

## Original Paper

# An Examination of the Early Life and Journey of Bai Yuchan, a Taoist Scholar

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### **Abstract**

*Bai Yuchan's life is marked by numerous uncertainties, particularly in regard to his early experiences, which are subject to considerable debate. Therefore, conducting a comprehensive review and critical analysis of relevant literature is of utmost importance. This paper begins by reviewing existing research in the academic community on the early life of Bai Yuchan, which is primarily comprised of two aspects: his year of birth and his cloud-roving experiences. Bai Yuchan's work, "Song of Cloud Roving", recounts his early years of seeking a master and pursuing the Dao through cloud roving experiences. The paper engages in a textual analysis of "Song of Cloud Roving", in conjunction with historical facts, to ascertain the timeframe of the described cloud roving experiences using a cross-examination of poetry and history. Additionally, by combining insights from "Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan" with Bai Yuchan's own poetic accounts, it aims to determine Bai Yuchan's year of birth.*

### **Keywords**

*Bai Yuchan, year of birth, cloud roving, Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan, Song of Cloud Roving*

### **1. Introduction**

Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 is the recognized founder of the Southern School of Daoist Inner Alchemy 道教金丹派南宗 and is a focal figure in the study of Daoism during the Southern Song Dynasty. Moreover, he made noteworthy contributions in diverse cultural and artistic domains, including literature, calligraphy, tea culture, and music. His impact extends far beyond the confines of Daoism. Commencing in the 1970s, the academic community has seen a substantial body of research and scholarly discourse dedicated to investigating his life and accomplishments (Note 1). The life and historical examination of Bai Yuchan remain contentious, particularly regarding his early experiences. Two major issues contribute to this debate: firstly, Bai Yuchan's year of birth, and secondly, the dating of his early

cloud-roving activities.

## 2. Existing Research on the Early Life of Bai Yuchan

### 2.1 Verification of Bai Yuchan's Year of Birth

The document titled “Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan”海琼玉蟾先生事实 was authored by Peng Si 彭耜 in the first year of Jiaxi 嘉熙元年(1237). It is the earliest detailed account of Bai Yuchan's birth year, lifespan, and some aspects of his life. It records Bai Yuchan's birth year as “Shao Xi Jiayin”绍熙甲寅(1194), the fifteenth day of the third month. However, the record of his year of passing is relatively vague, stating, “In Shao Ding Jichou 绍定己丑(1229) winter, it is said that Mr. Bai dissolved into Xu River 盱江” (Note 2). The “Wuyi Chronicles”武夷志略, compiled during the Ming Jiaping era, records: “His grandfather was named Ge Youxing 葛有兴, a native of Minqing County 闽清县, Fuzhou. He served as an educator in Qiongzhou 琼州 and gave birth to Yuchan. This occurred on the fifteenth day of the third month in the year ‘Jia Yin’甲寅(1134) during the Shaoxing 绍兴 era. After the passing of his grandfather, he accompanied his mother to the Bai family”. The conflicting accounts regarding whether Bai Yuchan was born in the Jia Yin year of the Shaoxing era or the “Jia Yin” year of the Shaoxi era had already emerged during the Ming Dynasty.

In contemporary academic discussions both within China and abroad, the issue of Bai Yuchan's birth year continues to revolve around the two main viewpoints: the “Shaoxing Jia Yin year”绍兴甲寅年 and the “Shaoxi Jia Yin year”. Scholars who support the “Shaoxing theory” include He Dunhua 何敦铤, Zhu Yihui 朱逸辉, Xie Jinliang 谢金良, Ge Jianmin 盖建民, and Lan Zongrong 兰宗荣, among others (Note 3). On the other hand, scholars who advocated the “Shaoxi theory” include Zeng Shaonan 曾召南, Wang Zunwang 王尊旺, Fang Baozhang 方宝璋, Fu Ying 符颖, Zhan Shichuang 詹石窗, Xiao Dengfu 萧登福, and Feng Guanghong 冯广宏, among others (Note 4). Additionally, according to Mr. Ge Jianmin's compilation, there are scholars such as Imai Uzaburo 今井宇三郎, Guo Wu 郭武, Wang Wanfu 王万福, and Li Yuanguo 李远国 who support the “Shaoxing theory”, while scholars like Shoji Miyakawa 宫川尚志 and Zhou Weimin 周伟民 adhere to the “Shaoxi theory” (Note 5). Indeed, scholars who support the “Shaoxing theory” often refer to the account found in Peng Zhu's 彭翥 “Three Aspects of Mr. Bai's Feats in the Shenxian Tongjian”神通鉴海琼白真人事迹三条, which states that Bai Yuchan's father, Zhenye 振业, experienced a dream in the third month of the Shaoxing Jia Yin year, during which he received instruction from a Daoist figure who presented him with a jade toad. On that same night, Bai Yuchan was born, and his mother named him “Yuchan” in accordance with the dream (Note 6). On the other hand, proponents of the “Shaoxi theory” often rely on the information presented in Peng Si's “Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan”. This debate has prompted scholars to explore various angles, including close readings of Bai Yuchan's works, his social interactions, and the discovery of new materials, in their attempts to provide evidence for their respective viewpoints.

