

Cosmic scripts and heavenly scriptures: the holy nature of Taoist¹ texts²

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Holy blueprints

Of all sorts of Chinese texts, most are composed or compiled by human beings: historical works, philosophical classics, as well as their commentaries, and technical writings such as medical or astronomical treatises - to name but a few. Besides, there exists a different class of scriptures, some of which are - it is true - written by humans as well. But some of them are, we are told, of a divine nature: the religious scriptures or, - to be exact - the Taoist scriptures. The *Jingji zhi*, *Treatise on Literature*, of the dynastic history of the Sui dynasty, the *Sui shu*, compiled in the 7th century AD has, in its discussion of the Buddhist and Taoist texts, the following to say about Taoist scriptures:

- - "As for what are called the [Taoists', SPB] sacred writings, they too are endowed with the primordial energy. They come into being spontaneously and are not made. Just like [Yuanshi] Tianzun, the Heavenly Venerate [God] of the Original Inception,³ they exist forever and are not destroyed. If [on the other hand] heaven and earth were not destroyed they would heap up and not be transmitted. As a kalpa develops [through its four periods], its texts reveal themselves. ... They are called Celestial Writings. The characters [they consist of] are one *zhang* (= 10 Chinese feet, SPB) square, and give forth beams in every direction shining and brilliant, so that the mind is rendered respectful and the eyes are dazzled."⁴

Thus - according to the *Sui shu* - these religious scriptures share with the highest gods the fact that they spontaneously emerged out of the primordial energy and together with the latter are eternal. The primordial energy is what existed in the cosmos before creation took place. According to a Chinese philosophical tradition that can be traced back at least to the Former Han dynasty (206 BC - AD 25), there was once a Great Inception which started the evolution of the cosmos. During this inception the all-encompassing universal law, the *dao*, began to make itself manifest and seems to have been responsible for the emergence of spacetime in the nebulous void or chaos. Once spacetime had come into being it produced the primordial energy *qi*. This energy then differentiated into a light and pure energy and into a heavy and turbid one. While the latter formed Earth, the light and pure primordial energy formed Heaven.⁵ It is precisely this Heaven-forming pure energy out of which the highest-ranking gods (such as Yuanshi Tianzun, the Heavenly Venerate of the Original Inception) as well as the highest-ranking Taoist scriptures, the Celestial Writings, spontaneously emerged.

Since these scriptures are cognate with the Yuanshi Tianzun - both being spontaneously formed from the same *qi* - the celestial writings in their original form as celestial scripts can neither be accessible nor be read - not only by ordinary mortal beings but even by lower ranking gods and immortals. Thus the *Sui shu* continues its account as follows:

- - "Though the Celestial Immortals are unable to gaze upon [the Celestial Writings], when the [Yuanshi] Tianzun opens up the kalpa, he orders the *tianzhen huangren*, the Supreme Persons and the Heavenly Perfected (= lower-ranking Heavenly beings, SPB) to change the energy in heaven and divide it up [to produce new copies]. From the *tianzhen* (Heavenly

Perfected) on down to the immortals the various classes hand them on to one another according to rank. After finally reaching the Immortals they are handed on to the men of this world. Since, however, the [Yuanshi] Tianzun takes years completely to open a kalpa, those who receive the doctrine keep it secret for a period, and then hand it on. [If it is a scripture] of the first class, [it is handed on] after a long time; [if it is a scripture] of a lower order, [it is handed on] in a short time. ..."⁶

In other words: only the highest gods are able to see the original celestial writings written in cosmic script. Only in times of an imminent catastrophe, namely when a kalpa comes to an end and the whole cosmos is to be destroyed before creation starts again, these texts can be transmitted, through a series of intermediary stages, finally down to some elected mortals. But it is not the original texts written in the celestial script, the heavenly blueprint as it were, which a few earthly beings are granted to see - it's only the earthly transcripts of heavenly transcripts of the original celestial writings that in the end become accessible to human beings.

It may be worth mentioning that in our Western tradition a comparable phenomenon is known.

