

Lu Xiujing (406–477) on Daoist Practice: Ten Lessons in *The Way and its Virtue*

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Abstract

This study is centered on a set of ten sermons explaining the practice of the Lingbao Retreat 靈寶齋 in the light of the *Daode jing*. Transmitted in Lu Xiujing's *The Illumination of Ritual* 太上洞玄靈寶法燭經, they provide a unique insight into the patriarch's religious convictions and vocation. The pastoral and pedagogical side of Lu's mission, revealed in sermons and exhortations addressed to his disciples, has received relatively little attention. His public reflections on the Retreat are particularly significant in the context of the far-reaching reform of Daoist ritual launched under his leadership and the challenge its assimilation of Buddhist practices posed for Daoist communities.

Keywords: Lu Xiujing, *Taishang dongxuan lingbao fazhu jing*, Lingbao zhai, *Daode jing*, sermon

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The medieval patriarch Lu Xiuqing substantially redefined the boundaries and content of a Daoist life in his time by devising the first canon of Daoist scriptures, reforming Daoist ritual, and orchestrating the Daoist community's response to the spread of Buddhist practices and doctrine in China. Lu Xiuqing's integrating vision also merged the Daoist currents of southern China with the institutions of the ancient Heavenly Master movement and established the ritual and textual corpus known as Lingbao 靈寶. His impact on the history of Daoism has been widely recognized and is the subject of a growing number of studies.¹

The present article examines an aspect of Lu's religious leadership that has received comparatively less attention: the "pastoral" side of his vocation. It is revealed especially in sermons and exhortations that Lu addressed to his disciples, in preparation for or during performances of the *zhai* 齋 Retreat, on the function and practice of ritual, on spiritual advancement, liberation, and return. His instruction encompasses ritual comportment, mental attitudes and moral precepts, acts of purification, as well as exegeses of mystical concepts and philosophical terms from scriptural passages, especially the *Way and its Virtue* or *Daode jing* 道德經 ascribed to the sage Laozi 老子. The sermons lay out Lu Xiuqing's vision of personal preservation and transcendence, besides offering precepts for escaping the snares of mundane, everyday existence. In historical perspective, they provide a guide to the moral universe and the code of conduct envisaged by Lu Xiuqing for reforming Daoism in an age of turbulent change.

Lu Xiuqing spent much of his life in the southern capital city of Jiankang 建康 (Nanjing) and on Mount Lu 廬山 near Jiujiang 九江 (Jiangxi), two of the main conduits for the transfer of Buddhist ideas, institutions, and practices to China. Born of an aristocratic

¹ See in particular Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Lu Xiuqing, Buddhism, and the first Daoist canon," in *Culture and power in the reconstitution of the Chinese realm, 200–600*, ed. Scott Pearce et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 181–99; John Lagerwey, "Canonical fasts according to Lu Xiuqing," in *Affiliation and Transmission in Daoism: A Berlin Symposium*, edited by Florian C. Reiter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 41–79.