Beyond the two mainstream viewpoints, some scholars have proposed new perspectives. Firstly, Feng Huanzhen 冯焕珍 suggests an alternative approach by analyzing Bai Yuchan's works. He argues that Bai Yuchan began to comprehend the Dao at the age of sixty-four, establishing the year 1205 as the pivotal year for his spiritual awakening. According to this view, Bai Yuchan's birth year is estimated to be around 1142 (Note 7). Secondly, Liu Shouzheng 刘守政 supports Feng Huanzhen's idea that Bai Yuchan attained enlightenment at the age of sixty-four. However, he proposes a different starting point, suggesting 1213 as the key year. Based on this, Liu estimates Bai Yuchan's birth year to be around 1149 (Note 8). Thirdly, Liu Liang 刘亮 suggests that based on Bai Yuchan's own poetry and other related records, his birth year should be around 1153, and he passed away around 1243. Liu Liang did not specify the exact works he relied on, but it's possible he referred to the poem "Poem in Thanks to Immortal Master's Letter" 谢仙师寄书词, in which Bai Yuchan mentions reaching the age of sixty-four (Note 9). This poem is dated as "24th day of the intercalary seventh month in the Year of Bing Zi of the Great Song Dynasty" 大宋丙子闰七月二十四日, with the only occurrence of a "intercalary seventh month" 闰七月 in the Southern Song Dynasty being in the year 1216 (Note 10). If one assumes that Bai Yuchan was sixty-four years old at that time, it would suggest a birth year around 1153. Fourthly, Zhou Quanbin 周全彬 relies on Su Sen's "Treatise on Distinguishing Confusion in Cultivating Immortality" 跋修仙辨惑论序, which mentions "at the age of nineteen, he became a disciple of Chen Niwan 陈泥丸 (also known as Chen Nan 陈楠) for nine years", implying that Bai Yuchan began studying under Chen Niwan in 1205. Zhou Quanbin concludes that Bai Yuchan's birth year is approximately 1187 based on this information. These additional viewpoints provide further diversity in estimating Bai Yuchan's birth year and add to the complexity of the historical debate surrounding his life (Note 11).

## 2.2 Research on Bai Yuchan's Early Cloud-Roving Experiences

The early cloud-roving activities of Bai Yuchan are primarily documented in the poem "Song of Cloud Roving". There are two poems titled "Song of Cloud Roving". The first one goes, "Cloud roving is difficult! Cloud roving is difficult! Across thousands of miles, the water and smoke stretch wide across the four seas..." 云游难! 云游难! 万里水烟四海宽... The second one starts with, "I still remember, a night of rain at Dongting Lake, with no cloak or hat to shield me..." 尝记得, 洞庭一夜雨, 无蓑无笠处... (Note 12). These two poems, comprising more than 1,200 words, narrate the early experiences and sentiments of Bai Yuchan during his cloud roving, outlining his general whereabouts. According to the poems, Bai Yuchan's travels span across the north and south of the great rivers. After leaving Guangdong, he ventured to places such as Fujian, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Anhui, Henan, Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and other regions. His extensive travels and arduous journey can be seen from these accounts. So when should the cloud roving experiences described in Bai Yuchan's "Song of Cloud Roving" be attributed to?

Peng Zhu, citing “Shenxian Tongjian” 神仙通鉴, a work composed during the late Ming and early Qing periods, specifies a timeframe for Bai Yuchan’s travels. It is noted, “At the age of sixteen, Bai Yuchan, singularly dedicated to studying immortality, wholeheartedly embraced the path of Daoism, carrying a mere three hundred coins. Initially departing from his hometown... he traveled northeast, crossing the river. This period coincided with the turmoil of warfare in Huai Xi 淮西, where corpses lined the road and the wilderness was devoid of even a blade of grass”. Additionally, it records, “At the age of forty-two, during the third year of Chunxi 淳熙, Bai Yuchan was journeying along the coast of Yongdong 甬东, where he happened upon Chen Niwan and garnered his admiration”. Embedded within this narrative, Bai Yuchan’s travels are depicted episodically, spanning from the age of sixteen to forty-two, encompassing the years between 1150 and 1176 (Note 13).