Excursion: Jahwe's handwriting

The second book of the Old Testament, called *Exodus*, narrates how Moses, after being instructed by his god Jahwe on Mount Sinai, received a couple of stone-tables with the laws inscribed on both sides in God's own handwriting. A few pages later, *Exodus* insists that the tables were made by God himself and that the script was God's script, carved into these tables.⁷ When Moses descended from the mountain and saw that the people meanwhile had begun to worship another god, the Golden Calf, he became furious, smashed the tables to the ground and destroyed them.⁸

Having done away with the Golden Calf and after some negotiations with Jahwe, Moses again ascends the mountain. This time, God orders Moses to make himself a new set of two stone tables⁹ and, after a period of forty days during which Moses had to prepare himself by fasting, Jahwe dictates the text of the laws which Moses, in turn, writes down on his own tables.

Analysing this narrative, it seems obvious to me that the destruction of the original law-tables cannot have aimed at withholding the laws from the people of Israel since in the end it indeed obtained a hardcopy of them, namely the tables inscribed by Moses. Rather, the aim must have been not to let the people see the celestial script as it was considered unfit. Not only should they not see Jahwe face to face, but they should also be prevented from seeing God's own handwriting.

Holy blueprints, continued

Turning back to our account in the *Sui shu*, this secular text was quite obviously informed by older religious texts. Thus we read, for example, in a text written towards the end of the fourth century AD, the *Suling jing* or *Scripture of the [heavenly chamber of the] immaculate transcendence*, the following sentence:

- - "[The Taoist scriptures] originally co-existed with the primordial energy and were produced at the same time as the original inception."¹⁰

The special relationship between the highest gods and the holy scriptures is described in these texts, too. One of the most principal, sacred Taoist scriptures, the *Duren jing* or *Scripture of salvation*, is said to

have been recited by the supreme deity at the dawn of the times within a pearl, within the "point of origin of the development of space when the stars stopped their motion" - which symbolizes the suspension of time and movement and indicates the beginning of a new cosmos.¹¹ Whereas gods and scriptures emerge independent from each other out of the primordial energy, through the fact that the high gods take hold of these sacred scriptures and recite them it becomes clear that gods and scriptures are not on the same hierarchical level. While the gods recite the scriptures there is no reciprocal action taken by the scriptures in regard to the gods. In addition, whereas it is a god who orders the transcription of the scriptures there is no equivalent initiative taken by scriptures to influence the gods or their nature.

Transmission

By a process that is not very clearly described in the *Sui shu*, the highest ranking celestial scriptures are handed down in Heaven in a series of steps from the Heavenly Venerate to the lower ranks of gods and immortals. Each step of transmission obviously must have involved the transcription of the text in question. The very first step, the transmission from the Heavenly Venerate to the Supreme Persons, seems still to be realized through the primordial energy which is divided once again and produces a set of new copies of the scriptures. Ideally, each of the following stages of transmission, whose recipients are persons of descending ranks, would have implied a transcription on increasingly less prestigious material and less esoteric scripts until the texts were, finally, passed on to elected human beings. These last copies were mostly written on silk, bamboo, or later even on paper, mostly in ancient scripts that often could only be read by specialists, if at all.

The recipients on the lower end of the hierarchy obtained the scriptures either through direct transmission by immortals or by gifted religious teachers, or the scriptures could be found in mountain caves or, for example, in lacquered boxes buried in the ground. Alternatively, mediums still nowadays can receive the content of a scripture in trance and transmit it by planchette writing from where it has to be transcribed into ordinary script.¹²

Examples of how immortals provided elected mortal human beings with scriptures are described, for example, in the *Zhen gao*, or *Declarations of the perfected*. This collection of protocols, revealed words of immortals, letters, memoranda, and records of dreams¹³ of a certain Yang Xi who, in the sixties and seventies of the fourth century AD, frequently was visited by immortals and received their revelations, was compiled in 499 by the foremost Taoist master of the time, Tao Hongjing. Here we find accounts of the Heavenly visits like the following one:

