

# Empowered Writing

Exorcistic and Apotropaic  
Rituals in Medieval China

Stephan Peter Bumbacher

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To Agnes

# Introduction

Writing has many functions. It prevents information from being lost. Bone inscriptions preserve the questions members of the Shang ruling families asked their oracle with regard to, e.g., the cause of diseases, the suitability of certain sacrifices, or the outcome of planned military campaigns. Chronicles maintain the memories of diplomatic activities between various vassal states of the Zhou kingdom as well as hints at the private lives of their rulers necessary for the understanding of their political behavior.

Writing also transmits the knowledge a person (or a group) has gained during their lifetime to the next generations. The works of the Chinese philosophers hand down the experiences the masters underwent as consultants to local rulers and as teachers of their disciples, materials they—or those who compiled them—considered worthy of transmission. The histories of past dynasties serve as the mirror to be held up to the present emperor. He should learn from their records where his predecessors failed, what they did wrong, and why, as a consequence, they brought their dynasty down.

Writing describes the world, the cosmological concepts, the forces believed active in the universe. Writing lists the pantheons (those of Daoists as well as of Buddhists); they contain the etiological myths surrounding local cults, saints, and immortals; and they transmit the alleged words of founders of religions.

Writing contains prescriptions—medical, political, religious. In both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* instructions can be found that advise the reader to meditate in a certain way in order to become one with the universe. Later Daoist texts include instructions concerning rituals allowing the practitioner, for instance, to keep his souls joined in the body and not letting them to report the adept's misbehavior to the heavenly authorities that would shorten his or her life as a consequence.

Writing is, moreover, a means of distributing information in an efficient way. The stone engravings of the Confucian classics during the Han and later dynasties not only fixed their authorized version but also made them publicly accessible to virtually everyone. While copying manuscripts by hand already resulted in a modest multiplication of the original text, the invention of woodblock printing in the Tang allowed their mass production.

Writing in the form of poems or novels serves to entertain and educate readers. Officials who often had to produce lyrics on the spot during outings learned the appropriate vocabularies and famous examples from specialized

encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書) like the *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (Records for Early Learning). Yet another type of writing appears in the prompt-books story tellers used in the marketplace to refresh their memories.

## Writing Materialized

All this is quite well-known. Less known is the fact that writing can have power as a “physical” or material object. In this form, writing can be treasured as an object in its own right regardless of contents. Thus, for example, texts written in the gifted calligraphy of a certain Yang Xi 楊羲 became so prestigious and sought after in the fourth and fifth centuries CE that almost an entire industry emerged producing forgeries that were sold at high prices (see Strickmann 1977).

In medieval Europe, emperors and kings as well as bishops and prelates used precious copies of gold-plated and wonderfully illuminated bibles as gifts for their most important guests. Clearly, it was not the text that mattered in these cases as the recipients most certainly already had their own copy of the holy book. Rather, it was the material luxury which made writing in this form such a valuable treasure. Along the same lines, some Theravāda communities in Southeast Asia, after the end of the first millenium, made Buddhist texts from gold and enshrined them in stupas, treating them like relics of the Buddha.

Many cultures believed that certain forms of writing had an intrinsic power which allowed their owners to control or influence their contemporaries, supernatural beings, or even nature. In such contexts, empowered writing might be used as apotropaic objects, i.e., objects that had the power to avert evil beings or negative events. Empowered writing could also serve as exorcistic objects, i.e., objects by means of which demons could be cast out of human beings and animals or expelled from certain locations.

According to this way of thinking, special kinds of writing enabled his or her author to spellbind other people or beings. Famous examples are the Greek “binding spells” (*katadesmoi*), small sheets of lead that were inscribed, folded, pierced with a bronze or iron nail, and buried with a human corpse or placed in a sanctuary. The texts contained curses used in a variety of contexts (see Faraone 1991). Here is a fourth-century BCE Attic curse laid upon a disloyal husband or fiancé: “[I bind?] Aristocydes and the woman who will be seen about with him. Let him not marry another matron or maiden” (Faraone 1991, 14).

Another example is a judicial curse against the members of the opposing party in court from the same time and place:

Let Thersilochos, Oino[philos], Philotios, and whoever else is a legal advocate for Pherenikos be bound before (the gods) Hermes Chthonios and Hecate Chthonia. The soul, the mind, the tongue, the plans of Pherenikos, and whatever else he is doing or plotting with regard to me—let all these things be contrary for him and for those who plot and act with him. (Faraone 1991, 15)

Similarly, the Roman historian Tacitus (ca. 55-after 115) believed that the death of the military leader Germanicus (15 BCE-19 CE) was caused by a tablet on which an adversary had written the name of the general in order to curse him (*Annals* 2.69).

An example how writing was used to control supernatural beings is provided by Johannes Chrysostomos (after 344-407), patriarch of Constantinople after 398. He relates in his 43<sup>rd</sup> *Homily* that among the Christians some used to suspend the gospel (most certainly extracts) at the bedside in order to ward off demons. Further evidence for the belief in influencing nature with writings can be found in the works of Rome's greatest poet, Horace (65-8 BCE). In his *Epodes* he mentions books that were imbued with such a strong power that they could pull down even the stars fixed on the vault of the sky (17.1).

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of empowered writing in Chinese religious culture and to explain its various functions. The book divides into three parts and an epilogue. Each part is devoted to one of the most important forms of empowered writings, namely talismans, petitions and holy scriptures.

## Chinese Tallies

The first part of this book begins with the description of a ritual act in which Wu Meng 吳猛, a Daoist of the third century CE, writes out a short text (of unknown contents) and uses this as a tally (*fú* 符) to stop a storm. In order for the reader to fully understand this act, I present a complex argument that runs through three subsequent chapters.

Chapter One introduces a range of inscribed objects with similar functions. It shows that the *fú*—often translated as “charm” or “talisman”—was in fact one of several kinds of tallies. These are the *jie*-, the *quan*-, the *qi*-, and the *fú*-tallies. These tallies, inscribed items consisting of several parts and made of different materials, can be traced back at least to the first decades of the fourth century BCE.

The earliest examples discovered to date in archaeological excavations are *jie*-tallies. These were imitations of bamboo segments cast in bronze whose lengthy inlaid golden inscriptions reveal that they once belonged to merchants and granted their exemption from being taxed en route when transporting goods along well-defined trading routes. Upon their return to the capital, they

had to join their parts with those of the feudal lord of the merchants's place of origin as well as with those of the officer of the Treasury. When all parts matched and thus formed a complete "tube," all legitimate parties of the transaction were thus identified and the due taxes could be handed over.

Pre-Han texts also preserve descriptions of the use of *quan* 券-tallies. Probably made of wood or bamboo, these two-part objects were given to both parties involved in financial transactions. Creditor and debtor each received one of two complementary parts. Before they were to settle their account, they had to join their respective halves of the *quan*. Only if both parts matched perfectly, were the legitimate partners identified and the transaction could be completed.

The *qi* 契-tally, in use at least in the state of Qi and during the third century BCE, was employed in credit operations. It stated the fixed budget for accomodating foreign diplomats during their journey along the network of official post or relay stations in Qi. One half of the tally was kept by the officer in charge of the post house while the accompanying official of Qi retained the other half. Once the mission was accomplished, both officers had to send their halves together with the bill to the accounting office in the capital. Thus the legitimate parties involved were identified and the bill could be settled.

The *fu*, finally, was a tally used in military contexts, serving two different yet closely related functions. On the one hand, both the supreme commander and his field general had one half of it. Whenever commands or requests had to be transmitted, the courier would bear the half of the sender and present it to the recipient who would join it with his own one. If both matched perfectly, the courier had to be accepted as the legitimate messenger. On the other hand, *fu* were used as passports for those who wanted to cross the border passes between the "Chinese" and the "barbarian" territories and for those who had to enter or leave the capital.

The comparison of these various kinds of tallies makes it obvious that their common function was to serve as certificates of legitimation. So widespread was the use of tallies in Chinese—civil as well as in military—daily life that I move on, in Chapter Two, to ask whether similar procedures were also applicable to the legitimation of the ruler. And in fact, by the second century BCE at the latest, the tally concept had found its way into the legitimation of government. The chapter starts with introducing the concept of the Mandate of Heaven which granted or withdrew the right to rule according to the ruling dynasty's moral behaviour. In late Shang and early Zhou times, Heaven showed its disapproval of earthly policy by certain heavenly warning signs such as comets. Likewise, Heaven let extraordinary constellations appear to confirm the legitimacy of a new dynasty.

Unfortunately, astronomical phenomena were not always at hand when a ruler's activities needed to be blamed or praised. Therefore, in course of time the concept of heavenly signs was expanded to include extraordinary earthly

phenomena and omens. In another innovative step, these omens were interpreted by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195-115 BCE; see Arbuckle 1995, 585) as one half of a *fu*-tally. Dong obviously applied the tally concept to the notion of the Mandate of Heaven. According to him, the ruler's behavior represented one half of a *fu*-tally which was matched by the complementary heavenly half in the form of omens sent by Heaven.

Thus the tally concept was, for the first time, used in a metaphorical way in order to interpret Heaven's reactions as inevitably complementary to earthly actions. Why did Dong single out the *fu* from the various different kinds of tallies? The *fu* was, as was said above, used in military contexts, and both punishing a dynasty by bringing it to fall and establishing a new dynasty were usually the result of military actions. The relationship between Heaven and the earthly ruler was obviously conceived of as a military one.

However, omens are by no means self-evident, but people have to attach a specific meaning to them. This meaning, on the other hand, was not obvious as different people could in principle interpret the same phenomenon in entirely different ways. It was, therefore, necessary to reduce possible ambiguities. As tallies usually bore inscriptions indicating their proper use, i.e., their proper interpretation, before long the first omens—the heavenly halves of tallies—appeared with some form of writing on them. In fact, not only was the Han emperor Wu presented with a cauldron whose inscription unambiguously stated Heaven's will, but the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9-23) received the Mandate of Heaven in written form. A white stone found when workers were digging a well bore the inscription: “[Heaven] announces that the Duke of Anhan [Wang] Mang [will] act as emperor.”

Once the precedent of announcing the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven by means of *fu*-credentials with written messages was set, it was but a small step for written prophecies to assume the form of full-fledged scriptures. In fact, what seems to have begun as rather short inscriptions on various kinds of objects soon developed into entire scriptures, the so-called apocrypha.

Not only Wang Mang but also his contenders based their aspirations on Heaven-sent scriptures. Accordingly, Liu Xiu 劉秀 could in 24 CE only ascend the throne as Emperor Guangwu after having received a prognostication text entitled *Chifu fu* 赤伏符 (Red Secret *Fu*-Credential).

Daoists established their unique rule in the area now known as Sichuan in the late second century CE. They, too, legitimized this move by means of *fu*-credentials. However, they replaced Heaven as the highest legitimizing authority with an even higher one: Dao. Even after their surrender to Cao Cao in 215, the Daoists still acted as the executors of Dao's will, and time and again made and presented *fu*-credentials as proof of the Mandate of Heaven legitimizing the emperor's rule.

Chapter Three explores the use of *fu*-credentials in what may be called religious contexts. Both popular religion and Daoism adopted the *fu*-concept.

Both believed that their priests, in order to pray to the gods for help, had first to legitimize themselves before the gods and only then could they approach the gods. During their education the priests were instructed how to make a *fū* and they learned that while they were busy preparing a *fū*, at the same time the complementary second half of the credential spontaneously came into existence in Heaven—if and only if the priests' moral qualities were adequate. Thus, whenever a Daoist needed the gods' help, he presented his "half" of a *fū*-credential which the gods then matched with the heavenly counterpart. As soon as both parts complemented each other, the priest was legitimized as authorized petitioner. In this case the gods felt free to answer his prayer. The gods' will was usually carried out by members of an army of armed spirits. This is the reason why the Daoists used the military *fū*-tally as certificate of legitimation.

At this point Wu Meng's ritual act becomes clear in its full implications. Due to his high-minded character and his irreproachable behavior he had received an immortal's instructions. When his host feared that the storm would destroy his house, Wu Meng, using this extraordinary knowledge, made his half of a *fū* and threw it at the building. The unseen gods matched it with their own half which was in Heaven and, as both halves matched perfectly, they knew that Wu Meng was indeed their legitimized earthly partner. Wu then must have asked them for help in the form of a secret prayer which the gods immediately granted.

*Fū*-tallies obviously also had an apotropaic function. Daoists not always made them when required, they also wore *fū*, which they had been given by their masters, in a clearly visible way at their belt. Demons and evil ghosts were fully aware of their use. Whenever such beings saw somebody wearing a *fū*, they knew this person's special relationship with the gods. Fearing divine punishment carried out by armed higher spirits the evil demons and ghosts did not dare approach such *fū*-wearing people.

## Daoist Ritual Petitions

The second part of this book deals with Daoist sacred writing in the form of memorials (*zou* 奏), petitions (*zhang* 章), and registers (*lu* 錄/錄), adopted from the secular administration. Chapter Four discusses early examples of the Daoist use of empowered memorials, which at first glance seem to imply that they were used like *fū*-tallies. The master who wanted to make ghosts appear wrote one and displayed it, and immediately the ghosts arrived at his place and were seen by everyone there. The traveller who wanted to cross a dangerously high river composed one, threw it into a nearby temple, and was able to continue his journey on the very same day.

However, as the term *zou* indicates, the Daoists did not use it as a certificate of legitimation. Rather, it was a means by which to inform the gods in written form about the actual problem and to ask for help.

In the Celestial Masters' tradition, Daoist priests developed the use of *zou* into a highly complex ritual of "submitting a petition" (*zouzhang* 奏章, *shangzhang* 上章) on behalf of ill parish members. This ritual included a special room, the "quiet chamber" or "oratory" (*jingshi* 靜室), a writing table together with stationery, an incense burner, the ill person's oral confession of his or her transgressions, and the priest. The latter entered the room and performed a series of preliminary rituals to prepare the ground. He then wrote out the text of the petition according to strict formal rules, restricting himself to no more than three subjects: the supplicant's disease or difficulty and its probable cause; his or her formal expression of repentance for relevant transgressions; and the request to the relevant celestial officials for help and exorcism.

Subsequently, the text was proof-read and checked with the supplicant before it could be wrapped, addressed, and sealed. This document was then delivered to the relevant celestial divinities. For that purpose, the priest first released some of his own body gods to leave his body and act as his companions. While the priest remained in deep meditation, they all ascended to Heaven on a road built from red *qi* that came out of the priest's body. Once arrived in Heaven, they handed over the document to the celestial divinities who inspected it and decided whether or not to comply with the plea.

Returned to Earth, the priest might further prepare the document so that the supplicant could ingest it—for instance, by soaking it in water and adding honey. This caused the document to come to the attention of supplicant's body gods, allowing them to drive out the illness-causing demons.

This ritual is also mentioned in secular sources. The *Liangshu* 梁書 (History of the Liang Dynasty) notes that the famous poet Shen Yüe 沈約 (441-513), when he felt that his end was nigh, called a Daoist priest, made his confession and asked him to send up a "red petition" (*chi zhang* 赤章; 13.243, Mather 1976, 221).

Chapter Five begins with a description of the politico-religious administration of the Celestial Masters. It shows how the Daoists adopted administrative procedures from the imperial government one of which consisted in registering the parish members at specific dates of the year. They thus emulated and further developed the imperial observance of registering the households which Bodde described as "a sort of annual census-taking conducted locally throughout the empire, with special attention given to aged persons as potential recipients of governmental honors and rewards" (Bodde 1975, 341). The Daoist code, on the other hand, reads: "On the seventh day of the first month, the seventh day of the seventh month, and the fifth day of the tenth month—the Three Assemblies—everybody among the people assembles in his own parish. The master revises the registers and records (*luji* 錄籍), removing the dead,

entering the newborn, minutely authenticating the ‘number of mouths’ [living in the parish], and correcting the roster of names” (Nickerson 1996, 353).

The interesting difference, however, between imperial and Daoist registers lies in the fact that a mistake made in the latter not only may have resulted in adverse consequences in the Daoist administration but inevitably influenced the spirit world in a negative way as well. As the Daoist code says: “On the days of the Three Assemblies, *the ten thousand spirits* of the Three Offices [Heaven, Earth and Water] *check their records* against each other. *If a new person has been added but the news is not sent up, the celestial bureaus will not have the name.* If a person has gone but is not removed from the record, the roster of names will not be correct” (Nickerson 1996, 354; emphasis added).

As soon as a petition was submitted to the gods, all personal data of both the supplicant and the priest included in it were checked against the heavenly registers. If any discrepancies were noticed, the gods dismissed the petition as irrelevant.

The Celestial Masters not only registered their parish members but also the inhabitants of the spirit world. The *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (The Pole Star’s Statutes against Demons, DZ 790; see Kobayashi 1992, 22; Schipper 1994, 69; Lai 2002),<sup>1</sup> a Daoist text of the third century, says: “They record the names of all demons and spirits on Earth and the method of [distinguishing] evil from good. They were given to the Celestial Master Zhang Daoling 張道陵 [residing in Heaven] and delegated [to him the power to] control demons and spirits” (Schipper 1994, 70).

Registers that listed the names of demons under their control were bestowed upon the adherents during graded rituals of initiation. They served as a certificate of legitimation, indicating to the gods against which demons the adept was entitled to ask for their help. As these registers could be worn at the belt, they also functioned as an apotropaic means since they kept those demons at bay that saw their names listed.

## Sacred Scriptures

The chapters of the last part of this book deal with the most prestigious form of empowered writing, the sacred scriptures. Chapter Six introduces the exorcistic properties and powers of Chinese scriptures: when put on a sick person’s pillow they would heal the patient; when recited appropriately, they could banish evil and hateful ghosts, block calamities, and eliminate misfortune. It also shows that anyone suffering from illness or on the point of death, when given

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<sup>1</sup> Works from the Daoist canon (*Daozang*, abbr. DZ) are cited according to Schipper and Verellen 2004.

the (now lost) *Sanhuang wen* 三皇文 (Writ of the Three Sovereigns) to hold, will be sure not to die. Or that a wife having trouble in childbirth will be safe, her child being born immediately.

Where does this power come from? Evidence is presented that it is a direct consequence of the scriptures' very nature. In the beginning of the cosmos, the scriptures spontaneously emerged from primordial *qi* 氣 together with the highest gods. Both gods and scriptures were thus but different manifestations of the same cosmic "energy." Like the highest gods the scriptures reside in Heaven and in their original form as celestial scripts they are neither accessible nor can they be read—not even by lower ranking gods and immortals. Only at very specific occasions these texts can be transmitted, through a series of intermediary stages, finally down to Earth. But it is not the original texts written in the celestial script, it is only the earthly transcripts of heavenly transcripts of the original celestial writings that in the end become accessible to human beings.

On the other hand, lower ranking texts, for example biographies of gods, were 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.

However, due to their close connection with the gods the Daoist scriptures share certain phenomena with the latter. For one thing, like the gods who are always surrounded by attendants and guards, they have supernatural personnel who guard the scriptures and punish anyone who abuses them. For another, like gods, Daoist scriptures are considered sacred and as they are accompanied and protected by supernatural beings, they have to be venerated like sacred figures and accordingly are cult objects. In addition, scriptures as sacred objects render their storage place sacrosanct.

The power of the scriptures can now be explained: whatever happens to them is reported to Heaven by their spirit guardians. The heavenly gods then decide to take action on behalf of the scriptures. Their will is executed by the guardians who may heal the sick if they hold the scripture with devotion or punish the evildoer who treats them badly. Accordingly, wearing a scripture at the sash or belt guaranteed the constant presence of this supernatural entourage and provided active protection for its bearer.

Chapter Seven goes a step further and, looking beyond the Daoist context, investigates the Buddhists' behavior toward their sutras. Buddhist sutras record the Buddha's own words, first orally transmitted—under conditions of control—by his disciples after his *parinirvāṇa*, later compiled and put into writing by monks. Initially conceived of as a mortal being and entirely extinguished at the end of his life, the Buddha later developed into a supramundane being co-eternal with the *dharma* and thus transcending all cosmic cycles (*kalpas*). The same process led to equally supramundane bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas*. As a consequence, although the original Buddhist canon was closed in the second

century BCE, new sutras continued to appear as the word of the now supra-mundane Buddha uttered while the Buddha was visualized by adepts in meditation.

The sutras present a form of empowered writing since they contain “the supernatural powers (*shenli* 神力) of all the buddhas of past, future, and present” and are protected by bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* against anybody who “despised, hated, envied, or bore a grudge against them.” Similarly, any devout reader of, for instance, the *Lotus Sutra* was protected by a vast number of buddhas. In the case of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, the protecting deity was even a local Earth god who, apparently co-opted by the Buddha, guarded and protected anybody expounding it. Exorcistic properties were also recorded as Buddhist lay adherents reciting texts like the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi sūtra* would heal the sick.

Supernatural beings protected Buddhist sacred scriptures as well as their holders. Buddhists soon came to worship the sutras themselves and developed a full-fledged cult to them, including sacrifices to the sacred texts.

Considering the obvious similarities between Daoist and Buddhist concepts of, and practices regarding, their sacred scriptures, in Chapter Eight we ask who influenced whom. Regarding the nature of the scriptures, it seems that the Mahāyāna concept according to which the sutras had been expounded eons ago must have been the earlier one. The Daoists reacted and, in order to surpass the Buddhists, let their own sacred scriptures come into being spontaneously during the self-creation of the cosmos.

Spiritual guardians protecting scriptures and their owners already appeared in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (Scripture of Great Peace) and may thus have existed before the Buddhist concept. However, this work seems not to have had any influence on the early Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure texts in the Daoist tradition. On the other hand, these texts were accompanied by spiritual guardians, too, so the adherents of both Daoist traditions may have borrowed the idea from Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The analysis of other aspects of the sacred scriptures seems to suggest that they, too, were modeled on already existing Buddhist patterns. In sum, Chinese empowered writing in all its many forms and manifestations integrated both properties deeply rooted in ancient Chinese traditions as well as properties adopted from Buddhism that were modified to mark Daoist pervasive superiority.

# Tallies



# Chapter One

## From Tally to Certificate of Legitimation

The famous third century CE Daoist Wu Meng was originally a local saint from the region of Lake Boyang and Nanchang. Later he became one of the Daoist “twenty-four examples of filial piety” and thus one of the patron saints of the “way of filial piety” of Tang Daoism that was to develop into one of the most important Daoist traditions of the Song and Yuan dynasties (see Schipper 1981; 1985). An episode of his life is recorded in the *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Searches into the Supernatural; ed. Beijing 1985) of ca. 340. This work, which has not come down to us in its original form but only remains in a Ming reconstruction, is attributed to the official and historiographer Gan Bao 干寶 (see Campany 1996, 55-62; DeWoskin 1974; Bailey 1966). It contains the following passage:

Wu Meng, a person of Puyang, was in service to Wu as the Magistrate of Xi'an. Then he settled his family in Fenning. He was very filial by nature. When he met the accomplished sage Ding Yi, he was given spiritual prescriptions (from Yi). He also obtained important methods and spiritual “talismans.” He was then capable of great feats of Daoist arts. [...]

Once in the home of Zhou, Adjutant of Xuanyang, a wild wind suddenly arose. [Wu] Meng then wrote out a “talisman” and threw it onto the building. A moment later the winds grew calm. (1.13; see DeWoskin and Crump 1996, 13; Mathieu 1992, 43-44; Miyakawa 1979, 93-94)

How do we have to understand this passage? What precisely was the ritual involved? Why was it—at least in the eyes of contemporaneous Chinese—effective? In order to answer these questions we first have to identify the important elements of the narrative.

They are: the reported fact that Wu Meng had been very filial; that, as a consequence of this, a wise man or immortal designated him for introduction into certain spiritual techniques; and that he wrote out a “talisman” or “charm” (*fú* 符) and threw it onto the building, so that the winds grew calm. Most essential is the last point. What, then, is the meaning of “talisman”?

Testimonials to the occurrence of the character *fú* for “talisman” appear first in texts from the late fourth century BCE. The earliest archaeological arti-

facts discovered so far date to the late Warring States period, to the third century BCE. Both sources, however, do not present these “talismans” as an isolated, single category of objects. Rather they occur as part of a whole range of objects of similar function, as documented in various sources. For example, the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Book of Master Meng; ed. Taipei 1974) by the Confucian philosopher Meng Ke 孟軻 (fl. 320; see Lau 1993) has:

Mencius said: Shun was an Eastern barbarian. He was born in Zhu Feng, moved to Fu Xia, and died in Ming Tiao. King Wen [of the Zhou] was a Western barbarian. He was born in Qi Zhou and died in Bi Ying. Their native places were over a thousand *li* (miles) apart, and there were a thousand years between them. Yet when they had their way in the Central Kingdom, their actions matched like the two halves of a tally. The standards of the two sages, one earlier and one later, were identical. (4B.1; Lau 1983, 128)

What D.C. Lau in this translation rendered as “their actions matched like the two halves of a tally,” literally reads as “[their actions were] like combining the *fu*-tally 符 and the *jie*-tally 節.” When describing the perfect match of the two outstanding heroic characters in Chinese antiquity, Mencius uses these two as a metaphor which must each have consisted of two halves to be combined to form a whole, a single unit that was considered perfect. “Tally,” it turns out, is an appropriate translation. Unfortunately, Mencius neither reveals what these objects were nor how they were different—and a difference must have existed, otherwise there would not have been two terms.

Additional early testimonials complicate the picture further. For instance, the *Xunzi* 荀子 (Book of Master Xun), by Xun Qing 荀卿, a Confucian thinker who lived about a century after Mencius (Loewe 1993b: 178-188), says: “As for those who combine the *fu*[-tally] and the *jie*[-tally] and who divide the *qi* 契 and the *quan* 券, it is because of this [act of joining and separating these objects] that they are considered trustworthy” (12.7).

This passage suggests that those who combined the tallies *fu* and *jie* were considered trustworthy and that there were two additional objects of a similar nature called *qi* and *quan*, whose separation into two halves also rendered their owner trustworthy. Both *fu* and *jie* as well as *qi* and *quan* being parallel and part of the same context, it seems that they all designated some kind of tally. As, moreover, neither thinker explains what these objects or their specifics were, they must have been common objects at the time whose appearance and function everyone was familiar with. Let us look at them in turn.

## The Jie-Tally

In 1957, during an excavation at Qiujiia huayuan 丘家花園 in Shouxian (Anhui) in the ancient southern State of Chu, Chinese archaeologists discovered four bronze objects with cast inscriptions inlaid in gold. They belong to two different sets that must have consisted of five pieces each which, when joined together, could be combined to form a kind of hollow tube with a node in the center. The whole mimics a piece of bamboo, clearly indicating that the metal objects derived from bamboo predecessors (Yin and Luo 1958, 8-11; Guo 1958, 3-7; Liu 1982, 60-65; see Fig. 1a).

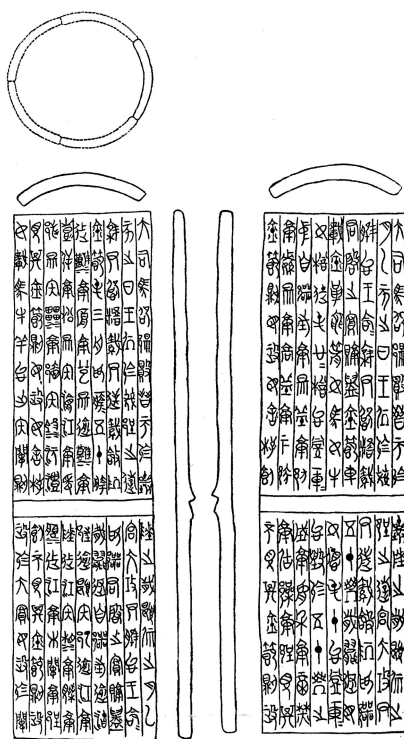


Fig. 1a. Metal *jie*, from Qiujiia huayuan in Shouxian (Anhui)

Of the first set only one piece was found. Its text is 162 characters long, whereas the text on each of the three extant pieces of the second set is slightly shorter, i.e., 144 characters. The first part of both texts is identical, beginning with a date that refers to the defeat of the Jin army by the Chu troops at Xiang-ling—an event that occurred, according to historical records, in the sixth year of King Huai of Chu's reign (323 BCE, i.e., in Mencius's lifetime).

## 甲节一枚释文

“大司馬邵鄩敗晉市(師)於襄陵之戢(歲),  
 顓(夏)朏之月乙  
 亥之日,王尻(居)於茂郢之遊宮。大攻(工)  
 尹雕台(以)王命命  
 集尹愬檣、裁尹逆、裁斂(令)阮,爲鄩君啓  
 之廩,賡鑄  
 金節。屯三舟爲一舳,五十舳,散鼂(能)返。  
 自鄩往,逾沽(湖),  
 达(上)灘(漢),庚厲,庚芑易;逾灘,庚郢  
 (黃?),逾顓(夏)內郢;逾江,庚  
 彭弮,庚松易,內(入)澮江,庚爰陵;达江,  
 內(入)湘,庚滕,庚  
 溲易;內雷,庚鄙;內(入)繁沅澧澧;达  
 江,庚木闌,庚郢。

見其金節則毋政(征),毋舍桴(逐)隊。不  
 見其金節則政。

女(如)載馬牛羊以出內闌,則政於大廩,毋  
 政於闌。”

## 乙节三枚释文

“大司馬邵鄩敗晉市於襄陵之戢,顓朏之  
 月,乙亥之日,王尻於茂郢之遊宮。大攻尹  
 雕台王命命集尹愬檣、裁尹逆、裁斂阮,爲鄩  
 君啓之廩,賡鑄金節。車五十乘,散鼂返。毋  
 載金革睪箭。女馬、女牛、女僮,屯十以堂一  
 車;  
 女梧徒,屯廿梧台堂一車;台毀於五十乘之  
 中。自鄩往,庚郝丘,庚郝堅,庚魯禾,庚昌  
 焚,  
 庚繁易,庚高丘,庚下都,庚居郢,庚郢。見  
 其  
 金節則毋政,毋舍桴隊。不見其金節則政。”

Fig. 1b. Guo Moruo's transcription of the *jie*-inscriptions

As the text contains the expression metal *jie* (*jinjie* 金節), it was definitely a *jie*-tally. The first section reads:

In the year when Shao Yang, the Great Minister of War, had defeated the army of Jin at Xiangling, in the *xiayi* month, on the *yibai* day, when the king [of Chu] dwelled in the pleasure palace at Jieying, Shui, the Great Intendant of Public Works, took a royal order to command Dao [?], official from Jiyin [?], Ni, official from Jianyin, and Qi, official from Jianyin, to cast these metal *jie* for the merchants from Qi's, Lord of E, treasury:

Add up three boats to make a convoy; fifty convoys a year shall be [allowed] to [make the journey] and to return. They shall depart from E, traverse the lake [?], go up the Han River, stop at Yan, stop at Xunyang, go up the Han River, stop at [?], traverse the Xia River, enter the Yun River, traverse the Jiang River, stop at Pengyi, stop at Songyang, enter the Lujiang River, stop at Yuanling, go up the Jiang River, enter the Xiang River, stop at Die, stop at Taoyang, enter the Lei River, stop at Chen, and enter the Zi, Ruan, Li, and You Rivers, ascend the Jiang River, stop at Muguan, stop at Ying.

When they will show their metal *jie*, they will be exempt from excise, [though] they will not be lodged or be given food [for free]. When they do not show their metal *jie*, they will be assessed excise. If they transport horses, oxen and sheep in and out of the gates, they will be assessed excise at the Great Treasury but not at the gates. (Guo 1958, 3-4; Falkenhausen 1999, 343-344)

The text of the second set has essentially the same passage, except for the central section which reads:

Fifty wagons a year shall be [allowed] to [make the journey] and to return. Do not transport metal, leather, or bamboo for making arrow shafts. If [you use] horses, buffaloes, or oxen, add up ten as the equivalent of one wagon; if [you use] human carriers, add up twenty as the equivalent of one wagon; and subtract these [wagon equivalents] from the total of fifty wagons.

Both kinds of *jie*, therefore, were made for merchants of the E area but while the first text refers to merchants traveling by boat, the latter addresses those making the journey by carts. In other words, any merchants from E who on official request, either by boat or by cart, embarked to collect various goods along a prescribed route had to bring their acquired merchandise back to the main city where the lord resided. They were responsible to the feudal lord of E—at that time a certain Duke Qi—who himself had to report to the Great Treasury in the capital of the State of Chu.

As outlined in these two inscriptions, the metal *jie*-tallies had a rather complex function. On the one hand, they served as sort of a “map” prescribing the way the merchants had to take. On the other, they served as an official certificate indicating to local magistrates that the merchants did not have to pay taxes locally. Upon their return to E, the merchants must have used their parts of the *jie*-tallies, when they delivered their goods at the Treasury, in order to identify themselves as the legitimate traders who had acted upon official com-

mand. Finally, the Lord of E, the responsible officer of the Treasury of E, the representatives of the merchants of E as well as the officers in charge of the Great Treasury, had to combine their parts of the *jie*-tallies in the capital of Chu. When all parts were joined together and thus formed a complete “tube,” all legitimate parties of the transaction were thus identified and the taxes that had to be paid could be handed over. The Lord of E, who as a feudal lord would normally not live in his fief but in the capital, and the Great Treasury would each receive their due shares.

Lothar von Falkenhausen has suggested translating *jie* as “tally.” He summarizes their function:

The tallies recorded the royal privilege for official trading activities administered by Ejun Qi. Their royal origin and the high status of the beneficiary no doubt account for their luxurious execution. Whether the merchants were themselves government officials or private individuals who conducted their business under some arrangement with Ejun Qi's administration is unclear; in any case, the tally inscriptions explicitly state that the merchants were not to be lodged and fed at government expense—presumably in contrast to traveling administrators. (Falkenhausen 1999, 340)

Important for our purposes is the fact, that the *jie*-tallies served, among other things, to identify and thus legitimate their bearers.

## The *Quan*-Tally

What, then, is meant by the term *quan* 券, also mentioned in the *Xunzi* passage? A most instructive example is preserved in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States; ed. Sibum Congkan), a third century BCE text that collects anecdotes as a “rhetorical textbook” for the instruction of future diplomats and high administrators. It presents numerous intelligent arguments used in political manipulations to secure advantage over others. The text has not survived in its original form but was redacted by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) (see Tsien 1993).

The *Zhanguo ce* includes a story that shows how *quan*-tallies were used. A certain Feng Xuan was asked by his ruler, Lord Mengchang, who was in urgent need of cash, to collect the interests from loans granted to the population of his fief. Feng, however, considered this intention unwise and cancelled both debts and interests to be paid, which in the long run turned out to be more advantageous for the ruler. The passage goes:

[Feng Xuan] hastened to Xue and sent out an officer summoning all those who owed debts to come forth and match their *quan*-tallies [with his]. When all *quan*-tallies had been matched, [Feng Xuan] feigned an order [from Lord Mengchang]

that all debts were to be forgiven the people. The *quan*-tallies were burned and the people cheered. (4.40b; Crumb 1970, 190-191)<sup>1</sup>

As this example clearly shows, the *quan* in two parts—probably made of wood or bamboo—served to identify both parties of a financial transaction in which one partner was a contractor of debts. Both parties received one half of the *quan*-tally when the transaction was initiated. When one party wanted to terminate the transaction, both had to present their halves. If both halves matched exactly, the legitimate partners were identified. Or, according to Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the Historian, ed. Beijing 1982), whenever the money-lender wanted to collect his interests, both parties had to match tallies. In all probability, the amount of the debt (and the annual interests?) were inscribed on them.

## The Qi-Tally

The third of the technical terms in the *Xunzi* passage is *qi* 契. Its function is described in another philosophical text of the third century BCE, the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan; ed. Taipei 1974; see Rickett 1993; transl. Rickett 1985; 1998), named after Guan Zhong 管仲 who died in 645 BCE. The text is a miscellany of writings composed between the fifth and second centuries BCE. They tend to deal with statecraft, are generally classified as Legalist, and were compiled by Liu Xiang.

One of the essays, entitled “Da Kuang” 大匡 (Large Basket), describes the development of Duke Huan's character from that of an initially timid young prince into an arrogant, impetuous tyrant who eventually became a mature and capable ruler (Rickett 1985, 282). The description of his circumspect administrative activities includes the following passage, dated to the third century. It reads:

Every thirty *li* [Duke Huan of Qi] set up a post house with supplies [for travelers] and placed an officer in charge of it. Whenever a feudal lord wished [to send an emissary] to communicate [with Qi], a civil functionary would accompany the traveler [on his way] and order one man to haul [the traveler's baggage] in a cart.

If they stopped overnight, he would have men take care of the horses and feed [the traveler] with<sup>2</sup> the supplies [of the post house. In making up the bill] the guest and the officer [in charge of the post house] would divide a *qi*-tally [each taking one half]. Upon arrival in the capital, each would submit<sup>3</sup> [his half of] the *qi*-tally. If [the officer] had been improper in expending [more or less than]

<sup>1</sup> A detailed account also appears in *Shiji* 75. See Haenisch 1962, 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Following the ancient, Zhu, and Liu editions, which write 以 for 其.

<sup>3</sup> Emending 入 to 入.

the amount prescribed by custom,<sup>4</sup> it was considered a crime. (VII.18; Rickett 1985, 308)

This text describes a network of post or relay stations along the main traffic routes where travelers could stay overnight and be entertained—a service that surely was not free of charge and that seems to have been an administrative innovation of Duke Huan of Qi. It served to feed and temporarily shelter travelers who, in exchange for cash, sought a safe haven in those precarious times.

The text makes it clear that each officer in charge of such a post house was accountable to the officials in the capital. However, if the traveler was not an ordinary person, an official, or a merchant, but rather an emissary of another feudal state, it was in accordance with the diplomatic practices of Qi to feed him at the state's expense. However, there existed a fixed budget that was not to be exceeded. The actual costs of the diplomat's stay in such a post house seem to have been registered on both halves of a *qi*-tally. Thus it seems that one of the functions of a *qi*-tally was to exempt the bearer from charges. Another function consisted, again, in legitimizing the correct “partners,” the foreign guest and the officer in charge of the post house, in the government's accounting office in the capital of Qi.

A *qi*-tally was therefore, in a certain sense, analogous with a *quan*-tally in that both were used in credit operations. Whereas the *qi*-tally in this example seems to have had a more specialized utilization, the *quan*-tally apparently was employed more generally. However, other texts present the *qi*-tally with the same general function as the *quan*-tally has in the *Zhanguo ce*. For example, the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Book of the Dao and the Virtue; ed. Sibū beiyao), the compilation of anonymous authors of probably the fourth century but traditionally attributed to Laozi 老子, has the following:

Therefore, when wise men hold the left half-tally pledge,  
They do not press their debtors for their debts.  
Men of virtue control the tally pledge;  
Men lacking virtue control the tithes. (ch. 79; Roberts 2001, 184)

According to this testimony, the *qi*-tally was generally used when money was lent. The left part was kept by the creditor, the right part by the debtor. Apparently, details of the contract were carved or written on the *qi*-tally, but the virtuous wise men would, as envisaged by the author of the *Daode jing*, confine themselves to inspecting the recorded names of the debtors, while those creditors who lacked virtue had only eyes for the amount of the interests recorded on them. This interpretation is, at least for Later Han times, confirmed by the *Laozi Heshang gong zhangju* 老子河上公章句 (Chapters and Verses of the Master

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<sup>4</sup> Emending 義 to 儀.

on the River, DZ 682; transl. Erkes 1958), a *Daode jing* commentary that may be as early as the Han dynasty but is definitely no later than 243 CE.<sup>5</sup> It says:

In antiquity, the wise men held the left half-tally (*qi*) and joined *fu*-pledges, they had neither [written] dispatches nor laws. They notched *qi*-tallies and joined *fu*[-halves] and considered them pledges. They only notched the *qi*-tokens and did not press their debtors for their debt as another activity. Rulers who have virtue control the examination of the split *qi*-tallies and that is all. Rulers who have no virtue memorize the wording on their *qi*-tallies and control what people are losing. (ch. 79; see also Erkes 1958, 131)

## The Use of *Fu*

Wu Meng's way of writing a *fu* and throwing it to stop the storm allowed the provisional translation as "talisman." In early texts, the term is not quite used in the same way. For example, the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Mister Lü [Buwei's] Spring and Autumn Annals; ed. Knoblock and Riegel 2000; see also Carson and Loewe 1993), compiled in the third century BCE has:

The Mohist leader Meng Sheng was on good terms with the Lord of Yangcheng, so the Lord of Yangcheng made him protector of his fief in Chu. Breaking a piece of jade in two and regarding them as a *fu*[-object]. Each took the oath: "Only when both halves are joined, will I obey an order."

When King Dao of Chu died, his ministers and vassals attacked Wu Qi. There was fighting at the burial ground in which Lord Yangcheng participated. Chu condemned him for that and so the Lord of Yangcheng fled. When Chu tried to appropriate his state, Meng Sheng said: "I have been entrusted with another man's state. To hand it over I require the [other half of the] *fu*[-object]. I have not received the *fu*[-object], yet I do not have the power to resist, so I must be prepared to die." (19.3; Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 487)

The procedure here is again that an object was divided into two halves and both parties involved—in this case military men—received one half each. Whenever one of the parties required the services of the other, first the legitimation of the parties, or their envoys, had to be established by joining the two halves of the *fu*. If they matched exactly, the requests or orders presented orally could be regarded as trustworthy. This strongly suggests that *fu* also were some sort of tally.

A tomb at Yin Queshan 銀雀山 in Linyi (Shandong), dated to before 118 BCE (Lau and Ames 1996, 4), has yielded textual fragments on bamboo strips of the military classic *Liutao* 六韜 (Six Strategies), probably compiled around 250 BCE (1979: 12). The text contains a paragraph entitled "Yinfu" 陰符 (Se-

<sup>5</sup> On this work, see Robinet 1977, 24-39; Chan 1991; Wagner 2000.

cret *Fu*-Tallies) which relates a discussion between King Wu and Duke Tai on their military use. The discussion begins with communication problems on the battlefields:

King Wu asked Duke Tai: “[Suppose] we led the army and entered deeply into the realm of the feudal lords. Suddenly, the three [divisions of our] army encounter slower [than expected] or faster [than expected progress], are either [in an] advantageous or are [in a] dangerous [situation]. Our general [therefore wants] to communicate over a [large] distance using nearby [means] or from the center [wants] to correspond to the periphery, in order to grant the [proper] use of the three [divisions of the] army. What can be done in that situation?”

In response, Duke Tai suggests that they apply a set of coded messages which relies on the use of *fu*-tallies to secure the secret communication between the ruler and his general:

Duke Tai said: “Ruler and general have secret *fu*, all in all eight kinds. There is the *fu* [indicating] a big victory and the conquest of the enemy, [it] is one *chi* (23 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the destruction of an army and the killing of a general is nine *cun* (20.8 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the fall of the walls of a city and the capture of a city is eight *cun* (18.5 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the withdrawal of the enemy and [the capture of] distant [territory as] reward is seven *cun* (16.2 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] haranguing the troops and taking secure guard is six *cun* (13.9 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the call for provisions and increasing [the number of] soldiers is five *cun* (11.6 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the defeat of [the own] army and the killing of the general is four *cun* (9.2 cm) long. The *fu* [indicating] the loss of [any] advantage and the loss of [all] troops is three *cun* (6.9 cm) long.

All those who are commissioned to transport a *fu* but are tarrying and, if the matter of the *fu* has leaked, those who heard [it] and those who passed [it] on, one [has to] kill them all. The eight *fu* are the art of secret communication between ruler and general, by means of which they in a hidden way put phrases through, and of the center and the periphery knowing from each other without leaking [the information]. Even if the enemies have the knowledge of divine [beings], none [of them would] thoroughly recognize [the message].” King Wu said: “Excellent!” (24.20ab; Strätz 1979, 76-78)

It is doubtful whether Duke Tai’s suggestions were ever put into practice. For one, depending on the material of the *fu*-tally, it was quite possible that it was damaged during transmission from general to ruler (or vice versa)—especially under conditions of war—so that it became impossible for the receiver to recognize its original length, resulting in a loss of its encoded meaning. For another, only a very limited number of secret messages could be encoded in this way; a difficult situation might have required more precise and detailed information. This case, however, was already anticipated by the anonymous author(s) of the *Lintao* as he added the paragraph entitled “Yinshu” 陰書 (Secret Letters):

King Wu asked Duke Tai: “[Suppose] we led the army and entered deeply into the realm of the feudal lords. Ruler and general wish to combine troops, put [tactical] changes of an infinite [number] into effect, [or] plan an unfathomable [strategically] advantage. [However,] these matters are so many [different ones], that *fu*-tallies are unfit to express [them] clearly. [Or] they are away from each other and a long way off, [so that oral] phrases don’t go through, what can be done in that situation?”

Duke Tai replied: “Whenever there are secret matters or great plans [at issue], one ought to use letters and not use *fu*-tallies. The ruler by means of letters [ought to] hand down [his orders to] the general, the general by means of letters [ought to send his] questions to the ruler.” (25.20b)

Overcoming the problem that *fu*-tallies as carriers of complex messages were unfit by introducing letters, the author(s) of the *Liaotao* were confronted with another problem: letters could be intercepted by the enemy and the secret plans fall into the wrong hands. So they had to consider “preparing” the letters in a way that rendered this impossible. Thus the text continues as follows:

The letters, being combined by one single [person], are then “twice separated” and by being “thrice sent forth” are [finally] known [by] one.

As for twice separated, [it means to] divide the letter into three parts. As for thrice sent forth are [finally] known [by] one, it means that of three persons one person takes one part, when they come together, they don’t know the facts [of the whole].

This is called a “secret letter.” Even if the enemies have the knowledge of divine [beings], none [of them would] thoroughly recognize [the message].”

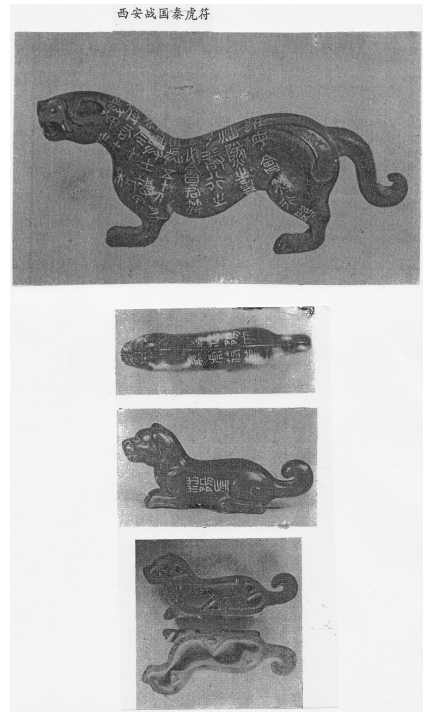
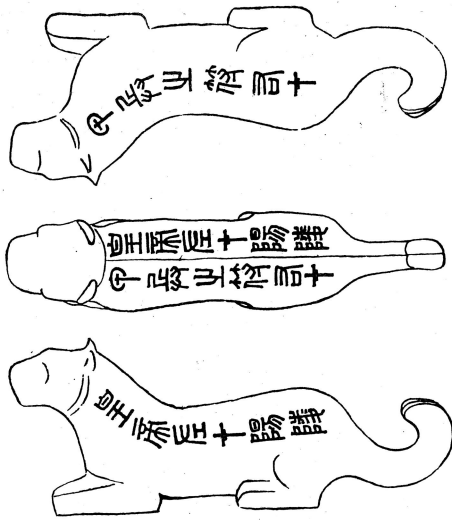
King Wu said: “Excellent!” (25.20b)

In theory and as desk design, this procedure might have made sense. However, in practice, and especially under conditions of war, it was more difficult to get three messengers through the enemy lines than a single one. Once one part of the information was lost, the whole message would become incomprehensible. Therefore, this method may not have been applied for a long time, if at all.

In reality, the procedure probably was as follows. A trustworthy messenger, a man of integrity, was given both one part of a *fu*-tally and an oral message. He then had to match his part of the *fu*-tally with that of the recipient of the message. If the match was perfect, he transmitted his message orally. In this way, communication was less cumbersome than in the case of a “tripartite secret letter.” On the other hand it was vital to employ a person of upright reputation as courier. Thus as a certificate of legitimation or credential, the *fu*-tally was very useful—clearly attested in text like the *Liushi chunqiu*. In addition, this use is further supported by archeological artifacts.

## Archaeological Examples

One of the earliest known specimens from the late Warring States, the so-called “Xinji Tiger *Fu*,” shows irregularities in the split surface of both halves which permit a perfect match only with its authentic other half. The gold-inlaid inscription on its back gives an indication of its use: “The use of more than fifty soldiers requires that this *fu* be matched with that of the king” (Hou 1977, 163, pl. X).



Figs. 2a, 2b: Tiger tallies of Warring States and Han times

In the year 1953, a *fu*-tally in two complementary parts made of bronze with an inlaid golden inscription, was transferred from private ownership into the custody of the provincial museum of Zhouzhi (see Figs. 2a, 2b). Ledderose and Schlombs describe the piece: “The bronze tiger figure consists of two identical halves. [...] Both halves are hollow in their interior. The left one has three cams that exactly fit into three corresponding cavities in the right half” (1990, 310). Although nothing is known about the circumstances of its discovery, the object can be dated to the early Qin dynasty and its original site must have been

near Xianyang. Its inscription consists of two phrases, each one to be seen on each of the two halves of the bronze tiger. It runs as follows: “Military *fu*. The right [half] is at the emperor[’s place], the left [half] is at Yangling” (Des Rotours 1952, 19).

In other words, whenever the emperor wished to give military orders to the commander stationed at Yangling, his messenger had to present the “imperial” half of this bronze tiger which the commander then combined with his own. If the match of both parts was perfect, the commander had to consider the oral command the messenger was transmitting as authentic. Similarly, whenever the commander was asking for supply or relief, his courier had to present the “Yangling” half of the *fu* before the emperor who, upon combining both halves, would listen to him.

Archaeological evidence of this type of military *fu*-credentials in the form of bronze tigers with inlaid gold inscription is provided for the time of the Warring States including the former State of Qin (Hei 1979, 93-94). Similar tiger *fu*-credentials with inlaid silver inscriptions are attested until the Han dynasty (Wang 1981, 91).

