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Banished Immortal 謫仙: The Representation of Exilic Imagery in Bai Yuchan's Shenxiao Thunder Rites 神霄雷法 and Inner Alchemy Teachings

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Abstract

Bai Yuchan (白玉蟾, 1134?–1229?), a prominent figure of the Southern Lineage of Golden Elixir Sect 金丹派南宗 during the Southern Song dynasty, established a unique synthesis of Shenxiao Thunder Rites and Inner Alchemy by cultivating the persona of a "Banished Immortal". By framing himself as a celestial thunder officer exiled to the human realm, he grounded his ritual authority in a narrative of divine origin. Central to this system was the "Heart 心," which served as the essential bridge between internal cultivation and ritual efficacy. Bai argued that the ability to command thunder relied not on mere technique, but on the alchemical refinement of the practitioner's own spirit and qi 氣/炁. Bai's writings, especially the *Qu Gong Poems* 曲肱詩, express his dual identity and his earthly life as a period of spiritual transcendence. Distinctively, Bai embraced genuine emotion and literati aesthetics. He used the "banished immortal" trope to translate the fierce, internal power of thunder into a socially recognized form. This theological and literary construction not only legitimized his public performance of rainmaking and exorcism but also forged a durable identity for the Southern Lineage that continued to shape Daoist traditions well into the Ming dynasty.

Keywords: Bai Yuchan; banished immortal narrative; Shenxiao Thunder Rites; Southern Lineage of the Golden Elixir Sect; Inner Alchemy

1. Introduction

During the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), Daoism developed in new ways. Ritual practices became closely integrated with internal alchemical cultivation. Amidst this vibrant religious landscape, Bai Yuchan[1] emerged as a key figure in the Southern Lineage of the Golden Elixir Sect. He stood out by combining Daoist alchemical theory with ideas from Neo-Confucianism and Chan Buddhism and summed up this blend in his saying: "Though the Three Teachings differ in their approaches, they share the same origin." 三教異門, 源同一也 (Bai 2013b, p. 71).

However, Bai Yuchan was not only a master of Inner Alchemy[2] but also a leading ritualist of the Shenxiao Thunder Rites (thunder rites transmitted and officially authorized by the Divine Empyrean). Within Bai's integrated framework, a recurring theme is his portrayal of himself as a "banished immortal", a former Thunder Official (leiguan 雷官) exiled from the celestial administration. This self-presentation was not just a literary pose. By portraying himself as a demoted celestial officer who hoped to regain his post, Bai gave legitimacy to his ritual authority and created a clear link between personal self-cultivation and the ability to command thunder in ritual practice.

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This phenomenon has been examined from several complementary perspectives. Lowell Skar focuses on its institutional implications. He argues that Bai sought to establish a more authoritative system by integrating Shenxiao Thunder Rites with celestial transmissions attributed to his master Chen Nan 陳楠, and drew on elements from the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshidao 天师道) and the Highest Clarity Sect (Shangqingpai 上清派) to construct ritual legitimacy (Skar 1996). Yu Hongtao 于洪濤 interprets the contrast between Bai's eccentric conduct and ritual solemnity as revealing the multifaceted nature of his character and the exclusion and controversy faced by the Southern Lineage at the time (Yu 2018). One interpretation sees the figure of the "banished immortal" as Bai's way of defining his own religious role and giving credibility to his ritual authority through references to different celestial ranks (Wan 2012). Another stresses the aspect of inner cultivation, describing Bai's practice as focused on hiding and purifying the heart, an ideal of spiritual transcendence that joins divine nature with human moral integrity (Lan 2012).

At the same time, a small number of studies that address Bai Yuchan's "banished immortal" consciousness have also drawn attention to the central role of the heart (xin 心) in his religious system. Lin Zhongyong 林鍾勇 points out that Bai's conception of celestial wandering differs from earlier "roaming immortals" (youxian 遊仙) traditions. Instead of seeking an outward escape, Bai emphasizes inner visualization and quiet contemplation, and turns imagined travel into an inward form of cultivation (Lin 2004). Similarly, Zhan Shichuang 詹石窗 and Fan Jingyi 范靖宜 read Bai's "banished immortal" poetry as a symbolic articulation of Daoist cultivation, transforming practices of Inner Alchemy and Thunder Rites into literary expression grounded in the refinement of the heart (Fan and Zhan 2018). This emphasis on the heart points to a core framework in Bai Yuchan's thought, often summarized by the principle that "the heart is the core" 以心為宗. Within this framework, Bai articulates a Dao-xin 道心 theory, which, as Gai Jianmin observes, treats the cosmological Dao and the human mind as inseparable, making inner regulation a direct engagement with cosmic creative power (Gai 2020). In this way, Bai develops earlier Southern Lineage teachings by equating the heart with the Dao itself and reworking traditional practices of quiescent contemplation (Li and Lu 2015).

This article explores how Bai Yuchan used narratives of celestial exile and return to shape his ritual authority and to connect inner cultivation with public ritual acts such as rainmaking and exorcism. It examines how, through the mediating role of the heart, inner alchemical cultivation and thunder ritual practice were brought into continuity. They did not remain purely internal but extended outward through literary expression, discourse, and symbolic forms, and they eventually formed a lineage with lasting public influence in the Southern Song and later periods.

2. Bai Yuchan's Construction of Southern Religious Authority: Lineage, Banished Immortal Narratives, and the Heart Method

This chapter explores how Bai Yuchan constructed a framework of authority for Shenxiao Thunder Rites within the Southern tradition. It first examines how he grounded Thunder Rites in a genealogical and celestially authorized transmission centered on Chen Nan. It then analyzes how banished immortal narratives, drawing on earlier Daoist traditions, functioned as mechanisms of legitimation within the Shenxiao celestial bureaucratic imagination. Finally, it turns to the Heart Method as the inner foundation through which Inner Alchemy and thunder ritual are integrated. Together, these elements show that Bai's synthesis is not merely literary self-fashioning or process of inner alchemical transformation of ritual practice, but a coherent theory of how heavenly authority is constituted and enacted in the human realm.

2.1. Celestial Transmission and Lineage Formation in Southern Thunder Rites

The Southern Lineage's Thunder Rites are generally traced back to its Fourth Patriarch, Chen Nan. He was the first to bring the Shenxiao Thunder Rites into the Southern tradition. Chen Nan's Internal Alchemy teachings came from the Third Patriarch, Xue Daoguang. Bai Yuchan believed that Chen's thunder methods were given directly by a celestial authority, namely Thunder Division Judge Xin Hanchen 辛漢臣[3].

> My master received the Thunder Scriptures on Mount Limu but did not say where they came from, possibly because they were from a divine being. The alchemical methods came from Monk Daoguang. Once, while drunk, my master said: "I am a disciple of Thunder Division Judge Xin; what business have I with Monk Daoguang?" (*Jingyu Xuanwen*, 靜餘玄問)
>
> 先師得雷書於黎母山中, 不言其人姓氏, 恐是神人所授也. 丹法卻是道光和尚所傳. 先師嘗醉語雲: "我是雷部辛判官弟子, 幹道光和尚甚事?" (Bai 2013b, p. 15)

This claim is supported by several sources. In *Haiqiong Bai Zhenren Yulu* 海瓊白真人語錄, Chen Nan is described as having received the Grand Thunder Method 都天大雷法 from "the fierce, wolf-toothed official, Thunder Division Judge Xin Hanchen" 狼牙猛吏雷部判官辛漢臣 (Daozang 1988, vol. 33, p. 115b). In *Record of Perfected Chen of Cuixu Receiving the Method* 翠虛陳真人得法記, it is said that Chen met "Thunder Division Commander Xin Zhongyi" 雷部都督辛忠義 (Bai 2013b, p. 332) at Mount Limu 黎母山, whose master was the Fire Master Perfected Wang 火師汪真君. This was the same person named by Wang Wenqing 王文卿 (1087–1153), founder of the Divine Empyrean Sect in the Northern Song, as the source of his thunder teachings. Some scholars think Xin Hanchen might be a legendary figure created to give authority, and that Chen Nan's thunder methods may have come from Shenxiao Daoists in Wang Wenqing's lineage instead (Qing 1996, p. 119). Wang Wenqing was one of the most important Shenxiao leaders in the Northern Song, and his ritual tradition continued to have influence for a long time.

Meanwhile, Bai Yuchan called himself an "Inactive Divine Empyrean Clerk" (shenxiao sanli 神霄散吏), a banished immortal from Divine Empyrean, and used celestial titles such as the Office of the Northern Culmen for Expelling Perversities[4] (beiji quxie yuan 北極驅邪院事). When presenting Chen Nan as someone who had learned the Thunder Rites from the Celestial Officer, Bai Yuchan was deliberately shaping a sense of lineage. This helped mark and keep the genealogical structure of the Southern Lineage. This celestial framing likely had two main aims. The first was to set up a clear and distinctive transmission line for the Southern Lineage's Thunder Rites, strengthening its religious community and attracting followers. The second was to distinguish Southern Thunder methods from those of Lin Lingsu[5] 林灵素 and his group in the Northern Song, whose political ties and the problems after the Jingkang Incident 靖康之難 had left a controversial reputation. By presenting the Southern Lineage this way, Bai strengthened its image as spiritually genuine and free from political corruption.

2.2. Banished Immortal Narratives as Claims of Celestial Authority

Bai developed the figure of the "banished immortal" not to describe his predecessors, but to fashion his own religious identity as an official of the Divine Divine Empyrean in the human realm. To understand how Bai repurposed this trope to assert ritual authority, it is necessary to briefly contextualize the evolution of the "banished immortal" archetype and distinguish Bai's theological innovation from earlier literary conventions.

