

Wang Chongyang's Guidance for the Jade Flower Society

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During the middle of the twelfth century, a failed scholar-official and soldier named Wang Zhe 王 嘉 (Chongyang 重陽 [Redoubled Yang]; 1113-1170) had a series of mystical experiences that transformed his life and vocation. These events inspired Wang to completely dedicate himself to life-long religious training aimed at complete psychosomatic transformation. They also inspired him to begin teaching, first in Shaanxi and then in Shandong province. Wang built hermitages in both locations, gathered a core of dedicated disciples, and eventually established a small eremitic Daoist community. This community primarily consisted of Wang Chongyang as teacher and a small group of first-generation disciples, who are most often referred to as the Seven Perfected (*qizhen* 七真). Formal affiliation required the acceptance of a renunciant path, specifically avoidance of the Four Hindrances (*sibai* 四害) of alcohol, sex, wealth, and anger. These individuals became the foundation for the emergence of the early Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) movement. Under their leadership, especially that of Ma Yu 馬 鈺 (Danyang 丹陽 [Elixir Yang]; 1123-1184) and Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (Changchun 長春 [Perpetual Spring]; 1148-1227), Complete Perfection was transformed from a local eremitic community into a regional

and then national movement, and subsequently into a monastic order. In its fully developed medieval expression, Complete Perfection consisted of hermits and renunciants, monastics, and a larger community of lay adherents and patrons. On an infrastructure level, Complete Perfection included hermitages, temples and monasteries, as well as lay associations.

Returning to the formative moments of the tradition, Wang was born in Xianyang 咸陽, which is located just northwest of Xi'an in Shaanxi province.¹ He was part of a local aristocratic family and received a typical literati education. He eventually married and had one or more children. After failing as both a scholar-official and a soldier, Wang became disconsolate and sunk into alcoholism.

Then, in 1161, at the age of forty-eight, he abandoned his family and the desire for worldly recognition. In the summer of that same year, he had a series of mystical experiences, which inspired him to embrace the life of a Daoist renunciant (*chujia* 出家). He eventually joined the eremitic community of Liujiang

¹ Translations of the earliest hagiographies on Wang Chongyang and his major associates and disciples are contained in my *The Way of Complete Perfection*.



Wang Chongyang – rubbing of a stele, from Chongyang gong

劉蔣 (present-day Huxian 戶縣, Shaanxi). There he built his second major hermitage, which became Chongyang gong 重陽宮 (Palace of Chongyang) after his death in 1170 and the interment of his body there. After four years of intensive training with two other hermits, Wang departed on an eastward journey, eventually arriving on the peninsula of Shandong province. There he began attracting disciples, including his senior and most influential early disciple Ma Yu. Ma invited Wang to live on his family estate in Ninghai 寧海 (present-day Muping 牟平), where Wang built the Quanzhen an 全真庵 (Hermitage of Complete Perfection). Although no longer extant, this is the source of the movement's name. Wang and some of his disciples eventually relocated to Yanxia dong 煙霞洞 (Cavern of Misty Vapors) in the Kunyu 崑崙 mountains. Located near Yantai 煙臺 and Weihai 威海, this place still has a small Complete Perfection Daoist community today. After intensive training, Wang and his first-generation disciples travelled throughout the Shandong peninsula, eventually establishing five

Daoist associations (*daohui* 道會), which are also referred to as “assemblies” and “congregations.” These meeting-houses included Yuhua hui 玉華會 (Association of Jade Flower; Dengzhou), Qibao hui 七寶會 (Association of Seven Treasures; Wendeng), Jinlian hui 金蓮會 (Association of Gold Lotus; Ninghai), Sanguang hui 三光會 (Association of Three Radiances; Fushan), and Pingdeng hui 平等會 (Association of Equal Rank; Laizhou), none of which exists today.