## A Literary Example

An interesting literary example of the use of such a military tiger *fu*-tally appears in the *Shiji*. Chapters 75-78 deal with four feudal lords who tried to resist the attacks of the powerful state of Qin during its conquest of the last remaining feudal states when establishing the first Chinese empire. Chapter 77 relates Wuji’s 無忌, the Noble Scion’s 公子, endeavors. Wuji was the Prince of Wei and son of King Zhao of Wei as well as the younger half-brother of King Anli of Wei. The relevant part begins with the description of the military situation:

In the twentieth year of King Anxi of Wei (258 BCE), the King [...] of Qin, having crushed Zhao’s army at Changping, dispatched more troops to besiege Handan (the capital of Zhao). The Noble Scion’s elder sister was the Lady of the Lord of Pingyuan, younger brother of King Huiwen of Zhao; [she] sent letters again and again to the King of Wei and the Noble Scion asking for help from Wei. The King of Wei sent General Jin Bi to lead 100,000 troops to the aid of Zhao. The King of Qin sent an envoy to tell the King of Wei: “We are attacking Zhao and it will fall any day now. If one of the feudal lords dares to help it, after seizing Zhao we will be sure to move troops to attack him first.” (77.2379-2381; Nienhauser 1994, 216-218; Haenisch 1962, 29-32)

This menace, uttered by the most powerful military force, was a serious matter. Small wonder that the King of Wei became frightened:

The King of Wei was afraid and sent a man to stop Jin Bi and have him remain encamped at Ye. In name aiding Zhao, in fact he grasped both ends of the situa-

tion and watched. The caps and carriage canopies of the messengers of the Lord of Pingyuan followed one after another to Wei, rebuking the Noble Scion of Wei:

“The reason that I [the Lord of Pingyuan] bound myself through marriage with the Noble Scion was because I thought that the Noble Scion’s lofty principles would enable him to hasten to those in difficult straits. Now Handan might surrender any day to Qin, yet Wei’s aid has not arrived; where is the Noble Scion’s hastening to those in difficult straits? Moreover, though the Noble Scion may think little enough of me to abandon me, allowing me to surrender to Qin, does he feel no love [at least] for his elder sister?”

The Noble Scion was dismayed by this, begging the King of Wei again and again, while his guests and rhetoricians persuaded the king with myriad arguments. The King of Wei feared Qin and did not heed the Noble Scion. Obligated by the then current ethical code, the Noble Scion had to help his elder sister. In view of the king’s obvious reluctance, he now had to become active himself:

The Noble Scion, realizing that he would never be able to gain [help] from the king and convinced that he would not survive himself while allowing Zhao to perish, invited his guests, gathered more than a hundred chariots and horsemen, and prepared to confront the army of Qin with his retainers and die together with Zhao.

When [the Noble Scion’s] retinue passed through Yimen Gate, he saw Scholar Hou, and told him of why he was preparing to die against the Qin troops. He bid farewell and set out. Scholar Hou said: “Do your best, Noble Scion; your aged vassal cannot follow.”

After the Noble Scion had proceeded several *li*, he became displeased: “My treatment of Scholar Hou has been adequate in every respect, the entire world has heard of it. Now that I am about to die, Scholar Hou hasn’t a single sentence or half a phrase to see me off; could it be that I have failed in some way?”

Apparently, Scholar Hou must have been an extraordinary character equipped with knowledge of a special kind—one might even regard him as an early example of what later became (Daoist) “transcendents.” The Noble Scion recalls Scholar Hou’s abilities and apologizes for his impoliteness:

He led the carriage back again and asked Scholar Hou. Scholar Hou laughed and said: “Your servant knew that you would return, Noble Scion. The Noble Scion delights in knights, and his name is renowned throughout the world. Now that you have difficulty, you have no better plan than to confront the army of Qin; one might compare this to throwing meat to a hungry tiger. What merit is there in this? What use has your patronage been? Thus you treated me generously, Noble Scion, so when you departed and I did not see you off, I knew that you would resent this and return.”

Now that the Noble Scion has passed the test as he recognized that Scholar Hou must have some hidden knowledge, he “can be taught”:

The Noble Scion knelt, bowed twice and questioned him. Scholar Hou dismissed the others and spoke privately with him: "I have heard that Jin Bi's military *fu*-tally is always kept in the king's bedchamber, and Consort Ru is now highest in his favor; going in and out of the king's bedchamber, it is within her means to steal it. I have also heard that Consort Ru's father was killed by a man and that Consort Ru nursed [her hatred] for three years, and from the king on down sought [someone] to repay her father's foe, but she was unable to do so.

Consort Ru wept for you, Noble Scion, and you sent your retainer to cut off her foe's head, presenting it to Consort Ru with your respects. Consort Ru's willingness to die for you, Noble Scion, is such that she would refuse no request; it is only that there has been no way for her to do this. If you only once open your mouth, Noble Scion, and ask Consort Ru, Consort Ru is sure to give her word, and you may then obtain the tiger *fu*-tally (!), seize Jin Bi's army, aid Zhao in the north, and repel Qin in the west; this is an expedition worthy of the Five Hegemons."

The Noble Scion now follows Scholar Hou's suggestion and puts the plan into practice. In so doing he is further assisted by Scholar Hou's advice:

The Noble Scion followed his plan and asked Consort Ru. Consort Ru did indeed steal Jin Bi's military *fu*-tally and gave it to the Noble Scion.

The Noble Scion set out. Scholar Hou said: "In the interest of the state, when a commander is abroad, there will be orders from his ruler he will not accept. Even though you match his *fu*-tally, Noble Scion, Jin Bi may not give you the troops, but instead send back a request [for confirmation]; your task is then sure to be endangered. Your servant's retainer Zhu Hai can go with you, Noble Scion. This man is knight of great strength. If Jin Bi heeds you, that would be best; if he does not heed you, you may have [Zhu Hai] strike him down."

At this the Noble Scion wept. Scholar Hou asked: "Are you afraid to die, Noble Scion? Why weep?"

The Noble Scion said: "Jin Bi is a blustering veteran general; when I go, I fear he will not listen, and I will certainly have to kill him; it was for this I wept. I would never fear death!"

After this, the Noble Scion went to make his request of Zhu Hai. Zhu Hai laughed and said: "I am only a butcher brandishing a chopper in the marketplace, yet the Noble Scion personally inquired after me again and again. The reason I did not return your courtesy was because I sought petty propriety useless. Now that the Noble Scion is in dire straits, this is the moment I shall serve him with my life." He went with the Noble Scion.

The Noble Scion called on Scholar Hou and thanked him. Scholar Hou said: "I should accompany you, but I am aged and unable to. Let me see you off [promising] that I shall count the days your journey should take, then face north the day Noble Scion arrives at Jin Bi's camp and cut my throat." The Noble Scion then set out.

Now follows the final episode of the story presenting a nice example how the military *fu*-tally actually was used:

When he reached Ye, the Noble Scion falsely claimed that the King of Wei had ordered him to replace Jin Bi. Jin Bi joined the *fu*-tally; he was suspicious, and raising his hand and gazing at the Noble Scion said: "I am now in command of a host of one hundred thousand camped on the border. This is the state's weightiest appointment, yet you come in a single chariot to replace me. How can this be?" He decided not to heed them. Zhu Hai had hidden a forty-catty iron hammer in his sleeve. He hammered Jin Bi to death and the Noble Scion took command of Jin Bi's army. [...]

Although General Jin Bi joined both halves of the *fu*-tally and, after their perfect match, should have obeyed the Noble Scion's orders, he refused to do so as he was suspicious. After the general's assassination, the Noble Scion was able to take over command of the army and to respond to his sister's requests for help.

That the Noble Scion could take over the command was obviously only possible since—which is not said explicitly in our story—the other officers must have believed in the Noble Scion's legitimation. So, for them the matching of the *fu* halves was not only sufficient to accept him as their new commander but also not to see any reason to complain against the killing of their general. This, at least in my view, shows the broad acceptance of the *fu*-“concept.”

This episode from the late Warring States shows that the *fu* (and the *quantally* in civil affairs) represented the first part of an interaction, namely the identification or legitimation of the correct partners. In cases of a military use of such certificates of legitimation, the act of joining the halves was followed by, e.g., transmitting the marching-order, the command for the dislocation of troops, a request for arms' supply, etc. Whereas in cases of civil use of *quantallies*, the second part of the interaction consisted, e.g., in a claim of debts or interests. In any case, whether in military or civil matters, the act of joining the halves of these certificates was followed by an act of oral communication during which the proper request was brought forward.

## The *Fu*-Tally as Passport

The *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (Master Sun's Art of Warfare; ed. Taipei 1984) is a military classic that may date back to the Warring States (Ames 1993, 3). Its received version was modified by its first known commentator, Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220 CE) (Gawlikowski and Loewe 1993, 448). It has: “Therefore, on the

day of the beginning of the [military] service,<sup>6</sup> block the passes and restrain the *fu*-tallies, do [no longer] communicate with his (sc. the enemy's) envoys" (11.213). Here *fu*-tally can only mean the certificate that allows its bearer to cross the pass and enter "Chinese" territory or to leave "civilized" soil in order to return to the enemy's country via the pass.<sup>7</sup> It may thus be compared to what we nowadays call a "passport."

Evidence suggests that in the Former Han dynasty *fu*-tallies were used in precisely this function, at least in the north-western regions of the Han empire, such as the Yumen and Yang gates of Dunhuang, and the Jin gate near Ulan-durbeljin. The principle of controlling the passage of travelers coming from the west and crossing into the metropolitan area was older than the Han dynasty. Han Wendi abolished this institution in 168 BCE, but his successor re-established it in 153. Already under Han Wudi entry to the metropolitan area was subject to control (Loewe 1967, 1: 107). Ferries and mountain passes had control stations where "travelers were issued with passports at the time of their inward passage and were required to return them to the officials guarding the pass when they returned there for passage outwards" (Loewe 1967, 1: 107). Such passports were called *fu*-tallies or sometimes *chuan* 傳. Thus, among wooden strips excavated at Ulan-durbeljin some clearly were numbered passports, permitting the bearer and his family to proceed on their lawful occasions through passes or other points of control (Loewe 1967, 1: 47). At least three examples are of the following type: wooden strips 6.3" x 1" in size with a groove or indentation cut toward the top of the left or right side and bearing the following inscription:

Six-inch passport [with] indentation, for inward and outward passages between the Jin Pass and Juyan xian, dated on the *jiachen* day, in the intercalary month of the seventh year of the Shiyuan reign period (80 BCE); series 1 to 1000, left-hand part to be retained at the office, right-hand part to be carried [by the traveler] to the Jin Pass. [The two parts of the] *fu* are to be fitted together for the procedure to be completed. [Passport] number eight. (Loewe 1967, 1: pl. 4, 1: 112.)

This means that one thousand copies were made of this sort of passport and stored at the pass. Travelers coming from the west were given one half and had to bear it when proceeding toward the east, to Juyan xian. When returning they had to present their half at the Jin Pass, where it was matched with the retained left half. When both parts matched exactly, the traveler returned his half and could go back to the west.

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<sup>6</sup> This seems to me to be the appropriate translation for 政舉之日, meaning "the day when military action begins." Ames translated it as "on the day a declaration of war is made" (Ames 1993: 162) which apparently is a rather free rendering. Griffith's classical translation has "on the day the policy to attack is put into effect" (1971, 139).

<sup>7</sup> Ames's translation "instruments of agreement" (1993, 162), although reflecting one general aspect of *fu*, is rather misleading in this context.

Also found at Juyan were two passports, made roughly a generation later, that now precisely list the travelers allowed to pass the area, giving their age and status within the family. The first one reads:

Day *jìyōu* of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Yongguang reign (4 March 40 BCE): passport of Sun Shi, officer commanding Tuotuo [company] of Yanshou; Sun Diqing, wife, adult, of Wansui village in Zhaowu, age 21; Wangnü, daughter, non-adult, age 3 years; Ernian, sister, non-adult, age 9 years. All with black coloring. (Loewe 1967, 1: pl.4, n13; 1967, 1: 115)

Similarly, the text of the second passport, issued the same day, runs:

Day *jìyōu* of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Yongguang reign: passport of Zhang Pengzu, officer commanding Tunhu [company] of Yanshou [...]; wife, adult, of Wansui village in Zhaowu, age 42; Fu, son, adult, age 19 years; Guangzong, son, non-adult, age 12 years; Nüzū, daughter, non-adult, age 9 years; Nanlai, Fu's wife, age 15 years. All with black coloring.

Such passports to be presented at the control posts of passes, obviously could also be forged, as an episode occurring in the year 144 BCE and reported both in *Shiji* and *Hanshu* shows:

At this time, when any of the Nine Ministers was found guilty and sentenced to death, [Ning] Cheng, the commandant of the capital] was sentenced to death. Only a few had suffered physical punishment, but [Ning] Cheng suffered an extremely severe punishment. Considering that he would never again be given an office, he broke the chain [of the iron collar placed around his neck], falsely carved a *chuan*-passport, got through the [Hangu] pass, and returned home. (*Shiji* 122.3135; *Hanshu*, ed. Beijing 1975, 90.3649-3650)

However, it was not only at the passes, at the empire's outposts, but also within the capital itself that people entering or leaving had to present passports. During the Later Han dynasty, the inhabitants of the imperial palace in the capital had to identify themselves by means of a *fū*, here clearly functioning as sort of a passport, when they left or entered the palace compound. Persons usually not living in the palace were also given appropriate *fū* when they had to enter on duty: at all gates, the majors were in charge of preventing unauthorized entry. Those who lived within the palace compounds always came and went through the same appropriate gates, where their names and offices were entered on a register. They identified themselves by iron tallies, whose other halves were kept at the respective gate. Persons who entered on special errands received from their superiors wooden credentials decorated with the picture of a lance. Officials who entered the palace compounds on regular duty were announced by attendants (*Shiji* 122.3135; *Hanshu* 90.3649-3650). During emergencies, these passports were collected, in order to prevent entry other than by force.

Later, during the time of Wang Mang, official functionaries as well as commoners en route had to be equipped with passports (*fuchuan* 符傳) to be allowed to spend the night in a hostel. Whoever could not present one, was not allowed to be lodged in these houses. Rather, he had to be questioned at the passes and the fords (*Hanshu* 99B.4122; Stein 1963, 60). The same applied to high officials and grand ministers.

## Conclusion

Looking for the original meaning of *fu*, used by Wu Meng to calm the storm, we have come to look at an entire series of cognate objects, all employed in a comparable way. Putting them in a single category, one might call them “tallies,” since they were for the most part split in two complementing parts to be matched repeatedly at specific occasions. Uniting the complementary parts took place when the legitimation of two (or, in the case of *jie*-tallies, more) parties interacting with each other had to be guaranteed.

More specifically, the *jie*-tally in the form of a metal bamboo-segment with inlaid gold inscription served not only to legitimize merchants, fief-holders, and treasury officials when the due taxes and fees had to be paid. It also contained the detailed prescription of the way the merchants had to take and it was a charter granting the merchants certain privileges en route. The wooden *quan*-tally was used both to “identify” creditor and debtor and, most probably, to record the due amount as well as the interest. It might be called a “lien-tally.”

The *qi*-tally, next, was close to the *quan*-tally in that both were apparently used in credit operations. They served to identify the legitimate partners and may both have listed particulars of the transaction. Textual examples suggest, moreover, that the *qi*-tally may have had the additional function of a document of exemption.

The *fu*-tally, finally, was used in military contexts to make sure that the messenger transmitting an order from the ruler to the military commander (or a commander's request to the ruler) was the legitimate carrier of the message, authenticating its content. Another function of the *fu*-tally, but still in a military context, was as a passport, legitimating the restricted access to blocked or closed areas. In other words, using a *fu*-tally was a ritual act serving to identify and legitimate its proper owner toward members of the administration. Presenting a *fu*-tally was an almost daily procedure in the social exchange among rulers and officials or generals. However, this does not yet explain Wu Meng's action and the power of his *fu*. Further exploration is necessary.



## Chapter Two

### *Fu*-Tallies and Political Authority

Government legitimation and political authority are essential in political change. Thus in modern Western societies, the head of government is either elected directly by the people or chosen by a parliament consisting of elected representatives. In either case, the government is legitimized by the election process. Even if problems arise during vote counting, procedures specify how to deal with them. Also, the mandate given usually expires after a fixed period set by the country's constitution. In traditional societies, on the other hand, the process of governmental changing often posed severe problems. Without democratic mechanisms they had to find other means to legitimize the rule as well as its change.

### The Mandate of Heaven

In China, the pattern of legitimation used under the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045-255 BCE) was the so-called Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命). As Pankenier put it: "Only Heaven could confer legitimacy by directly bestowing its mandate on the worthy ruler" (1983, 1). Heaven as the highest authority withdrew the mandate from the dynasty when it no longer ruled in accordance with moral standards and bestowed it to another clan considered fit for the task. As simple and straightforward as this may sound, the process had some serious problems.

First of all, how to know whether the present dynasty has lost its mandate? One of the earliest surviving texts on this issue is the "Junshi" 君奭 (Lord Jun) chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents, ed. Beijing 1979), probably composed close to 1036 BCE (Shaughnessy 1997, 101-136). It says: "Unpitied Heaven sent down harm on Yin (the Shang dynasty). Yin having dropped its mandate, we Zhou have received it" (223b; Shaughnessy 1997, 110).

Calamities, catastrophes, and disasters tended to be interpreted as portents indicating Heaven's discontent with the ruling house. Beginning with the Zhou dynasty for almost three millennia, the Chinese considered this pattern

appropriate. One of the tasks of historiographers was accordingly to record reports on any deviations of an idealized normality. Whether or not these were actually seen by the rulers as the warning finger of Heaven was, however, an entirely different question. Often a concerned official who, based on such reports, ventured to admonish his ruler lost his life as a consequence.<sup>1</sup>

The second problem was more serious: how does one know whether one has received the mandate? The usual pattern throughout Chinese history was that a new dynasty rose to power after militarily defeating of the previous one. King Wu of the Zhou, for example, vanquished the Shang in the battle of Muye on 14 January 1045 (Shaughnessy 1997, 52-56). But this triumph did not

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<sup>1</sup> A famous case is that of the scholar Xiang Kai 襄楷, who in two memorials to the throne in 166 CE urged Emperor Huan to change his unrest-causing policies and reform his government. He began his first memorial by saying: "Your subject has heard that august Heaven does not speak, but rather uses signs and portents as the means of instruction" (*Hou Hanshu*, ed. Beijing 1987, 30B.1076; De Crespigny 1976, 21). After interrogations, he was arrested and sent to prison. Although the emperor considered Xiang's words far too outspoken, he acknowledged that he had been reliable in the presentation of the heavenly signs and portents. Therefore, he was not executed, but was sent to serve sentence as robber guard (De Crespigny 1976, 31). Another example of the dire consequences of criticizing the ruler based on portents is Sui Hong 眭弘 who in 78 BCE was executed for having interpreted an omen as meaning that the ruling house ought to be replaced. The relevant passage reads:

In the first month of the third year of the Yuanfeng period of Emperor Xiao Zhao [78 BCE], on the south face of Mount Laiwu in the Mount Tai [range], there was a hubbub like the voices of several thousand men. Commoners went to look at it, and found there was a great stone that had stood itself up, fifteen feet high and forty-eight spans in breadth, embedded in the Earth to the depth of eight feet, and with three stones for its feet. After the stone had stood itself up, there were several thousand white crows that came down to gather by its side [...].

Stones and willows are both of the *yin* category, images of inferiors or commoners. As for Mount Tai, it is the sacred peak Daizong, the place where a true king announces a change of the ruling family [to Heaven]. Now, a great stone has set itself up [...] which is not a thing the strength of men is capable of accomplishing. [This means] it is appropriate that there is a common man who is to become Son of Heaven [...].

It would be proper for the Han emperor to make a searching inquiry throughout all-under-Heaven to discover a worthy and wise man to whom he can abdicate the imperial throne and retire, enfeoffing himself with a [state of a] hundred *li* [square], like the heirs of the two kings of Yin and Zhou, thereby to accept and comply with the mandate of Heaven. (*Hanshu* 75.3153-54; see Ar-buckle 1995, 588-89)

Sui Hong was subsequently executed together with the friend who submitted his memorial. However, Emperor Huan, after he "rose from among the common people" and ascended the throne in 74 BCE, posthumously promoted him to a higher rank in the imperial administration (*Hanshu* 75.3154).

mean the end of all hostilities. As early texts show, the Zhou had to organize a whole series of mopping-up campaigns in the former Shang realm, fighting against four allied states before they secured their victory (1997, 31-67). In fact, during the entire consolidation process the Zhou king could not be sure whether or not he really was the new sovereign of the “combined” Shang and Zhou realms.

In such a situation of uncertainty, the new ruler-to-be was looking for signs or omens to be interpreted as a confirmation of his receipt of the mandate. At the same time, the supporters of the previous dynasty had to be convinced that their new overlord was legitimized by the gods on high. In the case of the Shang-Zhou transition, a rare astronomical constellation seems to have provided the heavenly sign both announcing the end of the Shang dominance and indicating the Zhou’s mandate to rule. Pankenier notes that a series of Zhou and Han sources “suggest that these celestial events were taken from the start to signal the high god’s recognition of the legitimacy of a new regime” (1983, 124).

A total lunar eclipse may have served as a prelude. Both according to the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (Remaining Zhou Documents; see Shaughnessy 1993a) and to modern calculations, it occurred on the *bingzi* day in the first month of the 35<sup>th</sup> year of King Wen of Zhou (i.e., 12 March, 1065 BCE) (Pankenier 1995, 129). For the ruling Shang, this may have presaged that all was not in order. A few years later, in 1059 BCE, the famous Comet Halley made its apparition, further corroborating the doom of the Shang.

## The Vermilion Bird

Most impressive, however, was a massing of planets just west of the vast constellation known as “vermilion bird” (*zhuniao* 朱鳥), whose region of the sky was already linked with the Zhou by the mid-eleventh century BCE (Pankenier 1995, 142). It belongs to the part of the sky that corresponded to the original Zhou territory. A massing of the five planets in this quadrant then served as an auspicious omen which the Zhou could—immediately or later—interpret as a sign from Heaven indicating that they had received the mandate. The massing is recorded in the *Zhoushu jinian* 竹書紀年 (Bamboo Annals, ed. Legge 1865; see Nivison 1993, 39-47; Shaughnessy 1986): “In the 32<sup>nd</sup> year [of the Shang king Di Xin], the five planets gathered in [the constellation] Room [*fang* 房]. There was a red crow alighting on the Zhou Earth-altar” (Legge 1865, 140; Pankenier 1995, 142).

Although in all likelihood the first phrase of the passage represents a later interpolation—*fang* as a lunar mansion matching Scorpio is not attested before

the fifth century BCE<sup>2</sup>—it nevertheless preserves the memory of a remarkable event: on 28 May 1059, a rare massing of the five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) occurred, which was clearly visible for many days after full darkness had fallen (Pankenier 1995, 130) (see Fig. 3).<sup>3</sup>

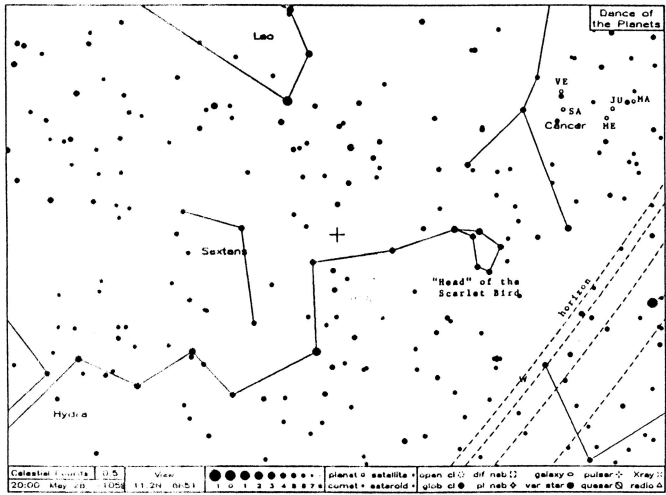


Fig. 3. Planetary massing of 1059 BCE in Cancer

The expression “red crow” in the second phrase scholars tend to accept as referring to the asterism Vermilion Bird, the symbolic animal of the south. In fact, this conjunction of the five planets appeared just west of the vast constellation known as the Vermilion Bird whose “head” was actually pointing at the group of planets (Pankenier 1995, 130). A later source, the “Fei gong xia” 非攻下 (Rejection of Aggression, Part B) chapter of the philosophical work *Mozzi* 墨子 (Book of Master Mo, ed. Taipei 1974), from the late fourth century BCE, expands on this and emphasizes the political aspect: “A red bird held in its beak a jade tablet and descended to the Zhou Earth-altar at [Mount] Qi. [Its inscription] said: ‘Heaven commands the Zhou king Wen [to] attack Yin (Shang) and take [their] land into possession’” (19.94-95; Schmidt-Glintzer 1992, 136).

<sup>2</sup> David W. Pankenier, personal communication, 23 February 2003.

<sup>3</sup> For 1059 BCE, May 28, the relevant figures are: Sun 56°, Mercury 79°, Venus 82°, Mars 75°, Jupiter 77°, Saturn 82°.

This passage forms part of a lengthy argument against aggressive war.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of their “doctrine of universal love” (*jian’ai* 兼愛), Mo Di and his adherents rejected offensive war while yet accepting self-defense and constructed effective armament for it.<sup>5</sup> Offensive war, they held, is of no benefit but rather interferes with agricultural work such as sowing and harvesting, kills countless numbers of people in battle as well as through famine, leads to the destruction of quantities of weapons and horses, and leaves the ancestors uncared for since there nobody remains alive to sacrifice to them. While their opponents argued that several personalities of ancient times, such as Yu, Tang or King Wu of Zhou, went to war, became famous, and grew into model rulers, the Mohists argued that these were not examples of aggressive warfare but rather punishment campaigns ordered by Heaven.

The main part of the argument begins with a description of the omens that indicated Heaven’s disapproval of the Miao tribes’ behavior:

When in antiquity the three Miao [tribes started] a big rebellion, Heaven ordered them put to death. [Accordingly,] the sun strangely rose [during the] night, it rained blood for three days, a dragon emerged in the ancestral temple, the dogs barked on the market, [there was] frost in the summer, the Earth broke open [down] to the springs, the five [kinds of] grains changed [their forms] [became deformed], and the people then was badly shaken. Gao Yang then issued an order in the “Dark Palace”:<sup>6</sup>

“Yu personally should take Heaven’s order [inscribed into a] jade tablet and go on a military punitive expedition against the Miao [tribes] and take them.” Four strokes of lightning induced [him] to respect [Heaven’s will] and there was a spirit [with] a human face and a bird’s body [who] [...] served [him]. He clutched the arrows and took the sheep of the Miao into possession. The Miao people became greatly confused and thereafter suffered from famine.

When Yu had subdued and taken the three Miao [tribes], he drilled water[ways] into mountains and discriminated between higher and lower things. While he enjoyed governing the far ends [of the world], [neither] spirits [nor] human beings disobeyed [him] and all under Heaven then was peaceful. Thus Yu punished and subdued the Miao.

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<sup>4</sup> The Han historiographer Sima Qian later cast this wisdom in the form of a law: “When the five planets meet, [...] [the one who] has virtue receives blessings and [after a] change is installed [as the new] Great Man [who will] seize and take into possession the four quarters and [whose] descendants will flourish and multiply. [The one who] lacks virtue receives calamities to the point of destruction” (*Shiji* 27.1321).

<sup>5</sup> For Mozi’s position on war, see Fung 1953, I: 94-95; Hsiao and Mote 1979, 265-272. Also see the eleven chapters of the extant *Mozi*, starting with section 52 on “Preparing Walls and Gates,” which are all devoted to discussing questions of weapons and tactics. A related episode appears in *Liushi chunqiu* 2; it relates how a feudal lord asked a Mohist to defend his fief.

<sup>6</sup> Pankenier notes that “this was identified by the late Zhou astrologer Shi Shen 石申 as the lunar mansion *yingshi*; see *Jinshu* 晉書, ed. Beijing 1982, 11.301 where Shi Shen’s pre-Han astrological nomenclature is preserved” (1995, 132).

Next, the text discusses the omens Heaven sent to show that the behavior of the ruler of the Xia was unacceptable:

As for the Xia king Jie, Heaven [also] had a cruel order: sun and moon did not [appear at the right] time, cold and heat arrived in confused [order], the five [kinds of] grains were scorched and died, demons were howling [throughout] the country, the cranes were shrieking more than ten nights.

Heaven then ordered Tang [in the] “Biao Palace”<sup>7</sup> to obey and receive Xia’s great mandate: “Xia’s virtue is in big disorder, [therefore] I have cancelled their mandate [as received] from Heaven. Go and punish them, I will arrange for you to be fit for it.” Tang thereupon dared receive and lead his troops and therefore enjoyed taking into possession the frontiers of the Xia.

[Shang]di then arranged [for Tang] to secretly and suddenly ruin and subdue the Xia capital. After a short time there was a spirit [who] came and announced: “Xia’s virtue is in big disorder, [therefore] go and attack them, I will arrange for you to be fit for it, I have received the order from Heaven.”

Heaven [then] ordered [Zhu]rong (god of fire) to send down<sup>8</sup> fire on the north-western corner of Xia’s city. Tang received Jie’s troops to subdue and conquer [the city]. He assembled all “feudal lords” in [his residence at] Bo and presented and displayed the Mandate of Heaven and communicating [it throughout] the four regions, none of the “feudal lords” under Heaven dared not submit [themselves to him]. Then it was this by means of which Tang punished Jie.

Next, the *Moxi* describes Heaven’s omens showing the Shang’s inability to rule and relates how the Zhou received the mandate and subdued the Shang:

Reaching to Zhou, Heaven [also] did not consider the Shang king’s virtue in order, as he performed his sacrifices at the wrong time. [Therefore,] night after night over ten days it rained earth on [the capital at] Bo, the nine sacred tripods shifted position, [ghostly] women strangely appeared in the night, there were demons moaning in the night, females appeared who became males, and Heaven rained meat, thorny brambles grew on the state roads. The king and [his] brethren, however, let themselves go [even more].

Then a red bird, with a jade tablet in its beak, descended to the Zhou Earth-altar at [Mount] Qi. [Its inscription] said: “Heaven commands the Zhou king Wen to attack Yin [Shang] and take their land.” Taidian came and was a guest [at the Zhou court], the [Yellow] River brought forth the Green Chart, the Earth brought forth the Yellow Phoenix.

When King Wu followed [King Wen’s] merit [and ascended the throne], he saw three spirits in a dream who said: “We have deeply immersed [King] Zhou of Yin into the power of alcohol, [therefore] go and attack him, we will arrange for you to be fit for it.” King Wu then attacked the dissolute man and replaced

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<sup>7</sup> As Pankenier has shown, this palace “does not refer to a terrestrial edifice at all, as the commentators would have us believe, but to one of the constellations or “palaces” of the Heavens, specifically, that quadrant encompassing the location in Sagittarius where the planetary event of 1576 BCE took place” (1983, 177).

<sup>8</sup> Reading 降 for 隆.

the Shang with the Zhou. Heaven bestowed upon King Wu a banner with a yellow phoenix.

After the king had subdued Yin and accomplished [Shang]di's orders, he equally considered the various spirits rulers, sacrificed to [the Shang King] Zhou and the former [Zhou] kings. Communicating with and holding together the four barbarian tribes, nobody under Heaven did not submit [to him]. Thereupon he continued Tang's line of succession. This then was by means of which King Wu punished Zhou. If we take these three sage kings and regard them, then [what they did] is not what one calls aggressive war, rather it is what one calls punishment. (*Mozǐ* 19.92-94)

As Pankenier suggests, this text also preserves the memories of two other remarkable conjunctions of planets that—according to the *Mozǐ*—signaled Heaven's conferral of the right to rule on a new dynasty. First it says: "Heaven then ordered Tang [to the] Biao Palace to obey and receive Xia's great mandate." This may refer to a December 1576 BCE conjunction in Wei and Ji 尾箕 (Scorpio/Sagittarius) (1995, 124). Second, it has: "Gao Yang then issued an order in the Dark Palace," instructing Yu to go on a military expedition against the Miao. This may well refer to "the earliest and most impressive of only four such events in the past five thousand years" (Weitzel 1945, 160; in Pankenier 1983, 179). It took place on 26 February 1953 BCE in the constellation Aquarius, which is at the same longitude as Alpha Pegasi, the prominent star that marked the lunar mansion *yingshi*, the location of the Dark Palace (Pankenier 1983, 178-179).

Heaven thus appears as the highest authority. Dissatisfied with the behavior of a tribe or a ruling dynasty, such as the Miao tribes rising in unrest, the virtue of the last Xia ruler being inadequate, the last Shang king being unfit, it would order harm to them and sent down bad omens. Also, the parallel phrasing of some key sentences in these passages makes it evident that their authors perceived a fixed pattern in the process of Heaven's bestowing and withdrawing the mandate.

## Zou Yan's Systematization

A further systematization of this notion took place a few decades after the compilation of the *Mozǐ* chapter, around ca. 330 BCE.<sup>9</sup> The thinker Zou Yan 騶衍 attempted to interpret natural as well as political phenomena within a new framework of polar duality (*yin* and *yang*) plus the system of five categories, the

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<sup>9</sup> Graham's dating to ca. 250 BCE (1989, 328), has to be corrected based on the *Shiji*: "Since the kings Wei (r. 357-320) and Xuan (r. 319-301) of Qi, the disciples of Master Zou [Yan], were busy discussing and compiling [scriptures on] the cycles of the five forces [of the book] *End and Beginning*". (28.1368)

so-called five virtues or forces (*wude* 五德), later developed into the system of the five phases (*wuxing* 五行).<sup>10</sup> Omens indicating a change in the Mandate of Heaven may well have played a major role in Zou Yan's theory. Unfortunately, apart from nine fragments identified so far (Ma 1853, 77: 16a-18b; Needham 1956, 236-238), his work has not remained intact and his ideas are known only through later reports. For example, the *Shiji* has:

Zou Yan saw that those who possessed states had become even more dissolute and were incapable of valuing virtue, through which they might incorporate in themselves [the principles to be found in] the "Da ya" chapters [of the *Shijing* 詩經, Book of Odes]<sup>11</sup> and diffuse them among the common people. Thereupon he examined the phenomena of increase and decrease of *yin* and *yang* and wrote essays totaling more than one hundred thousand words about their strange permutations and about the cycles of the great sages from beginning to end.

His words were grandiose and fanciful. He first examined small objects, then extended this to large ones until he reached what was without limit. He first spoke about modern times and from this went back to the time of the Yellow Emperor, all of which has been recorded by scholars. Moreover, he followed the great events in the rise and fall of ages, and by means of their omens and [an examination of their] institutions, extended his survey backward to the time when Heaven and Earth had not yet been created to what was profound and abstruse and cannot be examined. (74.2344; Fung and Bodde 1952, 1: 160; Chan 1963, 247; Nienhauser 1994, 180)

Zou Yan's political agenda also features in the protocol of an important political debate which took place at the imperial court in the first century BCE, the famous discussions on the state monopolies of salt and iron, ordered by imperial edict in 81 BCE. The *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 (Discussions on Salt and Iron, ed. Taipei 1974) is ascribed to Huan Kuan 桓寬 under Emperor Xuan (74-49 BCE) (see Loewe 1993c, 477-482; Mende, Schefold, and Vogel 2002). It begins its account of Zou Yan with a description of Zou's discontent with the main philosophical schools at the time, Confucians and Mohists:

The grand master said, "Master Zou [Yan] was angry about the Confucians and Mohists of later times, since they did not know the vastness of Heaven and Earth, or the bright and far-reaching Way. Grasping just one small thing they wished to talk about the other ninety percent [of the phenomena], occupying only one single corner, they wished to know the other ten thousand regions. It was

<sup>10</sup> See Bumbacher 1996a; 1998. The five phases became, with various modifications over the centuries, a key cornerstone of Chinese thinking. It has influenced all major aspects of life, from medicine through astronomy to political theory all over East Asia.

<sup>11</sup> Note that there is no agreement among scholars on the interpretation of the phrase including "*daya*." Chan (1963, 247) and Nienhauser (1994, 180) consider it either "a real gentleman" (Chan) or "those who possessed great refinement" (Nienhauser).

like wishing to know high and low without a water reference level, or like wishing to know square and round without a compass or carpenter's square. (53.54)

As a consequence, Zou Yan developed his own system. The *Yantie lun* has:

Therefore, he deduced the periods of ending and beginning of the great sages, in order to instruct the kings and dukes. He first ranked the famous mountains and the deep valleys of the Central Kingdoms, in order to reach at [an understanding of the things that were] beyond the seas. What is called the "Central Kingdoms" is [according to him, but] one part in eighty-one of all-under-Heaven. Its name is the Spiritual Continent of the Red Region, [further ] divided into nine continents.

They are cut off and their mounds and dry lands are not connected. Then [what] constitutes a single continent has a big ocean on its outside. This is called the "eight poles" [eight continents surrounding the central one] and constitutes the border between Heaven and Earth. Although the "Tribute of Yu" [in the *Shangshu*] also wrote about mountains and rivers, high and low, plains and marshes, [its author] did not know the dimensions of the big Way.<sup>12</sup>

Basing himself on all sorts of written traditions available to him, mostly however on historiographic records, Zou Yan must have experimented for some time with the "data" at hand until he came to a satisfying result that correlated, for example, the previous as well as the current dynasty with one of these five phases each. A hint at his mental experimentation is to be found in his biography in the *Shiji*:

He first ranked the famous mountains and the great rivers of the Central Kingdoms, the birds and beasts of the deep valleys, [the things] produced by water and Earth and the categories of objects [people] held precious. Based on these he went on to things which were beyond the seas and which man could not behold. From the separation of Heaven and Earth and onwards [up to the present time] he adduced the revolutions and changes of the five forces and arranging each of them [so that] it had [its] proper [place], there was a perfect match (*ju*-tally). (*Shiji* 74.2344; also Nienhauser 1994, 180)

The result of this correlation was then documented in the *Zouzi* 騶子 (Book of Master Zou), cited in Li Shan's 李善 (ca. 630-689) commentary to Xiao Tong's 蕭統 (501-531) famous literary anthology *Wenxuan* 文選 (Literary Selections, ed. Beijing 1987):<sup>13</sup>

The *Zouzi* says: [Of] the five forces, each follows the one which it cannot overcome. Yu [ruled by means of] earth, the Xia [ruled by means of] wood, the Yin [by means of] metal, and the Zhou [by means of] fire. (50.36.b)

<sup>12</sup> Note that this passage is at least in part informed by Zou Yan's biography in the *Shiji* (74.2344; Fung and Bodde 1953, 1: 159-61).

<sup>13</sup> This does not necessarily mean that Li Shan in fact had seen a copy of the *Zouzi*, he may have copied the quotation from another work. Such an example will be presented below.

Interestingly, only four of the five phases are mentioned together with the pertinent dynasty, the fifth one of water has to be extrapolated logically. At Zou Yan's time, the Zhou were still technically ruling the country, although in fact the feudal states were involved in a long and bloody civil war, each fighting for supremacy. Therefore, Zou could not yet know the dynasty that was to succeed the Zhou. Nevertheless, and this is the truly sensational aspect of his theory, it allowed a prediction. The next dynasty would have to rule by means of the phase water. That he indeed made this prediction can be seen in another citation of his work:

[Li Shan says:] The *Qilüe* says: The *Zouzi* has [a chapter entitled] “End and Beginning”<sup>14</sup> [which reads:] [Of] the five forces each follows the one which it cannot overcome: the force of wood continues [that of earth], the force of metal follows [wood], the force of fire follows [metal], the force of water follows [fire]. (*Wenxuan* 6.1412)

The *Qilüe* 七略 (Seven Summaries) preserving this *Zouzi* fragment is a bibliographic essay written by Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 46 BCE–23 CE), now lost and preserved in citations in literary anthologies and commentaries to dynastic histories. As this passage is partially identical with the former, it is tempting to assume that both are but two different cuts of the same original *Zouzi* section. A reconstruction of the original passage may thus look as follows:

The *Zouzi* has [a chapter entitled] “End and Beginning” [which reads:] [Of] the five forces [each] follows the one which it cannot overcome: [the force of earth ...], the force of wood continues earth, the force of metal follows wood, the force of fire follows metal, the force of water follows wood [...]. Yu ruled by means of earth, the Xia ruled by means of wood, the Shang ruled by means of metal, the Zhou ruled by means of fire, [and the next dynasty will rule by means of water].

As Zou Yan, according to various sources, apparently was the first to introduce the five phases as political indicators and deduce a correlation between them and dynastic succession, he must have derived indications as to the “reigning force” from the corresponding omens as reported in the collections of old documents and the annals of the various feudal states. We may get an idea of this from a description in the *Lǐshǐ chūnqiū* whose first part was directly influenced by Zou Yan's theory if it does not even represent an unmarked and

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<sup>14</sup> Bumbacher 1996a, 19.

adapted quotation of his work (although this text no longer speaks of the “force” (*de*) of earth, metal, etc., but of its “energy” (*qi*):<sup>15</sup>

Whenever an emperor or universal king is about to arise, Heaven is certain first to manifest good omens to the people below. At the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven first caused giant mole crickets and earthworms to appear. The Yellow Emperor announced: “The *qi* of earth is in ascendance.” He honored the color yellow and modeled his activities on [the phase] earth.

When it came to the time of Yu, Heaven first caused trees and grasses to appear that did not wither in autumn and winter. Yu proclaimed: “The *qi* of wood is in ascendance.” Since the *qi* of wood was ascendant, he honored the color green and modeled his affairs on wood.

When it came to the time of Tang, Heaven first caused metal blades to appear coming forth from water. Tang proclaimed: “The *qi* of metal is in ascendance.” Since the *qi* of metal was ascendant, he honored the color white and modeled his affairs on metal.

When it came to the time of King Wen [of the Zhou], Heaven first caused a fiery-red crow to appear and alight on the altars of Zhou, holding in its beak a document written with cinnabar. King Wen proclaimed: “The *qi* of fire is in ascendance.” Since the *qi* of fire was ascendant, he honored the color vermilion and modeled his affairs on fire.

The successor to fire is certain to be water. Heaven has again given initial signs that the *qi* of water is in ascendance. Since the *qi* of water is in ascendance, the ruler-to-be should honor the color black and model his affairs on water. If the *qi* of water culminates and nobody grasps that fact, its effective period will come to an end, and the cycle shifts to earth. (*Lǐshǐ chūnqín* 13.2.1; Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 282-283)

The last paragraph was probably written during a period of political instability, and its chapter was partly completed by 239 BCE (Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 32). At that time, a military campaign orchestrated by Lü Buwei had already delivered the death-blow to the Zhou dynasty. On the other hand, the founding of the new dynasty of Qin had not yet been declared and the First Emperor would not do so until 221.

In 239, the future emperor could not yet be sure of having received the mandate. In the same year his younger brother, having led an army to assault the state of Zhao, rebelled against him without success (*Shiji* 6.226). Another rebellion against the twenty-year-old king was led by Ai, the Marquis of Changxin, in the following year. At the same time the military campaigns against other remnants of feudal states had to continue. In this situation, and after comets had appeared in 239 and 238 (*Shiji* 6.227-228), it must have been evident that the Zhou was in agony, thus the sentence: “Heaven has again given initial signs that the *qi* of water is in ascendance.” However, it was by no

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<sup>15</sup> Ma in his vast collection of fragments of lost works apparently considers this passage a genuine Zou Yan fragment, although the *Lǐshǐ chūnqín* does not explicitly refer to the *Zouzi*; therefore, we cannot accept it as an *attested* fragment (1853, 77: 16a-18b).

means certain that the young king of Qin would make his way to unify all-under-Heaven, therefore the text recommended: “Since the *qi* of water is in ascendance, the ruler-to-be should honor the color black and model his affairs on water.” Whoever would become the next sovereign, he could thus profit from the “force” or “energy” of water.

As soon as the king of Qin had finally subdued the six remaining states—thus having “unified the world”—he became the First Emperor and, legitimized primarily by his military victory, fully adopted Zou Yan’s scheme for the political legitimation of his rule. He even explicitly referred to Zou’s text “Zhongshi” 終始 (End and Beginning):<sup>16</sup>

The First Emperor extended the [meaning of the] cycle of the five forces [as described in the scripture] “End and Beginning”: He thought that [while] the Zhou had obtained the force of fire, the Qin substituted the force of the Zhou, following as one which [the force of the Zhou] could not overcome.

The present time is the beginning of the force of water, [hence] he changed the beginning of the year and the congratulations during the court audience, both occurring on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month. The official garments, banners, and pennants were in most exalted black. In numbers, six was made the “regulator”: the length of the two-part *fu*-tallies and the height of the judicial caps all were six inches, the width of the carriages and the length of one yard (*bu*) were six feet (*chi*). [The imperial] vehicles were drawn by six horses. He also changed the name of the river [Huang] to “virtuous water,” since he considered [it] the beginning of the force of water. (*Shiji* 6.237-238; see Nienhauser 1994, 136; Chavannes 1967, 2: 128-129)

Sima Qian’s phrasing leaves no doubt as to the First Emperor’s adoption and extension of Zou Yan’s theory.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Note that this fact has escaped the attention of the translators of the chapter “The First Emperor of Qin” of the *Shiji*, see Nienhauser et al. 1994, 136, as they translate: “The First Emperor reckoned the revolution of the cyclic Five Essences; he decided that Zhou was born with the fire essence.” In so doing, they follow Chavannes (1967, 2: 128-129), who explains in a footnote that he takes the expression “end and beginning” as an adjective qualifying the five phases.

<sup>17</sup> Note that arguments have been advanced, mostly by Japanese scholars such as Kurihara and Kamada, to the effect that this passage might be a later interpolation not based on authentic Qin sources. Bodde, however, refuting them comes to the conclusion that “it would require an interpolator of exceptional astuteness and acquaintance with the entire work to insert all these parallel passages and do it so skillfully as to leave no tell-tale breaks between them and the surrounding texts” (Twitchett and Loewe 1986, 96-97).

## In the Absence of Heavenly Signs

While Zou Yan's notion proved useful,<sup>18</sup> the same was not generally true for astronomical phenomena. Not always were the "necessary" or "required" constellations ready at hand to serve as heavenly omens that could be interpreted as Heaven confirming the legitimization of a new rule. Already Loewe observed that "in the account of the first Qin emperor's adoption of his title, we read solely of his successful conquest of his enemies" (Loewe 1994, 90). Sima Qian quite accurately recorded the heavenly signs in his *Shiji*, yet he does not provide any remarkable astronomical appearances that might have been or were taken as Heaven's confirmation that Qin had received the mandate. This is not to say that he would always enter such records into his narrative in expected places. The dynasty following the short-lived Qin, the Former Han (206 BCE-8 CE) indeed witnessed a conjunction of the five visible planets in Gemini/Cancer<sup>19</sup> on May 30, 205 BCE, seen as an indication that the Han leader would shortly become the ruler of all-under-Heaven, reigning as Gaozu 高祖 (r. 206-195 BCE):

Zhang Er (King of Changshan) fled in defeat. He considered whether there were any of the "feudal lords" he could turn to, saying: "The king of Han and I were friends in old times. Yet Xiang Yu is also powerful and it was he who made me a king. Perhaps I should go to Xiang Yu."

But Lord Gan said to him: "When the king of Han entered the Pass the five planets appeared in conjunction in the constellation of the Eastern Well. The Eastern Well is the portion of the Heavens belonging to Qin, so that whoever reached Qin first must become its ruler. Although Xiang Yu is powerful he came later and therefore he will undoubtedly bow before the king of Han (and later emperor)!" (*Shiji* 89.2581, Watson 1961, 1: 183)

This passage, however, does not appear in the basic annals of the Han. Rather, it is found in a subordinate place, integrated into the biography of Zhang Er and Chen Yu.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), the compiler of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han, ed. Beijing 1975) who was a loyal servant to the house of Han, included this event quite prominently in the imperial annals, but deliberately changed its date to make it fit into the year when Gaozu defeated the Qin troops. Ban Gu thus used this wrong entry for legitimization purposes, saying: "In the first year [of the Gaozu of the Han], in the 10<sup>th</sup>

<sup>18</sup> After the Qin, when the cycle was completed, it was not obvious which force and which color should apply. Han Gaozu discussed the applicability of both fire and red as well as water with black. The issue continued to be hotly debated during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BCE). (See Dull 1966, 22-24; Bauer 1956).

<sup>19</sup> The planetary longitudes were as follows: Mercury and Jupiter 88.3° right ascension, Saturn at 90.7°, Mars at 98.4°, and Venus at 111.3°. See Dubs 1938, 1: 151.

<sup>20</sup> A corresponding entry appears also in the "Treatise on Astronomy," *Shiji* 27.1348.

month of winter (December 207 BCE), the five planets met together in the Eastern Well.” (*Hanshu* 1A.22)

The legitimization aspect is made evident in another entry of the same event in the “Astronomical Treatise” of the *Hanshu*:

Zhang Er said: “The Eastern Well [corresponds to] the land of the Qin; when the king of Han (i.e., Gaozu) entered Qin, the five planets following the year star met together, he ought, by means of his right conduct, to obtain all-under-Heaven.” (*Hanshu* 26.1301)

Apart from the problem that the desired astronomical constellations were not always available, the Chinese were also confronted with the difficulty that the interpretation of special constellations had to match the circumstances. Apparently, “wrong” interpretations could never be excluded. For example, Liu Xiang, fully aware of this, stated in a memorial: “The patterns of Heaven are difficult to communicate. Your minister, even after submitting a diagram, still needs to explain it in words, and then it can be understood” (*Hanshu* 36.1966; Pankenier 1995, 168n97). The signs produced by Heaven thus never speak for themselves, as with all omens, portents and presages, they always have to be interpreted.

## Interpreting the Signs

Interpretations, then, may vary from one scholar to the next, according to their implicit presuppositions. Thus, King Wu of the Zhou, in late 1048 BCE after the allied armies had already reached the Yellow River ford at Mengjin 盟津, called off his first campaign against the Shang when Jupiter unexpectedly changed its forward motion toward the Bird Star, reversed direction and began to retreat (Pankenier 1995, 130n11). Whereas the allies were in favor of attack (*Shiji* 4.120), King Wu interpreted the astronomical signs differently and let the armies retreat to the Zhou homeland. He said: “You do not know the Mandate of Heaven, it may not yet be done,” then withdrew the troops and returned home (Nienhauser 1994, 60; Pankenier 1995, 130).

Whereas in this case King Wu’s differing interpretation proved correct in the sense that his action was successful, other examples show how easily a heavenly sign could be misinterpreted. For example, when a conjunction of four planets was seen in the year 192, it was interpreted as Heaven indicating that Liu Yu 劉虞, then commander-in-chief and secretly designated as emperor, would soon be enthroned. However, he died in 193 when Gongsun Zan had him executed together with his wife and children thus proving the interpreta-

tion as wrong (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志 [History of the Three Kingdoms, ed. Beijing 1982] 8.241).

As it seemed rather unwise to depend solely on the appearance of extraordinary celestial constellations or on their ambiguous interpretation, already during the second century BCE people were looking for alternatives, for signs that were more precise and more reliable as far as the “attested will of Heaven” was concerned. In the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BCE), in 163, a jade pot was found which showed the inscription: “A prolonged life for the ruler of men” (*Shiji* 10.430).

