

# The Golden Flower and its Fruit

by  
Pierre Grison

*Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Summer, 1968) © World Wisdom, Inc.

[www.studiesincomparativereligion.com](http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com)

Pierre Grison spent some seven years in the Far East after the war, during which time he took the opportunity to study countries, men, civilisations and doctrines. Many articles from his pen have appeared in France in which he has treated subjects as diverse as Buddhism and its art, Chinese secret societies, the Caodai sect in Vietnam, the cosmological symbolism of the Angkor temples etc.; in all this work his perspective has conformed strictly to traditional orthodoxy, on the lines defined by René Guénon. A book of his on the TREATISE OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER OF THE SUPREME ONE now awaits publication in Paris; it will consist of a French rendering of the text coupled with annotations and preceded by an introductory study of the whole. He has also collaborated in an important DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS in respect of all subjects that concern Asia. At the moment M. Grison is working on a fresh translation of the TAO-TE-KING accompanied by a commentary.

*The Editor.*

IN Europe the Golden Flower opened slightly some forty years ago when Richard Wilhelm, prefaced by C. G. Jung, revealed its "secret."<sup>1</sup> It is not the least of the contradictions attaching to this work that it has become almost as well known thanks to Professor Jung's commentary as by reason of its own text: there is nevertheless no common measure between the two. The object of this commentary, so wrote the celebrated psychiatrist, "is to try and build the bridge of an interior, spiritual understanding between East and West." However, since the parallelism here was being established on a psychic level, not on a spiritual level, the said "bridge" he was building was that of a total confusing of values. The "action in non-acting" of Liu-tsu, the "fasting of the heart" (*sin-chai*) of Chuang-tse, the Taoist "spontaneity" (*tso-jan*) do not spell a "psychic *laissez faire*" opening a path for the suspect fantasies of the unconscious any more than does the "self-abandoning" of Meister Eckhart. In fact, every method of meditation, and the method of Liu-tsu in particular, presupposes a "stopping" of that imaginative function which Mr. Jung for his part had it in mind to "liberate." A traditional *mandala* is not comparable to such and such a drawing by a mental patient, unless it be by inversion, that is to say in the very way that the forces of the lower regions parody the divine Powers. But after all, why discuss the subject of *mandala*, seeing that its symbolism in no wise enters into the unfolding of the Golden Flower?

In the course of so brief a study one cannot claim to cover the complete analysis of the symbolism attaching to the Golden Flower; all one can do is to establish a few points of reference starting out from which it will be possible to replace its growth in the proper traditional framework—rather should one have said: in its traditional soil. Our text speaks of "the ground of thoughts," the fecundity of a spirit open to the celestial influx (in Chinese: *ling*, mouths opened to catch the rain from Heaven).

What is really in question here? A Taoist text, probably of late but ambiguous date, together with a commentary of the XVIIIth century whereof the tendencies, when all's said and done, do

not always coincide exactly with those of the text thus commented upon. *The Treatise of the Golden Flower of the Supreme One (T'ai-yi kin-hua tsong-che)* is not a systematic exposition by a spiritual Master; rather is it a noting down of the elements of an oral teaching by disciples who may not have been its listeners in a direct sense. The introductory doctrinal notions are confined to a few rather confused lines from which there emerges, however, the vocabulary of the ancient Taoist books of the Han period; the remainder is a description of a masterly method of spiritual realization, far too complete to have been originally intended for wide diffusion and not complete enough to be realizable without danger or by one devoid of a previous training. This exposition moreover is entirely lacking in chronological precision, it is encumbered with recapitulations and digressions, loose citations and obscure sentences: should one perhaps describe it as "heterogeneous"? In regard to its expression this might perhaps be so, but certainly not in regard to its method. In fact many solid and well authenticated elements can be discerned there, various in origin but skilfully assembled: one finds the constant principle of "action in non-acting," as mentioned above, also practices of "concentration" and of invitation to the enlightening intuition such as call to mind at one and the same time Chuang-tse and *the sutras*, the *Pao-p'u tse* and the *tantras*, not to mention the apocryphal writings of the T'ang period. To these must be added two apparently original elements, namely: the movement of "the revolving of Light," followed by what in modern technical language would be called "photosynthesis"; and the final opening of the Golden Flower.

