Text and Teacher in the Transmission of Alchemical Knowledge: Wu Wu and His Works

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Abstract: In the transmission of alchemical knowledge, alchemical practitioners have always been perplexed by the dilemma that they have the responsibility to transmit the Way but at the same time should not divulge the Way to unworthy recipients. In this paper, I show that Wu Wu 吳悮 (c. twelfth century), different from most of his contemporaries who stress the role of the teacher in the revelation of key points or secret instructions, puts more emphasis on the texts. For him, the teacher’s function is to impart the right text. The Way of divine immortals can be achieved through the mastery of principles that can be grasped from the texts. Although ancient sages compiled the alchemical texts to make the Way known to everyone, only the virtuous can comprehend the principles of the Way underlying in the scriptures. Hence, there is no need to worry that the Way is divulged to unworthy people. Thus the transmission dilemma does not present a problem for Wu Wu.

Introduction

“If the Way is not transmitted, it will extinguish; if the Way is transmitted to a wrong person, calamity will befall the transmitter.” [道不傳即廢，傳非
This passage warns of the dilemma in the transmission of alchemical knowledge.

To avoid this predicament, the transmitter usually had two options. One was to code the alchemical knowledge in texts by using secret names and recondite metaphors, as exemplified by two famous alchemical scriptures, the *Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易参同契 (Token for the Agreement of the Three in Accordance with the Book of Changes) and the *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Essay on the Awakening to Truth). The other option was to carefully select a disciple to pass on the knowledge by textual and/or oral instructions. This latter practice was often accompanied with solemn oaths and rituals to ensure secrecy. Alchemical practitioners especially valued secret oral instructions from their masters because they contained crucial information that was not elaborated in the texts.

Wu Wu 吳悟, a Daoist and alchemist who lived in the early period of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), unlike most of his contemporaries, put more emphasis on the text than on oral instructions in the transmission of alchemical knowledge. He considered the text to be the pivotal key to the comprehension of the Dao of elixirs. This paper studies his alchemical thoughts, with a particular focus on his attitudes towards texts and teachers in the transmission of knowledge. It shows how his case contributes a different and specific perspective to the transmission dilemma.

**Wu Wu and His Works**

The Ming edition of the *Taoist Canon*, compiled between 1406 and 1445 under emperor Zhu Di 朱棣 (1360-1424), attributes three alchemical treatises to Wu Wu, including the *Danfang xuzhi* 丹房須知 (Essential Knowledge for the Chamber of the Elixirs, preface dated 1163), *Zhigui* 1

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1 *Dahuan xinjian* 大還心鑒 (c. tenth century), 4b.
3 Chen Yingning 陳應寧 (1880-1969) had an elaborate explanation about the origin of the oral instructions, and the reasons why their transmission was guarded with the utmost care and secrecy. See Hu Haiya and Wu Guozhong (2006), vol.1, p. 96f.
4 Wu Wu has drawn the attention of modern researchers mainly because of his work the *Danfang xuzhi* which contains many illustrations of experimental apparatus of alchemy. See Cao Yuanyu (1932); Meng Naichang (1993); Needham et al. (1976), p. 198f; and Yuan Hanqing (1982). As Pregadio (2000), p. 179, has shown, the book itself is a compilation of quotations from other Daoist works.
ji 指歸集 (Collection Pointing the Way Home, compiled before 1163), and the Yuzhuang xiehou lu 漁莊邂逅錄 (Record of a Chance Encounter in a Fishing Village). The Dunfang xuzhi deals with operational procedures in external alchemy, while the Zhigui ji elaborates on basic principles of the alchemical process. Wu Wu himself explains in the preface that the Yuzhuang xiehou lu is about the preparation and production of an elixir with two of his friends in 1172. He also explains that he wrote the book to record the experiences and knowledge of his colleagues and himself for transmission to later generations.

Although Wu Wu is well known for his treatises, little is known about his biographical background. He styled himself Gaogai Shanren 高蓋山人 (Hermit in Mount Gaogai) and Ziran Zi 自然子 (Student of Nature). The former suggests that he lived a recluse’s life in the mountains, while the latter indicates that he was a person who pursued the Way.