This was interpreted as Heaven’s approval of the emperor’s way of ruling. This example makes it evident that written explicit messages, although possibly composed deliberately in the form of riddles and not unequivocal, narrowed the field of possible interpretations. In other words, written messages could suggest the desirable interpretation to some extent. The possible effects of the texts could be better controlled.

An important step in the process was an innovation by the Confucian philosopher Dong Zhongshu, documented in the text ascribed to him, the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn [Annals], ed. Sibu congkan; see Davidson and Loewe 1993, 77-87). Chapter 16, entitled “Furui” 符瑞 (Credential and Authentication; or: *Fu* as Auspicious Omens), begins with a passage that can be regarded as authentic:<sup>21</sup>

There are [things] that cannot be brought to pass through [human] effort, yet happen of themselves. [Like] “hunting in the west and capturing a unicorn”—this is the *fu*-credential of [having] received the [heavenly] mandate. (16.6.3a)

The sentence “hunting in the west and capturing a unicorn” is a verbatim yet unmarked citation from the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn [Annals], ed. Legge 1961), compiled after 481 BCE (see Cheng 1993). For the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Duke Ai, it says: “In spring, hunting in the west they captured a unicorn.” Supplementing this, the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Mr. Zuo’s Tradition, ed. Legge 1961)—written probably between the early 5<sup>th</sup> and late 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE—connected this with Confucius: “This spring, they were hunting westwards in Daye, and Chushang, one of Shu Sun’s charioteers, captured a unicorn. Thinking the thing was inauspicious, he gave [the creature] to the forester. Zhongni (Confucius) went to see it and said: ‘It is a unicorn,’ on which they took it [and carried it away to the capital]” (Legge 1961, 833-834).

Although not stated explicitly, capturing a unicorn was a positive sign, and therefore it was taken to the capital where it was probably presented to the king as a good omen. A later text, however, the *Kongzi jiaju* 孔子家語 (Kong

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<sup>21</sup> This part of the text is surely authentic as we find almost the same phrasing in Dong Zhongshu’s memorial to the throne, as preserved in *Hanshu* 56: 2500.

Family Sayings, ed. Taipei 1974), which may date back to the Former Han (Kramers 1993, 260), expands this episode, leaving no doubt that this omen, although in principle a positive one, had to be considered odd:

A charioteer of Shu Sun's, Zi Chushang, was gathering firewood in Daye, when he found a unicorn. Having broken its left forefoot, he carried it home with him in a carriage. Thinking it inauspicious, he threw it away outside the suburbs, then sent a messenger to tell Confucius, saying: "What is it? It is an antelope and horned."

Confucius went to see it, and said: "It is a unicorn. Why has it come? Why has it come?" He took the back of his sleeve and wiped his face, while his tears wet the lapel of his coat. When Shu Sun heard what it was, he sent and had it brought [to the capital].

Zi Gong asked the master why he wept, and Confucius said: "The unicorn comes [only] when there is an intelligent king. Now it has appeared when it is not the time for it to do so, and it has been injured. This is why I was so much affected." (16.42; Legge 1961, 834)

This version shows that the appearance of a unicorn was considered a "sign" apparently sent by Heaven that confirmed the ruler's good practice and legitimized his rule. Not only did Heaven announce a new ruler's or dynasty's mandate, but it also "assessed" the ruler's performance.<sup>22</sup> The idea that Heaven gives signs to show approval and disapproval of a ruler's policies was further developed by Dong Zhongshu who took into account several graded stages of heavenly interventions in the case of disapproval, as his memorial to the throne shows:

[Whenever] a country (i.e., the ruler) is about to suffer the calamity of losing its Way, Heaven first sends down natural disasters, in order to reprimand and indict it. [If] it does not know [that it must] examine itself, [Heaven] again sends down strange and extraordinary [phenomena], in order to warn and frighten it. [If] it still does not know to change [its behavior], injuring calamities then will arrive. By means of this one sees the benevolence and love for the rulers of men of Heaven's heart [and that] it wishes to stop their disorder. (*Hanshu* 56.2499)

On the other hand, Heaven lets the country and the ruler know when it approves. Dong Zhongshu apparently was first to use the term *fu* for this sort of legitimizing: "This is the *fu*-credential] of having received the Mandate [of Heaven]." Implicitly this was a tally consisting of two halves whose heavenly half (the auspicious omen) was handed down to Earth after the ruler first had presented his earthly half to Heaven in the form of an excellent policy. As

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<sup>22</sup> This is said quite clearly by the usurper Wang Mang: "When emperors or kings receive the [heavenly] mandate, there must be auspicious omens [in form of a] *fu*-credential attesting to their virtue" (*Hanshu* 99B.4112).

Dong says: “Therefore the heavenly auspicious omen arrives in response to sincerity” (*Hanshu* 56.2500).

Dong himself gave the example of King Wu of the Zhou who was on his campaign against the Shang when “[as] the *Shangshu* says, ‘a white fish leaped into the king’s boat and [a few days later,] a fire came to the king’s house and changed into a crow.’ ” He concludes that “this is the *fu*-tally] of receiving the mandate” (*Hanshu* 56.2500).

For Dong Zhongshu the use of *fu* in this context was metaphorical in the sense that the king’s part of the *fu*-tally was the symbol of his activities while the heavenly omens were the symbol of the heavenly part of the *fu*-tally—the omens he presented in his memorial were not yet connected in any way with any form of written text. Others at the same time were inspired to take *fu*-tallies, in analogy to their military use as credentials that bore some kind of inscription. This was not without consequence. Soon written prophecies proliferated, for example as inscriptions on vessels. Thus, in 116 BCE, a man of Qi called upon Gongsun Qing 工孫卿 to present a letter by a certain Master Shen 申公 to the emperor informing him that a precious tripod had been found that winter and that the circumstances were exactly the same as when the Yellow Emperor had obtained such a cauldron. Emperor Wu was very pleased, summoned Qing and asked him who Master Shen was. Qing answered:

Master Shen was a man of Qi who was friendly with [the immortal] Master Anqi 安期生 and from him received the words of the Yellow Emperor. He possessed no writings, but only the cauldron inscription which said: “When the Han dynasty comes to power, the months and days shall fall the same as they did at the time of the Yellow Emperor.”

It further said: “The sage of the Han shall be among the grandsons or great-grandsons of Gaozu. A precious cauldron shall appear and he shall commune with the gods at the Feng and Shan sacrifices. Of all the seventy-two rulers who attempted the Feng and Shan, only the Yellow Emperor was able to ascend Mount Tai and perform the Feng!” (*Shiji* 28.1393; Watson 1961, 2: 51)

Here Heaven expressed itself in writing and was more precise than any celestial constellation could ever be. Not only made it clear that an excellent Han sovereign would be found in the second or third generation after the founding father—leading to the current emperor Wudi—but it also suggested that he should perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices reserved for rulers of high merit. By directly connecting Wudi with the culture bearer and mythical sovereign Yellow Emperor (Birrell 1993, 130-137), Heaven elevated him to the highest echelon of the Chinese spiritual hierarchy. Small wonder, then, that Han Wudi subsequently developed a deep interest in portents and hired numerous *fangshi* 方士 or “master of recipes.”<sup>23</sup> Later noteworthy examples of ominous inscrip-

<sup>23</sup> On the *fangshi*, see Harper 1998, 50-52, 155-156. Many biographies are translated in Ngo 1976; DeWoskin 1983.

tions, now explicitly called *fu*-credentials, include incidents connected with Wang Mang.<sup>24</sup> In February of the year 6, the prefect of Wugong 武功, Meng Tong 孟通, allegedly found a white stone when digging a well. It was round on top and square below. The stone bore an inscription in cinnabar-red, saying: “[Heaven] announces that the Duke of Anhan [Wang] Mang [will] act as emperor” (*Hanshu* 99A.4078). To which Ban Gu added the comment: “The raise of [conferring Heaven’s] Mandate [by means of] *fu*-credentials began with this (*Hanshu* 99A.4079).”

Three years later there is a further entry to the effect that “[...] they obtained a copper *fu*-token and a silk chart in front of the stone whose inscription says:

‘Heaven announces an imperial *fu*-tally,  
The one who presents [this] [may be] appointed marquis<sup>25</sup>:  
Receive the Mandate of Heaven,  
And make use of the divinities[’s ability to] command!’ ” (*Hanshu* 99A.4093)

This makes the link explicit between the conferral of the Mandate of Heaven and the *fu*-token as the medium of conferral. Thus Dong Zhongshu, if he did not initiate the notion of Heaven bestowing its mandate by means of a *fu*-token, at least paved the way for a development which, ever since Wang Mang, was in full bloom.

## From Heavenly Signs to Apocrypha

Once the precedent of transferring the Mandate of Heaven by means of *fu*-credentials with written messages was set, it was only a small step for written prophecies to assume the form of full-fledged scriptures. In fact, what seems to have begun as rather short inscriptions on various kinds of objects soon developed into entire texts, the so-called apocrypha.<sup>26</sup> The first prophetic texts appeared under Chengdi (r. 33-7 BCE). Not a resolute personality and much under the influence of the family of Empress Wang, Empress Dowager after

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<sup>24</sup> For a general description of Wang Mang and his reign, see Bielenstein 1986, 223-240. On the events surrounding his usurpation, see Loewe 1974, 286-306. Further resources include Dull 1966, 97-182.

<sup>25</sup> On the meaning of *hou* as “marquis” and “commandant,” see Hucker 1985, 225.

<sup>26</sup> Studies of the apocrypha or *chenwei* 讖緯 texts include: Tjan 1949, 100-128; Kaltenmark 1949; Dull 1966; Lu 1995; Seidel 1983. *Chen* means “prognostication” or “divination;” *wei* means the “woof or transverse threads of a fabric.” The latter is thus the counterpart of *jing*, the “warp or lengthwise thread of a fabric,” the general term for the Chinese classics, Daoist scriptures, and Buddhist sutras.

Yuandi's death, he became addicted to wine and women, undertaking "incognito nightly visits beyond the palace" (Dull 1966, 101). When apparently disasters followed one after the other (see Tjan 1949, 122-123), many were convinced that the mandate of the Han ruling house had expired. A scripture duly appeared and presented as being of heavenly origin that should help the Han to retrieve the mandate:

During the time of Emperor Cheng, Gan Zhongke, a man from Qi, presented the *Tian guan li baoyuan taiping jing* 天管曆包元太平經 (Scripture on General Welfare and the Keeping of the Original Mandate According to the Calendar Revealed by the Heavenly Officers) in twelve scrolls, saying: "The house of Han is approaching the end of a big world [period].<sup>27</sup> It has to receive the Mandate of Heaven once again. So the Heavenly Emperor sent the perfected [immortal] Chijing zi (Master Red Essence; Kandel 1979, 7) down to instruct me with these teachings." (*Hanshu* 75.3192; Eichhorn 1955, 304n38; Kandel 1979, 6)

Liu Xiang, a member of the imperial family, was put in charge of collating the holdings of the imperial library by Emperor Cheng in 26 BCE. Asked for advice, he memorialized that Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 had used spirits and ghosts to deceive the ruler and delude the masses. Gan was duly imprisoned and subsequently died of illness. Further attempts to bring this book to the emperor's attention during the reign of Emperor Ai (r. 6-1 BCE) by Gan's disciples such as Xia Heliang 夏賀良 failed when Liu Xin, opined that these teachings could not be put into operation (Dull 1966, 116). Li Xun 李尋, a friend of the late Imperial Chancellor Zhai Fangjin 翟放進 (d. 7 BCE), however, succeeded in explaining the text to the emperor who then put some of the suggestions into practice and made a few reforms. But when his bad health did not improve and Xia and others accused high officials of not understanding the Mandate of Heaven, they were executed (Dull 1966, 117).

Despite the defeat of this "Taiping Faction" at court, the scripture survived in the government archives, as can be seen in the famous memorial Wang Mang presented in 9 CE which includes the note: "The apocryphal text of Gan Zhongke and Xia Heliang is stored in the Orchid Terrace" (*Hanshu* 99A.4094). Apparently, Wang Mang held it in high esteem (Kandel 1979: 22-23).

A severe legitimization crisis occurred when Emperor Ping had died in the year 6 at the age of 14 without an heir. Wang Mang, then in fact ruling the country, chose a child of two among the fifty-odd great-grandsons of Emperor Xuan since Emperors Ai, Cheng, and Yuan had no descendants at that time. He duly first became regent on behalf of the child emperor and later ascended to be acting emperor. Two years later, he was called Emperor.

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<sup>27</sup> A world period had 1,539 years. See Kandel 1979, 93n11, based on *Hanshu* 21B.1007. See also Eberhard 1970, 117.

Wang relied heavily on all sorts of portents and omens as well as on *fu*-credentials, such as the white stone found in the year 6 which says: “[Heaven] announces that the Duke of Anhan [Wang] Mang [will] act as emperor.” These various signs showed that Wang Mang was the legitimate recipient of the Mandate of Heaven and documented this fact to the country. When Heaven’s positive signs to that effect further proliferated, he declared himself emperor in the year 9 and announced the beginning of a new dynasty, the Xin. In his memorial to the Empress Dowager of the same year he referred to some of these omens, including the following wonder he had witnessed in person (part of which was already presented above):

In the 11<sup>th</sup> month, on the *renzi* day, at the winter solstice, the stone ox of the Ba prefecture arrived at the front hall of the Weiyang Palace as did, on the *mouwu* day, the inscription of the stone of Yong. [When] your servant and the Grand Guardian, the Marquis of Anyang, [Wang] Shun and others were looking [at them], a wind from Heaven arose and dust was obscuring [everything]. [When] the wind ceased, we obtained a copper *fu*-tally and a silk chart in front of the stone, whose inscription says:

‘Heaven announces [that this is] the *fu*-tally of an emperor,  
The one presenting [this] [will be] appointed marquis:  
Receive the Mandate of Heaven,  
And make use of the divinities[’s ability to] command!’  
(*Hanshu* 99A.4093; Dull 1966, 157)

Not only did Wang Mang inform the Empress Dowager about the heavenly credentials confirming his mandate, he widely publicized a work entitled *Fu ming* 符命 (Credentials for the Mandate) in forty-two sections. The work has not survived but is summarized by Ban Gu. It described forty-two episodes of lucky omens, extraordinary appearances, and revealed *fu*-credentials connected with Wang Mang’s rise to power. The text probably served as a comprehensive account of the heavenly legitimation of his rule.

Wang Mang’s reign, however, was a rather short-lived one. A rebellion in 22 CE spread and, after the rebels had defeated Wang Mang’s army, entered the capital on October 4 and killed him still holding the texts that had legitimized his rule. Problems, however, did not immediately come to an end. The first emperor of the Later Han dynasty was not installed until August two years later. Liu Xiu, having declined his generals’ urgency to ascend the throne, was finally moved by a prognostication text that had been composed in the year 21, the *Chifu fu* (Red Secret *Fu*-Tally) to ascend as Emperor Guangwu 光武 (Dull 1966, 194-196). Fan Ye’s 范曄 (398-445) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han, ed. Beijing 1987) cites this text:

The “Red Secret *Fu*-Tally” says: “Liu Xiu will call forth troops and seize [those who] don’t [have the correct] way, / the barbarians of the four [corners] will gather [like] clouds, and dragons will fight in the wilderness, / and at the juncture of four sevens, [the force of] fire will be ruler.” (1A.21; Dull 1966, 195)

According to Dull, the word “dragons” refers to the contenders for the throne. The “juncture of four sevens” is explained by the Tang commentator Li Xian as: “Four times seven makes twenty-eight. From the time of Gaozu to the time when Guangwu first rose up altogether 228 years had passed. This is precisely the juncture of four sevens. The [Later] Han was of the force of fire, therefore, fire was the ruler” (1A.22; Dull 1966, 195). Liu Xiu’s followers then assured him that this was precisely the *fu*-token confirming that he had received the Mandate of Heaven which nobody in the empire would put into question.

Wang Mang’s contenders, too, based their aspirations on heavenly sent scriptures. Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 37), for example, who served as Grand Administrator of Shu Commandery (modern Sichuan) and who declared himself emperor in the year 25, legitimized his rule by means of, among other texts, the *Yuanshen qi* 援神契 (*Qi*-Credentials of the Assisting Divinities).<sup>28</sup>

At least at one further instance did Emperor Guangwu reach an important decision after having read an apocryphal text: In the year 56, influenced by the *Hetu Huichang fu* 河圖會昌符 (*Fu*-Credentials of Meeting with Prosperity, [Attached to the] River Chart; lost, only fragments extant), he performed the Feng and Shan sacrifices on Mount Tai which served as sort of a heavenly guarantee that his rule was a perfect one (*Hou Hanshu* 7.3163; Dull 1966, 226). After Guangwu this kind of texts became very popular and continued to flourish—until proscribed in the thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

From such comprehensive texts a whole series of texts arose that spurted advice on how to rise to power, how to govern properly, and how to apply political reforms. This in turn explains why this category of scriptures, the apocrypha, were blessed with such long-lasting success.

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<sup>28</sup> This apocryphal text was later “attached” to the canonical *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Scripture of Filial Piety) and called *Xiaojing Yuanshen qi* 孝經援神契 (*Qi*-Credentials of the Assisting Divinities, [Attached to the] Scripture of Filial Piety).

<sup>29</sup> Dull lists various occasions when, for obvious political reasons, these texts fell into disgrace: at the time of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), some time before 217, and, moreover, ten proscriptions occurred between 267 and 1273 (1966, 401–406).

## From Apocrypha to Daoist Regalia

Early Daoist communities organized themselves against an imperial administration that could no longer satisfy popular needs, at least in such peripheral areas as present-day Sichuan. Competing with the government for political power in the area, they too had to legitimize their aspirations. They accordingly adopted the notion of the *fu* as credentials or certificates of legitimation sent by the highest religious authority to confirm their just and perfect policy. An important difference was, however, that their highest authority was no longer Heaven but the Dao, the universal law ruling the whole cosmos.

The so-called *Xiang'er Commentary* 想爾注 to the *Daode jing*, commonly believed to be the product of the early Celestial Masters tradition (see Bokenkamp 1997), explains the phrase “grasp the great image, and all under Heaven will proceed [to you]” as follows:

If the king grasps the correct law and models himself on the great Dao, all under Heaven will take refuge in him. Vast territories requiring numerous post stations will arrive as if borne on the wind.<sup>30</sup> The transformative influence of the Dao proceeds down from the top. When it designates a king, it values the “one man.” In its rule there are no “two lords.”

This is why the thearch-king should constantly practice the Dao—so that it will spread to his officers and to the populace. It is not the case that only Daoists can practice it and the ruler is cast aside. A lord of great sageliness who makes the Dao his master and perfects the practice, transforming all with the teaching, will find the world in order. *Fu*-credentials and *mi*-authentications [confirming the state of] Great Peace will accumulate in response to human merit. One who achieves this is truly a Lord of the Dao. (ch. 35; Rao 1991, 44; Bokenkamp 1997, 136-137)

The underlying idea is similar to that which we already have seen in the political context of the Han dynasty, namely, that of a two-part *fu*-tally: humans (or, more specifically, the ruler as their representative) are creating merit which acts as the human half of the tally, the Dao (instead of Heaven) then creates the state of Great Peace as its half of the *fu*-tally.

Evidence for the fact that early Daoist texts were still standing fully in the tradition of the apocrypha can also be found in the case of the *Wufuxu* 五符序 (Explanation of the Five *Fu*-Tallies). Probably one of the earliest extant Daoist scriptures, its received version seems to be a compilation including various lay-

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<sup>30</sup> Bokenkamp here notes: “That is to say, territories will want to join the kingdom without his even having to conquer them. That people will willingly flock to a just ruler is a notion expressed in many early Chinese texts on statecraft” (1997, 136).

ers from different times.<sup>31</sup> Already Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406-477) believed that initially it had consisted of one chapter only, but the version that Ge Xuan 葛玄 obtained in his lifetime (around 200) consisted already of two scrolls. After that, the text grew to three scrolls (see Strickmann 1981, 68). Although various scholars have dealt with it, there is yet no encompassing examination of the entire text, let alone a complete and annotated translation.<sup>32</sup>

Two traditions meet here: one consists of a series of *fu*-texts that were to be used as talismans or amulets and may well, according to some scholars, belong to the earliest stratum of the text (*Wufuxu* 2.25ab; 3. 8a-15b, 16ab); the other is the text as tally, evident in citations of known apocryphal texts,<sup>33</sup> and also in references to itself as a *fu*-tally that legitimizes a (perfect) ruler. For example, it notes that the mythical emperor Yu 禹 paused after he quelled the flood waters, made a tour around the kingdom, and sacrificed to Shangdi and the Tianhou on Mount Zhong. He then suddenly, and as a consequence of his meritorious deeds, received three texts as well as the oral instructions of an immortal that enabled him to understand the texts. He subsequently compiled them into one single scripture, copied it, and buried the copies in various places so that they could only be found by people of perfect attitude and behavior. In other words, the *Wufuxu* not only dealt with *fu*-tallies, it was itself a *fu* that was bestowed upon the perfect ruler Yu as a confirmation of his legitimate rule and will serve the same function in the future (Bokenkamp 1986, 65-66). It thus stood in the tradition of Han apocrypha.

After Daoists became firmly established in the Chinese society, they assumed the role of earthly executors of the heavenly will to confer the mandate to an emperor and to this end “produced” appropriate scriptures. In so doing they firmly stood in the tradition of Gan Zhongke and Xia Heliang who presented an early version of the *Taiping jing* to Emperor Cheng. They also profited

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<sup>31</sup> Bokenkamp characterized the text as follows: “This scripture, which predates the composition of the Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao* 靈寶) scriptures, defies easy summarization. Broadly speaking, *juan* 1 deals with the Three August Ones (*san huang*) and Five Monarchs of antiquity. The account of the Five Monarchs is taken from Sima Qian with apocryphal material added. Various meditation practices and ritual formulae based on the five phases are included in this section. *Juan* 2 contains prescriptions *fang* for immortality, banishing the three worms, avoiding grains, etc. *Juan* 3 presents *fu*-tallies, invocations, examples of celestial script and further accounts of the immortals of antiquity” (1983, 483-484.).

<sup>32</sup> Scholarly works on the *Wufuxu* include Bokenkamp 1983; 1986; Kaltenmark 1982; Ishii 1984; Kobayashi 1988; 1990; Yamada 1984; 1989; Arthur 2006a; 2006b.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the unmarked quotation of the *Hetu jiangxiang* 河圖絳象 (The Image Come Down [from Heaven,] [Attached to the] River Chart) in *Wufuxu* 1.9b-10a; Yasui and Nakamura 1971, 6:110; or the explicit quotation from the *Xiaojing yuanshen* (*Wufuxu* 2.2a). The latter is almost identical with an explicit citation from the same text found in Ge Hong’s *Baopuzi neipian* 11.196. Since the *Baopuzi neipian* is cited variously in the *Wufuxu*, the compilers of the latter may not in fact have had access to the original apocryphal text but simply may have copied this passage.

from Wang Mang's acceptance of the text as a Heaven-sent *fu*-credential confirming his mandate. Accordingly, the Celestial Master Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365-448; see Mather 1979), who was introduced to Emperor Taiwu 太武 (r. 424-452) of the Northern Wei in 424 as a kind of "messenger from the gods" persuaded him to receive the heavenly *fu*-credentials from his hands on a Daoist altar (see Mather 1979, 103-122). As the *Weishu* 魏書 (History of the Wei, ed. Beijing 1984) says:

In the third year of the reign period [Taiping] Zhenjun (442), Qianzhi presented a memorial [to the throne] saying: "Now your majesty rules the world as a perfect lord and has established the Law of the Heavenly Palace of the Calm Wheel. Since the beginning of antiquity such has not yet existed. You ought to ascend and receive *fu*-credentials and texts (符書) in order to make manifest [Heaven's confirmation of your] sage-like virtue."

[Emperor] Shizu [Taiwu] followed this advice and went in person to the Daoist altar and received the credentials and registers. [...] From then on, all emperors upon being enthroned acted likewise. (114.3053)

By adopting the idea that Heaven shows who receives the mandate by delivering appropriate *fu*-credentials in the form of scriptures, Daoists achieved two things. First, they could legitimize their own politico-religious rule as Celestial Masters in Sichuan from 184 to 216. Second, after Zhang Lu's 張魯 (d. 216, according to *Zhen'gao* 4.14b; Kleeman 1998, 77) surrender to Cao Cao (155-220) and for centuries to come (Kleeman 1998, 76-77), they acted as the executors of the Dao's will to confer the Mandate of Heaven by producing and presenting suitable *fu*-credentials.

Starting as an astronomical constellation, the legitimation of the Mandate of Heaven form had to be substituted by other kinds of omens and portents since conjunctions of planets were not always at hand when needed. Classifying all sorts of heavenly and earthly signs, cosmologists developed a system of five phases to be used as an alternative to astronomical signs. Still, this system was not "precise" enough, so *fu*-tallies or credentials were introduced—in analogy to their military use—as short inscriptions that allowed conclusions regarding the conferral or withdrawal of the mandate. As this proved convenient, it was further "expanded" into entire scriptures or apocryphal texts that might bear the characters *fu*- or *qi*-tally in their title. They served as the heavenly half of a tally or "certificate of legitimation," the other half being found in the proper behavior of the persons whose rule was to be legitimized. As soon as the Daoists had become a respected part of society and were received by the rulers, they—as representatives of the "highest possible authority," the Dao—adopted the notion of the *fu* as credentials or certificates of legitimation and offered these *fu* to the rulers as the Dao's confirmation of their perfect rule.

## Chapter Three

### The Religious Context

Toward the end of the Later Han, the philosopher, statesman, and political advisor Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140-204; biogr. *Hou Hanshu* 48.1609-1615; Nylan 1982, 2: 321-338) compiled the *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Thoroughly Explained Customs, ed. Tientsin 1980). Although only one third of the original text remains, it nevertheless is “a first-hand account of Han customs and contemporary beliefs, in addition to embodying the complex philosophy of one of the best informed intellectuals of the day” (Nylan 1982, 1: 2; also 1993, 105-112). The *Fengsu tongyi* reports that in a certain area mediums (*wu* 巫) who wanted to communicate with the gods had to “combine their *qi*-tallies with those of the gods.” Chapter nine, entitled “Guaishen” 怪神 (Marvels and Gods) contains the description of a local cult in which, on an annual basis, mediums selected men and women as consorts of two mountain gods. Returning to their proper families after one year, they were not allowed to take any mortal husbands or wives afterwards. This was the cause of much suffering for the common people. Ying Shao comments on it, then cites a memorial submitted by the local governor, Song Jun 宋均 (d. 76; biogr. *Hou Hanshu* 41.1411-1414):

In my respectful opinion, when Governor Song Jun arrived and assumed office and those who were in charge [of this cult] had [already] wasted their money in supplying betrothal [gifts] for the men and women, [Song] Jun said: “All these mediums join their *qi*-tallies with those of the gods. They know their orders and wants, yet in the end, they pick some humble commoners who are not suitable matches.” (*Fengsu tongyi* 9.4; Nylan 1982, 2: 530)

The mediums obviously must have had their halves of some *qi*-tallies whose other halves must have been in the gods’ possession. These *qi*-tallies served a double function: first, they legitimized their earthly owners, the mediums, to communicate with the gods, to inquire about their needs and to express their wishes; second, they legitimized the priests to ask people to give their offspring away for this cult, at least in the eyes of those commoners whose daughters and sons were selected for this cult.

At the same time such *qi*-tallies appear in combination with *fu*-tallies in the imperial administration as a method of corroborating the bonds between the ruler and his followers who helped him establish the empire. Gaozu thus “split credentials” (*po fu* 剖符) and shared them with his retainers while also distributing fiefs among them (*Shiji* 8.384; Chavannes 1967, 2: 388). The covenant was written down in cinnabar-red on iron *qi*-tallies—as if to fix the “due amount of solidarity” between both parties. The sacred object was then put into a golden box contained in a stone chest and stored in the ancestral temple (*Hanshu* 1B.81; Dubs 1938, 1: 146). This ritual, moreover, was accompanied by an oath and the sacrifice of a white horse, making its religious character obvious (Seidel 1983, 311).

This ritual act of the imperial administration in all likelihood served as the model the mediums adopted for their own purposes. In analogy to Gaozu’s act, they were given “religious fiefs” by the gods. As legitimate representatives, they performed their rituals in the gods’ names and on behalf of the believers.

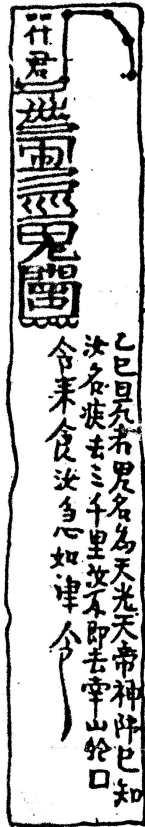
## Joining Credentials with Those of the Gods

Identification or legitimization by means of *fu*-credentials thus evolved in the religious sphere. The ruler who, on inspection tour through his realm, made a stop at the foot of a mountain was, according to the *Shiji*, to join his part of a *fu* with that of the gods (1.6). This act insured that he was properly recognized as the legitimated partner of the supernatural beings.

Unfortunately, the *Shiji* does not reveal any ritual details. However, archaeological excavations of tombs from the Han through the Six Dynasties have yielded several dozen wooden tablets with inscriptions and graphic elements that make them undoubtedly *fu*.

One example appears in a tablet found in a Han tomb in Shaojiagou 邵家溝, in the Gaoyou 高郵 district of Jiangsu, in 1957 (see Fig. 4). 28 cm long and 3.8 cm wide, it shows a complex graphic element in its upper left and an inscription in its lower right. The graphic element consists of a variant of the character *fu* 符 on top: without the “bamboo” 竹 radical but with a double “mouth” 口 radical. This character shows that the document indeed is a *fu*. Next follows the character *jun* 君, “lord,” indicating a deity’s name. The seven dots following it are connected by straight lines, representing the constellation of the Dipper—throughout Chinese history the most important aspect of the northern sky and the location of the Heavenly Emperor’s residence. The Heavenly Emperor, moreover, is the deity ruling over human life and death. The *fu* was clearly addressed to him, corroborated by the phrase, “The Heavenly Emperor and [his] Divine Master already know your name.” The last sentence,

furthermore, identifies the accompanying text as a prayer, since it includes the formula [*jí*] *ji ru lǐng* [急]急如律令, “[Swiftly,] swiftly in accordance with the statutes and ordinances!” the empowering prayer ending of the Daoists, used from the Han dynasty up to the present day. The text runs:



[You,] the subject deceased on the *yisi* day have the demon name “heavenly Brightness.” The [Yellow] heavenly Emperor and [his] Divine Master already know your name. Promptly remove yourself three thousand miles away! Should you not immediately go away, then the (?) of the Southern Peak [will be given] oral orders to come and devour you. Swiftly, swiftly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances! (*Kaogu* 1960.10: 18-23, 44)

Fig. 4. Wooden tally found in a Han tomb in Shaojiagou, Gaoyou (Jiangsu)

The expression “demon name” (*guiming* 鬼名) reflects the notion that the disembodied dead were believed to become demons who, deprived of life’s support, sought their way back to the world of the living; hence “demon” (*gui* 鬼) which is cognate to the verb “return” (*gui* 歸) (Karlgren 1972, # 569-570). The dead were thus seen as terrifying revenants inflicting disease and misfortune. In order to stop them, the living had to offer them slaughtered animals which provided them with *qi*.

This prayer is directed at two different addressees. For one, it informs the dead in the tomb that he no longer belongs to the realm of the living and that he, therefore, has been given a new, spiritual or “demon” name. He, moreover, is urgently asked to remove himself from the realm of the living as soon as possible. Also, the *fu* leaves no doubt that the living are legitimized by the gods to ask for their help, so he had better do as they wish. For another, the Yellow Emperor of Heaven, the supreme deity of Han religion, together with his clerks (the Divine Master and the spirit of the Southern Peak) are asked to discipline the dead in case they do not comply with the request.

Anyone asking a favor had had to legitimize himself before these heavenly authorities and they are accordingly the main addressees of the *fu*. This becomes obvious in another, later incantation, written on a *fu* found in a tomb at Turfan dated to 551 (see Fig. 5). Seidel describes it as “on a piece of paper (27.5 x 10 cm) folded inside a silk bag [...], we find a crude design of a human figure brandishing a long dagger and a huge peasant fork” (1987, 39). Its text reads:



The divine [envoy of the] Yellow heavenly Emperor severely represses and executes the hundred species of demons of death. After decapitation they must obey! The demons must not come near! May this order for protection be presented on high, according to my wish. Swiftly, swiftly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances!<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 5. *Fu*-tally found in a Turfan tomb dated CE 551

As the text says, this *fu* must be presented to Heaven above where it has to be joined with its heavenly counterpart. If the Yellow Emperor of Heaven ap-

<sup>1</sup> The handwriting of this document is not easy to read and other transcriptions of the same text have been proposed. See Wang 1996, 291; Chen 1999; Seidel 1987.

proves of the prayer, he will send his envoy, the Divine Master, to execute his orders.

As a *fu* consists of two complementary parts, where is the second part of the excavated funerary *fu*? In Chinese secular administration, one half of a two-part credential was always kept in the possession of the more powerful “partner” (e.g., emperor, feudal lord, creditor) or institution (e.g., treasury). It was these who had the bronze *jie* or tiger-*fu* cast or the *quan* and *qi* cut in bamboo or wood, in order to give the other half to those who were their dependents. The same held true for religious *fu* as well. The most powerful beings were the heavenly gods. These gods were the original proprietors of the *fu*. Accordingly, the *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Scripture of the Old Master, *Yunji qiqian* 18-19), one of the earliest extant religious Daoist texts (see Schipper 1979; 1995; Robinet 1993; Bumbacher 2001), says: “A *fu* is a pledge between Heaven and Earth” (ch. 53; *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (The Seven Labels of the Cloudy Book-case), DZ 1032, 19.18a).

Heaven here means the gods residing in Heaven, whereas Earth indicates human beings. The important evidence for one part of a *fu* being produced and kept in Heaven, however, appears in Ge Hong’s 葛洪 *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity: Inner Chapters, DZ 1185) of ca. 317 (ed. Wang 1985). Strickmann characterizes this work, saying: “Its contents are probably best seen as representing the esoteric baggage of the southern upper classes, or still more exactly, the family traditions and personal animadversions of one member of the old southern governing class, whose spiritual formation was complete prior to the influx of northerners [after 311]. Whatever the precise connection of this eclectic work with the real spiritual preoccupations of the old aristocracy of Wu, the *Baopuzi* clearly comes at the end of an autonomous local tradition” (1977, 8). It says: “Lord Zheng (Ge Hong’s master Zheng Yin 鄭隱) used to say that the *fu* stemming from Lord Lao (the deified Laozi) were all heavenly scriptures. Lord Lao was able to communicate with the gods and received these *fu* from them” (19.335; also Ware 1966, 313).

The gods thus had the *fu* which were written in celestial script and, keeping one half, passed the other to human beings through a spiritual intermediary such as the “accomplished sage” Ding Yi in the Wu Meng episode or through a god like Lord Lao. Another, though rare, possibility was to temporarily host an immortal in Heaven and to give him his part of a *fu* before he was asked to descend again to help human beings on Earth, as another of Ge Hong’s works the, unfortunately only incompletely transmitted *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Biographies of Spirit Immortals; transl. Campney 2002) shows:

When [Lord Lao] sent Xi back, he told [him]: “Go back to the human realm and cure those who are sick among the hundred families (i.e., common people). If you wish to come to this upper world, write this *fu* and hang it on the tip of a

pole. I will [then] welcome you.” Then he took one *fu* as well as one recipe [for becoming] immortal and bestowed [them] upon Xi. Xi suddenly felt as if he were asleep, and he was already back on Earth. By today, many are those who have obtained [this] *fu*.<sup>2</sup>

The precondition for Lord Lao’s behavior toward Shen Xi was that the latter has led a morally unblemished life: “[His] merit and integrity moved Heaven, and the heavenly spirits recognized him” (*Yunji qiqian* 109.6b; Campany 2002, 255).

Whenever deities considered a human being worthy of being their earthly “partner” due to his integrity, they either bestowed upon him his part of a *fu* or they let him be taught the rituals and technique by means of which he could produce his own part of a *fu*. The complementary part was kept in the heavenly archives—invisible to the human eye.

## Help from the Gods

As soon as the *fu*-credentials were introduced into the religious sphere, they spread widely. Many texts of the fourth century contain examples of how they were used. For example, the *Shenxian zhuan* recounts how a certain Commander Chen 陳尉 visited the immortal Wang Yuan 望遠 and requested to be made an official in the celestial bureaucracy. Wang, upon examining him, found that Chen could never be taught the Dao of immortality but he did have some good qualities:

When he was about to depart, [Wang] took one *fu* together with one [piece of] explication, placed them in a small box and gave them to Commander Chen, declaring:

“These will not enable you to transcend the world, but it will restore your originally [allotted] long life span, [so that] you will go beyond [the age of] a hundred years. When you turn toward the gods, you will be able to dispel misfortunes and cure diseases [by means of them]. As long as [there are] those who are sick [but their] allotted life spans have not yet run out and [if they are people] who are without sin, take this *fu* and go to their homes [...]. If [there are] evil demons thirsting for blood and being about to cause calamities, then wear this *fu* on [your] belt, in order to call here the agents of the earth-god [who] will send away these demons.”

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<sup>2</sup> There are two longer accounts of Shen Xi’s *Shenxian zhuan* biography apart from several small fragments. The earlier is to be found in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (ed. Beijing 1986) 5.36, the later in *Yunji qiqian* 109.6b. Since the *Yunji qiqian* tends to have the better reading (Bumbacher 2000b), its version is used here. See also Campany 2002, 258.

Commander Chen used this *fu* to cure illness and enjoyed success. Those who served him [as adherents] were several hundred families. He lived to be one hundred ten years old, then died. After his death, his sons practiced [the method of] this *fu*, but it was no longer efficacious. (*Yunji qiqian* 109.11a-16a; *Taiping guangji* 7.47-48; Campamy 2002, 263-264; Bumbacher 2000b, 797-799)

In this example, the immortal (Wang) gives to a mortal being (Chen) a *fu*—which means the “earthly” half of it—as well as the necessary explanations (for its proper use?). The ultimate partner intended by the *fu*, however, were the gods who would under certain conditions help to cure the sick. More specifically, the earth-god, when asked for assistance, might decide to help and send his clerks to dispel demons. Both proceedings were similar: illness was seen as caused by demons, by the errant souls of the dead who maltreated the living (Unschuld 1980, 35). When the gods decided to assist Chen, they sent their messengers to Earth to execute their orders—not unlike the Divine Master sent by the Yellow Emperor of Heaven.

The *Shenxian zhuan* further points out that immortals could recognize gods, spirits, and demons—as could Daoist adepts if they took the necessary precautions. Thus the *Baopuzi neipian* has:

[In the mountains] the spirits of old objects are capable of assuming human shape for the purpose of confusing human vision and constantly putting human beings to a test. It is only when reflected in a mirror that they are unable to alter their true forms. Therefore, in the old days, all processors (adepts) entering the mountains suspended on their backs a mirror measuring nine inches or more in diameter, so that aged demons would not dare approach them.

If any did come to test them, they were to turn and look at them in the mirror. If they were immortals or good mountain gods, they would look like human beings when viewed in the mirror. If they were birds, animals, or evil demons, their true forms would appear in the mirror. If such a demon comes toward you, you must walk backward, turning your mirror toward it, in order to drive it away. Then observe it. If it is an aged demon, it is sure to have no heels. If it has heels, it is a mountain god. (17.300; Ware 1966, 281)

Candidates for immortality, moreover, at a certain stage in their training, before they gained the ability to see spiritual beings, learned how to hear them. Thus Wang Zhen 王珍, the adjutant of a local commandant, also apprenticed with the immortal Liu Gen 劉根. Again the *Shenxian zhuan*:

Whenever [Wang] Zhen saw that Liu [Gen] wrote a *fu*, [it was as if there] was someone whom he called and it seemed that someone would come and fetch [it from him]. Or, on some occasions, he heard investigations [being conducted by Liu and] somebody replying. He also heard the sounds of chastising but never saw their forms, yet from time to time there was blood on the ground. He never fully understood what was going on. (*Taiping guangji* 10.69; also Campamy 2002, 246)

In other words, the spirit assistants of the heavenly (or earthly) deities checked the *fu*, joined the earthly and the heavenly halves on behalf of the gods, and when both parts matched perfectly forwarded the adept's prayer to the gods. They then returned to execute the gods' orders. In Liu Gen's case, Liu apparently questioned demons at some point to find out why a certain problem arose. He may then have begged them to disappear (as before, when the dead person was asked to remove himself by three thousand miles). When they did not obey, he asked for the divine clerks' help to control them. These spiritual bailiffs then disciplined the demons whose blood Wang Zhen could see on the ground.

This example helps to explain why *fu*—and not *jie*, *qi*, or *quan*—were used in such contexts: the *fu* was, after all, a military credential, and it was precisely the spirits' military power that was needed. In severe cases they even had to decapitate the demons, as the *fu* from the Turfan tomb showed. In any case, immortals and Daoists entreated the higher authority of the gods and their clerks for help against the lower authority of the demons.

As is made clear in the various episodes the beseeched gods addressed in these *fu* could comply with the request, but did not have to or were forced to do so.<sup>3</sup> They were quite selective and helped only if the person in need was known to them as a man of integrity. However, the gods were not entirely free, either, and could not help if the petitioner was a through-and-through sinner. To be successful, certain preconditions had to be met: only if the individual's life expectancy as allotted by Heaven through the Department of Destiny and the Ruler of Fates (Siming 司命) had not yet run out and only if the sick person was not guilty of any offense to be punished by a shortening of his life, did the gods have the power to help.

It was thus not impossible that a *fu* fell into the hands of people who were not quite legitimized to possess them, especially if they did not meet the gods' requirement of moral integrity. In such cases the deities would not listen to the prayers and would not grant the request. This matches the *Shiji* story where General Jin Bi did not accept Wuji's command despite the fact that both parts of the tiger-*fu* matched perfectly. Possessing a *fu* was *conditio sine qua non* for the gods to listen to the prayer of a Daoist. If, on the other hand, they found him unworthy as a "partner," they could and would refuse to lend their assistance. This is precisely why for Commander Chen's sons, although they "practiced [the method of] this *fu*" in order to heal diseases, "the *fu* was no longer efficacious." Only those who excelled in their behavior, by showing piety or charity,

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<sup>3</sup> The prayers, absolutely necessary element of such a *fu*-ritual, have come down to us only in very rare cases. Usually, they must have been silently "uttered" or "recited." So far it is solely on such funeral *fu*, as in our example from the Shaojiagou tomb, that prayers were fixed in writing and survived.

and who were properly examined and initiated by a sage could be the gods' legitimized partners.

Nowhere within the whole process of presenting a *fu*, reciting a (silent) prayer, matching the credentials in Heaven, sending down spiritual assistants, and helping the adept, there is either an act of coercion or a forced result. Within the limits set by the Ruler of Fates, the gods can always choose to act as they wish. This aspect is important as it presents an argument against the Frazerian notion of magic, the implicit basis of de Groot's, Robinet's, and other sinologists' understanding. Frazer says that magical acts force nature to do what the magician wants. There is no such force here. Also, Frazer positions magic as the first or lowest stage of human development and characterizes it as working "invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency" (Frazer 1983: 63-64). In contrast, the use of a *fu* in Daoism involves the activity of deities and their spiritual agents, according to Frazer a characteristic of the second stage of evolution, the stage of religion as opposed to magic. The third and last stage, that of the natural sciences, finally, works exclusively with the laws of nature.

Looking back at the story cited in the beginning, Wu Meng who controlled the wind with the help of a *fu* was a qualified initiate due to his irreproachable character and his exemplary conduct. He received knowledge of special religious rites and their function from the immortal Ding Yi. Using these techniques, he produced his half of a *fu* and threw it at the house. The gods matched it with their own half and, as both halves matched perfectly, saw that Wu Meng was indeed a legitimized earthly partner. Most likely Wu then presented them with his quest for help in the form of a secret prayer. The deities showed understanding and calmed the storm. However, it is very clear that they did not have to do so. They only did so because they were assured of the justification of his quest and of himself as a worthy partner due to his integrity.

## "Tallied" Water

"Tallied" water, "talisman" water or "charmed" water (*fushui* 符水; Michaud 1958, 76; Engelhardt 2000, 102), consists of the ashes of a burnt *fu* dissolved in water which, in the early Daoist communities, was given to sick people as a cure after they had reflected upon their sins. Its earliest mention is in relation to the Way of Great Peace (Taiping dao 太平道) of Zhang Jue, recorded in Yu Huan's 魚豢 *Dianlue* 典略 (Outline of Records), compiled around 270. The text, originally of 39 *juan*, recorded the final phase of the Han dynasty up to the year 219 (Maspero 1971, 408). Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372-451; biogr. *Songsbu* 宋書 [History of the Liu Song, ed. Beijing 1974, 64.1698-1701] commentary to Chen Shou's 陳壽 (233-297; biogr. *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志 [History of the Land of

Huayang, ed. Beijing 1958], 11; *Jinshu* 晉書 [History of the Jin, ed. Beijing 1982], 82; see de Crespigny 1970, 2-4), *Sanguo zhi*, commissioned in 428 and presented to the throne in 429 (de Crespigny 1970, 14-19) cites it as follows:

In the reign period Guanghe (178-183) in the east there was Zhang Jue and in Hanzhong there was Zhang Xiu. [...]

Jue's system was the Way of Great Peace; Xiu's was the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (Celestial Masters). The masters of the Way of Great Peace carried staves with nine knots, made *fu* and spells, and taught sick people to bow their heads and reflect upon their faults. Thereafter they gave them tallied water to drink. When, after having drunk [the potion] the sick were cured in a short time, they were believers in the Dao. If, however, they were not cured, then they were unbelievers in the Dao.

Zhang Xiu's system was roughly like that of Zhang Jue. In addition, [he built] quiet chambers where the sick were left to ponder their faults. He also used men as demon soldiers and libationers. The latter saw that the *Text in Five Thousand Words* (*Daode jing*) was used and practiced everywhere. The demon soldiers offered prayers for the sick.

Their method [was]: the surname and the personal name of the sick person were written with a declaration of his/her faults. Three copies were made: one was sent up to Heaven and displayed on a hill; one was buried in the ground [to Earth] and the last one was thrown in the river [to Water]. These were called "handwritten documents of the Three Offices." They regularly had the family of the sick man pay five pecks of rice and because of that they were called the Five Pecks of Rice masters. (*Sanguo zhi* 8.264; see Michaud 1958, 78; Wu 1979, 7)

Elsewhere in the same commentary Pei Songzhi cites Yu Pu's 虞溥 (fl. 317-322; biogr. *Jinshu* 82.2139-2141) *Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳 (Traditions of the Jiangbiao [region], completed before 322, lost):

At that time [around 200], there was a Daoist Yu Ji from Langye who had formerly resided in the east [but then] departed and come to Wuhui (west of present-day Shanghai), [where] he built a quiet chamber, burnt incense, read Daoist texts, and made tallied water in order to cure diseases. Many of the Wuhui people served him. (*Sanguo zhi* 46.1110)

This suggests that even a generation after the Yellow Turban Rebellion of the Great Peace followers in 184 and in the wake of its bloody suppression by the Han military, there were still some Daoists of this denomination who cherished its teachings and practiced its rituals wherever they took refuge.

More details on tallied water, however, come from an even earlier source: the manuscripts found in tomb 3 at Mangwadi 馬王堆 (near Changsha), which were interred together with the deceased and copious grave goods in 168 BCE and excavated in 1973. One of them, the *Wushier bingfang* 五十二病方 (Recipes for Fifty-two Ailments; transl. Harper 1998), says: "[When] somebody is [...] [attacked] by *gu* poison and gets sick, one may incinerate a north-facing

paired *fu*, then steam sheep buttock, drop [it] into hot bath water, and toss in the ashes of the *fu*. Then [...] [bathe] the sick person, wash his hair and body, and thus treat the poison” (Harper 1998, 301).

Here it seems that a *fu*—possibly made of some organic material such as bamboo, wood, or fabric—was burned and its ashes blended with some other material to both be put into bath water. This concoction was then used to bathe the person or possibly was ingested for healing.

Continuing through the early Daoist communities, the procedure was still in practice in the early fifth century, when Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 entered an anecdote into his famous *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World; ed. Taipei 1974) that amounted to a Buddhist polemic against the Daoists’ use of tallied water: Chi Yin 郗愔 (313–384; biogr. *Jinsbu* 67), sometime governor of Kuaiji and an adherent of the Celestial Masters, rather than being healed of some intestinal ailment by means of tallied water supposedly had his problem precisely because of taking it. It says:

Chi Yin believed in Daoism with zealous devotion. Once he was suffering from an ailment in his bowels, which various [Daoist] physicians were unable to cure. Hearing that the [Buddhist monk] Yu Fakai 于法開 (ca. 310–370) had a good reputation, he went to consult him.

After he had come, Fakai took his pulse and said: “What Your Excellency is suffering from is caused by none other than an excess of zeal, that’s all.” Whereupon he mixed a dose of medicine with some hot water and gave it to him.

No sooner had Chi taken the medicine than immediately he had an enormous bowel movement in which he evacuated several wads of paper, each as big as a fist. When he opened them up, they turned out to be the *fu* he had ingested earlier. (20.184; see Mather 1976, 361)

This anecdote obviously served to illustrate the superiority of Buddhist medicine over Daoist healing practices and contains some gross exaggerations: all extant sources say that, prior to ingestion, the *fu* had to be incinerated, so they would not have survived the digestive tract intact. Their ashes could be taken in various ways: by putting them into water and drinking the mixture, thus using literally “tallied water,” or by mixing them with honey to produce a sweet pill to be swallowed. But there is no indication that the *fu* had to be eaten as whole pieces of paper or silk. Also, although the anecdote is placed in the fourth century, the procedure must still have been common a century later or Liu Yiqing’s readers could not have understood and appreciated it.

Why, then, would one ingest a *fu*? The famous Daoist and herbal master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) notes in his *Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱訣 (Concealed Instructions for Ascent to the Perfected, DZ 421): “[One] ingests *fu* in order to call and inform the body gods” (1.2b). While wearing *fu* at the waist thus drew the external gods’ attention, ingesting them alerted the gods within. Who and what, then were these body gods (*shen shen* 身神)?

## Body Gods

Body gods play a key role in early medieval Daoism. The main sources describing them are the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Scripture of the Yellow Court; ed. Schipper 1975) and the *Laozi zhongjing*.

