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The heavenly court: a study on the Iconopraxis of Daoist temple painting
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1 History and Development

The oldest surviving temple paintings depicting a Daoist Heavenly Court date to the thirteenth century. Representations of a Heavenly Court also exist in stone sculptures, the earliest dating to the mid-eighth century. Textual references however push the earliest date of a Daoist Heavenly Court back to the fifth century. In this very early phase, the Heavenly Court is not an entirely new invention but elaborates on a particular theme, the *chao* 朝 -audience theme, of which representations exist dating back to the second century.

The first section of this chapter presents a chronological survey of representations of the Daoist Heavenly Court in their social-historical context as these survive today in material form such as sculptured statues, scroll paintings, wall paintings, or in references thereof in textual sources. Although depicted in different media they are representations of the same praxis, as expressed in the theme of the Heavenly Court.

The second part of this chapter will give an art historical account of the early development and origins of the representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court. I will argue that a Daoist Heavenly Court painting is a later development of a fixed theme in Chinese art history, a theme I call the audience-theme and which exists in various pictorial formats prior to the emergence of the Daoist Heavenly Court in about the fifth century (or perhaps earlier). The connective principle between a representation of a Daoist Heavenly Court and the other representations of the audience theme is not only pictorial but also practical, or what I call iconopraxis: Daoist Heavenly Court paintings as well as the other images depicting an audience theme are representation of a ritual practice, namely a court audience ritual.

1.1 Four phases

The history and development of representations of the Daoist Heavenly Court can be divided into four general Phases: Early (400-700), Transitional (700-1000), Middle (1000-1400), and Late (1400-present). The transitions between these periods are chosen for convenience and by

approximation and do not correlate exactly to dynastic change or “stylistic” change, in the sense of a period-style. The four phases and their changes are characteristic for the development of the representation of the Heavenly Court, and not for entire Chinese art and history. If so, this still would remain to be attested in the future.

The four phases are defined by the change in overall appearance, contents, and layout of the Heavenly Court representation, and as such I would like to characterise the Early Phase as ‘Daoist,’ the Middle Phase as ‘imperial,’ the Late Phase as ‘popular,’ and the Transitional Phase as a time when ‘Daoist’ and ‘imperial’ representations co-existed. These phases are not mutually exclusive but accumulative. Each next phase also contains the representation or elements thereof of the previous phase, e.g. Late Phase Heavenly Court representations feature deities in Daoist, imperial and popular representations.

Early Phase, 400-700

No concrete material survives of representations of the Heavenly Court in the Early Phase. The beginning of the Early Phase in the fifth century is also arbitrary and based on the first references to Daoist images or imagery mentioned in conjunction with a ritual area.

The history of Daoism is much older and officially starts with Laozi 老子, the author of the *Daode jing* 道德經. Laozi is traditionally identified with Lao Dan 老聃 (also called Li Er 李耳) who was a librarian and astrologist at the Western Zhou court and who, according to legend, once received Confucius 孔子 (551-479) seeking instruction on ritual. Laozi remained a central figure of Daoism in the following centuries and was deified as the embodiment of the Dao in the Later Han (25-220), also receiving official worship of the Han emperors. This was also the period when Daoist practitioners organised themselves in an order with a defined set of communal rules, liturgies and a clergy of ordained priests who provided services to a community of Daoist believers. One order was called the Taiping Dao 太平道 (Way of the Great Peace) in Shandong 山東 in east China, but soon disappeared at the end of the second century. Another order was the Tianshi Dao 天師道 (Way of the Heavenly Masters) established in Sichuan 四川 in southwest China, and this order, taking Laozi as their central god and the *Daode jing* as their central scripture, would have lasting influence on Daoism, its religious practices, and its art up to present times since the order is still flourishing today, although undergoing several transformations. After the fall of the Later Han, the members of the Heavenly Master order disseminated their practices over the rest of China where they mingled and competed with other Daoist practitioners still versed in the rituals and techniques