The term "banished immortal" refers to a celestial being who is sent to the human world for a time as punishment for breaking heavenly law. It is a special form of the wider idea of the immortal.[6] From texts such as *Arrayed Traditions of Transcendents* (Liexian Zhuan

列仙傳)[7], through Han-Six Dynasties "tales of the strange" 志怪小說 collections, as well as in historical records and early Daoist writings, such figures are typically portrayed as retaining their supernatural abilities while undergoing periods of worldly trial.[8] In this context, Buddhist notions of reincarnation 轉世 were largely absent. Rather than undergoing physical rebirth, these beings were imagined as descending intact from the celestial realm. During their time in the human world, they underwent little fundamental transformation, retaining their supernatural capacities and failing to acquire a fully mortal identity (Xuemei Liu 2003). By the Tang period, banished immortal tales had been absorbed into Tang *chuanqi* 唐傳奇 narratives and given more secular features.[9] Their trials were elaborated, and the immortals were portrayed with human emotions and social roles, aligning the motif more closely with lived experience.

It is during the Song-Yuan period that Bai Yuchan's portrayal of the banished immortal becomes particularly significant. Rather than merely repeating earlier narrative patterns, Bai redirected attention to the process of worldly trial itself. This shift is most clearly embodied in his *Biography of Perfected Lord Xu Jingyang* 旌陽許真君傳, which tells the life of Xu Xun 許遜, honored in Daoism as Xu Jingyang 許旌陽 (Bai 2013b, pp. 262–70). The biography shows his steady perseverance through many trials and hardships in the human world, ending with his return to the celestial realm.[10] This narrative emphasis reflects Bai Yuchan's broader religious concerns. The banished immortal is not simply a figure of past legend but a model through which heavenly legitimacy is demonstrated in the present world. This helps explain why, elsewhere in his writings, Bai could portray Chen Nan as receiving Thunder Rites directly authorized by a celestial officer: both figures exemplify the same logic of sanctioned descent and earthly operation within a celestial bureaucratic order. In this way, banished immortal narratives become intertwined with Bai's claim that Southern Thunder transmission originates in heaven yet must be enacted and verified through human practice. His call to face trials in the present life is also found in his poetic work *Qu Gong Poems*, which will be discussed later in this study.

2.3. The Heart Method as the Inner Foundation of Ritual Authority

Although Inner Alchemy and Thunder Rites arose in different Daoist lineages, Northern Song developments in Inner Alchemy made it easier to connect personal cultivation with emerging ritual systems such as the Shenxiao Thunder Rites. This was done by treating inner practice as the basis for mobilizing and directing potent forces that can be correlated with the practitioner's essence, qi and spirit. For Bai Yuchan, the decisive bridge between the two lay in the Heart, and this emphasis reflects his inheritance and expansion of Zhang Boduan's 張伯端 Inner Alchemy "heart method" orientation. Zhang, advocating dual cultivation of spiritual and physical life 性命雙修[11] and drawing on both Confucian and Chan resources, distinguishes an original spiritual awareness 元神 from the desire-driven mind[12] 欲神 and frames practice as a return from the latter to the former through "illumining the mind and seeing one's nature" 明心見性[13], avoiding one-sided quietism or mere technique.

Bai Yuchan develops this into a heart-centered synthesis, insisting that "the heart is the Dao, and the Dao is the heart" 即心即道, 即道即心 (from *Chanxian Jielao* 蟾仙解老, a commentary on *Daode Baozhang* 道德寶章, Chapter 21; Bai 2013b, p. 28), uniting heart, nature, and spirit in the Dao. For Bai, returning to oneself is realized through refining the Heart. His method centers on Spirit Visualization 存神, a systematic inner contemplation of the elemental forces within the body, whose essence is turning inward to practice Inner Alchemy. Bai's "Heart Method" teaches that cultivating the Heart is identical with cultivating the Dao and the Golden Elixir.

In *Donglou Xiaocan* 東樓小參 (Bai 2013b, pp. 86–87), he locates the Dao in the mind, portraying self-cultivation as balancing heart, pneuma (qi 氣), and spirit, in order to preserve one's original nature and life. This includes calming emotional disturbances so that the practitioner may attain longevity, transcend the physical body, and unite with the Dao.[14] In *Xuanguan Xianmi Lun* 玄關顯秘論 (Bai 2013b, pp. 18–21), he further explains the Dao as the heart's return to its source: through stillness, forgetting form, pneuma, and spirit, and by employing the inner alchemy of water and fire, one refines the Golden Elixir, attains long life, and ultimately merges completely with the Dao.

The same centrality of the Heart that characterizes Bai's Inner Alchemy also governs his Thunder Rites within the Shenxiao tradition. In this context, the "Five Thunders" (Wulei 五雷) correspond to the Five Elements (金 metal, 木 wood, 水 water, 火 fire, and 土 earth). Within the human body are linked to the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys, and the heart is the coordinating source that enables all elemental energies to resonate. In Bai Yuchan's thought, the Heart functions both as the center of being and as the place of actual practice. It links the inner work of alchemy with the outer forms of Thunder Rite ritual. Through this twofold meaning, the Heart becomes not only a metaphysical foundation but also a living medium of cultivation, emotion, and human experience. Bai gives Daoist practice a distinctly human and poetic character, allowing the feelings of the scholar and the movements of the spirit to flow together. From this unity arises the image of the exiled immortal or Thunder Official, a celestial figure who moves through the human world while keeping the resonance of Heaven within. The following discussion will examine in greater detail how the Heart serves as the source and bridge for Bai Yuchan's synthesis of inner and outer paths.

3. The Story of the "Banished Immortal": Exile and Cultivation in the Qu Gong Poems

3.1. Cycles Between Heaven and the Human World: The Tale of Three Banishments

Although references to banishment appear throughout Bai Yuchan's writings, the *Qu Gong Poems* stand out as his most coherent and complete poetic cycle. Composed as a connected sequence of twenty interlinked poems, it forms a continuous autobiographical narrative that traces his repeated passages between the celestial and human worlds in chronological order. In this sense, it serves as the principal text for articulating his vision of the "Banished Immortal." (For the complete translation, see Appendix A; Bai 2013a, pp. 221–22.)

曲肱詩

1. 昔在青華第一宮, 只緣醉後怒騎龍, 傾翻半滴金瓶水, 不覺人間雨發洪.
2. 玉皇有敕問神霄, 誰去騎龍亂作妖, 自別雷城一回首, 人間天上已相遼.
3. 謫居塵世意徘徊, 煉盡金丹待鶴來, 歸去神霄朝玉帝, 依前令我掌風雷.
4. 五雷深鎖玉清宮, 白鶴呼風唳碧空, 說著這般辛苦處, 三千玉女蹙眉峰.
5. 太乙天皇謁紫清, 翠娥百萬擁雲軿, 當時不合抬頭看, 忽見天丁叱火鈴.
6. 我不生嗔怨玉皇, 翠娥不復舞霓裳, 如何天上神仙女, 染汙清都一散郎.
7. 夢斷南柯覺昨非, 因緣盡處兩分飛, 寒松空鎖翠娥夢, 我獨於今未得歸.
8. 玉府官僚無甚人, 上皇憐我最辛勤, 忽然詔下催歸去, 猿叫萬山空白雲.
9. 瑤池王母宴群仙, 兩部笙歌簇綺筵, 誤取一枚仙李吃, 又來人世不知年.
10. 我到人間未百年, 恰如頃刻在三天, 向來我本雷霆吏, 今更休疑作甚仙.
11. 往昔逍遙在太華, 朝餐玉乳看瓊花, 當年身著六銖服, 不識人間有苧麻.

12. 做到天仙地位時, 三遭天遣落天墀, 卻嫌天上多官府, 且就人間洞府嬉.
13. 白雲隨我見天臺, 又趁金華路上回, 棲鳳亭中留不去, 武夷山下野猿哀.
14. 說與清風明月知, 揚州有鶴未能騎, 夜來五鳳樓前看, 天上臺雲空自飛.
15. 跣足蓬頭破衲衣, 悶來飲酒醉吟詩, 廛中走遍無人識, 我是東華大帝兒.
16. 這回空過二十年; 肉重不能飛上天, 抖擻衲頭還自笑, 囊中也沒一文錢.
17. 我有隨身一顆珠, 見時似有覓時無, 金雞叫罷無人見, 月射寒光滿太虛.
18. 不識看經不坐禪, 饑來吃飯困來眠, 玉皇若不開青眼, 卻是凡夫骨未仙.
19. 不把雙眸看俗人, 五湖四海一空身, 洞天深處無人到, 溪上桃花幾度春.
20. 桑田變海海成田, 這話叫人信也難, 只有一般輸我處, 君王未有此清閒.

Before turning to a structural analysis of the *Qu Gong Poems*, it is necessary to outline relevant aspects of Bai Yuchan's life and circumstances that inform the "banished immortal" persona shaping this cycle. This persona resonates closely with the social and political realities of the Southern Song, a dynasty that faced loss of territory, increasing military pressure, and the displacement of its elite. For Bai, this reality took form in two kinds of exile. The first was the failure of the usual route to advancement through the Confucian civil service 儒家科舉, which blocked the normal path to official rank and prestige. The second was his long wandering in search of the Dao, traveling widely to visit masters and practice religion. According to the *Zhengde Qiongtai zhi* 正德瓊臺志 (Tang 2006, p. 838), Bai "at the age of twelve, sat for the child-class examination," but according to differing records, opted to roam rather than pursue an official career. This long search for the Dao, vividly shown in his *Two Songs of Roaming the Clouds* 雲遊歌二首, gave his worldly identity a repeated image of wandering and earthly banishment. This mirrored the exile themes that run through his poetry. His case, however, was unusually extreme. Beyond the familiar story of a frustrated scholar turned religious recluse, contemporary records suggest a major break in his life. Chen Zhensun's 陳振孫 *Zhizhai Shulu Jieti* 直齋書錄解題 notes that Bai committed an offense and fled. He portrays Bai as unpredictable and warns against admitting such figures into circles of the virtuous. Li Shining 李士寧 and Zhang Huaisu 張懷素 are citied as comparable examples (Z. Chen 1987, p. 353). Likewise, the *Gazetteer of Jiangxi* 江西通志 compiled by Yu Chenglong 於成龍 records that Bai killed a man in knight-errant fashion, fled to Wuyi 武夷, later followed Daoist master Chen Niwan 陳泥丸, and was known for illusory pursuits and unconventional actions, wandering between Mount Lu 廬山 and other places while writing freely.

