

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

屠 龍 劍 , 縛 虎 絳 , 運 轉 天 罡 斡 斗 杓<sup>29</sup> 。

tú lóng jiàn , fù hǔ tāo , yùn zhuǎn tiān gāng wò dòu biāo 。

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

鍛 煉 一 爐 真 日 月 , 掃 盡 三 千 六 百 條<sup>30</sup> 。

duàn liàn yì 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 遙 , 罪 垢 凡 塵 一 筆 消 。

bù yún xiāo , rèn xiāo yáo , zuì gòu fán chén yì bǐ xiāo 。

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

### Commentary

---

<sup>28</sup> 天罡 refers to the Big Dipper.

<sup>29</sup> 斗杓 refers to the three stars at the handle of the Big Dipper.

<sup>30</sup> 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， 槎 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<sup>31</sup> 駕 鵲 橋。  
mō zhe zhī nǚ zhī jī shí, tà biàn niú láng 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<sup>32</sup> 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

<sup>31</sup> 牛郎織女 refers to the romantic story of Herd-boy and Weaving-girl, separated lovers in Chinese mythology. Herd-boy corresponds to Yang and Weaving-girl to Yin.

<sup>32</sup> 王母 refers to the Queen Mother of the West, a mythological figure and beautiful immortal.



無根樹，花正雙，龍虎登壇戰一場。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng shuāng , lóng hǔ dēng tán zhàn yì chǎng 。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers form in pair.  
The dragon and tiger,  
Come out to wrestle.

鉛投汞，陰配陽，法象玄珠<sup>33</sup>無價償。  
qiān tóu gǒng , yīn pèi yáng , fǎ xiàng xuán zhū wú jià cháng 。

When lead and mercury combined,  
And Yin and Yang copulated.  
The priceless treasure,  
Finally produced.

此是家園真種子，返老還童壽命長。  
cǐ shì jiā yuán zhēn zhǒng zǐ , fǎn lǎo hái tóng shòu mìng cháng 。

This treasure is a real seed,  
Take care at your homeland.  
The youth will be regained,  
And the lifespan extended.

上天堂，極樂方，免得輪回見閻王<sup>34</sup>。  
shàng tiān táng , jí lè fāng , miǎn dé lún huí jiàn yán wáng 。

With this treasure at homeland,  
You will enter into the Pure land.  
With this treasure at homeland,  
You will escape from *samsara* and death threat.

### 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.*

(二十)  
(èr shí)  
20

無根樹，花正奇，月里栽培片晌時。  
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.

<sup>33</sup> 玄珠 is implied to the primordial breath.

<sup>34</sup> 閻王 refers to Yama, King of Hell.

挈云手，步云梯，采取先天第一技。  
ná yún shǒu , bù yún tī , 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 shuǎng , 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 kǒng lú zhōng 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，產在中央戊己鄉<sup>35</sup>。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng huáng , chǎn zài zhōng yāng wù jǐ xiāng 。

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。  
dōng jiā nǚ , xī shě láng , pèi hé fū qī rù dòng fáng 。

The woman of the east neighbor,  
And the man of the west.  
They get married,  
And enter into the bridal chamber.

<sup>35</sup> 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.

黃婆<sup>36</sup>勸飲醜醜<sup>37</sup>酒， 每日醺蒸醉一場。  
huáng pó quàn yǐn tí hú jiǔ , měi rì xūn zhēng zuì yì chǎng 。

The yellow old woman urged the new couple,  
To drink more fairy liquor.  
So they get drunk,  
Day in and day out.

這仙方， 返魂漿， 起死回生是藥王。  
zhè xiān fāng , fǎn hún jiāng , qǐ sǐ huí shēng shì yào wáng 。

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 míng , yuè pò tiān xīn bī rì hún 。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers so bright.  
The moon is well lit,  
By the sun light.

金烏髓， 玉兔<sup>38</sup>精， 二物擒來一處烹。  
jīn wū suǐ , yù tù jīng , èr wù qín lái yí chù pēng 。

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

陰火陽符分子午<sup>39</sup>， 沐浴<sup>40</sup>加臨卯酉<sup>41</sup>門。  
yīn huǒ yáng fú fèn zǐ wǔ , mù yù jiā lín mǎo yǒu mén 。

The Yang advances at midnight,

<sup>36</sup> 黃婆 corresponds to the mediator between Yin and Yang.

<sup>37</sup> 醜醜 corresponds here to the great elixir. The original meaning is the essence of cow's milk in ancient China.

