

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft  
**Band:** 44 (1990)  
**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** Chen Tuan at Mount Huangbo : a spirit-writing cult in late Ming China  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146879>

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CHEN TUAN AT MOUNT HUANGBO:  
A SPIRIT-WRITING CULT IN LATE MING CHINA

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„The religious bond which has the effect of attaching man to ... [the] superior beings is ... a social bond.

Emile Durkheim, *Concerning the Definition of Religious Phenomena*

*Introduction:*

The recent publication of *The Flying Phoenix*, a major study of sectarian spirit-writing, or *fuji* in Taiwan co-authored by David Jordan and Daniel Overmyer has given us much insight into the function and significance of this practice in contemporary Taiwan<sup>1</sup>. Our understanding of *fuji* in earlier times (sectarian or otherwise) is unfortunately much less extensive. The only major study of spirit-writing in the traditional period was completed

[Note: I am greatly indebted to Livia Kohn who generously lent her erudition and judgement to the completion of this article. Not only did she read several drafts of the work and offered her comments and suggestions, but she provided me with much invaluable assistance in clarifying the structure and nature of the Chen Tuan legend. Those wishing further information regarding the life and legend of Chen Tuan are referred to Professor Kohn's excellent book on the subject, *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981. This book was originally Professor Kohn's doctoral dissertation and was written under her maiden name, Livia Knaul. Professor Kohn has also written two articles which concern Chen Tuan's reputation as a physiognomist; "Mirror of Auras: Chen Tuan on Physiognomy," which will appear in *Asian Folklore Studies* 47 (1988), and, "A Textbook of Physiognomy: The Tradition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*," *Asian Folklore Studies* 45 (1986), 227-258. An English language volume which will incorporate the above material and more is being planned. When it appears it will most certainly represent the definitive study of this important semi-legendary figure.]

- 1 See David K. Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix, Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*. Princeton: 1986. In 1972 Kani Hiroaki also published an article on spirit-writing in Taiwan in his series of articles on popular religion on the island. See Kani Hiroaki, „*Furanzakki*,“ *Shigaku*, 45.1, 1972, 57-88. J.J.M. de Groot also took note of the practice of *fuji* in a religious context in his study of religious practice in Fujian during the late imperial era. See J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*. Leyden: 1910, reprinted Taipei: 1982. Book II, Vol. VI, 1298.

by Xu Dishan in 1941<sup>2</sup>. Xu has done us a great service by compiling and cataloguing a collection of over one hundred and thirty references to *fuji* from the pre-modern era. This work provides an excellent base from which to embark upon further study. Unfortunately, very few have been drawn to such study and the task of evaluating the significance of *fuji* in traditional China remains largely undone.

In contemporary Taiwan and Hong Kong, *fuji* is primarily employed to generate scripture in support of the religious activities of many new religious sects which have sprung up there. Members of such sects also rely on *fuji* to resolve questions related to their spiritual life or the functioning of the sect. In traditional China, on the other hand, it is apparent that spirit-writing in its most fully developed form was often used in a more general social context. It was employed in the forecasting of questions to be on the civil-service examinations, predictions of future events and fortunes, the composition of poetry, and even the playing of chess! Furthermore, rather than being widely practised by men and women from all levels of the social strata as seems to be the case in present-day Taiwan<sup>3</sup>, *fuji* was most prevalent among the literate elite<sup>4</sup>. By the late imperial era in China the literati were far less easily defined in socio-economic terms than they had been in earlier times. They were distinct as a social class more because of a shared ethos and class esprit than anything else. That ethos and esprit was, for the most part, founded upon a common goal: participation in the imperial bureaucracy. Entry into the imperial bureaucracy was, in turn, determined by success in the imperial examination system.

Xu Dishan tries to argue that a direct connection existed between the examination system and literati interest in spirit-writing. He observed that in Fujian, where he grew up, it was commonplace for spirit-writing "altars" to be established in the halls and temples where the "literary societies" of examination candidates functioned. There, spirit-writing became incorpo-

2 See Xu Dishan, *Fuji mixing di yanjiu* (Research into the Superstitious Belief in Spirit-writing). Changsha: 1941.

3 See Jordan and Overmyer, 6-7 regarding the social make-up of *bailuan* sects.

4 Primitive forms of spirit-writing, involving the use of various instruments to elicit simple 'yes' or 'no' answers were no doubt still practised by the common people and especially women among whom the practice seems to have arisen. See Xu, 7-20, Jordan and Overmyer 36-41 and Chao Wei-pang "The origin and growth of the *fu-chi*," *Folklore Studies* I: 9-27, for discussions of the historic development of spirit-writing.

rated into the various social and literary activities of the young literati<sup>5</sup>. Even after candidates had been successful and had taken up official careers, their reliance on spirit-writing continued. Many apparently found it impossible to make decisions, personal or public, without first consulting the spirits.

It would be difficult to establish the precise relationship between the rise in importance of the imperial examination system and the popularity of spirit-writing among the traditional literati. It may be that Xu Dishan is basically correct in his assumptions. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that spirit-writing was appreciated only by those who owed their status and livelihood to the civil-service examinations. There were those whom we must class as members of the literatus class, but who did not, as a rule, take part in any examinations. These were the Buddhist monks and Taoist priests, particularly those who had come from literatus families. We find evidence of monkish and priestly interest in spirit-writing scattered throughout historical and literary records from the Song Dynasty onwards.

Recently, I have come upon a text which amounts to a case history of spirit-writing activities among a group of high-ranking monks at the famous Wanfu Monastery on Mount Huangbo in Fujian. This text offers us the opportunity to observe in more detail just how spirit-writing was practised in late-traditional China. Basing myself on the accounts of these monks I have attempted to reconstruct the atmosphere and social context within which spirit-writing took place. My aim has been to recreate the manner in which these men related to a number of "immortals" or "transcendents" (*shenxian*) who descended to the *ji* or *planchette*<sup>6</sup>. The picture which, in fact, emerges is of an animated and intensely social environment around the *ji* and the medium who at least bodily presided over it. We find that the monks not only sought and received oracles, they conversed with the immortals, exchanged poems and even remonstrated with them. The boundaries dividing the worlds of mortal and immortal were manifestly thin and fluid, and the spirits, though invisible, were close at hand. They

5 See Xu 49-50.

6 The Chinese word *ji* actually means 'winnow' or 'dust-pan' and derives from the fact that these devices were sometimes used to mount the writing-brush in for the purposes of spirit-writing. Sometimes another character also having the same sound, is used. This character means to divine, and now is used to pertain specifically to the process of divining by using a stick to write on a tray filled with sand.



possessed noble virtue as well as endearing foibles and they apparently enjoyed their contact with the inhabitants of the dusty lower world. Most importantly, in the intercourse between monks and transcendents patterns of behaviour take shape which allow us to posit a kind of sociology of planchette in which mortals and immortals have their own distinct, but inter-related, roles to play. What I hope to show is that *fuji* afforded those who engaged in it an extension of their social lives, and that spirit-writing provided a medium for expression beyond the confines of earthbound society. As such, I believe, it played a valuable and positive role in the lives of late-traditional Chinese literati.

### *The Text:*

The text which provides the basis for this study is a rather obscure compilation made in Japan during the late seventeenth century under imperial auspices by a group of Buddhist monks. This most unlikely source provides us with a well-defined and candid body of evidence for the practice of *fuji* among the members of one segment of the literate population, the emigre monks who founded the Ōbaku school of Buddhism (Huangbo in Chinese pronunciation) in Japan. So far as I am aware, the *Tōzui hen*, or *Peach Bud Collection*, is completely unknown on the Chinese mainland. It was written and eventually published in Japan at the request of the Japanese emperor in the early eighteenth century. The book carries a preface composed by the Emperor Reigen dated December 8th, 1705, and we assume that the manuscript editions were produced shortly after that date<sup>7</sup>. The book was intended first and foremost as a record of the circumstances surrounding an oracle made through the medium of spirit-writing.

7 The *Kokusho sōmokuoku* (Union Catalogue of National [Japanese] Books) vol. 6, 69 lists a four complete manuscripts, and several fragmentary texts. I am fairly certain that one of those complete editions, of 1783, is, in fact, a block print. The edition of the *Tōzui hen* to which all references pertain is the manuscript copy in three fascicles held in the Japanese National Diet Library in Tokyo. I have referred to the authors, the title of the article, its number in the sequence of articles, its fascicle (A,B,C) and the page number in the fascicle. The page numbering is my own as the original is not numbered. In the footnotes, the *Tōzui hen* will be abbreviated as *TZH*. Although I have given the names of the Japanese authors in Japanese pronunciation and the Chinese authors in Chinese pronunciation. The titles of the articles are all given in Chinese pronunciation.