The suffix of the style name shanren (literally, ‘man in the mountains’) was common among practitioners of alchemy at the time. For example, Yang Zai 楊在 (c. eleventh century), who compiled the Huandan zhongxian lun 還丹眾仙論 (Discourse of the Immortals on the Reverted Elixir) in 1052, styled himself Baofu Shanren 抱腹山人. Peng Si 彭耜 (1185-after 1251) styled himself Helin Shanren 鶴林山人, which suggests that he was a hermit in Mount Helin 鶴林山. Yu Yan 俞琰 (1253-1314) was a recluse in Mount Linwu 林屋山, who called himself Linwu Shanren 林屋山人. Peng’s and Yu’s style names also indicate their places of origin. In analogy, we can therefore assume that Wu Wu may have originated from Mount Gaogai near Fuzhou 福州 in south China.

Teacher Imparts the Right Text

During the Song dynasty, alchemical practitioners commonly stressed that the teacher played an important role in the transmission of oral instructions. The author of the Dadan qiangong lun 大丹鉛汞論 (Discourse on Lead

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5 On the use and meaning of the term neidan 内丹 (internal elixir), the Zhigui ji has come to some scholars‘ notice. See, for instance, Baldrian-Hussein (1989), p. 187; and Robinet (2011), p. 82.

6 In alchemical texts, there are always terms like “accomplished person” (zhiren 至人), “extraordinary person” (yiren 異人), “eminent teacher” (mingshi 明師), “immortal master” (xianshi 仙師) and “divine person” (shenren 神人). They are different appellations for teachers.
and Mercury of the Great Elixir’) recounted, for example, that he had always failed halfway every time he tried to make the great elixir until some “extraordinary person” (yiren 異人) instructed him personally. Repeating the experiments using these instructions, he understood the art of the elixir and realised that the alchemical scriptures were true.8

Similarly, Yang Zai suggested in the *Huan dan zhong xian lun* that the principles of “true lead and true mercury” could not be understood without oral instructions. He claimed that, although he had already become interested in the Way of alchemy when was twenty (ruoguan 弱冠), it took him more than thirty years before he understood the principles of the alchemical scriptures, and he could only achieve this after an “eminent teacher” instructed him.

Cheng Liaoyi 聶一一 tells us in his *Danfang aolun* (Recondite Discourses on the Elixir Laboratory) how pleased he was to hear about the Way when he was still in his childhood and he spent years looking for a teacher. He could not comprehend the secrets of the golden elixir until he met his teacher in 1018, the “immortal master” (xianshi 仙師) Wei Junyan 魏君顏, who taught him the “secrets of the elixirs” and gave him oral instructions on how to produce them. In this case, personal contacts and oral instructions were again indispensable for understanding the written knowledge about making elixirs. Upon his return to Hunan 湖南, Cheng practiced according to the instructions he had been given, confirming everything he had learned from his teacher.9

In each of these three cases, the authors considered personal training by their teacher essential for understanding the Way of producing elixirs. Wu Wu, like many alchemical practitioners, also asserted that he was eager to look for a teacher. In the preface to the *Danfang xuzhi*, however, he qualifies his statement by saying that the value of a teacher lay mainly in his ability to introduce the student to the right text. This text, he suggested, was the *Jin bi jing* (The Gold and Jasper Canon):

[I] sought for teachers everywhere. Most of them taught me fabricated books by “masters of recipes” since Qin and Han times. They were misleading and very harmful. At a later time I met Mr Wang from Huainan 淮南 who transmitted to me the *jin bi jing*. Thereafter, I visited the

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7 This text itself is attributed to Jin Zhupo 金竹坡 of the Tang Dynasty, but Fazeen Baldrian-Hussein dated it from the eleventh century or later. See Schipper, K. & and Verellen (2004), vol.2, p. 852.
8 *Dadan qiangong lun* 大丹鉛汞論 (eleventh century or later), 1b-2a.
9 *Huan dan zhong xian lun* 還丹眾仙論 (c. 1052), 2a.
10 *Danfang aolun* 丹房奧論 (c. 1020), 1ab.
celebrated mountains and places of nimbus... and I found out that [the Jinbi jing] was in line with the great Way without any doubt. [遍求師承，多指秦漢以來方氏偽成之書。以盲指盲，所喪不少，及晚遇淮南王先生授《金碧經》，遂訪名山，曆觀靈跡……合于大道而無疑。]

Initially the teachers instructed him inefficiently because they used what Wu Wu considered fabricated books. It was only after Mr Wang introduced the Jinbi jing to him that he could pursue the Way of elixirs efficiently. Obviously, in mentioning the masters, Wu Wu was actually referring to the texts they introduced to him. The authenticity of a text seemed to him more important than teachers in his success in pursuing the Way of elixirs. The teacher’s role was to provide the correct text.