The earliest document is the *Huangting waijing jing* 黃庭外景經 (Scripture of the Outer View of the Yellow Court; DZ 332, *Yunji qiqian* 12), a text without precise date or known author. Written in verse, it consists of three parts and 198 lines of seven characters each. From a formal point of view, the absence of any parallelism and the simple pattern of end-rhymes among consecutives lines contrasts with the delicate lyrical compositions created by the elite of the Han and the Three Kingdoms. The first lines mention Lord Lao or Laozi as the author and give a contents summary: “Lord Lao, living in seclusion, composed [this] seven-word [text]. He [thereby] explains the human body and all [its] gods.”<sup>4</sup>

Whether these opening lines are authentic or represent a later interpolation is not clear.<sup>5</sup> As for the date of composition, the earliest firm date seems to be February 1, 255, when the *Dadao jia lingjie* 大道家令戒 (Precepts and admonitions for the family of the great Dao) was issued.<sup>6</sup> It refers to the *Huangting jing* twice: first, defending it against some unnamed “heterodox” Daoist group(s) that deny its legitimate claim for truth and correctness (14b; Bokenkamp 1997, 172); and second by noting: “The [Scripture in] Seven-Character Verse on the Three Numina and the Yellow Court, which the wondrous perfected composed through me, is a gloss on and an explanation of the basic scriptures” (16a; Bokenkamp 1997, 175).

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<sup>4</sup> The earliest version of this text is a stele inscription dated to 337 and attributed to the calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (321-379). It does not have these two lines. Their earliest appearance is in the *Yunji qiqian* edition of the text, compiled in the late 1020s (Skar 2000, 419). All later editions replace Lord Lao with Laozi.

<sup>5</sup> However, this question is by no means a trivial one, for if these lines were authentic, they could serve for the relative dating of the text: during the Later Han dynasty, Laozi’s status was raised to that of a heavenly god whose cult found its way into the imperial court. A stele was erected in his honor on imperial command in 165 in Hu, eastern Henan at the border to Anhui (Seidel 1969a; Kohn 1998, 38-41). In this inscription the title Lord Lao does not yet occur, therefore the reference in the *Huangting jing* was composed after 165.

<sup>6</sup> The text is preserved in a collection of early texts of the Celestial Masters, the *Zhengyi fawen tian shijiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 (Scripture of Precepts and Codes Taught by the Celestial Master, from the Texts of the Law of Correct Unity; DZ 789; Bokenkamp 1997, 3-4, 149, 164-85).

Which basic scriptures are intended here, if indeed any, is unclear since the *Huangting jing* does not refer to any other texts.<sup>7</sup> To take the statement at face value, on the other hand, would mean that the *Huangting jing* was revealed to the author of the *Dadao jia lingjie* and must have been produced before 255. However, it is equally possible that the *Huangting jing* existed previously and was claimed by the author of the *Dadao jia lingjie*. Another early reference is in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian* of ca. 317, meaning that it definitely existed by the early fourth century and thus was composed in the third century at the latest. As for its geographical and social position, the *Dadao jia lingjie* reference localizes it among the Celestial Masters, many of whose adherents at the time were forced to live in diaspora and had to face a considerable crisis as their leaders were confronted with internal problems and the state of Wei disintegrated and finally perished in 266.

The Celestial Masters developed in the latter half of the second century CE in present-day Sichuan. There a certain Zhang Xiu 張修 revolted in 184 against the Han government after successfully establishing a religious and military administration that operated parallel to the decaying Han system. His organization was called the Way of Five Pecks of Rice, as all families had to pay five pecks of rice or equivalent to the priests for treating ailments and protection. After Zhang Xiu's death in 191, the unrelated Zhang Lu took over and established a theocratic state. He claimed to be the grandson of the legendary founder of this tradition, Zhang [Dao]ling 張[道]陵. He supposedly adopted the religious notions of Zhang Xiu as well as his three-layered hierarchy of priests and the infrastructure of the community. In addition, he erected a network of so-called lodges of righteousness (*yishe* 義舍) along the main trade routes where travelers could stay on their journeys and eat free of charge (see Stein 1963). In 215, Zhang Lu surrendered his community to the warlord Cao Cao 曹操, whose son soon established the Wei dynasty among the Three Kingdoms. Cao Cao appointed Lu and his five sons to high positions in his administration, then dispersed the movement. About a quarter of the estimated four hundred thousand followers went with the Zhangs into the diaspora in northern China and were scattered throughout the realm—many of them later establishing themselves at the capital Chang'an, while about eighty thousand went to Luoyang and Ye.

The Celestial Masters' textual corpus as identified so far is rather small. It includes a slightly abridged version of the *Daode jing*, which they called the *Text in Five Thousand Words*, a fragmentarily transmitted explanation of the text in the

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that there may not exist implicit, unmarked quotations. But none have been identified to date. However, unmarked quotations in the *Huangting jing* are rather unlikely as it is not very probable that these source texts were also written in the same lyric form, thus the passages to be quoted would have had to be edited to some extent—unless the *Huangting jing* did not represent a formal singularity and other texts were also composed in the same format, for which no evidence has yet been found.

*Xiang'er Commentary*, the *Dadao jia lingjie*, and the *Huangting jing* as well as a commented longer fragment of a ritual text (see Cedzich 1987).

The *Huangting jing*, then, combines two things: a description of parts of the human body most important for Daoist adepts and various ritual prescriptions. Knowledge of the former is a necessary precondition for the latter. The proper execution of these rituals will protect the adept from diseases, assure long life and, ideally, lead to immortality.

The *Huangting jing* begins by distinguishing four parts of the human body. The first two are introduced as follows: “Above, there is the Yellow Court, below, the Origin of the Pass” (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.3). These are rather obscure terms. Commentaries to the text, from the sixth century onward, do not agree on their meaning and suggest various locations for Yellow Court: from the eyes through the spleen to a certain place within the brain (Maspero 1971, 527n1). The Origin of the Pass is less problematic, and most commentators agree that it is a point roughly three inches below the navel.

The next two are: “Behind, there are the Mysterious Doors; in front is the Gate of Destiny.” Wu Chengzi 務橙子 of the early Tang explains: “The kidneys are the Mysterious Doors [...]. The navel is the Gate of Destiny [with a size of] three inches.”

Next the text localizes a god (or gods) in the Yellow Court and describes it (or them): “The personage in the Yellow Court wears a red robe. [By means of] lock and key of the Origin of the Pass he closes both wings [of the door]” (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.9). Wu Chengzi, who locates the Yellow Court in the eyes, considers the “key” to be the tongue and interprets the “lock” as the teeth. “Both wings [of the door]” may thus be the parts of the mouth. This deity would thus be responsible for the closing of the mouth by means of the tongue.

Another god resides in the Middle Pond—the gall bladder, according to the commentary. It houses a lord clad in red, vermilion clothes (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.14). Also, in the Residence (commentary: the heart), there is a deity who always wears pink (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.20). Nothing is said about the possible function(s) of these figures. Yet they are important. As the text says about the lord in the heart: “If you are able to see him, you will [manage] not to become sick” (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.21).

Adepts should just establish a relationship with this god in the heart by “seeing him.” What does that mean? The line has the same structure as a later that begins: “If you are able to guard it [...]” “To guard” here has as its object an internal barrier not far from the Residence (Schipper 1975, 1: 1.22). The activities of “seeing” and “guarding” are synonymous and seem to refer to some kind of visualization. In other words, the text prescribes a meditative practice of visualizing gods in the body, such as the god of the heart. Adepts are to concentrate on their appearance and hold it tight. As a result, the visualized deity will take care of the person and the adept will not fall ill.

The *Huangting jing* also leaves no doubt that the Daoists' goal was not only to remain healthy, but ultimately to become immortal. Line 70 says: "[He] will live long, will [be] see[ing] for a long time and then will fly off and leave [the world as an immortal]."

## Highest Clarity

After the Celestial Masters' exodus from Sichuan, the *Huangting jing* became more widely known, reaching even as far as southeast China, where Ge Hong mentions it, listing it among those works his master Zheng Yin (fl. 303) had in his library, and Wang Xizhi inscribed his stele about it. Both Ge and Wang belonged to aristocratic class families, suggesting that the geographic spread of the work was accompanied by a "receptive diffusion" from the lower social classes (of the original Celestial Masters) to the elite of the Zhejiang and Jiangsu areas.

Right there, the next stage of Daoist development soon began to unfold. In the small town of Jurong near modern Nanjing, beginning in the 360s, a series of scriptures were revealed to a young medium named Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-?), who was in service to the aristocratic Xu 許 family (see Strickmann 1977). Some dozen perfected and immortals descended to him from the Heaven of Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清) and transmitted sacred scriptures and personal instructions (see Robinet 1984; 2000).

The Xu clan belonged to a group of families who had migrated from northern China to the south during the Han and, in 185, had settled near present-day Nanjing where they became part of a new elite. Their religious needs, as Strickmann suggests, may well have been satisfied:

By the ecstatic cults endemic to the region south of the Yangtse, whose officiants, the exorcists of Wu and Yue, had long been renowned for their dramatic displays of spiritual possession, or by representatives of that learned esoteric tradition, wonder-workers in possession of a "Dao" or potent spiritual method, whose most eminent members subsequently frequented the court of the rulers of Wu. (1977, 6)

After the fall of Luoyang in 311, a new wave of immigrants (among them some great northern families) arrived from the north. After a bitter factional struggle among émigrés and old residents, the former succeeded in taking over political power. Bringing along the creeds and rituals of the Celestial Masters, the immigrants not only consolidated their political predominance but also introduced a new religious system to the area, at the same time subduing its original spirits. Accordingly, they had shrines and temples destroyed and made a concerted effort to convert the local populace to the new system. Old southern families, if they wanted to be part of the new administration, had no other choice but to

convert to the Celestial Masters' tradition, as did some members of the Xu family. However, as the new denomination did not cover all their religious needs, they yet also relied on local religious specialists or private priests whose background may have had much in common with the system in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian*. Yang Xi was not only such a religious specialist, he was also a highly talented medium whose literary and calligraphic qualities caused his scriptures to spread far beyond the original scope.

Among the scriptures Yang Xi received there was also a new version of the *Huangting jing*, the *Huangting neijing jing* 黃庭內景經 (Scripture of the Inner View of the Yellow Court, ed. Schipper 1975). As Schipper has shown, Yang Xi must have been in possession of the older version, as he not only took over the form of a seven-characters-per-line poem but also reused 96 of the original 198 lines and worked them into his new 36 stanzas and 424 lines (1975, 8-10).

## New Gods

The new text presents a series of new gods. For one, there is a group in the human head, presented from the top down, i.e., beginning with the god of the hair, followed by the god of the brain and that of the eyes etc:

The Niwan and the hundred sections [of the body] all have deities.  
 The god of the hair is Azure Florescence, aka Highest Origin  
 The god of the brain is Essence Root, aka Niwan.  
 The god of the eyes is Bright Superiority, aka Beautiful Darkness.  
 The god of the nose is Jade Mound, aka Numinous Solidity.  
 The god of the ears is Void Enclosure, aka Mystery Field.  
 The god of the tongue is Passing Mandate, aka Upright Principle.  
 The god of the teeth is Mountain Range, aka Arranged Thousands.  
 All the deities of the face honor the Niwan. (Schipper 1975, 7.1.2-9)

Whereas the deities of the older version of the *Huangting jing* were fairly equal and did not interrelate in any way, this last line indicates that they are arranged in a hierarchy in the Highest Clarity version. The god of the brain, the Essence Root, aka Niwan, seems to have held an eminent position and been the object of homage of all other "deities of the face" (i.e., the gods of hair, eyes, nose, ears, tongue, and teeth). Moreover, Essence Root was not the only god residing in the brain, which also housed the Nine Perfected, each with a chamber of his own and each depending on Essence Root. As the text says:

Each of the Nine Perfected has a chamber  
 With a floor-space of one [square] inch, [in] whose center [he dwells].  
 They all wear purple clothes and light underwear.  
 (Schipper 1975, 7: 11-13)

The difference between the old and new versions, i.e., isolated gods on equal terms versus hierarchically ordered deities interrelated with each other, may reflect a difference in readership, i.e., initially more or less egalitarian adherents of the Celestial Masters' tradition versus a hierarchical elite in south China. Although the Celestial Masters did in fact have a hierarchy, later historiographic sources emphasize the egalitarian character of this tradition. Highest Clarity, in contrast, was originally exclusively intended for elite families like the Xu clan who served in the imperial administration and were permanently confronted with a steep hierarchy and accordingly hoped for high positions in a hereafter that was also conceived of as hierarchically organized. It was one of Yang Xi's duties to help them to achieve their objective.

Both the old and the new version of the text share the view that adepts can prolong life with the help of the body gods. The text states, "[If] only you meditate [on the deities of] this one section (i.e., the head), [your] longevity will have no limits" (7, 1.14). Whereas the older *Huangting waijing jing* still knew only a few body gods and tended not to record their names, the new *Huangting neijing jing* not only presents the whole body as populated by deities but also provides their personal names and styles, so the adept can address them personally. While the description of the gods of the head in the new version is as unsophisticated as that of the earlier one—only the color of their garb is mentioned—the various deities of the main organs are presented in more detail. For example, about the god of the heart we read:

The palace of the heart section [is like] the yet-unopened lotus flower.  
 [Its] lower part has a lad [descended from the] Danyuan family.  
 He rules over cold and heat [so that] blood and *qi* are harmonized.  
 Clad in light garments of cinnabar-red brocade and, beneath, in jade  
     [colored] light silk,  
 With a red belt with metal bells, he sits in total quietness.  
 He adjusts the blood and regulates destiny, so that the body does not  
     wither.  
 Outside, mouth and tongue correspond [to the heart]; they expel the  
     five florescences (emanations of the main organs).  
 [As] one approaches the end [of life], one [ought to] call him; then rises  
     to revival.  
 [Whoever] practices it over a long period, [will] fly up to the great dis-  
     tant places [in the Heavens]. (10.1.1-9)

Unlike the earlier version, the text here dispenses with cryptic designations and calls the parts of the body by their ordinary names. It talks about the heart and discusses mouth and tongue. While it is probable (though unproven) that the Celestial Masters explained the meaning of the *Waijing jing's* cryptic names to adherents after they had passed certain stages of initiation, Yang Xi originally compiled his version for only a couple of recipients, his patrons Xu Mi 許謚

(303-373) and his youngest son Xu Hui 許翽 (341-ca. 370). Within such a small religious community, it was certainly not necessary to encode crucial terms.

Even details of the gods' clothes, such as the belt trimming, are described, a feature that, in a less sophisticated form, already appears in the older version. These detailed descriptions were necessary to allow the most painstaking meditative practice, more dominant even in Highest Clarity (see Robinet 1979). Adepts had to picture the deities in all exactitude to eventually be able to join them in the Heavens or engage in a sacred marriage with them. As the *Neijing jing* has: "Close the eyes, look inwardly, [there the deities] face each other by themselves" (33: 1.12); and "[As soon as] one is about to die, one [ought to] visualize [this] god (i.e., the blue-green lad in the liver), [and] death returns to life" (11.1.9). The more precisely a deity was described, the easier it was for adepts to visualize him or her—and the other way round: if during meditation various gods appeared, it was easier for adepts to identify the one relevant to the present situation.

To sum up, Yang Xi partially adopted and developed an older version of the *Huangting jing* that came from a different geographical and sociological context and changed it to fit the needs of his patrons. He expanded the concept of the body gods considerably and interpreted practically all organs of the human body as populated by controlling deities. He further cast this divine community into a hierarchical structure.

## The *Laozi zhongjing*

A more complex concept of body gods appears in a third source of the same period transmitted under different titles: *Laozi zhongjing* and *Zhugong yuli* 珠宮玉曆 (Jade Calendar of the Pearly Palace, in *Yunji qiqian* 18-19) (see Schipper 1979; 1995). The former refers to the fact that the text claims to have been composed by Laozi, the mythological author of the *Daode jing*. While the *Daode jing* divides into an "upper" and a "lower" section, the phrase "central scripture" here may indicate the idea of a "middle" section and thus place the text into the lineage of the *Daode jing*. While the title does not appear in an unambiguous context before the sixth century, the expression "central scripture" appears in the Laozi hagiography of the *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (Inner Explanation of the Three Heavens, DZ 1205), a Celestial Masters text of the early fifth century (Bokenkamp 1997, 4). It says: "[When Laozi] met Yin Xi, he bestowed upon him the upper, lower, and central scripture in one chapter [each]" (1.4a). Should this refer to the *Laozi zhongjing*, this would attest its existence in the early fifth century and be evidence for the text's reception within Celestial Masters' circles.

The second version of the title, *Zhugong yuli*, seems more original, given that in the last paragraph of this text there is a self-reference that calls it the “Jade Calendar of the Sun [and Moon] Together with the Mysterious Illustrations of the Divine Immortals in Fifty-five Sections.” The received text indeed comprises fifty-five sections in two chapters. However, the situation becomes more complicated because several reputable sources list more than one possibly related text. Thus Ge Hong’s *Baopuzi neipian* mentions both a *Laojun yuli zhenjing* 老君玉歷真經 (Perfect Scripture of Lord Lao’s Jade Calendar) as well as a *Yuli jing* 玉曆經 (Scripture of the Jade Calendar). Similarly, the *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 (Rules and Precepts for Worshipping the Dao, DZ 1125; dat. ab. 620) lists the following three titles: *Yuli jing* (Scripture of the Jade Calendar) in one chapter, *Lizang jing* 歷藏經 (Scripture of the Calendar Collection) in one chapter, and *Laozi zhongjing* (Central Scripture of the Old Master) in one chapter (4.7a; Kohn 1997, 91). It is not clear whether these are different titles of one text or whether any of them referred to the *Zhugong yuli*. Only the *Fengdao kejie* makes the connection to the *Laozi zhongjing*. Nor are there any clear citations of the text in early texts, so there is no clear *ante quem* point.

Still, the text contains a piece of information in its last section that may provide a *post quem* date. Laozi says: “I passed through the [ages of] the Qin [dynasty] (221-207 BCE) and of Xiang [Yu] (232-202 BCE) without appearing. On behalf of the Han [dynasty], I will appear in accordance with the Yellow Era” (2.22a; Schipper 1979, 77). Even during the Wang Mang interregnum, the Han dynasty was still considered the Red Era and the idea that it might be replaced with a Yellow Era did not appear until late in the second century CE. All this suggests that the text was compiled slightly before 200 CE. Schipper too regards the text as old—if not from the Later Han, then certainly from the third century (1979, 77). Maeda Shigeki, on the other hand, places it in the late fourth century (1988), while Suzanne Cahill sees it “perhaps [in] the fifth” (1993, 35).

Like both versions of the *Huangting jing*, the *Laozi zhongjing* is mainly concerned with the body gods. A fundamental difference, however, becomes obvious when examining the fourth deity of the text, the goddess Xiwangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West):

The *Scripture* says: The Queen Mother of the West is the primal pneuma of grand *jin*. Her surname is So-of-itself; her cognomen Ruling Thought. Below she governs the Mountain of Kunlun with its golden city walls in nine layers, its cloudy pneuma of the five colors, and its mountain passes tens of myriads of feet in height. On high, she governs the Northern Dipper and Floriate Canopy, beneath the Purple Chamber and Northern Chronograms.

Humans also have her. She resides in the center of a person’s right eye, where her surname is Grand Yin, her name Mysterious Radiance, and her aka

Supine Jade. A person must obtain the King Father<sup>8</sup> and the Queen Mother and guard them in his two eyes. Only then will he be able to practice pacing the void, observing and looking up, and with acute hearing and eyesight distinguish and recognize good and evil. Then he can cause to flow down the various deities, just as a mother thinks of her child, and as a child also thinks of its mother. The germinal essence and pneuma will obtain each other, and for a myriad generations he will prolong his stay.

Now as for a person's two nipples, they are the germinal pneuma of the myriad divinities, where *jin* and *yang* pour down and bubble up. Below the left nipple is the sun; below the right nipple is the moon. These are the residences of the King Father and the Queen Mother. Above they rule in the center of the eye and play on top of the head. They stop beneath the nipples and lodge in the purple chambers of the Scarlet Palace. This is the pneuma of *jin* and *yang*. (1.3ab; Cahill 1993, 35-36)

As this shows, the deities here exist in the human body, in specific locations on Earth, and in various constellations in the sky. Seen in the context of the whole scripture, this last aspect is more important: the deities are primarily heavenly and only secondarily move into residences within the human body which they leave as soon as one does not behave properly. Adepts, therefore, have to make sure that the deities actually take residence in their body—visualizing and actualizing them in meditation. As the text has: “[If] I wish to cultivate uprightness, I have to visualize the King Father of the East and the Queen Mother of the West” (1.2ab). Thus they can keep the gods.

The gods, moreover, can change their properties depending on whether they are in Heaven or in the body: Thus the Highest Great One, the father of the Dao, assumes the form of pure *qi* or “original pneuma” when in Heaven, but in the human body he “[has] a human head [on top of] a bird's body, his shape resembles that of a rooster with the five colors of a phoenix” (1.1a).

The relationships among the body gods in the *Laozi zhongjing* divide into two categories. One may be called the “family model,” the other the “model of administrative hierarchy.” As their names indicate, the King Father of the East and the Queen Mother of the West constitute a pair of parents. Their partnership is well attested in the iconographical record of the Han (Loewe 1979, 88): The King Father consists of *yang qi* while the Queen Mother is *yin qi*; the former rules over the terrestrial east while the latter governs the terrestrial west, and both form a sexual union that harmonizes all existing polarity. They are the universal pair, pure and simple.

Another pair consists of the Lord of the Dao, the highest ruler of Heaven and also identified as the Pole Star and key figure in the human body as well,

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<sup>8</sup> The King Father of the East is described in the previous entry as “the primal pneuma of blue *yang*, the precedent one of the myriad divinities, who resides at the magic island of Penglai in the Eastern Sea.”

plus his “spouse, the Jade Maiden of Mysterious Radiance of Greatest Yin. She wears dark yellow clothes with five-colored pearls. She is nine tenths of an inch tall” (1.4a). This couple is further joined by a baby, known as “the Perfect Man, Master Cinnabar. Little by little he grows [until he reaches the size of] your own body.” This baby serves as a key intermediary to the Lord of the Dao, calling him whenever he is in Heaven and causing him to descend into the adepts’ body. As the text says:

If you are able to concentrate on him (the infant), [you can] talk to him. He will then call [you, so that] you can ascend and visit the Lord of the Dao. He is the One. He drives a cloud carriage with pearls and jade and a team of horses of the “Nine Extremes [Heavens]”, at times he mounts six dragons in order to drive to the Earth.

As soon as they have made contact with the Lord of the Dao, adepts can visualize him at sunset or at midnight on the festivals of the Eight Nodes, (i.e., solstices, equinoxes, seasonal beginnings; Stein 1979, 70) as well as on the first and fifteenth days of each month. Then they say the following prayer:

I wish to obtain a long life. [You,] the One of Greatest Mystery, preserve my, so-and-so’s, body. My lord Marquis of the five organs, grant my wish for everlasting peace. (1.4a)

While this chant invokes the Lord as a father and within family relations, the gods also work in a model of administrative hierarchy. For example:

The *Scripture* says: The eight deities of the lungs are [civil] lords of great harmony. They are [also] called the office of the secretary of the Palace of Jade Perfection. They have 3,600 supporting officials. They drive carriages of white cloud-pneumas, harnessed by white tigers. Sometimes they mount white dragons.

The eight deities of the heart are [military] defenders-in-chief. They are [also] called the originally light [ones], the old men of the ultimate beginning of the Scarlet Palace. They have 3,600 supporting officials. They drive carriages of red cloud-pneumas, with red birds as canopies and cinnabar snakes as handles, harnessed by red birds. Sometimes they mount red dragons. (1.17b-18a; Homann 1971, 35-36)

This passage shows the religious adaptation of the bipartite administration in a civil and a military arm and its projection into the human body. However, here the 3,600 “supporting officials” are not further differentiated according to hierarchical ranks.

Altogether the various scriptures show that the idea of body gods was widespread in Chinese religion from as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, a fact further corroborated by their mention in the apocrypha:

When you lie down at night, call them (the gods of hair, ears, eyes, nose, and teeth) three times. If you are in trouble, call them nine times and the evil demons will leave. (*Longyu betu* 龍魚河圖; Yasui and Nakamura 1971, 6: 93)

A key function of the *fu*, then, as noted by Tao Hongjing, was their ingestion “in order to call and inform the body gods.” A Daoist *fu*-tally, formally written out and burnt would be taken into the body either mixed in water or as a pill with honey. Connecting there to the relevant god or goddess, the ingested *fu* would there combine with the half held by the deity and, if both parts matched perfectly, the god would consider the bearer a legitimate partner and allow him or her to present a request.

## Prayer

In whichever format, the presentation of a *fu*-tally is only the first step when communicating with the gods. Just as in the world of civilian and military administration where, after combining both halves of a *fu*, the request or order was transmitted orally, so in the religious realm identifying or legitimating a person represented only the first act. The second step consisted in informing the gods about the problem at issue, using an appropriate format. This may have been done silently, vocally, or in writing, as in the case of the prayer accompanying the *fu* deposited in the Han tomb in Shaojiagou. The latter possibility, however, seems to have been restricted to “grave communications.” Secret and silently uttered, prayers (*mizhu* 祕祝) were the more common form. As the *Baopuzi neipian* says, citing the *Taiping jing*:

While entering the mountain you should know the Six Jia Secret Prayer. It goes like this: “May the warrior chiefs be my vanguard!” This nine-word prayer must be constantly recited in secret. It means, “May all evils flee me and the essential procedures present no trouble.” (Wang 1985, 303; Ware 1966, 287)

Another example for a whole apotropaic ritual, including the presentation of a *fu* and the accompanying secret prayer appears in the writings of Highest Clarity as collected around by Tao Hongjing. Tao belonged to a clan long allied to the Xus by marriage, who succeeded in assembling a substantial corpus of the early texts as well as a “number of transcripts by other hands of matter apparently belonging to the same series of revelations” (Strickmann 1977, 4). In 492, he retired to Maoshan 茅山 near Jurong to edit and annotate these texts, as well as to comment on the “discontinuous portions of the revealed materials, namely the auricular instructions and fragmentary poetic effusions dictated nightly to Yang by his celestial visitors” (Strickmann 1977, 4). The resulting collection

was called *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected, DZ 1016; dat. 499), which

[...] divides into seven books (with a further subdivision into 20 *juan*), of which the first five (j. 1-16) chiefly contain the revealed word of the Perfected. The sixth is devoted to letters, memoranda, and records of dreams written by Yang and the Xu themselves, while they still dwelt in the world of men. The texts contained in these first six books are all accompanied by Tao's running commentary. The seventh book of the *Zhen'gao* is Tao's own editorial postface, comprising a meticulous account of the manuscript components of the work, Tao's reconstruction of their textual history, and a reasoned genealogy of the Xu family. (Strickmann 1977, 4)

According to this, Xu Mi once received in a nightly visit the youngest Mao brother, a major deity of Maoshan, who advised him on how to behave after having dreams that are presages of sepulchral plaints:

Whenever you have this dream, after waking face directly upwards, click your teeth three times, and say the following incantation:

"Perfect Man of Lofty Plainness of the Nine Capitals in the Purple Heaven of the Upper Mystery of the Grand Primordial who Commands Spirit Souls and Protects Lives—I wear [the *fu* of] the Supreme Law, and have received the Teachings of Great Mystery. [May I enjoy] life everlasting and eternal vision, [may] my spirit fly up to embody transcendence. Let the sepulcher and tomb be forever safe, the demonic suit's perniciousness be blocked, the spirit- and material-souls harmonious and joyous, and prevent evil vapors from arising. If roaming goblins or nasty demons dare to trouble my spirit, let the Northern Monarch arrest them, gather in their vapors and throw them into the abyss. Having received the registers of the Supreme Augustus, I respectfully memorialize the Jade Purgation."

Repeat the incantation, then, click your teeth together three times once more. Then you will no more dream of tombs and spirits of the dead of your household. This is a secret incantation of the Northern Monarch. Anyone who has a mind to use it may practice it. If anyone frequently has evil dreams of the inauspicious, he can follow this method and the demonic vapor will be destroyed and the evil demons disappear. (Nickerson 1996, 273)

The main part of the ritual consists of a prayer, divided into three segments: the adept's address to the Perfected of Lofty Plainness with his full name; the act of legitimation vis-à-vis the divinity, during which the adept states that he wears the appropriate *fu* of "superior law," which means one authorized by Highest Clarity; and the request proper.

While the character *fu* does not appear in the text, it does use the word *pei* 佩 which means "to wear at the waist," an action usually associated with *fu*. Thus the *Zhen'gao* says: "He wears the '*fu*-tally of the divine tiger' at his waist" (5.1b). Further legitimation is also offered by the statement about having "received the Teachings of the Grand Mystery," which shows that the petitioner

was properly educated and had the right ritual standing. *Fu* would have formed an essential part of this education and position.

The text moves on to present additional information concerning the ritual. Thus “secret prayers” are not “prayers kept secret and not passed on to others,” but silently voiced ones. As the text has: “This is a secret incantation of the Northern Monarch. Anyone who has a mind to use it may practice it.”

## Conclusion

That two parties when interacting with each other had to legitimize themselves by means of various sorts of tallies also applied to religious contexts. The ruler who on an inspection tour in his realm wanted to contact the local gods, the spirit-mediums wishing to communicate with the gods of their area, the Daoist priests who tried to cure sick members of their community by asking the gods for help in expelling the disease-creating demons—they all had to present their tallies first. Not visible to the human beings the gods matched the “earthly” parts with their “heavenly” parts of the *fu*. If both parts tallied exactly, the gods were prepared to listen. Then, in a second act, the human “partners” expressed the matter as secret prayers to the gods (or demons in funerary *fu*). It was then within the gods’ discretion to act on behalf of those seeking help. For the first time, it is now possible to explain the phenomenon of tallied water. As certain gods residing within the human body can also be asked for help, the *fu* has to be brought to their attention by ingesting it in a suitable form.

# Petitions



## Chapter Four

### Petition Rituals

The presentation of a *fu*-tally and the matching of its complementary halves were soon adopted into Chinese religion. Before asking the gods to keep evil influences at bay or to exorcize any demons, Daoist priests had to present the earthly half of a *fu*-tally in what should by all rights be a formal administrative act. Now, if Daoist ritual at this level was indeed an administrative procedure, there should be more Daoist (or other religious) rituals emulating the civic and military administration.

A first instance appears in Ge Hong's *Shenxian zhuan*. Liu Gen, a Daoist immortal said to have lived in the early years of the Common Era,<sup>1</sup> was sought out by various magistrates and prefects. Under Wang Mang, an epidemic broke out in the prefecture and many people died, including members of the prefect's family. Upon request Liu advised them to perform a certain ritual which led to the end of the epidemic. Later, a succeeding prefect by the name of Zhang who considered Liu a trickster, ordered him to appear before the local court. The text has:

The entire district remonstrated with Zhang on Liu's behalf, but Zhang would not drop the orders. The bailiffs reached Liu, intending to order him to return with them, but Liu would not comply. Then Zhang's envoy reached Liu and invited him to return. Liu replied. "What does Commandant Zhang want with me, that he sent you all here? I fear that if I do not go back with you, you will all be accused of not daring to come here to summon me." (*Taiping guangji* 10.67; Campany 2002, 241-242)

Liu Gen thus went to the commandant's office that day. When he arrived, the offices were filled with visitors. The narrative continues:

Commandant Zhang ordered over fifty men brandishing swords and pikes to tie Liu up and stand him at attention. Liu's face showed no change in color. The

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of his life appears in *Hou Hanshu* 82B.2746 (DeWoskin 1983, 82-83; Ngo 1976, 137-138).

commandant interrogated him: "So, do you possess any arts of the Dao?" The answer was: "Yes."

The commandant asked: "Can you summon ghosts?" "I can."

"Since you can," said the commandant, "you will bring ghosts before this chamber bench at once. If you do not, I will have you tortured and killed."

Liu replied: "Causing ghosts to appear is quite easy."

Liu then performed a ritual of submitting a memorial which effected the apparition of a large number of ghosts:

Liu Gen borrowed a brush and an ink stone and composed a memorial (*you an* 奏案). [In an instant,] a clanging sound like that of bronze or iron could be heard outside. Then came a long whistling sound, extremely plaintive. All who heard it were awestruck; the visitors all shook with fear.

In another moment, an opening several dozen feet wide appeared in the south wall of the chamber, and four or five hundred armored troops could be seen passing orders down the lines. Several dozen crimson-clad swordsmen then appeared, escorting a carriage straight through the opened wall into the chamber.

Even more surprising than the appearance of the host of ghosts is that Liu gave orders to these supernatural beings:

The opened wall then returned to its former state. Liu Gen ordered the attendants to present the ghosts. With that, the crimson-clad guards flung back the shroud covering the carriage to reveal an old man and an old woman tightly bound inside. They hung their heads before the bench.

Upon examining them closely, the commandant saw that they were his deceased father and mother. Shocked and dismayed, he wept and was completely at a loss. The ghosts reprimanded him, saying: "When we were alive, you had not yet attained office, so we received no nourishment from your salary. Now that we are dead, what do you mean by offending a venerable official among divine transcendents and getting us arrested? After causing such a difficulty as this, aren't you ashamed even to stand among other people?"

This passage is remarkable for several reasons. For one, the spiritual like the human world has military personnel, including armored troops and swordsmen. For another, Liu Gen composed a petition or memorial to establish contact with the spirit world and through this made the divine troops appear with their captives.

Another memorial (*you* 奏) appears in the *Yiyuan* 異苑 (Garden of Marvels; ed. Ming dynasty<sup>2</sup>), compiled by Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (fl. 418-471). It says:

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<sup>2</sup> The text appears in official catalogues only before the Tang, indicating that it was lost. The Ming edition by Hu Zhenheng 湖震亨 appeared in 1588 or 1589, during the Wanli period (1573-1620), notorious for the compilation of fragments of famous lost works. An-

As regards the shrine of Wu Yuan, the Minister of Wu, during the Yongjia reign period (307-312), a native of Wujun [had an] uncle who was “secretarial court gentleman” in Luoyang. When the capital was overthrown and he returned [home], the roads were blocked up [by invaders]. When he had to cross the [Yangtze] river, due to southerly winds he could not advance. He then threw in a memorial (*tou zhou* 投奏) and on the same day he could ferry. (*Yiwen leiju* 79.1349)

Although the precise content of either memorial remains unclear it seems that they must have contained a formal request for help.

A clear example occurs in an important sixth-century compilation, Tao Hongjing's *Dengzhen yinjue*, which, besides some old sources preceding the Highest Clarity revelations, contains textual materials the immortals and deities had revealed to Yang Xi. Tao did not want to include this in his *Zhen'gao* since, due “to the esoteric nature of much of its contents, it was not intended for general diffusion” (Strickmann 1979, 140). Unfortunately, the received version in three scrolls is but a fraction of the original in twenty-four (Robinet 1984, 2: 347-351).

The third scroll has parts of the biography of Wei Huacun 魏華存 (251-334), formally known as Lady Wei of the Southern Peak, Grand Sovereign of the Purple Void and Superior Perfected [Immortal] Directress of Destinies.<sup>3</sup> In her earthly life, Lady Wei had been an active member of the Celestial Masters, reaching the leading rank of libationer (*jijiu* 祭酒) and thus participating in various rituals of “submitting a petition” (*shang zhang* 上章, *zhou zhang* 奏章), the functional equivalent of the memorial.

Presented in the form of oral instructions by the legendary first Celestial Master, Zhang Daoling, the ritual basically asked relevant celestial officials to help an endangered community member in distress (see Cedzich 1987; Nickerson 1997; Verellen 2004). The person in question was assumed to have committed a transgression which was being punished by demons who had caused the sickness or other problems. To remedy the situation, the supplicant had to identify and confess his or her bad deeds and sincerely and formally repent them. Then a priest would inform the divine officials about the problem and its probable cause by means of a petition.

As Tao Hongjing's says: “This means that, [whenever] a fierce malady occurs suddenly, invite Lord Tianchang and others as listed below [by means of]

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other example is the *Shenxian zhuan* (see Bumbacher 2000b; Penny 1996; Campany 1996, 78-80; 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The *Wei furen zhuan* 魏夫人傳 (Life of Lady Wei), also called the *Nanyue furen zhuan* 南嶽夫人傳, *Nan zhen zhuan* 南真傳, and *Wei zhuan* 魏傳 (*Zhen'gao* 19.2b, 7.10b, 12.5b, 20.4a), was composed by the immortal Fan Mao 范邈 (*Zhen'gao* 7.10b) on request of her master Wang Bao 王褒. Now lost, fragments appear in the *Taiping yulan*; a summary in *Yunji qiqian* 106.1a-8a; and a reconstruction in *Taiping guangji* 58.356-359. See Robinet 1984, 2: 399-405.

submitting a petition begging for relief” (*Dengzhen yinjue* 3.11b; Cedzich 1987, 123). If they found the supplicant worthy of support, the divinities, such as Lord Tianchang, would then order the relevant demons to stop their harmful activities. The ritual work, moreover, usually took place in a previously set-up room, the so-called quiet chamber or “oratory” (*jingshi* 靜室).<sup>4</sup>

## The Quiet Chamber

The quiet chamber is first mentioned as part of Celestial Masters’ practice in various fifth-century sources, such as Lu Xiujing’s *Daomen kelue* 道門科略 (Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community, DZ 1127; see Nickerson 1996), the 6<sup>th</sup>-century *Xuandu lüwen* 玄都律文 (Statutes of the Mysterious Capital, DZ 188; see Kohn 2004, 24-49), and the *Zhen’gao* (ch. 18).<sup>5</sup> They assert that it was one of the institutions Zhang Xiu 張修 adopted from Zhang Jue 張角 of the Way of Great Peace in the late second century. Yu Huan’s 魚豢 *Dianlue* 典略 (Outline of Records; lost, only fragments extant) of around 270 records:

[Zhang] Xiu’s methods were by and large identical with [those of] [Zhang] Jue (i.e., *fu*-tallies and confessions),[but] in addition he installed quiet chambers and made those who were sick dwell in them and think about their transgressions. (*Sanguo zhi* 8.264)

Zhang Xiu’s methods were further taken over by Zhang Lu, the alleged grandson of the first Celestial Master, between 188 and 191. As the *Dianlue* notes: “When Jue was put to death and Xiu was killed, Lu became chief in Hanzhong. Because his people trusted and practiced Xiu’s methods, he increased and adorned them” (*Sanguo zhi* 8.264).

More than the mere mention of the chamber Yu Pu’s 虞溥 *Jiangbiao zhuàn* describes its uses. The text was written before 322 and submitted to Emperor Yuandi of the Jin dynasty (r. 317-322) by his son Yu Bo 虞勃 (*Jinshu* 82.2141). It records that around the year 200 a certain Yu Ji 于吉 from Langye went to

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese expressions for “oratory”, “quiet chamber”, “meditation hut”, “meditation chamber”—all synonyms—include *jingshi* 靜室, 靖室, as well as *jingshe* 靜舍, 精舍.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the DZ edition, the *Xuandu lüwen* appeared in two editions under the Song (of 8 and of 15 chs.; see van der Loon 1984, 98). Fragments and citations are scattered through Tang works such as the *Sandong zhuàn* 三洞朱囊 (Bag with the Pearls of the Three Grottos, DZ 1139) and *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* 要修科儀戒律鈔 (Important Documents on Cultivating Ritual and Discipline, DZ 463). An early version must have existed during the Liang, as Tao Hongjing cites it in his *Dengzhen yinjue* (see *Taiping yulan* 667.5a).

For studies of the quiet chamber, see Eichhorn 1954; Chen 1963; Stein 1963; Yoshikawa 1987; Bumbacher 2000a: 478-82.

“Wuhui (west of present-day Shanghai) and built a quiet hut [for meditation], burnt incense, recited Daoist scriptures, and made ‘tallied’ water (*fushui* 符水) to cure diseases. Many of the local people served him” (*Jiangbiao zhuan* as cited in *Sanguo zhi*, Wu 1.1110). It therefore seems that in the late Han and early Jin dynasties, Daoists used simple huts for fasting and spiritual exercises, such as reflecting on transgressions, burning incense, reciting scriptures, and producing “tallied” water for the sick.

Lu Xiujing finds the huts used excessively. He says:

Today, many who have received the Dao do not have a proper quiet chamber. Rather, they merely mark a piece of ground with a railing and call it a parish-altar (*zhiitan* 治壇). But even there they do not cut the grass and [thus] offend Heaven. Or they set up an open shack which does not even have doors [so that] the six domestic animals roam and dwell [in it] and dung and dirt reach to their knees. Others yet may call a facility “quiet chamber,” yet use it to store miscellaneous family goods and hastily rush in and out, with rats and dogs staying there. (*Daomen kelue* 4b-5a; Cedzich 1987, 64; Nickerson 1996)

According to this, the quiet chamber was a common institution, part of every proper Celestial Masters household, where personal religious needs were satisfied and a senior master could perform the ritual of sending petitions to Heaven for curing sick family members (Cedzich 1987, 65-105). For example, the biography of Wang Ningzhi 王凝之 (d. 399) says:

As the Wang family had served the Five Pecks of Rice tradition for many generations, Ningzhi too was completely earnest [in these matters]. During Sun En’s attack of Kuaiji (in 400; Eichhorn 1954, 344-346), an associated clerk (?) begged him to prepare for his (Sun’s) arrival, but Ningzhi did not comply. Instead, he entered the quiet [chamber] and prayed. He issued the words [to] all [spiritual] generals (*jiangzuo* 將佐), saying: “I beseech the Great Dao to send demon soldiers to help me so that the rebels may be destroyed.” (*Jinshu* 80.2130)

Not only impromptu prayers for succor but also formal rituals were performed in the quiet chamber. The *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi* 上清黃書過渡儀 (Highest Clarity Observances for Salvation through the Yellow Book, DZ 1294), probably from the fifth century, describes sexual rites of passage supervised by the parish master occurring in such locations (see Kalinowski 1985, 782; Kobayashi 1992; Raz 2008). The chamber, moreover, was laid out to clear specifications:

The *Statutes* say: Any leader among the male and female officers, when they register disciples enter the quiet chamber at the times of heavenly virtue, make sure they are ranked properly and enter their respective parish halls. An oratory used by the people should be 8 feet long and 10 feet wide.

A parish hall should be 12 feet long and 14 feet wide. A large parish hall can even be 16 feet long and 18 feet wide. The front and main door should face east, and a stove should be placed in its very center. Anyone going against this statute

will be punished by a 1-period reduction in reckoning. All should always be set up as discussed in the dignified statutes of the Covenant. (*Xuandu linwen* 15ab; Kohn 2004, 42)

The *Statutes of the Mysterious Capital* says: “Daoist families who have established quiet chambers, on days containing [the stems] *jia*, *yi*, *bing*, and *ding*, should enter it.” (*Yaoxin keyi jielü chao* 10.4b)

Lu Xiujing further specifies:

The chamber should be completely separate and not connected with other buildings. Its interior should be pure and empty, not cluttered with superfluous things. When opening and closing the door, do not recklessly bang it or rush out. Sprinkle, sweep, purify, and revere the space, thinking of it as a dwelling for spirits. Only place four objects inside: an incense burner, an incense lamp, a table for petitions, and a writing-knife. (*Daomen kelue* 4b; also *Zhen’gao* 18.6b-7b)

The peace and purity of the quiet chamber stand in marked contrast to the pomp and eccentricity of the shrines of ordinary people.

The quiet chamber first mentioned in the *Taiping jing* as a “straw hut” and developed into a religious hall by Zhang Xiu in the late Han thus became a key place of Daoist worship during the period of division. Ideally part of the compound of every family venerating the Dao, i.e., members of the Celestial Masters, it served as a private chapel and was also used on Maoshan by members of the Xu family, thus integrating it into Highest Clarity (see *Zhen’gao* 20.9b).

## Preparation

When a Daoist follower decided he needed a petition submitted to the gods and had found a suitable Daoist priest within his parish to perform the ritual, the first step was for the priest to enter the quiet chamber and prepare the ground by paying homage to the incense burner and the divinities of the four cardinal directions. This was the same rite as was a ceremony every Celestial Masters priest performed twice a day, in the morning and evening (*Dengzhen yinjue* 3.6a), patterned on the audiences at the imperial court and continued in the morning and evening services in Daoist temples today. Wei Huacun’s biography describes it as follows:

When one enters the quiet chamber, first look at the incense burner and pray in spirit:

“Supreme Ancient Lord of the Mysterious Origin and the Four Directions:  
Please call the messengers of the Department of Labor [of the divine administra-

tion],<sup>6</sup> the Dragon and Tiger Lord at your left and right, the gentlemen who carry incense and the upright spirits of the three *qi*. Have them swiftly ascend to inform the Supreme Lord of the Mysterious and Original Dao in the Three Heavens that I am burning incense here and now, to pay a visit to the spirits after entering the quiet chamber. Please, may the true *qi* of the eight directions come and enter my body so that my plea may be heard quickly and be brought before the Heavenly Emperor.”

This concluded, burn incense and perform the rite. (*Dengzhen yinjue* 3.6b-7b)

The term Department of Labor, part of the Han imperial administration, already indicates just to what degree the Celestial Masters imagined the spirit world as an organization similar to the imperial government on Earth.

After addressing the gods in this preliminary fashion, the priest next bowed to the deities residing in the four directions and asked them to forgive all trespasses, keep away all evil and noxious influences, and restore good health. Again, the key mode of operation was administrative. The priest then said:

I request to inform the Celestial Master, the Female Master, the Master of the Lineage, and the clerks, lords, and agents of the chancellery of the Three Preceptors<sup>7</sup> and wish to obtain that the three *qi* of Correct Unity may nourish my body and spirit. May they cause my five organs to blossom and my six viscera to circulate *qi*. May they expel calamities in all directions on my behalf, relieve misfortunes and suffering [due to sins of my ancestors of] seven generations, allow me to live long, continue for a long time, and become a flying immortal.

[This prayer] concluded, again bow twice. (*Zhen'gao* 3.8a)

In a similar way the priest prayed to the gods of the four directions, concluding each prayer with a kowtow and, in a general gesture of penitence, by slapping his face several times. Yet, the text does not make it clear whether this preparation involved only the priest or also the supplicant. It does note that after the affair and before leaving the chamber, the officiant has to honor the incense burner one more time (*Zhen'gao* 3.8a-10a).

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<sup>6</sup> The Department of Labor (*gong cao* 功曹) forms part of the imperial administration. It includes “staff agencies in regions (*zhou*), commanderies (*jun*), and districts (*xian*) in charge of assembling and overseeing labor gangs as needed [...]. Usually headed by Administrative Clerks (*shuzhuo*) in regions, Scribes (*shi*) in commanderies, and Administrators (*yuanshi*) in districts” (Hucker 1985, 296#3489).

<sup>7</sup> The chancellery translates *menxia* 門下, “lit., at the gate, denoting service at the palace; used as a prefix to various titles indicating a relationship with the imperial palace; [...]. May also be encountered as an abbreviation of *menxia sheng* (chancellery)” (Hucker 1985, 328#3934). The Three Preceptors (*sanshi* 三師) are a “collective reference to the eminent central government dignitaries known in other periods from antiquity as the Three Dukes (*sangong*): Grand Preceptor (*taishi*), Grand Mentor (*taifu*), and Grand Guardian (*taibao*)” (Hucker 1985, 401#4904).

## Petitioning the Gods

The petition proper, then, occurred in a series of formalized steps. As Peter Nickerson outlines it:

First, incense was to be burned. The brush and ink used were to be reserved only for petitions (and perhaps the copying of scriptures); they certainly were not to be employed for worldly tasks (see *Zhen'gao* 3.12b).

The text of the petition had to be treated with great care: it was to touch neither the surface of the petition table (a cloth was placed over the table), nor one's own clothing, nor the ground. During the writing, the brush was not to be dipped in water or placed in one's mouth.

Elaborate rules specified the size and spacing of characters on the page—words like demon and death, for instance, could not appear at the top of a line—and limits were placed on the number of corrections that could be made in the text: three characters only in the case of a short petition (see *Chisong zhi zhang li* 2.3b-4a). (1997, 251-252)

Ideally, the text of the petition should not touch on more than three subjects: the supplicant's disease or difficulty and its probable cause; his or her formal expression of repentance for relevant transgressions; and the request to the relevant celestial officials for help and exorcism. Which deity was relevant constituted a serious issue as much as the proper amount of remuneration for the god's services. To find the right addressee, the priest used an old manual that in its earliest form goes back to the Celestial Masters of the second century.<sup>8</sup> Remuneration was decided among priest and family and depended on the rank of the deity needed.

According to the *Dengzhen yinjue*, in matters of minor importance only the name and title of the officiating libationer had to be written in red ink. In urgent matters, and matching the practice of the imperial administration, both the head and the tail of the document, consisting of sender, date of writing, and precise address, had to be written in red: "If in an urgent matter [one is to] submit a petition, one ought to use red to write the text" (3.11b). Tao Hongjing comments:

This means that whenever a fierce malady occurs suddenly, whoever invites Lord Tianchang and other deities as listed below with a petition begging for relief ought to write in red [ink]:

"I, of the [parish of] the Peaceful Energy of Correct Unity of Mysterious Capital of [the Heaven of] Highest Clarity, affiliated with the Celestial Master so-and-so, as libationer of the governing *qi*, by name of so-and-so, your humble servant."

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<sup>8</sup> Citations of this manual survive in the *Dengzhen yinjue* and elsewhere, e.g., the *Qianer bai guan yi* 千二百官儀 (Manual of the 1200 Officials). See Cedzich 1987, 35-41.

After the text proper, place tiny characters for “Great Clarity” together with your, the humble servant’s family name and the location you belong to as well as the day, month, and year [of the petition], followed by “[addressed to] the staff units<sup>9</sup> of the Three Heavens.” All this should be written in red. Then the whole document can be memorialized and brought to notice. It is just like today’s red-marked credentials (*jū*) for urgent business of the Ministry of Rites.<sup>10</sup> (3.11b)

In between these formally prescribed sections, the petition itself opened very formally, closely resembling official documents addressed to functionaries of the imperial administration. Unlike the *Dengzhen yinjue*, which does not preserve entire petition texts, relevant materials appear in the *Chisong zǐ zhāng lì* 赤松子章曆 (Master Redpine’s Almanac of Petitions, DZ 615), a Tang compilation that may contain materials going back as far as the fourth century (see Cedzich 1987, 15-18; Nickerson 1997). It says that after the full religious title of the priest, the text should say:

We address our superiors:

Now, so-and-so of such-and-such region, district, township, and village has provided a full statement in which he has said that the auspices of his house are in disastrous decline and the members of his household have been burdened with successive illnesses. Their activities are unprofitable; their dwelling is unquiet. (5.19a; Nickerson 1997, 261)

After this introduction which identifies the priest and the supplicant and outlines the problems to be remedied and the purpose of the document, the text moves on to state the assumed cause for the issues. Often it was that one or the other ancestor had to stand trial in the nether world and was taking revenge on the living. In this case the petition was to relieve the effects of a “sepulchral plaint” (*zhongsong* 塚訟):

Now, judging by the appearance of the situation, one might seek out the [plaint’s] roots in a rough fashion. One must suspect that, among his ancestors to the seventh generation, or his forebears to the ninth, among his close relatives or his near kin, [there was someone who,] since when alive his or her trespasses were excessive, after death became subject to all manner of inquisitions and punishments. His descendants having yet to redeem him, in the darkness he is crying out bitterly. (5.19a)

<sup>9</sup> “Staff” translates *cao* 曹, “throughout history a common generic term for specialized units among which the clerical or administrative staffs of larger agencies were distributed, found at all levels of government, in the military as well as the civil service” (Hucker 1985, 520#6916).