Master Liu-tsu, who is looked on as author of this teaching, is a historical figure of the T'ang period (IXth century) who was subsequently included among the Eight Immortals of the Taoists under the name of T'ong-pin. The fact that he is sometimes said to teach how to concoct pills of long life can moreover only be considered in a timeless context, for the *recipé* for such "pills" is already known through a text of Wei Po-yang, an author of the Han period (IInd century) who certainly was not their inventor. However, in the absence of allusions actually dating from T'ang times, the biography of this person, as well as the doctrine "of *Ming* and *Sing*" attributed to him (and from which the present treatise derives) are especially known through works of the Song and Yuan period: such, for instance, is the *Orthodox History of the Golden Lotus* of Ch'u-li (1301), the title of which is particularly evocative. There is no doubt that the *Treatise of the Golden Flower* has its roots implanted in that period, which is the time of the development both of *ch'an* Buddhism and of a "neo-Taoism" of a somewhat syncretistic kind, in the framework of which the poet Su Tong-p'o together with Ch'ang-keng and others re-evaluate the spiritual or interior Alchemy (*nei-tan*) as opposed to the material or external Alchemy (*wai-tan*) of the Chinese "blowers."<sup>2</sup>

Equally timeless is that teaching which people do not hesitate to refer back to Yin-hi, the "Guardian of the Pass" to whose care Lao-tse entrusted the *Tao-te-king* and whom the *Lie-sien chuan* makes into an Immortal "versed in esoteric science, always nourishing himself with the purest essence, keeping secret his own virtue and carefully regulating his activities." What is more, Yin-hi is here represented as "the True Man of the Beginning of Form" (*Hing-che chen-jen*), while the ordering of the primordial chaos is ascribed, according to the Taoist doctrine of the Han, to Lao-tse himself. This amounts to saying that such a teaching is as old as the world or, if one so prefers, it is the very consequence of the original separation of Heaven and Earth: we shall try to explain why.

\* \* \*

According to the school here in question, the symbolical Alchemy is established on various levels, of which the level of *ming* and *sing* is the most characteristic: *sing* covers the physical and subtle components of the individuality, its "celestial" essence; *ming* is the destiny of man, his "earthly" determination. We are taught that *ming* and *sing*, which in the Principle are not distinct, separate at birth in the same way as the cosmic Unity (*T'aiyi*) manifests itself as Heaven-and-Earth.

The symbolic aim of spiritual realization is a return from duality to Unity, a reuniting of *ming* and *sing*, that is to say a "return" to embryonic indistinction as a stage in the ultimate "return" to the Principle.

The method taught in the *Treatise of the Golden Flower* is a translation of this same process in "tantrik" mode: the union which is to be reconstituted at the "centre" of the being is the union of *tsing* and *k'i*, "essence" and "breath" (*virya* and *prana* in Hindu parlance), concerning which *the Hi-se* says that they are the two original components of the corporeal being. The union of *tsing* and *k'i* in the anatomical "crucible," such is the real "interior Alchemy": it is the union of Water and Fire respectively symbolized by the trigrammes *k'an* and *li* of the *Yi-king*,<sup>3</sup> of Moon and Sun, of Earth and Heaven, origin of all productions. The product, which is the "gold" of this Great Work, is the unique Light and the "Embryo of Immortality."

*Li*, Fire, is *yang* without and *yin* within (its sign is composed in fact of one *yin* stroke between two *yang* strokes). Inversely, *k'an*, Water, is *yin* without and *yang* within (one *yang* stroke between two *yin* strokes). They therefore are homologues of the two halves, white and black, of the *yin-yang*, with each half including a trace of the opposite sign; together they symbolize precisely the original cosmic indistinction. Now "like things are attracted to one another": the *yin* stroke of *li* "descends" towards pure *yin*, that is to say towards the trigramme *k'uen* (corresponding to the belly, to Earth); the *yang* stroke of *k'an* "rises" towards pure *yang*, that is to say towards the trigramme *k'ien* (corresponding to the head, to Heaven). This twofold movement symbolizes, on the one hand, the "crystallisation" of *k'i*, its "fixation" and, on the other, the purification and "dissolving" of *tsing*. It is a constant tradition, in all forms of Alchemy, that the "volatile" must be "coagulated" and that the "condensed" must be "dissolved": *solve et coagula* say the Hermetists of the West.

It is however necessary to distinguish, or so it would seem, between two stages in the embryonic process respectively describable as the opening of the Golden Flower and the ripening of its Fruit. The Golden Flower (*kin-hua*) is another name for the Golden Cinnabar (*kin-tan*) which here stands for the Elixir of Life. If the commentary of our treatise is to be believed, its formation is consequent on the purification of *tsing*, therefore on the "sublimation" and regressive movement of the seminal energy, which here plays an essential part. It is only after the formation of the *kin-tan* (=the phase of "flowering") that the latter unites with the *k'i* that has "crystallised" with a view to the procreation of the Embryo (=the phase of "fructification"). One ancient Taoist treatise, the *T'ai-si king*, apparently teaches that *tsing* and *ki'i* unite to give birth to the mysterious Embryo. The latter knots itself giving birth to a body: this is the process of the inward Alchemy (*nei-tan*) leading to immortality. However, the phase of "flowering" is not mentioned in the *T'ai-si king*: this is doubtless because in the above treatise, as being founded on "embryonic breathing," predominant importance is given to the role of "breath," whereas the tantrism of our treatise gives first place to "essence." The regressive movement of essence, contrary to what happens with the ordinary vital process, is (to express oneself in hermetic terms) the *nigredonow* in China black corresponds to the element Water and to the kidneys; its