In the preface to the Zhigui ji, Wu Wu states:

I knew and admired the Way when I was a child. That was twenty years ago. I met with an accomplished person who imparted to me the divine instructions... All these are instructions by the Divine Farmer (Shennong). They are contained in the book called Jinbi longhu jing (The Gold and Jasper Canon of Dragon and Tiger). [予幼知慕道今二十年，常遇至人授以神訣……此皆神農氏之訣，其書謂之《金碧龍虎經》。]

Although Wu Wu remarks that his teacher transmitted to him “the divine instructions,” he immediately points out that they came from the Jinbi longhu jing. The function of the teacher was hence to introduce the appropriate text.

Wu Wu is consistent in his emphasis on the text. In the preface to the Yuzhuang xiehou lu he says:

Ever since I was a child, Ziran zi [this is how Wu Wu addresses himself] dreamed that Three Lords Mao imparted to me the elixir-making instructions. Ten years later I came across Mr Wang who taught me the gist of the Jinbi jing... The gist of the Jinbi jing is the secret instructions about how to make the great dragon and tiger elixir of Shennong. All immortals throughout history

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11 Dansang xuzhi 丹房須知 (c. 1163), 1b.
12 In Wu Wu’s treatises, the book title Jinbi longhu jing is also referred to as Jinbi jing.
13 Zhigui ji 指歸集 (c.1163), 2a-3b.
14 The Three Lords Mao are referred to the Three Perfected Lords Mao brothers Mao Ying, Mao Gu, and Mao Zhong in the Western Han dynasty (206 BC-8 AD).
Once again, in mentioning his teacher Mr Wang, Wu Wu refers to the book *Jinbi jing*. He stresses the significance of the book by claiming that all the immortals consulted the *Jinbi jing* to start. He elaborates on this point in another passage from the *Zhigui ji*:

> The *Cantong qi* of Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, the *Ruyao jing* 入藥鏡 (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) of Perfected Person Cui 崔, the *Huandan jue* 還丹訣 (Instructions on the Reverted Elixir) of Qingxia zi 青霞子 and the *Jin yaoshi lun* 金鑰匙論 (Discourse on the Golden Key) of Perfected Person Peng 彭, as well as hundreds of schools, are all derived from it [the *Jinbi longhu jing*]. [魏伯陽《參同契》、崔真人《入藥鏡》、青霞子《還丹訣》、彭真人《金鑰匙論》，其源始，且百家之源出於此也。]

In short, most alchemical experts emphasize the role of a teacher in giving oral instructions and indicating key points, but Wu Wu considers that the true role of the teacher is to introduce the right text—text being the thing that really matters.

**Texts and the Principles of the Way of Divine Immortals**

Although Wu Wu thought highly of the *Jinbi jing*, he did not deny the value of other texts. In his opinion, alchemical writings were “different in their presentations, but the underlying principles were compatible with each other [言雖不同而理實一貫].” He believed that the principles were “recorded in the book by sages in their full details [聖人載之于書，纖悉備具].” All these “were passed on by ancient sages to enlighten later...

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15 *Yuzhuang xidou lu* 漁莊邂逅錄 (c. 1172), 1ab.
16 The Perfected Person Peng here is Peng Xiao 彭曉 who lived in the Five Dynasties period (907-960). *Jin yaoshi lun* is one of Peng’s works. It is included in the seventieth volume of the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籖 (Seven Lots from the Bookcase of the Clouds) with the full title *Huandan neixiang jin yaoshi* 還丹內象金鑰匙 (The Golden Key for the Inner Images of the Reverted Elixir).
17 *Zhigui ji*, 3a.
18 Ibid., 12a.
19 Ibid., 11b.
Valuing the wisdom of ancient texts, Wu Wu justified the compilation of his own works based on ancient texts. In fact, all his three treatises consist almost entirely of quotations from other writings. In each of his three works he classified quotations from different texts under different rubrics, each representing a set of common principles. The student could apprehend the Way of elixirs by elaborating on these common principles. At the end of the Zhigui ji he explicitly states the instructive purpose of his work collecting sayings from different works or authors “for passing on the principles”.