<sup>10</sup> *Yangguan* 陽官, “variant reference to the Ministry of Rites (*chunguan*)” (Hucker 1985, 576#7882).

But it is also possible that no former trespasses committed by remote ancestors are to be blamed and that instead a dead relative feels disturbed in the tomb or that someone died a premature or violent death, thus causing troubles:

Perhaps it is a plaint over burial on a spring, or over a funeral's having encroached on a god's temple. Perhaps it is a plaint over a grave having been dug into a cavern, or over a coffin having been damaged. Perhaps it is a plaint over old sepulchers lying atop one another, or new sepulchers striking against one another. The months and years having passed long away, the heirs would be unaware [of the problem] [...].

Then again, maybe it is a plaint over drowning in water, or being burned by fire, or wounding with vermin, or poisoning with drugs. Perhaps it is a plaint over weapons and imprisonment, or plague and ulcers. Perhaps there are paternal uncles or brothers, or paternal aunts, nieces, nephews, or sisters, infecting each other in succession and causing calamities and harm. (3.19b)

In those cases where the nether world has not been able to identify the malefactor it was apparently also possible that the divinities chose those to be punished “at random.” As the text notes:

Once there is deception and calumny and [the culprit] is not called to account, the Mansions of Feng[du] (the palace in the far north, where the souls of the unsanctified dead are confined) will make their indictment arbitrarily. However, the *Mysterious Statutes* may yet send down their beneficence, and [the issue of responsibility for] the trespass may still be pursued. (3.19b)

Once the petition had been written down, the priest proof-read it and prepared it for delivery to the heavenly deities. This involved another ritual, the “sending off” of the petition.

## Delivery

The first step was called “handing over the petition” (*cao zhang* 操章), another procedure adopted from the civil administration (Cedzich 1987, 89). The priest formally asked several divinities of the celestial administration in his body to take the petition and see that it safely went to the Most High in Heaven. After this, he added the address of the Most High Lord Lao with all his epithets (consisting of fifty-two characters) as well as the date of the event and the official destination: “Unit-staff of the Three Heavens.”

The next step consisted of sealing the document (*feng zhang* 封章), a step that later ritual masters, such as Jin Yunzhong 金允中 (fl. 1225), suggest should

actually come before the “handing over.”<sup>11</sup> The proper procedure is described in the *Chisong zhi zhang li*:

[Once the taking over] is concluded, one binds the scroll tightly and passes it through the smoke of the incense. Usually by means of an entire [piece of] paper one wraps [it] up. [Its] title reads: “Respectfully addressed at the Jade Throne of the Golden Gate of the Spontaneity of the Void.”

Below [it], one completely [writes one’s] ordination rank, [for example:] Grand Inspector of Merits, third grade,<sup>12</sup> Deputy of the Left-Wing Chancellery of the Pneuma of Peace [belonging to] the Peace of the yang-“Parish” of the Celestial Masters Connected to the Pneuma of Correct Unity of the Exalted Mysteriorious Capital; also Left-Wing Inspecting Libationer, True Person of the Original Mandate [possessing the register of] “Walking on the network of the red Heaven [according to the rules of] the three and five,” your servant so-and-so, respectfully seals [this petition]. (2.22ab)

Following this, the document was placed in an envelope to be tied and sealed:

Put [the petition] into an envelope and tie it with three green-blue silk-strings. Seal it with wax and apply the seal of the capital of the nine ancient immortals. Wrap it in a piece of green-blue paper and mark it with red [ink] at the top and bottom—never inverting the order. Close it at both ends, write the character “in-tact” in red ink on them, and finalize it with a seal.

The notice on the outer wrapper reads: “Having the honor to be a disciple of the Great Dao, I—with title, family name, and personal name so-and-so—on behalf of such-and-such matter beg permission to send such-and-such a petition in so-and-so many copies and with it respectfully approach the chancellery of the Three Heavens.”

The characters for “[I] beg permission [...]” ought to be written horizontally, the characters for “[I] respectfully approach [...]” [ought to] be written sideways. Next, indicate your ordination rank as before [and write]: “So-and-so has respectfully closed it.” The place of the last words cover with a seal.

Having thus readied the petition for delivery, the priest submitted it in an act of deep meditation to the throne of Lord Lao, accompanied by the officials of his own bodily administration, his body gods (see Bumbacher 2002). He kowtowed in front of his desk, visualized a red *qi* originating in his heart and moving up to Heaven, passing hundreds of miles in one instant. The deep red passageway formed by this *qi* was bordered by long rows of magnificent trees. The priest walking on this way of *qi* soon came across a yellow path made by the light of

<sup>11</sup> See his *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (Great Rituals of Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure, DZ 1223, 25.132b; Cedzich 1987, 93-94).

<sup>12</sup> This translates *duogong* 都功, the sixth of a total of twenty-four offices that formed the administration of Celestial Masters parishes (*zhi* 治). It was in charge of registering lower ranking officials based on merit as well as administering taxes and other duties of the membership. Cedzich 1987, 93n170, citing the *Xuandu liwen* according to *Sandong zhunang* 7.18a.

the sun and the moon. He continued his journey until, after five or six miles, he perceived a hazy purple shape in the distance which, upon approach, turned out to be Heaven's gate guarded by armed guards (*Chisong xi zhang li* 2.23b-24b; Cedzich 1987, 95-97).

Attended by his body god General Zhou and the divine official on duty, the priest entered the sacred precinct followed by his personal jade lad who was there specifically to deliver the petition and was holding it in his hands. In the western part of the gate tower, the priest paid respect to the Master of the Law of the Three Heavens and Correct Unity, i.e., Zhang Daoling. Kowtowing, he informed him about the particulars of the present case and entered the Heavenly Gate of the Phoenix Palace.

Soon an immortal dressed in red and wearing a dark cap, i.e., Grand Unity, approached the jade lad, took the petition from his hands, and carried it into the palace, where he temporarily deposited it, while the priest and his companions waited outside. Coming out of the palace Grand Unity guided the priest into the palace and to the throne of the Most High placed at the far end of the palace hall. The Most High was dressed in nine-colored clouds, wore the cap of ninefold virtue, and was attended by two Perfected. Grand Unity then took up the deposited petition and handed it over to the Most High who glanced through it. Grand Unity then received it back and, upon the Most High's request, displayed it at the jade steps of the throne of Great Clarity.

The officials then verified the formalities on the document, such as address, sender, ranks, etc., then had it taken to an official in the department on duty. The priest and his body god kowtowed before the Most High and retreated. Once outside of the palace, they took leave of Zhang Daoling. The priest clapped his hands and, together with the jade lad, jumped to return to the quiet chamber on Earth, praying that his petition shall be heard (Cedzich 1987, 96-97).

## Concluding Acts

The priest's emergence from the meditative state signaled the end of the submission ritual, but the actual paper of the petition was still physically there and had to be handled appropriately. In cases other than illness, the libationer handed the original to the client for inspection, expecting return immediately if the matter was of grave importance and within a few days in cases of lesser urgency. Also, sometimes the priest would make a copy and add it to his personal collection for future reference. In all cases, however, the original was stored in a sealed box until the tenth month of the following year when they would be ritually burned. The latter occasion again would require the invitation

of numerous divine officials to witness the proper incineration (*Tai<sub>zhen</sub> ke* in *Yaoxian keyi* 11.16b-17a).

In cases of illness, the priest would ask the supplicant to join him in the quiet chamber on the morning after the ritual. There he soaked the petition in water, then mixed it with cinnabar and honey, and finally gave it to the patient to ingest—very much like the use of *fu*-tallies in “tallied” water. This showed the demons in the patient’s body who had caused the disease that the highest authorities of Heaven were now informed of their misdeeds. This alone might scare them into leaving the body, even before the measures taken by the heavenly authorities came into effect. At the same time, the patient and his body gods would be strengthened by the gesture that assured them of Heaven’s impending intervention.

During all of these ritual acts the priest carried an audience tablet (*hu* 笏), adopted from ancient court ceremonies where officials used it for taking notes and orders when present before the king or emperor. However, as the priest was not supposed to receive divine instructions while submitting a petition, the paper that typically covered the tablet was unnecessary. Tao comments: “[The priest should] carry the audience tablet with both hands; it should not be wrapped in paper” (*Dengzhen yinjue* 3.7a). Still, the priest held on to his tablet. As the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites, ed. Shisan jing zhushu) describes it:

Audience Tablet: The Son of Heaven carries one made of *qiu*-jade; the feudal lords carry one made of ivory; the grand masters carry one made of bamboo ornamented with fish whiskers; the servicemen carry one made of bamboo with ivory.

Whoever had something to indicate or draw before the lord used the audience tablet and advanced; whenever somebody received a command before the lord, he wrote it on the audience tablet. Such was its use in these circumstances. It was ornamented in accordance with the bearer’s rank. The audience tablet was two feet and six inches long, its center was three inches wide, its ends were smaller by a sixth. (Couvreur 1950, I.2: 698-699)

Petition rituals formed part of Daoism from the beginning as documented in early sources, such as Yu Huan’s *Dianlue* and Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuàn*. For example, the *Sanguo zhi* notes about the followers of the Way of Great Peace:

The demon soldiers offered prayers for those who were sick. The method of offering prayers was: the surname and the personal name of the sick man were written down together with a declaration of his faults. Three copies were made; one was sent up to Heaven and displayed on a hill; one was buried in the ground and the other was thrown in the water. These were called “handwritten documents of the Three Offices.” (8.264)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The same account is also preserved in the commentary to *Hou Hanshu* 75.2436, see Michaud 1958, 78; Cedzich 1987, 61; Wu 1979, 7.

“Three Offices” (*sanguan* 三官) was another designation borrowed from the civil administration where it was a synonym for Three Dukes (*sangong* 三公), a term used from antiquity as a “collective reference to dignitaries who were officially considered the three paramount aides to the ruler and held the highest possible ranks in the officialdom” (Hucker 1985, 398#4866, 399#4871).

Another account appears in Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuàn*:

[Zhang Dao] Ling also wished to govern people by means of honesty and shame and did not like to make use of punishments. Thus he established a code causing those who had an illness to record the sins they committed since birth in a memorial (*shuji* 疏記) and compile a handwritten document to throw into water. They were to swear before the gods that they would never violate the laws again upon punishment of death.

Thereupon, the hundred families reckoned that whenever they unexpectedly met with a disease, they immediately ought to confess their transgressions. If it was only one, they would recover; if there were two sins, they would feel ashamed and be mortified and never dared to violate the laws again. Rather, fearing Heaven and Earth, they would reform. From this time onward, all those who had disobeyed changed and became good persons. (*Taiping guangji* 8.56; Campamy 2002, 351; Güntsch 1988, 137)

The ritual of “memorializing by means of a petition” thus emulated the secular administrative act of presenting a memorial or petition to an emperor—using the word “memorial” (*zou*) before the Han and the word “petition” (*zhang*) later, according to Nickerson (1997, 234). Alternatively, in the Daoist context *zou* may have designated the unsophisticated ritual to be performed in emergency cases—similar to the use of a *fu*-tally, as Liu Gen’s example at the beginning of this chapter showed. *Zhang*, in contrast, may have referred to the developed ritual whose importance and complexity grew as Daoists increasingly established a celestial administration and set up formal bureaucratic structures in their ritual system.

## Conclusion

Originally, the memorial may have served the Daoist to describe the problem she or he was facing and to ask the gods for help. In the context of the Celestial Masters’ tradition the Daoist priests, acting on behalf of the parish members, cast this simple act of informing the gods and requesting support into a highly sophisticated petition ritual modeled on a secular administrative procedure. They thereby assumed the officials’ role of messengers and also replaced the highest earthly authority, the emperor, by the heavenly authorities, the relevant gods.

## Chapter Five

### Daoist Bureaucracy and Registers

The “Great Petition of Sepulchral Complaints,” echoing the meditation manual *Laozi zhongjing*, included a whole range of divinities, each served by an entire army or at least accompanied by 120 “civil and military officials.” Daoists imagined the spirit world as a huge administrative system divided into civil and military wings, whose deities belonged to either section and were present both within the human body and in certain stellar constellations. For example:

The eight divinities of the lungs are the lords of great harmony, also called the [civil] officials of the imperial secretariat in the Palace of Jade Sincerity. They have 3600 personnel. They mount white-cloud carriages drawn by white tigers. Sometimes they mount white dragons.

The nine divinities of the heart are the [military] defenders-in-chief, also called Shining Prime, or the old men of the South Pole of the great beginning in the Red Palace. They have 3600 personnel. They mount red-cloud carriages with red birds as canopies and cinnabar snakes as railings. They are drawn by red birds. Sometimes they mount red dragons. (*Laozi zhongjing* 17b-18a; Homann 1971, 35-36)<sup>1</sup>

Patterning their world on the imperial administration of the Han, early Daoists yet did not follow their predecessors, the masters of recipes, and hoped to reform imperial politics by influencing the emperor with sacred scriptures like the *Taiping jing*. Rather, they felt that only a large-scale revolution could change the world. Anna Seidel described the efforts of the recipe masters as follows:

The very first mention of the Taiping movement in the annals shows that it was concerned with the figure of the emperor and with imperial rule. A book entitled “The Classic on Great Peace and on the Conservation of the Origin According to the Calendar Revealed by the Officers of Heaven” was presented to Emperor Cheng of the Former Han (32-7 BCE) by a certain Gan Zhongke from Qi. Its

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<sup>1</sup> The two offices are described in Hucker 1985, 410-11#5043, 216#2034, and 485#6261.

text had been revealed to him by Master Red Essence, a deity sent by the Celestial Emperor with the order to renew the mandate of the Han ruling house.

Because of his temerity, Gan Zhongke was imprisoned and done away with, but in 5 BCE his disciples were able to convince the ailing Emperor Ai of the necessity to change the name of the era into Taichu Yuanjiang (Initiation of the Grand Beginning) and to assume the title “August Emperor of Great Peace of the Liu [Family] Exalting Saintliness” so that “the Han State might obtain once more the token of the mandate.” Still in the same year, when Emperor Ai’s health deteriorated again, an imperial decree rescinded both charges. (1969b, 217-218)

## The Celestial Masters’ Organization

Unlike Daoists of the Way of Great Peace, who rose in rebellion in the *jiazi* year of 184 CE in Eastern China and were exterminated by imperial forces, the adherents of the Celestial Masters succeeded in establishing a theocratic regime in Hanzhong, which is today north-eastern Sichuan and south-western Shaanxi. Their administration lasted until 215, when the warlord Cao Cao conquered the region and the Daoist leader Zhang Lu “felt free to hail the ruler of the Wei dynasty as the new legitimate emperor sanctioned by Lord Lao” (Seidel 1969b, 227). During the thirty or so years of their rule, the Celestial Masters installed a bureaucratic administration that was, at least partly, modeled on the imperial Han bureaucracy. As the *Xuandu liwen* says: “The bestowal of the titles of parish offices and registers on male and female officials is comparable to the investiture of a king” (15b; Seidel 1983, 291; also Maspero 1971, 43-57).

Similarly, the *Laojun yinsong jiejing* 老君音誦誡經 (Scripture of Recited Precepts of Lord Lao, DZ 785), compiled in the environment of Kou Qianzhi, has: “Lord Lao says: Those who have received the registers of administration and their commandments should be treated by their disciples with the same respect and according to the same rites and regulations as the officials instituted by the secular administration” (9a; Seidel 1983, 332). In addition, Zhang Daoling, the first Celestial Master and a highly legendary personage (possibly invented by Zhang Lu for legitimation purposes), was allegedly visited by a heavenly being identified as Lord Lao who bestowed upon him a covenant between Heaven and himself. Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuan* says:

He entered Shu (Sichuan) and dwelled on Mount Crane Cry [...]. He meditated and refined his thoughts. Suddenly there appeared a heavenly personage, accompanied by a thousand chariots and ten thousand cavalry-men riding in a golden carriage with a feathered canopy. Those who rode dragons and strode on tigers were innumerable. At times he called himself the Scribe Below the Pillar (i.e., Laozi), sometimes he was called the Young Lad of the Eastern Sea. He bestowed upon Ling the Way of the Newly Issued Covenant of Orthodox Unity. When

Ling received it, he was able to cure diseases. (*Taiping guangji* 8.56; Campany 2002, 350-351; Kleeman 1998, 67; Güntsch 1988, 136)

Zhang's meeting the god on a mountain top and receiving a new covenant closely matches the highly prestigious imperial Feng and Shan 封禪 sacrifices performed by successful and ambitious rulers from Qin times onwards. Although most of that ritual was secret, there is an eye-witness' account of the Han Emperor Guangwu's ascent of Mount Tai in 56 CE and ritual performance (*Hou Hanshu* 7.3166-3167).<sup>2</sup> As Stephen Bokenkamp describes it:

The ultimate purpose of the Feng rite, then, was to enact the sealing of a new covenant between the emperor, one of whose titles was "child of Heaven," and Heaven, also called the "Thearch on High." The Shan rite was meant to actualize a similar covenant with the feminine divinity of Earth. Through this covenant, the position of humanity between Heaven and Earth was secured and the mediating status of a specific dynasty assured. (1996, 253)

From the context it is clear that Emperor Guangwu expected a "restoration" of his mandate to rule. Thus the official stele inscription of the year 56 cites the apocryphal text *Hetu buichang fu* 河圖會昌符:

The ninth [generation emperor] of the imperial [family] Liu will match [the tally of his] mandate [on Mount] Tai [with that of Heaven]; [if] he [knows to] use it in an honest and good way, debauchery and falsehood [will] not be sprouting. (*Hou Hanshu* 7.3165)

During the Feng and Shan sacrifices on Mount Tai the emperor expected to see auspicious omens or meet divine representatives of Heaven. They served to confirm and legitimate his rule—*feng* 封 meaning "to seal," that is to confirm the covenant between Heaven and emperor. Similarly Zhang Daoling's meeting with Lord Lao on Mount Crane Cry meant that Heaven legitimized him to "rule" over the new community of "Daoists" and possibly also as political authority over Hanzhong. Zhang thus became a legitimized sovereign, strengthened in this role by the declining central government. He duly changed the area's name from Hanzhong to Hanning 漢寧, made himself governor, and adopted the title Leader of Court Gentlemen [in charge] of Protecting the People (*zhenmin zhonglang jiang*) (*Sanguo zhi* 8.263).<sup>3</sup>

Having grown into a successful leader, Zhang Daoling organized his adherents. As the *Shenxian zhuan* says:

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Bokenkamp 1996; also translated by Bielenstein 1979, 172-179. The relevant part of the chapter dealing with this ritual was translated by Chavannes 1910, 158-169. Sima Qian's *Shiji* account of the Feng and Shan sacrifices was translated by Chavannes 1967, III: 413-519 and by Watson 1961, II: 13-69.

<sup>3</sup> For the title, see Hucker 1985, 191#1581.

Thereupon commoners flocked to serve him as their teacher. His disciples came to number several tens of thousands of households. He therefore established “libationers” to divide up and take charge of the households, just like government officials.

He also established a code by which his various disciples would on appropriate occasions contribute rice, silk, vessels, paper, brushes, firewood, and a variety of other goods. They would lead the people in repairing roads, and those who did not participate in the repairs he would cause to fall ill. If there were bridges or roads that should be built within the country, the commoners would cut weeds and clear out latrines; there was nothing they would not do, all at his initiative. (*Taping guangji* 8.56; also Company 2002, 351; Güntsch 1988, 136-137; see Kleeman 1998, 68)

Although the text claims that most of the Celestial Masters’ organization goes back to Zhang Daoling, it is more likely that it was only initiated by him and developed into its full form under his alleged grandson Zhang Lu. At the time, the infrastructure run by the central Han government, such as the system of postal relay stations along the major trade routes, was deteriorating and the ruling administration suffered from all sorts of internal problems. The Zhangs in contrast installed an efficient network of so-called Lodges of Righteousness (*yishe* 義舍) that at first competed with and later replaced the Han system. The *Sanguo zhi* characterizes these Lodges as “present-day *tingshuan* 亭傳” (8.263).

*Ting* 亭 under the Han was a “neighborhood, a unit in a sub-district (*xian* 縣) organization of the population,” and the base of a township (*xiang* 廂). It “performed local police functions and also maintained one or more postal relay stations (*youting* 郵亭), which among other things served as hostels for traveling officials” (Hucker 1985, 511#6747). *Zhuan* 傳 is probably short for *zhuanshe* 傳舍, a variant of *youting* and thus another name for relay station (see Hucker 1985, 587#8085, 186#1487). Travelers could stay there and eat free of charge, which was not only a convenient service but also presented the local administration in a good light (Eichhorn 1955, 319n90). Establishing such a system, the Zhangs followed the example of Han officials who, in their various commanderies, also erected such stations along the trade routes.<sup>4</sup>

As far as civil administration is concerned, the highest-ranking functionaries of the Celestial Masters not only had tasks comparable to those of government officials, but were even called by a title adopted from the imperial administration: libationers (*jiju* 祭酒). They were “heads of the top-echelon educational agency in the dynastic capital, the National University” (Hucker 1985, 130#542). It may well be that the Celestial Masters’ office of libationer existed prior to Zhang Lu (Kleeman 1998, 68), which means that it was established by

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<sup>4</sup> Stein names the prefect of Guiyang (at the border to Jiaozhi, Tonkin) as an example. According to *Hou Hanshu* 106, he set up a *tingshuan* in 26 CE (1963, 61).

Zhang Xiu and inherited by Zhang Lu in 191. Indeed, there is epigraphic evidence for this, especially an inscription of 173 which connects the libationers, of whom it mentions four by name, with the Celestial Masters and notes that, after receiving twelve scrolls of secret scriptures they “vowed to propagate the law of the Celestial Masters without limit” (Hong Gua, *Lixu* 3.8b; Kleeman 1998, 68-69; Stein 1963, 43).

Overall, the Celestial Masters’ administration consisted of four layers. The *Sanguo zhi* has:

When [Zhang] Lu hastened to Hanzhong, he educated the population in the way of the demons and called himself “lord of the masters.” Those who came to learn his way were initially all called “demon soldiers.” After they received his fundamental method and proved their faith, they were called “libationers,” each controlling an organized group [of followers]. Those who were in control of many adherents were “grand libationers and parish heads.” All instructed the people in honesty, faith, and not cheating or deceiving. (8.264; Ngo 1976, 52)

At the very top was Zhang Lu with the title Lord of the Masters (*shijun* 師君). Next came the libationers who replaced the imperial officials and each led a substantial group of adherents. If the community was large, the leader was a grand libationer and parish head (*zhitou da jijiu* 治頭大祭酒). There were, it seems, twenty-four of them. As Kleeman notes: “An administrative framework was set up for the church consisting of twenty-four *zhi* or administrative centers, commonly translated as “parishes.” Only three of these parishes were within the territory of Zhang Lu’s Hanzhong state. It is unclear how long the other parishes continued and to what degree they maintained administrative or religious ties to the Zhangs” (1998, 69).<sup>5</sup>

Within each parish, the libationer was responsible for managing the community and also running the Lodges of Righteousness. It is also quite possible that, as the *Sanguo zhi* suggests, they were in fact based in the Lodges from where they fulfilled their other tasks, such as guiding adherents in studying and reciting the *Daode jing* and maintaining proper ethical conduct (8.264). In this latter function they were called “directors against debauchery” (*jianling* 姦令). *Ling* here is another term adopted from the official Han administration, “throughout history one of the most common titles given to administrative or executive heads of agencies large or small” (Hucker 1985, 313#3733). They were also in charge of praying on behalf of the sick, in which role they were called “officers against specters” (*guili* 鬼吏) (Wei 8.264). This was the function in which they practiced the ritual of submitting a petition. Below them, the mass of common believers were called “demon soldiers” (*guizu* 鬼卒). At the

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<sup>5</sup> On the new role of the parish under the reformed Celestial Masters of Kou Qianzhi, see Bumbacher 2000a, 484-89.

base of the hierarchy were all other residents of the community who either did not belong to or did not want to belong to the tradition of the Celestial Masters.

In the fifth century, when Kou Qianzhi in the north and Lu Xiujing in the south set about to reform the organization, their model of an ideal Celestial Masters' administration again followed the imperial bureaucracy. The main concept was once more that the supernatural world was organized like the hierarchies on Earth. Not only were the gods, immortals, and demons integrated in a hierarchical framework and subject to promotion and demotion according to strict laws and statutes, the Most High also transmitted the regulations to human beings in times of disaster. This was the case when Zhang Daoling received his covenant. Taking into account what was still known about the administration of the early Celestial Masters in Hanzhong, Lu Xiujing says:

The Most High was appalled that things were like this and therefore gave to the Celestial Master [Zhang Daoling] the Way of the Covenant of Orthodox Unity with its prohibitions, vows, statutes, and codes, in order to regulate and instruct the myriad people.

As for contrariness and obedience, calamities and blessings—he made them know what was good and what was evil. He set up twenty-four “parishes” and thirty-six “chapels,” with female and male priests numbering 2,400. He sent down 10,000 sets of petitions to the 1,200 Celestial Officials, and credentials of punishment for attacking [popular] temples. He killed the demons and gave life to people. (*Daomen kelue* 1.1ab; Nickerson 1996, 352)

The Zhangs and their descendants were thus not only personally legitimized by a covenant between them and Heaven—like the emperor whose mandate was renewed by Heaven in the Feng and Shan sacrifices. They also claimed that their laws and statutes came directly from the divine. Just like the emperor who in his own understanding was the earthly representative of Heaven and the medium through which Heaven executed its will, the acting Celestial Master was Heaven's first servant on Earth, ruling over the population, instructing people to live according to Heaven's moral laws, and curing the sick by submitting petitions to the gods and administering “tallied” water and other remedies.

## Registers to Control People

In addition to prohibitions, vows, statutes, and codes that served to regulate the people, the Celestial Masters also made ample use of so-called registers (*lu* 錄 or 籙). These registers kept a record of each parish's members, on Earth as well as in Heaven. They were collated and corrected on special occasions throughout the year. Lu Xiujing notes:

Whenever the Celestial Masters set up parishes and establish offices, they are like the offices of the daylight world [of the imperial administration] in the commanderies, counties, cities, and prefectures that govern the people's affairs. Those who worship the Dao list their households and are entered in the records (*ji* 籍), each having a place to which he belongs.

On the seventh day of the first month, the seventh day of the seventh month, and the fifth day of the tenth month—the Three Assemblies—everybody among the people assembles in his own parish. The master revises the registers and records (*luji* 錄籍), removing the dead, entering the newborn, minutely authenticating the “number of mouths” [living in the parish], and correcting the roster of names. [...]

On that day the celestial officials and the terrestrial spirits all assemble at the master's parish and collate the documents. (*Daomen kelue* 1.2a; also Nickerson 1996, 353)<sup>6</sup>

Lu Xiujiing emphasizes the importance of this kind of “personnel accounting” and promises spiritual protection as a reward for proper book-keeping. He says:

The household registers of the Daoist codes are the auxiliary registers of the people. The “numbers of the mouths” of the male and female population should be entered. The [celestial] officials who guard the house will take the registers as correct and the household members, whether moving or resting, will always be protected.

In each of three seasons [at the Three Assemblies], one revises the registers. For this, there is a constant rule. Whether the numbers increase or decrease, the records are always changed. (1.3a; Nickerson 1996, 354)

The updating of the registers is essential because mistakes may have disastrous consequences. For one, the supernatural administration may punish a wrong person as the result of a trial in the nether world. For another, the sick person may not find the appropriate priest for the submission of a petition which is doomed to fail:

On the days of the Three Assemblies, the ten thousand spirits of the Three Offices [Heaven, Earth and Water] check their records against each other. If a new person has been added but the news is not sent up, the celestial bureaus will not have the name. If a person has gone but is not removed from the record, the roster of names will not be correct.

Sometimes someone marries and does not send up the news. Sometimes a woman is given in marriage, but is not removed from the records of her natal

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<sup>6</sup> These assemblies also served to educate the members. Lu Xiujiing suggests: “[The master] makes the people know the laws [...]. When the Assembly is over and the people have returned home, they should instruct old and young in the codes and prohibitions and the rituals they had heard and encourage them reverently to practice them. If this sort of transformation through the Dao is propagated, then there will be Great Peace for family and state” (1.2ab).

household. Thus one ends up with hundred-year-old boys and centenarian virgins. Those present and departed are mixed up, existence and nonexistence are not genuine.

Then a day comes when one falls ill and one does not go to one's original master but solicits another priest. The new priest makes no inquiries about the past and simply writes a petition [lacking vital information]. The ailing person was not previously registered, yet the present petition suddenly appears [in the celestial offices].

It will not be under the jurisdiction of the celestial officials who guard the house, nor will the first Three Celestial Masters take charge. The Three Heavens will lack a record, and the Department of Destiny will not have the correct name. In vain one shatters one's skull on the ground [from vigorous kowtowing].

Though there be a profusion of documents, since it was not done according to the proper rites, the Dao will not assist. How can one help but to give thought to a principle like this? (*Daomen kelue* 1.3ab; Nickerson 1996, 354)

The registers thus provided the necessary information concerning the relationship between parish members needed for the petitions submitted in cases of illness. All members were accounted for, since married-out daughters as well as newly married-in brides and other newcomers had to be registered as well.

The registers also served to tax the population or to have people “donate pledges,” as the text says. This matches the information in the *Shenxian zhuan* that Zhang Daoling established a system of having his adherents contribute five pecks of rice or their equivalent in silk, vessels, paper, brushes, firewood, and a variety of other goods. Lu Xiuqing accordingly emphasizes the importance of these duties:

As for the codes for receiving the Dao, the masters take the records of destiny as the root, and the people take the pledges as the chief matter. The masters set out the pledges for them and send the pledges up to the Three Heavens. They ask the celestial officials who guard the house to protect them from harm, ward off disasters, and dispel calamities in accordance with the population records. (*Daomen kelue* 1.4a; Nickerson 1996, 355)

This reflects a classical situation of reciprocity: the members of the Daoist community pay a certain “premium” in the form of so-called destiny-pledges (*mingxin* 命信) and expect as “return on investment” that the deities protect them. The essence of the displayed pledges will be used by the gods, the items themselves will be used by the priests, whereas objects like paper and brushes will be utilized during the rituals of submitting petitions and will be of immediate benefit to community members. Rice and firewood will be used by the priests themselves and also redistributed among poorer parishioners. Again, disregard of any pledges due may have severe consequences:

If one's destiny-pledges do not arrive, then one's record of destiny is not sent up [to Heaven]. Although one might later make bountiful offerings and gain blessings through kitchen-feasts, this cannot absolve the lack of pledge.

Therefore the teaching says: "Although a thousand pieces of gold are precious, they do not compare to one's original pledge-destiny." If a household that worships the Dao does not offer its pledges for several years, the Three Heavens will excise their names from the records. The officials who guard the house will return to the celestial bureaus and the energy of the Dao will no longer protect them. The injuries of demon-bandits will bring them illness and early death. Families thus thrown into depression remain forever unaware and instead blame the masters and resent the Dao. Is it not pitiful! (1.4ab; Nickerson 1996, 355)

All this suggests that registers played an important role in the Celestial Masters' organization both as keeping track of the population and their tax contributions and also as a means of establishing an active connection to Heaven.

## Registers to Control Demons

Beyond controlling adherents, the Celestial Masters also used registers to control demons, defined as malevolent supernatural forces of various kinds but especially local deities and ancestors worshiped with blood sacrifices by the wider population in so-called local or lascivious cults, which constituted the popular Chinese religion at the time. Daoists interacted with these in a complex way. In some situations they tried to integrate them into their own tradition, in other situations they fought against them, destroying temples and prohibiting worship in order to convert their "deluded" adherents to the "pure gods" of the Dao (see Stein 1979).

In antiquity, it had been the duty of state officials to quell local cults, especially if they were considered detrimental to the population. The best known example is the official Ximen Bao 西門豹 who, in the fourth century BCE, put an end to a costly cult which involved the annual sacrifice of a young girl by marrying her to the river god in order to prevent floods (Bumbacher 2000a, 510-511). As soon as the Daoists in their parishes assumed the roles of the former state officials, they inherited this task. To identify individual demons, they duly started to compile so-called demon registers (*guilu* 鬼錄) (see Schipper 1965: 27). An example appears in the first scroll of the *Nüqing guilü*, a text that may in part go back to the early Celestial Masters but whose present version probably dates from the late fourth century. It says:

[When] the Highest Great Dao could bear no longer to see [the disasters on Earth], at noon of the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the second year of the Tianhuang reign period, it revealed these "Statutes against Demons" in eight scrolls. They record the names of all demons and spirits on Earth and the method of [distinguishing] evil from good. They were given to the Celestial Master Zhang

Daoling and delegated [to him the power to] control demons and spirits. (1.1ab; see Schipper 1994, 70)

By Tao Hongjing's time, an entire series of registers of specific categories of demons and spirits had evolved. For example, he refers to a *Huangchi neilu* 黃赤內籙 (Inner Register of the Red and Yellow; no longer extant) whose spiritual officials were in charge of uniting and harmonizing the yin and yang sexual energies of men and women (Cedzich 1987, 128n.124, 125). He also lists all the gods known to him, independent of various Daoist traditions, and organizes them in a register according to spiritual rank and area of responsibility: His *Zhenling weiye tu* 真靈位業圖 (Charts of the Ranks and Functions of the Numinous, DZ 167) was an attempt at finding a way to handle the huge heavenly administration. It was believed that the same registers were also kept in Heaven, just like the gods' registers of immortals. As the *Zhen'gao* notes:

I once met Le Zichang of Nanyang. He was a pure and sincere person, but as he was not my teacher, I did not receive his instructions. [...] Although he did not live a prolonged life on Earth and did not reach full immortality, he ascended to the halls of bliss after death, refined his spirit, and received the right *qi*. [As a result,] his name was submitted to the divine registers. He subsequently obtained the position of a gate attendant [in Heaven]. This rank is second to that of immortal. (8.12ab)

Similarly the *Housheng daojun lieji* 後聖道軍列紀 (Annals of the Latter-day Sage, Lord of the Dao, DZ 442) describes a "Blue-green Register on White Tablets" as containing not only the ranks of the celestial administration but also a complete list of the various grades of sacred scriptures (8b-9a). As, moreover, the registers are also the ultimate certificate guaranteeing one's celestial rights, some documents can only be seen by those who are listed on them. As the *Wufuxu* notes: "Those who are not entered in an immortals' register will not see these texts" (1.22a).

Just as the Celestial Masters and their adepts (and to a lesser extent the disciples of Highest Clarity) held registers to control humanity and demons, so the gods had their own registers: one type included those submitted by the priests when they took a census of their community; another type was their own, the so-called registers of life, that listed living human beings and their remaining years on Earth as well as the names of the deceased, the so-called registers of death. Under the guidance of the Department of Destiny, a whole plethora of spirits constantly calculated additional days of life as rewards for good deeds and subtractions in life expectancy for bad behavior.

Along the same lines, the apocryphal *Hetu ji mingfu* 河圖紀命符 (Recorded Credentials of Destiny, [Attached to the] River Chart<sup>7</sup>) says that there are spirits in Heaven and on Earth who survey the conduct of people and immortals—the latter also in danger of committing offenses and being punished by demotion in rank or banishment to Earth. They are the ones who calculate the deduction in life expectancy according to the severity of the transgression. Their assistants include the so-called Three Corpses (*sanshi* 三尸), spirits akin to the souls and demons who reside in the human body and nurture on people's errors and misbehaviors. They want the person to die early so that they can get the mourning offerings and take over their corpse. On certain days, the *gengshen* 庚申 or 57<sup>th</sup> day of the sexagenary cycle, they ascend to Heaven and inform the Department of Destiny about sins and transgressions of their host (see Kohn 1995b).

The notion of “registers of life” and “registers of death” became very common in Daoism and appears in texts of all different traditions. For example, the *Laozi zhongjing* says:

If you see him (a specific divinity), call out loud: Director of Destiny, Director of Registers, Jade Girls of the Six Ding, oh, come and remove me from the registers of death and [let my name be] written in the registers of life of the Jade Calendar. (21a)

Similarly the *Duren jing* 度人經 (Scripture of Salvation, DZ 1) has the following instructions:

In the 7<sup>th</sup> month, if you hold a long retreat and chant this scripture, you will attain the status of a divine immortal. Wherever on the white slips of the Yellow Registers in the various Heavens your name is inscribed, the word “death” will be scratched out and the word “life” written over it. (1.27a; Bokenkamp 1997, 412)

## Registers as IDs

A yet different function of Daoist registers is their role as personal identification device for the spirit world. The Celestial Masters established “a complex system of graded registers which also served to unify and order the community” (Kleeman 1998, 72). Each member of the community was a priest insofar as everybody possessed registers specifying their identity, rank, and parish (Schipper 1985; 1993, 60-71). They obtained these registers during regularly

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<sup>7</sup> Surviving fragments are found in the medical collection *Ishinpō* 醫心方 (Essential Medical Methods), compiled by the Japanese court physician Tamba no Yasuyori (912-995). See also Yasui and Nakamura 1971, 6: 113-14.

scheduled, formal initiations that each member, from children to married adults, had to undergo. Everybody, at least theoretically, could obtain the same kind of registers that legitimized the priests. They contained basic information concerning their bearers and also listed spiritual assistants and spirit-generals at their disposal who protected them against evil influences. Plus, they had information of all those demons under the control of the relevant spirit-generals and thus subject to the practitioner. Lu Xiuqing notes:

The *Codes* say: If a Daoist commoner has three diligences, this makes a merit. Three merits make a virtue. If a person has three virtues, he or she is different from ordinary people and may be appointed to holding a register.

After receiving the register, he or she must have more merit in order to advance step by step from the elementary Register of 10 Spirit-Generals to the Register of 150 Spirit-Generals. Some among the [newly initiated] registered servants may be loyal and good, simple, careful, and prudent, loving the Dao and excelling in diligence, steeped in the old and knowledgeable about the present, capable in proselytizing. Those disciples may be appointed priests who disperse the energy [of Dao].

Some among the latter may be particularly pure in cultivating [the Dao]. They may be promoted to posts in detached parishes. Some among them may be even more refined and sincere. They may be promoted to posts in traveling parishes [...] (and so on through eight more grades). One ought to seek offices through perspicaciously spreading merit and virtue. Neither let the person dominate the office nor let the office control the person. (*Daomen kelue* 1.5b-6a; Nickerson 1996, 356)

The number of spirit-generals indicated to the members of the celestial host how many generals the adherent had at his disposal for defense and protection.

## Conclusion

Each time someone received a register he or she was brought to the gods' attention, and copies of their registers were filed in Heaven. This means that two copies existed, one in Heaven, the other on Earth in the possession of the member of the Daoist community. This situation is highly comparable to that of the tallies and credentials, one half of which was stored in Heaven and whose other half was hanging from the belt of the Daoist. Just as the combination of those two halves, whenever they matched exactly, qualified the Daoist in his request for heavenly help, both the heavenly and the earthly registers had to be identical to allow for the correct response of the divine beings. Registers were forms of celestial identification and passports to spiritual power in the hands of the community members. In many ways registers were thus a different form of tallies or divine credentials as they were used by priests and initiates.

The feature pervaded medieval Daoism. Even members of Highest Clarity and later integrated forms of Daoism, although they were organized more individually along master-disciple lineages and did not join large communities like those of the Celestial Masters—thus developing a certain immunity against bureaucratic tendencies—they still kept traditional registers and integrated them into their system. However, they ranked them at the lower end of the spiritual hierarchy, using registers mainly for the lowest three ranks in the fully developed medieval hierarchy.



# Scriptures



# Chapter Six

## Daoist Sacred Scriptures

Ma Shu's 馬樞 *Daoxue zhuan* 道學傳 (Biographies of Students of the Dao; lost; see Bumbacher 2000a), compiled in the late sixth century, contains the biography of Gu Huan 顧歡 (ca. 420-483), who happened to become the first “historian” and bibliographer of the Highest Clarity tradition. Famous for his polemic treatise against the Buddhists, the *Yixia lun* 夷夏論 (On Barbarians and Chinese),<sup>1</sup> he belonged to a group of scholars who met in the Shan mountains of the Kuaiji area in Zhejiang in the mid-fifth century. They brought their shares of the original Highest Clarity scriptures along to establish a dependable canon of authentic texts, clearly distinguished from the many forgeries available at the time (see Strickmann 1977, 31-40; Bumbacher 2000a, 29). The text relates the following episode:

Gu Huan of the [Liu] Song [dynasty (420-479)] was skilled in Daoist arts [...]. Once someone had a nasty disease, and a relative asked Huan about it.

Huan said: “Which books are there in the family?”

The reply was: “We have only the *Xiaojing* (Scripture of Filial Piety; see Boltz 1993).”

Huan said: “Select the section on ‘Confucius Living [in Retirement],”<sup>2</sup> place it next to the pillow of the sick person, honor and treat it with all due courtesy, and he will be cured.”

They did so and the sick was indeed cured. (*Sandong qunxian lu* 三洞群仙錄 20.2ab; Chen 1963, 469.7, 10-11; Bumbacher 2000a, 231-232)

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Ming Sengshao's 明僧紹 *Zheng erjiao lun* 正二教論 (On the Rectification of the Two Teachings), in *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (Collection [of Essays on the] Expansion and Elucidation [of Buddhism]), T 2102, 6.37b15 (see Schmidt-Glintzer 1976, 107-108.), *Nan Qishu* 南齊書, ed. Beijing 1972, 54.931, *Nan shi* 南史, ed. Beijing 1975, 75.1875; and in Zhen Luan's 甄鸞 *Xiao dao lun* 笑道論 (On Turning Daoism into Ridicule) in *Guang hong mingji* 廣弘明集 (Enlarged Collection [of Essays on the] Expansion and Elucidation [of Buddhism]), T 2103, 9.146a, 148b, 148c.

<sup>2</sup> A chapter in the *Liji*. See Couvreur 1951, 2: 376-390; Legge 1885, 270-277. On the *Liji*, see Riegel 1993.

According to this, Gu Huan relied neither on drugs, acupuncture, or other medical techniques to heal the sick. Instead, he suggested to place a classical scripture on the pillow of the sick person and—very importantly—offer it proper veneration and treat it with formality and politeness. The scripture, in other words, had to be treated like a high ranking person and would in turn manifest its exorcistic properties and restore the patient to health.

Another instance where a scripture has exorcistic and demon-dispelling or apotropaic properties appears in the *Hou Hanshu*:

Gongsha Mu [...] lived without companions in the Jiancheng Mountains, where he built himself a hovel in the woods on a high pass. Once, during a storm with violent winds and ground-shaking thunder, a voice called his name three times from outside.

Mu did not reply. Soon the caller entered through an opening in the wall. It was a strange creature in both sound and appearance. Mu maintained his composure and intoned a classic scripture. In the end, no demon-wrought problems resulted. (82B.2730; DeWoskin 1983, 69; Kieschnick 1997, 175n.125)

The expression “strange creature” uses the word *guai* 怪, which in medieval China connotes the ideas of spirit (*shen* 神), ghost/demon (*gui* 鬼), numinous (*ling* 靈), and the like (Campany 1996, 28n.14). The creature, it appears, was therefore a spirit or ghost. Chanting a classical scripture, that is, reading or reciting it aloud, thus protects the protagonist from any demon-wrought harm. The story gives no specific title, so it may not matter which classic was used as long as it was a scripture of some standing, i.e., a *jing*. Being holy in itself, it had apotropaic properties.

Along the same lines, Ge Hong notes in his *Baopuzi neipian*:

The classic states that if the *San huang [nei] wen* is in a household, it will banish evil and hateful ghosts, soften the effects of epidemics, block calamities, and rout misfortunes. If anyone is suffering from illness or on the point of death, let someone believing in the process with all his heart give this text to the patient to hold, and he will be sure not to die.

If a wife is having trouble in childbirth to the point of possible death, let her hold this text, and her son will be born immediately. If Daoists pursuing long life hold this text when entering the mountains, it routs tigers and wolves so that none of the mountain powers, poisons, or evils will dare approach. When crossing rivers and seas, Daoists can dispel crocodiles and dragons, or halt wind and waves with this book. (19.336; Ware 1966, 314-315)

Ge Hong makes it very clear: the possession of a scripture, in this specific case the *Sanhuang neiwén* 三皇內文 (Inner Writ of the Three Sovereigns; lost, see Robinet 1984, 2: 27), keeps demons and demonic influences at bay—it has apotropaic properties. Although one might argue that “evil and hateful ghosts”

have nothing to do with “epidemics,” “calamities,” “misfortune,” “illness” or “death,” all these calamities as well as enemy forces are in fact brought about by demons—although, in the last instance, human beings are responsible for their baleful activities. Unschuld has traced what he calls *Dämonenmedizin* (demon medicine) to the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045-250 BCE), arguing that the ancestors who, during the Shang and early Zhou dynasties, were responsible for their descendants’ well-being and sickness—meted out according to their behavior—were little by little replaced by demons inflicting diseases upon humans (Unschuld 1980, 28-47). Evidence goes back to the third century CE. An ancient catalogue once in use by the early Celestial Masters, the *Qianerbai guan yi* 千二百官儀 (Manual of the 1,200 Officials), of which Tao Hongjing’s *Dengzhen yinjue* preserves passages, lists the names of 1,200 divine bureaucrats to be asked for help in healing diseases. Each of these officials in turn commanded a staff of subordinated civil and military officers and soldiers who executed his orders. The manual sees demons as sources for chest pains, “rising *qi*,” and coughing, among others, as well as for stomach distention and pains beneath the navel. It advises to invoke the respective divinities in order to be healed, as they would subdue the demons:

The [*Qianerbai guan*] *Yi* says: When the pains of the chest are strong and rising *qi* and coughing up phlegm [occur], invoke the Lord Great Pivot of the Northern Village and his 120 men of civilian and military officers. He governs the [astral] Palace of Great Balance and controls the demons responsible for coughing up phlegm, rising *qi*, vomiting green, yellow, red or white [material], responsible for the five pestilences, *gu*-poisoning and the six thirst-demons. As offerings use brooms, paper and writing-brushes [...].

The [*Qianerbai guan*] *Yi* says: When the swelling of the stomach is strong and below the navel you have intense pain, invoke the Lord of Feili and his twelve men. He chiefly controls the demons of the twelve diseases that may occur below the waistband of men and women. As offerings use rice and grain. (*Dengzhen yinjue* 3.15b)

However, not only demons causing illness could be brought under control by higher divinities, but, in fact, any spiritual being could be checked by some higher ranking divine being. For example, the *Jinshu* biography of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 says that the family member Wang Ningzhi, instead of preparing for a rebel attack under Sun En, entered the quiet chamber and prayed “to all spiritual generals, saying: ‘I beseech Demon Soldier Xu of the Great Dao to help me, so that the rebels may be destroyed’ ” (80.2130). In order to ward off the attacking troops, Wang Ningzhi did not take any military preparations, but instead prayed for spiritual help. He called the spirit generals and begged them to deploy demon soldiers. Could it, then, be that scriptures acted on the same principle as activating spiritual beings on behalf of those who possessed them? If so, how do sacred books come to have apotropaic and exorcistic properties?

## The Nature of Sacred Scriptures

The first clear passage on how extraordinary scriptures are appears in the *Hou Hanshu*:

The marvelous tablets of the sacred scriptures, their jade slips [with] gold-thread bindings, are secluded in the treasuries of the luminous divine, they are sealed and tied up on altars of precious jade, they cannot be obtained nor scrutinized by people. (82a.2703; see Ngo 1976, 73; DeWoskin 1983, 43)

This brief description is elaborated and cosmologically embedded in the *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui; ed. Beijing 1973) chapter on bibliography, the “Treatise on Literature,” submitted to the throne with other monographs in 656. It has:

As for the so-called [Daoist] sacred writings, they too are endowed with primordial energy. They come into being spontaneously and are not made. Just like the Heavenly Venerable of Primordial Beginning, they exist forever and are indestructible.

If, on the other hand, Heaven and Earth were never destroyed, they would just pile up and not be transmitted. As the *kalpa* unfolds [through rise and decline], its texts are revealed appropriately [...].

The texts are called celestial writings, with characters one *zhang* (ten feet) square. They give forth beams in every direction, shining and brilliant, so that the mind is rendered respectful and the eyes are dazzled. (4.1091; Ware 1933, 244)

The scriptures thus share their spontaneous emergence from primordial *qi* with the highest god, the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊) and, like him, are eternal and indestructible. Primordial *qi* existed in the cosmos before creation. According to a Chinese philosophical tradition that can be traced back at least to the Former Han dynasty, there was once a Great Inception which started the evolution of the cosmos. During this phase, the Dao as all-encompassing universal law began to manifest and became responsible for the emergence of space-time in the nebulous void or chaos. Once space-time had come into being, it produced primordial *qi*. This differentiated into a light and pure *qi* versus a heavy and turbid *qi*, which in due course formed Heaven and Earth (*Huainanzi* 3; see Major 1993). This Heaven-forming pure *qi*, then, is the stuff from which the highest gods are made. The highest scriptures, the celestial writings too emerged from it spontaneously.

Since these scriptures are cognate with the Heavenly Worthy and other high gods of pure Dao—both being spontaneously formed from the same *qi*—the celestial writings in their original form as celestial scripts can be neither accessed nor read, being inaccessible not only to mortal beings but also to lower-ranking gods and immortals. The *Suishu* continues:

Though the celestial immortals are unable to gaze upon [the celestial writings], when the Heavenly Worthy initiates the *kalpa* (world-age), he orders the supreme persons and the heavenly perfected (lower-ranking celestials) to change the *qi* in Heaven and divide it up [to produce new copies].

From the heavenly perfected on down to the immortals, the various classes [of supernatural beings] hand them on to one another according to rank. After finally reaching the immortals, they are passed on to people of this world. Since, however, the Heavenly Worthy takes years to completely 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. (4.1091-1092)

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, when a *kalpa* comes to an end and the cosmos approaches destruction before creation can start anew, are the texts transmitted—through a series of intermediary stages—to specially select mortals. But they are not the original texts written in celestial script, the heavenly blueprints. Earthly beings are only allowed to receive transcripts of the original celestial writings.