“Shenxian Tongjian” is primarily composed by novelists, but it is the earliest work to define the timeframe of the Cloud Roving in “Song of Cloud Roving”. Therefore, it should be treated as a significant viewpoint. In contemporary scholarship, two main perspectives have emerged. The first aligns with the viewpoint presented in “Shenxian Tongjian”, asserting that the Cloud Roving described in “Song of Cloud Roving” took place before Bai Yuchan encountered his master Chen Nan 陈楠. This view is upheld by scholars such as Lan Zongrong, Liu Liang, Feng Huanzhen. The second perspective contends that the Cloud Roving described in “Song of Cloud Roving” occurred after the passing of Chen Nan. Notably, this viewpoint is exemplified by Huang Yongfeng and Chen Jinfeng (Note 14).

### *2.3 The Complexity of Bai Yuchan’s Early Life Biography Verification*

The above discussions represent the primary areas of research in the academic community regarding the early life of Bai Yuchan. Scholars who assert Bai Yuchan’s birth in 1134 rely on Peng Zhu’s account and utilize the timeframe between 1150 and 1176, as outlined in the “Song of Cloud Roving”, to support the first issue. Nevertheless, the chronology of the cloud roving events documented in the “Song of Cloud Roving” is contentious, and Bai Yuchan’s birth year adds complexity to assessments related to the latter matter. So these two issues are interrelated and mutually dependent. To avoid circular reasoning, the paper begins by excluding the debate over Bai Yuchan’s year of birth and focuses on investigating the timing of his early cloud-roving and Daoist learning activities.

### 3. A Reexamination of Bai Yuchan's Early Cloud-Roving Experiences

#### 3.1 *The Early Purposes of Bai Yuchan's Cloud Roving*

Based on the line “Thoughts dwell on seeking a master and pursuing the Dao are difficult” from “Song of Cloud Roving Part One”, it can be inferred that Bai Yuchan's cloud roving across various places was undertaken to seek a master and pursue the Dao. It was only in the middle of the “Gui-You”癸酉 year, during the mid-autumn season, that Chen Niwan imparted the technique of cultivating inner alchemy to him. Bai Yuchan then realized, “Originally, there was genuine gold at home; I had been toiling in vain until now. Having acquired the immortal formula for longevity, I construct a thatched hut, meditate in seclusion, amidst the deep white clouds”原来家里有真金，前日辛勤枉用心。既得长生留命诀，结茅静坐白云深 (Note 15). In “Song of Cloud Roving Part Two”, it further mentions, “Bearing the cold, enduring hunger, I have not yet seen the essence of meditation, nor witnessed the essence of the Dao. Profound and virtuous is the Azure Vacuity Elder, with a single meeting, he bestowed his compassion upon me”受尽寒，忍尽饥。未见些子禅，未见些子道。贤哉翠虚翁，一见便怜我 (Note 16). Therefore, Bai Yuchan likely engaged in his cloud roving across different places before encountering Chen Niwan and gaining insight into the method of cultivating inner alchemy. Afterward, he temporarily ceased his travels to focus on this practice.

The composition of the “Song of Cloud Roving” evidently aimed to disseminate the techniques of cultivating inner alchemy. After Chen Niwan's passing, Bai Yuchan resumed his cloud roving, but during this phase, his purpose had shifted to transmitting knowledge and teachings to disciples. Bai Yuchan's disciples were primarily accepted during this period. For instance, in a letter to Peng Si, he stated, “The ‘Thunderous Jade Classic’雷霆玉经 has probably been published, ten copies can be distributed to instruct the scholars of Jiangxi” (Note 17). This serves as further evidence. From this, the conclusion can be drawn that the cloud roving experiences described in the “Song of Cloud Roving” likely took place before the mid-autumn of the “Gui-You” year.

#### 3.2 *Controversies Regarding the Versions of “Song of Cloud Roving”*

However, the assertion that Chen Niwan transmitted the technique of inner alchemy to Bai Yuchan on the mid-autumn night of the “Gui-You” year is subject to uncertainty. This is due to the fact that there exists an alternative version that reads “Gui-Chou”癸丑 year instead of “Gui-You” year in the line “On the mid-autumn night of the ‘Gui-You’ year, the wilderness was clear”. Considering Bai Yuchan's chronology, the plausible year for “Gui-You” would be 1213, while “Gui-Chou” would correspond to 1193. The twenty-year difference between these two interpretations has also attracted the attention of some scholars, prompting a thorough analysis.