This oracle predicted the Emperor Reigen's birth two years before it actually occurred. The oracle had been pronounced by the Daoist immortal Chen Tuan, or Chen Bo, as he had come to be known, and given to the Buddhist monk Yinyuan longqi before the latter undertook a journey to Japan. The Emperor had become aware of this oracle via indirect channels and was intrigued by the idea that a supernatural being in far-off China had known of his own birth before it happened. Thus he commissioned several followers of Yinyuan, by then recognized as members of the new Ōbaku school of Zen Buddhism<sup>8</sup>, to write what they knew of the oracle and of the process of spirit-writing in general. The book was edited by the imperial councillor, Kadenokoji Akimitsu and contained thirty-five articles from fourteen different writers including several Ōbaku monks of both Chinese and Japanese birth, an imperial prince and the Immortal Chen Tuan himself. The material included in the various articles is as heterogeneous as the authors. There are, among other things, eyewitness accounts of the seance during which the oracle was received, hear-say accounts of the same, an extensive biography of the Immortal Chen Tuan, and a report of a dream in which Chen had visited one of the imperial princes.

*The Invitation to go to Japan*

In the sixth month (July-August) of 1651 the monk Yelan xinggui set off from Xiamen (Amoy) on a journey which was intended to take him to Nagasaki where he was to take up the position of abbot of the Sofuku Temple<sup>9</sup>. This temple was one of three major Buddhist establishments in Nagasaki which served the spiritual needs of the local Chinese merchant community. Unfortunately for Yelan, the ship in which he was travelling was wrecked and he and his followers were all drowned. This tragedy left the Sofuku Temple still without an abbot. After some consideration, it

8 In 1662, with the official opening ceremonies for the base temple of Ōbaku, the Manpukuji, Ōbaku was recognized as a faction of the Rinzai Sect of Zen Buddhism. See Hirakubō Akira, *Ingen*. Tokyo: 1962, 141. The sect was not officially known as the Ōbaku Sect, *Ōbaku Shu* until much later, in 1874. See Abe Zenryō, "Ōbakuzan no kaisō to Ōbaku bunka" in *Manpukuji (Kōji junrei-9-Kyōto)*. Kyōto: 1977, 90.

9 See Hirakubō, *Ingen*, 78.

was decided to extend an invitation to Yelan's master, Yinyuan<sup>10</sup>. Thus, on 13 May, 1652 a letter was sent to Yinyuan asking him to consider filling the position originally offered to his disciple. The letter carried the names of thirteen members of the Chinese community and the Japanese military administration.

To have made such an invitation was in many ways extraordinary. Yinyuan was a monk of some considerable repute in China, having studied with the masters Miyun, and Feiyin who traced their doctrinal lineage to the Tang Dynasty Chan master Linji, founder of the Linji school of Chan (*Rinzai zen* in Japanese pronunciation). In 1637, at the age of 46 *sui*, Yinyuan had been recognized by Feiyin as his official successor in the Linji line of transmission<sup>11</sup>. In collaboration with his teacher, Yinyuan had taken part in a major revival of Mount Huangbo as a centre of Buddhist activity. During his terms as abbot of the Wanfu Monastery<sup>12</sup>, Yinyuan had initiated a program of rebuilding to restore extensive damage done when pirates had sacked it in the century before<sup>13</sup>. At the time when Yinyuan received the first letter of invitation to go to Japan he was sixty-one *sui* and had been abbot of the Wanfu Temple for seven years. As abbot of a major temple and acknowledged successor in a prestigious line of doctrinal transmission, he was not an obvious candidate for relocation to the remote trading outpost that Nagasaki must have seemed at the time. The motivation behind the invitation may well have been a desire to revive Zen Buddhism in Japan with an infusion of prestige and spiritual authority earlier provided by Chinese masters such as the venerable Daoyuan (Dōgen) (1200-1253), founder of the Japanese Sōtō Sect of Zen, and Lanxi (Rankei, 1213-1278) who had introduced the Rinzai teachings into Japan in the thirteenth century.

10 Hirakubō, *ibid.*, 79.

11 *ibid.*, 33.

12 Yinyuan first took up the abbotship of the temple in 1637, after Feiyin had retired and moved to another temple. In the spring of 1644 he withdrew from Wanfu Temple to join Feiyin at a temple in Zhejiang. After residing at a number of different temples in Zhejiang and Fujian, Yinyuan returned to become abbot at Mount Huangbo in the first month of 1646. See Hirakubō, *ibid.*, 36-37, and 54.

13 See (Qianlong) *Fuzhou fuzhi*, (Gazetteer of Fuzhou) Xu Jingxi et al. ed., 1754, 16b.27a: [quoting from the *Mindu ji* "At the beginning of the Dynasty (Ming) it (the temple) was rebuilt. In the Jiaqing era (1522-1566) it was again raised by *Wo* (Japanese?) pirates." Hirakubō, using the temple gazetteer for the Wanfu Temple, states that it was in 1555 that most of the temple was burned. See Hirakubō, *Ingen*, 39. For more details on the rebuilding process, see Hirakubō, *ibid.*, 40-57.

*The Oracle:*

The decision to undertake the perilous sea journey to far-off Japan was not one to be taken lightly, especially considering the fate of the earlier expedition. Thus we should not find it surprising that Yinyuan sought divine guidance in making his decision. What is somewhat surprising, however, is that the authority to which Yinyuan appealed was not the Buddha or a Bodhisattva, but rather the Daoist immortal Chen Tuan.

It seems that sometime in 1652, Yinyuan made the short trip from his temple at Mount Huangbo to nearby Mount Shizhu for the purpose of consulting with Chen Tuan. Chen had made the Observatory of the Nine Immortals on Mount Shizhu his centre of operations in the Fuzhou area and Yinyuan often went there to communicate with him. As Chen Tuan had become an immortal or transcendent spirit in 989 A.D. and no longer made himself physically manifest in the world, Yinyuan conversed with him through the medium of spirit-writing. Yinyuan was, as usual, accompanied by several of his disciples. It is through these men, and one in particular, Gaoquan xingdun, that the Emperor Reigen learned of Chen Tuan's oracle<sup>14</sup>.

The details of the seance during which the oracle was pronounced are dispersed among a number of articles in the *Tōzui hen*, but it is possible to reconstruct the general course of events. It seems that after the medium had prepared the ritual area and entered his trance<sup>15</sup>, Yinyuan proposed a question to Chen, saying; "This old monk has recently received an invitation from Japan. I do not know if the Buddhist *Dharma* can be put into practice there or not." The Immortal replied; "It can! However, when you first get there do not use the stick (i.e. the stick carried by Chan masters for the purpose of rebuking students) for I fear that there may be those among the common people who do not know what it means. If the Master leaves now [his arrival] will correspond with a new emperor appearing in the world. In later times the Way will be much practised." Thereupon he composed a *gātha* which said<sup>16</sup>;

14 Aside from Gaoquan, we know that the monk Nanyuan xingpai was also present at the seance. See Dazhong daogui, *Chen bo mingbian*, (Discussion of Chen Bo's Name) *TZH* #9, A. 31-32.

15 For a description of the manner in which the spirits were summoned to the seance see Appendix.

16 The previous passage is paraphrased or quoted from Gaoquan's *Xianshi fayu* (Sermon on Matters of the Transcendent) *TZH* #2, A. 2-5.

The yellow roots may be all eaten but the teeth are not cold  
 Thus one knows that under the circumstances there is a pass for  
 Chan  
 On the first day three thousand peach buds come forth  
 To await a feast in the company of the Perfected one<sup>17</sup>.