The meeting-halls provided a communal context for the early Complete Perfection adepts, a place for potential adherents to become familiar with Complete Perfection views and practices, and an opportunity for lay participation and involvement. Although it is generally unknown who established them and how many people participated, we do have some fragmentary information. It seems that the Association of the Jade Flower was established by two lay patrons by the name of Zhang and Shao. In addition, another source informs us that the Association of Equal Rank may have had as many as one thousand members. The early Complete Perfection associations were lay organizations overseen by Wang Chongyang and his more dedicated disciples. They were places where communal ritual was carried out and where basic forms of meditation, emphasizing clarity and stillness (*qingjing* 清靜), were taught. While the formation of these associations was at least partially intended to introduce the general population to Complete Perfection beliefs as well as basic ethical and meditation practice, there can be little doubt that these community centers also created patterns of patronage. Such lay patronage and popular support were instrumental in transforming semi-independent Complete Perfection renunciants into a clerical and monastic elite.

This takes us into the context of reception and intended audience for the “Yuhua she shu” 玉花社疏 (Guidance for the Jade Flower Society), which appears in Wang’s literary anthology titled *Quanzhen ji* 全真集 (Anthology of Complete Perfection; DZ 1153) and which is translated below. Wang Chongyang probably delivered it as a public talk to the Association of Jade Flower in Dengzhou,

Shandong. It was probably composed in the final year or so of Wang's life (1169-1170), before he departed for Shaanxi and died along the way in Bianliang 汴梁 (present-day Kaifeng, Henan). It was thus primarily intended for an audience of lay adherents, patrons, and local residents. This is important, as it apparently contradicts other teachings of Wang and his formal disciples.

In terms of content, Wang Chongyang provides basic instruction on the cultivation of innate nature and life-destiny (*xingming* 性命), or adepts' spiritual capacities and foundational vitality. Wang suggests that attention to one's essential needs, specifically food and sleep, is the foundation of Daoist practice. He also advocates Daoist practice as an all-pervasive existential approach, wherein every moment is an opportunity to engage in self-cultivation. However, when we read statements like "there is no need to practice meditation or to study the Dao," we must avoid totalizing and essentializing interpretations. Like other contextual teachings from the early movement, these insights are intended for a particular audience, and specifically for individuals who have not fully committed themselves to the path of a Complete Perfection renunciant. They are meant to establish an initial foundation for deeper practice.

Here a few additional words about the "Guidance for the Jade Flower Society" and Wang Chongyang's literary corpus may also be helpful. Although the *Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun* 重陽立教十五論 (Redoubled Yang's Fifteen Discourses to Establish the Teachings; DZ 1233; abbr. *Chongyang shiwu lun*, *Lijiao shiwu lun*, or *Shiwu lun*) is often held up as the most important work by Wang and of the early movement, that text is problematic in terms of authorship and dating.² While helpful as a primer for Complete Perfection practice, it may not have been written by Wang. In order to gain a deeper understanding of Wang's teachings and practices, the literary anthologies, and specifically the poetry contained therein, are extremely important. Along

2 The text has been translated in Handbook 8 of my *Handbooks for Daoist Practice*. It is also republished in my *The Way of Complete Perfection*. Both works discuss issues of authorship and dating as well as content and audience.

these lines, the "Guidance for the Jade Flower Society" provides a glimpse into a teacher, the founder of Complete Perfection, expressing personal concern and providing spiritual direction for his religious community. It is a rare opportunity to hear the voice of an individual whom many Complete Perfection Daoists view as an immortal.

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Guidance for the Jade Flower Society*

玉花社疏

Wang Zhe 王嘉,
Master Chongyang 重陽

竊以玉花乃氣之宗，金蓮乃神之祖。氣神相結，謂之神仙。《陰符經註》云：「神是氣之子，氣是神之母。」子母相見，得做神仙。

Now, the Jade Flower is the ancestor of qi, while the Gold Lotus is the ancestor of spirit. When qi and spirit are bound together, we refer to this as “spirit immortality.”