Mr. Liu Liang meticulously conducted a thorough examination of the “Gui-Chou” and “Gui-You” years in the process of verifying Bai Yuchan's birth and death dates. His research led to the firm conclusion that the year “Gui-Chou” (1193) is indeed the correct birth year for Bai Yuchan. To substantiate this claim, he presented two compelling lines of evidence. Firstly, Mr. Liu Liang pointed out a significant historical fact: Bai Yuchan's mentor, Chen Niwan, passed away during the sixth year

of Emperor Ningzong's Jiading reign, corresponding to the "Gui-You" year (1213). It seems highly improbable that Bai Yuchan could have become Chen Niwan's disciple in the same year he passed away. Secondly, considering that Peng Si became a disciple of Bai Yuchan in 1217, it implies that Bai Yuchan had already achieved a noteworthy reputation through his mastery of alchemy by that time (Note 18). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the usage of "Gui-You" instead of "Gui-Chou" is an error in historical records. Both of these pieces of evidence have loopholes. Firstly, Bai Yuchan's poem "Bi Jing Nei Di Ge" 必竟恁地歌 states, "Master Cuixu spoke to me, his knowledge and insight were extraordinary... On the Mid-Autumn night of the first year of Kaixi, we burned incense and transmitted teachings" (Note 19). By the latest, in the Mid-Autumn night of the first year of Kaixi (1205), Bai Yuchan had already met Chen Niwan. Thus, the notion that Bai Yuchan became Chen Niwan's disciple in the "Gui-You" year and Chen Niwan passed away is not plausible. Secondly, the assumption that Bai Yuchan had "already achieved mastery and gained renown for many years before 1217" is merely speculative and has evident shortcomings. First, Bai Yuchan met Peng Si and Liu Yuanchang in 1217. If he had already achieved mastery and gained renown before that time, there should have been many people seeking to become his disciples. Why did he only start transmitting teachings in 1217? During Bai Yuchan's lifetime and after his passing, his disciples compiled and published his works. If Bai Yuchan had already been renowned, there would have been numerous poems and writings about him, yet the earliest surviving works that indicate a specific time are from 1215.

Mr. Lan Zongrong also maintains that the "Gui-Chou" year should be considered accurate. He provides evidence from the compilation of "Song of Cloud Roving" in the "Complete Collection of Song Dynasty Poetry" 全宋诗, where Quxian recompiled the "Collected Works of Haiqiong Master" 海琼先生文集 during the Ming Dynasty's Zhengtong 正统 period based on Peng Si's original manuscript, listing "Song of Cloud Roving" under the "Gui-Chou" year. Lan Zongrong also cites the opinion of Mr. Wang Zunwang, suggesting that since the Zhu Quan's 朱权 engraved edition during the Ming Dynasty's Zhengtong period was expanded from Peng Si's original, the "Gui-Chou" year is more likely correct (Note 20). However, the persuasiveness of this viewpoint is limited. Firstly, it is not explicitly mentioned whether the version Zhu Quan encountered was an original Song edition. Even if the version Zhu Quan saw was indeed an original Song edition compiled by Peng Si, errors could have easily crept in during centuries of transmission. Thus, equating the value of the Zhengtong version with the Song edition simplifies the matter. The preface to the collected writings of Mr. Hai Qiong Yu Chan, written by Pan Fang 潘昉 in the Southern Song, note that the collection of Bai Yuchan's poems and writings compiled by Peng Si comprised forty volumes (Note 21). Zhu Quan later recompiled the collection into an eight-volume version, supplementing the content from the "Shang Qing" 上清集, "Yu Long" 玉隆集 and "Wu Yi" 武夷集 sets that were not included in the original compilation (Note 22). Clearly, Zhu Quan made substantial changes to the collection he obtained.

### 3.3 Reanalysis of Versions of the “Song of Cloud Roving”

Based on my research, in addition to the Zhengtong edition “Collected Works of Haiqiong Yuchan Masters”海琼玉蟾先生文集 compiled by Prince Ning Zhu Quan, there are other editions that support the “Gui-Chou” year interpretation. These editions include the one compiled by He Jigao, Wang Qianxing, Liu Maoxian, and Tong Jinguang of Jinlu Shiyutang, the edition preserved in the “Xingwutang”省吾堂 Collection, and the Qing Dynasty Tongzhi reprinted edition of “Bai Zhenren Ji”白真人集 which also state “Gui-Chou” year as “Gui-Chou mid-autumn in the wild and clear” (Note 23). It’s important to note that these versions advocating the “Gui-Chou” year date back to the Ming Dynasty. However, during the same period in the Ming Dynasty, there were also versions that indicated the “Gui-You” year. The Zhengtong edition of the “Taoist Canon”道藏 includes the “Ten Books of Cultivating Reality”修真十书, among which “Song of Cloud Roving” also states “Gui-You mid-autumn in the wild and clear”. Additionally, the National Library holds the edition of “Newly Engraved Collected Works of Qiongguan Mr. Bai”新刻琼管白先生集 from the Anzhengtang 安正堂 Printing House in the 22nd year of Wanli, edited by He Jigao 何继高 and Lin Yousheng 林有声, which also uses “Gui-You mid-autumn in the wild and clear” (Note 24).