Chen then promised that if Yinyuan did undertake the sea journey he would order his disciple, Guiya zi to accompany and protect him. Guiya zi, we are told, was the fabulous golden turtle-dragon of the Northern Sea. After Chen had finished writing the monks saw clear water gushing out of an alms bowl and onto the mat. This may have been meant to demonstrate Chen Tuan's mastery over water<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the cryptic nature of the *gāthā*, this pronouncement was taken as an unequivocal affirmation of the virtue of accepting the invitation to go to Japan. Chen Tuan had also given his guarantee that the journey would be a safe one. It appears, however, that there were other considerations to be made as more than two years passed before Yinyuan boarded a ship bound for Nagasaki. When he did eventually disembark from Quanzhou, in the summer of 1654, the reliability of at least some of Chen Tuan's predictions was soon proven. According to an official chronicle of Yinyuan's life, gigantic sea creatures numbering several myriad accompanied the boat as it sailed along. These creatures were assumed to be under the charge of Guiya zi, Chen Tuan's oceanic disciple<sup>19</sup>.

*The Religious Landscape around Mount Huangbo:*

Although it would be interesting to follow Yinyuan and his disciples to Japan and to trace the history behind the actual text of the *Tōzui hen*, those are perhaps subjects best dealt with in another study. Suffice it to note that the fact that the Emperor Reigen was born some two months before Yinyuan's arrival was taken as partial fulfillment of Chen Tuan's

17 See *Songxing chenshi* (Oracular Poem on Departure) *TZH* #1, A. 1.

18 This is reported as hearsay from the words of Yinyuan and Gaoquan by Gatsutan dōchō. See *Xian mingzi yi*, (The Meaning of the Transcendent's Name) *TZH* #10, A. 37-38.

19 See Changxi xingyan *Huangbo kaishan puzhao guoshi nianpu*, (Annals of the Illustrious Founder of the Ōbaku Sect) C.2b. Also *Xian mingzi yi* *TZH* #10, A. 38.



oracle. When news of the oracle eventually reached the Japanese imperial family sufficient interest was taken in the affair that a book about the oracle, about Chen Tuan and about spirit-writing in general was commissioned. This was the origin of the *Tōzui hen*.

Leaving Japan and the fate of Ōbaku Zen and returning to Fuzhou we must set the geo-religious stage for the spirit-writing activities on and around Mount Huangbo. It seems that the area southeast of Fuzhou city where Mount Huangbo was located had a long tradition of religious activity, both Buddhist and Daoist. Legend recalls that during the reign of the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (reigned 140-87 B.C.) the nine He Brothers came to the Fuzhou area and eventually attained immortality there. They are said to have ridden a carp as they made their ascent to the heavens from a mountain southwest of Fuzhou city. This mountain was consequently named Nine Immortal Mountain. The He Brothers were also reputed to have spent time on mountains in Fuqing Prefecture where Mount Huangbo was located. Mount Shizhu, where Yinyuan received the oracle from Chen Tuan, was believed to be one of their favourite wandering places. The mountain had a number of locations associated with the He Brothers, but perhaps the most significant of all was the Purple-cloud Grotto. This grotto, like similar cavities on other mountains, was looked upon as the entrance to a subterranean heaven. If the properly initiated entered the magic confines of Purple-cloud Grotto they could find a divine realm in which immortals and Daoist initiates dwelt. According to Wang Shimao, the scholar-poet to whom we owe much of our acquaintance with the Fuzhou region of the Ming period, some unknown person had inscribed the characters *Peng hu* in "grass script" at the entrance to Purple-cloud Grotto, thus equating it with the transcendent isle in the Eastern Sea<sup>20</sup>.

Beside the Purple-cloud Grotto was built a Daoist temple dedicated to the He Brothers called the Nine Immortal Tower, or Observatory. This was considered to be their "detached palace" (*ligong*). Local tradition held that the He's divided their time between Nine-carp Mountain and Mount Shizhu. In the autumn they would reside on the former summit, and during the spring they held court on the latter. It seems that at least since the Song Dynasty the He's had held the reputation of being highly responsive to requests for oracles. These they generally gave in the form of dreams.

20 *Peng hu* was an alternative name for Mount Penglai, one of the three magic island-mountains in the Eastern Sea.

Thus it was that during the spring, people from far and wide came to Mount Shizhu to pray to the He brothers for dream oracles<sup>21</sup>. Precisely what was involved in dream divination is not clear from our sources, but it is apparent that since the presence of the spirits was felt most strongly at that particular sacred location and during a particular season, those requiring divine guidance had to make a pilgrimage in order to receive help from the spirits.

It is possible, indeed probable, that apart from visiting people in dreams, the He Brothers also occasionally took possession of spirit mediums who temporarily gave their bodies up to the use of spirits who wished to communicate with mortal humans. Spirit-mediumship had been exceedingly widespread in Fujian from very early times. It allowed a very direct, if less private, means of learning the wisdom of those dwelling in the various supra-mundane realms. Sometime during the Ming Dynasty a further means of communicating with certain spirits was introduced into the Fujian area. This new technology added a new dimension to the presence of the He Brothers at Mount Shizhu. It was sometime prior to the beginning of the 17th century that one of the brothers, known as He Zhen, or Perfected He, became known for his ability to communicate with mundane humans through messages written with the *ji*. Although this meant that the spirit could not manifest his likeness to ordinary humans as he did in their dreams, it allowed him to demonstrate his talents in different areas. Spirit-writing had, since its inception during the Song dynasty, involved the composition of poetry and other literary forms. *Fuji* spirits were, thus, expected to compose verse and Perfected He was able to do this with great ease. Furthermore, since a writing brush could be mounted on the *ji* the spirit was able to write out his poems and responses using his own calligraphy. Because of his skill in this art he was frequently called upon to write all manner of plaques and inscriptions to be placed at the doorways to temples, houses and business establishments. Perfected He was also adept at painting portraits. His paintings of the local luminary

21 See *Gujin tushu jicheng, Fujian shanjing*, (Classic of Fujian Mountains) 9a, quoting *Mindu ji* "When the people of Min (Fuzhou) wish to pray for a dream, in the autumn they go to Nine-carp Lake, in the spring they go to Mount Shizhu. Shizhu is the detached palace of the Nine Carp (He Brothers). It is the place of their vernal government." According to tradition, the He's were very responsive to requests for favours and especially for dream oracles. See also *Fuzhou fuzhi* 6/57a, comm.



and Huangbo patron, Ye Xianggao<sup>22</sup>, and of the Bodhisattva Guanyin were of special renown.

The audience for this kind of spirit-writing was, naturally, very limited. Only those who could read and understand poetry and ornate prose, that is to say, members of the literate elite, might effectively take part in *fuji* seances. Among these men (and, rarely, women) poetry and classical prose were the most important means of communication and social intercourse. The ability to compose in these forms was, therefore, one of the prerequisites for membership in this social group. It follows, then, that spirits who could employ the written word, particularly in the form of poetry or ornate prose, similarly distinguished themselves as a kind of divine literary elite. Their literary skills made them superior to non-literate spirits who took possession of the village mediums. These skills also allowed them to enter into dialogues with earth-bound literati. Thus, with the rise in popularity of *fuji* in the area around Mount Shizhu, He Zhen and certain of his fellow transcendents not only achieved higher status in the spiritual hierarchy of the time, they entered into the social world of the literati.

*Chen Tuan in Fuzhou:*

Among the other spirits who frequented the planchette in the Fuzhou area during the late Ming Dynasty was the former Daoist adept Chen Tuan. Chen Tuan had lived in the mortal world during the period of transition between the Tang and Song dynasties. After he left the mundane realm and entered the ranks of the transcendents in the late tenth century<sup>23</sup> he seems to have maintained contact with the world of men through spirit-writing<sup>24</sup>. According to the monks of Mount Huangbo, Chen had

22 Concerning Ye Xianggao see L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, ed., *Dictionary of Ming Biography: 1368-1644*. New York: 1976, Vol. II, 1567-1569.

23 The traditional date for Chen's transcendancy is 989 A.D. See Li Zhi *Zangshu* (Undisclosed Writings), reprint Taipei: 1974, 67.1125.

24 Xu Dishan locates at least one reference to *fuji* contact with Chen Tuan in an early Ming source, the *Qixiu leigao* (Compendium of Examples of the Seven Disciplines) of Lang Ying. The area in which the contact took place was the Nanking region. See Xu, 23-24.

moved to the Fuzhou area some fifty years prior to Yinyuan's journey to Japan<sup>25</sup>. From that time onwards his reputation among the literati and the monks of the region grew rapidly until it is apparent he was more sought after than the He brothers.

The reason for Chen Tuan's rise in popularity among the literate population of the area in and around Fuzhou seems related to two main factors. The first was the appearance of a medium who was especially skilled at *fuji* and who claimed a special relationship with Chen Tuan. The second was the hagiographic or mythic reputation of Chen Tuan as a being of extraordinary ability.

