

Symbolism of Water in Daoism: A Sufi Point of View

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Abstract

On the symbolism of water, two esoteric doctrines of the Far-Eastern and Islamic traditions, i.e. Daoism and Sufism, have many comparable teachings. Although different points of view would take different aspects of the symbol into account, the teachings in question come to interesting analogous points around the life-giving aspect of the symbol. Above all, water represent the source of life equally and simultaneously containing all the possibilities of manifestation and seeds of life of everything. In thins meaning, water represents the Great Element of the Throne of Life in Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, equivalent to the state of the Submerging Cloak (hunlun) or Water as the first epiphany of the Great One (taiyi) in Daoism. This pre-eternal water of the unmanifested state is also manifested with the same quality in the states of the Being. This paper first takes a short survey of different symbolical aspects of water in Sufism, and after explaining the place of the idea of life in Daoism, it presents major connotations of the symbol in Daoism from a Sufi point of view..

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The symbolism of water can provide us an occasion for endless discussions on the correspondences of two esoteric teachings of the two different traditions: Daoism and Sufism respectively belonging to the Far-Eastern and Islamic traditions. These two teachings other than the metaphysical principles, shared by all the Eastern traditions, have many similarities in common even pertaining to the realm of forms, which explains why these two teachings have been subject of many comparative studies of great metaphysicians of our century.¹ The symbol of water has various aspects, which make different dimensions for its symbolical meanings according to the point of view one takes up. In Quranic teachings, at least for Islamic esoterism, water represents various aspects of epiphany of the divine qualities (*al-Asmā waṣ-Ṣifāt*) in successive states of existence. Above all, water represents 'existence', 'knowledge', and more commonly 'life'. These three can be envisaged as three viewpoints each one of which can solely be applied in every symbolical uses of water, or an emphasis on one of them can make it predominant on others. In Sufism, particularly in *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* school of Ibn 'Arabī, water of oceans and seas is envisaged as representing Existence. In this symbolism, sea foams, spumes, and waves represent different determinations of Existence, however indefinitely abundant they are, the water is one,² and the determinations are all identified as water.

Ocean is ocean as it was in pre-eternity, and all the accidental things of the world is its waves and currents; beware not to be veiled by the forms which form them from what is hidden behind these forms.³

Waves, gem and the ocean are all one, but each form has made an apparent difference.⁴

This relation of water and existence, in Sufi perspective, is derived from relation of water and the divine Mercy, on the one hand, and relation of the divine Mercy and the Being, on the other. Shaikh Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī says, "The Name of ar-Raḥmān (the Merciful) is the unfolding of His absolute Being on the possibilities which are manifested by its epiphany. In reality, mercy is Existence itself and ar-Raḥmān (the Merciful) is God as al-Ḥaqq (the Truth) the Being of which is an expanded existence on whatever

is manifested from Him. Also, ar-Raḥmān (the Merciful) is God as al-Ḥaqq (the Truth) which in respect to its Existence, has a perfect passivity on any command at any time in any level, thus, He as ar-Raḥmān governs all the possibilities."⁵ This aspect of the symbol of water is commonly considered when the Quran says, "He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His Throne was upon water."⁶

According to some commentators of Quran, water is also a symbol of knowledge: "He (Allah) sends down water from Heaven, making the valleys to overflow as much as they contain";⁷ water is here interpreted as knowledge and the valleys as the hearts.⁸ However, water finds its richest symbolism around the conception of 'life' which is also naturally the most direct one attached to the symbol. Sustainability of plant, animal, and human lives is depends on water. Most of Quranic references to water envisages this aspect of the symbol: "From water, we gave life to everything;"⁹ "And He is the One Who sends down water from Heaven. Then by means of water, We bring forth vegetation of everything."¹⁰ This symbolism is also confirmed in the story of Moses and al-Khiḍr (the Green Immortal). As the story goes, Moses wishing to meet the Immortal al-Khiḍr, start a journey towards the "meeting place of two seas" (*majma' al-baḥrain*) where a dried fish comes to life "whether because of the extreme nearness of the Waters of Life, or because a drop of these waters actually falls on the fish".¹¹ Ibn 'Arabī also takes this point of view as for the symbol of water where he acknowledges it as the 'Great Element':