of the Early Han, manifesting themselves with their own textual traditions such as the Shangqing 尚清 (Highest Purity) and Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure) traditions, also in response to the growing presence of Buddhism that had entered China since the first century. These two traditions were basically immortality cults of individual practitioners without a community, a clergy or patriarchs and it would be difficult to describe them as an order. In the fifth century, a Daoist priest called Lu Xiuqing 陆修靜 (406-477) published on the order of the Southern Dynasties Song court (420-477) the first Daoist Canon (*daozang* 道藏) binding the various various traditions together and providing Daoism with a new defined set of rituals and techniques. This canonisation of texts and rituals further allowed that the Daoist clergy was organised in a hierarchy of priests each of whom was ordained in a higher level of texts, registers (*lu* 錄), and talismans (*fu* 符) that served as proof of his or her status. It is from this century onward that we encounter the first concrete references to representations of a Heavenly Court and here our discussion of the Early Phase starts.

The representation of the Heavenly Court in the Early Phase is in fact only known from textual sources providing descriptions or regulations for the decoration and images of the Daoist ritual area (*daochang* 道場). The Daoist ritual area consists of three types: an oratory (lit. “quiet room” *jingshi* 靜室 or *jingshe* 靜舍), an open-air altar (*tan* 壇), or a hall in a monastery (*guan* 觀). The first two have much older antecedents in ancient China, while the latter seems to have become fashionable only from the sixth century onward.¹ Despite the diversity in architecture, the types of decoration are very similar. Early Daoist texts do not endorse any imagery in the ritual area or are at least silent about them, but non-canonical sources such as stele inscriptions and historical essays demonstrate that statues, paintings and other ritual paraphernalia were very common, in particular from the sixth century onward.²

¹ On early Daoist monasteries, see Stephan P. Bumbacher, *The Fragments of the Daoxue zhuan*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 431-493. On the Daoist oratory, see Ishii Masako 石井昌子, “Shinkô ni toku seishitsu ni tsuite 真誥に説く靜室について.” *Dôkyô to shûkyô bunka* 道教と宗教文化. Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987, pp. 136-153, and Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫. “Seishitsu kô 靜室考.” *Tôhō gakuhô* 東方學報 59 (1987), pp. 125-62.

² For the oratory decoration, see Lu Xiuqing’s (406-477) critique in *Lu xiansheng daomen keli* 陸先生道門科略 DZ 1127, 4b. For a translation, see Stephen R. Bokenkamp with Peter Nickerson, *Early Daoist Scriptures*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 64. This description can be compared to the decoration of an oratory in Tantric Buddhism of the sixth century in *Longshu wuming lun* 龍樹五明論 T 1420, 967b-c. For the contents and dating of this scripture, see Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, pp 134-135. See *Sui shu* 隨書 compiled by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-683). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973, j. 35, pp. 1092 and 1094 for non-canonical references to the use of statues of Heavenly Worthies and immortals by Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365-448), a reformer of the Heavenly Masters order at the Northern Wei court, and the use of “ritual images” (*faxiang* 法像) in the open-air altar; and Ware, Jamer R., “The *Wei Shu* and the *Sui Shu* on Taoism.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 53.3 (1933), p. 215-250.

For example, the official Laozi temple in Bozhou 亳州 (Henan), the native town of Laozi, was renovated on the imperial order of Sui Emperor Wen 文 (r. 581-604) in 586 and adorned with statues or wall paintings – the text is not clear on this point – representing “a Heavenly Worthy solemn and dignified, and immortals surrounding him majestically and silently.”³ This is arguably our earliest reference to a representation of a Heavenly Court.