Wu Wu’s emphasis on the principles is more explicitly shown in his elaboration of what the principles of the Way of the divine immortals are, in his preface to the Zhigui ji. For the convenience of discussion, I have divided the structure of Wu Wu’s argument into four parts.

Firstly, he points out that the most fundamental principle is that the accumulation of virtues enables one to achieve the Way of divine immortals.

The world has the Way that is there of itself, and the ten thousand things have the principles that are there of themselves. If one does not start from principles, one cannot understand things, not to mention the Way. The Way of divine immortals is utmost and subtle, and is achieved through the accumulation of virtues.

Secondly, Wu Wu argues that a person can only accumulate enough virtues if he lives long enough. However, since “only a few can enjoy a
lifespan of seventy up to a hundred years [人生百歲七十者],” 24 one must first find a way to achieve longevity in order to have enough time to accumulate virtues. The way that Wu Wu suggests achieving this is through *waidan*. He therefore forthrightly correlates the realization of longevity with *waidan*:

Therefore, those who aim to study immortality, must quest for a long life in order to accumulate virtues. For this purpose there is a theory called transmutation by means of *waidan* (*waidan dianhua* 外丹點化). [是以欲學仙者, 必求長生以積功累行, 故有外丹點化之說。] 25

Thirdly, Wu Wu believes that the practice of *neidan* alone could not make people “ascend to the heaven” or “become divine immortals.” He states his argument from two perspectives.

On the one hand, Wu Wu defines *neidan* as a mixture of various techniques for nourishing life, including concentration and breath retention, sexual techniques, ingestion of herbs and plants, and so on. In his opinion, *neidan* as such “seeks for peace and contentment [求安樂也],” 26 not for longevity. He claims that, “from antiquity till now, though people have practiced *neidan*, nobody has ascended [to the heaven] without practicing *waidan* [自古至今, 雖修內丹, 未有不煉外丹而飛升者也。].” 27 Wu Wu’s statement implies that *neidan* was inferior to *waidan* in terms of achieving immortality, because “ascending to the heaven,” not “longevity,” is the symbol for immortality.

On the other hand, Wu Wu exposes the fallacy of immortality being achieved through *neidan*. He says,

With certain petty side-door techniques, some people claim they can achieve immortality by means of *neidan*. If this was the case, why didn’t immortals since ancient times just practice *neidan* alone, but still practice *waidan*? [得一旁門小法, 便謂內丹可成, 神仙可致。殊不知自古神仙, 何不只修內丹, 又不必煉外丹乎。] 28

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid. *Dianhua* refers to either the process of transforming things into gold or turning mortals into immortals. In both cases the transformative process is, in fact, achieved by means of a small quantity. Pregadio (2008), p. 357 translates it as “projection” or “transmutation.”
26 Ibid., 1b.
27 Ibid., 1a.
28 Ibid., 1b-2a.
Concerning the evidence of ancients practicing *waidan* he says, “nowadays in the divine places and spots in the realm there still exist, for making elixirs and ascending to the heaven, stove wells and elixir hearths. [天下洞天福地，皆因煉丹飛升，有爐井丹灶存焉。]

Wu Wu also refutes the commonly-held view that “one must first practice *neidan* and succeed; then achieve transmutation to immortality by means of *waidan* [先修內丹必功成，然後得用外丹點化。].” Wu Wu believes that this process is unnecessary, but his argument is based on commonplace logic, “when ancient immortals ascended to heaven, their servants, chickens and dogs also accompanied them to become immortals. How was it possible that servants, chickens and dogs also practiced *neidan* first? [古神仙奴婢雞犬隨之飛升，又安有先成內丹者乎。]"

Fourthly, Wu Wu explains why the principle of longevity can be found in *waidan*:

Quicksilver, under the stimulus of the *qi* of *yin* and *yang* for 800 years, forms cinnabar; after 3000 years it forms silver; after 80,000 years it forms gold—the older it is the firmer, through a thousand metamorphoses and a myriad transformation. The sages cycle Water and Fire, following the model of the operation of the *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, in order to bring to completion the virtue (of the elixir); this is what is called ‘surpassing the ingenuity of the Shaping Forces of Nature’. The substance is transformed from cinnabar to silver, from silver to gold, and then from the gold liquid back to cinnabar. This is the elixir to be taken and swallowed. The principle of longevity resides in this. [水銀感陰陽之氣，八百歲成砂，三千歲成銀，八萬歲成金，愈久愈堅，千變萬化。聖人運水火法陰陽之氣而畢其功，所謂奪得造化機者也。由砂以至銀，由銀以至金，金液還丹，取而服餌，長生之理在乎此。]

In short, the reason that Wu Wu attaches so much importance to the texts is because he believes that the Way of divine immortals can be achieved through the mastery of principles that can be grasped from the texts.

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29 Ibid., 2a.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 The translation of this passage is based on that of Sivin (1980), p. 234.
33 Zhigui ji, 2b.
Texts Are Open to Everyone, but Only the Virtuous Can Comprehend the Principles in the Texts

Wu Wu does not actually see himself facing a transmission dilemma. This is reflected in the following four aspects.

Firstly, Wu Wu believes that ancient sages compiled the alchemical texts to make the Way known to “the people in the world (tianxia zhi ren 天下之人).” Since the transmission of the Way is open to everyone, it is unnecessary to worry about divulging the heavenly secrets. This view is evident at the end of the Zhigui ji:

The crux (ji 機) of Heaven and Earth, the principles of yin and yang, and the use (yong 用) of natural transformations (zaohua 造化) are recorded in the book by sages in their full details. They were meant to be passed on for posterity so that the Way would be known to the people in the world. [古天地之機，陰陽之理，造化之用，聖人載之于書，纖悉備具。傳之後世，將使天下之人皆知至道之歸。]

Secondly, Wu Wu considers that the general view that “the heavenly secrets should not be divulged” results from a misinterpretation of the sages’ intention by unworthy or unwise men. He claims that:

The unwise did not have faith in the sages’ teachings and wrongly alleged that the heavenly secrets should not be divulged. Thus they went in the opposite direction of the Way and did not see their stupidity until death. This was because the behaviour of the unwise did not comply with the principles, and accordingly their minds could not comprehend the principles and they are excluded from knowing the Way. [而愚迷之徒，顛倒妄執不信聖人，而謂天下機不容洩漏，遂與至道背馳，雖死不悟。此無他，行不合理，故心不通理，不入於道也。]

Thirdly, Wu Wu assumes that the prophecy of heaven’s retribution is intended to warn unwise people to regulate their behaviour. He takes the incantation from the Yinfa jing 陰符經 (Scripture of the Hidden Contracts)

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34 Zhigui ji, 11b.
35 Ibid.
36 The Yinfa jing is also called the Huangdi yinfu jing 黃帝陰符經. Scholars do not agree on the date it was written. Some place its origin in the Warring Stated period (475-221 BC), or in the Jin or Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 AD), while others think that it was discovered by the Tang scholar Li Quan 李筌. Daoists regard it as
as an example and points out again that the warning in no way means “the Way should not be transmitted.”

The *Yinfu jing* warns that those who reveal the heavenly secrets will face the punishment of three kalpas. This is meant to warn the unwise who stealthily study the Great Way without following the principles. It does not mean that the Way should not be transmitted. [彼《陰符經》所謂洩漏天機，沉之三劫，言愚迷之人竊弄大道以為非理，非欲道之無傳耳。]

Fourthly, Wu Wu correlates the understanding of the texts with the virtues of their readers. He argues that only the virtuous can comprehend the principles of the Way underlying in the scriptures, and that vicious people will be unable to understand the Way, even if the text is shown to them. In consequence, although the saints leave alchemical books behind in the hope that everybody can learn the Way without any intention of concealing it, the result is that only worthy people can truly understand.

This viewpoint is evident in the following passage, in which Wu Wu compares the open transmission of alchemical knowledge with that of Confucianism and Buddhism.