In the minds of our monkish informants, the presence of the transcendent Chen Tuan at Mount Shizhu was closely linked to the art of a mortal by the name of Zheng. Master Zheng, as he was generally known, was originally from Fuzhou but he had gone to Nanking with a group of eighteen others in order to study techniques of spirit-writing. There he learned the techniques which allowed him to convey the words of a spirit-immortal like Chen Tuan.

We may surmise that Master Zheng was not a lower-class village medium but rather came from a relatively well-to-do family. The trip to Nanking as well as his board and tuition in the city would have amounted to a considerable expense, beyond the means of the average peasant or artisan. The Huangbo monks indirectly reinforce this assumption when they refer to Master Zheng by the title of Daoist Priest (*yushi*), and by the rather impressive-sounding "Man of the Way, Zheng of the Three Mountains (i.e. Fuzhou)"<sup>26</sup>. It is unlikely that such respect would have been accorded to anyone not in possession of a solid education as well as the appropriate social manners. In any case, there is no question that Master Zheng enjoyed friendly relations with the higher ranking monks at Mount Huangbo and with the literati in general. In the course of those relations he was able to introduce his familiar, Chen Tuan, into the upper crust of Fuzhou society.

25 In the words of Gatsutan; "... At the end of the Ming and beginning of the Qing, [Chen Tuan] went to teach in southern Min. Although he did not show his form or likeness, he descended to the planchette and manifested his spirit. It is not easy to fathom!" See *Xianming ziyi*, TZH #10, A.34.

26 See Gaoquan, *Jiangxian jitan*, (Chronicled Discourse on Calling the Transcendent) TZH #20, B.50. I have included a translation of Gaoquan's description of the method used by Master Zheng in the *Appendix*.

*Chen Tuan in History and Legend:*

The hagiographic image of Chen Tuan, and the reason that such an image made him an especially suitable spirit for literati and high-ranking monks to converse with are much more difficult to assess. Our historical knowledge of his life is rather scarce<sup>27</sup>. He supposedly was born in the latter half of the 9th century in Honan – allegedly in the very place where the venerable Laozi had come from. Between the years 900 and 930 he spent much time wandering around the famous mountains, presumably seeking instructions in various Daoist arts from rusticated and learned masters. During this time he stayed for a long while on Mount Wudang in Hunan, where he practised Daoist techniques of meditation and gymnastics, as well as dietetics and breathing exercises.

Probably in the early 940's Chen Tuan settled on Mount Hua in Shanxi. There he took care to restore an ancient Daoist settlement which had fallen into disrepair during the restless and destructive last years of the Tang dynasty. It was on Mount Hua that he spent the rest of his life, save for a number of short trips, including two to the capital. This last sojourn was a long one as he reputedly died only in 989, at the impressive age of 118 *sui*<sup>28</sup>.

Chen's two verifiable trips to the imperial court came in 956 and 984. On the former occasion he met with Zhou Shizong. Shizong asked him about the practice of alchemy, possibly with a view to filling the imperial treasury with synthetic gold or silver. Chen replied that he regrettably knew nothing of such matters. On the latter occasion he had an audience with Song Taizong. Because Chen made favourable remarks about the fashion of Taizong's government he was awarded the honorary title *Xiyi xiansheng*, "Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible," a reference drawn from ch. 14 of the *Daode jing*.

Chen Tuan's methods of prognostication were naturally based on his achievement of a state of 'oneness' with the Dao. However, when he formulated his predictions he frequently had recourse to the philosophy

27 For a detailed study and translation of most of the stories concerning Chen Tuan, see Livia Knaul, *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981.

28 There is a strong likelihood that this age is exaggerated, especially since it is a multiple of the auspicious number nine. For this reason I would be inclined to place his date of birth somewhere in the early tenth century rather than the late ninth.

of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes). In this connection he is supposed to have been the originator of the famous *Taiji tu* (Diagram of the Great Ultimate). It is said that he passed this diagram and its supporting philosophy down to a certain Chong Fang, from whom it was transmitted to Shao Yong who in turn conveyed it to Zhou Dunyi, thus making a line of transmission directly to the heart of Neo-Confucianism<sup>29</sup>.

The earliest accounts of Chen Tuan's life integrate historical notes on Chen Tuan's visits to the Song court as well as a number of local anecdotes told about him in the area of Mount Hua<sup>30</sup>. The official history of the Song dynasty, the *Songshi*<sup>31</sup>, completed in 1345, made extensive verbatim use of such sources and other, slightly later works<sup>32</sup>. In the *Songshi* we also find reference to his prognostications concerning the foundation of the Song dynasty and his role in nominating Zhenzong as heir apparent. These stories had appeared earlier only in *biji* literature<sup>33</sup>.

While the authors of the *biji* merely retell attractive stories which they had heard at one time or another, Daoist chroniclers tend systematically to develop the theme of the supernatural aspects of Chen's life. His amazing powers of meditation and the thoroughness of his withdrawal from the world are also described and embellished. The most comprehensive hagiography is the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror Through the Ages of Realized Immortals and Those Who Embody the Dao) by Zhao Daoyi of the early 14th century<sup>34</sup>. This lineage of hagiography

29 For a discussion of this part of Neo-Confucian philosophy and Chen Tuan's role, see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde trans., Princeton: 1953, II.440.

30 See, for example, the *Lequan ji* (Collected works of the Recluse Lequan) by Zhang Fangping (1007-1091) of the year 1078. For a description of this text see Yves Hervouet, *A Sung Bibliography*. Hong Kong: 1978, 385-386.

31 *Songshi*. Peking, 1977, 457.13420seq.

32 Notably the *Dongdu shilue* (Summary of Events in the Eastern Capital) by Wang Cheng and dated to the year 1186. See Hervouet 1978, 89-90.

33 *Biji*, or *suibi* (miscellaneous jottings) such as the *Dongxuan bilu* (Notes from the Eastern Pavilion) by Wei Tai (dated 1091), the *Wenjian qianlu* (Former Record of Things Heard and Seen) by Shao Bowen (1057-1134), the *Yuhu qinghua* (Elegant Sayings of Yuhu) by the Buddhist Wen Ying, (published in 1078), and the *Shengshui yantan lu* (Compilation of Banquet Conversations of the River Sheng) by Wang Pizhi (approximately 1090), all provide us with early anecdotes concerning Chen Tuan. See Hervouet 1978, 101, 102 and 103.

34 See Judith Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*. Berkeley: 1987, 56 regarding this text.

reaches its culmination in the *Huayue zhi* (Gazetteer of Mount Hua) by Li Rong of the year 1831. This text combines the traditional Daoist account with literary quotations from the official sources in the lineage of the *Songshi*.

Chen Tuan's reputation was certainly not limited to religious circles. He continued to draw mention in more secular biographies. Zhu Xi's (1130-1200) *Zhuzi mingchen yanxing lu* (Master Zhu's Collected Anecdotes of Eminent Statesmen), Zhang Duanyi's *Gui er ji* (Collection of Matters Elevating to the Ears), dated 1241-1248, and Li Zhi's *Zangshu*, published in 1599, all contain accounts of Chen's life and legend with particular reference to his relations with the imperial government and members of officialdom. In a somewhat related manner, the *Shihua zonggui* (Collection of Magic Phrases from Poetry Stories) by Ruan Yue (completed 1123) provides early evidence that Chen Tuan was also becoming known as a poet<sup>35</sup>.

In addition to these rather formal sources, popular stories about Chen Tuan are found in certain Yuan dynasty dramas such as the *Sanxing zhao* (Three Stars are Shining), *Bieyou tian* (There is Another World) and *Pantao hui* (Immortality-peach Society). In these plays Chen appears as a soothsayer, as a reclusive Daoist master living in the mountains, and as a heavenly transcendent.

The drama which contains the most detailed portrayal of Chen Tuan is *Chen Tuan gaowo* (The Exalted Sleep of Chen Tuan), by the famous dramatist Ma Zhiyuan (fl. 1252). In this play Chen is first a common soothsayer who, however, has the good fortune (and good sense) to correctly predict the rise of the Song dynasty. In the second act he is seen in a Daoist monastery on Mount Hua. From there he is invited to be the guest of the emperor. The latter presents him with an official honorary title. Later, when Chen Tuan retires to his room at the palace, a young woman presents herself and requests to keep him company. Chen insists that he would rather "sleep," i.e., enter one of his famous meditative trances. The two then spend the night in animated discussion which is joined by a general who happens to pass by. Only after a long exposition of the Dao and its qualities does Chen finally get his rest. He hastens to return to the solitude of his mountain hermitage the following morning.