The standard imagery of an Early Phase Heavenly Court would have included Heavenly Worthies (*tianzun* 天尊), immortals (*xianren* 仙人) and veritables (*zhenren* 真人),⁴ as well as assistant deities such as jade maidens (*yunü* 玉女) and golden boys (*jintong* 金童) – basically the court ladies and attendants in the Heavenly Court – and various kinds of messengers and warriors. Beside these paintings or statues, the Early Phase Heavenly Court abounds with depictions of auspicious motifs and animals most commonly associated with the supernatural realm, such as cloud-vapours (*qi* 氣), mushrooms, phoenixes, dragons, and unicorns, set in a mountainous landscape scenery. Mountains were the place where the mundane world connected to the supernatural spheres and the Daoist Heavenly Court is also understood as being located on a cosmic mountain, either Kunlun 崑崙, the *axis mundi* located in the western regions according to Chinese mythology, or Jade Capital Mountain (*yujingshan* 玉京山), its celestial counterpart. The Daoist ritual area of the Early Phase is therefore a visual representation or recreation of this cosmological mountain. In the ritual area of an open-air altar, the images and decoration motifs were all painted on banners hung from gates made of bamboo poles surrounding the central altar mound. These banners or curtains could range in length from half a meter to over two meters, and the visual drama evoked by such large paintings must have been enormous.⁵

An early seventh century text, the *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒, codifying Daoist monastic life in the early Tang and stipulating rules for the building of monasteries and the making of images amongst others, provides similar data for wall paintings. In the case of temple painting

³ The Laozi temple in Bozhou already received state support by Emperor Huan (r. 147-168) of the Later Han. *Laoshi bei* 老氏碑, by Xue Daoheng 薛道衡, dated 586. Chen Yuan 陳垣 (comp.), Chen Zhichao 陳智超 and Zeng Qingying 曾慶瑛 (eds.), *Daojia jinshi lue* 道家金石略. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988: pp. 43-44. See also Liu Yang, “Manifestations of the Dao: A Study in Daoist Art from the Northern Dynasty to the Tang (5th-9th Centuries).” PhD Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 1997, p. 243.

⁴ Veritables and immortals are persons who have achieved the Dao, that is returned to the origin of the Dao.

⁵ The types of decorated banners are found in *Chuanshou sandong jingjie falu lüeshuo* 傳授三洞經戒法律略說 DZ 1241, 2: 19b-20a, by Zhang Wanfu 張萬福 (fl. 700-742), a Daoist priest at the Tang court and although active in the Transitional Phase, probably describing a practice also common for the (late) Early Phase. The measurements of the banners are also found in this text and are transcribed in Charles D. Benn, *The Cavern-Mystery Transmission: A Taoist Ordination Rite of A.D. 711*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991, pp. 25-27, 167, note 10.

however, the wall paintings decorate the ritual area inside a monastery hall and are consequently organised differently compared to the open-air altar, even though both types displayed the same visual arena.⁶ Because of the rectangular architecture of the hall, in contrast to the circular layout of an altar mound, the wall paintings with the images of the immortals, numinous animals and cloud-vapours were divided to the left and right of the three statues of the Heavenly Worthy, Daojun 道君, and Laojun 老君. In this Daoist text, these three deities are codified for the ritual area for one of the first times, signalling a change in conception of the Heavenly Court. The addition of Daojun and Laojun to the image of the Heavenly Worthy, collectively referred to as the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶) and the precursors of the Three Purities (*sanqing* 三清), is an elaboration of the seventh century, that basically fused the Heavenly Worthy with the images of Laozi, thereby also fusing visually the traditions of Lingbao, Shangqing and the Heavenly Masters, whose main deities they represent. This format of the three main deities flanked by wall paintings on the east and west side of the temple hall would remain the basic structure of Daoist Heavenly Court painting up to the present day.