In the eleventh year of Jiading (嘉定十一年, 1218), while visiting West Mountain 西山 in Jiangxi, Bai witnessed an imperial incense ritual at Yulong Palace 玉隆宮. Though he avoided joining it, palace officials persuaded him to return. He was seated in the place of honor "for the nation" and watched by crowds "like a wall" (Bai 2013b, p. 376). Shortly afterward, he led a state offering (jiao 醮) at Ruiqing Palace 瑞慶宮 on Nine Palaces Mountain 九宮山. After these ceremonies, Emperor Ningzong 宋寧宗 sought to meet him, but Bai withdrew to a distant retreat, maintaining a deliberate distance from political authority. This attitude underlies his self-fashioning as a "banished immortal," calmly accepting each shift in his situation and transforming it into part of a larger life story.

Building on this stance of cultivated distance from political authority and, the poems construct a carefully organized narrative of exile. The sequence follows a clear temporal logic, charting the protagonist's repeated descents from the celestial realm and his subsequent sojourns in the human world. Overall, the cycle recounts three banishments arranged into two major phases: the first twelve poems focus on the causes and repercussions of his fall from heaven, while the latter portion shifts toward his wandering existence among humans. The banishment timeline unfolds in a cyclical rather than a linear pattern:

- First Banishment (Poems 1–2): After a drunken indiscretion while riding a dragon, the protagonist overturns a "golden vase," triggering a catastrophic flood in the human realm.
- Second Banishment (Poems 5–7): Following a period of cultivation and return to the Divine Empyrean (Poem 3) and a lament over earthly hardships (Poem 4), he is exiled again for a breach of etiquette—raising his head to gaze upon celestial maidens during an audience with the Jade Emperor.
- Third Banishment (Poems 8–10): Restored to favor owing to a shortage of heavenly personnel and his continued cultivation, he is recalled to service. Yet, at a banquet in the Jasper Pond, he consumes a "celestial plum" before permission is granted. This act leads to his third and final exile, which corresponds directly to his present earthly existence.

Starting with Poem 13, the story becomes clearly connected to real places, mentioning locations such as Wuyi and Jinhua. At this point, the main figure, accepting his fate, "bends his arm for a pillow" (a Confucian reference to finding contentment in poverty), focuses on practicing internal alchemy and waits patiently for the set time to return.

In terms of space, the *Qu Gong Poems* build a cosmic structure centered on the Divine Empyrean, the highest level of the Nine Heavens in Daoist belief. Within this heavenly order, Bai Yuchan presents a dual pre-incarnate identity, combining the roles of Literary Scribe and Thunder Functionary. Although the exact official titles he names differ in various works, his loyalty is always linked to the Divine Empyrean as a whole. Drawing from this cosmology centered on the Divine Empyrean, the following section takes the *Qu Gong Poems* as its focal point and reads them alongside Bai Yuchan's other writings to examine how banishment functions as a symbolic bridge linking inner cultivation and Thunder rites.

3.2. Heavenly Duties and Earthly Wandering: The Dual Identity in the Qu Gong Poems

In the *Qu Gong Poems*, the protagonist, although demoted more than once, consistently appears in celestial roles associated with the Thunder Department. Bai Yuchan's other writings confirm that his heavenly service was not confined to a single position. As a celestial scribe, he presents himself as a civil official charged with drafting imperial edicts and maintaining Heaven's registers. In the fourth poem of *Juhua Xin* 菊花新, he recalls: "I remember that I am the son of the Great Emperor Donghuang, holding the bamboo slips and plying the brush" 念我東皇大帝兒, 是操觚弄翰之職 (Bai 2013a, p. 284). A similar image appears in *Bijiashan* 筆架山: "I am the calligraphic immortal of the Jade Terrace, wielding tablets and ink before the Jade Emperor, turning clouds into ink and the sea into an inkstone, with the empty cold sky as a snowy scroll" 吾是瑤臺翰墨仙, 操觚弄槧玉皇前, 翻雲為墨海為硯, 一片寒空如雪箋 (Bai 2013a, p. 37). The anecdote aligns with *The Deeds of Master Haiqiong Yuchan* 海瓊玉蟾先生事實, preserved by Peng Si 彭耜[15], which states that Bai was "banished to the human realm for ten lifetimes due to an error in proofreading the cosmic cycles" 因誤校劫運之箓, 降人間十世 (Bai 2013b, p. 376).

In Poem 3 of the *Qu Gong Poems*, Bai depicts a return to the Shenxiao realm. Even after exile, his position as a director of the elements is reaffirmed. This mirrors *Feixian Yin* 飛仙吟, where he states:

> I submit that I am a Minister of Thunder, once banished from the Golden Palace for a past transgression. Buried in the red dust up to my ears, I subsist on a sparse, ascetic diet, maintaining a bitter discipline. 奏雲臣是雷霆卿, 舊因罪去辭金闕. 红尘埋身平至耳, 餐青饮绿守苦节. (Bai 2013a, p. 59)

Both texts highlight a central motif: the Thunder office is not abolished by banishment, but shifted into a different realm of operation. Whether through repeated descents or parallel appointments, Bai's heavenly identity is inherently dual. In the celestial sphere,

he wielded talismanic authority as a scribe and commanded wind, lightning, and storm as a Thunder Functionary. In the earthly sphere, these roles overlapped with his self-image as an itinerant poet and master of Thunder Rites, uniting literary cultivation with ritual command.

This dual framework runs through the *Qu Gong Poems*, which dramatize its implications in a sequence of three exiles. The first banishment (Poems 1–2) stems from a drunken indiscretion: overturning the "golden vase" 金瓶水 while riding a dragon. This spill is later reinterpreted in karmic terms as a heavenly accident that triggers a human flood, linking events across the two realms. The second exile (Poems 5–7) follows an etiquette breach, when he raises his head to gaze at fairies during an audience. The third (Poem 9) results from eating immortal fruit, a deliberate literary echo of Dongfang Shuo 東方朔[16]. These misdeeds are portrayed as playful rather than juridical: peeking at fairies, drinking too much, and stealing divine fruit become acts of whimsy rather than grave transgressions. Poem 6, where he asks, "How could the Jade maidens ever stain one such as I, an inactive clerk of the Divine Empyrean?", exemplifies this light and ironic tone.

By contrast, the two *Yunyou Ge* 雲遊歌 provide a markedly different representation, foregrounding the material and corporeal demands of prolonged wandering and cultivation in the human realm. This register also resonates with the lived conditions described in Poems 15 and 16 of the *Qu Gong Poems*. Representative lines include:

> Clothes pawned away, not a soul met along the road. 身上衣裳典卖尽, 路上何曾见一人.
>
> Utterly poor to the bone and marrow, one night's parasol tree rain in a desolate field. 真个彻骨彻髓贫, 荒郊一夜梧桐雨.
>
> Under the blazing sun burning the sky, unable to endure walking barefoot on the road. 炎炎畏日正烧空, 不堪赤脚走途中.

In the *Qu Gong Poems*, these scenes appear inside an ironic and sometimes self-mocking frame, setting an exalted celestial background against clear signs of poverty, physical decline, and social obscurity. In the *Yunyou Ge*, the focus shifts to a more factual style, describing environmental and bodily hardships such as hunger, extreme temperatures, fatigue, and lack of resources as part of cultivation. This comparison shows that exile is not only a literary way of re-imagining heavenly authority but also a period of sustained physical training in the human world, combining the role of a wandering poet with that of a master of Thunder Rites whose skills are tested through real hardship.

Following descriptions of his arduous training in the human realm, Bai Yuchan's work often centers on a yearning to return to the celestial domain. This impulse can be seen as a natural development of the banished immortal persona once it has been tested and tempered by the conditions of earthly practice. In some of his writings, moments of descent are imbued with irony and self-mockery, while in others the focus shifts to sustained recollection of the Jade Court of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao yufu 神霄玉府) and to the imaginative projection of this remembered order into the physical and social settings of the human world. Both reflecting on the celestial and applying its imagery to earthly life aim at the same thing: using cultivation to return to the heavens.

Bai's vision of the Jade Court of the Divine Empyrean is not merely emblematic but architecturally and bureaucratically precise. In the *Jiutian Yingyuan Leisheng Puhua Tianzun Yushu Baojing Jizhu* 九天應元雷聲普化天尊玉樞寶經集注 (Bai 2013b, pp. 169–70), he details a structured hierarchy in which ministers and generals occupy defined offices, manage cosmic affairs, and safeguard universal balance. This system positions the Perfected King of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao zhenwang 神霄真王) in a southeast palace, between the Jade Pivot Five Thunder Offices 玉樞五雷使院 and the Jade Court Five Thunder Offices

玉府五雷使院. The Thunder City 雷城, organized according to the Five Phases 五行, reproduces the layout of an imperial court with thunder as the pivotal instrument of governance.

While Bai Yuchan's systematic depictions of heavenly bureaucracy establish his doctrinal understanding of the Shenxiao order, other poems reveal a more personal emotion attached to this heavenly order. In poems such as the first two pieces of *Buxu Ci* 步虛詞, the poet reconstructs his former habitation in the Shenxiao domain through detailed visionary description:

> Once in the Divine Empyrean, I trod the jade heavens on flying clouds; the Jade Heaven holds thirty-six realms, and with six Brahma worlds gathering immortals in flight. 昔在神霄府, 飛雲步玉天. 玉天三十六, 六梵聚飛仙. (Bai 2013a, p. 31)

This passage situates celestial memory within a concrete, hierarchical cosmology, while the concluding lines—"Who now recalls the Jade Court, the spirit flying upward into the blue void" 誰復念玉府, 飛神登蒼蒼—register the speaker's growing distance from that origin. The spatial precision, coupled with emotional estrangement, marks the impulse to return as a movement of both recollection and loss.