The secular, historiographic *Suishu* obviously relied on older religious texts, such as, for example, the *Suling jing* 素靈經 (Scripture of Immaculate Numen, DZ 1314), a text attested from the fourth century CE and thus prior to the Highest Clarity revelations, into which it was later integrated. It is cited in the *Wushang bijiao* 無上秘要 (Essentials of Supreme Secrets, DZ 1138; see Lagerwey 1981), compiled in 574, and in Wang Xuanhe's 王懸河 (fl. 672-683) *Sandong zhenang* and amalgamated various other texts (see Robinet 1984, 2: 285-299). The most ancient part of the scripture has: "[Daoist] scriptures originally co-existed with the primordial energy and were produced at the same time as the original inception" (1b).

Other religious texts also describe the special relationship between the gods and scriptures. A key text—and surely the most influential and widely known of the original Numinous Treasure corpus (Bokenkamp 1997, 373)—was the *Duren jing*. The supreme deity recited it at the dawn of times while resting in a pearl, the "point of origin of the development of space when the stars stopped their motion" (Robinet 1979, 33)—a symbol of the suspension of time and movement and the beginning of a new cosmos:

For the space of seven days and seven nights, the suns and moons, stars and lodges, even to the Cogs, Armils, and Jade Transverses [of all the Dipper of all the Heavens], stopped at once in their rotations. The spirit-driven winds were still and silent. The mountains and seas hid away their cloudy emanations.

The Heavens lacked even floating haze; the air was perfectly clear in all directions. Throughout the whole kingdom, the Earth—all mountains and rivers, forests and groves—became uniform and flat, so that there were no longer high and low places. All became as cyan jade; there were no other colors [...].

Straightaway the Heavenly Worthy, within the precious pearl, expounded this scripture to the end and, with the host of Perfected overseeing the ordination, transmitted the scripture to me. (1.5a-6a, 1.15a. See Bokenkamp 1997, 405-408)

While gods and scriptures emerge independently from each other from primordial *qi*, the fact that high gods recited the sacred writings makes it clear that gods and scriptures are not entirely on the same hierarchical level. The gods recite the scriptures, but there is no reciprocal action on the side of the scriptures vis-à-vis the gods. And, while the gods order the scriptures' transcription into human mode, there is no equivalent initiative the scriptures take to influence the gods or their nature.

## Revelation

The *Suishu* is not very clear about the exact process in which the highest ranking scriptures are handed down from the Heavenly Worthy to the lower ranks of gods and immortals. Each step must have involved a transcription of sorts, and the very first step, from the Heavenly Worthy to the supreme persons, apparently was still part of the workings of primordial *qi* as it divided once again and produced a set of new textual copies. Ideally, each of the following stages of transmission, whose recipients are persons of descending rank, should then mean a transcription on increasingly less prestigious material and in less esoteric scripts until the texts were, finally, passed on to select human beings. These last copies were written on silk, bamboo, and paper, largely in ancient scripts that often could only be deciphered by specialists.

The recipients on the lower end of the hierarchy obtained the scriptures either through direct transmission by immortals or from gifted religious teachers. Alternatively the scriptures appeared on the walls of mountain caves or hidden in lacquer boxes buried in the ground. Then again, spirit mediums could, and still 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 (see Ledderose 1984; Jordan and Overmyer 1986).

Some pertinent examples of how immortals provided humans with scriptures appear in the *Zhen'gao*. It says:

In the third year of [the reign period] Resurgent Peace, when the year-star was in [the celestial mansion of] *yizhou*, on the night of the twenty-fifth of the sixth month (July 26, 365 CE), Lady Wang of [the Heaven of] Purple Tenuity descended to me.

A divine woman accompanied her, dressed in a shirtwaist of cloud damask, cinnabar-red above and blue below. Its patterned colors 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. (1.11b-12a; Hyland 1984, 108-109)

An example of a divine oral transmission reads:

After a while, the True Consort declared: “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. (*Zhen'gao* 1.13b; Hyland 1984, 112)

The immortals visiting Yang Xi not only dictated their scriptures, they also handed over written documents. Tao Hongjing comments:

Originally, this book must have been in cosmic script. But since Lord Yang [Xi] knew the characters [of the script] of the Perfected he has transcribed them here into ordinary characters. (*Zhen'gao* 2.7b2; Schipper 1965, 12n.4)

Not every recipient was as gifted or skilled as Yang Xi. Ge Hong's *Shenxian zhuan* reports an incident where three immortals, dressed in feather garb 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 tablet of white jade and a scepter 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 (*Taiping guangji* 6.36; Campney 2002, 255-258).

However, not all Daoist texts existed as heavenly blueprints which spontaneously emerged from primordial *qi*. Lower texts, such as biographies of gods, were written by the deities much later than the period of original creation. Nevertheless, their transmission is subject to similar rules: they cannot be handed down at any time or to anybody, but are transmitted to candidates of immortality only in limited editions and on special occasions. As the *Housheng daojun lieji* says:

Lord Green Lad of the Eastern Palace of Fangzhu Island composed the present text [*Lieji*] in order to present it to the Sage Lord [himself]. The latter transmitted it to the Green Lad's disciple Wang Yuanyou who was duly ordered to descend and show it to those who have corporeal marks that indicate their destination for

immortality. It will be transmitted either twice in a hundred years or three times in seven hundred years to students of Dao so they can become immortals. (6b)

It also happened that the gods or immortals—responding to the times and eager to help a distressed humankind—created new texts which they then passed on to special people.

The *Shenxian zhuan*, furthermore, contains an example of how a scripture is first distributed among immortals on Earth before they 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 BCE) he followed his master to a spring where they met another immortal who gave Gan Ji the *Taiping jing* in ten chapters. Gan Ji followed the instructions in the book and “accomplished his Dao,” which probably means that he was promoted from an earthly to a heavenly immortal and eventually ascended to Heaven in broad daylight. He handed the scripture over to Gong Song who prepared elixirs that prolonged his life and became immortal (*Xianyuan bianzhu* 仙苑編珠 [Threaded Pearls of the Garden of the Immortals, DZ 596] 2.19a). Apparently, the transmitted scripture contained recipes for mixing elixirs and its disciples attained immortality by following its guidelines.

Earth immortals or lucky human beings who received scriptures frequently concealed them, even if they had made copies. Quite possibly this was because they had not come across a worthy candidate or disciple for transmission. The *Shenxian zhuan* suggests as much: when the immortal Kong Yuanfang 孔遠方 transmitted two scrolls of a secret text to a disciple by the name of Yu, he informed him that the scripture contained important words concerning the universal law and that it could be transmitted only once in forty years. If no suitable recipient was found, the text could not be passed on, even if it meant violating the “forty years rule.” On the other hand, if a transmission was missed and two acceptable people appeared after eighty years, both could receive the text (*Taiping guangji* 9.61; Campany 2002, 315).

Other examples document how certain people, because of their exemplary moral behavior and diligent cultivation practice, were able to discover sacred scriptures hidden in mountain caves or buried in the ground. As Ge Hong says: “In response to those who have secured the divine process and entered the mountain to give sincere thought to it, the god of the mountain will automatically open the mountain and let such persons see the texts (*Baopuzi neipian* 19.336; Ware 1966, 314).

A prominent case is that of Zuo Ci 左慈 (155-220; see Robinet 1991, 87), who found the *Jindan jinye jing* 九丹金液經 (Scripture of the Liquefaction of Gold and the Nine [Sorts of] Cinnabar; see Pregadio 1991) in a rock-cave and later became an immortal (*Shenxian zhuan* in *Taiping guangji* 11.76; Campany 2002, 279). Another example is Wang Lie 王烈 who, after climbing Mount

Baodu 抱犢山 in Hedong, unexpectedly caught sight of a rock-cave. It contained a stone plate, on top of which there were two scrolls of the *Sijing* 素經 (Scripture of Simplicity; see van der Loon 1984, 145-146). He picked the text up to read it but could not 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 稽康, a prominent member of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (see Holzman 1956) who recognized the characters. Together they went to the cave to inspect the original, but although the path was clearly discernible and they arrived at the right rock, the cave had disappeared. Wang Lie then told his disciples that obviously Xi Kang was not fit to access the scripture and this was why they could not find the cave (*Taiping guangji* 9.61; Campamy 2002, 339).

This episode exemplifies the conception that only worthy people were given full access to the scriptures. As long as they were on the right path but had not yet mastered the Dao, they might find an important text but were unable to read it or they could understand its contents but were not given the actual text. However, in both cases the message was clear: the very presence of the sacred material in the person's life was an obvious heavenly portent that the candidate was well on his way to immortality.

Also, once a worthy adept had full access to a scripture, he was never to take the original away—just as later Daoist ordinands would not carry originals of bestowed documents with them. Rather, they had to copy the scripture(s) and leave the originals in place. Again the *Baopuzi neipian*:

When Bo Zhongli (Bo He) obtained scriptures inside a mountain, he set up an altar and surrendered silk as pledge offering. Like other adepts, he made one copy of the scriptures and departed with them. (19.336; Campamy 2002, 136.)

The originals thus stayed in the safe custody of the mountain deity (or monastic administration) and could, therefore, be revealed to later worthy adepts.

## Protection

Despite all these rules and precautions, it was still possible that sacred scriptures fell into the wrong hands. Ge Chaofu's 葛巢甫 (fl. 400) Numinous Treasure texts, for example, soon became so popular that "new" texts were fabricated to satisfy increasing demand. As usual, when there is a market for a given merchandise, it assumes a certain price. Scriptures were, therefore, sought and collected by wealthy collectors for other than religious reasons.

Anyone possessing important scriptures thus faced a dilemma: on the one hand, he needed to pass them on, since one of their *raison d'être* was to be recited and venerated and they were essential in propagating the Dao; on the

other hand, scriptures in the hands of unfit persons inevitably caused problems. The *Shenxian zhuan* sums it up in the words of the immortal Kong Yuanfang:

If there is an opportunity to transmit [the scripture] and you fail to do so, you block the Way of Heaven. If, on the other hand, you transmit it to someone who is not worthy to receive it, you leak the Way of Heaven. In either case you will bring disaster on your children's children. (*Taiping guangji* 9.61; see Campany 2002, 315.)

In severe cases punishment extended to the descendants up to and including seven generations. However, there were also occasions when only the guilty person was punished. A fragment of the *Daoxue zhuan* tells of a case when someone received a scripture although not yet entitled or at the wrong transmission time:

[Huan Fa-]Kai went to the villagers and asked permission to separate one part [of the scripture] and return it to the capital and make offerings there. He first presented it to Lord Tao [Hongjing], who said: "This [is] the authentic old edition [of the *Taiping jing*] made by Gan Jun himself."

Kai took it to the capital anyway, but he suffered bitterly from fever, and all kinds of treatments could not cure it. Master Tao heard about this and said: "This illness will not go away. I fear that taking the scripture was a fault. Why not send it back to its original place?"

When Kai followed this advice and sent it back, his disease healed. (*Sandong zhuan* 1.17a3-10; Bumbacher 2000a, 270-271)

Although Huan Fakai 桓法闕 seems to have had good intentions, the *Taiping jing fuwen xu* 太平經復文序 (Dispatched Preface to the Scripture of Great Peace, DZ 1101a) insists that he was wrong to take the scripture when the time was not yet ripe for its release (Wang 1985, 745; Seidel 1983, 338). What he ought to have done was ask the gods' permission by means of divination. As Tao Hongjing did, when he found the *Mingtong ji* 冥通記 (Record of Exploring the Otherworld, DZ 302), the written records of his disciple Zhou Ziliang 周子良 (497-516) in which Zhou describes his encounters with divinities. Tao first paid his respects, then asked the gods for permission to take it (1.5a).

Due to their sacred character, the scriptures had to be treated with great respect. Lack of due propriety resulted in punishment, not even sparing nobles and princes. A fragment of the *Daoxue zhuan* that was originally part of Meng Jingyi's 孟景翼 biography relates an episode centered on Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 (460-494), Prince Jingling of Qi:

When Prince Jingling of Qi<sup>3</sup> came across a segment of the *Lingbao jing* (Numinous Treasure Scriptures), he examined it and immediately threw it on the ground. A few days later, his hand grew abscesses and sores; the pain and distress were exceedingly great. He subsequently sent for the master<sup>4</sup> and confessed his transgression.

The master wrote a statement of repentance on his behalf, but cautiously increased his suspicions [concerning the prince's sincerity]. Even though the prince was better, in the end he died from this ailment. (*Sandong zhuan* 1.8a-8b; Bum-bacher 2000a, 219-220)

Xiao Ziliang was one of the most important promoters of Buddhism in south China. The *Daoxue zhuan* also notes that he distributed sutras on a vast scale and gathered monks from far and wide to have them debate with Meng Jingyi on the question which of the two teachings, Buddhism and Daoism, was false and which correct (*Sandong qunxian lu* 16.8a-8b). His intention clearly was to discredit Daoism, a tendency exemplified in his disregard of the *Lingbao jing*. However, as soon as he became sick, he recalled the disease's probable reason and, as the scripture in question was of Daoist origin, he called the Daoist Meng Jingyi for treatment. Meng, upon learning the problem, "wrote a statement of repentance on his behalf," most probably in the form of a petition. But deep in his heart Xiao must have been insincere, as Meng suspected, and the treatment did not effect a permanent cure. Still, it showed that Xiao's response was correct—if he had only been a bit more sincere!

## Guardians and Benefits

Who, then, was responsible for the execution of such punishments? The authorities guarding the scriptures are very similar to those surrounding the highest gods: attendants, soldiers, and guards of various kinds. Similarly, the scriptures had their own supernatural personnel, whose duty it was to extend protection and punish whoever maltreated them. The *Housheng daojun lieji* has:

Attendant on this text (*Lieji*) are ten jade lads, attendant on the *Jin que zi wen* 金闕紫文 (Purple Writ of the Golden Gate) are ten jade maidens. Each time you re-

<sup>3</sup> The fragment reads Liang 梁 which has to be emended to Qi 齊: Liang must be a copyist's error, for the title Prince of Jingling did not exist during the Liang. In *Sandong qunxian lu* 16.8a-8b he is correctly called "Prince Jingling of Qi." Xiao Ziliang has an official biography in *Nan Qishu* 40.692-701.

<sup>4</sup> The character *feng* 馮 poses a problem. If interpreted as a surname—as Chen Guofu does—it cannot refer to Meng Jingyi but introduces a new person. This makes no sense since the fragment's protagonist is Meng who would then have no function. A Master Feng, on the other hand, does appear in the *Daoxue zhuan*: Feng Faxian 馮發先 (Bumbacher 2000a, 318). More plausible is a verbal function of the character in the sense of "to rely on."

cite this scripture or put its contents to use, bow respectfully to them. Wash your hands and burn incense to the left and right of the writing.

Whoever treats this numinous record rudely will be changed into a ghost of the lowest rank and his descendants will undergo infernal interrogation up to the third generation. This is because the jade lads and jade maidens report the transgressions to the authorities above and will make known who is sincere of heart. Each bad or good deed, no matter how insignificant, will be recorded. (6b; Bokenkamp 1997, 351)

Wearing a scripture at the sash or belt guaranteed the constant presence of this supernatural entourage. Elsewhere in the *Zhen'gao*, the Lady of the Southern Peak tells Yang Xi that:

The *Baoshen jing* 寶神經 (Scripture of Treasuring Spirit) is the book in the embroidered bag of [the transcendent] Pei Qingling. Its attendants are always with the person who carries it at the belt. (*Zhen'gao* 1.7a; Hyland 1984, 98)

These transcendent attendants were thus accompanying the scripture and protected its legitimate carrier. Again the *Housheng daojun lieji*.

[The Sage Lord says:] By wearing my *Annals* at your sash, you may pass unscathed through calamity and pestilence, flood, fire, and warfare. None of the myriad sprites of mountains and forests or the multiple forms of perversity and disaster will dare stand against you. When others see you, they will be filled with joy. This is because the writing is attended by jade lads that might protect your person.

If evil persons malevolently drive you off or curse you, I will send the sacred spirits of the mountains and streams to take their lives. Do not imagine that, since the Dao is distant, such spiritual oversight is impossible. From above the Grand Barrens or within the Mystic Void I observe you as closely as your eyes regard your own nose. If you do not believe, you are welcome to try it once by breaking my prohibitions or your oaths to me. See if I do not plumb the wordless depths of your heart to respond to such indiscretions with the proper punishment! (7ab; Bokenkamp 1997, 352)

Apart from Highest Clarity, the same conception was also adopted in the Numinous Treasure school, as can be seen in the *Duren jing*, which has: "Attendant on this scripture are twenty-four jade lads and twenty-four jade maidens of the Five [Supreme] Gods. They guard the sacred text and protect the persons of those who have received it" (1.26a; Bokenkamp 1997, 412).

Jade lads and jade maidens acted as intermediaries between the scriptures and the gods. They filed regular reports on everything that happened to the scriptures while also executing the orders the gods gave after reading their reports. Acting on the deity's authority, they punished wrongdoers and rewarded those who behaved in an exemplary way.

The active role of the scriptures' spiritual attendants appears clearly in the fifth-century *Han Wudi waizhuan* 漢武帝外傳 (Outer Biography of the Martial Emperor of the Han, DZ 293), a text related to Highest Clarity (Smith 1992, 196-226):

The Black Ox Adept received instruction from Lu Nüsheng: "If your family possesses the *Wuyue zhenxing* 五嶽真形 (True Topography of the Five [Sacred] Mountains), each mountain will dispatch five spirits to come and protect [the scripture]. The river and marsh deities who reside among the mountains and streams in the vicinity of the map's residence will also dispatch attendant officials to perpetually guard the safety of yourself and your family.

Violent criminals desiring to injure you will suffer their own violence instead, and the five spirits will slay the ringleader of those who plot together against you. They will respond even to their dream-thoughts. They will also fend off the five pestilences from the five directions and the disasters of flood and fire. You may wear them at the belt and walk among sharp or pointed [weapons].

In your innermost heart, attentively hold the *True Topography* in respect—honor it more than even your ruler or father. For everything there should be a proper procedure: first, always burn incense in a quiet place and inform the lords of the five sacred mountains [about your plans].

The five lords always record the adept's good deeds but will also see to any treachery and impropriety while speaking of others. Disaster will befall those individuals guilty of impropriety, and disaster will befall the families of those guilty of treachery. You must therefore treat it with profound dread and caution. For the adepts who wear this text at the belt and for those who hold it while walking through the mountains and forests, the spirit lords of the earthly springs on the hundred mountains emerge from their domains and bow to them in greeting, display their radiant forms, guard and protect them from evil, and respect and honor the *Topography of the [Sacred] Mountains*.

Their pledge will extend throughout life. Even ghosts and gods will maintain humble deference—how much less could one be deterred by ordinary humans? (7a-7b; tr. Smith 1992, 569)

What, then, were the rewards one could expect as a "worthy" owner of a sacred scripture? What kind of beneficial properties did the scriptures have?

According to the *Suishu*, those who owned scriptures or at least had access to them and were able to decipher their script, by practicing according to their instructions would gradually extend their lives and eventually become immortals and ascend to Heaven in broad daylight.

This notion can be traced to the Former Han dynasty. Already the *Shiji* contains examples of immortals bestowing scriptures on select people who then gained great benefit for themselves and others. Zhang Liang 張良 is a good example. He served the Duke of Pei 沛公, the later King of Han and eventually first Han emperor, Gaozu (*Shiji* 55.2034-2049; see Bauer 1956). He supposedly once met an old man on a bridge who, after he had intentionally dropped his shoes into the water, urged Zhang to fetch them and put them on his, the old man's, feet. After Zhang complied, he asked him to meet him again

five days later. When Zhang arrived, the old man was already there, blaming him for being late. Again he ordered Zhang to come in five days. The third time, Zhang was early enough and was given the *Taigong bingfa* 太公兵法 (Taigong's Military Tactics). The old man then uttered a prophecy concerning Zhang's future and departed.

Zhang studied the writing and later explained it to the future Han ruler who used the stratagems to his best advantage. Since other people ignored the book even when he presented it to them, Zhang realized that the Duke was close to receiving the Mandate of Heaven. Later he realized that he had climbed the political hierarchy to the highest point he could without being related to the emperor. He duly retired, hoping to pursue the Dao along the pathways taken by the immortal Chisong zi (Master Redpine; see Kaltenmark 1953, 35-42). He accordingly "learned to abstain from grain, to conduct and withdraw [breath], and to make his body light," i.e., he tried to reach extended old age.

The motif of a person's being chosen—due to an excellent character or extraordinary behavior—appears elsewhere in the *Shiji*: Bian Que 扁鵲, later known as a famous physician, received Lord Chang Sang's 長桑君 secret recipes before the latter, who "probably was not an ordinary human," disappeared (*Shiji* 105.2785-2794; Bridgman 1955, 17-24).

The legendary episodes of Zhang Liang's biography anticipate themes that become standard in later Daoist collections: a person who is chosen by one or several immortals, has to pass an examination, and is eventually given a sacred scripture.

## Recitation

Even the mere recitation (*song* 誦) of a sacred scripture for a certain number of times has beneficial effects. Thus the female Daoist Wang Daolian 王島憐 in the *Daoxue zhuan* is said to have "[...] received the *Scripture of the Three Grottos* and day and night exercised reciting it" (*Xianyuan bianzhuan* 3.7b2-8; Bumbacher 2000a, 301-303). Another fragment has:

When the female perfected Qian Miaozhen (fl. 520-527) was still a child, she studied the Dao. Later she dwelled in the grottos and mountains of Juqu. At age eighty-three, she recited the *Huangting jing*. Completing [the requisite number], she bade farewell to relatives and friends, ate yellow and white colored drugs, entered Swallow Grotto, and stayed there the whole night.

The next morning, when Daoist monks and nuns went to ask for her, they suddenly heard a sound of thunder in the grotto and saw a carriage drawn by a dragon and a phoenix. It rose from the northwest and bore her ascending to Heaven. (*Xianyuan bianzhuan* 1.15b9-16a3; Bumbacher 2000a, 303-304)

In other words, the repeated recitation of Daoist scriptures, in combination with the consumption of some elixirs, resulted in Qian's immortality.

Another scripture, the *Sandong jing* 三洞經 (Three Caverns Scripture) also had to be intoned ten thousand times in order for an adept to become a transcendent being able to ascend to Heaven:

[After] her reciting the scripture (*Sandong jing*) ten thousand times, a cloud carriage came to collect [the Daoist nun Wang Daolian]. There was also a sudden clap of thunder and a gust of violent wind while a fragrant scent filled the sky. (3.7b2-8)

The *Zhen'gao*, too, notes that one would become immortal if one recited the *Huangting jing* ten thousand times over twenty-one years (9.23b). It also describes a series of revelations by the immortal Lord Pei 裴君. In one of them he informs Yang Xi about the consequences of not adhering to the required number of recitations.

Lord Pei said: In former times, Lord Zhou and his two brothers loved the Dao. For ninety-seven years they meditated on Mount Chang. Heaven was moved and they unexpectedly saw an old man whose head was brilliantly white. The three knew this was a great spirit and knocked their heads on the ground in reverence until the blood flowed. They wept on and on incessantly, grief and joy seizing each other, and went toward him asking for his Dao.

The man gave them the *Sijing* (Book on Simplicity) in seven scrolls, telling them to recite it. The three brothers purified themselves and chanted the text. Soon afterward there was a white deer on the mountain slope. The two younger brothers disregarded the book and watched the deer, but Lord Zhou continued his recitation.

When the two brothers returned [...] one of them said: "The immortal changed [his shape] into a white deer, we call you to see it." But Lord Zhou did not respond. He duly recited the scripture ten thousand times, while the two brothers recited it 9,733 times.

As a result, Lord Zhou fluttered about and flew off to the immortals. However, when the brothers took up the book to continue their recitation, a stone suddenly exploded in the grotto, producing a fire that consumed the book. The two younger brothers subsequently did not attain immortality and are still on Mount Chang, traveling around its five sacred peaks. (5.6ab)

Heaven thus directly rewards good behavior—in this case ninety-seven years of persistent meditation—and often sends an immortal who presents the protagonist(s) with a sacred scripture. Then, as can also be seen in other examples, the recipients have to pass a test before they can reach the fruits of their labor. Here they had to steadfastly continue reciting and not let themselves be distracted by something however extraordinary like the apparition of a white deer. Completion of the required number of recitations then leads to the bestowal of immortality; failure is punished by immediate destruction of the scripture.

The *Zhen'gao* also preserves remarkable evidence that some adepts kept precise records of their recitations. Chapter 18 says that by the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month—the year, unfortunately, is not given—Xu Mi had already recited the *Huangting jing* 190 times. Not unlike in later Pure Land practice, the record-keeping chart consisted of stroke lists, each containing ten horizontal strokes equivalent to ten recitations followed by the date when the recitations were completed. Thus we learn that on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month Xu Mi reached his 400<sup>th</sup> recitation (18.4a).

The recitation of Daoist scriptures is powerfully attested in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian*. It differentiates between the beneficial reciting of important, authentic scriptures and the useless incantation of shallow, unimportant texts. However, he also emphasizes that reciting scriptures is a necessary but not sufficient condition to becoming an immortal. It is also vital to look for and to find a good teacher, since only an insightful and intelligent master can properly guide the adept on his way to perfection. He says:

In many cases curiosity seekers sincerely wished to pursue the divine process but were unable to devote themselves to finding an intelligent teacher [...]. Day and night they merely recited and interpreted thousands of volumes of unimportant writings and arrived at old age without acquiring any benefits. (14.256; Ware 1966, 234)

Another examples notes:

Wu Wen, the Governor of Chengdu, tells the story of a certain Cai Dan of Wuyuan. He was interested in the divine process but did not succeed in getting the essentials from a good teacher. Completely neglecting the livelihood of his family, he spent days and nights reciting such classics as *Huangting jing*, *Taiqing jing*, and *Zhong[huang jing]* [...].

He devoted himself to the quite nonessential writings of various authors, and claimed that the divine process was there in all fullness. But he was totally ignorant of anything practical. (*Baopuzi neipian* 20.348; Ware 1966, 324)

Even earlier, traces of Daoist recitation appear in the Later Han dynasty. Under Emperor Ming (r. 57-75), the *Daode jing* was clearly chanted as a sacred text, as is shown in a decree of the year 65 that everybody who had committed a capital crime should be given the opportunity to atone. Liu Ying 劉英, one of the sons of the former emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25-58), who was enfeoffed as Duke of Chu in 39 and as King of Chu in 41, sent one of his courtiers to the capital with a substantial amount of silk to redeem the punishment he pretended to deserve. An excerpt of emperor Ming's answer reads:

The imperial decree declares: The King of Chu recites the subtle words of Huang[di] and Lao[zi] and respectfully performs the gentle sacrifices to the Bud-

dha (浮屠). After three months of purification and fasting, he has made a solemn vow (*shi* 誓) to the spirits. What dislike or suspicion could there be that he repents [his sins]? Let [the silk which he sent for] redemption be sent back to contribute to the lavish entertainment of the *upāsakas* (*yīpūsai* 伊蒲賽, lay followers) and *śramanas* (*sāngmen* 桑門, monks). (42.1428; Zürcher 1959, 27)

Liu Ying, the King of Chu who then resided in Pengcheng 彭城, a flourishing center of commerce at the eastern extension to the Silk Road, therefore recited both scriptures of Laozi, i.e., the *Daode jing*, and of the Yellow Emperor, i.e., works listed in the *Hanshu* but now lost, while also performing sacrifices to the Buddha. He used this creative mix of practices to atone for his crime and was released from his punishment.

Laozi officially became a god a little bit later (see Kohn 1998). During the first two years of his reign, Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r. 147-168) had a sanctuary dedicated to Laozi in the Hu district 苦縣 (Hubei), the place known as Laozi's birth place. Both in 165 and 166, he dispatched eunuchs there to sacrifice to the new god. On September 24, 165, he further had the famous stele with the *Laozi ming* 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi) inscribed, responding to the god's appearance to him in a dream. On September 26, 166, the emperor himself performed a sacrifice on behalf of Laozi in the Zhuolong gong 濯龍宮 (Palace of the Brilliant Dragon) in the imperial residence at Luoyang (*Hou Hanshu* 7.317). Surely, among the population a Laozi cult must have existed before for quite some time, but the sources keep quite about it. Nevertheless, in the very *Laozi ming* a passage hints at ideas in vogue among contemporary adepts of Daoism:

Those of the contemporaries, who like the Dao, taking analogies [to the *Daode jing*] amplify them, assume that Laozi separates from and unites with the pneuma of the primordial chaos, that he ends and begins with the three luminaries (sun, moon and stars), that he observes the sky and deduces prognostications, that he descends from and goes up to the stars of the Big Dipper, that he, following the course of the sun, transforms nine times, that he, according to the seasons, decreases and increases, that he by means of compass and square regulates [the course of] the three luminaries, that the four heraldic animals are at his sides, that he concentrates his thought on the cinnabar fields and the purple chamber of the Grand Unity. (See Kusuyama 1956, 41-60)

This shows that Laozi at the time was surrounded by extensive and complex cosmologies and believed to influence the course of the celestial bodies. The same is borne out also in the *Laozi bianhua jing* 老子變化經 (Scripture of Laozi's Transformations; see Seidel 1969), which survived in Dunhuang (S 2295). It says:

He is the sublime essence of spontaneity, the root of the Dao [...].  
The root of Heaven and Earth,

The top and bottom of the ladder of life,  
 The sovereign of the gods,  
 First ancestor of *yin* and *yang*,  
 The *hun-* and *po-*[souls] of the ten thousand beings.  
 He creates by changing and adjusting to what is required  
 Encircling the eight poles,  
 He supports the Earth and hangs up the sky. (Seidel 1969b, 223)

Laozi at this point was not only a god but the supreme deity of an entire pantheon. As the text says: “He is the sovereign of the gods.” In addition, he is also an eschatological savior who protects believers from imminent catastrophes:

Since now the actions of Heaven and Earth are disturbed,  
 I myself will change destiny. In this present age I will choose the good people.  
 You must not select yourself; by [your] upright behavior and self control  
 I will recognize you. (Seidel 1969b, 225)

Toward the end of the text, Laozi says:

I have instructed all of you five or six times.  
 When the planet Venus leaves its orbit,  
 Come quickly, join with me!  
 Search for me on the Southern Peak (?)  
 And you will be saved from danger.

To prepare his followers for future disasters and save especially those who are of high virtue and excellent moral behavior, Laozi thus exhorts his people to turn their minds constantly to him and think of him even in their dreams. He further commands them to read “his work,” the *Book in Five Thousand Words*, ten thousand times: “[If during this crisis] you wish to know my whereabouts, chant the *Five Thousand Book* ten thousand times.” Chanting Laozi’s text is, of course, to worship its author. This act of reverence, in combination with meditation, prayers, and moral behavior, had the further effect that the god would recognize honest and sincere adepts in times of danger and crisis and help them when in peril.

To sum up, the recitation of Daoist scriptures in a court environment and combined with Buddhist cult practices is firmly attested for the first century CE. Unambiguous evidence for the recitation of scriptures in a Daoist environment, on the other hand, does not go not further back than the early fourth century. Reciting the *Daode jing* meant entering into communication with its mythical author, Laozi, who was considered an immortal as early as in the first century and had become a high god by the second. As some early texts say, Laozi as a god would help in various ways all those who cherished his scripture and thus

honored him as its author. All other sacred scriptures were only composed in the fourth century, describing how spiritual beings guarded them and reported their owner's behavior to the gods. Recitation of these scriptures over thousands of times proved the adept's deep devotion and respect for the gods and—in a form of reciprocity—motivated gods to intervene on their behalf.

## Daoist Book Cults

Given the sacred nature of the scriptures and their mighty guardians, it does not come as a surprise that they were also the subject of cults and veneration. Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian* already hints at some special form of reverence toward the scriptures:

In response to those who have secured the divine process and entered the mountain to give sincere thought to it, the god of the mountain will automatically open the mountain and let such persons see the texts, just as Bo He got his in a mountain, and immediately set up an altar, made a present of silk, drew one ordinary copy, and then left with them. A purified place is always prepared for such texts, and whenever anything is done about them one must first announce it to them, as though one were serving a sovereign or a father. (19.336; Ware 1966, 314)

Bo He 帛和 (*xi Zhongli 仲理*) did not dare to remove the original scripture, assuming that it ought to be kept in the holy place for others to see. He set up an altar which clearly shows that he believed in the presence of divinity in the place. The gods, the true owners of the original scripture, received silk, the material on which further scriptures could be written. From this incident Ge Hong derived the general rule that whenever scriptures were found, one not only had to venerate them but must also keep their location clean. This probably meant sweeping and sprinkling the ground of the cave and putting the scripture on a special repository, such as an altar. If found in the open, other measures were to be taken. The *Daoxue zhuan* shows:

In the beginning of the Liang (502 CE), in the vast plain desert around the islet of the Kunlun mountains, there were three old lacquered boxes, inside which was the *Taiping jing* in three parts,<sup>5</sup> written on yellow silk in the hand of Gan Jun. The villagers held them in awe, extended their discovery site, erected a meditation hut, and made offerings. (*Sandong zhuan* 1.17a; Bumbacher 2000a, 270; also Seidel 1983; Beck 1980; Bumbacher 1995)

This shows that the scripture's discovery or holding place was not just swept and kept clean, but it was felt necessary to erect a special building for it, a meditation hut, quiet chamber, or small shrine.

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<sup>5</sup> Alternative reading: "Three parts of the *Scripture of the Great Peace*."

Just as the scripture as a sacred object renders its resting place sacred, so the quiet chamber erected on its behalf was originally a dwelling place for the gods. The villagers' behavior toward the scripture, treating it like a god or powerful spirit, is a form of cult that focuses on the worship of the holy *Scripture of Great Peace*. The passage may well be the first evidence of a Daoist book cult. Since Daoist scriptures—thanks to their origin as emanations from the primordial energy—were considered sacred and since they were, at least in the Daoist organizations from the fourth century onward, believed to be surrounded and protected by supernatural beings, they had to be treated like sacred objects or like gods or immortals. The villagers, certainly unable to read the text, considered its appearance a good omen. Not knowing who had put it there and why, it must have seemed natural that gods or immortals deposited it for them to have and to hold. The presentation of offerings to the text accordingly were also offerings to the gods, who in turn would respond by bestowing wide blessings.

Veneration of the scriptures, moreover, was not only the bailiwick of uneducated villagers living at the periphery of the civilized world. Intellectuals, too, and high-ranking aristocrats connected to the imperial court working in the center of the Chinese culture were just as likely to be involved in such practices. Tao Hongjing, famous scholar and foremost Daoist, too, participated in a book cult. As the *Daoxue zhuan* notes, “Tao took a ‘magpie-tail’ incense burner of real gold, followed those who carried the scriptures and sacrificed to them” (*Sandong zhuan* 4.10b; Bumbacher 2000a, 273).

This is the only surviving trace of this ritual. Yet we can imagine that Tao had the box containing the scriptures carried to the place where it was to be stored and, following the disciple who held it, himself carried the incense burner, bowing before the deposited box and offering the sacrificial goods. It is worth noting that a “magpie-tail” incense burner—an incense burner with a long handle—is first mentioned in a Buddhist context. Wang Yan's 王琰 (fl. 463–485) *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 (Records of Signs from the Unseen Realm, lost; see Campamy 1996) reports that this utensil was used by a certain Fei Chongxian 費崇先, native of Wuxing 吳興, in 467.<sup>6</sup>

Tao may have relied on an earlier Highest Clarity tradition as the Later Sage in the *Housheng Daojun lieji* asked the prospective readers of sacred Daoist scripture to act as follows:

Each time you intone this scripture or put its content to use, you should bow respectfully to them. Wash your hands and burn incense to the left and right of the writing. (6b; Bokenkamp 1997, 351)

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<sup>6</sup> *Mingxiang ji* as cited in *Fayuan zhulin* 24.467a.

## Conclusion

Daoist sacred scriptures evolved from the apocrypha of the Han dynasty. This can still be seen, e.g., in the *Wufuxu* which contains lengthy quotations (without attribution) from apocryphal texts (see Bokenkamp 1986). Accordingly, they inherited from the apocrypha their heavenly origin. Like the apocrypha which acted as the heavenly “half” of a tally that matched the well-behaving characters of the human recipients (the earthly “half” of the tally), Heaven bestowed the Daoist sacred scriptures upon human beings of excellent comportment.

Like omens sent to announce the change of the mandate when the political situation of the empire had become intolerable, so the Daoist sacred scriptures were revealed in times of distress to help a population left on its own by an incapable secular administration.

However, Daoists of the fourth century went a step further and elevated their highest scriptures to the same rank as the highest gods, integrating them into a new cosmology. As the scriptures thus shared certain properties with the gods, they had to be given the same attention and were to receive the same reverence and even similar cults.

## Chapter Seven

### The Buddhist Context

Daoism and Buddhism did not evolve in China independently yet both traditions were, and are, fundamentally different in their ultimate goals. How, then, did Buddhists deal with their sacred scriptures or sutras? Were there any similarities between Daoist and Buddhist behavior with regard to sacred texts? And if so, were they the results of parallel yet unrelated developments? Or did they come about because of some influence by the other tradition?

Buddhist scriptures in China were present at least in the last decades of the second century CE when evidence suggests a large-scale preoccupation with Buddhist texts in the broader Pengcheng area. As the *Sanguo zhi* says:

Zhai Rong, a native of Danyang, [...] erected a large Buddhist temple, made a human [statue] from bronze: gold varnished its body, and it was dressed with brocade. [From the building] were suspended nine layers of bronze scales and below there was a building of several stories and covered ways, suitable for containing more than three thousand people, all [of whom could] examine and read Buddhist scriptures.

He ordered that those of the people from within the area [of his command] and from adjacent prefectures who were devoted to Buddhism had to listen to and to receive the way [of Buddhism]. He dispensed them from their other statue labor duties in order to [be able to] call them. Those who, on account of this, from far and near sooner or later arrived [at the monastery] were more than five thousand individuals. (Wu 4.1185; alternative translation in Zürcher 1959, 28)

For so many people to be able to “study Buddhist scriptures” (*kedu fo jing* 課讀佛經) implies that some of the sutras must have already been available in Chinese translation. Of course, adherents might have just listened to oral explanations of the texts by bilingual or foreign monks accompanied by Chinese interpreters, but the word *du* 讀, “to read,” in the passage suggests that those present had indeed some form of text in front of them.

An Shigao 安世高, who “probably initiated the systematical translation of Buddhist texts and who organized the first translation team” (Zürcher 1959, 32), settled at Luoyang as early as 148 and spent over twenty years there. It is

quite likely that translation in China began in small, private endeavors even earlier. There is, therefore, no reason to doubt that from the middle of the second century at the latest, Chinese versions of Buddhist scriptures were available probably from Dunhuang in the west up to the Pengcheng area in the east.

## The Word of the Buddha

The traditional view of Buddhist scriptures is reflected in Wei Shou's 魏收 (506-572) "Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism" (*Shilao zhi* 釋老志), completed toward the end of 554 and included in the *Weishu* (ch. 114). It distinguishes two sorts of texts: scriptures (*sūtras*, *jīng* 經) and treatises (*śāstras*, *lun* 論). The former consist of recordings of the Buddha's own words, compiled by his disciples after his *parinirvāṇa*; the latter, written hundreds of years later, were published by arhats and bodhisattvas. The relevant passage reads:

To begin, Śākya (the historical Buddha) preached the law. After his nirvana there were voice-hearing disciples, Dajiashe (Mahākāśyapa), A'nan (Ānanda), and others, numbering five hundred, who selected, compiled, and recorded the teachings.<sup>1</sup> Ānanda had personally received the Buddha's commission; he was both attentive and retentive.

Thus he was able to penetrate to its very limit the Profound Ultimate, without losing or missing any of it. Accordingly, he put together the words and composed the scriptures of the Three Storehouses and Twelve Divisions. They are like the differing traditions of the Nine Schools. Their ultimate point is based on the Three Vehicles.

Then it refers to the treatises:

Several hundred years later there were arhats and bodhisattvas who in succession published treatises clarifying the scriptures' principles, and thereby refuting alien ways. These are the *Mobeyan lun*, the *Greater and Lesser Abhidharma*, the *Treatise of the Mean*, the *Treatise of Twelve Gateways*, the *Treatise of the Hundred Laws*, the *Treatise of the Attainment of Truth*, and others. All of them, basing themselves on the great doctrines of the Storehouses and Divisions, artificially set up a question from an outsider and, by resort of the Inner Doctrine, resolve it. (*Weishu* 114.3028; Hurvitz 1956, 44)

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of Hurvitz's original footnote reads: "This refers to the famous, albeit legendary, Council of Five Hundred (*pañcasātasamgīti*), allegedly held at Rājagṛha and known to the Chinese as *wubai jieji* 五百結集 or *wubai jifa* 五百集法. All three branches of the Buddhist canon make reference to this, but a notice very similar to that found in our text will be seen in the first *juan* of the *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan* 付法藏因緣傳, supposedly translated by the Northern Wei monk Tanyao 曇曜 and his associates" (Hurvitz 1956, 44).

A different tradition, roughly one and a half centuries older, assumes an oral transmission. Thus the Chinese monk Shi Dao'an 釋道安 (312-385), in his catalogue of current Buddhist scriptures compiled in 374, the *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 綜理衆經目錄 (Comprehensive Catalogue of Scriptures, lost), writes:<sup>2</sup>

When monks in foreign countries are trained in the teachings [of Buddhism], they kneel down and receive it orally. The teacher confers on his disciples the teachings exactly as he received them from his own teacher by repeating it ten or twenty times.

If even one word deviates [from the accepted transmission], it is revised after mutual conference and [the wrong word] is immediately deleted. There is no laxity as far as the monks and the teachings are concerned. It has not been long since the [Buddhist] scriptures reached the land of Jin [China]. (*Chu sanzang jiji* 38b8; Tokuno 1990, 34)

There is no contradiction between having an oral and a written transmission of the sacred scriptures, as McMahan makes clear:

Hearing the words of the awakened one, either through being in his presence during his lifetime or by hearing his teachings recited, was the primary and perhaps only way of receiving and engaging his teachings. Even after texts were being written down, it was not for the purpose of their being read privately.

The Vinaya gives detailed lists of all items of property a monk may have but never includes books or writing utensils. Rather, the Buddha's words were committed to palm leaf so that they would be preserved and read aloud in the context of instruction or public recitation. (1998, 54)

Whether orally transmitted, as in Dao'an's account or handed down in written form as described by Wei Shou, both traditions assume a direct transmission of the Buddha's word from its source to the China of their days with apparently no further revelations on the way. However, looked at more closely, the story becomes more complex.

## Transmission and Revelation

The clerical picture has it that the Buddha's word reached China as texts, either brought by foreigners or Chinese who had gone west to secure original scriptures, and that these scriptures were then translated into Chinese. However, this "indirect" transmission is only one part of the picture. In fact, there is am-

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<sup>2</sup> What survives are the parts contained in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445-518) later catalogue, the *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏集記 (A Compilation of Notices on the Translation of the *Tripitaka*, T 2145), compiled ca. 515.

ple evidence that there also was a “direct” transmission: the unmediated bestowal of the words of a sutra or its meaning by a celestial being upon a Chinese person.

Among the surviving fragments of Wang Yan’s *Mingxiang jì* is the biography of the nun Huimu 慧木, born in 369 with the secular surname Fu 傅. Once she dreamt that Amitābha, the future Buddha, explained the *Lesser Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* on her behalf:

Mu said: “When I was lying prostrate on the ground [in veneration], I dreamt that I went to the Country of Peace and Care (Western Pure Land) and saw [Amitābha] Buddha. He expounded the *Lesser Perfection of Wisdom* for me, and I obtained four scrolls. Then I was trampled on [by someone] and immediately awoke. I was very much annoyed and vexed about it. (*Mingxiang jì* in *Fayuan zhulin* [法苑珠林, Pearl Garden of the Dharma Forest, T 2122] 15.400a27)

During a direct encounter in a dream, Huimu thus received four scrolls of the sutra from the Buddha Amitābha before her transmission was interrupted. Amitābha residing in his Pure Land (*jing tu* 淨土, *anyang guo* 安養國), in the west, was known to the Chinese since about 179, when the Indo-Scythian monk Lokakṣema first translated the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi sūtra*<sup>3</sup> into Chinese, the earliest datable literary reference to this complex (Williams 1994, 220).

According to the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (Biographies of Buddhist Nuns, T 2063; transl. Tsai 1994), compiled by Baochang 寶唱 around 516, a celestial personage—quite possibly once more Amitābha—also expounded the monastic rules of the *Prātimokṣa* (*jieben* 戒本; see Prebish 1975). It says:

Not long before the evening of ordination, [Huimu] dreamt of a person who orally imparted the *Prātimokṣa* to her. After she had been ordained, she looked at it only twice and then could recite it [from memory]. (2.939a)

Other extraordinary personalities said to reveal sutras or important information concerning sacred scriptures include arhats. Dao’an’s biography in Huijiao’s 慧皎 (479-554) *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Lives of Eminent Monks, T 2059; see Wright 1954) has an account according to which not a buddha or an unknown supernatural person reveals a sutra but the famous arhat Piṇḍola who, upon request, confirms Dao’an’s interpretation of various sutras:

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<sup>3</sup> The *Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 exists in two versions that are attributed to Lokakṣema, one in three scrolls (T 417) and one in one scroll (T 1416). Although it has been suggested that the longer version may have been translated by Dharmarakṣa, this is now considered untenable, as the two versions are too similar in content to have been translated by different people. See Stevenson 1986, 90n.41.

Dao'an frequently annotated the sutras, but he feared that [his interpretations] did not match the principles [of the sacred texts], so he announced the following vow: "If what I have explained is not very far from the principles, may I behold an auspicious sign!"

He then dreamed that he saw an Indian man of Dao who had white hair and long eyebrows. He spoke to An, saying: "The annotations you, Sir, have made to the sutras are quite in harmony with the principles [of the sacred texts]. As for me, I have not obtained nirvana and live in the Western Regions. I will aid you in diffusing [the doctrine]. From time to time you may make me an offering of food." (5.353b; Link 1958, 34)

Although initially unknown, the identity of this arhat was recognized and disclosed by Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-417):

Afterwards when the *Saṃvāstivāda-vinaya* arrived [in China], the Reverend [Hui-] Yuan recognized that the subject of the *upadhyāya*'s [Dao'an] dream was the [arhat] Piṇḍola. Thence they established a seat to make food offerings to him, and everywhere this became the rule. (5.353b; Link 1958, 34)

Piṇḍola-Bhāradvāja, also called "Chief of Lion's Roarers" (*Simhanādin*), sometimes is listed among the four chief disciples of the Buddha, i.e., Mahākāśyapa, Piṇḍola, Rāhula, and Kauṇḍinya. He allegedly still lived in the time of Aśoka and presented himself to the king (Edgerton 1953, 2: 345). Probably due to these legends, he gradually came to be thought of in China as an "old man of the mountains" who lingered in this world to aid worthy seekers of the true doctrine (Chavannes and Lévi 1916).

Dreams have the disadvantage that they usually cannot be directly influenced—most people cannot manipulate their content and they are hard to schedule beforehand. On the other hand, both time and content of a meditation can be controlled in accordance with specific techniques. Thus various reports relate how devoted monks in deep meditation encountered a buddha or bodhisattva and obtained a sacred scripture or religious instructions. The *Da Tang dacien si sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (Biography of the Sanzang Dharma-Master [Xuanzang] of the Dacien Monastery of the Great Tang [Dynasty], T 2053), by Huili 慧立 and edited by Yanzong 彥綜, says:

The master [Xuanzang] then concentrated his mind (*zhuan xin* 專心) on the palace in the Tusita Heaven and reflected (*nian* 念) on Maitreya, vowing to be reborn where he could pay homage to the bodhisattva and learn from him the *Yogācārabhūmi* while listening to the fine dharma. After having gained complete wisdom, he would be reborn again in this world where he would teach these same men, bringing them to practice good deeds and to abandon all evil acts, and where he would propagate the dharma widely for the benefit of all beings.

Next, the master paid homage to the buddhas of the ten directions, and then he sat mindfully (*zhengnian erzuo* 正念而坐), fixing his thoughts on Maitreya, free

of any other [mental] object (*wufu yilu* 無復異緣). It seemed that in his mind he ascended Mount Sumeru, passed through the first, second, and third Heavens, and then saw the palace in the Tusita Heaven with the bodhisattva Maitreya sitting on a dais made of marvelous gems and surrounded by heavenly beings. (234a; Sponberg 1986, 24)

The tradition of this rather late account can be traced at least to the fourth century. As Jan Nattier observed,

The notion of a mystical encounter with Maitreya as bodhisattva has been closely linked with the tradition of scriptural commentary, particularly that of the Yogācāra school (where Maitreya—whether or not the name originally referred to a historical person—is considered to be the author of a number of important philosophical texts). His role as “patron saint of commentators” was not, however, restricted to dictating Yogācāra literature of Asaṅga.” (1988, 29)

Similarly Dao'an turned to Maitreya for clarification of difficult scriptural passages. His disciple Sengrui 僧叡 wrote a preface to a commentary to Kumārajīva's (350-409?) translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa sūtra* (dat. 406). He says that Dao'an interrupted his commentarial work and during the period of discouragement thought of getting the solution from Maitreya (*Chu sanzang jiji* 59a8; see Demiéville 1948, 377).

An early Mahāyāna-text, the *Mañjuśrīparinirvāṇa sūtra* (T 463) which was translated around 300, clearly distinguishes between meditation and dream as vehicles for the transmission of Buddhist knowledge. It has:

If there are [people who] deeply believe in the Mahāyāna scriptures, this *dharmakumāra* [Mañjuśrī] during meditation will expound the profound dharma for them. As for [those whose] distractions [during meditation] are manifold, [Mañjuśrī] will expound the true meaning for them, [thus] allowing them to be firm. (481a25)

Meditation here is the main state for the proper revelation of a sutra, however, the “secondary” knowledge, the explication of its meaning, is transmitted in dreams. The original scripture is clearly more important, hence the revelation must take place in the superior state of mind that is normally reached only after severe efforts. The sutra's interpretation, on the other hand, is of lesser importance and can be transmitted in a dream.

## Lay Reception

Sacred scriptures, or parts thereof, could be miraculously transmitted not only to monks but also to poorly educated lay people. In that case, they functioned as a spiritual response to acts of pity or sympathy and represented examples of the doctrine of stimulus and response (*ganying* 感應). The *Mingxiang ji* tells the following story:

Dingchen, styled Deshen, a native of Jiyin, of the Jin [Dynasty], served as [district] magistrate of Ningyin during the Jian'an period. At that time the peasant women living at the northern border of the district used to go to a well outside their village to draw water. Once a foreigner with a long nose and deep-lying eyes passed by the well. He followed one woman and begged for a drink. When he had finished drinking, all at once he was no longer seen.