Early references to such representations are however not found in either Daoist scriptures or dynastic histories, even though these histories profess a great state support for Daoism during the Early Phase. Testimonies of this support are recorded in the bibliographical section of the *Sui shu* 隨書 (History of the Sui Dynasty, 581-618) compiled by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-683), a Daoist priest himself, stating that the Northern Wei (386-534) emperors save the first two as well as the Northern Zhou (559-581) emperors were all ordained as Daoist priests receiving Daoist registers and talismans (*shou fulu* 受符籙). He further added that during the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577) the finest monasteries were built to house Daoist priests.⁷ Daoism undoubtedly had a foremost position in the successive dynasties ruling over northern China from the fourth to the sixth centuries, a status that was probably continued with the establishment of the Tang dynasty (618-907) which chose Laozi as its first ancestor, thereby rallying great support from an, presumably, pro-Daoist populace, but these ties between Daoism and imperial court in the Early Phase have remained very obscure in the remainder of official writings on Chinese history. Even though examples are

⁶ *Dongxuan lingbao sandong fengdao kejie yingshi* 洞玄靈寶奉道科戒營式 DZ 1125, 2.4a-b. For studies of this text see Florian C. Reiter, *The Aspirations and Standards of Taoist Priests in the Early T'ang Period*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998; Livia Kohn, "The First Handbook of Monastic Daoism: The Date and Compilation of the *Fengdao kejie*." *East Asian History* 13 (1998), pp. 91-118; and idem, *The Daoist Monastic Manual: A Translation of the Fengdao Kejie*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁷ *Sui shu* j. 35, p. 1094.

lacking in official writing, we may surmise that under such favourable circumstances Daoist art must have flourished as well, and that numerous representations of the Heavenly Court must have existed. For example, preliminary research on early Daoist monasticism yielded already over one hundred monasteries for South China alone during the fifth and sixth centuries.⁸ The actual number for entire China may be much higher, and Daoist temple painting also more common than reflected in the official sources.

Our suspicion is confirmed by references in stele inscriptions of the seventh century, sources that bespeak the views of contemporary authors rather than those of historiographers writing centuries later: representations of the Heavenly Court, and mostly in the format of sculptural designs (which were also undoubtedly painted) it seems, should have abounded in Daoist monasteries.⁹ These inscriptions not only proof that such representations existed, but that they must have been part of an artistic tradition with its own repertoire and models in which painters and sculptors were trained. We may further assume that banner painters and wall painters, as well as the sculptors were working in this same tradition.

Chinese sources on painting history of the Early Phase do not mention Heavenly Court paintings directly, but nevertheless provide us with some tantalising clues. Two important texts are our main sources on early painting history; one is Pei Xiaoyuan's 裴孝源 *Zhenguan gongsì hua shì* 貞觀公私畫史 (History of Paintings in Imperial and Private Collections of the Zhenguan Period, foreword dated 639), and the other is the *Lidai minghua jì* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters through the Ages, dated 847) by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (fl. 815-875). The *Zhenguan gongsì huashì* lists forty-seven temple paintings but these are, curiously, all Buddhist. The *Lidai minghua jì* lists no Daoist wall paintings painted before 700 and those listed after 700, with one or two exceptions, are described too tersely to make any statements on their contents (I will return to these further below). The long catalogues on scroll paintings contained in these two works do not reveal any immediate connection with Heavenly Court

⁸ Bumbacher, *The Fragments of the Daoxue zhuan*, pp. 467-472.

⁹ See for example the abovementioned stele inscription on the Laozi temple in Bozhou dated 586; the *Chijian Niaooshi guan bei* 敕建鳥石觀碑記, by Chen Zongyu 陳宗裕, 629. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 48-49 which mentions statues and wall paintings as well as an image of the Daoist immortal Xu Xun 許遜 (d. 374); the *Qi Guan tianzun bei* 祁觀天尊碑, by Wang Mu 王母, dated 634. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 50-51 which mentions "a statue of one Heavenly Worthy, veritables, jade boys, heavenly warriors (*tianding*), lions, and earth spirits ... all placed opposite of each other to the left and right"; the *Wang xiansheng bei* 王先生碑, by Yu Jingzhi 于敬之, 673. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 58-60 which states that the Taiping guan 太平觀 (Great Peace Monastery) on Maoshan 茅山 had statues of a Heavenly Worthy and veritables and paintings of various auspicious motifs; and the *Yizhou Zhizhen guan zhu Li jun bei* 益州至真觀主黎君碑, by Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰, 671. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 62-64 which mentions that "the monastery once had more than ten thousand stone statues of Heavenly Worthies and veritables in various sizes."