The throne of Life is the throne of the Will, the point of establishment of the Essence (*al-Dhāt*), and it is the same as the throne of Identity. In the *Quran*, Allah says, "From water, we gave life to everything;" (21:30) about this water He also says, "His Throne was upon water." (11:7), that is, he made life manifested in you, "in order to test you." (11:7) In another occasion He says, "He has made death and life in order to test you" (67:2) where has places "in order to test you" closer to life [than death], since one who is died has no consciousness [to be tested], and it is the same word of him: "His Throne was

upon water in order to test you." (11:7) and compare it also with "From water, we gave life to everything" (21:30). This water is the Great Element, namely, the Throne of Life, and it is the Name of Names and the first of Names upon which all of them exist.¹²

The Great Element is created from manifestation of God from Himself on Himself by means of Quiddative Lights (*Anvār as-Subuḥāt*): "this creation was forthwith with no casual succession and there is no way to understand this."¹³

One of the ideas generally taken up in the Daoist tradition as the central point of view is that of 'life',¹⁴ defined as "the splendor of the *de*":¹⁵ Dao (道, the Truth of truths) is the principle of life¹⁶ and every lives is from Him alone in all the metaphysical and physical domains.¹⁷ In the formal states, this life includes not only animal and human beings but also all the plant and inanimate beings.¹⁸ The mystery of life is called the 'breath of the One' (*yiqi* 一氣), that is, an exhalation of Dao as the Non-Being or, if preferred, Beyond-Being which brings forth the Cosmos through the Being,¹⁹ while its inhalation implies the return of everything to the state of Non-Being after their reuniting with the One.²⁰ The Being is the Principle, the Destination, and the Immanent: as the Principle it is called the One; as the Destination it is called the Whirlpool (*chong* 冲),²¹ and as the Immanent and universal presence in all the states of Existence and in all the beings both in macrocosm and microcosm it is called the 'Great Intrinsic Flow' (*datong* 大通) and the 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣).²² Also, it is this view that the ultimate state of spiritual realization is described as achieving 'immortality' (*xianren* 仙人),²³ the symbolical usage of which has been commonly neglected particularly in modern times. Laozi says,

The ten thousand beings grow together, I, however, observe them as returning. These beings spread like weeds; all return to their Origin. Returning to the Origin is called stillness. Stillness is called returning to life. Returning to life is called permanency. Knowing permanency is called light (of knowledge).²⁴

With respect to pivotal place of the conception of life in Daoism, sages has given a special attention to the symbol of water. The old form of the Chinese character for water, called *shui*水 (𠂔) depicts the trigram Kan (坎; 三) of the *Yijing* (易經), but in a vertical shape and additional vision of waveform.²⁵ The trigrams, above all, represent the archetypes (*xiang*象) governing possibilities of manifestation in the pre-eternal Heaven (*xiantian*先天), i.e. within the Principle itself.²⁶ Next to this, they are symbols of the aspects governing manifested objects in the posterior Heaven (*houtian*後天). In the Daoist teachings also naturally water includes both the mentioned states. It is firstly a symbol of the passive aspect of the Great One (*taiyi* 太一) or the first product of it, since it is the treasury of possibilities of manifestation as well as the destination (*chong*沖; literally whirlpool)²⁷ to which all things return. Among the texts found in a tomb in Guodian, there is a Daoist texts, generally called *Taiyi Shengshui* (太一生水) which describes water as the first product of the Great One above Heaven:

The Great One gives birth to Water. Water returns and assists the Great One to complete production of Heaven. Heaven returns and assists the Great One to complete production of Earth.... Therefore, the Great One conceals in Water and moves in Time.... Because of its circulation, it becomes the mother of the ten thousand beings.²⁸

The Great One above Water strictly evokes the Throne of ar-Raḥmān upon Water mentioned above. In the *Laozi* too it is the One who is cause of existence, permanence, clarity and stillness of Heaven and Earth (and all beings):

Heaven gained the One and became purified; Earth gained the One and became still. Spiritual beings gained the One and became subtle.... The ten thousand beings gained the One and came to life.²⁹

Although there is no mention of water in this passage, yet it being "close to Dao" must be understood in this sense:

The transcendental Excellence is similar to water. Water is excellent and benefits the ten thousand beings with no contend. It resides where most people avoids. Thus, it is close to Dao.³⁰

Water as a symbol of the all-possible aspect of the Great One, equivalent to the Great Element of the Throne of Life for Ibn 'Arabī, denotes the state of the 'Submerging Cloak' (*hunlun* 混淪), the word consisting of two characters which both contains the verbal particle of 水 (water).³¹ These pre-eternal waters, however, are manifested in the non-formal domain of existence with the corresponded quality as containing possibilities of manifestation or, in accordance with our preceding expressions, as cloaking indefinite lives of beings pertaining to the successive states of the Being. A metaphorical expression of this water is stated by Yuanduzi (緣督子 aka. Zhao Youqin 趙有欽):

Heaven is similar to a ball of yarn half-filled with water. On the water afloat a wooden plate which represents the great Earth. All beings, all the races of men, and all the ten thousand kinds of entities are all positioned on the plate. This ball is constantly rotating, a rotation without being felt or known by the beings on the plate. Heaven is day and night rotating and Earth is inside it, but men and beings residing on the Earth are still with no movement.³²

This image is in accordance with the theory of the spherical Cosmos (*huntian lun* 渾天論) which envisage Heaven as shaped like an egg inside which Earth is its yolk. This theory is in apparent contrast with the theory of the canopy-shaped Cosmos (*gantian lun* 蓋天論) which view Earth as a flat plane upon which Heaven is a canopy, which determines the extremes of the plane of Earth. Nonetheless, these models are merely symbolical images for interpreting the world, and they are not claimed as its concrete shapes. It is here that Water, substituted for Man of the Great Triad (*sancai* 三才, Heaven, Earth, and Man), becomes a term of the Three Realms (*sanjie* 三界, Heaven, Earth, Water).³³ Among the three, the Water realm is the

middle one. This intermediate position of this realm, which connects it to the subtle state, is confirmed by the fluid quality of water and its alchemical substitute, Mercury,³⁴ as well as the rain coming down from the heaven to the earth. Let us once again remember the Quranic verse, "And He is the One Who sends down water from Heaven. Then by means of water, We bring forth vegetation of everything," (*Quran*, 6:99) that is, seeds of life of everything, comparable to the Daoist concept of the 'essence-spirit' (*jing* 精)³⁵.

To sum up, we will mention that study of living symbols, not vague mythical elements, through correspondences of traditional doctrines provides us new horizons leading to a rich amount of results in understanding their teachings. Here, we examined the case of the symbolism of water in two esoteric teachings of Daoism and Sufism. We saw that in spite of numerous symbolical aspects of water, Sufism and Daoism have many analogous visions in common, especially from the point of view, which takes the concept of life as its central idea.

Endnotes

1. · Ivan Aguéli (for the first time in 1911), René Guénon and Toshihiko Izutsu have presented some essential correspondences between these two traditions. See René Guénon, *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism* (NY, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004); Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (California: UC Press, 1984).

2. · 'The One' or Unicity (*al-Wāḥid*) is one of the Names (*al-Asmā*) of Allah that is itself the first determination of Him as 'the One without a second' or 'Unity' (*al-Aḥad*). *Al-Wāḥid* is the ultimate source of everything, while it has its principle in *al-Aḥad*. On this question, one may readily recall the *Laozi's* formula: "the Dao gives life to the One." (Ch. 42) 道生一。

3. This poem, composed by Shaikh Mu'ayid ad-Din Jundī, is quoted in Shaikh Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī in his *Explanations on Ibn 'Arabī's Nuṣūṣ* (*Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ*) in a chapter which is devoted to the symbolism of ocean and its waves (Jāmī, Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ*, ed. Aaṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2005], pp. 60-61).

البحر بحر على ما كان في قدم / ان الحوادث امواج وانهار / لا يحجبنيك اشكال تشاكلها / اعمن تشكّل فيها فهي استار.

⁴ Irāqī, Fakhr ad-Dīn, *Collection (Kulliyāt)*, ed. Sa'īd Nafīsī (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh Sanāyī, 1984) p. 92.

جملة يك چیز است موج و گوهر و دریا و لیک / صورت هر يك خلافي در میان انداخته.