These dramas probably give us a more accurate idea of the popular image of Chen Tuan during the 13th century than do any of our secular

35 See Hervouet 1978, 449.



or religious biographies. In them we see that Chen was first and foremost a fortune-teller, an accurate evaluator of character and a successful forecaster of destinies; destinies both private and collective. In this respect it was especially his early recognition of the eventual success of the Song dynasty that caused him to be known outside of his immediate surroundings.

Related to this reputation as a fortune-teller was Chen's knowledge of physiognomy, *xiangshu*. This is a method of basing prognostications on the shape and appearance of a person's face and body. In a more abstract sense it is the art of "reading the mind's construction in the face" and also in the body. In the works on physiognomy for which he is given credit<sup>36</sup>, Chen Tuan develops the theory that physiognomy is the recognition of the cosmic processes and agents which are at work in the shaping of actual situations and events. It is through his mastery of this art that he was able to evaluate the *qi*, or cosmic energy, of the future Song emperor and thus predict his fate.

Chen Tuan is also seen as a man with extraordinary grasp of cosmology. In this respect he uses the concepts of the *Yijing* as they have been transmitted and developed over the centuries. This knowledge he integrates with a mastery of various more practical Daoist arts, especially meditation. Chen's manner of meditation is generally described as "sleep" in Daoist texts<sup>37</sup>. In effect, Chen practised a form of "inner alchemy" — the creation of an elixir of immortality within his body through the psychic manipulation of bodily essences. He did this while reclining or lying on his back in a state of deep trance for enormously long periods of time. Among the earliest stories we find a report that he was once "sleeping" in his hermitage in the mountain when a man gathering fire-wood

36 The most important text on the subject of physiognomy attributed to Chen Tuan is the *Fengjian*, (Mirror of Auras). An extensive discussion and translation of this text is found in Livia Kohn's "Mirror of Auras: Chen Tuan on Physiognomy," *Asian Folklore Studies* 47 (1988). Another text attributed to Chen Tuan, the *Shenxiang quanbian* (Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy) has also been studied by Kohn. See "A Textbook of Physiognomy: The Tradition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*," *Asian Folklore Studies* 45 (1986), 227-258.

37 A major discourse of the art of "sleep" meditation is contained in the *Huashan shier shuigong zongjue* (Comprehensive Explanations of the Twelve Methods of Sleep Meditation from Mount Hua). This text has been attributed to Chen Tuan, but was first published during the Ming. It is now contained in Zhou Lujing's *Yimen guangdu* (Broad Archives of the Formless Gate).

came upon him. Mistaking his state for death or near death the man was frightened and woke Chen. The latter was not the least appreciative of the gesture and complained that this "marvelous sleep" had been unnecessarily interrupted. Chen supposedly told an emperor that no palace in the world could compare with his heavenly visions and he is said to have composed songs of praise about his numinous "sleep."

These are the principal strands from which the fabric of Chen Tuan's popular image were woven. There were, however, other minor strands which stand out amid the general pattern. We know, for example, that Chen was a remarkable painter. It is recorded in the official history that the Emperor Zhenzong posthumously rewarded Chen Tuan when he visited the Yuntai Observatory on Mount Hua where the master had formerly lived. It seems that Chen Tuan had painted a number of icons on the walls of the temple. When the Emperor saw these he was so impressed that he exempted the temple from taxation<sup>38</sup>.

As early as the closing years of the Northern Song dynasty Chen Tuan had become known as a prolific poet. The *Songshi*, for example, records that his collected works contained over six hundred poems<sup>39</sup>. As with his older contemporary and putative teacher, Lü Dongbin, there were many later collections of Chen Tuan's poetry. It is quite possible that, as in the case of Lü Dongbin again, these were produced through the medium of spirit-writing. One such collection is mentioned in the *Tōzui hen* as we shall see below. Poetry was more than an artistic pastime among the literati, it was an indispensable part of social intercourse during the traditional period in China. Poems were composed for all occasions; they commemorated everything from casual encounters to important state functions. In the tradition of many renown seers Chen Tuan often used poetry to convey predictions of events to come, but as a literate and well-educated man, Chen Tuan naturally also composed many 'social' poems. A number of anecdotes drawn from hagiographic sources show Chen Tuan in the process of using poetry as a medium of social exchange:

There was once a man called Guo Chen who was staying overnight at Chen Tuan's temple on Mount Hua. In the middle of the night Chen Tuan woke him up and called him to return home quickly. Chen went with him for one or two *li* at which point a man called to them say-

38 See *Songshi*, 457.13422.

39 *Songshi*, 457.13421. The titles of his poetry collections are *Gaoyang ji* and *Diaotan ji*. Neither of these works is extant.



ing that Guo's mother had died. Chen gave Guo some medicine and told him to give it to his mother for it would save her. Guo poured the medicine down his mother's throat and she subsequently returned to life. He was considerably impressed both with Chen Tuan's foresight and with his medical knowledge<sup>40</sup>.

On another occasion, Wang Lu, the local magistrate, said to Master Chen; "You live among the streams and ridges; what chamber do you rest in, who serves as your officer and who is your guard?" When Chen heard this he laughed and responded with a poem:

The lofty places of Mount Hua, these are my palace  
When I go out I traverse the sky and tread the morning wind  
There is no need to lock my tower with an iron chain  
When I return the white clouds always give me their report<sup>41</sup>.

There is also an anecdote which may be related to the story of how Chen refused the intimate company of a lady at the Song court. In this case, Chen had been invited to stay at the court of the emperor Mingzong of the Latter Tang dynasty. After entertaining Chen at court, Mingzong sent three courtesans to Chen's room as a gift. Chen turned down these fleshly offerings with a poem:

Clouds make their fleshly bodies, jade forms their cheeks  
Many thanks to His Royal Highness for sending them forth  
But this rustic scholar does not dream of Wu Gorge  
Tempted for naught by 'clouds and rain,' I descend Yang Tower<sup>42</sup>.

With that our celibate seeker of the Way left the court to continue his studies<sup>43</sup>.

40 See *Lequan ji*, 33.13b, *Songshi* 457.13421, and *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.8a.

41 See Wang Shizhen *Liexian quanzhuan* in *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan*. Shanghai: 1961, 7.3b and *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.8b-9a.

42 This is an allusion to the romantic and sexual encounters between King Xiang of the ancient state of Chu and the goddess of Wu Mountain. 'Clouds and rain' is, of course, the standard euphemism for sexual intercourse. The Yang Tower was where the liaison between King Xiang and the Goddess took place. See Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman*. San Francisco: 1973, 1980, 43-48 for a discussion of this myth.

43 This particular anecdote is found in Li Zhi's *Zangshu*, 67.1123.

Poetry also played a major part in Chen Tuan's relations with other Daoist immortals. We are told that the famous adept Lü Dongbin often went to visit Chen Tuan and the two would always exchange poems. On one occasion on a spring day Chen was walking by a stream on Mount Hua when he encountered Hu Gong, Chisong zi and Lü Dongbin<sup>44</sup>. A local earth spirit was kind enough to give the group a bowl of fruit and a pitcher of wine. When they had all become moderately drunk they each composed a poem<sup>45</sup>. In another instance the immortal Li Qi is said to have initiated his friendship with Chen Tuan by sending him a poem. Li Qi wrote his poem in red ink on green paper and had a young boy carry it to Chen Tuan. Chen responded with a poem and they were like old friends thereafter<sup>46</sup>.

Considering this past, albeit legendary, history of versifying, it is natural that after he moved to Mount Huangbo Chen Tuan should continue to compose poems and to employ them in his social relations. One of the monks who had witnessed Chen's spirit-writing notes; "The Master (Chen) was originally good at poetry and prose. His [compositions] always reach to the heart. Poems, long and short, fill the scrolls [of his collected works]. He often sang (i.e. composed poetry) in harmony with those on Mount Huangbo who valued knowledge. His were all works to startle the world [with their quality and content]"<sup>47</sup>. It appears that Chen Tuan composed such startling verse frequently enough during his stay at Mount Shizhu to warrant a new collection of works. This collection was called *Muyan ji*, or the *Wooded Ridge Collection*, taking its title from his nickname at Mount Shizhu, *Muyan sou*, Old Man of the Wooded Ridge. Yinyuan and Gaoquan both had copies of this book but only Gaoquan seems to have taken his with him to Japan.