Compared to the “Gui-Chou theory”, the “Gui-You theory” has more evidence to support it. First, the dating of the versions is earlier. The earliest surviving version of “Song of Cloud Roving” is the Yuan Dynasty Jian’an Yu Clan Jing’an edition of “Qiong Guan Bai Yuchan Shang Qing Ji”琼琯白玉蟾上清集, which states “Gui-You mid-autumn in the wild and clear” (Note 25). Second, there are two corroborating pieces of evidence. In the “Poem in Thanks to Immortal Master’s Letter”, Bai Yuchan mentions two important time points when Chen Nan imparted teachings to him: “Regarding Jade Chan, it took three generations to feel the grace of the master, waiting for a decade to truly harness the reins. It was on the eve of the Gui-You autumn moon that the Daoist sword was discussed, and on the day of the Yi-Hai spring rain that the hexagrams were fully understood... The earlier perceptions became the later perceptions, already etched into the heart’s transmission. At that time, it was the same as this time, and the thoughts of the Dao were never forgotten” (Note 26). The phrase “Gui-You autumn moon” aligns with “Gui-You mid-autumn in the wild and clear”. Moreover, the “Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan”, attributed to Peng Si, states: “In the Jia Ding Gui-You year, Cuixu dissolved in water at Linzhang, then emerged at Wuyi, imparting all the profound mysteries” (Note 27). This account also places the transmission of profound mysteries from Chen Nan to Bai Yuchan in the Gui-You year of Jiading era.

Therefore, it is more appropriate to interpret the phrase in “Song of Cloud Roving” as “Gui-You mid-autumn in the wild and clear, sitting alone in the shade of pine trees discussing the long and short”. The cloud roving experiences described in “Song of Cloud Roving” should be placed before the year 1213.

#### 4. Verification of Bai Yuchan's Year of Birth

##### 4.1 The Huai-Xi Warfare Experienced by Bai Yuchan

The desolate scene of the Huai-Xi warfare 淮西战火 is mentioned in “Song of Cloud Roving”. The region of Huai-Xi was the frontline of conflict between the Southern Song Dynasty and the Jin Dynasty, experiencing several battles over the span of nearly a century. To determine which instance of the “Huai-Xi warfare” Bai Yuchan experienced, we can roughly pinpoint the time of his cloud roving adventures in “Song of Cloud Roving”. While different scholars propose different timeframes based on historical events, it seems that none of these proposals can be definitively confirmed as the exact period in which Bai Yuchan undertook his journeys as described in “Song of Cloud Roving”. This uncertainty underscores the challenges in pinpointing a precise timeline for Bai Yuchan's cloud roving adventures.

Feng Huanzhen drew upon the “Jian Yan Yi Lai Xi Nian Yao Lu” 建炎以来系年要录 (A Comprehensive Record of Events since the Jianyan Era), specifically referencing the entry for the spring of the 32nd year of Shaoxing (1162). This entry sheds light on the period spanning from 1162 to 1164, during which the Jin Dynasty launched invasions into the Southern Song Dynasty, resulting in the capture of cities such as Hao, Lu, He, and Chu (Note 28). On the other hand, Mr. Xie Jinliang posits that “during the disorder in Huai-Xi in the early years of the Southern Song Dynasty's Shaoxing era, Bai Yuchan also suffered”, suggesting that the reference to “Huai-Xi warfare” in the “Song of Cloud Roving” occurred in the early Shaoxing era (Note 29). However, both of these assertions lack precision. Mr. Wang Zunwang, for instance, argues that “the turmoil in Huai-Xi that occurred after the Shaoxing Jia Yin (1194) year was not a single occurrence. There were confrontations between the Song and Jin Dynasties in Huai-Xi in March 1217, March 1219, April 1221, and March 1222” (Note 30). It is essential to note, though, that all of these time points mentioned by Mr. Wang Zunwang fall after the year Jiayin in Jiading (1213) and thus should not be considered.

In reality, the assessment of the timing of the “Huai-Xi warfare” as described by Bai Yuchan cannot be simplistically correlated with historical conflicts that transpired in the Huai-Xi region. A comprehensive examination necessitates a thorough integration of various historical sources.