A commentary on the *Yinfu jing* (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman) says,³ “Spirit is the child of qi; qi is the mother of spirit.”⁴ When child and mother meet, you can become a spirit immortal.

* “Yuhua she shu” 玉花社疏. From *Quanzhen ji* 全真集, DZ 1153, 10.20b-21a. This translation originally appeared in my *The Way of Complete Perfection*, and I am grateful to the State University of New York Press for permission to reprint it here.

3. The sixth-century *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 (DZ 31), which is an anonymous work of unclear provenance. The *Yinfu jing* became one of the most important Daoist scriptures in the early Complete Perfection movement, and this remains the case in the modern monastic order. A recent translation appears in Handbook 7 in my *Handbooks for Daoist Practice*.

4. Section 1b of the *Yinfu jing zhu* 陰符經註 (Commentary on the *Yinfu jing*; DZ 121) by Tang Chun 唐淳 (Jinling daoren 金陵道人 [Daoist of Nanjing]; 11th c. CE?), which Eskildsen (2004, 36, 216, n. 43) points out was the preferred *Yinfu jing* commentary of the early Complete Perfection movement. The passage in question appears in section 1b. According to the *Danyang yulu* 丹陽語錄 (Discourse Record of Danyang; DZ 1057, 10a), Daoist adherents should not read excessively, as it disturbs the heart-mind. When one does wish to study scriptures, Ma Danyang recommends Heshang gong’s commentary on the *Daode jing* and Master Jinling’s commentary on the *Yinfu jing*. See also Liu Changsheng’s commentary (*Yinfu jing zhu*, DZ 144, 5b). Both Ma’s discourse record and Liu’s commentary have been translated in my *The Way of Complete Perfection*. A parallel passage also appears in section 1a of Sun Simiao’s (581-682?) *Cunshen lianqi ming* 存神煉氣銘 (Inscription on Visualizing the Spirits and Refining Qi; DZ 834). See Kohn 1987, 119.

起置玉花、金蓮社在于
兩州，務要諸公得認真
性。不曉真源，盡學旁
門小術。此是作福養身
之法，並不干修仙之道。

The reason why I established the Jade Flower and Gold Lotus Societies⁵ in the two prefectures is because I wanted all adepts to recognize perfect innate nature. If you do not understand the perfect source, you will only study the lesser techniques of subsidiary schools. Such methods may produce blessings and nourish the body, but they have nothing to do with the Way of Cultivating Immortality.

性命之事，稍為失錯，轉乖人
道。諸公如要真修行，飢來喫飯，
睡來合眼。也莫打坐，也莫學道。
只要塵冗事屏除，只要心中清
淨。兩箇字、其餘都不是修行。

Considering the issue of innate nature and life-destiny,⁶ if you make even the slightest misstep, you may be led astray from the human path [through transmigration]. Fellow adepts, if you long for perfect cultivation, simply eat when hungry and sleep when tired. There is no need to practice meditation or to study the Dao. You only need to separate yourself from the affairs of the mundane world. You only need to allow your heart-mind to be clear and pure.⁷ Anything beyond these two words [clarity and purity]⁸ is not cultivation.

5. The Yuhua hui 玉華會 (Association of Jade Flower; Dengzhou, Shandong) and Jinlian hui 金蓮會 (Association of Gold Lotus; Ninghai, Shandong), respectively.

6. *Xingming* 性命. Innate nature (*xing* 性) specifically relates to the heart-mind, consciousness, and spirit, while life-destiny (*ming* 命) relates to the kidneys, corporeality, and physical vitality (including vital essence and qi).

7. These lines recall, and perhaps contrast with, sections of the *Fifteen Discourses to Establish the Teachings*. There Wang Chongyang explains that Complete Perfection aspirants must embrace a renunciant way of life, retreat to a hermitage, and practice consistent and prolonged stillness-based meditation.