5. Jāmī, *Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ*, p. 92.

و تسميته الرحمن عبارة عن انبساط وجوده المطلق على شؤونه ظاهرة بظهوره؛ فَأَنَّ الرحمة نفس الوجود، و الرحمن الحق من كونه وجوداً منبسطاً على كل ما ظهر به، و من حيث كونه ايضاً باعتبار وجوده له كمال القبول لكل حكم في كل وقت بحسب كل مرتبة و حاكم على كل حال.

6. *Quran*, 11:7.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ.

7. *Quran*, 13:17

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةً بِقَدَرِهَا.

8. C.f. *Mishkāt al-Anvār* quoted from Lings, Martin, "The Qoranic Symbolism of Water", in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 3. (Summer, 1968). It is interesting to see that the heart (*al-Qalb*) in Islamic tradition is, before everything else, the faculty of knowledge: "There may be hearts for them to think." (*Quran*, 22:46) In this respect, *al-Qalb* can be compared with some specific uses of *xin* (心) in the Far-Eastern tradition, considering that both of which possess a vertical hierarchy from 'Human Heart' (*renxin* 人心) to 'Dao Heart' (*daoxin* 道心).

9. *Quran*, 21:30.

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ.

10. *Quran*, 6:99.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ.

11. See Lings, Martin, "The Qoranic Symbolism of Water".

12. Ibn 'Arabī, "The Bolt for the Restless" (*Uqlat al-Mustawfiz*) in *Ibn 'Arabī's Treatises (Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī)*, ed. Sa'īd Abd al-Fattāḥ (Beirut: 2002), vol. 2, p. 85.

فعرش الحيات هو عرش المشيئة وهو مستوى الذات و هوش العرش الهوية. قال الله تعالى: "وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ" و قال فيه " كَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ " أى اظهر حياة فيكم "لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" وكذلك قال تعالى فى موضع آخر "الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوكُمْ". فجعل "لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" إلى جانب الحياة، فإن الميت لا يُتخبر وهو قوله: "عَلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" وهو قوله تعالى: "وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ" فهو العنصر الاعظم، اعنى فلك الحياة، وهو اسم الأسماء و مقدّمها و به كانت.

13. *Ibid*, p. 79.

14. The idea of 'life' seems undeductible to 'knowledge' in Daoism, although it is so in other traditions.

15. *Zhuangzi*, Ch. 23 ("The True Scripture of the Southern Flowers") [*nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經] in *The Cannon of Dao [zhonghua daoang 中華道藏]* [Beijing: Huaxia Pub., 2003], vol. 13, p. 50). 生者，德之光也。——The Daoist usage of *de* (德; lit. uprightness) denotes mainly the axis leading to Dao, and secondly the center of a specific state intercepted by the axis. *De* is the compass showing the Way; comparable to the Sufi concept of *vajh al-Ḥaqq* (face of the Truth) as "what by

means of which everything is the Truth, for nothing has reality unless by the Truth." (Jorjānī, Ali bin Muhammad, *The Definitions [at-Ta'rifāt]* [Tehran: Nasir Khusrou Pub., 1991], p. 110)

وجه الحق: هو ما به الشيء حقا اذا لا حقيقة لشيء الا به تعالى.

16. Heshang Gong, who composed the first complete commentary of the *Daodejing*, interprets the "Eternal Dao" (*changdao* 常道) as "the self-subsisting permanent Life" (Heshang Gong 河上公, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De" [*daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經註] in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 9, pp. 134-135). The notion of "the self-subsisting permanent Life" (*ziran changsheng* 自然長生) which appears in many Daoist writings calls to mind the two names of Allah which is constantly repeated in Quran together: *al-Hayy* (the Alive) *al-Qayyūm* (the Self-Subsisting). Although *ziran*, here translated as 'self-subsisting', has its own particular meaning in technical terminology of Daoism, it is not far from the Islamic philosophical conception of *al-Qā'im bidh-Dhāt* (sustained *per se*) when used for the Principle itself. According to the *Laozi*, "Man imitates Earth, Earth imitates Heaven, Heaven imitates Dao, Dao imitates being self-subsisting." Heshang Gong on the last portion says, "the nature of Dao (*daoxing* 道性) is self-subsisting (or 'from the self' as the most literal translation of *ziran*) without imitating from anything else." (Heshang Gong, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", p. 140). 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。【道性自然，無所法也。】