- - "In the third year of the Resurgent Peace [period], when the year-star was in [the celestial mansion of] Yizhou, on the night of the twenty-fifth of the sixth month (July 26, AD 365), Lady Wang of [the Heaven of] Purple Tenuity descended to me. A divine woman also came together with her. The divine woman was wearing a shirtwaist of cloud damask, cinnabar-red above and blue below. Its patterned colours were shining and freshly bright. Around her waist was a green-embroidered sash. Tied to the sash were more than ten small bells. The bells were blue and yellow, unevenly spaced from each other. A jade pendant was tied on the left. The pendant was like the pendants of our world, but a little smaller. Her clothing coruscated with light, illuminating the entire room - just like looking at the contours of mica in the reflection of the sun. Her cloudy hair was done up in a chignon, arranged in peerless fashion. She made her topknot on the crown of her head. The rest of her hair fell down around her waist. There were golden rings on her fingers. White pearls were bound about her arms. To look at her, she might be around thirteen or fourteen.¹⁴ ...

After a good while, the True Consort declared to me: "I would like to make a composition

of a single page to present to you, and moreover to avail myself of you, taking your brush to convey my humble meaning. Will that be all right?"

I replied: "I obey your orders." Then I immediately spread paper and dipped my brush in ink. She stood up and orally made her transmission."¹⁵

The immortals visiting Yang Xi not only dictated their scriptures into Yang's hand, they also handed over written documents. In an added comment to the reproduction of one of these documents, Tao Hongjing says:

- - "Originally, this book must have been in cosmic script. But since Yang Xi knew the characters [of the script] of the perfected he has transcribed them here into ordinary characters."¹⁶

Not every recipient was as gifted or skilled as Yang Xi. Ge Hong's (284-364) *Shenxian zhuan*, the *Biographies of divine immortals*, which was compiled during the first two decades of the fourth century AD,¹⁷ reports an incident where three immortals, dressed with feather clothes and wearing appropriate insignia, visited a certain Shen Xi whom they considered fit to become an immortal, since he had deserved well of the people. They gave him an inscribed table of white jade and a sceptre of blue-green jade, covered with cinnabar characters. But Shen was unable to decipher them. Therefore, the immortals took him with them up to heaven where, we must infer, he was instructed in reading them.¹⁸

However, not all Taoist texts existed as "heavenly blue-prints" which spontaneously emerged from the primordial energy. Lower ranking texts, for example biographies of gods, are written by gods and at a much later time than when the primordial chaos came to an end. Nevertheless, similar rules regarding their transmission apply: they cannot be handed down at any time to everybody, rather they are rarely transmitted and only in a limited edition, as it were, to candidates of immortality. Witness the following:

- - "Lord Green Lad of the eastern palace of Fangzhu island composed the present [*Annals of the Lord of the Dao, the Later Sage, [from the Heaven of] Highest Purity*] in order to present it to the Sage Lord [himself] who transmitted it to the Green Lad's disciple, Wang Yuanyou, who was charged to descend and show it to those who have corporeal marks that indicate their destination for immortality. Twice within a hundred years it will be transmitted or three times in seven hundred years in order to give it to those who learn the *dao* so that they become immortals."¹⁹

It also happened that the gods or the immortals - responding to the times and eager to help a distressed mankind - created new texts which they then passed on to elected humans. An example is provided again by Ge Hong's *Shenxian zhuan*:

- - "Suddenly, heavenly persons came down: a thousand mounted [on chariots], ten thousand on horseback, and golden chariots [with] feather canopies, teams of dragons, yoked tigers, impossible to establish their numbers. Someone [of the heavenly persons] called himself Zhu Xiashi, another one was called Donghai Xiaotong. They then transmitted to [Zhang Dao-] Ling the "Newly issued method of the bright majesty of the orthodox unity".²⁰

Here the term "newly issued method" means that this method was just recently invented by the gods to

supersede previous ones. The same *Shenxian zhuan* has an example of how a scripture first is distributed among immortals on earth before they finally pass it on to a human being. A certain Gong Song served the earthly immortal Gan Ji as his disciple. During Emperor Han Yuandi's reign (48-32 BC) he followed his master to a spring where they met another immortal who gave Gan Ji the *Taiping jing*, *Scripture of the great peace*, in ten chapters. Gan Ji acted according to the content of this book and consequently "accomplished his *dao*", which probably means that he was then promoted from an earthly immortal to a heavenly one and eventually ascended heaven in broad daylight. He handed this scripture over to his disciple Gong Song. Gong subsequently prepared elixirs that helped to prolong his life and eventually he became an immortal himself.²¹ Apparently, the transmitted scripture contained recipes for mixing pills of immortality and it was by practicing these prescriptions that Gong obtained immortality.