This tension between remembrance and present hardship recurs throughout Bai's corpus, forming a cycle of deprivation, recollection, and renewed discipline. The poem *Kexi* 可惜 (Bai 2013a, p. 74) articulates this dynamic most directly. "How can the human world compare to the Divine Empyrean? My face is now covered in dust" 人間何似神霄府, 我今面目蒙塵土 juxtaposes the purity of the Divine Empyrean against the contamination of the mundane. "The white clouds stretch endlessly away, the blue bird never comes again" 白雲漠漠去無盡, 青鳥杳杳何曾來—extend this longing into visual and emotional motifs of alienation.

In *Manjiang Hong·Yong Bailian* 滿江紅·咏白蓮 (see full text in note, Bai 2013a, p. 292), the white lotus is imagined as the transformed jade hairpin of Chang'e 嫦娥, taken by a water god, its "white as jade, colder than snow" purity marking it as an object of immortal provenance that no one dares to touch. Through this allegory, Bai Yuchan elevates the lotus into a mirror of his own banished immortal condition, a being displaced into the human realm yet retaining an untarnished celestial nature.

Such aesthetic "immortalization" extends to persons as well. In *Xu Jing Xiansheng Xiang Zan* 虛靖先生像讚, Bai describes the Daoist master Zhang Jixian[17] (張繼先, 1092–1127), canonized as Xu Jing Xiansheng, through an explicitly immortal lens:

> Seven times refined, his elixir none can equal; he returned unseen, who could know him? If one would see the true Xu Jing, look west of the Northern Dipper for a single star. 七返還丹阿誰無, 先生歸去誰識渠. 時人要見真虛靖, 北斗西邊一點如. (Bai 2013a, p. 259)

In these portraits, historical figures are presented as continuations of the celestial lineage to which Bai himself belongs. They reflect his own "banished yet divine" status and articulate the aspiration for eventual restoration. By the final movement of the *Qu Gong Poems* (Poems 17–20), this yearning has evolved into a renewed engagement with the work of return. Yet, in the closing line, he declares, "Yet there is one place where I surpass all kings: they have never known such leisure and freedom" 只有一般輸我處, 君王未有此清閒, indicating that, once cultivation is accomplished, he finds in the human realm a serenity that rivals or surpasses the attractions of heaven.

This revaluation of the present world is developed further in the *Kuaihuo Ge* 快活歌 (Bai 2013a, pp. 92–96), where Bai reimagines worldly life as a legitimate arena for alchemical fulfillment. Lines such as "Letting go of all ties, attaining ease is true joy" 放下萬緣都掉脫, 脫得自如方快活 and "Following one's own rhythms in market or mountain alike" 或居朝市或居山 frame detachment and self-direction as central virtues. Re-

frains like "Happy, happy, truly happy" 快活, 快活, 真快活 serve as manifest declarations of the boundless pleasure found in spiritual freedom. Descriptions such as "a carefree man between heaven and earth, laughing aloud so the world widens" 一個閒人天地間, 大笑一聲天地闊 and daily routines stripped of striving portray one who has cast off all entanglements and attained clarity. In both *Kuaihuo Ge*, references to cinnabar, mercury, the "three passes" 三關, and the harmonizing of water and fire place the technical language of Thunder Rites and inner alchemy inside scenes of free wandering. The second *Kuaihuo poem* intensifies this freedom with vivid scenes, such as wandering wildly or sitting still, "drinking only the body's own jade-like fluids" in summer 熱時只飲華池雪, and "drawing Dantian fire" in winter 寒時獨向丹田火. These images blur the line between human life and an immortal's realm. This blending of boundaries allows him to live at ease in the present world, without longing to return to an otherworldly domain, and to realize the intent of practice in everyday life. His practice rests on inward contemplation of the mind in a state of meditative stillness.

3.3. Longing to Return Yet at Ease on Earth: Remembrance, Cultivation, and Freedom

In the *Daofa Huiyuan* 道法會元, the section *Qingwei Daofa Shuniu* 清微道法樞紐 states:

> For one who has attained the Dao, the embryonic state is perfected and the spirit is transformed; the body becomes pure yang, freely traversing the three realms without obstruction. Thus such a person can personally attend the Celestial Emperor, discourse on affairs, and reverse the course of heaven.
>
> 蓋成道之士胎圓神化，體變純陽，三界圓通，無往不可，故能親朝上帝，論事回天. (Daozang 1988, vol. 28. p. 749c)

Such mastery—commonly referred to as the "roaming of the Yang Spirit 陽神" —is not merely a posthumous ascent but an embodied realization of transcendence. It closely parallels the state articulated in Bai Yuchan's notion of "dreamless return" (wu meng 無夢). This meditative attainment allows the adept ascends without the intermediate imagery of dreams. In *Chao Dou* 朝鬥, Bai Yuchan writes: "At night in the tower, a single thread of incense smoke from the jade censer drifts upward into the highest of the Three Heavens; after worshipping the Dipper, the sky fills with wind and dew, yet the worldly will cling all the more to sleep" 夜樓一穗玉爐煙, 飛入三天最上天, 朝罷滿空風露晚, 世人應是更貪眠 (Bai 2013a, p. 185). In this scene, the rising incense becomes a medium for Bai's inward concentration, guiding his mind into profound meditation. Within this state, he ascends without dreams as the Yang Spirit, returning to the celestial realm. In *Ke Xi* 可惜, Bai Yuchan laments: "In recent years I have reached Shenxiao without dreaming; once, grief overwhelmed me and my tears fell like rain." 年來無夢到神霄, 一度傷懷淚如雨 (Bai 2013a, p. 64). In *Zeng Zihua Shijing Zhou Xiqing* 贈紫華侍經周希清 (Bai 2013a, p. 74), Bai Yuchan remarks that Zhou could, without dreaming, arrive at the the Queen Mother's banquet—an attainment conceivable only for a banished immortal. Such visionary states correspond closely to the Zhuangzi 莊子, "the Perfected have no dreams" 古之真人, 其寢無夢 (Guo et al. 1998, p. 136), which depicts an individual who has entirely transcended internal disturbances.

Such instances reveal that Bai Yuchan's poetic visions were not mere literary ornamentation, but direct reflections of meditative states in which the boundaries between celestial realms and lived spiritual practice dissolve. Although his self-descriptions as a banished immortal often evoke the hope of returning to heaven, his cultivation practice and psychological orientation reveal an ambition that extends beyond posthumous ascent. What he sought was not merely release at life's end, but the realization of transcendence and liberation within the present body, moment, and environment.

For Bai Yuchan, the dissolution of boundaries between Shenxiao's celestial expanse and the human world depends on inward cultivation. This means deliberately entering meditative absorption to contemplate one's own spirit, the "original nature" in which the immortal realm is already present. His verse often affirms that the body itself contains a Penglai 蓬萊 paradise. As stated in the twelfth poem of *Huayang Yin* 華陽吟:

> Within the human body there is a Penglai, its twelve tiers ascended by white jade steps. The Lovely Maiden and the Gold Elder hold constant feasts; before the hall, the peony blooms night after night. 人身自有一蓬莱, 十二层楼白玉阶. 姹女金翁常宴会, 堂前夜夜牡丹开. (Bai 2013a, p. 200)

Such imagery renders the inner cosmos as no less vivid than any mythic geography. Likewise, *Xilin Rushige* 西林入室歌 situates the consummation of the Nine-Reversion Elixir (jiuhuandan 九還丹) within the meditative state of "Right Concentration" 正定 and the highest awakening of "Perfect Awareness" 圓覺:

> The Bodhisattva Guanyin abides in Right Concentration; the Buddha embodies Perfect Awareness. At times it is like spring beauty adorning mountains and rivers; at others like autumn brightness refreshing cliffs and ravines. It is also called the Ninefold Reverted Great Elixir, known as the medicine of eternal life. Each step ascends the marvelous Huayan Palace, each layer reveals the precious Maitreya Pavilion. 观音菩萨正定心, 释迦如来大圆觉. 或如春色媚山河, 或似秋光爽岩壑. 亦名九转大还丹, 谓之长生不死药. 步步华严妙宫殿, 重重弥勒宝楼阁. (Bai 2013a, p. 104)

Bai Yuchan, by relying on the mind's inward contemplation in a state of meditative stillness, allows this inner paradise to manifest. By deliberately stirring the mind in inner contemplation (neiguan 内观), he can in turn mobilize it as the operative force of the Thunder Rites. The next chapter will focus on a detailed analysis of these processes and their technical foundations.

4. The Heart as the Pivot: The Integration of Inner Alchemy and Thunder Rites in the Practice and Application of the Banished Immortal

4.1. The Inner Cultivation Dimension of the Heart Method: Spirit Visualization and the Practice of Thunder Rites

As recorded in *Haiqiong Bai Zhenren Yulu*, Bai stated: "All methods arise from the Heart; beyond the Heart there is no other method" 法法從心生, 心外無別法 (Bai 2013b, p. 92). This encapsulates his conviction that the Heart is both the source and the governing principle of all spiritual practice, whether meditative or ritual, and that nothing outside the Heart can lead to the Dao. In Bai's view, the Thunder Rites themselves emerge from this same Heart Method. From Heart to Thunder, the crucial link lies in the practice of Spirit Visualization, preserving and focusing spirit so as to stir and direct qi, thereby mobilizing the mutual resonances of the five viscera and six bowels. Through this inner ignition, the cosmic potency of thunder is rooted in and activated by the refined energies of the body, joining celestial force with human physiology.