The physical characteristics of the foreigner clearly hint at a non-Chinese—and therefore potentially dangerous—person. Asking the woman for a drink is a test of her human qualities. The woman passed the test and was rewarded:

The woman then felt pain in her belly. Subsequently it became more intense, and she screamed and shouted. Suddenly she rose from her seat, spoke in a foreign language and pointed at the [Buddhist] banners. The district had several tens of families who all came to watch. The woman called for paper and a brush and wished to write. When she obtained the brush, she immediately wrote in foreign script: arranged in horizontal lines some characters were like *ji* 乙, some were like *ji* 己.

The author may have had in mind something like the Kharoṣṭhī script still found on ancient Buddhist scrolls from Gandhāra (see Salomon 1999, pl. 10).

She filled five sheets of paper, spread them on the ground and instructed the others to read the text. No one in the district could decipher it. [However,] there was a small boy, ten odd years old. The woman then pointed at the boy, saying that he was able to read it.

When the boy saw the writing, he immediately read it aloud in a foreign language. Those who watched were startled and did not know what to say. The woman bade the boy to rise and dance. He got up, stood on tiptoe, and gestured with his hands. They both moved in mutual harmony and stopped after a while.

In order for the story to gain official recognition state authorities had to become involved. That is where the district magistrate, Deshen, comes in again:

This was brought to Deshen's attention. He summoned the woman and the boy to his office and questioned them. They said that at the time they unexpectedly became unaware of themselves. Deshen wished to verify this matter and sent a

messenger to take the text to the [Buddhist] Xuxia Monastery, in order to show it to an old foreign monk.

The foreigner was surprised and said that [it complements] a sutra of his which had parts missing and that, the way [to India] being long, he had been grieved at not being able to obtain it otherwise. (*Mingxiang ji* in *Fayuan zhulin* 18.417a; see Campamy 1991, 44-45; Yang and Yang 1958, 122-123)

The story places great emphasis on the foreign provenance of both the text, written in “barbarian” script (*hu shu* 胡書) and chanted in “barbarian” language (*hu yu* 胡語), and the key characters of transmission: the foreign monk who asks for water and apparently serves as the mysterious carrier of the scripture; and the old monk who recognizes the text and knows what to do with it. Also, the dance performed by woman and boy, performed in veneration of the scripture,<sup>4</sup> seems to be exotic and possibly of Indian or Central Asian origin: “stay-ing on tiptoe and gesturing with the hands” (*yi shounong* 以手弄). The story thus repeats the process of the indirect transmission but condenses it in time and space, implying that the truth of the Buddha’s word is “communicable across boundaries of class, language, literacy, gender, and culture” (Campamy 1991, 46).

These examples show that Daoist scriptures were not the only ones revealed directly in dreams or in trance by some immortal beings. Buddhist sutras and commentaries, too, were occasionally revealed in dreams or in meditation by buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, or other supernatural personages.

## Transmission in Meditation

Visualizing a buddha or bodhisattva (*buddhānusr̥ti*) has a long tradition in Buddhism. Already the *Sutta Nipāta*, generally considered one of the oldest extant Pāli texts (Williams 1994, 217), mentions a Brahmin named Pingiya (“the wise”) as saying:

There is no moment for me, however small, that is spent away from Gautama [Buddha], from this universe of wisdom, this world of understanding [...] *with constant and careful vigilance it is possible for me to see him with my mind as clearly as with my eyes*, in night as well as day. And since I spend my nights revering him, there is not, to my mind, a single moment spent away from him. (*Sutta Nipāta* v. 1140, 1142, Williams 1994, 217; emphasis added)

As Harrison notes, various forms of *anusr̥ti*—literally, “recollection,” “remembrance,” and by extension, “calling to mind,” “keeping in mind”—was part of Buddhist practice from early on, as amply attested in the Pāli *Nikāyas*

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<sup>4</sup> This can be regarded as some simple form of “ritual performed on behalf of scriptures,” for which see below.

and the Chinese translations of the Sanskrit *Āgamas* (1978, 36). In Mahāyāna texts, however, only recollections of the Buddha, the *vinaya*, and the *saṅgha* were important and among these, *buddhānusmṛti* was pre-eminent (1978, 37). In a canonical collection of the pre-Mahāyāna,<sup>5</sup> the *Ekottarāgama*, a passage describes it in some detail:

The Lord said:

“A *bhikṣu* correct in body and correct in mind sits cross-legged and focuses his thought in front of him. Without entertaining any other thought he earnestly calls to mind (*anusmṛ-*) the Buddha. He contemplates the image of the Tathāgata without taking his eyes off it.

Not taking his eyes off it he then calls to mind the qualities of the Tathāgata—the Tathāgata’s body made of *vajra*, endowed with the ten Powers (*bala*), and by virtue of the four Assurances (*vaiśāradya*) intrepid in assemblies; the Tathāgata’s countenance, upright and peerless, so that one never tires of beholding it; his perfection of the moral qualities (*śīla*) resembling *vajra* in indestructibility, like *vaiḍūrya* in flawless purity.” (*Zengyi aban jing* 增壹阿含經 [T 125] 554a20; Harrison, 1978, 38)

Early Mahāyāna followers further developed the practice. The *Pratyutpanna-  
[buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita]-samādhi sūtra* (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 T 418), translated by Lokakṣema in 179, states that its instructions on how to practice the *samādhi* of direct encounter with the buddhas of the present (*pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi*) will, if strictly observed, lead to the appearance of Amitāyus before the meditator:<sup>6</sup>

The Buddha said to Bhadrupāla: “In the same way, Bhadrupāla, bodhisattvas, whether they be ascetics or wearers of white (laymen or laywomen), having learned of the Buddha-field of Amitābha in the western quarter, should call to mind the Buddha in that quarter. They should not break the precepts, and call him to mind single-mindedly, either for one day and one night, or for seven days and seven nights. After seven days they will see the Buddha Amitābha. If they do not see him in the waking state, then they will see him in a dream.” (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 905a10, 13-17; Harrison 1998, 17)

In this context bodhisattva indicates a Buddhist adept or meditator in general. In a state of deep *samādhi*, he will receive the direct transmission of the doctrine, the Buddha’s oral presentation of the dharma. The text continues:

<sup>5</sup> Although the Hīnayāna scriptures are written in Pāli, a canon in Sanskrit must also have existed. Fragments, belonging to the Sarvāstivāda school, appear among manuscripts found in East Turkestan and Nepal as well as in Chinese and Tibetan translations. Here the Pāli expression *nikāya* corresponds with the term *āgama*.

<sup>6</sup> For a translation of the Tibetan version which may be close to the lost Sanskrit original, see Harrison 1978, 43.

It is like the things a man sees in a dream—he is not conscious of day or night, nor is he conscious of inside or outside; he does not fail to see because he is in darkness, nor does he fail to see because there are obstructions. It is the same, Bhadrāpāla, for the minds of the bodhisattvas: when they perform this calling to mind, the famous great mountains and the Mount Sumerus in all the Buddha-realms, and all the places of darkness between them, are laid open to them, so that their vision is not obscured, and their minds are not obstructed.

These bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* do not see through [the obstructions] with the divine eye, nor hear through them with the divine ear, nor travel to that Buddha-field by means of the supernormal power of motion, nor do they die here to be reborn in that Buddha-field there, and only then see; rather, while sitting here they see the Buddha Amitābha, hear the sutras which he preaches, and receive them all. Rising from meditation they are able to preach them to others in full. (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 905a17–26; Harrison 1998, 18)

In other words, the *Pratyutpanna-[buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita]-samādhi sūtra* has the Buddha explain the special state of meditation called *buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi* to the householder-bodhisattva Bhadrāpāla. Through this, mental powers are focused in such a way that devotees perceive themselves carried to other Buddha-fields to see the present buddhas expounding the dharma. The devotees, furthermore, retain what they were taught and communicate it to others.

However, the same text also presents an aspect that is highly similar to what occurs in the Daoist context: the appearance of sacred scriptures—in this case, the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi sūtra*—in caves. It says that, after circulating for a short period, it will disappear and be suddenly rediscovered in the ‘Last Age’:

The Buddha said to the bodhisattva Bhadrāpāla: “After my *parinirvāṇa* this *Samādhi sūtra* will appear for forty years; thereafter it will no longer appear. Then, in the latter age of confusion, at the time when the Buddhist dharma is about to perish, when *bhikṣus* no longer accept the Buddha’s teaching, at the same time of the latter age of confusion, when kingdom takes up arms against kingdom, at that time this *samādhi* will again appear in Jambudvīpa; because of the Buddha’s might, this *samādhi* will again emerge.” (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 911a5–10; Harrison 1990, 97)

Later the text makes it clear that the sutra will be hidden in *stūpas* and mountains (911b27), i.e., in caves, to be suddenly rediscovered and propagated anew.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harrison comments the Tibetan versions of this passage:

The discovery of hitherto unknown texts hidden in the ground or inside *stūpas* was of course a common occurrence in Tibet, where such texts were known as *gter mas* (‘treasures’); according to Kvaerne (1974), the first *gter mas* were discovered in the eleventh century. Here, however, we have a reference to the same sort of things some nine centuries earlier, and in India. Without more data it would be difficult to determine whether this was merely a particularly original and inventive piece of self-authentication on the part of the author of the *Pra-*

## Protection against Maltreatment

In the case of Daoist scriptures, maltreatment and wrongful transmission were punished by spiritual guardians. This holds equally true for Buddhist sutras. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, or *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law* (*Miaofa lianbua jing* 妙法蓮華經 T 262; abbr. *Lotus Sutra*) gives an extensive description. Thus the Buddha tells Śāriputra:

If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra,  
immediately he will destroy all seeds for becoming a buddha in this world.  
Perhaps he will scowl with knitted brows and harbor doubt or perplexity.  
Listen and I will tell you the penalty this person must pay.

Whether the Buddha is in the world or has already entered extinction,  
if this person should slander a sutra such as this,  
or on seeing those who read, recite, copy and uphold this sutra,  
should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them,  
the penalty this person must pay: listen, I will tell you now.

In accordance with the tremendous importance the text accords itself, the punishments inflicted are severe:

When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell,  
confined there for a whole *kalpa*, and when it ends, be born there again.  
He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of *kalpas*.  
Though he may emerge from hell, he will fall into the realm of beasts,  
becoming a dog or jackal, his form lean and scruffy,  
dark, discolored, with scabs and sores, something for men to make sport.

Or again he will be hated and despised by men,  
constantly plagued by hunger and thirst, his bones and flesh dried up,  
in life undergoing torment and hardship, in death buried beneath the tiles  
and stones. (*Miaofa lianbua jing* 3.15b; Watson 1993, 74-75)

Punishment beyond death and over several life times will thus be exacted upon anyone who treats the sutra in a disrespectful way or slanders it as well as on those who “on seeing those who read, recite, copy and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them.”<sup>8</sup>

Texts like the *Lotus Sutra* are normative in that they focus on principles and rules and may not reflect actual beliefs and practices. In contrast, more

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*tyutpanna-sūtra*, or whether it points to a well-known process of text-discovery current at the time. (1978, 57n.22)

<sup>8</sup> A comparable description is found, although not in *gāthā* form but in prose, elsewhere in the *Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa lianbua jing* 28.62a, Watson 1993, 323-324).

descriptive works may relate detailed events. For example, the *Mingxiang ji* contains the account of a former nun who has to pay with her life for improperly treating the sutras:

The Song-dynasty nun Shi Zhitong 釋智通 belonged to the Jianjing Nunnery in the capital. She was young and beautiful, and her faith in the path was not very deep. In the ninth year of the Yuanjia period (432), her superior died and she left the path and was married to one Liang Qunfu of Wei Commandery. She gave birth to a son.

When he was seven years old, the family was extremely poor, and she had no fabric for clothing. While Zhitong was a nun she had obtained several rolls of sutra texts on plain silk, including the *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 (*Sukhavatī-yūha sūtra*), the *Lotus*, and others. She now sewed these together to make clothes for her son.

A year later she grew sick. She was terrified because her body was covered with sores where the skin was torn and scaled as though she had been burned by fire. Tiny white worms multiplied daily on her body and caused excruciating pain. She howled day and night. She often heard a voice in midair saying: "Ruining sutra texts to make clothes—this is the reason why you are receiving this severe retribution." In a little over a week she died. (*Mingxiang ji* in *Fayuan zhulin* 18.418c, variants in *Taiping guangji* 116.2; see Campamy 1991, 41)

The question arises: who was responsible for the execution of the punishment? The *Lotus Sutra* states that, like Daoist scriptures, sutras are protected and guarded by powerful divine beings, i.e., by "the supernatural powers (*shen li* 神力) of all the buddhas of the past, future, and present" (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 T 262, 14.38c19; Watson 1993, 206).

More than that, Śākyamuni himself, before revealing it to the world, had guarded it himself:

"Mañjuśrī, this *Lotus Sutra* is the secret storehouse of the buddhas, the Tathāgata. Among sutras, it holds the highest place. Through the long night I have guarded and protected it and have never recklessly propagated it. But today for the first time I expound it for your sake." (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 14.39a18, Watson 1993, 207)

Later he speaks of an even larger group of guardians who protect it against evil:

At that time the bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* who had gathered from the lands of the other directions, greater in number than sands of eight Ganges, stood up in the midst of the great assembly, pressed their palms together, bowed in obeisance and said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, if you will permit us in the age after the Buddha has entered extinction to diligently and earnestly protect, read, recite, copy and offer alms to this sutra in the world, we will preach it widely throughout this land!"

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas*: "Leave off, good men! There is no need for you to protect this sutra. Why? Because in this world of mine there are bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* who are as numerous as the

sands of sixty thousand Ganges, and each of these bodhisattvas has a retinue equal to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. After I have entered extinction these persons will be able to protect, read, recite and widely preach this sutra.” (*Miaofa lianbua jing* 15.39c19-28; Watson 1993, 212)

Here the *Lotus Sutra* is not only protected by bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* but also by the large retinues serving them. This matches the equally two-layered protection of sacred Daoist scriptures that consisted of the gods and their servants, the jade lads and jade maidens working as scripture attendants.

The guardians protected the sutras even against people of goodwill who for some reason tried to change their size or wording. The *Mingxiang ji* relates the story of the Monk Shi Huiyan 釋慧嚴 who felt uncomfortable with the length of the *Da niepan jing* 大涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*) and decided to trim it down and distribute copies of his abridged version. After showing it to his friends, he was warned over successive nights by an apparition about “the dangers of altering and taking the sutras lightly.” To avoid punishment, he destroyed all copies of his short version as soon as he awoke on the third morning. (*Fayuan zhubin* 18.418c; Campy 1991, 66n58.)

## Beneficial Properties

Buddhist sutras being embedded in a vast environment of protecting and guarding agents, they also had supernatural properties to benefit their owners. Just as protection extends to anyone despising or ill-treating a supporter of the text, so everybody who cares for it participates in this benefit program. Thus the biography of the first monk in China, Kāśyapa Mātāṅga (She Moteng 攝摩騰) from central India, says:

Mātāṅga said: “The *Sūtra* says: ‘Whoever can expound the law of this sutra will be protected (*hu* 護) by the spirit of the soil. He will cause the dwelling place [of the person] to be peaceful and pleasing.’” (*Gaoseng zhuan* 1.322c)

The *Sūtra* in question is the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa sūtra* (*Jin guangmei jing* 金光明經 T 663), known as the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, translated by Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchan 曇無讖) from Central India between 414 and 421.<sup>9</sup> Here the protector is not a buddha or bodhisattva but a local god of the soil, clearly co-opted by the Buddhists.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the quotation is not a literal one. The notion referred to is to be found in *Jin guangmei jing* T 663.345c.

More details appear in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song [Collection of] Biographies of Eminent Monks, T 2061), compiled upon imperial orders and under the guidance of the distinguished monk Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001) between 982 and 988. According to this Shi Hongzheng 釋洪正 recovered from a chronic disease and vowed to recite the *Jingang boruo jing* 金剛般若經 (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, *Diamond Sutra*) twenty times every day.

One night he was busy reciting while the monk next door was in deep meditation. The latter saw two ghost-messengers (*guili* 鬼吏) come into the room carrying documents in their hands. They talked to each other saying that they had to fetch Hongzheng and bring him to the underworld. One of them observed that, as Hongzheng was mentally focusing on the sutra, he was protected by a great and exceptional spirit right beside him. Thus it was impossible for them to approach and get him. Fearing that they could not fulfill their task in due time, they went away and caught another monk who happened to have the same name. The next morning, the monk who had seen the ghosts inquired and found out that indeed a monk by the name of Hongzheng had died in the night. In other words, Buddhist sutras had an apotropaic power which, in fact, was exercised by the supernatural beings surrounding the sacred scripture and its legitimized owner or reciter (24.864a; Jan 1977, 296).

The *Lotus Sutra* already promised the reverential believer that he or she will be protected by a vast number of buddhas:

If a person is able to hear this *Lotus Sutra*, if he copies it himself or causes others to copy it, the benefits he gains thereby will be such that even the Buddha wisdom could never finish calculating their extent. If one copies these scrolls and uses flowers, incense, necklaces, incense for burning, powdered incense, paste incense, banners, canopies, robes, various kinds of lamps such as lamps of butter oil, oil lamps, lamps with various fragrant oils, lamps of *champaka* oil, or lamps of *navamālīkā* oil to make offerings to them, the benefits that he acquires will likewise be immeasurable [...].

At that time Buddhas will join in praising him from afar, saying: 'Excellent, excellent, good man! In the midst of the Law of Śākyamuni Buddha you have been able to accept, uphold, read, recite and ponder this sutra and to preach it for others. The good fortune you gain thereby is immeasurable and boundless. It cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water. Your benefits are such that a thousand Buddhas speaking altogether could never finish describing them. Now you have been able to destroy all devils and thieves, to annihilate the army of birth and death, and all others who bore you enmity or malice have likewise been wiped out. Good man, a hundred, a thousand Buddhas will employ their transcendental powers to join in guarding and protecting you. (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 23.54b20-26 and 23.54c07-14; Watson 1993, 287)

Thus a believer who heard, copied, or otherwise handled a sutra in a reverential manner earned great benefit and was assured heavenly protection. The sutras promised their hearers, readers, owners, copiers, and transmitters untold spiritual and bodily boons.

## Divine Power

Once monks and lay followers became aware that sacred scriptures were surrounded by celestial guardians who not only warded off evil from the sutras but also from their owners, it was a small step to assume that wearing these texts on the body could guarantee permanent protection. As Robert Campany shows, a story—the only one of that kind found so far—illustrates how a certain Xing Huaiming unknowingly issued a bright light in the night by carrying a sutra on his head. The light, in turn, allowed a friend to find his way. Again the *Mingxiang ji*:

Xing Huaiming, a native of Hejian, served as Adjutant to the Major General under the Song [during the Yuanjia period, 424–453]. He participated in the northern campaign led by the Regional Inspector of Jingzhou, Zhu Mingzhi, whose forces were defeated. Xing and others were captured alive by the enemy. But, with a handful of compatriots, he managed to escape. For three days they traveled by night and hid during the day. Even so they feared being pursued and recaptured, so they sent one man ahead to scout for enemies, and this man did not return for several days.

One dark and rainy night, the man suddenly came back. On arriving, he said in surprise: “As I approached, I could see very plainly the bright light of a fire, so I came this way; how is it that when I arrive I find it completely dark here?”

The group marveled at this and could find no explanation. Now, Huaiming had previously venerated the dharma and, throughout the campaign, continuously carried the *Guanshiyin jing* (*Avalokiteśvara sūtra*) on top of his head, reciting it without interruption. He had also been reciting it that very night, so everyone suspected that [this anomaly] was due to the divine power of the sutra. With that they all developed prayerful hearts, and after they had escaped they resided in the capital. (*Mingxiang ji* in *Fayuan zhulin* 23.459b, Campany 1991)

Campany comments: “All extant versions of this story are careful to say that the protagonist not only wore the sutra on his head but also recited it” (1991, 38). It is thus not entirely clear which of these various activities—reciting, diligently concentrating his thoughts, or carrying the scripture on his head—in the end caused the bright light. However, there are further examples, some from the *Lotus Sutra*, that substantiate the idea of material presence as key to protection (Campany 1991, 39). Although not fully proven, it can certainly not be excluded that some Chinese Buddhists from the fourth century onwards thought wearing a sutra on their body might serve as apotropaic protection. Also, while at first glance comparable to the Daoist wearing of *fū*-tallies at the waist, it is not the same practice at all. Tallies, after all, only served as certificates of legitimation that entitled their bearer to ask the gods for favors, usually by means of a prayer. They were not in themselves carriers of supernatural

powers that might intervene on the bearer's behalf. On the other hand, the parallel is certainly striking.

In addition to apotropaic properties, sutras were also believed to effect exorcisms. Thus the *Mingxiang ji* notes that convalescence from illness, not unlike in comparative Daoist cases, could be achieved through the recitation of a sutra:

Dong Ji of the Jin Dynasty (265-419) was a native of Yuqian. [His family] having served the dharma for three generations, during Ji's lifetime, they were making particular progress in their refinement. He constantly practiced [abstention] and [observed] the precepts, and recited the *Shou lengyan jing* 首楞嚴經 (*Sūratigama* [*samādhi*] *sūtra*, T 642). Whenever in [his] village somebody was sick and [they] would informally beg Ji to recite the sutra, many of those whom he helped were cured. (*Mingxiang ji* in *Fayuan zhulin* 18.417b; Campney 1991, 48)

Just as the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gods (*devas*) could cause people to become sick if they maltreated sutras, so they could also heal them if they upheld the dharma.

This benefit, however, is next to nothing when compared with the blessings bestowed upon those who listened to or read the *Lotus Sutra*. Chapter 18 ends with a *gāthā* describing in an impressive way what can be expected, if somebody motivated somebody else to listen to the words of the sutra:

Suppose someone encourages another person,  
urging him to go and listen to the *Lotus*, saying:  
"This sutra is profound and wonderful,  
hard to encounter in a thousand, ten thousand *kalpas*!"

And suppose, as urged, the person goes to listen,  
even though he listens for just a moment.  
The blessings that the first person gets in reward  
I will now describe in detail:

Age after age, no afflictions of the mouth,  
no teeth missing, yellow or blackened,  
lips that are not thick, curled or defective,  
no hateful features,  
a tongue not dry, black or too short.

Nose high, long and straight,  
forehead broad, smooth and well shaped,  
face and eyeballs properly aligned and impressive,  
the kind people delight to look at,  
breath free of foul odor,  
a fragrance of *utpala* flowers  
constantly emitted by the mouth.

Similarly, whoever went in person to listen to the sutra would be lavishly rewarded:

Suppose one goes to the monks' quarters  
expressly to listen the *Lotus Sutra*  
and listens with joy for just a moment—  
I will now describe his blessings:

In existences to come among heavenly and human beings  
he will acquire wonderful elephants, horses, carriages,  
palanquins adorned with rare jewels,  
and will mount to the palaces in Heaven.  
If in the place where the law is expounded  
one encourages someone to sit and hear the sutra,  
the blessings he acquires will enable him  
to gain the seat of Śakra, Brahmā, and the wheel-turner.

How much more so if one listens single-mindedly,  
explains and expounds the meaning,  
and practices the sutra as the sutra instructs -  
that person's blessings know no bounds!  
(*Miaofa lianhua jing* 18.47b; Watson 1993, 249)

## Recitation

As the Daoists recited their sacred scriptures, so did the Buddhists. In an article entitled “The Power of Recitation: An Unstudied Aspect of Chinese Buddhism,” Jan Yün-hua draws attention to the fact that “Chinese Buddhists [...] had fully recognized the power of recitation. They regarded it as one of the most powerful means to achieve a religious goal” (1977, 190). Historiographic works mention it variously, for example, the biography of the scholar and Buddhist Lu Jingyu 盧景裕 (fl. 532-539), author of commentaries to various classics, says:

After Lu Jingyu's defeat, he was put into shackles in the prison of Jinyang. Earnestly reciting sutras, the cage and lock came off by themselves.

A fellow prisoner at the time was accused of a crime and faced execution. In a dream a monk taught him to recite a sutra. When he woke up, he followed the dreamed instructions and secretly recited the text a thousand times. Reaching the point of execution, the blade broke off. The ruler heard of this and granted a pardon.

This sutra subsequently circulated in the wider society. It was called *Gao wang Guanshiyin jing* 高王觀世音 (Sutra of Avalokiteśvara, from the Era of Prince Gao). (*Weishu* 84.1860)<sup>10</sup>

A later version of the same episode not only provides the name of the prisoner, making him a soldier called Sun Jingde 孫敬德, but also explicitly mentions Gao Huan 高歡 (496-547), the chief minister who pardoned him.<sup>11</sup>

The story is remarkable for various reasons. First, it is another example of the sutras' beneficial properties as recitation leads to the destruction of the executioner's sword. Second, it belongs into the category of supernatural or direct revelation. Although recitation techniques were usually transmitted from master to novice, when no master was available it could also be learnt from a heavenly spirit or god (*deva*, *tianshen* 天神). The *Gaoseng zhuan* lists the monk Zhi Tanyue 支曇籥 as an example of this (13.413c), while the *Biqiuni zhuan* says about the nun Daochou 道籌 (fl. 424-453) of Zhihuan Convent that "she recited the *Lotus Sutra* three thousand times and [as a result] frequently saw radiant omens" (2.938b).

These omens were the spiritual response to her diligence, indicating that she was on the right path. For example, "On the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Yuanjia (439), in the middle of the night, a jeweled umbrella hung down [from Heaven] and hovered above her" (2.938b).

It further seems that the nuns received instruction in sutra recitation by foreign monks who also taught meditation:

The instructor (who ordained Jingjian 淨檢 of Zhulin Convent, the first Chinese nun) was the *śramaṇa* Zhishan (otherwise unknown) from the Western Regions. He dwelled in Zhipin (Kashmir), was gentle, knowledgeable, and elegant in thought, and practiced meditation (*dhyāna*) and recitation. (1.934c)

This possibly indicates that, independent of whether China at the time had a tradition of reciting scriptures, Buddhist sutra chanting was a Western rite, performed at least in Kashmir if not in India.

As far as the literary treatment of Buddhism is concerned, Campamy discusses narratives of texts like the *Mingxiang ji* and Lu Gao's 陸杲 (459-532) *Xi*

<sup>10</sup> Note this sutra was branded as spurious, what today is called an *apokryphon*, by Zhisheng 智昇 in his catalogue *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings, [Compiled During the] Kaiyuan [Era], T 2154) of 730. (See *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 18.672a; also see Tokuno 1990, 55)

<sup>11</sup> Hou Bai's 侯白 (fl. during the Sui dynasty) *Jingyi ji* 旌異記 (Citations of Marvels, lost), quoted in Daoxuan's 道宣 (596-667) *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 (Collected Records of Responses Among the Three Treasures of the Spiritual Continent, T 2106), on which the version of *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (18.674c) seems to be based; see Tokuno 1990, 55. On the *Jingyi ji*, see Campamy 1996, 90.

*Guanshiyin yingyan ji* 繫觀世音應驗記 (More Records of Avalokiteśvara's Responsive Manifestations; Campany 1996, 85-86) of 501. He notes that "the devotional use of sutras most ubiquitous [...] is their recitation: the repeated chanting of all or some of the words of the text," then adds that many tales carefully specify even the number of times a believer recited a sutra, "ranging from hundreds to thousands to, at least in one case, ten thousand recitations" (1991, 30).

In most stories that contain the motif of sutra recitation the focus is on cases of miraculous rewards, brought about by exceptional spirits standing by the scripture as well as by particularly powerful beings such as bodhisattvas (especially Avalokiteśvara) or certain buddhas. The strongest reward involved the prevention of imminent death, especially escape from execution, motivating the beneficiary to put more effort into his religious practice or, in the case of a lay person, to enter the *saṅgha*.

An example appears in the *Xi Guanshiyin yingyan ji*. "A certain Zhang Da was once imprisoned and sentenced to death. Left with no other alternative, he devoted himself exclusively to reciting the *Guanshiyin sūtra*. When he had done so close to 1,000 times, his shackles and fetters all broke. In a few days he was allowed to go free. *He then became a monk*" (Campany 1993, 239; emphasis added). In addition, such miraculous retributions convinced contemporaries that the Buddhist way was superior to anything else. This clarifies accounts like that in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks, T 2060), which states that some reciters' tongues or mouths remained intact without decay after their death as a numinous response to their recitation of the *Lotus Sutra* (Jan 1977, 293).

Despite the fact that these sources are rather late (5<sup>th</sup> c.), their central issues were already part of the earliest Chinese translations of Mahāyāna sutras—those translated by Lokakṣema in the late second century. Harrison notes: "[by] these sutras [...] at every step one is reminded of the great merit to be derived from reading, reciting, copying, preserving and imparting the texts to others. [As ...] they render one safe from thieves, poisonous snakes, death from fire and water, harassment by civil authorities, attack or possession by demons, drought, hailstorms and other natural disasters (see *Pratyutpanna-[buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita]-samādhi sūtra*, *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavi-nodanā sūtra* (*Aśbeshi wang jing* 阿闍世王經, The Dispelling of Ajātaśatru's Remorse, T 626), *Akṣobhyatathāgata-syaryūha sūtra* (*Achn foguo jing* 阿閼佛國經, The Magnificence of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya, T 313)" (1993, 175-176).

## Sutra Veneration

Not only Daoists had a cult of the book, Buddhists pursued it as well, in fact, “one of the most important aspects of early Mahāyāna practice is the worship of written sutras themselves” (McMahan 1998, 256). The *Mingxiang ji* says:

On another occasion this family suffered a devastating fire, in which everything was totally destroyed; but the [*Mahāprajñāpāramitā*] *sūtra* and a relic were found unscathed among the ashes. Wang Daozi of Kuaiji once visited [Zhou] Gao and asked for permission to make an offering to [these two objects]. (*Mingxiang ji* in *Fayuan zhulin* 18.417b; Campany 1991, 35; emphasis added)

While this example may still be dubious since there is also the veneration of a sacred relic in the tradition of *śarīra* (see Nishiwaki 1992), the following story about Shi Faxian 釋法顯 in Huijiao’s *Gaoseng zhuan* is very clear:

There was somebody whose family-name and personal name I forgot. He lived next to the Zhuqiao Gate [in the capital of Nanjing], and his family had served the correct transformation (Buddhism) for generations. He copied one part [of the *Da nihuan jing* 大泥洹經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*)], read it, recited it, and sacrificed to it.

As he had no separate sutra chamber, he stored it together with various other books. Later, wind and fire arose unexpectedly and reached his house. His property and goods were entirely consumed, and only the *Parinirvāṇa sūtra* was miraculously preserved without damage. The reduction to ashes did not encroach upon it nor did its scrolls change color. When the news spread in the capital, everybody sighed about the spiritual wonder. (3.338b; Shih 1968, 115)

These are the only examples of a Chinese Buddhist book cult in non-normative texts I have been able to find. This stands in sharp contrast to its importance in early Mahāyāna, as noted in the *Lotus Sutra*: “I now ought to sacrifice to Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue as well as to the *Lotus Sutra*” (23.53a).

However, the evidence clearly shows the high esteem the sutras enjoyed in China as early as the late third century. Their appearance was welcomed and they were greeted like famous personalities of high rank. Dao’an reports a relevant episode about Mokṣala’s (Wuchaluo 無叉羅) and the Indian layman Zhu Shulan’s 竺叔蘭 Chinese translation of the *Pañcavimśatisāhasrikāprajñā parāmītā sūtra*, the *Fanguang jing* 放光經:

When the *Fanguang jing* appeared, it widely circulated in the Chinese capital [Luoyang], and hosts of “retired gentlemen of calm mind” (cultured lay devotees) made copies of it. The *upadhyāya* Zhi at Zhongshan sent people to Cangyuan to have it copied on pieces of silk.

When [this copy] was brought back to Zhongshan, the king of Zhongshan and all monks welcomed the sutra [at a place] forty *li* South of the city, with a

display of pennants and streamers. Such was the way in which [this scripture] became current in the world. (*Chu sanzang jiji* 7.48a15; Zürcher 1959, 64)

The King of Zhongshan must have been Sima Dan 司馬耽, until 277, King of Jinan. According to the *Jinshu*, he passed away on October 9, 292. In other words, this event must have occurred between December 31, 291, when the translation of the sutra was finished, and his death (Zürcher 1959, 64).

## Conclusion

The Buddhist understanding and activation of sacred scriptures shows clearly that Daoist scriptures were not the only ones revealed in dreams or meditation sessions. Just as they often appear in times of socio-political unrest, so do Buddhist sutras often emerge in the “latter age of confusion.” In addition, Daoist scriptures were not the only ones surrounded by guarding agents and supernatural powers but Buddhist sutras, too, were protected by numerous buddhas, bodhisattvas, *mahāsattvas*, and their extensive retinues. In both religions, moreover, heavenly protection of the sutras extended beyond the texts themselves to their worthy owners. Both Buddhists and Daoists recited their holy scriptures and, last but not least, both practiced similar forms of cultic veneration.

## Chapter Eight

### Whose Influence?

The parallels between the Daoist and Buddhist examples are striking. Obviously both traditions share an entire complex of notions on sacred scriptures. Why is this so? Is it a pan-Asian tradition of book cults that just cropped up everywhere? Was it an indigenous Chinese idea subsequently adapted by Buddhists as part of their missionary strategy? Or were they originally Indian or Central Asian concepts that entered China with Buddhism and eventually became part of the Daoist religion? Is it maybe possible that there was a parallel development both in India or Central Asia and in China which subsequently merged into one single tradition in China?

### The Nature of the Scriptures

While Buddhists saw the sutras as the Buddha's own words recorded by his disciples, Daoists understood their scriptures as spontaneously formed from primordial *qi* at the beginning of cosmic self-creation, conceiving them as part of an entire cosmology. These two concepts are quite different and may indicate independent developments. However, the Daoist concept does not appear before the second half of the fourth century when it can be placed in the emerging tradition of Highest Clarity. It assumed its most elaborate form in Numinous Treasure whose formative scriptures appeared only a few decades after the original Highest Clarity corpus. As members of both schools were acquainted with Buddhism, it cannot be ruled out that Daoists developed this cosmology to secure a higher status for their scriptures, superseding Buddhist sutras. How certain, then, is it that Daoists of both Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure were well-versed in Buddhist scriptures?

The most elaborate description of the origin of Daoist scriptures appears in the *Duren jing*, which belongs to the Numinous Treasure corpus. Writing at the turn from the fourth to the fifth century, Ge Chaofu about whom next to nothing is known except the fact that he was the grandnephew of Ge Hong,

compiled a series of texts, the so-called Numinous Treasure scriptures (see Bokenkamp 1983). These were to initiate the third important Daoist tradition after the Celestial Masters and the Highest Clarity schools. Ge not only borrowed heavily from Yang Xi's Highest Clarity scriptures, he also made extensive use of Buddhist notions and concepts (see Zürcher 1980). As Bokenkamp has observed, fully half of his texts are structured in a manner strikingly similar to Buddhist scriptures (Bokenkamp 1990, 121). Ge even copied, almost verbatim, the first two sections of Zhi Qian's 支謙 (ca. 220-252)<sup>1</sup> *Foshuo Pusa Benye jing* 佛說菩薩本業經 (*Sūtra* of the Buddha's Explanation of the Original Karma of the Bodhisattvas; T 281) which deal with the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and the bodhisattva vows (Bokenkamp 1990, 126; 1983, 468-471).

The original Numinous Treasure corpus could be identified thanks to the catalogue compiled by Lu Xiuqing in 437, recovered among Dunhuang manuscripts (P 2256) and reconstructed by Ōfuchi Ninji (1974).<sup>2</sup> It was released between 397 and 402 and disseminated widely within a decade (Bokenkamp 1983, 441). It has also "already prompted unscrupulous persons to forge imitations" (Bokenkamp 1997, 374). The forgers obviously followed Ge Chaofu in using Buddhist elements.

An interesting point is made by Zhen Luan 甄鸞 in his *Xiao dao lun* 笑道論 (On Turning Daoism into Ridicule, *Guang hongming ji*, T 2103.143c-152b, see Kohn 1995a), written in 570 after his attendance at three court debates between Daoists and Buddhists sponsored by Yuwen Yong, Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou. After citing a passage from the (now lost) [*Lingbao*] *miaozhen jing ge* [靈寶妙真經歌 (Songs from the Numinous Treasure Scripture of Wondrous Perfection), Zhen comments: "This is [merely a plagiarism] changing [the phrase] 'wisdom of the Buddhas' of the *Lotus Sūtra* into 'wisdom of the Dao' " (150c25).

Can Zhen's claim be substantiated? He says:

E.g., the *Miaozhen ge* says: Even if the whole of [those who have] heard the sound [of Buddha's teaching]—their number being equal to the sands of the Ganges—*would exhaust their thoughts and would share their capacities, they would not be able to fathom the Dao's knowledge.* (150c22)

The relevant passage of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in Kumārajīva's translation, reads:

<sup>1</sup> He has a biography "attached" to that of Kang Senghui 康僧會 in *Gaoseng zhuan* 1.325a-326b, Shih 1968, 21-23.

<sup>2</sup> The list of the texts together with a short summary of each can be conveniently found in Bokenkamp 1983, 479-85. See also Yamada 2000.

Even if one filled the world [with people] all like Śāriputra, and they *would exhaust their thoughts and would share their capacities, they would not be able to fathom the Buddha's knowledge.* (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 2.6a02)

The identical Chinese characters are printed here in italics. The similarity is quite evident.

Such heavy appropriations, of course, would not go unnoticed. Daoists were accordingly accused of “having excerpted passages” from Buddhist scriptures like the *Lotus Sutra*. In response to Gu Huan's *Yixia lun* of 467, which claimed that Daoism and Buddhism were essentially the same yet the former is good for the Chinese while the latter is more suited for barbarians, Xie Zhenzhi 謝鎮之 (fl. ca. 470) wrote:

Daoist scriptures and records are simple and vulgar, they often produce the chiseling of [empty] holes. [When we] arrive at [works] like the *Numinous Treasure [Scripture] of Wondrous Perfection*, [we see that] they plucked and took up the *Lotus Sutra*, excerpted (lit. “restrictedly exploited”) [it] and were particularly unskillful [at that]. (*Hongming ji* 6.42c13)

Gu Huan felt obliged to defend the Daoists against this attack. He turned the argument around and said that the reverse was true: Buddhists had in fact re-written Daoist scriptures:

Formerly the question was put to the Daoist Gu Huan. Huan replied: “The *Numinous Treasure Scripture of Wondrous [Perfection]* is [written] in big characters of heavenly script and comes out [directly] from spontaneity. It is not originally [based on the] *Lotus Sutra*. Rather, it is so that Kumārajīva and Sengzhao changed our Daoist scriptures and fabricated the *Lotus Sutra*.” (*Guang hongming ji* 9.150c26)

According to Gu Huan, the translators Kumārajīva and Sengzhao used the Numinous Treasure text *Scripture of Wondrous Perfection* to make their own *Lotus Sutra*. Whereas the *Lotus Sutra* had already been translated in 255, in 288, and in 286 (by Dharmarakṣa in Chang'an),<sup>3</sup> Kumārajīva's version of 406 became standard—a text issued only a few years after Ge Chaofu released his textual corpus. As the Numinous Treasure text in question did not belong to Ge's original scriptures, it may even have been written considerably later than Kumārajīva's translation of the *Lotus Sutra*.

However, Ge Chaofu must have anticipated the argument and thus deliberately introduced the superior ancestry not only of Numinous Treasure scriptures over other Daoist texts but also over Buddhist sutras. He used a threefold strategy. First, he made sure that the Numinous Treasure corpus was superior to other Daoist traditions. For this reason he situated them earlier in time than

<sup>3</sup> Of these early translations only Dharmarakṣa's version is still extant. It is the *Zhengfabao jing* 正法華經, T 263. More on this below.

the Highest Clarity scriptures, the most popular scriptures of his day, claiming that they had been revealed to his ancestor Ge Xuan (fl. 240), the Immortal Duke Ge (Ge Xiangong 葛仙公) (Bokenkamp 1990, 121). Second, by portraying them as having originally formed during the early phase of the primordial chaos and, adopting Yang Xi's notion (*Zhen'gao* 2.7b2), having originated in "heavenly script" (*tianwen* 天文), he made them—as Bokenkamp has put it—"immune" to charges of plagiarism. This argument was in turn adopted by Gu Huan: "[This scripture is written] in big characters of heavenly script and comes out [directly] from spontaneity."

Third, the Mahāyāna sutras themselves claimed having been expounded eons earlier. Thus, the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi sūtra* has: "The Buddha said: 'Formerly, innumerable eons ago, during the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, I heard this meditation (the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi sūtra*) in the presence of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, and immediately took it up'."<sup>4</sup> As a result, the only way for Daoists to show the superiority of their scriptures was to place their origin at the very beginning of the entire cosmos.

From this point of view, all other Daoist and Buddhist scriptures could be described as of later and less perfect origin if not actually as plagiarized. Even if a Buddhist sutra was expounded by the Buddha or a bodhisattva to a monk in deep meditation or explained in a dream, this was an event that—even if the monk was transported to the western Pure Land or to Heaven—took place at a much later time than the period of primordial chaos when the Numinous Treasure scriptures originated. This means that Ge Chaofu's conception was not developed independently of the Buddhist notion of the nature of their sutras but presupposed its existence and reacted to it.

## Direct Transmission of Scriptures

In having Daoist scriptures originate in the beginning of cosmic creation, Ge Chaofu followed a path initiated by Yang Xi. However, while Yang may have invented it, Ge deliberately and systematically made use of this notion in the beginning of each text. Yang Xi's *Suling jing* says: "[The Daoist scriptures] originally co-existed with primordial *qi* and were produced at the same time as original inception" (1b).

The Highest Clarity scriptures then typically speak of their transcription by the heavenly deities and list their transmitters before revealing them to humans. The earliest example of the idea of a direct transmission accordingly appears in Daoist literature of the mid-fourth century. However, this raises the

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<sup>4</sup> *Banzhou sanmei jing* 915c10, Harrison 1998, 76. Other examples include: Harrison 1998, 93, 99, or 65.

question whether this was a true innovation or whether Yang Xi relied on other sources of inspiration.

Now, chapter nine of the *Zhen'gao* preserves a text of Yang Xi that extensively cites the introductory narrative of the earliest Chinese Buddhist work, the *Fo jing sishier zhang* 佛經四十二章 (Forty-two Sections of Buddhist Scriptures).<sup>5</sup> A close examination of the synopsis containing this *Zhen'gao* version and other early citations as well as of parallel versions of the text shows that Yang Xi's text occasionally preserves the original text where the received versions either have suffered omissions or alterations (see Bumbacher 2006). Moreover, elsewhere the *Zhen'gao* contains approximately half of the main text of the *Fo jing sishier zhang* without any explicit indication that these passages were copied verbatim from a sutra (e.g., 6.6a-9b).

However, there are some remarkable differences between the received text of the Buddhist text and Yang Xi's version. First, Yang Xi did not copy the text in its entirety. Among the passages that he left out are those dealing with specifically Buddhist topics, such as the definition of *śramaṇa* (*shamen* 沙門, monk) or the description of the Buddhist hierarchy from *arhat* (*aluohan* 阿羅漢) to *pratyeka-buddha* (*pizhifo* 辟支佛). It seems likely that Yang Xi deliberately purged Buddhist elements in order to conceal the true origin of this part of the scripture which he integrated into his own text. This is further confirmed by the fact that he systematically substituted the original formula "the Buddha said" which introduced each section with phrases like "the Lord Green Lad of Fangzhu said" or "the Lord King of the Western City said." He thus replaced the Buddha with Daoist divinities also found in other revealed texts. At the same time he also changed the phrase "the Buddha asked" to "the Most High asked" while the expression *śramaṇa* is consistently replaced with "persons of the Dao" (*daoren* 道人) (Bumbacher 2006, 826).

This makes it clear that Yang Xi as early as the mid-fourth century not only had first-hand knowledge of Buddhism and had Buddhist texts in Chinese translation at his disposal, but that he also used these texts for his own ends. Historically this makes sense also. As Erik Zürcher has shown, Buddhism already had thoroughly infiltrated the Jiangnan region of China in the early third century, over a century before Yang was active (1959, 1: 48). Both traditions were soon competing with each other.

The direct encounter between the medium and divine beings and the transmission of scriptures and information—whether in deep meditation, in drug-induced trances, or in visionary dreams—was Yang Xi's "innovation" in

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<sup>5</sup> This is the original title as to be found in the earliest quotations such as that in the *Zhen'gao*, indicating that its forty-two sections were compiled from various, mostly Hinayāna scriptures. Nowadays, however, it is usually called *Sishier zhangjing* 四十二章經 (*Sūtra* of Forty-two Sections) which is clearly mistaken, as the form of the text is entirely different from the usual form of a sutra.

Daoism. On the other hand, the Buddhist sutra that most prominently describes the meditative techniques that lead the devotee to a direct encounter with the Buddha Amitāyus and to a direct transmission of the doctrine by the latter, is the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi sūtra* translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in 179 CE. Lokakṣema is usually credited with the introduction of Mahāyāna Buddhism into China. He was active in north China and, with his disciple Zhi Liang 支亮 from Scythia, instructed his compatriot, the lay disciple Zhi Qian, at Luoyang.

Zhi Qian headed south shortly before 220. After 299, he moved from Wuchang to Jianye (later Jiangang, today Nanjing), where he gathered sutras in their original version among local Buddhists and translated them into Chinese. He was the only important translator in southern China before the late fourth century. No less than thirty-six works are attributed to him, twenty-three of which are still extant. Zhi Qian even won the favor of Sun Quan 孫權, the ruler of Wu (r. 229-252), and was put in charge of instructing the crown prince (Zürcher 1959, 1: 48-51). Most certainly he brought copies of the sutras translated by his ancestral master Lokakṣema with him. As an *upāsaka* or lay devotee he was, as Zürcher has shown, not authorized to engage in missionary activities and had to confine himself to translations. However, when he retired to Mount Qionglong 穹隆山 in modern Jiangxi around 241, he kept close in contact with local monks, making sure that his works passed into the right hands.

This suggests that although there were early examples of the direct divine transmission of sacred scriptures possibly known to Yang Xi, the specific form this transmission took in his compositions is without known Daoist precedent. On the other hand, similar forms of transmission had already appeared in Buddhist circles. It is thus likely that Yang was inspired by the Mahāyāna sutras available in his time and region.

Going further back, already Ge Hong reports incidents where either a god bestows a scripture upon a human being or an immortal hands over a text to a mortal. In most cases, however, masters pass texts on to disciples. In this respect, Ge Hong clearly stands in a genuine old Chinese tradition.

The earliest reference to a divine transmission in Chinese history is in fact the *Hongfan* 洪範 (Great Plan), today a “chapter” of the *Shangshu*. Although the *Shangshu* is traditionally considered the earliest Chinese text, about half of its documents were forged systematically during the fourth century CE (see Shaughnessy 1993b). The remainder were written approximately between the tenth and the second centuries BCE. The *Hongfan* belongs to the ancient segment but cannot be dated precisely. The *Liishi chunqiu*, completed in 239 BCE, cites it by title and in content. The theory of the five phases, which appears in the *Hongfan*, moreover, was developed by Zou Yan at around 330 BCE. Thus, the text must have been written between these two dates. It says:

The prince of Qi said: I have heard that in ancient times Gun obstructed the inundating waters and brought disorder into the arrangement of the five elements. God then was roused and angry and did not give him the Great Plan in nine sections. [...] Heaven then gave Yu the Great Plan in nine sections, whereby the constant norms get their proper order. (*Shangshu* 188b; Karlgren 1950, 29)

According to the *Hongfan*, Di 帝 (God, short for Shangdi 上帝, God on High) examined the rulers' or heroes' qualities and decided to withhold or transmit the text accordingly, because the scripture represented the knowledge essential for a ruler to properly administer his realm.

The classical passage on a scripture's transmission by an immortal is, moreover, Sima Qian's *Shiji* which relates how an "old man" gave Zhang Liang the *Taigong bingfa* in one section. Zhang later explained this text to the Duke of Pei who made successful use of its stratagems. Here the same motif is found as in the *Hongfan*: the scripture transmitted contains necessary rulership directives for the recipient. Daoists in turn adopted this motif, making their immortals the teachers of rulers (see Seidel 1978a). Accordingly, the Yellow Emperor received the *Sanhuang neiven* from the Master of the Purple Storehouse "in order to impeach and summon the ten thousand divinities." He also received alchemical recipes from the Master of the Central Yellow and obtained a scripture on self-perfection from the Master of Broad Perfection (*Baopuzi neipian* 18.323, Ware 1966, 302). From this it was only a small step to let a master hand down a sacred scripture to his disciple after having tested him and found him worthy. Knowledge of its content would enable the adept not only to perfect himself but also to "transform" others.

In conclusion, the idea of a direct transmission of a text from a god, an immortal, or a master to select persons was part and parcel of the Chinese tradition. Transmission during "altered states" of the recipient, such as meditation, trance, and dreams, was not. This concept Daoists borrowed from Buddhists.

## Indirect Transmission

The general pattern of textual transmission as it occurs in Ge Hong's works is that of direct transmission. However, one instance in the extant fragments of his *Shenxian zhuan* shows Wang Lie finding a scripture in a cave whose script he cannot decipher (*Taiping guangji* 9.62). This idea goes back to a Daoist text evidently known to Ge Hong, the *Lingbao wufuxu*.

The *Wufuxu* is cited as *Lingbao jing* in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian* (Bokenkamp 1986, 74n51). The received version of this text may date from the beginning of the fifth century, however, its first scroll and earliest part may go back to date from the third. It also incorporates material that goes back to the former Han dynasty, such as passages *verbatim* copied from the first chapter of the *Shiji* (1b6-3b1; Kaltenmark 1982, Bokenkamp 1986).

In its earliest part we find the following long passage, the “Grotto Passage”:<sup>6</sup>

After this, in the twelfth year of King He Lü of the Wu, in the beginning of spring, first month, [the king] ordered that he be rowed out on the rivers and lakes, with resplendent banners and dragon [boats], to display his weaponry in the enemy kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

He stopped to rest<sup>8</sup> at Bao Shan. The Recluse of Bao Shan served him as attendant. The Recluse was called the Elder of Dragon Prowess. He was the one who was ordered to trace to the limits the depth of the Grotto Court and tread to the source its vast caves. [...]

Thereupon [the Recluse], carrying a torch and traveling day and night, went forth for 174 days and then returned. (Bokenkamp 1986)

When he came back, he reported to the king what he had seen:

“I still do not know the limits of the cavern. [I] the recluse had probably walked over 7,000 *li* (miles) when I came upon a myriad holes and miscellaneous caverns, a thousand paths and a hundred roads. These sandy passageways came from all directions to converge in one spot. Its shape was just like a door. At the mouth of the converging paths there were golden city-walls and jade chambers, 500 *li* in circumference.