17. As expressed in the *Liezi*: "There is the Bestower of life which is not bestowed a life itself. There is the Manifester which is not manifested itself. That which is not bestowed a life can give life to all lives. That which is not manifested can manifest all manifestation." (Liezi 列子, "Central Emptiness and Ultimate Uprightness" [*chongxu zhide zhenjing* 冲虚至德真經] in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 15, p. 1). 有生不生，有化不化。不生者能生生，不化者能化化。—"Dao [which cannot be defined whatsoever] can roughly be approached through a combination of the conceptions called 'Heaven', 'Life', 'Spirit', and 'Mystery'." (Guanyinzi 關尹子, "True Scripture of Archetypal Beginning" [*wenshi zhenjing* 文始真經] in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 8, p. 7) 故曰天、曰命、曰神、曰玄，合曰道。

18. They are so, due to possession of the 'nature of Dao' (*daoxing*, commonly rendered as the Dao-nature to suggest as being borrowed from the Mahāyāna idea of the *buddhadhātu* or Buddha-nature, a load which can be but an orientalist presupposition). The nature of Dao is "the true ultimate of intrinsic order and sustenance, and its core meaning refers to circular inherent flow which returns to the sole source of darkness and silence and it includes all the ten thousand beings. Even deviated and confused beings are covered by it; even temporal and inanimate beings follow it; it is through it that all of them ascends to the state of sanctity." (Meng Anpai 孟安排, "The Pivot of Daoist Terminology" *Daojiao Yishu* 道教義樞 in

The Cannon of Dao, vol. 5, p. 572) 道性者，理存真極，義實圓通，雖復冥寂一源，而亦備周萬物，煩惑所覆，暫滯凡因，障累若消，還登聖果，此其致也。——Let The Daoist idea of nature is closely related to life. As Zhuangzi says, "Nature is the quality of life." (*Zhuangzi*, Ch. 23) 性者，生之質也。The character *xing* (性, nature) is composed of 生 (life) and the abbreviated form (亅) of 心 (heart).

19. This exhalation which produce "pre-eternal Heaven and Earth integrated within Dao" (*dao* *zai* *tiandi* *zhi* *xian* 道在天地之先, the Cosmos in its archetypal form) is ingested by the Cosmos; it is only after this ingestion that the ten thousand beings comes to life. See Heshang Gong's commentary on the first chapter of the *Laozi* in "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", vol. 9, p. 140 and Liu Yiming 劉一明, "Constitutional Meanings of the *Daodejing*" (*daodejing* *huiyi* 道德經會義), in the *Collection of the Laozi* (*laozi* *jicheng* 老子集成), (Beijing: Zongjia Wenhua Pub. 宗教文化出版社, 2011), vol. 10, p. 140.

20. In the Daoist literature, the state of the Being is named variously as the 'Being' (*you* 有), the 'Great Being' (*youji* 有極), the 'Great Ultimate' (*taiji* 太極), the 'One' (*yi* 一), and the 'Great One' (*taiyi* 太一). The state of the Non-Being also has various designations such as 'Non-Being' (*wu* 無), the 'Great Non-Being' (*wuji* 無極), Emptiness (*xu* 虛), and so on.

21. This idea seminally derives from the *Laozi*'s fourth chapter.

22. The 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣) is referred to as "representation of the Whirlpool" (*chongyong* 沖用) which is "uniting with *yang* in Heaven and with *yin* in Earth both of which becomes one as the Great Unity". (Yin Qing 尹情, "Commentary on the Scripture of the Five Kitchens" [*wuzang jingzhu* 五廚經註], in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 23, p. 155) 沖用所謂元氣，沖用在天揚和，在地陰和，交合為泰合。——See note 31 below.

23. Comparable to the Sufi notion of *baqā* (permanence) which is similarly the highest of *maqāmāt* (spiritual stations).