##### 4.2 Determining the Timing of the Huai Xi Warfare

“I am born without belief in immortals, nor do I know of lofty heavenly realms. How can I bear to hear talk of Penglai? I hide my face and smile at their folly. Many are the claims of sevenfold returns of elixirs, often mistaken for empty boasts. The world claims immortals can ascend to the skies, yet they say they cannot escape death for ten thousand years. Flesh lacks wings and must fall to the ground, how can humans extend their lives to a hundred years? All around, I witness life and death entwined, a cycle that loops endlessly. Cui Xu True Man 翠虚真人 spoke to me, his perspective greatly differs from these notions” 我生不信有神仙，亦不知有大罗天。那堪见人说蓬莱，掩面却笑渠疯颠。七返还丹多不实，往往将谓人虚传。世传神仙能飞升，又道不死延万年。肉既无翅必坠地，人无百岁安可延？满眼且见生死俱，死生生死相循环。翠虚真人与我言，他所见识大不然 (Note 31). This excerpt from “Bi Jing Nei Di Ge” reflects Bai Yuchan's skepticism towards the concepts of immortals and eternal life. It



suggests that he only began to consider such ideas after encountering Cui Xu True Man, implying that his search for spiritual wisdom and his journey into Taoism as described in “Song of Cloud Roving” likely occurred after the events of the poem, which is consistent with a timeline after the year 1205.

In the “Recorded Sayings of the Jade True Person of Haiqiong”海琼白真人语录, there is a verse titled “Luofu Emerald Void Verses by Niwan True Person”泥丸真人罗浮翠虚吟 which goes: “In the autumn of the eighth month of Jiading Renshen year (1212), the Emerald Void Daoist was at Luofu... Thus, he imparted the alchemical process of the Golden Elixir, explaining it to Bai Yuchan of Qiong Mountain, enabling him to deeply understand the transformation of life’s essence” 嘉定壬申八月秋, 翠虚道人在罗浮... 遂以金丹火候诀, 说与琼山白玉蟾, 使知深识造化骨(Note 32). This indicates that Bai Yuchan had returned to Luofu Mountain by the eighth month of the year Jiading Renshen (1212).

In this paper, the “Huai Xi warfare” experienced by Bai Yuchan refers to the Northern Expedition (开禧北伐) led by Han Tuo Zhou during the Kaixi era seems plausible. The Kaixi Northern Expedition officially began in the second year of the Kaixi era (1206) in the month of May, as decreed by Emperor Xiaozong, and lasted until the ninth month of the first year of the Jiading era (1208) when a peace treaty was reached. The span of six years from the second year of Kaixi to the first year of Jiading provides a reasonable timeframe for this interpretation. In conclusion, it can be inferred that Bai Yuchan’s journey began in the Kaixi era’s first year (1205) during mid-autumn, when he received guidance from Chen Nan (“burning incense and kneeling on the ground to receive oral transmission”). Subsequently, he embarked on his cloud roving quest for enlightenment, facing various hardships without achieving the desired results. No later than the eighth month of the Jiading era’s year of Ren Shen (1212), he returned to Luofu Mountain, where he resumed practicing under Chen Nan’s guidance. Eventually, he attained insight into the method of cultivating inner alchemy. This realization prompted him to compose the “Two Songs of Cloud Roving” to communicate his earlier experiences of seeking the Dao through cloud roving to future generations of learners.

#### *4.3 A New Piece of Evidence Regarding Bai Yuchan’s Birth Year*

In the preceding discussion, this paper has, without assuming Bai Yuchan’s year of birth, deduced that Bai Yuchan’s early endeavors, as documented in the “Song of Cloud Roving”, took place between 1205 and 1212. Consequently, this analysis does not provide supporting evidence for Bai Yuchan’s birth in 1134.

In fact, there is more direct evidence for the dating of Bai Yuchan’s birth. Bai Yuchan sent a poem to Peng Si. The title of this poem is “Stepping into the Realm of Adulthood, One More String Than the Brocaded Zither, My Worldly Journey Remains Unfinished—Just Half a Day’s Journey from the Celestial Sphere. Overwhelmed by Uncontainable Emotions, I Find Comfort in Gazing at My Own Reflection, Holding the Radiant Moon as It Ignites Melancholy. My Yearning Drifts on the Westerly Breeze, Seeking the Distant Unknown. In My Grasp, a Bald Hare—a Token to Soothe My Inner

Turmoil. I Dedicate This Verse to My Crane Forest Friend 年逾弱冠，又多锦瑟之一弦；身堕尘樊，未彻玉霄之半日。醉怀无奈，顾影自怜，抱明月以兴悲，向西风而思远。谩拈秃兔，姑慰心猿。寄鹤林友(Note 33), which is quite lengthy and contains a lot of information.

While the precise date of its creation remains elusive, there exists a well-defined upper temporal boundary. The poem explicitly addresses a recipient known as the “Crane Forest Friend”, none other than Peng Si. Bai Yuchan’s initial encounter with Peng Si transpired in the year Dingchou of Jiading (1217). Consequently, the composition of this poem can be confidently asserted to postdate 1217. Based on this, we can decipher the temporal information within it.