<sup>38</sup> 金烏玉兔 金烏 corresponds to Yang and 玉兔 to Yin.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> 沐浴 corresponds to the process of maintenance in the course of cultivation.

<sup>41</sup> 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<sup>42</sup>，養谷神<sup>43</sup>，男子懷胎笑煞人。  
shǒu huáng tíng , yǎng gǔ 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，摘盡紅花一樹空。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng hóng , zhāi jìn hóng huā yí shù kōng 。

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

空即色，色即空，識破真空在色中。  
kōng jí sè , sè jí kōng , shí pò zhēn kōng zài sè zhōng 。

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 kōng sè xiāng miè , fǎ xiāng zhǎng cún bú luò kōng 。

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

號圓通，稱大雄，九祖<sup>44</sup>超升上九重<sup>45</sup>。  
hào yuán tōng , chēng dà xióng , jiǔ zǔ chāo shēng shàng jiǔ chóng 。

<sup>42</sup> 黃庭 corresponds to the mid cinnabar field, the place for refining elixir.

<sup>43</sup> 谷神 corresponds to the god of vacancy. Taoist priests believe in Pure Void

<sup>44</sup> 九祖 is a general term of all the ancestors.

<sup>45</sup> 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.*

( 二 十 四 )

( èr shí sì )

24

無 根 樹 ， 花 正 無 ， 無 相 無 形 難 畫 圖 。  
wú gēn shù , huā zhèng wú , wú xiāng wú xíng nán huà tú 。

Rootless tree,  
Its flowers disappearing.  
Without the forms and appearances,  
One can hardly draw pictures.

無 名 姓 ， 卻 聽 呼 ， 擒 入 中 間 造 化 爐 。  
wú míng xìng , què tīng hū , qín rù zhōng jiān zào huà lú 。

Like the man without name,  
And the echo of deserted valley.  
Tao's true meaning is taken,  
From the furnace of gestation.

運 起 周 天 三 昧 火 <sup>46</sup> ， 鍛 煉 真 空 返 太 無 <sup>47</sup> 。  
yùn qǐ zhōu tiān sān mèi huǒ , duàn liàn zhēn kōng fǎn tài wú 。

Light the three fires  
In the breeding furnace,  
And refine the vanity,  
To turn to the land of nihility.

謁 天 都 ， 受 天 符 ， 才 是 男 兒 大 丈 夫 。  
yè tiān dōu , shòu tiān fú , cái shì nán ér dà zhàng fu 。

Visit the fairyland,  
And obtain the Tao secret.  
You deserve to be called  
A real man this moment.

**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.*

---

<sup>46</sup> 三昧火 refers to essence, breath and spirit, the three materials for the cultivation.

<sup>47</sup> 太無 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\*

- FAN, Enjun. *The Taoist immortals*. Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2007. 範恩君, *道教神仙*, 宗教文化出版社,
- FU, Qinjia. *The history of Chinese Taoism*. Beijing: Unity Publishing House, 2002. 傅勤家, *中國道教史*, 團結出版社,
- GE, Guolong. *The origin of Taoist inner alchemy*. Beijing: The Central Edition and Translation Press, 2012. 戈國龍, *道教內丹派溯源*, 中央編譯出版社,
- HU, Fuchen. *A general introduction to Taoist theory*. Beijing: Social Scientific Documents Press, 2009. 胡孚琛, *道教通論*, 社會科學文獻出版社,
- HU, Fuchen. *The Chinese Taoist dictionary*. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1995. 胡孚琛, *中華道教大辭典*, 中國社會科學出版社,
- HUANG, Zhaohan. *Textual research on Zhang Sanfeng, Taoist priest of Ming Dynasty*. Taipei: Taiwan Student Books Press, 1988. 黃兆漢, *明代道士張三豐考*, 台灣學生書局,
- KONG, De. *The essentials of Wudang alchemy theory*. Beijing: The Central Edition and Translation Press, 2013. 孔德, *武當丹道精要*, 中央編譯出版社,
- 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, *周易參同契*, 西北大學出版社,

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

- SCHIPPER, Kristofor; VERELLEN, Franciscus. *The Taoist Canon* (道教通考). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- XIE, Lujun. *The origin of Chinese Taoism*. Beijing: Jiuzhou Publishing House, 2006. 謝路軍, 中國道教源流, 九州出版社,
- ZHANG, Zehong. *Studies on Taoist songs and Chinese folk culture*. Beijing: The People's Publishing House, 2011. 張澤洪, 道教唱道情與中國民俗文化研究, 人民出版社,