Earthly immortals or lucky human beings who were bestowed with scriptures frequently concealed the scriptures they had received or the copies they had made. One of the reasons for this might have been the fact that they had not come across any worthy candidate or disciple to be entrusted with them. A possible hint at the difficulties in finding an appropriate recipient is again given in the *Shenxian zhuan*: When the immortal Kong Yuanfang transmitted two scrolls of a secret text to a disciple called Yü, he informed him that this scripture contains important words concerning the universal law, *dao*, and that it can be transmitted every forty years to a mortal person. If no suitable man is found then the text must not be given to a wrong candidate just in order to satisfy the "forty-years' rule". If no candidate is found within a given forty-year period, but after eighty years there are two suitable persons, then both are entitled to receive them.²²

Besides such reports of a direct transmission of scriptures there are many examples preserved in the available Taoist literature of persons who found holy scriptures either in mountain caves or buried in the ground. The *Shenxian zhuan* says that Zuo Ci, who later became an Immortal, found the *Jiu dan jin ye jing*, the *Scripture of the liquefaction of gold and the nine [sorts of] cinnabar*, in a rock-cave.²³

Another example is Wang Lie who once ascended Mount Baodu at Hedong. Unexpectedly he caught sight of a rock-cave. It contained a stone plate, on top of which there were two scrolls of the *Su jing*, the *Scripture of simplicity*. He took them up and wanted to read them but was unable to decipher its script. Since he did not dare to remove the scrolls, he put them back but secretly copied a few dozens of its characters. He showed them to the famous Xi Kang, member of the group of the "Seven sages of the bamboo grove". Xi Kang recognized all characters without exception. Together they went to the cave in order to inspect the original scripture, but although the path was clearly discernible and they arrived at the rock, the cave had disappeared. Wang Lie then told his disciples that obviously Xi Kang was not yet fit for being given access to this scripture, therefore they could not find the entry to the cave again.²⁴

This episode exemplifies the conception that only worthy persons were given full access to the scriptures. As long as they were on the right path but had not yet mastered the *dao*, they either could find an important text but were unable to read it, or they were able to grasp its content but were not given the text itself. However, in both cases the message for the persons concerned was clear: being presented with excerpts only of a scripture but being able to read them or being able to find a whole scripture, although being unable to read it, was an obvious portent sent by Heaven indicating that the candidate was on his way to immortality but had not yet achieved.

Protection against "wrong proprietors"

Apparently, it was possible that the wrong persons could obtain important scriptures. Whoever possessed important scriptures faced a dilemma: on the one hand he should pass it on to others, since the *raison d'être* of scriptures was to be read, if not the *dao* would not be properly expanded; on the other hand scriptures kept in the hands of unfit persons inevitably cause problems for them. Therefore we find

in the *Shenxian zhuan* the warning uttered by the immortal Kong Yuanfang:

- - "If I don't transmit [the scripture] to a worthy person, then I obstruct [the expansion of] the heavenly *dao*. If someone gets it whom I must not give it to, then I betray the heavenly *dao* and he faces harm up to his childrens' children."²⁵

The *Daoxue zhuan*, the *Biographies of students of the dao* - a text written around the middle of the sixth century AD²⁶ - tells us what can happen to an adherent of the *dao* who gets hold of a scripture although either he is not yet entitled to obtain it or the time is not yet ripe for the scripture to be distributed among the mortals:

- - "[Huan] Kai took the scripture and arrived at the capital. He then bitterly suffered from fever, and all cures did not heal [it]. Tao Zhenbai (= Tao Hongjing, SPB) heard [it] and said: "It is not so that this illness will exceed. [However,] I fear [that] to fetch the scripture was a mistake.²⁷ Why not to send the scripture and put [it] back to the original place?" Accordingly, [Huan Kai] followed the advise and sent [it back]. [His] disease accordingly was cured and that was it."²⁸