In ancient Chinese history, there are two interpretations of the number of strings on the “Brocade Zither”锦瑟, which can either be fifty or twenty-five strings. In traditional Chinese literary symbolism, Brocade Zither can be associated with a person’s age. The poem’s title mentioning “one more string than Brocade Zither”又多锦瑟之一弦 implies that Bai Yuchan also employed this figurative method. Ancient Chinese age calculation was based on ten-year intervals, each with a different term. When the poem says “Emerging into adulthood’s realm”年逾弱冠, it means he had just crossed the age of twenty, suggesting “Brocade Zither” represents “twenty-five”. Adding “one more string than Brocade Zither”, it indicates he was around twenty-six years old. Therefore, Bai Yuchan’s earliest birth year should be around 1191 or 1192, and at the latest, it wouldn’t be beyond the Shaoxi era. From this perspective, Peng Si’s account of Bai Yuchan’s birth aligns closely with the descriptions in Bai Yuchan’s poems, indicating that Bai Yuchan’s birth year should be considered as 1194.

## 5. Conclusion

The two primary inquiries surrounding Bai Yuchan’s early life have been successfully addressed. Commencing from an analysis of the content and various versions of the “Song of Cloud Roving”, it has been cogently argued that Bai Yuchan embarked on his initial cloud-roving journey sometime between 1205 and 1212. This conclusion, substantiated by corroborative evidence drawn from Peng Si’s historical accounts and Bai Yuchan’s autobiographical references in his poetry, firmly establishes Bai Yuchan’s year of birth as 1194.

With the matter of Bai Yuchan’s birth year resolved, it is reasonable to anticipate that numerous associated disputes will progressively find resolution. Nevertheless, it is essential to concede that certain questions, such as those pertaining to Bai Yuchan’s year of passing and his exact lifespan, remain shrouded in uncertainty due to a paucity of definitive source material, thus necessitating future research endeavors.

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## Notes

Note 1. The earliest comprehensive study of Bai Yuchan's life and accomplishments was conducted by the Japanese scholar, Shoji Miyakaw 宫川尚志. Shoji Miyakaw, The Deeds of Bai Yuchan, a Daoist Priest in the Southern Song Dynasty 南宋の道士白玉蟾の事迹, in *Collection of Oriental History Essays: In Celebration of Dr. Uchida Ginfu's Birthday* 东洋史论集: 内田吟风博士颂寿纪念, Kyoto 京都, 1978: 499-517.

Note 2. Peng Si, Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji* 白玉蟾全集, Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2013, pp. 987-989. In this article, I use a modern edition entitled Bai Yuchan Quanji (The Collected Literary Works of Bai Yuchan), which is compiled, edited and punctuated by today's scholars and is of easier availability.

Note 3. He Dunhua, “An Exploration of Several Issues Regarding the Fifth Ancestor of Taoist Golden Elixir Southern Tradition, Bai Yuchan”关于道教金丹派南宗第五祖白玉蟾几个问题的探索, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 67. Zhu Yihui, “The Cultural Master Bai Yuchan from Qiong (Hainan)”琼籍文化宗师白玉蟾, *Journal of Hainan University (Social Science Edition 海南大学学报(人文社会科学版))*, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 203. Xie Jinliang, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Dates and Related Issues”白玉蟾的生卒年月及其有关问题考辨, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 68. Ge Jianmin, “Investigation into the Timing of Bai Yuchan Meeting His Master”白玉蟾遇师时间辨考, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 2019, Vol. 2, p. 90. Lan Zongrong, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Travels in Wuyishan”白玉蟾武夷山行迹考论, Master’s Thesis, Shandong University, 2008, p. 21. Fang Youtian, “A Study on the Life and Achievements of Bai Yuchan”白玉蟾的生平事迹和成才原因研究, Master’s Thesis, Hainan Normal University, 2018, p. 22.

Note 4. Zeng Zhaonan, “A Brief Study on Bai Yuchan’s Birth, Death, and Life Events”白玉蟾生卒及事迹考略, *Religious Studies* 宗教学研究, 2001, Vol.3, p. 28. Wang Zunwang & Fang Baozhang, “On Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Dates and Related Issues. A Discussion on Recent Studies on Bai Yuchan”也谈白玉蟾生卒年代及其有关问题—兼谈近年来有关白玉蟾问题的研究, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 2003, Vol. 3, p. 96. Fu Ying & Fu Heji, “Doubts About Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”白玉蟾生卒年岁疑, *Chinese Taoism* 中国道教, 2005, Vol. 3, p. 48. Zhan Shichuang, “A Study on the Travels and Cultural Contributions of Bai Yuchan, Ancestor of Southern Taoism”南宗道教祖师白玉蟾行踪与文化贡献考论, *Laozi Studies* 老子学刊, 2016, Vol. 2, p. 153. Feng Guanghong, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Journeys and Hidden Practices”白玉蟾行藏考, *Journal of Literature and History* 文史杂志, 2015, Vol. 5, p. 37. Xiao Dengfu, “The Relationship between Southern Tradition Bai Yuchan and the Dragon and Tiger Mountain Quanzhen Taoist Sect. Discussing Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”南宗白玉蟾与龙虎山正一道派之关系—兼论白玉蟾之生卒年岁, *Laozi Studies* 老子学刊, 2016, Vol. 2, p. 10.