In *Xuan Zhu Ge Zhu* 玄珠歌注 (Bai 2013b, pp. 317–24), Bai explains that the heart is the "Celestial Dipper (tiangang 天罡)," the central command that drives the circulation of all qi. The essence of thunder work lies in condensing qi through "closing breath and inner observation" so that shen (spirit) and qi remain stable. With such stability, the five elemental qi—associated with the five organs—can be stimulated ("五炁相激剝") to manifest as the Five Thunders. He outlines intricate visualizations and body alignments:

Mud ball palace (Niwan gong 泥丸宫, located in the head) is described as the residence of the Highest Emperor and the meeting place of all spirits; qi is lifted through key internal passes to reach it, merging human and cosmic forces.

Specific correspondences link organ qi interactions to meteorological phenomena. Conflict between water and fire produces lightning and thunder, opposition between metal and wood triggers thunder, the cooperation of metal and water supports rainmaking, and the interaction of wood and fire disperses clouds or brings wind.

Rain from the kidney's water by circulating qi through the inner "sea of yin" 陰海 *until it reached both heaven and earth; creating sunlight from the heart's fire by picturing great flames moving through the body's qi-cosmos; and producing hail and snow by reversing the flow of yin qi* 陰氣*, letting yang rise first and yin then fall.* Weather events like wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning were seen as coming from qi, which was thought to start in the heart. By continuing to visualize fire or water, the practitioner would gradually feel heat or cold in the body.

Earth (spleen) is the neutral center 中宫 that allows qi of all Five Phases to gather; without it, no cosmic integration takes place.

Importantly, Bai warns that without mastery of inner qi generation, external talismans, chants, or ritual postures alone will not summon thunder; the process depends entirely on correctly gathering and directing the five organ qi in accordance with cosmic yin-yang alternations. The practitioner must "guard the One," keep the mind sincere and intent unwavering, and engage heart, breath, and imagination to align inner elemental dynamics with cosmic forces.

This link between the inner and outer worlds was explained further in Bai's other writings. In his *Preface to Wang Huoshi Leiting Ao Zhi* 汪火師雷霆奥旨序 (Bai 2013b, pp. 324–25), he said that a mind kept clear and pure could, when guided, move with the cosmic order, opening a path between heaven and earth, connecting with spirits, and balancing yin and yang. In *Leiting Sanshuai Xin Lu* 雷霆三帥心錄 (Bai 2013b, pp. 327–30), Bai presents an embodied theology of thunder in which three thunder marshals are not only invoked as external powers but are installed as living presences within the practitioner's own visceral organs. This placement is summarized in the core line: "Deng is in the heart, Xin in the gallbladder, Zhang in the kidneys; their placements follow the virtues by which their ancestors governed the world." 邓帅在心, 辛帅在胆, 张帅在肾, 皆按其祖所王天下之德. Reading closely, this does more than assign deities to organs. It aligns the marshals with the body's visceral organs and Five Phase correspondences, so that the practitioner's internal yin–yang dynamics become the medium through which thunder and lightning can be generated. The result is an inner map in which deity visualization, elemental correspondence, and physiological loci converge into an operative system.

This internalization of thunder power becomes even more explicit in *Zuo Lian Gongfu* 坐煉工夫 (Gai 2023, pp. 45–46), where Bai adapts core inner-alchemical procedures for use in thunder methods aimed at "breaking the ground and summoning thunder" 破地召雷法. "Suddenly there is a single resounding crack; the thunderbolt pierces through to the Niwan" 忽然一聲響, 霹靂透泥丸, frames thunder as an experiential outcome of successful inner refinement. "Breaking the ground" implies drawing the yang force up from a hidden yin depth. "Summoning thunder" is the expansion of that activated vitality to the threshold where body and cosmos meet. The phrase "pierces through to the Niwan" further ties this effect to the internal ascent of refined qi toward the crown center, making the thunderclap the audible correlate of a completed inner circuit. Bai then supplies the technical mechanism: "Preserve the ancestral qi; from the lower elixir field

it passes through the Weilu… entering the Niwan as opening the upper pass" 存祖炁, 自下丹田透過尾閭…入泥丸為開上關. This is a direct deployment of the inner alchemical "Three Passes"—Weilu 尾閭 (lower), Jiaji 夾脊 (middle), and Yujing/Niwan 玉京/泥丸 (upper)—recast as the internal infrastructure of a thunder operation. Opening the passes is not an abstract spiritual metaphor. It is the required condition for allowing the "image" of thunder and lightning to rise through the body and emerge at the "gate of Heaven."

Shu Fu Neimi 書符內秘 (Gai 2023, pp. 46–47) extends the same synthesis into talismanic practice, showing that the writing of Talisman is itself an alchemical-thunder process:

> When Water and Fire strike and strip against one another, fire naturally flares and wind surges… entering within the root-base of ancestral qi in the Central Palace" 水火激剝, 自然火發風騰…入中宮祖炁根蒂之內.

Water and Fire mutually stimulating becomes the "thunder principle" embedded within talisman production. Practitioner writes simultaneously performs internal operations: settling into seated meditation, generating and swallowing internal fluids 津液, sustaining heart-centered visualizations, and guiding the water–fire exchange until it produces a thunder-like force that can be "injected" into the talisman. The Talisman is therefore "charged" by the same inner processes that, in thunder rites, produce thunder and lightning. Talismanic efficacy is the extension of inner refinement, not a separate technology.

Bai's teachings thus describe a mature system in which the practitioner's body serves as the altar and the cosmos can be read through internal correspondences. Thunder appears in ritual, vision, or talisman not as excess or disorder but as the expected expression of an inner landscape brought into correct alignment.

4.2. From "Nature" (Xing 性) to "Emotion" (Qing 情): Literati Discourse and the Outer Expression of Thunder's Fierce Power

Because thunder is fierce, sudden, and unrestrained, Bai repeatedly implies that only sustained inner cultivation can prevent the practitioner from being overwhelmed by the very power he seeks to command. In this sense, the Reversion Elixir marks more than a technical milestone: it is the condition under which one can deploy the "strong methods" of Thunder Rites without inner disturbance, demonstrating a heart–mind that remains unmoved even as it gives full force to the rite. At this stage, the practitioner's outward conduct, whether joy, anger, laughter, or rebuke, can become an immediate expression of the Dao rather than a symptom of agitation. What is released outwardly is not uncontrolled passion but "true feeling" grounded in open sincerity, often formulated in Bai's tradition as the "straight" or unfeigned heart[18] (zhixin 直心). In Bai's synthesis, the visible sign is therefore not only an inner vision of deities or the smooth circulation of refined qi, but also a distinctive outward "style" of expression in which emotion is allowed to appear openly while remaining tethered to a stable inner root.

This claim bears directly on a central question of this study: unlike many of his Daoist predecessors and even certain successors, Bai Yuchan stood out for exceptional literary talent and an unusual willingness to write the full range of personal emotion. *Da Ming Yitong Zhi* 大明一統志 says he was "skilled in poetry" 工詩 (Xian Li 1990, p. 1263). This was a quality he shared with his patriarch Zhang Boduan 張伯端, whose poems mainly explained the stages and timing (huohou 火候) of Inner Alchemy, and with Zhang Jixian, the thirtieth Celestial Master of the Zhengyi tradition, who worked to integrate Inner Alchemy and Thunder Rites but wrote poetry mainly celebrating the quiet life of cultivation and explaining the Dao. In contrast, Bai's poetry went further. As noted in *Baiyu Zhai Ci Hua* 白雨齋詞話 (T. Chen 1959, p. 52), his verse was praised for having "shed all traces of the otherworldly air" 脫盡方外氣, a judgment that implicitly recognizes a latent literati persona within his Daoist identity. He gave full expression to all aspects of his emotional life.

To better understand this distinctive stance, it is useful to recall a related view from the classical literati tradition. In Su Shi's 蘇軾 commentary on the *Zhouyi* 周易, he explained a distinctive reading of the terms li 利 and zhen 貞, interpreting zhen as the constancy and uprightness of one's nature, and li as the active, outward expression of this nature in the form of emotion. In Su's view, nature connects upward to life (ming 命) and downward is manifested as emotion (Su 2011, vol. 12, pp. 114–15). When nature is stirred into activity, it transforms into emotion; by following emotion in proper accord, one can return to and realize nature. This framework, which refuses to set nature and emotion in opposition, resonates with Bai's own character: for him, displaying emotion openly was not a flaw, but could be a genuine path toward the Dao.

This helps explain why "banished immortal" imagery is so productive for Bai. The trope emerged out of earlier Daoist and literary materials and was reworked during the Tang–Song transition within the genre of roaming immortal poetry, gradually becoming a means by which literati fashioned a public persona. In scholar-official culture, it resonated with ideals of exile and reclusion, and it attached itself to the lived experiences of demoted or displaced officials. Li Bai's famous epithet, bestowed by He Zhizhang 賀知章, quickly circulated as a marker of extraordinary talent shadowed by frustrated political prospects. During the Song, with strong Daoist patronage and broader secular uptake, the title could be applied even to figures like Su Shi 蘇軾 (praised as a "second banished immortal")[19], whose Daoist beliefs were relatively mild. In this cultural transformation, banished immortal imagery converged with the larger tradition of banishment culture 貶謫文化. Both revolved around removal from a center of value, whether from heaven to earth or from court to frontier, and both encoded the psychic aftermath of lost status. Yet Bai's use of the trope differs in an important way. He does not merely borrow it to lament displacement or to claim transcendent talent. He integrates it into Shenxiao cosmology and into the moral and physiological economy of thunder power, so that "banishment" becomes an expression of divine office, ritual authority, and disciplined management of qi.

Qu Gong poems render this conversion especially clear. The speaker does not just style himself as an immortal cast down to the dust. He narrates banishment as a shift in cosmic bureaucracy and thunder office (see poem 1). Here, the conventional Tang–Song linkage between alcohol, spontaneity, and unrestrained genius is retained, but it is immediately shifted to meteorological and ritual consequence: a single misdirected action becomes rain catastrophe, as if the poet's inner impulse were already a thunder mechanism affecting the world. The poems repeatedly stage the tension between the fierce potency associated with thunder administration and the ethical demand for an unresentful heart: "I feel no anger toward the Jade Emperor (see poem 6)." That is, the affective economy of exile—so central to literati banishment writing—is here subordinated to a straight heart capable of wielding fierce power without being driven by grievance. Emotion is present, but it is not allowed to develop into rancor.