Where the passageways joined, the sun and moon shone clearly, illuminating mottled patterns with shifting beams.<sup>9</sup> In the center were canopies, bed-platforms, windows and secret rooms—all inlaid with purple gems and decorated with gold. Cloudy buildings scraped the Heavens so that I could not distinguish their shape.

Thereupon I glanced around and saw no one. Gazing afar at the side of the wall I saw that there was a sign above the gate which read: “Detached Palace of the Empress of Heaven.” On the door itself was another sign which proclaimed: “Hall of Grand Yin.” [I] the recluse then knew it to be a spirit-hostel and did not dare rush in the gate.”

After having ritually purified himself, he dared enter this hall and saw the sacred scripture:

“So I carried out the Purgation rites, meditating on Perfection for three days. This completed, I prepared myself and entered, walking about and looking around within.

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<sup>6</sup> The following footnotes are Bokenkamp’s.

<sup>7</sup> King He Lü reigned from 514–496 BCE

<sup>8</sup> “Stopped to rest” is literally “loosened his sash” 解帶.

<sup>9</sup> I have emended 明月 to 日月 on the basis of line 8b9 below. Actually, both readings are possible since grotto heavens, as self-contained universes, possessed both sun and moon and, presumably, day and night.

On the northern dais of a jade chamber there was a single scroll of plain red silk. I could not understand the writing of the scroll but [I,] the recluse bowed repeatedly and took it, saying: "This servant of the lower Earth is an envoy of the King of Wu. I request this spirit-writing in order to publish it abroad and thereby spread belief in the efficacy of the Breaths of Perfection."

Then I returned outside, only to see the gate shut itself behind me. I heard from within the piercing reverberations of syrx (flute) and drum, and the sounds of men and horses. [I,] the recluse shook with fear, not daring to linger yet unwilling to advance. The passageway, I feared, had become confused [in my mind] and I did not know to return."

Eventually Bao Shan managed to find his way home, equipped with the holy book:

Finally he returned, carrying the book he had obtained to present to He Lü. [The recluse] himself explained that, when he first entered, the passageway was cramped and dark and he needed a torch to proceed. Yet, he was still able to distinguish [things] in the murky dark.

The passageway was, on all four sides above and below, of azure stone about five or six square *zhang* in size. These stones were fairly uniform. After a time, there were wide and narrow places. Where his foot tread was moistened with water for the space of perhaps one or two *li*.

Bao Shan's way led him through passageways, grotto courts, marvelous gardens, springs, and numinous storehouses. Only then could he report to the king: "The recluse thus wrote out all the particulars of his wanderings and showed it to the king. The king listened in respectful awe." What, then, looks as if the king practiced some form of book cult is in fact a cult offered to Heaven, the presumed owner of the scripture: "After cleansing and purgations, he sacrificed to Heaven in the Terrace of Quietude and received the writings from him."

The king's decent behavior toward the scripture showed its effect. As the text has: "That year, in the great [kingdom] of Wu, the winds and rains were timely and the five grains ripened in profusion. The commoners delighted in their enterprises and all was peace and harmony within the kingdom."

Thus the sheer presence of the holy scripture and the fact that it was duly revered by its new owner sufficed to effect blessings for the whole kingdom. Small wonder, then, that it raised the ruler's curiosity about its contents which he was unable to understand:

He Lü prized the celestial script, but could not understand its expressions. So, he sent an envoy, carrying the writings, sealed in a case of gold and imprinted with the Seal of the Jade Luminary, along with a letter inquiring about it to the Grandee of Lu, Confucius. The envoy reached the kingdom of Lu and, offering up the book, he knelt before Confucius and said:

"Some time ago the King of Wu ordered that he be driven out to gaze at the seacoast. He stopped to rest at the mound of the eastern grove to banquet on the northern Baoshan. Then, while the horses were being fed and the chariot stored

away, a vermilion bird suddenly appeared and soared about overhead. In its beak it held this document which it dropped before the king's conveyance.

"For the Great Man this is a sign of primal auspiciousness—a numinous omen from Heaven bestowing on the kingdom ten-thousand decades, the longevity of metal and stone. He dispatched me from the capital to formally present this celestial script, wishing that you may proclaim the cause of this good fortune and incipient blessing."

Obviously, the envoy for unknown reasons had invented his report, relying on the ancient tradition of the red bird holding a text in his beak. Confucius, having revealed the very nature of the book as being a celestial script serving as certificate of the Mandate of Heaven, goes on to relate further details:

Confucius sat quietly in meditation, not opening the book-case.<sup>10</sup> Then he replied to the envoy, saying: "Formerly, when I was traveling on the Western River, I heard a ditty which went:<sup>11</sup>

The King of Wu went out to roam, to survey the Roiling Lake.<sup>12</sup>  
The Elder of Dragon Prowess, named the Recluse,  
Went north up Baoshan, to enter the numinous Barrens.  
Then he reached the Grotto Court and stole Yu's writings.  
The grand script of the Celestial Thearch cannot be unrolled:  
It is only to be transmitted to an Elder Sire  
At the onset of hundred-six.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The term 閑居 usually connotes a period of ritual or meditative seclusion. This does not seem to be the case here.

<sup>11</sup> A ditty, lit. "boys' chant" 童謠 is a prophetic utterance, usually, as in this case, in the form of a poem. Little is known of their origins, but those that have survived—collected in the "Treatise on portents" of the Dynastic Histories—generally feature, as here, a political prophecy.

<sup>12</sup> The name "Roiling Marsh" 震澤 appears in the "Tribute of Yü" 禹貢 chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 and was traditionally identified with Lake Tai (see Knechtges 1982, 378, comment on line 65). The "Wu Capital Rhapsody" 吳都賦 of Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250-ca. 305) (transl. Knechtges 1982, 373-428), seems to have drawn from the same stock of images concerning the kingdom of Wu as those exploited in the "Grotto Passage."

<sup>13</sup> "Hundred-six" 百六 refers to the cataclysms occurring after the first one hundred and six years of the disaster cycle by a method of computation known as "Yang-nine, hundred-six" 陽九百六." Knechtges explains the system as follows:

Each epoch [yuan 元] consisted of 4,617 years and had an allotted number of disaster years, which were keyed to the alternation of *yin* (flood) and *yang* (drought). After the first 106 years of an epoch, there were to be nine drought years, which were called 'Yang Nine'. After the next 374 years, there were to be nine flood years, which were called 'Yin Nine'. This process continued for seven more stages. Within each epoch, there were a total of 4,560 'normal years' and 57 'disaster years.'" (1982, 374).

Now it has been taken through the Portal [named] Loss of State.

“I, Qiu, on the basis of the words of this ditty [declare]: long ago Yu controlled the waters and brought to their levels the mountains and rivers. His enterprise completed, he made a circuit of the kingdom and came to the slopes of Mount Zhong. There he obtained the *Santian Lingbao jing*, received by Thearch Ku and the rest and stored there.

“Then he roamed to Kuaiji, to further delve into the mystic script of the Numinous Treasure. He composed the Numinous Treasure script and stored one scroll in the stone vault of a mountain of renown. Another copy was entrusted to the Water Spirit so that a Daoist who has achieved the Dao might obtain it and present it to the king. I, Qiu, suspect that this writing must certainly be the *fu*-tallies of the Numinous Treasure, the Perfected Script of the Most High. If a vermilion bird brought it in its beak and dropped it, then it is something that I know nothing about.”

The envoy knelt and thanked him, conceding that all was as the Grandee had said. (*Wufuxu* 1.7a-10a, Bokenkamp 1986, 66-69)

These *fu*-tallies of Numinous Treasure had first been bestowed upon the mythical Emperor Ku by celestial officials. Ku, highly esteeming them but being unable to make out the script in which they were written,

then sacrificed to the Emperor of Heaven on the altar of the Northern River, concealed [them] on the peak of Bell Mountain, sealed in a case of green jade, there to await a future saint of merit and virtue, who would deliver them from their obscurity and obstruction. (*Wufuxu* 1.4a)

Later, as the ditty quoted by Confucius says, Yu who apparently was such a “future saint” obtained these texts and was instructed in their use, copied them and buried them at three different places. There they should “hibernate” until, in times of severe crises, worthy people would discover them and put their content into practice. Now, does this example of an indirect transmission of a Daoist scripture reflect an indigenous Daoist idea?

## Early Buddhist Traces

Two details of the “Grotto Passage” story are of particular interest. First is the “seven treasure-gems that blazed forth in scintillating radiance.” As Bokenkamp has shown, these seven treasure-gems (*qibao* 七寶) are the *saptaratna* of Buddhist scripture. They appear in the description of the Pure Land of the famous *Sukhāvati-vyūha sūtra*, already in their earliest translations into Chinese, by Boyan (248-260; previously attributed to Lokakṣema: *Foshuo Wuliang qingjing pingdeng juejing* 佛說無量清淨平等覺經, T 361), and by Zhi Qian (*Foshuo Amituo sanye sanfo salou fo tan guodu rendao jing* 佛說阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過渡人道經, T 362). However, the wording is sufficiently different from the “Grotto

Passage” of the *Wufuxu* to exclude a direct appropriation. On the other hand, a direct source of the passage is at hand: the ditty prophecy is (with minor variants) taken from an apocryphon, the *Hetu jiangxiang* 河圖絳象 (Images Descending [from Heaven], [Attached to the] River Chart, lost; fragments in Yasui and Nakamura 1971, 6, 110; see Kaltenmark 1960). Unfortunately, this cannot be dated precisely, and scholars agree only on its Later Han origin.

The other interesting detail is the storage of sacred texts in mountain caves and their reappearance in times of disaster. The *Hetu jiangxiang* seems to be the earliest reference to this motif in a Chinese context. In the Buddhist tradition, it first occurs in the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhāvasthita-samādhi sūtra* whose original Indian or Central Asian version may date from the first century. In other words, due to the notorious dating problem, it is not certain whether the Buddhist notion has informed the Daoist or vice versa or whether this reflects an accidental coincidence.

There are two very interesting instances of indirect transmission in Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuan*. The first mentions a *Taiqing jing* 太清經 (Scripture of Great Clarity, lost) carved on the walls of a cave by an unknown copyist of ancient times which could only be seen after Bo He had gazed at the wall in meditation for three years (*Chuxue ji* 8.178, 24.585). Although revealed in meditation, it is not through a visualized god or immortal who transmits it. Rather, the text is already there, chiseled into the wall, but it can only be seen when a devoted adept spends a long time gazing at it.

The second example relates how Zuo Ci “during his meditation on Mount Tianzhu 天柱山, obtained the *Jiudan jinye jing* from inside a cave” (*Taiqing guangji* 11.76; Company 2002, 279). For revelations of scriptures during deep meditation, we do not have any Chinese evidence going further back than the third century CE—a time when Buddhist Mahāyāna sutras were already available in southern China. Could it be that Ge Hong, who refers to a *Lingbao wufu* (*Baopuzi neipian* 11.197), was already familiar with this foreign tradition, since the received *Lingbao Wufuxu* shows traces of original Buddhist concepts? Is it possible to identify Buddhist elements in his extant works?

The only unambiguous passage appears in Ge Hong’s “Confucian” book, the *Baopuzi waipian* 抱朴子外篇 (The Master who Embraces Simplicity, Outer Chapters; Taipei 1974). The author complains that women in his time take all sorts of liberties, thus following in the footsteps of the Confucian Han philosopher Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 90-165) who in his *Qian fu lun* 潜夫论 (Comments of a Recluse, Shanghai 1978) utters similar points of criticism (3.143; de Groot 1910, 6: 1209). He says that they go out amusing themselves instead of working at sericulture or making cap strings and weaving hemp, and sheds a negative light on Buddhist monasteries which shelter women who better would stay at home to look after the household:

Some stay over night at others' houses, some only under cover and during the night return. They amuse [themselves in] Buddhist monasteries or gaze on and look at fishing and hunting. (25.148; Sailey 1978, 143)

The technical term *fó sì* 佛寺 used by Ge Hong cannot mean anything else than “Buddhist monastery,” attesting to his acquaintance with Buddhism.

Turning now to Ge Hong's Daoist writings, as far as his *Shenxian zhuan* is concerned, Campamy noted that some details of its Laozi biography “betray an imitation—probably a consciously competitive imitation—of the conception and (more especially) birth scenes of the two earliest-known Chinese versions of the life of Gautama Buddha” (Campamy 2002, 209).

The earlier of these versions, the work of two or possibly three translators, namely the Sogdian Kang Mengxiang 康孟詳 as well as the Indians Zhu Dali 竺大力 (Mahābala?) and Zhu Tanguo 竺曇果 (Dharmaphala?), was produced in the early years of the third century (Zürcher 1991, 284), “presumably in the environs of Luoyang” (Campamy 2002, 209). This biography of the Buddha in two parts was made into two distinct Chinese scriptures, the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (T 184) and the *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經 (T 196). Zhi Qian was responsible for the later version. He completed it sometime between 222 and 229 (Zürcher 1959, 1, 309) in south China where he was active as a high official at the same Wu court which Ge Hong's grandfather Ge Xi 葛系 served as a Chamberlain for Dependencies (*da honglu* 大鴻臚; Hucker 1985, 466#5947). Zhi Qian combined and re-edited the whole *Xiuxing benqi jing* and the first part of the *Zhong benqi jing* together with passages he took from other sources (Zürcher 1991, 284) and made them into the *Taiji ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (T 185). Campamy finds various details in the Laozi biography<sup>14</sup> that have parallels in that of the Buddha.<sup>15</sup>

(a) Conception following descent of a meteor. Indigenous legends of other sages contained similar scenes, and in the case of the Buddha it is not a meteor but a white elephant (a transformation of the future sage's own body) that enters the holy mother.

(b) Birth from left armpit and under a tree. The Buddha emerges from his mother's right armpit, under a tree. (In one text, he also first enters his mother through her right armpit).

(c) Ability to speak at birth; immediate, religiously significant declaration, accompanied by hand gesture. Laozi, in one of the versions related by Ge Hong, points at the plum (*lǐ* 李) tree under which he has just emerged and declares that his surname will be Li (for, in this version, he has no father and

<sup>14</sup> The extant fragments of Laozi's biography in the *Shenxian zhuan* are translated in Campamy 2002, 194-204 and commented on 204-211. The sources and their reliability are discussed in Bumbacher 2000b; Campamy 2002, 375-386.

<sup>15</sup> The relevant parts are T 184.463b-465b and T 185.473b-474a.

hence no lineage-derived surname). The future Buddha, on alighting on the ground, immediately takes seven strides and (in Zhi Qian's version) raises his right hand and declares: "In the Heavens above, and beneath the Heavens, it is only I who am a Worthy. The three realms suffer; how can they be made joyous?"

(d) Detailed attention to somatic markings. The list of physiognomic features (*xiang* 相) that appears later in Ge Hong's hagiography parallels the attention to the thirty-two somatic marks (Sanskrit *lakṣaṇas*, rendered in our texts as *xiang* 相) in both Buddhist texts. As noted above, such lists also appear in weft (apocryphal) text legends of Confucius and other indigenous sages (2002, 208-210).

Laozi's spectacular birth from his mother's armpit does not occur in the earliest Laozi biographies, neither in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, in the *Lixian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Arranged Biographies of Immortals, DZ 294; see Kaltenmark 1953), attributed to Liu Xiang and probably written during the Han, nor in the famous *Laozi ming* inscription of 166 CE. The *Laozi bianhua jing*, according to internal evidence, was compiled after 185 (Hendrischke 2000, 147) or at least toward the end of the Han (Seidel 1969a, 2). Here, Laozi "entrusted his shape to the pregnant womb of Mother Li" and stayed in her "belly" (*fu* 腹) for seventy-two years (Kohn 1998, 239-243). Later the text says that he transformed himself and entered a woman's belly from which he was born after seventy-two years. He is still not splitting open her armpit.

The first section of the *Laozi Daode jing xuyue* 老子道德經序訣 (Introductory Explanation to Laozi's Scripture on the Way and the Virtue, S 75) notes: "[Laozi] was born by splitting [his mother's] left armpit" (Ōfuchi 1979, 509-511). Dating this text in five different sections is problematic (Kohn 1995, 202-203). Kobayashi places it around 540 (1990, 269-295), yet the biography of Heshang gong 河上公 in the second section must have been connected with the so-called *Heshang gong*-commentary to the *Daode jing*, which is indirectly cited in 234 (Bumbacher 1996b, 693-694). Laozi's biography in the first section, moreover, must have been written after the deification documented in 165. Kobayashi who considers it close to the Daoist *Santian neijie jing* of the year 420 dates it to that year. However, in light of the various Buddhist elements which the section contains, the exact date is not highly relevant. Already Kobayashi notes the occurrence of terms such as "ten directions" (*shi fang* 十方), "various Heavens" (*zbutian* 諸天), kalpas (*jie* 劫), and so on, which are clearly of Buddhist origin (1990, 269-295). This leads to the assumption that Laozi's birth from an armpit was appropriated from Buddhism.

Another interesting parallel is the birth of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī as described in the *Mañjuśrīparinirvāṇa sūtra* (T 463), translated in the late third century. It says: "He came out of the right flank of his mother. His body had the color of

purple gold. *As soon as he put his foot on the ground, he was able to speak?* (Lamotte 1960, 37; emphasis added).

The earliest Daoist reference to this topic is the Laozi biography in Ge Hong's *Shenxian zhuan* (*Taiping guangji* 1.1-4). It reads: "At the time [of his] birth, he emerged by splitting his mother's right armpit" (*Taiping guangji* 1.1). Collation shows its close similarity to the corresponding sentence in the Buddhist *Lihuo lun* 理惑論 (On Treating Doubts, *Hongming ji* T 2102.1.1b-7a), attributed to a certain Mouzi 牟子 (Zürcher 1959, 1, 13-15; Schmidt-Glintzer 1976, 48-50; 1994), and the parallel phrase to be found in Zhi Qian's biography of the Buddha. This suggests that Ge Hong partially adopted the *Lihuo lun* which, on the other hand, is derived from the *Taizhi ruiying benqi jing* of 222-229 (Maspero 1910, 106).

On another note, the topic of the miraculous birth from any part of the mother's body but the vagina has a long history in India and is cognate with Athena's birth from Zeus' head, thus reflecting a common Indo-European heritage. Thus, Aurva was born from the thigh (*Mahābhārata* 1.2610), Kakṣīvat from the upper arm, Pṛṣṭu from the hand (*Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* 1.13; Cowell 1969, 6n2) and Māndhātṛ like Indra either from the forehead (*Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* 4.2) or from his father's left side (*Mahābhārata* 3.1.10450, Cowell 1969, 6n3). The topic's frequency in Indian literature, both non-Buddhist and Buddhist, and its late occurrence in the Laozi complex make it likely that it migrated from India to China, rather than suggesting an independent parallel development in both cultures.

Also, there is the description of a paradise that appears nowhere else in contemporaneous Daoist works—Campany calls it "anomalous" at least from the point of view of the Celestial Masters and the Highest Clarity tradition (2002, 255). It appears in the *Shenxian zhuan* biography of Shen Xi 沈羲 (*Yunji qiqian* 109.6b-8a; *Taiping guangji* 5.8; Campany 2002, 255-258). It may have been informed by descriptions of Buddhist paradises as found in the *Sukhāvati-vyūha sūtras*.

These obvious parallels between Ge Hong's works and Buddhist texts cannot be mere chance. More likely, they are traces of Buddhist influence. This does not necessarily mean that Ge Hong, who at least knew and mentioned the institution of Buddhist monasteries, was aware of it, let alone that he deliberately appropriated these elements. He may just have relied on sources that themselves already contained them.

Is, then, the indirect transmission of Daoist scriptures an indigenous idea? Maybe. While the topic of an immortal transmitting a scripture is genuinely Chinese, the persistent dating problem prevents a firm decision whether the burial of scriptures for the benefit of later generations and their subsequent discovery in caves originated in Chinese apocrypha or whether the idea emerged under Buddhist influence. Transmission in meditation, however, almost definitely was informed by Mahāyāna sūtras available at the time.

## Protection of Scriptures

The notion of spiritual guardians surrounding Daoist scriptures is prominent especially in the Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure traditions. In Chinese Mahāyāna, comparable guardians surround the *Lotus Sutra*. As was noted earlier, Yang Xi knew and adopted the *Fo jing sishier zhang*; he may also have already known the *Lotus Sutra*, which was translated into Chinese at least six times between the third and early seventh centuries. The first two translations, in 255 and 286, are no longer extant, as is that of 335. But Dharmarakṣa's (ca. 223-300) first complete version, the *Zhengfabhua jing* 正法華經 (T' 263) of 290, as well as Kumārajīva's *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (ca. 350-410) of 406 (T' 262), plus a later rendition of 601 still survive. Although Kumārajīva's version became standard, Dharmarakṣa's work is more relevant for the Daoist connection.

Dharmarakṣa was a bilingual Indo-Scythian (Zhu Tanmoluocha 竺曇摩羅刹), as pointed out in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan* (1.326c-327a; Shih 1968, 33-37; Zürcher 1959, 1, 65-70). He had a Sanskrit copy of the *Lotus Sutra* which was kept in Chang'an and still available in the early seventh century. With the help of three Chinese assistants, who noted down and polished his oral translation, he completed the work in only three weeks, September 15 until October 6, 286. This work was then revised by two non-Chinese experts, the Indian monk Zhu Li 竺力 and the Kuchean layman Bo Yuanxin 帛元信. A second revision was made in March 288. Only two years later, the translated sutra already circulated in Luoyang, arousing considerable interest. At a fast-day assembly at Luoyang, on November 3, 290, Dharmarakṣa and his collaborators recited, explained, and discussed the scripture with a group of Chinese laymen. Based on this, they created a third revision of the translation.

The version, moreover, also circulated beyond northern China. According to Zürcher (1959), prominent southern Buddhists were in direct contact with Chang'an, the center of Dharmarakṣa's activities. After the Xiongnu sacked Luoyang, massacred the population, and conquered Chang'an in 311, many Chinese aristocrats fled south and settled in the region of the lower Yangtze, taking refuge in the ancient territory of Wu. Buddhist devotees, including some of Dharmarakṣa's disciples, took their faith and their scriptures with them on their flight as did Celestial Masters' Daoists. It is thus quite possible that Yang Xi knew the sutra and was inspired by it.

However, it is also possible that the notion of spiritual guardians protecting sacred scriptures goes back beyond the fourth century. The *Taiping jing* has: "As regards my writings, heavenly spiritual agents are sitting at their side and protect them. [...] Concerning my writings, the spiritual agents of the three luminaries, following them, look after and observe them" (ch. 46; Wang 1960, 129).

Dating the *Taiping jing* is, unfortunately, one of the most notorious problems in Daoist research (Kandel 1979; Hendrischke 2000; 2006; Beck 1980; Penny 1990; Petersen 1989; 1990a; 1990b). Scholars agree that the text consists of many layers but there is no clarity of how to identify or date them. The transmitted text, which cannot be traced further back than the sixth century, apparently consists of at least three layers. According to Hendrischke, forty-four chapters consist largely of layer-A texts, defined as depicting conferences between a Celestial Master and his disciples, a group of perfected. They go back to several sources and can be dated anywhere between the second and fifth centuries (Petersen 1990a, 198). Layer-B texts include dialogues between a Heavenly Lord (*tianjun* 天君), a Great Spirit (*dasben* 大神) and a student (*sheng* 生). Parts of chapters 110-112 and 114 seem to belong to this layer, which may come from one single source (Hendrischke 2000, 143). Layer-C, the remainder of the text, with no dialogues but large sections of charts and *fu*-tallies, is too diverse to identify properly.

Although some authorities date the *Taiping jing* to the second century (Kaltenmark 1979; Takahashi 1984; Hachiya 1983), Hendrischke notes that the evidence for an early date is inadequate. She comes to the provisional conclusion that “as things stand, we must consider the *Taiping jing* to be a text edited in the sixth century from earlier, most likely second-century material ” (2000, 145).

In other words, spiritual guardians of sacred texts play an eminent role in Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure. They are also very important in the *Lotus Sutra*, which predates both. However, a clear contact of Daoists with the sutra cannot be proven. In addition, the concept is also present in the *Taiping jing* whose relevant parts may predate the fourth-century schools. Yet this cannot be firmly ascertained either. A close examination of the *Zhen'gao* and other Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure texts shows no references to the *Taiping jing* whatsoever. It seems that neither movement had access to this text and was more likely to receive Buddhist Mahāyāna influence. Yet again, there may also have been an oral tradition that survived within Daoism from the Great Peace movement; and the *Taiping jing* itself may have been part of an earlier guardian tradition.

## Beneficial Properties and Recitation

The content of a scripture being useful to its owner is an old idea, found already in the *Hongfan* and in Zhang Liang's biography of the *Shiji*. The concept that the mere possession or physical holding of a scripture may be beneficial regardless of content can only be traced back to the *Sanhuang neiben*. The *Baopuzi neipian* says:

The classic itself states that if *Sanhuang neiben* is in a household, it will banish evil and hateful ghosts, soften the effects of epidemics, block calamities, and rout misfortunes. (19.336; Ware 1966, 314)

The origin of the *Sanhuang neiben* is described in four different traditions, three of which Ge Hong presents. The first says that the Yellow Emperor received the text from the Master of the Purple Chamber (18.323; Ware 1966, 302); this is an etiological myth of no great interest. The second says that Ge Hong himself received the text from his master Zheng Yin, who in turn might have obtained it from his master, Ge Hong's grand-uncle Ge Xuan (19.333). The third focuses on the immortal Bo He who received it in a mountain cave (19.336); this version also appears in the *Shenxian zhuan* (in *Xianyuan bianzhu* 2.17b). The fourth tradition, finally, attributes the scripture to Bao Jing 鮑靚, "the father of Ge Hong's wife," who has a biography in the *Daoxue zhuan* as cited in the *Xianyuan bianzhu* (3.20a; Bumbacher 2000a, 325). The latter attribution was rather late. Tang Daoists used it to give it greater credibility to the text since the *Sanhuang neiben* had been forbidden and burned by the government (Seidel 1983, 326). The previous two traditions, moreover, Ge Xuan's and Bo He's possible authorship, only go back to the generation before Ge Hong or to his very own time. As he says in the *Baopuzi*: "I met Bo Zhongli in Luoyang[*洛陽*]. He showed me that the pupils of his eyes were square (which is a characteristic of immortals). Thus he was an extraordinary person" (20.351).

The beneficial property of scriptures as described in relation to the *Sanhuang neiben* was thus new in Daoism. In Buddhism, on the other hand, it was already a prominent aspect of the *Lotus Sutra* as circulated in Luoyang in 290, ere "it at once caused great interest" (Zürcher 1959, 1, 69). Ge Hong himself, as he says in his autobiography, after having subdued a minor rebellion during the Tai'an reign period (303-304), "threw down my spear, removed my lorica (armor), and immediately started for Luoyang to search extensively for writings that are out of the ordinary" (50.202; Ware 1966, 15; Sailey 1978, 260). There is, however, a contradiction between his statement about Bo He and the fact that he may not have actually made it to the capital due to the rebellion that broke out around that time and blocked his way north. He had to turn back half way (50.200; Sailey 1978, 250).

Being it as it may, since this sort of beneficial property of sacred scriptures for the first time appeared in Daoism at a period when in Buddhism it was already known for quite some time, it cannot be excluded that the Daoist notion was in fact inspired by the Buddhist model.

Recitation of Daoist scriptures is another key feature of the medieval religion. In a court environment—in combination with Buddhist cultic practices—it is attested for the first century CE. Unambiguous evidence, however, cannot be traced further back than the fourth century.

In Chinese Buddhism clear evidence for the beneficial effect of sutra-recitations already appears in the *Banzhou sanmei jing* (*Pratyutpanna-buddhasaṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi sūtra*), translated by Lokakṣema around 179, in the *Achu foguao jing* (*Akṣobhya-tathāgatasyavyūha sūtra*), also translated toward the end of the second century, (Williams 1994, 243; Zürcher 1977, 202), and in the *Lotus Sutra*, translated in 255.

Evidence that Ge Hong was informed by Buddhists is rather modest. Yang Xi, on the other hand, is known to have received Buddhist influence. Thus, in its lengthy citation of the *Fo jing sishier zhang* the *Zhen'gao* preserves the following sentence: “Formerly, there was a person who mournfully recited the scriptures at night” (6.9b). The matching sentence in the received text reads: “There was a *śramana* who mournfully recited the sutras at night” (723c). Obviously, Yang Xi exchanged the Buddhist term *śramana* (*shamen* 沙門) for the neutral “one person” (*yiren* 一人) and added the indeterminate date “formerly” (*xiguo* 昔). The relevant second part of the sentence is identical. This is clear evidence that Yang Xi knew of the Buddhist ritual of “reciting a sutra” (*song jing* 誦經) when he compiled the biography of Lord Zhou.

Although reciting scriptures may have been a genuine Chinese phenomenon, we cannot exclude the possibility of a Buddhist influence on the Daoists. However, unless more pieces of evidence for one or the other have come to light, one may rather opt for a parallel development both in Daoism and Chinese Buddhism.

## Book Cults and Overall Influence

Evidence attesting to a Daoist cult of the sacred book cannot be traced back beyond Ge Hong. Once again he seems to be the starting point of an apparently new Chinese development. However, as he compiled a summary of Daoist knowledge available in south China at the time, it is perfectly possible that what he described was the result of an older—yet lost—tradition.

A new aspect appears with the description of the discovery of the *Taiping jing* as related in the *Daoxue zhuàn*. Erecting a meditation hut at the place where the scripture was found, not unlike erecting a temple, goes far beyond merely paying homage to the scripture or burning incense on its behalf. Although it could be considered a logical next step after “setting up an altar and making a present of silk,” as Ge Hong describes, it is noteworthy that the *Taiping jing*-episode is said to have occurred in the far west of China. This may indicate the point of origin: Central Asia or even northern India.

In a seminal article, Gregory Schopen has analyzed the meaning and function of the phrase “*sa prthivīpradeśas caityabhūto bhavet*” as it appears in the Sanskrit version of the *Vajracchedikā sūtra* and in other early Mahāyāna texts (1975).

In a further detailed and differentiating study he has also shown that the phrase ought to be rendered as “that spot of Earth becomes an eminent sacred place” (1975, 178). “That spot of Earth” indicates the place where a Mahāyāna sutra is taught, illuminated, recited, taken up, made into a book, copied, worshiped, and adored—in short: the locality where the sutra cult takes place. In other words, if the presence of the Buddha at a particular place renders that place sacred and if the Buddha’s teaching as formulated in the sutra is “part” of himself, then the presence of his sutra equally renders the place where it is located sacred. Schopen goes on:

Once this formula was worked out and accepted, it could then be inserted into the text which one recited and wished to establish, and then the recitation, etc., of that text at a particular spot, on the basis of the associations asserted in the formula, would have, in effect, the effect of authoritatively legitimating that spot as a cultic center. (1975, 179)

That is to say, by using this mechanism it was possible to expand and develop new centers. We may thus see here one of the means by which the representatives of the early Mahāyāna established their own “domain” in opposition to the *stūpa*-cult of Mainstream Buddhism. This formula also marks the shift from an oral transmission of the sutra for which the presence of *bhāṇakas* was necessary to a transmission of the written text that could be read by anybody capable of reading. More important, however, was the fact that now “the spot of Earth on which the book stands, is the focal point of the cult of the book—the organizational center around which the cultic activity (flower-*pūjā*, dancing, etc.) takes place.” Schopen further assumes:

Since each text placed itself at the center of its own cult, early Mahāyāna (from a sociological point of view), rather than being an identifiable single group, was in the beginning a loose federation of a number of distinct though related cults, all of the same pattern, but each associated with its specific text. (1975, 181)

This sutra cult flourished for three or more centuries in Central Asia. The place where the *Taiping jing* was discovered (according to the *Daoxue zhuan*) lies on the trade routes from Central Asia to China. Therefore, it seems likely that this Daoist book cult was in fact adopted or “imported” from the west. Kohn’s statement, “[... the] practice of scripture veneration w[as] introduced from Mahāyāna Buddhism” (2000, 303), thus may have a foundation even if she does not present any textual evidence.

Beyond the book cult, questions about general cultural influence are delicate. For example, filial piety in Chinese Buddhism is commonly attributed to Chinese influence. As Kenneth Ch’en says:

The frequent references to filial piety in the inscriptions [of Longmen] testify to the change that had taken place in Buddhism after its introduction into China. Buddhism started as a religion renouncing all family and social ties; yet in the inscriptions one meets again and again with prayers for the well-being of deceased ancestors, uttered even by monks and nuns.

These expressions of piety indicate that although the monks and nuns had joined the monastic order, their ties to family and ancestors still remained strong and enduring. *This is a specific example of how Buddhism had adapted itself to contemporary social conditions in China.* (1964, 179; emphasis added)

This view went unchallenged for almost twenty years until Gregory Schopen showed that it represents a serious case of misinformation since Buddhist scholars had shown very little interest in epigraphic material from South Asia. He examined the earliest inscriptions in Sri Lanka that can be definitely attributed to a particular ruler and dated to 210 and 200 BCE as well as a set from about a hundred years later. He found sentences like “the cave of princess [Abi] Tissā, daughter of the great king Gāmaṇī-Uttiya, is given to the *sangha* of the ten directions, for the benefit of [her] mother and father” (*Gamani-Uti-maharajhaha [j]hita Abi-Ti] śaya leṇe daśa-diśaśa sagaye dine mata-pitaśa aṭaya* [Paranavitana 1970, 1no.34]) (Schopen 1984, 12) and “the gift of Sagharakhita, for the benefit of [his] mother and father” (*sagharakhitasa mātapituna aṭhāyā dānam* [Barua and Sinha 1926, 22no.28]) (1984, 13).

Furthermore, twenty-nine of the Kharoṣṭī inscriptions, from northwest India in the mid-first century BCE, contain statements of individual donors expressing the intentions of their gifts or other religious acts. Almost half indicate “that the religious act was in whole or in part undertaken on behalf of the donor’s parents” (1984, 13). Schopen concludes “that ‘filial piety’ was an old, an integral and pervasive part of the practice of Indian Buddhism from the earliest periods of which we have definite knowledge.” More generally, he says, “once again the actual monk of the first to fifth century in India turns out to be—when we can catch a glimpse of him—something quite different from the picture of the monk that has been abstracted from our textual sources” (1984, 124).

## Conclusion

Bearing in mind a general caution regarding cultural influence, the evidence suggests that the Daoist notion of the spontaneous creation of scriptures during the primordial phase of the cosmos was genuinely Chinese. Yet it developed due to the Buddhist concept that Mahāyāna sutras were expounded eons before the present. In order to surpass the Buddhist sutras in age, Daoists recovered and elaborated the early cosmological model expressed in *Daode jing* ch. 42.

Examples of a direct transmission of scriptures existed already during the Former Han dynasty. However, the specific form this idea assumed in Yang Xi's work betrays a Buddhist inspiration. Transmission of Daoist scriptures in meditation, trance, or dreams was definitely informed by Buddhist examples.

While spiritual guardians protecting scriptures and their owners already appeared in the *Taiping jing*, possibly predating the Buddhist concept, this work had no apparent influence on the early Highest Clarity and Numinous Treasure texts. As, on the other hand, these texts were accompanied by spiritual guardians, too, the adherents of both Daoist traditions may have borrowed the idea from Mahāyāna sutras.

Reciting texts may have been practiced in China long ago, in fact as early as the composition of its first texts. In the case of the *Shijing*, even singing its poems can be taken for granted. Reciting Daoists scriptures to explicitly obtain beneficial results effected by the spiritual guardians, however, most likely was the result of Buddhist influence.

The same might be true for certain forms of book cult such as establishing altars for scriptures and burning incense to them, or even establishing a hut on the place where a scripture was found.

To sum up: It is difficult to avoid the impression that almost the entire complex of Daoist notions about scriptures was in some way or another modelled on Buddhist patterns. In view of the tough competition between both religions from the fourth century onward, Daoists may well have felt obliged to adopt certain Buddhist ideas and integrate them into their own traditions.





## Epilogue

### The End of Chinese Magic

What interpretation, then, have China scholars to offer for Wu Meng's act? Mathieu in his partial French as well as DeWoskin and Crump in their complete English translations of the *Soushen ji* do not comment on the incident. Miyakawa, on the other hand, says, "The *Soushen ji* gives a short account of Wu Meng that emphasizes his *magical* power of calming the wind" (1979, 93; emphasis added).

He does not further specify what he understands by "magical power." But the context suggests that he considers writing a *fu* and throwing it at the wind a magical act. Although not referring to this text, Doub, when speaking of magical power and attributing it to the *fu*, says: "These talismans were written or drawn in certain shapes and enabled the possessor to do certain things or gain protection from certain dangers by their *magical* or divine power" (1971, 120; emphasis added).

He similarly offers no explanation of his understanding of "magical power." In using the terms "magic" or "magical" but not specifying what they understand by it, these two scholars are by no means alone. Rather, they are representative examples of the vast majority of China scholars who, when applying the label "magic" (or its adjective "magical"), do not render account of what they mean by it.

### "Magic" in Chinese Studies

One of the few China scholars to explain "magic" is Johannes Jacobus Maria de Groot (1854-1921). He considered magic the "backbone" of the Daoist religion which was primarily exercised through *fu*. The use of *fu* was a means by which the Daoist priests *compelled the gods into complying* with their wishes (1918, 136; emphasis added). The *fu* were impregnated by a force that was more powerful than the gods. The gods had no alternative: they had to do what the priests wanted. However, where this force came from and why it was the *fu* of

all things that were its carrier, de Groot does not explain. Implicitly, he applies James George Frazer's notion that the priests apply "a set of precepts [...] in order to compass their ends" (Frazer 1983, 15) "without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency" (1983, 63).<sup>1</sup>

Another China scholar who is conscious of the issues is Homer H. Dubs. In discussing "idol worship" during the former Han dynasty, he uses the technical term "sympathetic magic":

Such an image (*sic* in the shape of a human being) was probably an article used in the widespread form of *sympathetic magic*, in which the person whom it was intended to injure was represented by the image [...] and certain things [injury, etc.] were done to this image, with the expectation that similar things would happen to the person represented. (Dubs 1937, 2; emphasis added)

Dubs obviously borrowed the term "sympathetic magic" from Frazer (1983, 16) without acknowledging it.

While Derk Bodde in his article, "The Chinese Cosmic Magic Known as Watching for the Ethers" (1959) nowhere explicitly refers to magic, he uses the term in his "Sexual Sympathetic Magic in Han China" (1963). Doing so, he is the first to introduce the term "sexual sympathetic magic" into modern Chinese Studies. The term obviously represented for the ritual advocated by Dong Zhongshu:

On every *gengzi* day, that is, on every thirty-seventh day throughout the year of the recurrent sixty-day cycle, all married couples throughout the country should have sex relations. By so doing they will insure a proper balance between the *yin* and *yang* principles in the human world, which, because of the intimate interrelationship between man and nature, will bring about a corresponding balance between the two forces in the world of nature. Since droughts (and, it might be added, floods as well) are the result of an imbalance between the *yin* and *yang*, it is obvious that these will be prevented in this way. (Bodde 1963, 295)

He further explains the underlying principle as one of holding together "by sympathetic attraction or by mutual action and response, as within a common electrical field,"<sup>2</sup> all members belonging to the same categories into which all components of the universe were classified (1963, 295). Bodde's "sexual sympathetic magic" quite obviously is a further development of Frazer's "sympathetic magic."

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<sup>1</sup> The paperback edition of 1957, reprinted in 1983, of the abridged version of Frazer's *Golden Bough* is used throughout this chapter. See below.

<sup>2</sup> Note this explicit analogy to the Western natural sciences. Frazer and others explicitly relied on this model when they introduced their concepts into the field of the humanities. See also Gladigow 1991.

Joseph Needham, initiator and main contributor of the monumental *Science and Civilisation in China*, explicitly albeit briefly discusses Frazer's "two 'laws' and one general principle of magic," i.e., the law of similarity and the law of contact, which Needham calls the law of contiguity or contagion, as well as the principle "that while 'religion conciliates, magic constrains'" (1956, 280). He also refers to Hubert and Mauss' *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*, but fails to see that the latter was in fact a fundamental criticism of Frazer, involving a shift from an ontological to a sociological definition of magic.

In more recent years Donald Harper has made several significant contributions to our understanding of magic in traditional China, notably in his article, "Magic in East Asia" (1987), and his book, *Early Chinese Medical Literature* (1998; see Bumbacher 2002b, 135-140). In the article, he makes a basic distinction between "magic" and "various occult sciences," characterizing magic as providing "a means to accomplish specific ends" for which, furthermore, "there was no cause for rationalization" in the development of Chinese thought. The phrase "to accomplish specific ends" is reminiscent of Frazer's magic being "the means adopted by most of these practitioners to *accomplish their ends*" (1983, 81; emphasis added). The occult sciences, which include divination, astrology, hemerology, geomancy, and alchemy, "were elaborated in terms of a theory of symbolic correspondence based on the concepts of *yin-yang* dualism and of Five Actions (*wuxing*: water, fire, wood, metal, and earth)" (1987, 112). In his book, moreover, taking into account various positions on magic by anthropologists (Tambiah 1990), historians (Vickers 1984), and classical scholars (Lloyd 1979), he summarizes the situation:

Lively debate continues to focus on the relation between science, magic, and religion in a pre-modern context and on the question of what constitutes rationality. A number of earlier theories and interpretations have been put to rest, among them: that magic and religion are fundamentally different; that magic is failed science; and that scientific "progress" already separated science from magic in ancient times. (Harper 1998, 9)

He also acknowledges the difficulties that arise when discussing magic: "Any attempt to discuss magic encounters formidable problems of definition. Without minimizing the importance of theory and definitions, I propose to take a primarily descriptive approach with the Mawangdui medical manuscripts." He further adds in a footnote:

I take for granted the obsolescence of earlier theories which attempt to relate magic developmentally to either the history of religion or of science (with the implicit understanding that religion and science are more evolved civilizational forms); nor is magic simply degenerate religion. (1998, 149)

In other words, he explicitly refrains from defining magic and rather opts for an "intuitive" approach to the phenomenon:

One does not need a definition in order to recognize that the two recipes just cited are relevant to the investigation of magic in early China. Indeed, it is only with this kind of evidence that we will come to know more about the subject of early Chinese magic.

At the same time, however, he does not abandon magic as a category but holds to it. In so doing, he must have an implicit, and thus not reflected, definition of magic in mind—otherwise, how would he label any operation or device as “magical.” His understanding of magic as “to accomplish specific ends” and as “human actions undertaken in the belief that spirits and divine powers are present in nature” seems to indicate that Harper belongs to the tradition of scholars following Frazer who offers “ontological” or substantial definitions of magic—in contrast to those who, in the wake of William Robertson Smith and Marcel Mauss, define it in sociological terms. On the other hand, Harper is clearly at variance with Frazer who explicitly states that “magic [...] assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any *spiritual* [...] agency” (1983, 63; emphasis added).

To sum up, the overwhelming majority of China scholars in the West use the term “magic” uncritically, not specifying what exactly they mean by it. Notable exceptions are de Groot, Bodde, and Needham—who worked in the first half of the twentieth century and may have been more keenly aware of Frazer’s considerable influence—plus, more recently, Harper. They obviously followed the tradition of James George Frazer.

## Frazer’s Magic

James George Frazer (1854–1941) was the son of a well-to-do pharmacist in Glasgow. Trained as a classicist at Cambridge, in 1884 he started a project of translating and commenting on Pausanias’ *Periēgesis tēs Hellādos* (Description of Greece), which he only finished in 1899 (6 vols., 3,000+ pages). In between, he wrote articles on “Taboo” and “Totem” for W. Robertson Smith’s ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and, expanding on these, completed the first edition of his main work, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (2 vols., 1890).<sup>3</sup> Expanding this, he published a second edition in three volumes in 1900, and a third in twelve volumes between 1911 and 1915. This was now called *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. An abridged version (without textual references) in one volume appeared in 1922. Finally, in 1936, Frazer appended yet another volume, *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*.

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<sup>3</sup> Frazer later expanded the article on “Totem” into *Totemism and Exogamy*, published in five volumes between 1910 and 1937. Its first volume provided Sigmund Freud with the data, and probably the idea, for his own *Totem and Taboo* which appeared in 1911.

In this work, following Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories, Frazer sees the development of humankind as an evolution—a technological evolution as well as corresponding “phases of the human mind”—and suggests that “in the evolution of thought, magic has preceded religion” (1983, 44). In addition, he assumes a three-stage model of evolution whose first period is the “Age of Stone” that, on the intellectual level, goes along with an “Age of Magic” (1983, 72). This, in turn, is followed by the “Age of Religion” (1983, 74), which eventually leads to an “Age of Science,” [...] through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion and science” (1983, 74).

Frazer considers the goal of magic as “producing a desired effect.” He says:

Positive magic or sorcery says: “Do this in order that so and so may happen.” [...] The aim of positive magic or sorcery is to produce a desired event. (1983, 25)

Frazer sees in magic mistaken associations of ideas. He says: “If my analysis of the magician's logic is correct, its two great principles turn out to be merely two different misapplications of the association of ideas” (1983, 15). These “two different misapplications” are then what he calls “homoeopathic” and “contagious magic”:

Homoeopathic magic is founded on the association of ideas by similarity; contagious magic is founded on the association of ideas by contiguity. Homoeopathic magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which resemble each other are the same; contagious magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which have once been in contact with each other are always in contact. (1983, 15)

Frazer discriminates between two types of magic: “positive” in contrast to “magic” or “taboo” which “says: ‘Do not do this, lest so and so should happen’” and whose aim “is to avoid an undesirable [event]” (1983, 15). He regards magic as a pseudo-science, as “a spurious system of natural law, as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art.” He accordingly divides magic—like science—into a theoretical and a practical or “experimental” part:

Regarded as a system of natural law, that is, as a statement of the rules which determine the sequence of events throughout the world, it may be called Theoretical Magic; regarded as *a set of precepts which human beings observe in order to compass their ends*, it may be called Practical Magic. (1983, 15; emphasis added)

His concept of magic can thus be summarized as follows. Magic is sympathetic magic, based on the law of sympathy, which resolves into two principles:

First, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on

each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion. (1983, 14)

At several occasions, Frazer emphasizes that on this stage of evolution the savage people think exclusively in terms of forces, forces that can be manipulated by magic, i.e., by “a set of precepts which human beings observe in order to compass their ends.” It has to be emphasized that in such practices no higher “beings” are involved in any form:

Along with the view of the world as pervaded by spiritual *forces*, savage man has a different, and probably still older, conception in which we may detect a germ of the modern notion of natural law or the view of nature as a series of events occurring in an invariable order *without the intervention of personal agency*. (1983, 13, emphasis added)

Or, even more poignantly:

Wherever sympathetic magic occurs [...], it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably *without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency*. (1983, 63, emphasis added)

Frazer places great emphasis on the close analogy between the magical and scientific conceptions of the world, since both assume the succession of events to be perfectly regular and absolutely certain, determined by immutable laws that allow precisely calculated operations (1983, 64).

For several decades after the publication of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer played a dominant role in anthropology, influencing major scholars. Thus Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) wrote in 1925: “The extended and deepened outlook of modern anthropology finds its most adequate expression in the learned and inspiring writings of Sir James Frazer” (1954, 18). He leaves no doubt about what earned Frazer his lasting success: “Frazer’s best known contribution is his theory of magic in its relation to religion and science” (1960b, 196). As late as 1965, Edmund Leach still said: “The continuing celebrity of Sir James Frazer [...] is an astonishing phenomenon” (1965, 25). This easily explains why China scholars writing in the first half of the twentieth century typically relied on Frazer’s notion of magic and why, more recently, young researchers still use it implicitly, although they may no longer be aware of where it comes from.

Nevertheless, and despite its success, there were critics who questioned aspects of Frazer’s concept. Especially the evolutionary sequence “magic → religion → science” met with disapproval since in certain cultures all three are at work at the very same time. Among major critics are Robert Ranulph Marett, Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edward Evans-Pritchard, and even

the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein,<sup>4</sup> but on the whole his central tenets were never quite put in question nor were the critical voices heard beyond the circles of anthropology and history of religion.

## Wu Meng Yet Again

Returning to our point of departure, none of the translators of the *Soushen ji* bothered to interpret or comment on Wu Meng's ritual act of writing a *fu* and throwing it onto the house to bring the storm to a halt. Only Miyakawa notes that the passage gives a short account of Wu Meng which "emphasizes his magical power of calming the wind" yet does not explain "magical power." De Groot's general statement on Chinese magic may offer an indication of how to understand the episode: by using a *fu*, the Daoist priests compel the gods to comply with their wishes. At a first glance, the *Soushen ji* account seems to verify this statement: Wu Meng composes a *fu*, throws it at the house, and "a moment later" the storm abates *as if*, de Groot would argue, it had been forced to do so by the inherent power of the *fu*. In accordance with the Frazerian definition, to which de Groot subscribes, this procedure would thus have to be termed "magic."

However, our analysis of the function of *fu* in early and medieval China shows clearly that using a *fu* was a ritual act to legitimate its proper owner in relation to the gods, adopted from the imperial administration. There the *fu* played a key role in various daily procedures of social intercourse between rulers and civil officials or military generals. It was taken over by Daoists to be used in the communication between gods and human beings. It is quite evident now that not only was there no exertion of force in the use of *fu*, but the divine beings had the choice to respond to or refuse their presentation. Both clearly contradict the Frazerian definition of magic.

In the complex ritual of submitting a petition which eventually resulted in the exorcism of demons in a sick person's body, too, there is no magic in Frazer's sense. The Daoist priest submits the document on behalf of his supplicant; the gods are free to approve the request or ignore it.

In the Daoist world, the apotropaic power of registers does not rest with any kind of force that keeps demons at bay. Rather, registers are a sort of certificate guaranteeing that the gods would control the demons listed on them. In addition, demons seeing their names listed on such a register knew that the bearer was entitled to ask higher ranking spirits or gods to protect him and, therefore, did not dare to approach this person.

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<sup>4</sup> See Marett 1909; Malinowski 1954; Lévi-Strauss 1958; Evans-Pritchard 1965. On Wittgenstein's intellectual encounter with Frazer, see Tambiah 1990, 54-63.

Similarly, the exorcistic properties of Chinese sacred scriptures which, when put on the pillow of a sick person, can heal the patient, and their exorcistic powers to banish ghosts, block calamities, and eliminate misfortunes are all due to the unseen accompanying spirits. The spirits protect both the scriptures and their holders against evil. They also drive the disease-causing demons out of the adherent's body—at least if the gods order them to do so. Again, there is no trace of Frazerian magic. Studying the ancient and Daoist use of empowered writing in its various forms thus leads to the end of Chinese magic as defined in terms of Frazer.

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