"dissolving" in the crucible is the *albedo*—white corresponds to the element Metal, God, therefore to *kin-tan*: "the Golden Flower is white," so we are taught expressly; the luminous union of essence and breath is the *rubedo*—now red is the colour of the element Fire.

The "flowering" of cinnabar in the body is the attainment (an effective and not an imaginative attainment) of the "central" or "primordial" state, the state of "true man" (*chen-jen*) or again, as some other treatises put it, the state of a "terrestrial immortal." The formation of the "spiritual body" and its return to the Principle by way of the crown of the head—along the vertical axis uniting that spot with the Pole-star—, this is the attainment of the state of "transcendent man" (*shen-jen*) or of a "celestial immortal."

Here we are far away, let it be admitted, from those pathological *pseudo-mandalas* at the centre of which Mr. Jung thought he perceived a Heaven-knows-what unwholesome flowering.

\* \* \*

Neither does the means of reaching this supreme realization derive from imagination, but results (as was pointed out earlier on) from the annihilating of external perceptions and mental functions. The essential phase consists in concentrating all one's thoughts on a point situated between the eyes, a point which here is called *sheu-ts'uen* ("space of a thumb") and which in India bears the name of *brûhmadya*, *prajnâ-chaksus*, *ajnâ-chakra*, all indicating the organ of unitive know-ledge, thanks to which the interior Light by its own involutive movement is led to concentrate itself in "the heart." Here there is no question of an original method, as Master Liutzu admits: this is the method of *ch'an* Buddhism, also that of the *T'ien-tai* sect, which can be summed up in the formula: "to stop and realize."<sup>4</sup> This gloss of the Song period also undoubtedly contains an echo of the Taoist *wu-wei*: "one does not imitate Heaven, says Chuang-tse, by claiming to imitate Heaven (but rather by remaining in non-action)." To stop, so teaches the great Master Chih-chi of the *T'ien-tai*, is to enter into the wondrous silence and peace of potentiality (*dhyana-samapatti*); to realize is to penetrate into the riches of intuition and transcendental intelligence (*matti prajna*).<sup>5</sup>

In fact it is only "stopping" that has been taken over—as a pure convenience—from *T'ien-tai* and *Ch'an*; "realizing" is practised according to an original method whereof some slight idea will have been given in the foregoing pages. If then the method in question is Buddhist, the aim is otherwise. The "Tantrism" we have been describing does not conceal its kinship with Indian sources, but it stands still closer to Taoist practices of the Han period. As for the symbolical use of the *pa-kua*,<sup>6</sup> it associates the above-mentioned Tantrism with the best tradition of the esoteric commentators of the *Yi-king*. It is mostly from this interpenetration that people have been inclined to infer a "neo-Taoist syncretism," whereas they should above all have seen therein a harmonious synthesis.

In conclusion, all one need do is to quote the beautiful formula of *Ko ch'ang-keng*, the XIIIth century restorer of the *nei-tan*: "if it be objected that this method is exactly that of the *ch'an* Buddhists, our reply will be that under Heaven there are not two ways and that the Sages are always of like heart."

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

*Eckhart said, "There are people upon earth that bear our Lord in spirit as his mother did in flesh."*

*They asked him who these were. He answered, They being free from things do see in the mirror of truth whereto they are gotten all unknowing; on earth, their dwelling is in heaven and they are at peace: they go as little children.*

<sup>1</sup> English edition : *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., London, 1931). In the original Chinese title of the work the word "secret" does not figure, but only the expression *tsong-che* = "treatise, fundamental teaching."

<sup>2</sup> Nickname applied, in Europe, to those who tried to imitate Alchemy experimentally, as a result of misunderstanding the true nature and purpose of this science : that is to say, those who took literally the aim of making "gold" from "lead," thus hoping to grow rich in the ordinary sense of the word.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Yi-king* the union of *k'an* and *li* is the "completion" (of the passage): *ki-tsi*.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the only "bridge" here able to provide a valid link with the West is the one that rejoins certain aspects of the Hesychast method of prayer.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from *Dhyana pour les débutants* (edited by Bhikshu Wai Dau and Dwight Goddard, Paris 1951).

<sup>6</sup> The "eight trigrammes" of the *Yi-king*.