Li Bai, Su Shi, and Bai Yuchan all experienced exile, a condition that shaped Bai Yuchan's poetics of qi and qing and his reconfiguration of the "banished immortal" tradition. Drawing on literati culture and a shared air (qiyun 氣韻) of freedom and transcendence, Bai reinterpreted exile as a movement from cultural center to margin. In Li Bai's *Qiang jin jiu* 將進酒 (B. Li 2015, vol. 1, p. 276), expansive imagery, imperative rhythms, and the liberating power of wine generate an aura of unbounded spontaneity. This quality was later distilled into the label "banished immortal" and became a stylistic resource for Bai's own self-fashioning.

Bai keeps the traditional association between alcohol and sudden power but places it within the logic of Shenxiao cosmology and personal cultivation. In the Qu Gong poems, drunkenness and anger do not signal disorder; instead, they bring about tangible storm ef-

fects that show deliberate control over wind and thunder. By contrast, Su Shi's *Ding Fengbo* 定風波 defines strength as calm endurance and turns suffering into equanimity. Su's exceptional air, evident even in exile, earned him the title of "banished immortal," making Bai's posture familiar to educated officials. Bai's innovation is to give this shared sensibility a clear cosmological basis. The transcendent power admired in Li Bai and Su Shi is transformed, in Bai's work, into an external expression of cultivated qi and moral discipline, a means of channeling thunder's violent force without bitterness or self-indulgence.

Seen in this light, Bai Yuchan's literary voice is not an accidental ornament added to his Daoist practice. It is one of the ways his synthesis of Inner Alchemy and Thunder Rites becomes socially legible and experientially verifiable. By writing emotion as the outward function of cultivated nature, and by allowing the dynamics of qi to shape poetic tempo, imagery, and sonic force, Bai provides thunder ritual with a distinctive exit into the visible world of texts. The fierce power of thunder does not remain sealed inside the body or confined to the ritual altar. It appears as a style of speaking and writing that is straightforward, unfeigned, and powered by qi, and it joins inner realization to the active force of Shenxiao cosmology. As the first Southern Lineage master to spread Thunder Rites widely, Bai's emotional self-fashioning also had a strategic aim: by showing his methods in his own life, he became a living example of refining the self into thunder.

4.3. The Public Practice and Transmission of Thunder Rites: Rainmaking, Disaster Aversion, Communal Order, and the Continuation of the Southern Lineage's 'Banished Immortal' Consciousness

For Bai Yuchan and his Southern Lineage disciples, the aspiration toward the Divine Empyrean formed a common ideal. This shared vision transformed the image of the "banished immortal" from solitary exile into the spiritual foundation of a small but cohesive community of adepts. Through formal petitions such as the *Chuan Du Xie En Biaowen* 传度谢恩表文 (Bai 2013b, pp. 294–95), Bai not only secured Shenxiao appointments for his disciples but also conferred on them the same celestial identity that defined his own practice as a shenxiao leiting li, a Thunder Officer of the divine realm:

> Peng Si 彭耜— Commissioner of the Western Terrace in the Jade Court of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao Yufu Xitai ling 神霄玉府西台令)
>
> ……
>
> Pan Changji 潘常吉— Left Attendant of the Scriptures in the Jade Court of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao Yufu you shijing 神霄玉府左侍经).
>
> Zhou Xiqing 周希清— Right Attendant of the Scriptures in the Jade Court of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao Yufu you shijing 神霄玉府右侍经).

These ceremonial appointments, written and ritually performed, embodied Bai's conviction that the cosmic bureaucracy of thunder had to be mirrored by a disciplined community on earth. In his poems and ritual texts he repeatedly urged figures such as Peng Si and Pan Changji 潘常吉 to turn longing into cultivation, to treat exile as a divine assignment; in the preface to *Sending to Peng Helin of the Three Mountains* 寄三山彭鹤林 (Bai 2013a, p. 1), Bai even described his bond with Peng Si not merely as that of master and disciple but as "father and son of the immortal household" 玉蟾于彭耜, 则仙家父子也, suggesting a lineage grounded in shared transcendence rather than hierarchical instruction. Similarly, in *He Xinlang: Zeng Ziyuan* 贺新郎·赠紫元 (Bai 2013a, p. 307), Bai recalls their companionship in the celestial palaces—"once companions in the Eastern Court and Western Terrace" and "remembering the time when the golden vase rain poured down" 犹记得, 当时伴侣. 东府西台知谁主, 忆当时, 自泻金瓶雨—thus linking their earthly friendship to divine origins and the motif of the "golden vase water" in the *Qu gong poems*. In a poem to Pan

Changji (Bai 2013a, p. 307), he notes that she and Peng Si were reunited as companions in this life due to a bond formed in their former existence in the Divine Empyrean. Through these intimate voices of remembrance and exhortation, Bai transforms personal nostalgia into a program of communal, in which poetic memory itself functions as ritual encouragement. Thus, the "banished immortal" became not a trope of isolation but a shared identity aimed at living out the Dao in the human world while awaiting the day of return.

Bai's framing of the "Heart" as the pivot between inner alchemy and ritual law carries an overt political resonance. The *Guanzi* states that "the heart in the body is the ruler's position; the nine apertures have their offices" 心之在体, 君之位也; 九窍之有职, 官之分也 and that "motion displaces the ruler from his position, stillness allows him to attain himself" 动则失位, 静乃自得. Like the ideal sovereign who empties desire so that spirit may dwell 虚其欲, 神将入舍, the ritual master's inner composure governs the "officials" of the cosmic body, ensuring that gods take their stations and petitions rise in proper order (See *Guanzi, Xinshu I*. 管子·心术上, Xiangfeng Li 2004, p. 798). This metaphor turns the stilling of the heart into an administrative act, making personal cultivation inseparable from the maintenance of collective harmony.

Bai regarded the Shenxiao thunder rites not only as esoteric techniques for initiates but as a means of saving people and bringing material benefit to a local populace. He attached great importance to the *Scripture of Salvation* (Duren jing 度人经), reciting it himself every night and requiring his disciples to chant it morning and evening. Bai stressed that thunder methods are merely instruments, and that the true key to salvation lies in inspiring within others a single sincere thought. This capacity of the heart to move Heaven is grounded in virtues such as filial devotion, integrity, righteousness, compassion, strength, and loyalty, all concentrated in one mind and one correct intention. In this way, Bai recast ritual power as a moral force whose public efficacy in securing order, timely rain, and renewal rested on the cultivation of inner sincerity rather than on private attainment alone.

Building on this understanding of ritual as a public practice, Bai often described acts of rainmaking in which he presented himself as the ritual agent acting for the community. In *Qiyu Ge* 祈雨歌 (Bai 2013a, p. 102), drought is depicted as a shared crisis affecting both the natural world and human society, with Heaven and Earth unresponsive and the land left dry and barren 天地聾, 日月瞽, 人間亢旱不為雨. Bai portrays the ritual response in concrete terms: he descends on a crane, commands dragons and thunder, restrains drought spirits, and releases the "golden vase water," which becomes cooling rain across the land 一滴天上金瓶水, 化作四天涼. In *Daoyu Youying Ji Helin* 禱雨有應寄鶴林, he again emphasizes the administrative nature of the rite by describing a formal petition to Upper Clarity deities, followed by an immediate rainfall. Although observers assume that the adept stands idle during the rite, Bai explains that its efficacy lies in inner stillness rather than visible action, concluding that "this heart is merged with the Great Clarity" and that he had already served as a Shenxiao officer in former lives 豈知此心冥太清, 夙世已是神霄卿. Together, these poems present rainmaking as a form of public ritual whose effectiveness depends on inner stillness and ritual authority, restoring balance for the community while the ritual master quietly withdraws once the task is complete.

During the Southern Song, the relative stability and economic recovery of the coastal regions of Guangdong 廣東 and Fujian, in contrast to northern warfare and unrest in the Jiangsu–Zhejiang heartland, created favorable conditions for the rapid growth of Bai Yuchan's Southern Lineage (Huang 2023). Emerging from these regions, Bai initially performed exorcisms, healing rites, and rainmaking rituals for local gentry and communities, practices that addressed shared concerns and secured elite patronage. As Lowell Skar has shown, Bai enhanced the public legitimacy of his community by aligning its ritual system with the logic of imperial governance. At the same time, by printing and circulating texts

such as the *Leiting Yujing* 雷霆玉經 among educated elites in Jiangxi and elsewhere, Bai rendered thunder ritual knowledge previously confined to secret transmission accessible to the literati. Skar further emphasizes Bai's literati identity, noting that his calligraphic skill and meditative discipline constituted important "cultural credentials" that allowed him entry into circles of Song elite society (Skar 1996). Beyond this, Bai's self-fashioning as a "banished immortal" resonated strongly with elite ideals of moral refinement and cultivated withdrawal. Together, these cultural strategies allowed him to move from local ritual service to broader elite and imperial visibility.