The Way of the ancient sage kings Yao, Shun, Wen and Wu, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius is recorded in the Six Classics, which educate the people in the world to be gentlemen. And all gentlemen are educated this way. Even if the books are in the hands of men of no virtue, they may read them but will not understand them. The Buddhist scriptures are everywhere to educate men to be Buddhists, and all Buddhists are educated this way. As for those who do bad deeds, they can recite the texts but cannot comprehend them. Since the books of Fuxi and Shennong are known to all, there should not be any secrecy. As long as his mind is in accordance with the Way and his acts comply with the principles, one reading the books will naturally comprehend the principles and obtain the Way. [今夫堯舜文武周孔之道在六經，諄諄訓誨，將使天下之人皆為士君子，而天下之士君子者皆出於是。至於小人之歸，雖讀之不曉。釋氏之書徧滿天下，種種教化，將使天下之人皆為佛，而天下之佛咸出於是。至 於喜造惡業者，雖誦之不達也。又況伏羲神農之書，既傳]

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one of the most important Daoist scriptures. Others consider it to be a book on military practices or on Confucianism.

37 Zhigui ji, 11b.
In the *Danfang xuzhi*, Wu Wu again emphasizes that, while an accomplished person can immediately comprehend the principles in the texts, an unworthy man cannot comprehend the Way even if it is revealed to him.

Now that the texts are there, they can be grasped by everyone wise or foolish. However, the accomplished person behaves in accord with immortals, so when he sees the scripture, he will comprehend its principles spontaneously. This is like the cook dissecting the ox and Jiu Fanggao 九方皋 evaluating the horses.³⁸ When they look, they see the Way. This is the so-called ‘cannot but be transmitted.’ The unworthy man, on the contrary, goes against the principles, thus he is already too preoccupied with his personal biases to comprehend the holy books. As Laozi says, if the Way can be achieved and presented, nobody will not present it to his monarch; if the Way can be achieved and introduced, nobody will not introduce it to his relatives; if the Way can be achieved and transmitted, nobody will not transmit it to his offspring. Even if one wants to transmit the Way, can it be done [if one does not have the right person to teach]? ³⁹

In summary, in Wu Wu’s works, he repeatedly stresses that alchemical texts were written by sages with the intention of making the Way known to everyone. There is no intention for secrecy at all. The impending severe punishment does not mean that the Way should not be transmitted. It means that only the virtuous can comprehend the principles in the texts and therefore find the Way. Wu Wu thus holds a different attitude towards the diffusion of alchemical knowledge, that is, that knowledge should be open to all. This attitude frees the transmitters from fear of punishment. Nevertheless, the compulsory combination of the comprehension of the

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³⁸ Zhigui ji, 11b-12a.

³⁹ Here Wu Wu is using stories from the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 and the *Liezi* 列子 respectively to illustrate his point. See Wang Xianqian (2005), p. 43f; Yang Bojun (1979), p. 255f.

⁴⁰ *Danfang xuzhi*, 1ab.
texts with the virtues of the recipients ensures that only the virtuous can understand the Way.

Concluding Thoughts

Whilst being responsible for the transmission of alchemical knowledge, alchemical practitioners had to avoid revealing the heavenly secrets to unworthy recipients. This is the dilemma that perplexed many alchemical practitioners and was reflected in their alchemical writings. In this paper, I have shown that Wu Wu asserts that alchemical practitioners are able to comprehend the art of the great elixir and achieve immortality by cultivating their virtues and earnestly deliberating the principles in the texts. The acquisition of secret oral instructions from a master is not a must, and the comprehension of the Way depends on the virtues of the learners. Thus, for Wu Wu, this transmission dilemma does not present a problem at all.

Most alchemical practitioners in and before the Song times emphasized the role of the teacher in revealing key points or secret instructions and were worried that disseminating alchemical texts to inferior men would bring misfortune upon themselves. In contrast, Wu Wu is exceptional in his approach to texts as the principal means of circulating alchemical knowledge. However, when compared to the Neo-Confucian literature of Song times, Wu Wu’s approach seems to be in accord with the general intellectual attitude towards the role of ancient classics in the transmission of knowledge. Song literati advocate that one can discover and understand the true meaning of ancient sages in the classics only if one deliberately cultivates one’s mind and virtue. One typical example is Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) the great reformer of the late Northern Song, who claimed that one should follow the principles of ancient sages in governing the state and that these principles were implied in the classics. Wu Wu’s case suggests an analogy between Neo-Confucian literati and alchemical practitioners in terms of their attitudes toward the texts in the transmission of knowledge. Further analysis of this topic is beyond the scope of this study.

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