Note 5. Ge Jianmin, “Investigation into the Timing of Bai Yuchan Meeting His Master”白玉蟾遇师时间辨考, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 2019, Vol. 2, pp. 85-86.

Note 6. Peng Zhu, “Three Aspects of Mr. Bai’s Feats in the Shenxian Tongjian”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, pp. 1014-1015.

Note 7. Feng Huanzhen, “A New Theory on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”白玉蟾生卒年新说, *Modern Philosophy* 现代哲学, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 99.

Note 8. Liu Shouzheng, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Taoist Thought”白玉蟾道教思想研究, Ph.D. Dissertation, Nanjing University, 2012, p. 14.

Note 9. Bai Yuchan, “Poem in Thanks to Immortal Master’s Letter”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 168.

Note 10. Liu Liang, “New Evidence on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”白玉蟾生卒年新证, *Literary Heritage* 文学遗产, 2013, Vol. 3, p. 80.

Note 11. Zhou Quanbin, “Introduction”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 3.

- Note 12. Bai Yuchan, “Song of Cloud Roving”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, pp. 714-717.
- Note 13. Peng Zhu, “Three Aspects of Mr. Bai’s Feats in the Shenxian Tongjian”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, pp. 1014-1015.
- Note 14. Huang Yongfeng & Fang Baozhang, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Activity Area” 白玉蟾活动区域考, *World Religious Studies* 世界宗教研究, 2012, Vol. 6, pp. 67-75. Chen Jinfeng, “An Investigation into Bai Yuchan’s Taoist Activities in Jiangxi” 白玉蟾江西道教活动考述, *Journal of Huaqiao University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 华侨大学学报(哲学社会科学版), 2013, Vol. 1, pp. 21-30.
- Note 15. Bai Yuchan, “Song of Cloud Roving”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 716.
- Note 16. Bai Yuchan, “Song of Cloud Roving”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 717.
- Note 17. Bai Yuchan, “Letter to Peng Si”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 172.
- Note 18. Liu Liang, “New Evidence on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”, *Literary Heritage*, 2013, Vol. 3, p. 78.
- Note 19. Bai Yuchan, “Bi Jing Nei Di Ge”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 724.
- Note 20. Lan Zongrong, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Travels in Wuyishan”, Master’s Thesis, Shandong University, 2008, pp. 23-24.
- Note 21. Pan Fang, “The preface to the collected writings of Mr. Hai Qiong Yu Chan”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 989.
- Note 22. Zhu Quan, “Preface to the Reconstructed Collected Works of Mr. Bai Yuchan from Haiqiong”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 993.
- Note 23. The first three Ming Dynasty editions are currently held in the National Library of China, the Japanese Cabinet Library, and the Harvard University Yanjing Library, respectively. The latter Qing Dynasty edition has been reproduced in the “Compilation of Taoist Texts” 道书集成 edited by Tang Yijie 汤一介.
- Note 24. The reprinted edition by Lin Yousheng is now preserved in the National Library of China.
- Note 25. The Yuan Dynasty printed edition was originally stored in the Shanghai Library. This paper refers to the reprint from “Chinese Recreated Editions: Jin and Yuan Dynasties”.
- Note 26. Bai Yuchan, “Poem in Thanks to Immortal Master’s Letter”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 168.
- Note 27. Peng Si, Factual Records of Mr. Bai Yuchan, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 987.
- Note 28. Feng Huanzhen, “A New Theory on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Years”, *Modern Philosophy*, 2011, Vol. 5, p. 100.
- Note 29. Xie Jinliang, “A Study on Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Dates and Related Issues”, *World Religious Studies*, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 66.
- Note 30. Wang Zunwang & Fang Baozhang, “On Bai Yuchan’s Birth and Death Dates and Related Issues. A Discussion on Recent Studies on Bai Yuchan”, *World Religious Studies*, 2003, Vol. 3, p. 101.
- Note 31. Bai Yuchan, “Bi Jing Nei Di Ge”, in *Bai Yuchan Quanji*, p. 724.

Note 32. Chen Nan, “Luofu Emerald Void Verses by Niwan True Person”, in Daozang 道藏.

Note 33. Bai Yuchan, “A Poem to Peng Si”, in *Bai Yuchan QuANJI*, p. 784.