Based on new materials[20], it is now possible to see that the Southern Lineage transmission associated with Bai Yuchan in the Ming dynasty Yunnan 云南, and the broader Southwest continued to preserve a distinct and self-conscious sense of the "banished immortal." This identity did not disappear with Bai's own Southern Song community, but instead became a durable model for religious authority that later Daoists consciously adopted and institutionalized. Ming-period figures active in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, such as Bai Feixia 白飛霞[21] (born Han Mao 韓懋), explicitly identified themselves as members of the "Bai Yuchan school of the Divine Empyrean" 神霄白玉蟾派. Among these adepts, Dao Ning 道凝[22] and several disciples of the Bai Yuchan school of the Divine Empyrean referred to themselves in inscriptions as "Inactive Divine Empyrean Clerk". Epigraphic evidence, including the *Zixia Shishi Stele* 紫霞石室碑, shows that Dao Ning traced his lineage directly to Bai's Shenxiao Thunder Department, adopting the title "Divine Empyrean Jade Court Heart-Seal Thunder Officer of the Bai Yuchan Perfected Lord" 神霄玉府心印雷吏玉蟾白真君宗派. Bai Feixia's own teachers included Chen Dounan 陳斗南, who is possibly identifiable with Chen Nan, and the Wuyi Immortal Elder (Wuyi Xianweng 武夷仙翁) or the Zhu-yi Weng 铢衣翁. The epithet "Zhu-yi" also appears in Bai Yuchan's *Qu Gong Poems* (poem 11) and *Robe of Six Zhu* (Liuzhu 六铢), where the poet nostalgically evokes, before banishment, the immortals in their celestial robes. Bai frequently styled himself as the "Recluse of Wuyi" (Wuyi sanren 武夷散人) and spent many years teaching in the Wuyi Mountains. Accordingly, titles such as "Wuyi Immortal Elder" or Zhu-yi Weng may be read as markers of affiliation with his lineage. Taken together, these sources show that the Daoists of the Bai Yuchan school of the Divine Empyrean inherited both Bai's combination of thunder ritual and inner alchemy and his distinctive way of teaching. They used the image of the banished immortal, ethical instruction, and poetic and ritual expression to build local religious communities.

5. Conclusions

Bai Yuchan's preeminent status in the history of Southern Song Daoism stems from his successful integration of Shenxiao Thunder Rites and Inner Alchemy into a highly unified doctrinal system. The establishment of this system relied not only on technical fusion but also on his profound construction and literary expression of the "Banished Immortal" consciousness. By portraying himself as a celestial Thunder Official temporarily displaced in the mortal world, he skillfully linked personal inner cultivation with cosmic thunder authority. This transformed private alchemical practice into ritually effective social power, completing a transition from individual transcendence to public service.

In this process, the "Heart" played a pivotal role. Bai emphasized that "all methods arise from the heart," believing that the power of Thunder Rites originates from the condensation and eruption of the practitioner's internal jing-qi-shen 精氣/炁神. What he presents in the *Qu Gong Poems* is precisely a life narrative centered on the "Heart." This poetic cycle not only records his cycles between the celestial and human worlds but also redefines earthly poverty, loneliness, and hardship as a process of refining the heart for the practitioner. This narrative renders abstract Daoist theories as lived experience charged

with emotional tension, harmonizing the majesty of Thunder Rites with literati sensibility through a "straight heart," and thereby endowing Daoist practice with a distinctive literati temperament and spiritual depth.

The influence of Bai Yuchan's banished immortal consciousness extends far beyond the Southern Song era. This self-conscious identity provided a complete template for constructing authority and a spiritual sanctuary for later Daoists. Historical evidence shows that Bai's banished immortal consciousness saw significant continuation and institutionalization in Southwest China during the Ming dynasty. Practitioners identifying as the "Bai Yuchan School of the Divine Empyrean" not only inherited his thunder techniques but also adopted banished immortal titles in official documents and religious designations. The continued vitality of this exiled immortal consciousness demonstrates that Bai Yuchan effectively converted a literary figure into an enduring religious institution and collective identity. Beyond securing cultural recognition for Thunder Rites within elite circles, he also employed literary forms, including the *Qu Gong Poems*, to embed a profound spiritual ethos into Chinese religious tradition—one oriented toward transcendence while remaining firmly engaged with the worldly realm.

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Appendix A

Qu Gong Poems

1. Once, in the first palace of Transcendent Qinghua, I was drunk and angrily rode a dragon, overturning half a drop from the golden vase of Heaven's water; I did not know that, in the human world below, the water had already turned into a flood.

2. The Jade Emperor issued a decree asking the Divine Divine who dared ride a dragon to stir up chaos; since I left the City of Thunder and glanced back once, the human world and Heaven were already immeasurably distant.

3. Banished to the mortal dust, my heart wandered in hesitation; the golden elixir fully refined, I wait for the crane to come. When I return to the Divine Empyrean and enter court before the Jade Emperor, he will once again assign me to govern the powers of wind and thunder.

4. Five Thunders are locked deep within the Palace of Jade Clarity; the white crane calls the wind, crying into the azure sky. Speaking of such hardships, three thousand jade maidens knit their brows into peaks.

5. The Great Emperor of Supreme Oneness paid homage to the Purple Clarity; a million jade maidens crowded the cloud-borne imperial carriage. At that moment I should not have raised my head—suddenly I saw the heavenly guard scolding with a fire bell. (The fire bell, ordinarily a ritual implement in Daoism, is here transformed into the weapon of celestial soldiers.)

6. I feel no anger toward the Jade Emperor; the jade maidens no longer dance in rainbow gowns. How could the Jade maidens ever stain one such as I, an inactive clerk of the Divine Empyrean?

7. The Nanke dream has ended, and I awaken to yesterday's delusion. At the end of our fate, we parted and flew away from each other. Cold pines lock away the jade maiden's dream; only I, to this day, have not returned. (The Nanke dream is a classical allegory for an illusory dream.)

8. In the Jade Palace there are few true officials; the Supreme Emperor feels my toil. An edict comes, summoning my return; apes cry across ten thousand mountains, white clouds floating in the emptiness. (The cries of apes is common poetic imagery for departure or return.)

9. At the Jade Pool, the Queen Mother feasts the immortals; two ensembles of pipes and songs cluster around embroidered tables. By mistake I ate one immortal plum and was sent again to the mortal world, losing track of the years.

10. I have not yet spent a hundred years in the human world; it is as if only a brief moment has passed in the Three Heavens. Formerly I was an officer of thunder; now there is no doubt that in this life I shall become an immortal.

11. In the past, I roamed freely on Mount Taihua; in the morning I drank jade milk and looked at crystal flowers. Back then I wore robes of six-zhu silk and did not know that in the human world there was coarse hemp. (Six-zhu robes are fine, light celestial garments.)

12. When I had reached the rank of Celestial Transcendent, I was sent down three times from Heaven's steps. Disliking the many offices in Heaven, I stayed in earthly grottoes for my own pleasure.

13. White clouds followed me to Mount Tiantai; I turned back again along the Jinhua. At Qifeng Pavilion I lingered and could not leave; under Wuyi Mountain, wild apes cried. (Tiantai, Jinhua, and Wuyi are renowned for their many Daoist sacred sites.)

14.I told these matters to the clear wind and bright moon: in Yangzhou there is a crane I have yet to ride. Last night I lingered before the Wufeng Tower, watching terrace clouds drift idly through the sky.

15. Barefoot, hair messy, in a patched monk's robe, I drink wine when bored and chant poems when drunk. Walking in the marketplace, no one knows me — I am the son of the Thearch Lord of Donghua.

16. This time I have wasted twenty years; my body is heavy and I cannot fly to Heaven. I shake out my ragged robes and laugh at myself — there is not a single coin in my pouch. (Flying to Heaven requires lightness; heaviness here means worldly burdens.)

17. I carry a single pearl; when seen it seems real, when sought it is gone. After the golden rooster crows, no one sees it, and the moon casts cold light over the great void. (The pearl symbolizes a Daoist enlightenment.)

18. I do not read sutras or sit in meditation; when hungry I eat, when tired I sleep. If the Jade Emperor does not grant me his azure gaze, it only means these bones of mine are still mortal.

19. I do not look at worldly people; across five lakes and four seas, my body is empty. In the deep caverns of Heaven, no one comes; by the stream, peach flowers have bloomed for many springs.

20. Mulberry fields turn to sea, and sea to fields—this saying is hard for men to believe. Yet there is one place where I surpass all emperors: they have never known such leisure and freedom.

Notes

[1] Bai Yuchan, originally named Ge Changgeng 葛長庚, was a native of Qiongzhou 瓊州 (modern Haikou 海口), and his family hailed from Minqing 閩清 in Fujian Province. Scholarly debate over Bai Yuchan's birth date is sharply divided between the 1134 "Shaoxing view" 紹興甲寅說 and the 1194 "Shaoxi view." 紹熙甲寅說. Proponents of the former include Guo (1995), Y. Li (2003, pp. 76–77), and the present author, while the latter is supported by (宮川尚志, Miyakawa 1978), Zhu (2008), and others. Related to these chronological disputes is the question of his lifespan, with estimates ranging from a "short-lived" thirty-six years to a "long-lived" ninety-six years or more. Despite these uncertainties, later followers establish Bai as the culmination of the Southern Lineage transmission, succeeding Zhang Boduan (984–1082) 張伯端, Shi Tai (1022–1158) 石泰, Xue Daoguang 薛道光 (1078–1191), and Chen Nan (?–1213) 陳楠.

[2] Inner Alchemy (neidan 內丹), meaning "inner elixir," is one of the two main branches of Daoist alchemy, distinct from External Alchemy (waidan 外丹) which produces elixirs by heating minerals in a crucible. Neidan aims to refine vital essence, pneuma, and spirit (jing 精, qi 氣, shen 神) within the practitioner's body to achieve spiritual transcendence and union with the Dao. While borrowing much of the symbolic language of waidan, its methods center on meditative and physiological practice informed by Daoist cosmology (yin-yang 陰陽, five phases 五行, *Yijing* hexagrams 易經卦象). The tradition emerged between the 3rd and 8th centuries from early internal visualization and meditation, incorporated cosmological alchemical theory through the influential *Cantong Qi* 參同契, and developed into organized lineages in the 9th-10th centuries, such as the Zhonglü tradition 鐘 (離權) 呂 (洞賓)一脈. By the mid-11th century, Zhang Boduan's *Awakening to Reality* (Wuzhen pian) 悟真篇 systematized the Southern Lineage, defining the classic three-stage process—"refining essence into qi, qi into spirit, and spirit returning to emptiness." 鍊精化氣、鍊氣化神、鍊神還虛. For an accessible introduction, see Pregadio (2019).