24. All quotations from the *Laozi Daodejing* is rendered from our own translation of the book in Persian (See *Laozi Daodejing: an annotated translation*, tr. Esmaeil Radpour [Tehran: Zendagi Rūzāna Pub., 2017]).—Heshang Gong comments, "here, grow means to receive life.... men must give importance to returning to their Root.... The ten thousand beings [as weeds] all dry up and drop down [i.e. they leave worldly life] with no exception. Therefore, they all return to their Origin and finds even more life.... Returning to the Origin ... is not turning to death.... Stillness is returning to the source of life and becoming deathless ... thereupon being moved by eternal movement of Dao.... One who is moved by the eternal movement of Dao becomes enlightened [i.e. participated in sapiential light of Dao]." (Heshang Gong, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", vol. 9, p.

140). 萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，歸根曰靜，靜曰復命。復命曰常。知常曰明。【作，生也。...人當念重其本也。...萬物無不枯落，...各復反其根而更生也。...故不復死也。...安靜者是為復還性命，使不死也。...乃道之所常行也。...能知道之所常行，則為明。】

25. From the far antiquity, intensely symbolical mind of the Chinese had taken symbolical aspects to writing (depicting in origin) of characters.

26. Laozi, Ch. 21: "Dao is indistinct and indeterminable; integrated within it are the archetypes".

27. *Shui*水 (water) shows up in the abbreviated form of 冫 in *chong*冲; the other particle of the character (中) means 'center'.

28. *Taiyi Shengshui* 太一生水 in Meyer, Dirk, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 353-354. 太一生水，水反輔太一，是以成天。天反輔太一，是以成地。...是故太一藏於水，行於時。...周而或 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 萬物母。

29. Laozi, Ch. 39. 天得一以清；地得一以寧；神得一以靈；...萬物得一以生。

30. Laozi, Ch. 8. 上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處衆人之所惡，故幾於道。——The Daoist idea of *tuirang* (推讓) or 'yielding in advancement' is best represented in the current of water, which cannot be stopped by obstructions though it does not struggle with them.

31. It is interesting to note that the word for the celestial mountainous paradise of Xiwangmu (西王母, the immortal Empress of the West), i.e. *Kunlun* (崑崙) is both vocally and visually has a great similarity to *Hunlun* (混淪, the Submerging Cloak). The only difference is that the semantical particle 水 (water) in *hunlun* is replaced by 山 (mountain) denoting that the possibilities of manifestation of *Kunlun*, which clearly belongs to the subtle manifestation, are contained in the unmanifested state of the *Hunlun*. Here, mountain is a symbol of determination on the one hand, and the mediator of the downward movement of mountainous streams, or possibilities of the gross state, on the other. Also, the famous diagram of the 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣) in the form of a mountain upon the sea of the trigram *kan* (坎; 三) with vast rivers flowing downward to the sea, although representing the formless manifestation, must be linked to this subject (the diagram is found in Chen Zhixu 陳至虛, "Diagrams of the book of the Great Elixir of the Golden Alchemy by the Master Transcendent Yang" [*shangyangzi jindan dayao tu* 上陽子金丹大要圖] in in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 27, p. 595).

32. Chen Zhixu 陳至虛, "Commentary on the Scripture of Salvation" (*duren shangpin miaojing zhu* 度人上品妙經註) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 3, p. 651. 天如繡毬，內盛半毬水，水上浮一板，板比大地。板上置諸物，比人品萬類；毬常旋

轉，板上諸物未嘗覺知。天乃日夜旋轉，地居其中，人物在于地上，安然不動。

33. Though comparable, it is obviously different from the Hindu or Buddhist *triloka*, in spite of the use of the same Chinese characters in translation of the Sanskrit word.

34. The alchemical application of the symbolism demands a detailed study of its own. For a masterful study of the subject, thought mostly considering Hermetic alchemy, see Guénon, René, *The Great Triad*, tr. H. D. Fohr (NY, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001), Ch. 12.—It is interesting to note that both in Chinese and Persian languages, words for mercury contains a verbal element denoting 'water'. The Persian word *sīmāb* is a combination of *sīm* (silver) and *āb* (water). Similarly, the Chinese word *shuiyin* (水銀, mercury) consists of two characters of *shui* (水, water) and *yin* (銀, silver). In addition, the other Chinese word for mercury, the monosyllabic one, *gong* (汞) contains the semantical particle of 水 (water) in the bottom half of the character.

35. The Chinese character *jing* (精, essence-spirit) interestingly contains the semantical particle of 米 that shows a seed of rice being green (青).

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