We may assume that to the majority of those living in and around the mountains of Fuqing Chen Tuan was known primarily for his 'technical' abilities in divination or medicine, but to the highly literate and scholarly monks of the monastery on Mount Huangbo his mastery of poetry, paint-

44 Hu Gong and Chisong zi were also famous Daoist Immortals.

45 See Li Zhi, *Zang shu*, 67.1125. All of the poems end with the couplet:

When we meet other people none speaks of human affairs  
Smiling, we point to the white clouds that come and go.

46 See Kadenokoji, *Chenxian guangzhuan*, (Comprehensive Biography of Transcendent Chen) TZH #34, B.34. Kadenokoji is quoting from the *Yuhu qinghua*, however, this passage is not found in the versions of this work which I consulted.

47 See Dazhong, *Chen bo mingbian*, TZH #9, A.32-33.

ing and calligraphy were considered more worthy of admiration. It was through his virtuosity in these skills that Chen was able to gain entry into the most elite level of the monastic society and achieve a very special relationship with monks like Yinyuan and Gaoquan.

*Chen Tuan's Friendship with Yinyuan:*

It was to be expected that Chen Tuan and Yinyuan should have established a friendship. Since 1631, when he was forty *sui*, Yinyuan had divided his time between monasteries on Mount Huangbo and on Lion Ridge (*Shizi yan*) in his home prefecture. Both of these places were very close to Mount Shizhu where Chen Tuan made his residence<sup>48</sup>. Yinyuan clearly was interested in spirit-writing and took advantage of this proximity to visit Chen Tuan's temple on Mount Shizhu. The medium, Master Zheng, also made frequent visit to Yinyuan's monasteries, accompanied by his numinous familiar.

The monk and the immortal must easily have recognized special qualities in each other. Yinyuan was an ambitious and talented Buddhist cleric destined to become abbot of the major temple in the region. Chen Tuan was a Daoist immortal who possessed an impressive ability to forecast the future and whose services had formerly been sought by emperors. Both stood out from the ranks of their peers and thus naturally drew attention to themselves. Although we have no clear chronology of the development of this friendship, the monk Fayun recalls that there was one particular occasion on which Yinyuan earned Chen Tuan's lasting respect. Chen had descended to the planchette while Yinyuan was in attendance. This presented an opportunity for a dialogue to develop between the two. Yinyuan presented a number of poetic compositions for Chen's appreciation. The latter was very impressed and in response composed a poem using the rhymes of one of Yinyuan's poems on the theme of living in the mountains. He also went on to compose poems in the style of the Tang dynasty founder of the Huangbo monastery, the Chan priest Huangbo xiyun. These gestures were symbolic of respect and admiration for Yinyuan and his religion. From that time forward Chen Tuan is said to have placed great faith in Yinyuan.

48 See *Fujian tongzhi*, 6.4a. Lion Ridge was, in fact, directly adjoined to Mount Shizhu.

As this friendship continued it became more intimate and informal. The two men engaged in exchanges in which both had the opportunity to demonstrate their talent and cleverness. One day when Chen Tuan descended to Mount Huangbo, Yinyuan went to see him and wrote a *lianju* couplet for him<sup>49</sup>. Chen responded by completing the couplet in imitation of Yinyuan's idea. Yinyuan in turn wrote a poem making fun of Chen's efforts. The latter admitted defeat and composed a complimentary poem using Yinyuan's rhymes<sup>50</sup>. There were many other occasions when the two carried on dialogues in poetry and sometimes Yinyuan would even pay Chen Tuan the compliment of allowing him to correct his poems<sup>51</sup>. Because Chen was highly enlightened and held the *Dharma* in great veneration, these poetic exchanges were often supplemented with discussions of spiritual truth. The level of mutual understanding achieved between Chen and Yinyuan was so perfect as to constitute a kind of "transcendental camaraderie (*fangwai zhiyou*)"<sup>52</sup>.

Perhaps the most interesting episode in the relationship of Yinyuan and Chen Tuan began during a seance on Huangbo when Yinyuan was not initially present. This incident is reported by Gatsutan:

"One day Master Zheng (the medium) went to Mount [Huang]bo. Gaoquan and a number of others ordered him to invite the spirit. When the spirit descended he wrote poems or determined the auspiciousness of various affairs of concern to the monks. At that time there was in the Old Patriarch's (Yinyuan's) community an old monk whose name was Zizu (Self-satisfied). He lived in the Wansong hermitage. He was almost seven feet tall and had a nature that was especially rigid and direct. It so happened that he had come out from the hermitage and seen the monks gathered around to invite the spirit. He was not pleased by this and said to himself; "Where have these idle spirits and vulgar ghosts come from to deceive and confuse this Chan congregation?" The spirit knew what he thought and wrote a poem which said:

It's said he is tall, but he doesn't reach a *zhang*  
 To call himself wealthy would be to boast  
 Like an old bony ox  
 His body is laden with iron chains.

49 The intention of *lianju* couplets is that they must be completed or continued by someone other than the original author.

50 See Dasui daogui, *Chenshi zhishuo* (Explanation of the Oracular Poem), TZH #12, A. 41.

51 See *Chen bo mingbian*, TZH #9, A.32.

52 See *Chenshi zhishuo*, TZH #12, A.41.

The planchette moved and shook as though it were angry as it continued to write; "In the next three days I will release a tiger and order it to eat [someone]." The congregation saw this but did not understand which person it pertained to. They took the matter to Yinyuan, who laughed and said; "This must have to do with Zizu. I suspect that he must have maligned the spirit. Thereupon he called Zizu to ask about the affair. It was as he had thought. Yinyuan said; "The spirit is extremely clever and quickly knew what was in your mind. How could you be so disrespectful and rude. You must quickly apologize." Zizu apologized. The spirit said "If he wasn't such an old monk I wouldn't have been inclined to forgive him." Yinyuan said to the spirit; "You are kind and compassionate and exhort people to abstain from killing. How could you wish to release a tiger to eat someone just because of his slander?" The spirit replied; "I only wanted to frighten him, that's all!"<sup>53</sup>

Here we find Yinyuan actually rebuking Chen Tuan for apparently not behaving according to the moral principles he himself advocated. In doing this Yinyuan assumes the role of religious instructor to his friend, the True Immortal Chen. From this it is evident that although Chen Tuan received the respect and patronage of the Huangbo monks, including Yinyuan, he did not occupy a position of unimpeachable authority. The general tenor of his relationship with Yinyuan indicates that, despite his supernatural abilities at prognostication, Chen Tuan must have been envisioned as more or less a social peer of the abbot.

#### *Chen Tuan and Gaoquan:*

Yinyuan was not the only one to develop a close personal relationship with Chen Tuan. Gaoquan was even more interested in the arts of the planchette than his teacher and he actively engaged Chen Tuan and other immortals in communication through that medium. At the Wanfu Temple Gaoquan had not occupied a position of such great prestige as Yinyuan. This was no doubt due in large part to his lack of seniority, he was only twenty *sui* in 1552 when Yinyuan received the prophesy concerning his trip to Japan. Gaoquan had, however, exhibited considerable potential at that early age, especially as a poet. Even at the tender age of seventeen he had garnered praise from older scholars and members of the gentry who saw fit to make him gifts of their own verse. Gaoquan wrote in all the important forms: five and seven character metres; old style and "new"

53 Gatsutan, *Xian mingzi yi*, TZh #10, A.36-37.



regulated verse. He liked to refer to his poems as his “literary Chan” (*wenzi chan*), and it was said of him that though he did not seek to embellish his style, his diction was naturally fine and elegant. This poetic gift was further complimented by considerable talent as a calligrapher. After he travelled to Japan he often published collections of his verse in fine bindings. These enjoyed wide circulation and popularity<sup>54</sup>.

Gaoquan frequently accompanied Yinyuan to spirit-writing sessions and may have developed an interest in the spirits of the *ji* through his teacher. He had been with Yinyuan when Chen Tuan forecast favourable conditions for the abbot’s trip to Japan. Because Gaoquan was only twenty at that time, his presence at Yinyuan’s side may have been a sign that his talent had received the Master’s recognition. In 1661, Gaoquan was the one chosen to convey felicitations from the abbot of the Wanfu Temple at Huangbo to Yinyuan on the occasion of the old monk’s seventieth birthday. This may be taken as further evidence that Gaoquan had been a favourite with his old teacher.