[3] Xin Hanchen, also called Xin Tianjun 辛天君, is a guardian god in Daoist mythology, especially in the Shenxiao Thunder Rites tradition. He is one of the Thirty-Six Divine Generals of the Thunder Division, and is a figure from legend, not a real historical person. In Bai Yuchan's hometown area of Limu Mountain 黎母山 in Hainan, people have long worshipped the God of Thunder. Xin Hanchen may be seen as a new form of this local thunder god.

[4] Derived from the signature in Bai Yuchan's preface to *Wang Huoshi Leiting Ao Zhi* 汪火師雷霆奧旨, see (Bai 2013b, p. 325).

[5] Lin Lingsu 林靈素, whose birth and death dates are unknown, was a Daoist from Wenzhou 温州 in the late Northern Song. He gained Emperor Huizong's 宋徽宗 trust through his skill in the Thunder Rites and other esoteric practices.

[6] Before the Spring and Autumn period 春秋時期, most legendary tales featured gods 神, as recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經. In *Free and Easy Wandering* 逍遙遊, the concept of immortals 仙 became distinct, describing a pure and perfect being dwelling on Mount Miaoguye, sustained by wind and dew, and roaming freely beyond the Four Seas (Guo et al. 1998, pp. 11–12). This shift marked the transition from mythical deities to a Daoist vision of transcendence, shaping later views of physical, spiritual, and moral immortality. Xiaqiu Zhong 瑕丘仲 is portrayed as a long-lived, enigmatic healer, whose extraordinary abilities led people in the north to call him a "banished immortal" (Xiang Liu 1990, pp. 10–11). The text emphasizes his insight and ability to "shed his traces," while leaving his celestial origins and the reason for his exile unexplained.

[7] Xiaqiu Zhong 瑕丘仲 is portrayed as a long-lived, enigmatic healer, whose extraordinary abilities led people in the north to call him a "banished immortal" (Xiang Liu 1990, pp. 10–11). The text emphasizes his insight and ability to "shed his traces," while leaving his celestial origins and the reason for his exile unexplained.

[8] Han-Six Dynasties narratives frequently portray banished immortals as celestial beings exiled to the human world following moral or ritual transgressions, with the possibility of eventual reinstatement. Representative cases include Liu An 劉安, King of Huainan, whose ascent was interrupted by accusations from heavenly officials (*Shenxian Zhuan* 神仙傳; Campany 2002, pp. 442–47); Xiang Mandu 項曼都, demoted for violating celestial etiquette before later reascending (*Baopuzi* 抱樸子; Wang 1985, p. 350); Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, associated with transgressive immortality motifs in *HanWu gushi* 漢武故事; Cai Dan 蔡誕, punished with exile for negligence while serving the Lord Lao; and the female immortal E Lühua 萼綠華, banished for a past crime and descending during the Jin period (*Zhengao* 真誥; cited in *Haiqiong Bai Zhenren Yulu* 海瓊白真人語錄). Together, these stories exemplify the characteristic "heaven-to-earth" trajectory of banishment and eventual return found in Han-Six Dynasties banished immortal narratives. Redemption 救贖 was generally understood in two main ways. One was self-redemption through renewed cultivation, undertaken either to return to the celestial realm or to resolve unresolved karmic obligations. The other was the accumulation of merit by guiding others on the path toward immortality (Lu et al. 1991).

[9] In Tang chuanqi narratives, banished immortal stories were elaborated to explain the causes of exile, hardships in mortal life, and eventual return to the celestial realm. Some figures were based on historical persons, such as Cui Shaoxuan 崔少玄, formerly the Jade Emperor's attendant scribe Yuhua Jun, whose posthumous ascent is recorded in *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記 (F. Li 1961, vol. 7, pp. 414–16). Others, such as Qing Jun 青君 in *Tongyou Ji* 通幽記, demonstrate the secularization of the motif, as banished immortals were increasingly portrayed with human habits, emotions, and social roles.

[10] Bai Yuchan's hagiographic narrative model exerted a lasting influence on later shenmo fiction 神魔小說. Deng Zhimo's 鄧志摩 Record of the *Iron Tree* (Tieshu Ji 鐵樹記) directly adapts Daoist biographies preserved in Bai Yuchan's *Yulong Ji* 玉隆集, transforming the Pure and Luminous Way (Jingmingdao 淨明道) of loyal and filial cultivation into an extended monster-slaying narrative 伏魔敘事. By contrast, *Record of the Enchanted Jujube* (Zhouzao Ji 咒棗記) adopts a similar hagiographic structure of moral accumulation, worldly trial, and final transcendence in its portrayal of Sa Shoujian 薩守堅, later revered as a Daoist patriarch and master of Thunder Rites. Together, these works demonstrate how Bai Yuchan's biographical paradigm shaped Ming shenmo fiction at the level of narrative form and religious imagination.

[11] Zhang Boduan was the chief synthesizer of the Northern Song inner alchemy and predated the later Quanzhen movement. He advocated inner alchemy (neidan) as the primary path to transcendence, taking the "dual cultivation of nature and life" as its central principle. In his view, the human body serves as the crucible, with essence and qi as the alchemical ingredients and spirit as the controlling fire. Through inner refinement, in which spirit returns to the void (lian shen fan xu 煉神返虛), essence and qi

are condensed into the Golden Elixi. Zhang's ideas are most clearly expressed in his seminal work *Awakening to Reality*, which became the foundational classic of the Southern Lineage.

12 From Zhang Boduan, *Qinghua Miwen* 青華秘文: "As for Spirit, there is the Original Spirit and the Spirit of Desire. The Original Spirit is a single spark of numinous light from the Pre-celestial state; the Spirit of Desire is the nature determined by one's endowment of qi. The Original Spirit is the Pre-celestial Nature, while that which comes after the formation of the body is the nature of psychophysical disposition. If one is adept at reversing this, the Nature of Heaven and Earth is preserved therein" 夫神者, 有元神焉, 有欲神焉. 元神者, 乃先天以來一點靈光也. 欲神者, 氣稟之性也. 元神乃先天之性也, 形而後者氣質之性, 善反之, 則天地之性存焉. (Daoist Canon, vol. 4, p. 364).

13 The phrase mingxin jianxing ("illuminating the mind and seeing one's nature") originates in Chan Buddhism, where it denotes the direct realization of one's innate, luminous awareness through clarifying and pacifying the mind. In Zhang Boduan's context, the term expresses the inner alchemical process of returning from the desire-driven mind to the Original Spirit: by inward contemplation and refinement, the practitioner restores clarity of consciousness and recovers the genuine nature of the Former Heavens 先天.

14 Bai Yuchan's *Donglou Xiaocan* centers on the concept of the heart as the root of the Dao. Drawing from Daoist, medical, and inner alchemical thought, he teaches that the Dao is not sought externally but realized through inner stillness, emptiness, and self-mastery. The mind rules the body and is the abode of spirit—when tranquil, qi harmonizes, and spirit condenses, bringing vitality and longevity; when disturbed and attached to externals, one's essence scatters and death follows. True cultivation lies in eliminating distractions, maintaining unity of mind, preserving calm and humility, so that qi gathers, spirit abides, and nature and life are perfected, ultimately merging with the Dao itself.

15 Peng Si (1185–?), a native of Fuzhou, Fujian, was one of the Seven Perfected of the Southern Lineage and a close disciple of Bai Yuchan. He assisted Bai in organizing the lineage and compiled important Daoist works.

16 On Emperor Han Wu's birthday banquet, the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 came to offer her congratulations and pointed at Dongfang Shuo, giving rise to a tale of Dongfang Shuo stealing peaches, which later became a popular theme in imperial birthday celebrations. Peng Si 彭耜, in The Deeds of Master Haiqiong Yuchan, having altered the Mulang incantation 木郎咒to pray for rain with remarkable success, was suspected by some to be the reincarnation of Zhang Jixian (see Bai 2013b, p. 376).

17 Peng Si 彭耜, in *The Deeds of Master Haiqiong Yuchan*, records that Bai Yuchan altered the Mulang incantation 木郎咒 to pray for rain with remarkable success, which led some to suspect that he was the reincarnation of Zhang Jixian (see Bai 2013b, p. 376).

18 "Undoubtedly, the straight heart is the true Way. To guard the One without doubt is the correct Dharma; when the One is guarded without doubt, every Dharma is the Dharma of the heart." 无疑是直心, 守一是正法. 守一而无疑, 法法皆心法. (from *Helin Chuanfa Mingxin Song* 鶴林明法頌; see Bai 2013a, p. 257).

19 Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 praised Su's prose as "majestic and transcendent, beyond the realm of mortal speech," and honored him with the epithet "Banished Immortal."

20 The new material comes mainly from the Ming dynasty *Zixia Shishi stele* at Mount Zixia in Bozhou, which records the birth, training, and teaching of the Daoist Dao Ning, and notes that his lineage was the "Divine Empyrean Jade Court Heart-Seal Thunder Officer of the Bai Yuchan Perfected Lord". For a detailed discussion of this new material, see Luo (2025).

21 Bai Feixia (1441–1522), originally named Han Mao, was a native of Luzhou 瀘州, Sichuan 四川. Because his parents were frail and he himself was sickly from childhood, he abandoned Confucian studies for medicine, practicing to heal the public.

22 Scholarly views differ on Dao Ning's identity. For instance, Luo Xi 羅禧 holds that he was a member of the Yang Tusi ruling family of Bozhou in the Ming dynasty. Dao Ning styled himself "Mad Immortal" (Dianxian 癲仙) and "Inactive Divine Empyrean Clerk", with the full Daoist name "Bai Dao Ning." He was trained under multiple masters and lineages, but ultimately affiliated himself with the Divine Empyrean Jade Court Heart-Seal Thunder Officer of the Bai Yuchan Perfected Lord. Both Dao Ning and Han Mao adopted the surname "Bai" as part of their inheritance of this Shenshao Bai Yuchan tradition.

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