8. *Qingjing* 清淨 (“clarity and purity”), which also appears as *qingjing* 清靜 (“clarity and stillness”). A central Daoist value and commitment, clarity and stillness primarily relate to a state characterized by energetic stability and spiritual clarity. In technical Complete Perfection usage, *qingjing* also refers to celibacy. Interestingly, alternative early names for the Complete Perfection movement included Jinlian 金蓮 (Gold Lotus) Wuwei qingjing 無為清靜 (Non-action and Clear Stillness), and Xuanfeng 玄風 (Mysterious Movement).

諸公各懷聰慧。每日齋場中細細省悟。庶幾不流落於他門。行功乃別有真功真行。

All adepts should cherish discernment and wisdom. Each day when you practice in the purification chamber remain continuously alert for awakening.⁹ Do not become lost in other schools. For practice and accomplishment,¹⁰ [21a] there is nothing else beyond perfect accomplishment and perfect practice.

晉真人云：「若要真功者，須是澄心定意。打疊神情。無動無作，真清真淨。抱元守一，存神固氣，乃是真功也。」

Perfected Jin said,¹¹ “If you long for perfect accomplishment, you must purify your heart-mind and stabilize your thinking. Discipline spirit and emotions. Free from movement and activity, this is perfect clarity and perfect purity. Embrace the Origin and guard the One.¹² Preserve spirit and stabilize qi. This is perfect accomplishment.

9. Here “purification chamber” translates *zhaichang* 齋場. I am reading this as equivalent to “pure chamber” (*jingshi* 淨室) and “meditation enclosure” (*huandu* 環堵), or practicing solitary mediation in a secluded room or hut.

10. Or “when practicing exercises.”

11. A reference to the *Jin zhenren yulu* 晉真人語錄 (Discourse Record of Perfected Jin; DZ 1056), most likely associated with Jin Daocheng 晉道成 (Chongzhen 崇真 [Exalted Perfection]; fl. 1110?). The passage appears in section 3a. This text has been translated in my *The Way of Complete Perfection*.

12. *Baoyuan shouyi* 抱元守一. In technical Daoist usage, these terms refer to Daoist apophatic or quietistic (emptiness-/stillness-based) meditation and the corresponding contemplative/mystical state. Having some parallels with modern Daoist “quiet sitting” (*jingzuo* 靜坐), this type of meditation is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. Classical and influential passages appear in the *Laozi* 老子 (Book of Venerable Masters; chs. 10 & 19), *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuang; chs. 4, 6 & 11), and “Neiye” 內業 (Inward Training; ch. 24) chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan). A translation of the latter appears in Roth 1999 and in Handbook 1 of my *Handbooks for Daoist Practice*. For historical uses of *shouyi* see Kohn 1989.

「若要真行者，須是修仁蘊德，
濟貧拔苦。見人患難，常行
拯救之心。或化誘善人入道
修行。所行之事，先人後己，
與萬物無私，乃真行也。」

伏願諸公，
早垂照鑒。

“If you long for perfect practice, you must cultivate humaneness and accumulate virtue by alleviating poverty and relieving suffering. If you see people in difficult situations, constantly cultivate a heart-mind of assistance and liberation. At times, you should persuade suitable people to enter the Dao and engage in cultivation. In whatever you do, put others first and yourself last. Be selfless when relating to the myriad beings.¹³ This is perfect practice.”

I humbly wish that all adepts may soon receive [these instructions] and [attain] clearness of apprehension.

13. These lines recall chapter 19 of the *Daode jing*: “Appear plain (*xiansu* 見素) and embrace simplicity (*baopu* 抱朴); lessen personal interest (*shaosi* 少私) and decrease desires (*guayu* 寡欲).” In internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), accumulating merit and performing good deeds, or cultivating “hidden virtue” (*yinde* 陰德), often is referred to as “establishing the foundations” (*zhuji* 築基).