Gaoquan’s accomplishments as a student of religion and as a poet did not go unnoticed by the spirits of the empyrean regions. The reason for this is explained in a story retold by the monk Dazhong daogui: It seems that a certain Wang Xiaolian, an official of the imperial academy, was passing by the house of another academician, Ye Xianggao. The Ye family was in the midst of a seance in which the Perfected He of the Purple Grotto (He Zhen) had descended to the *ji*. Master He wrote a poem and asked Wang Xiaolian to convey it to Gaoquan. Wang was taken aback and said to the spirit, “[Gao]quan is at Huangbo and has never met you. How do you know him?” The Perfected replied, “Of old I was a friend of his in the purple clouds. He was born [again] to complete his spiritual endowment (literally, ‘his bones of the Way’), but I fear he may end up by falling [permanently] into the dusty world. Thus I have written this poem to send to him.” When Gaoquan received the poem he responded with a quatrain, using the same rhymes as Master He, thanking his old friend for reminding him of his life before his present incarnation. Dazhong observes that we must conclude from this that Gaoquan “did not come forth [into this incarnation] from the state of *Prajñā* (wisdom) or through the cultivation of virtuous behavior (as a Buddhist *deva* or *arhat* might have), he

54 See Dazhong, *Xianpi shixu* (Preface to Poems Criticized by the Transcendent), TZH #28, C.29-30.

proceeded from a position among the divine transcendents”<sup>55</sup>. This perhaps explains Gaoquan’s lifelong preoccupation with spirit-writing.

Aside from being old friends with the Perfected He, Gaoquan was also on exceptionally close terms with Chen Tuan. Once when Gaoquan was attending a session of spirit-writing with Yinyuan, Chen Tuan, probably in response to a silent request made by Gaoquan, wrote out a *ci* poem which read:

A mirror in the centre of the sky the moon rises  
In quiet sadness, he does not find recognition in the worldly realm  
His cloud-heart would become a constant friend of the mountains  
With a song he attends to the teachings and completes his destiny<sup>56</sup>.

He then went on to write another couplet of a similar nature:

In the picture there is a single form, do you know who it is?  
The blossoms which await the snow to bloom are moved to the rear<sup>57</sup>.

Gaoquan received these poems with pleasure and in relation to the latter couplet proclaimed; “The immortal has made a prophesy. I fear that those who see it will not understand what it means, but when the time comes it will all be made known.” In fact, it seems that by the time the *Tōzui hen* was compiled the prophesy’s time had not yet come as the explanation offered by Gaoquan’s disciples is rather strained at best<sup>58</sup>. Some time later, on New Year’s Day of 1661 to be exact, Chen Tuan visited a dream upon Gaoquan. In the dream Gaoquan was floating on the sea in a wooden

55 *TZH* #28, C.28-29. Gatsutan points out, immortals (*xian*) are equivalent to the *Rṣi* of the classical Buddhist scriptures and they inhabit a realm above men but below the *devas*. They follow a variety of regimes but if they do not practice *samādhi*, or meditation, they are sent down to the realm of men. See Gatsutan, *Xianshi huowen*, *TZH* #22, B.63-66. The theme of Gaoquan’s life in the Immortal realms was re-invoked after his death by Konoe Iehiro in his stele inscription for the monk. Konoe notes that three days after the death of Gaoquan’s earthly form, his lips were still red, his hands soft and his facial complexion was as if he were still living. Konoe Iehiro, *Bukkoku zenshi kōsen ōshō hai*, in *Shodō zenshū*, vol. 22, inset.

56 See Dazhong, *Xianpi shixu*, *TZH* #28, C.28.

57 *ibid*.

58 See Gatsutan, *Zengshi jieyi* (Explaining the Meaning of the Bequest of the Poem), *TZH* #31, C.41-43 and Dasui, *Chenju jieyi* (Explaining the Meaning of the Oracular Lines), *TZH* #32, C.43-47.



bowl. When the bowl reached the shore a voice from the sky announced, "This is Japan!" It was immediately after this that he was asked to take birthday wishes to Yinyuan in Japan<sup>59</sup>.

Poetry played a large part in Gaoquan's dealings with Chen Tuan and other planchette spirits. We have already noted how he exchanged poems with both Chen Tuan and the Perfected He. On at least one occasion he even asked Chen to go over manuscripts of his poems and to suggest corrections. Chen did this by adding notes and addenda directly to Gaoquan's copy. Gaoquan was naturally honoured to be paid such a compliment and carefully preserved the manuscripts carrying the immortal's extraordinary calligraphy. When he travelled to Japan he took one such manuscript with him. Perhaps he hoped to show this prize to his old master, Yinyuan.

This manuscript, which comprised roughly one hundred poems written on about twenty sheets of paper, eventually found its way into the hands of the Emperor Reigen who was thrilled with it<sup>60</sup>. The Emperor marvelled that he should have the opportunity of examining a text produced by the Immortal Chen. The Ōbaku monks had of course told him that he had a special cosmic relationship with Chen Tuan and that is why Chen was able to forecast his birth so accurately. Interestingly, it seems that it was Chen's calligraphy which most impressed him. Upon seeing the manuscript he is reported to have exclaimed, "This is a thing very rarely to be obtained, like a rare udumbara flower<sup>61</sup>. Although it is true that I have had a miraculous relationship with the Divine Immortal, if it had not been for the monk Gaoquan's coming to Japan, how could I have ever seen such calligraphy!?"

Reigen decided to have the manuscript divided into two equal parts and mounted on silk. He then ordered the famous calligrapher, Konoe

59 See Konoe Iehiro, *Bukkoku zenshi kōsen ōshō hai*. Also see Dazhong, *Xianpi shixu*, TZH #28, C.28.

60 Gaoquan had given it to his disciple Dazhong daogui for safe-keeping. Later Dazhong showed this to Prince Shinkei who in turn told the Emperor. When the Emperor heard of this precious example of the Immortal Chen's handwriting, he requested also to see it. Dazhong thus presented it to him. This took place in the autumn of 1698, some three years after Gaoquan's death. See Dazhong, *Xianpi shixu*, TZH #28, C.30-32.

61 *ibid.*, C.31. The udumbara flower is referred to in the Lotus Sutra. It was produced by a tree which usually brought forth fruit without blossoming. The blossoms appeared only once every three thousand years.

Iehiro, to inscribe the head and foot of each piece. Konoe also commented on the great beauty of the immortal's brush-work, speculating that Chen was able to command such technique, "because the pneuma (*qi*) he generated while traversing the sky and treading the emptiness has overflowed onto the paper"<sup>62</sup>. The Emperor kept one of the two scrolls in the imperial archives and returned the other to the Bukkoku Temple which Gaoquan had founded. The manuscript was to serve as a "wondrous treasure to perpetually quell the killer demons." The Emperor also hoped that all the later residents of the temple might look upon this treasure and know that the temple's founder had once personally engaged in "transcendental camaraderie" with the immortal Chen Tuan.

### *Conclusion:*

In his essay on spirit-writing in China, Gaoquan indicates that *fuji* was an activity which men of learning engaged in during their spare time<sup>63</sup>. We have no reason to dispute this characterization. The monks of the Wanfu Temple on Mount Huangbo most certainly did not view their contact with planchette spirits as central either to their religious or secular life. We must not assume, however, that spirit-writing was no more than a petty amusement, as many orthodox scholars have tried to maintain. Leading members of the community, such as Yinyuan and Gaoquan, took their relations with the spirits very seriously. In actively seeking and cultivating the society of "true" spirits, such as Chen Tuan and Master He they demonstrated far more than a belief in the reality of these beings, they showed their admiration and trust. For in Chen Tuan, Yinyuan and Gaoquan had indeed found a most worthy comrade. Chen was no ordinary spirit, he was an immortal who had formerly attained an extraordinary level of wisdom and spiritual perfection. Because of these virtues he had become the brother-in-arms of such divine worthies as Chisong zi and Lü Dongbin and his counsel had been sought after by Chinese emperors. Furthermore, Chen possessed great skill as a poet, calligrapher and painter. This proved that he was a being of talent, cultivation and breeding. Gaoquan's official stele inscription makes specific reference to the Old Mas-

62 See Konoe, *Xianpi shiba* (Postface to the Poems Criticized by the Transcendent), *TZH* #29, C.36.

63 See Appendix below.

ter's contact with both Chen Tuan and Master He. Such reference indicates that not only his personal aura and reputation as a religious teacher, but also his poetry and calligraphy may have gained in stature by having been associated with the immortal Chen Tuan. Through this association, by engaging in poetic games and clever exchanges with an immortal, by having him correct their poems, in short, by interacting with him as they would have a close friend and peer from the phenomenal world, Gaoquan and his Master, Yinyuan, were clearly doing more than amusing themselves. They were making a statement about their own talent and spiritual attainment. For if these men had not achieved an exceptional level of enlightenment and spiritual purity Chen Tuan would not have been inclined to favour them with his special attention.