Due to their holy character the scriptures, as will be shown below, had to be treated respectfully. Showing lack of propriety resulted in adequate punishment. Even princes could be punished by the nether world for misbehaving towards the scriptures. The *Daoxue zhuan* says:

- - [When] Prince Jingling of the Liang [dynasty]²⁹ came across the *Lingbao jing*, the *Scripture of the spiritual treasure*, in one section, he examined [it], immediately took [it] and threw [it] on the ground. A few days later, [his] hand put forth abscesses and sores, the sharpness of its pains was extraordinary. He subsequently sent for Master Feng and confessed [his] fault. The Master made a statement of repent³⁰ on his behalf, [but] cautiously increased [his] suspicion [concerning the prince's sincerity]. [The prince's health] only got a small change, and in the end because of this ailment he died.³¹

We may now ask ourselves: who was responsible for the execution of such punishments? The answer is found in another aspect which the divine scriptures share with the highest gods. The gods in general and the highest ones who emerged from the primordial energy in particular were always surrounded by attendants and guards. Similarly, the scriptures had their supernatural personnel, too, whose duty it was to guard the scriptures and to punish whoever maltreated them. An example is provided by the already quoted *Annals of the Lord of the Dao, the Later Sage, [from the Heaven of] Highest Purity*:

- - "This text (= the *Life* of the Lord of the Dao, the Later Sage, SPB) is guarded by ten jade-youths, and the scripture *Purple writ of the Golden Gate* is guarded by ten jade-girls. ... Whoever fails to pay his respects [to them] will be changed into a ghost of the lowest rank [by these guards]. His descendants will be punished up to the third generation."³²

Proper handling of the scriptures implied performing appropriate rituals on behalf of them.

Rituals for the scriptures

Since Taoist scriptures - thanks to their origin as emanations from the primordial energy - were considered holy, they had to be treated like holy persons such as gods or immortals. Accordingly, we find in the *Daoxue zhuan* the following paragraph:

- - "In the beginning of the Liang [dynasty] (= AD 502) in the plain desert [around] the islet of the Kunlun mountains, there were [found] three old lacquered boxes, and inside there was [some] yellow plain [silk on which] was written what Gan Jun had produced [as the] *Taiping jing*, or *Scripture of the great peace*, in three parts. [As] the villagers [who found this text] were astonished, they cleared at the place of the scriptures and erected a meditation [chamber] and supplied nourishment [as offerings to them]."³³

The villagers were certainly unable to read the text, but they may have considered its appearance a good omen. Ignoring who had put it there and why, it must have seemed not impossible that gods or immortals deposited the scriptures there. If indeed this were the case, then presenting offerings to the text would also mean offering to the gods, their former owners, who might recompensate the villagers' sacrifices by future blessings.

The context of the following quotation, however, makes clear that at least within this text the offerings were not only made on behalf of the supernatural personnel guarding the scriptures but also specifically for the texts themselves. Since the scriptures in question are said to be compiled by gods, venerating these texts also meant venerating their divine authors. The relevant excerpt - already partially quoted above - reads:

- - "This text (= the *Life* of the Lord of the Dao, the Later Sage, SPB) is guarded by ten jade-youths, and the scripture *Purple writ of the Golden Gate* is guarded by ten jade-girls. Before one gets ready for reciting them, one should clean the hands and then make offerings for these guardians as well as for the texts."³⁴

Supernatural properties of the scriptures

Finally, attention should be drawn to another important, if not the most important aspect of the Taoist scriptures. According to the account in the *Sui shu*, those who owned scriptures or at least had access to them and were able to read the script, gradually, by practicing what is described in these scriptures, succeeded in prolonging their lives and, eventually, in becoming immortals who ascended to heaven in broad daylight. However, not only practicing the content of a scripture but even reciting it a certain number of times could make one immortal. Of the female Taoist Wang Daolian it is said in the *Daoxue zhuan* that she:

- - "... received the *Scripture of the Three Grottos*³⁵, and day and night she exercised reciting [it]",³⁶

and in another fragment of the same work we learn that:

- - "[when] the female perfected³⁷ Qian Miaozhen³⁸ was a child, she learned the *dao*. [Later she] dwelled in the grottos and mountains of Juqu. [When she was] aged eighty-three, she recited the *Scripture of the yellow court*. [Having] completed [it] several [times], she then

bade farewell with relatives and friends, ate yellow and white coloured drugs, [and when she had] finished, she entered the Swallow Grotto, stayed [there] over the whole night, and on the next morning, [when] Taoist nuns and [male ordained] Taoists competed for departing [in order to] greet her, they suddenly perceived that in the grotto there was a sound of thunder and they saw a carriage [drawn by] a dragon and a phoenix. It came from the north-west and took [her] up in order to ascend to heaven."³⁹

In other words: the repeated recitation of Taoist scriptures, combined with the consumption of some drugs, resulted in Qian's immortality. Elsewhere we read that it suffices to recite the *Scripture of the yellow court* five thousand times in order to become immortal.

It may be worth noting that not only sacred Taoist scriptures were believed to have such effects, but philosophical classics could apparently also be used in order to cure diseases. The *Daoxue zhuan* provides us with the following example:

- - "Moreover it happened [that someone] who had an evil disease asked [Gu] Huan [how to get cured]. Huan said: "Which books does the family have?". The reply was: "There is only the *Scripture of filial piety*⁴⁰". Huan said: "[One] may select the *Zhongniju* [-chapter]⁴¹, place [it] at the pillow side of the sick person,⁴² and reverently treat it with propriety, [and] it will cause a difference [in health] by itself." And afterwards [the person] who was sick [as a] result [of this] was cured."⁴³

The reasons why - according to Taoist belief - holy scriptures could cure diseases or even lead to immortality are twofold. Firstly, it was their content which was helpful, since their descriptions of rituals or their recipes of elixirs - if performed properly or mixed and consumed as prescribed - would lead to the desired result. Secondly, it was the primordial energy itself that - like that of their cognate highest gods - was so mighty and endowed with supernatural power that it could do wonders.

Conclusion

Given the ominous character of the holy scriptures, given their divine nature that could render their owners immortal, given the social prestige the possession of scriptures gave to the owners, there is small wonder that in the fifth century AD literati and wealthy noblemen systematically searched for Taoist scriptures. On top of their shopping lists were the transcripts in Yang Xi's own famous calligraphy of those scriptures he had been dictated by the immortals during his nightly visions. Apparently, demand was much greater than supply and so a whole industry emerged that was specializing in producing scriptures that were said to be the work of the early patriarchs of the Mao Shan - the tradition which was set up by Yang Xi and his noble sponsors, the Xu family. It was Tao Hongjing who, in the early sixth century by carefully investigating the calligraphy used in all manuscripts of this tradition he could get his hands on, was able to distinguish between original and fabricated copies and to discard the forgeries.⁴⁴ However, all subsequent Taoist traditions - or sects - followed the blueprint of the Mao shan tradition and started with a revelation of heavenly scriptures.

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NOTES

1 With the exception of the terms "Taoism" and "Taoist" all Chinese terms, names and titles within this article are given in Pinyin romanisation.

2 Paper presented at the Conference "Scripts and Cosmograms", held under the auspices of The Traditional Cosmology Society, Edinburgh, 2-4 August 1994.

3 According to Maspero (1971: 61 and 101) one of the gods of the top-most Heavenly triad, the highest heavenly instructor god.

4 *Sui shu jingji zhi* 4.1091.

5 *Huainan zi* 3.

6 *Sui shu jingji zhi* 4.1091-1092.

7 *Exodus* 32.16.

8 *Exodus* 32.19.

9 *Exodus* 34.1.

10 *Su ling jing* 1b.

11 After Robinet 1979: 33.

12 Ledderose 1984.

13 Strickmann 1977: 4.

14 *Zhen gao* (ZG) 1.11bf., tr. after Hyland 1984: 108f.

