

Destiny, Vital Force, or Existence? On the Meanings of *Ming* in Daoist Internal Alchemy and Its Relation to *Xing* or Human Nature*

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Abstract

Neidan or Internal Alchemy has developed two main modes of self-cultivation. The first is based on cultivating the mind and intends to remove the causes that prevent one from “seeing one’s true nature,” which is equated with the Elixir. The second is based on purifying the main components of the human being—Essence (*jing* 精), Breath (*qi* 氣), and Spirit (*shen* 神)—so that they may serve as ingredients of the Elixir. These two modes of self-cultivation are said to place an emphasis on *xing* 性 and on *ming* 命, respectively. However, Neidan texts repeat time and again that *xing* and *ming* can only be understood and realized in conjunction with one another.

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* This article is a contribution to the research project on “Fate, Freedom and Prognostication,” directed by Prof. Michael Lackner at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, University Erlangen-Nuremberg. I am deeply grateful to Shawn Cartwright, Philipp Hünnebeck, Terry Kleeman, and Song Xiaokun who, with their comments and remarks, have contributed to improve earlier drafts of this paper.

In Neidan, *xing* and *ming* are said to be the “foundation” (*ti* 體) and the “operation” (*yong* 用) of one another; they correspond to Spirit and Breath; and they are related to the “mind” (*xin* 心) and the “body” (*shen* 身), respectively. These views are at the basis of the discourses on *xing* and *ming* in the two main Neidan lineages. The Southern Lineage (Nanzong 南宗) gives precedence to the cultivation of *ming*, and the Northern Lineage (Beizong 北宗) emphasizes the cultivation of *xing*. Despite this distinction, the “conjoined cultivation of Xing and Ming” (*xingming shuangxiu* 性命雙修) is a virtually omnipresent subject in Neidan. In this context, “priority” means which one between *xing* and *ming* is seen as the basis for cultivating the other in order to realize both.

Two final sections examine the views of two major Neidan masters. Li Daochun 李道純 (late 13th century) points out that *xing* and *ming* pertain to the “celestial mind” and the “dharma-body” instead of the ordinary mind and body, which harm and damage one’s *xing* and *ming*. Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821) similarly makes a fundamental distinction between the “false” and the “true” *xing* and *ming*. The false ones are one’s character and destiny (including one’s life span); the true ones are one’s innate nature and one’s embodiment of the One Breath (*yiqi* 一氣) of the Dao.

Keywords: Daoism, Neidan, Fate, Li Daochun, Liu Yiming

金丹者，性命之別名。

Golden Elixir is another name for *xing* and *ming*.

—Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821)¹

¹ *Zhouyi chanzhen* 周易闡真 (Uncovering the Truth of the *Book of Changes*), Introduction (“Juanshou” 卷首), 57a. In this article, quotations from texts in the *Daozang* 道藏 (Daoist Canon) include the numbers they are assigned in Kristofer Schipper, *Concordance du Tao-tsang* (Paris: EFEO, 1975), preceded by the abbreviation “DZ.” Works by Liu Yiming are quoted from the editions reproduced in *Daoshu shi'er zhong* 道書十二種 (Twelve Books on the Dao; Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyiyao chubanshe, 1990). This book, mostly consisting of a reprint of the 1880 Yihua tang 翼化堂 edition of Liu Yiming’s collected works, is in turn entirely reprinted in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Daoist Texts Outside the Canon [Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992–1994]), vol. 8. Editions of other sources are cited in footnotes.