In a most general sense what we see in the relations between the Huangbo monks and their friends of the empyrean is that spirit-writing in traditional China had a sociological aspect to it. Intercourse with the immortals was carried on in accordance with much the same principles as governed relations with other mortals, or at least those in literate society. The immortals were not lofty and inaccessible divinities who provided didactic monologues for the edification of an adoring throng of faithful. They could be engaged in conversation and poetic exchange just as any other well educated man could. They might even be reprimanded if they committed errors of taste or judgement. We might say that the practice of spirit-writing added an extra, divine dimension to social relations in traditional China. Those who attended the *ji* had access to the friendship of beings unseen and unperceived by other mortals. This was a friendship which was consummated beyond the hierarchies of everyday society and thus was not laden with social or political obligation. Furthermore, because of the marvellous and otherworldly intelligence possessed by the divine beings, one might communicate with them on a level that men of pedestrian intellect could never appreciate, much less attain to. For mortals of superior talent such as Yinyuan and Gaoquan, however, *fujī* provided a forum for expression which was more elevated and in many ways freer than that which they found in earth-bound relationships. It was for this reason that they valued their "transcendental camaraderies" so highly.

## APPENDIX

*The Practice of Fuji:*  
by Gaoquan xingdun<sup>64</sup>

In Great Tang (China) anytime men of letters have idle time they study spells and talismans from Daoist priests. Then they take a branch from the side of a peach tree facing the sun and make a *ji*. For the *ji* they use a rice winnow or a dust pan and take the peach branch and stick it into the edge of the winnow. Then they take a brush and stick it onto the peach branch so that they hold it up with their hands. Then they make invocations and burn talismans. After the burning is done they make ritual prayers towards the sky and knock their teeth six times. Then the immortal will descend. When the immortal descends the winnow always moves. There are those who seek poems and those who seek prose, and those who seek divination of auspicious and inauspicious. Paper is placed in front of [the medium] and thence, according to its ideas [the spirit] flourishes and splashes [with the brush], in an instant completing the composition, without waiting to think things out. This is because the immortal possesses the five powers<sup>65</sup> and is good at knowing man's hearts. Also when one beseeches him it is not necessary to expend many things. He only likes one censer of incense and one cup of clear water. This is how it was when those [immortals] were invited [to the *ji*] in former years at Huangbo.

In Fuzhou there was a Daoist priest named Zheng. He often came to Huangbo and could employ this method. The Elder [Yinyuan] gave him instructions and many times asked him to compose poems. Whenever a person had a silent prayer [the spirit] never failed to respond and produce results.

64 TZH #15, B.41-44.

65 The five supernatural powers (*wu shentong*) include *deva*-vision, i.e., instantaneous view of anything anywhere in the form realm; *deva*-hearing, i.e., ability to hear any sound anywhere; "other-mind," i.e., the ability to know the thoughts of all other minds; "fore-life knowledge," i.e., the ability to know of all former existences of self and others; and "spirit-power," (*shen-tong*) the power to be anywhere or do anything at will. See W.E. Soothill and L. Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*. London: 1937 / Taipei: 1976, 123. Most of these powers are demonstrated in the various anecdotes about Chen Tuan. Interestingly, Chinese Buddhists gave special acknowledgement to immortals and other spirits who had attained these skills through non-Buddhist means.

The immortal called himself Chen Bo, his *zi* was Wuyan (No smoke), and his pet name was Old man of Muyan. He was a man of the Song era and was several hundred years old. When he painted his own likeness he had a lotus-leaf cap on his head, and wore a purple gown. At his waist he tied a calabash gourd and on his feet he wore straw sandals. He had a childlike face and egret-white hair. His side-locks were so long they fell below his waist. By nature he liked sleeping and each time he slept it was for several months<sup>66</sup>. He also had one disciple in attendance. His name was Guiya zi. He was the golden tortoise-dragon of the North Sea. He had a body like a tiger. When he goes to the stone bed and utters a sound of arousal the immortal awakes.

He (Chen) always urges people to abolish killing and to release living things. He has a collection of literary works in several scrolls, all of which are startlingly good.

There is also an immortal of equal level called He Zhen who is one of nine brothers. He is the immortal of Nine-carp Lake in Xinghua. If invited he will also descend, only the invocations and talismans are different. This immortal is good at painting Guanyins. I have personally seen him do this. If there is someone who requests a painting they take cotton or silk, sometimes eight or ten sheets, and lock it in a basket. After approximately one or two hours they open it up. The painting shines forth brightly, [already completed], moreover the form and style are most marvellous. It is not the sort of thing that a [mortal] artist could do. His Guanyins mostly wear straw clothing, and some use tree leaves. Sometimes there are paintings of flowers, fruits, birds and animals. Even if one is a great scholar there are things which cannot be comprehended. It is truly the brush work of a divinity. His paintings of those in the household of Grand Historian Ye, the patron of the Huangbo temple, are very numerous.

I respectfully present this for Your Majesty's perusal.

66 This is a reference to his ability to enter a state of suspended animations which enabled him to extend his life-span.

## Glossary

- Biyou tian* 別有天  
*biji* 筆記  
*Chen Tuan* 陳搏, or Chen Bo 博  
*Chisong zi* 赤松子  
*Chong Fang* 种放  
*Daoyuan (Dōgen)* 道元  
*Emperor Reigen* 靈元  
*fangwai zhiyou* 方外之遊  
*fayu* 法語  
*Feiyin* 費隱  
*fuji* 扶箕 (alternatively 扶乩)  
*Fuqing* 福清  
*Gaoquan xingdun* 高泉性敦  
*Guiya zi* 規涯子  
*Guo Chen* 郭沉  
*He Brothers* 何九仙  
*He Zhen* 何真  
*Hu Gong* 壺公  
*Huangbo xiyun* 黃蘗希運  
*ji* 箕 or 乩  
  
*Kadenokoji Akimitsu* 勘解由小路韶光  
*Lanxi (Rankei)* 蘭溪  
*Li Qi* 李琪  
*lianju* 聯句  
*ligong* 離宮  
*Linji* 臨濟  
*Lü Dongbin* 呂洞賓  
*Master Zheng* 鄭先生  
*Miyun* 密雲  
*Mount Huangbo* 黃蘗山  
  
*Mount Peng lai* 蓬萊山  
*Mount Shizhu* 石竹山  
*Muyan sou* 水巖叟,  
*Muyan ji* 水巖集  
*Nanyuan xingpai* 南源性派  
*Nine-carp Lake* 九鯉湖  
*Nine-carp Mountain* 九鯉山  
*Nine Immortal Mountain* 九仙山  
*Obaku Shu* 黃蘗宗  
*Pantao hui* 蟠桃會  
*Peng hu* 蓬壺  
*Prince Shinkei* 真敬親王  
*Purple-cloud Grotto* 紫雲洞  
*qi* 氣  
*Rinzai Sect* 臨濟宗  
*Sanxing zhao* 三星照  
*Shao Yong* 邵雍  
*shenxian* 神仙  
*Shizi yan* 獅子巖  
*Song Taizong* 宋太宗  
*suibi* 隨筆  
*Taiji tu* 太極圖  
*Tang Mingzong* 唐明宗  
*Tōzui hen* 桃蘗編  
*Wanfu Monastery* 萬福寺  
*Wang Shimao* 王世懋  
*Wang Xiaolian* 王孝廉  
*wenzi chan* 文字禪  
*wo* 倭  
*wu shentong* 五神通  
*xiangshu* 相術

Xiyi xiansheng 希夷先生

Xu Dishan 許地山

Yelan xinggui 也懶姓圭

Ye Xianggao 葉尙高

Yinyuan longqi 隱元隆琦

yushi 羽士

Zhenzong 真宗

Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤

Zhou Shizong 周世宗

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