15 ZG 1.13b, tr. Hyland 1984: 112.

16 ZG 2.7b2, tr. Schipper 1965: 12 n. 4.

17 Bumbacher (in press).

18 SXZ ap. *Taiping guangji* (TPGJ) 6.36.

19 *Shangqing Housheng daojun lieji* 6b.

20 SXZ ap. TPGJ 8.55.

21 SXZ ap. *Xianyuan bianzhu* (XYBZ) 2.19a.

22 SXZ ap. TPGJ 9.61.

23 SXZ ap. TPGJ 11.76.

24 SXZ ap. TPGJ 9.61.

25 SXZ ap. TPGJ 9.61.

26 On the *Daoxue zhuan*, see Bumbacher 1995.

27 According to the *Taiping jing fuwen xu*, reproduced in Wang Ming (1985: 745), it was Huan Kai's mistake to take this scripture because the time was not yet ripe for its new release. Also see Seidel 1983: 338.

28 *DXZ ap. Sandong zhu'nang (SDZN)* 1.17a3-10.

29 This must be a copyist's error. The title Prince of Jingling did not exist during the Liang. In *DXZ ap. Sandong qunxian lu (SDQXL)* 16.8a9-8b2 he is correctly called "Prince Jingling of the Qi". The prince in question was Xiao Ziliang, Prince of Jingling, who lived during the Liu Song and Nan Qi dynasties (his dates are 460-494). His official biography is in *Nan Qi shu* 40.692-701.

30 Most probably in the form of a "petition": Whenever a member of a Daoist parish was in peril he could go to see his priest who would then interview him about his problem, its possible causes, his family background (especially the deceased family members, for they were often regarded as causing ailments). The client had to apply - in written form - for the opening of a petition procedure. This provided the priest with information to be used in the writing of the petition. After having entered the "room of tranquillity" and having burned incense and greeted the gods of the different geographical directions, the priest ritually prepared his ink and wrote the petition down in *zhengshu*-style characters. First introducing himself he then described the client's problem in detail. Then the heavenly beings were begged pardon and the document was ritually sealed.

The priest had to visualize the god Laojun during a meditation *séance* and, once he saw him in front of him, he submitted the petition to the god. In the morning after the submission, both the priest and his client assembled. The priest soaked the petition in water, mixed it with honey and cinnabar, and finally gave it to the client who had to eat it. (For a detailed and well documented description of the whole procedure see Cedzich 1987: 65-102).

31 *DXZ ap. SDZN* 1.8a7-8b1.

32 *Shangqing Housheng daojun lieji* 6b.

33 *DXZ ap. SDZN* 1.17a3-10.

34 *Shangqing Housheng daojun lieji* 6b.

35 *San dong jing*.

36 *DXZ ap. XYBZ* 3.7b2-8.

37 *Nü zhen*.

38 *Fl.* 520-527.

39 *DXZ ap. XYBZ* 1.15b9-16a3.

40 *Xiaojing*.

41 One of the chapters of the *Liji [Record of ritual]*, whose correct title is *Zhongni yanju*. See Couvreur

1950, II: 376-390.

42 Classical scriptures were used to drive away demons, see Stein 1963: 39, referring to *Hou Han shu* 112B.1b. The *Xiao jing* was read to drive away bewitchings, Stein, *loc. cit.*, referring to Yuan Hong's (328-376) *Hou Han ji* (the exact reference is not given). According to Stein, it did not matter which text was used for such purposes, but the *DXZ* seems to show that, in fact, it *did*.

43 *DXZ ap. SDQXL* 20.2a9-2b3.

44 Strickmann 1977. Before Tao Hongjing was active in separating original texts from their imitations an earlier Taoist master, Lu Xiujing (406-477), had already undertaken a similar task. Roughly thirty years after the initial revelation of the *shangqing*- or Mao Shan texts and their transcription by Yang Xi, another set of scriptures, the so-called *lingbao*- or Spiritual Treasure scriptures were revealed to a certain Ge Chaofu (fl. 397). These texts, too, were confronted with the fabrication of a multitude of imitations and forgeries (Bell 1988: 366, Bokenkamp 1983: 434). It was Lu who reconstructed the original corpus and compiled a catalogue (Bokenkamp 1983: 434). In this respect Lu certainly served as Tao's model.

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