paintings, providing only titles such as “Painting of Roaming Immortals” (*youxian tu* 游仙圖), “Designs for Various Demons and Deities” (*za guishen yang* 雜鬼神樣),¹⁰ and paintings of Laozi, a Heavenly Worthy, or veritables (*zhenren* 真人) are entirely lacking.

There is however one tantalising reference and contained in both works under the heading of the painter Gu Kaizhi (fl. 345-406), who is recorded to have painted a “Painting of the Water Prefecture” (*shuifu tu* 水府圖).¹¹ At first sight there is nothing that would connect this title to a Daoist theme, let alone a Heavenly Court painting, were it not that in the modern liturgy of Daoist priests of the Heavenly Master order in Taiwan and in South China a painting with the same title appears in a set of hanging scrolls making up a Heavenly Court.¹² In this set, the painting of the “Water Prefecture” depicts the deities of the Realm of Water because, according to Daoist cosmogony, when the cosmos was created from the Dao, first one original energy (*yuanqi* 元氣) emerged which then divided into three energies that consolidated as the three realms of Heaven, Earth and Water (*tian di shui* 天地水). These three realms are called the Three Heavens (*santian* 三天) in early Daoist scriptures and constitute one of the basic ideas of the Heavenly Master order.¹³ The assumption that the “Painting of the Water Prefecture” is indeed a painting of Daoist deities becomes even more appealing when we consider that Gu Kaizhi was a member of the Heavenly Master order and that he therefore should have been very familiar with Heavenly Master cosmology and rituals. Perhaps the “Painting of the Water Prefecture” originally consisted of a set of three paintings, one for each realm, decorating a ritual area.¹⁴ If my assumption is correct, it would mean that the Gu Kaizhi painting is one of the earliest references to the practice of Heavenly Court painting.

There are strong indications that representations of the Daoist Heavenly Court in the Early Phase were closely related to a common visual culture in the sixth and seventh centuries

¹⁰ *Zhenguan gongsì huashi*. In He Zhiming 和志明 and Pan Yungao 潘運告 (annotators), *Tang Wudai hualun* 唐五代畫論. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997, pp. 13, 19. On the translation of *yang* 楊 as “design,” see chapter 3 of this study.

¹¹ *Zhenguan gongsì hua shi* p. 15; *Lidai minghua ji*, p. 206.

¹² These paintings are discussed in more detail further below in section 1.4.

¹³ One Heavenly Master scripture, dating to the fifth century, where this cosmogony of the Three Heavens is explained in fullest form is the *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 DZ 1205. For an annotated translation of this text, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 186-229. For a similar cosmogony but in a scripture of the Lingbao tradition, see *Dongxuan lingbao ziran jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 洞玄靈寶自然九天生神章經 DZ 318, which also dates to the fifth century.

¹⁴ The three paintings of the Three Officials (*sanguan* 三官) in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and dating to the Southern Song (1127-1279), depicting the three deities of Heaven, Earth, and Water and their entourages who rule over their respective realms, may be a later example of Gu Kaizhi’s type of painting. The Boston paintings of the Three Official are discussed below in section 1.3.

associated with depictions of the supernatural. The representation of the supernatural with the same motifs and elements is also found in contemporaneous tomb decorations, Buddhist wall paintings, and in palace murals from all parts of China. Auspicious animals and motifs abound for example on the ceilings of caves 249 and 285 at Mogao 莫高 near Dunhuang 敦煌 and dated to 535-557 and 538-539 respectively,¹⁵ and in the tomb murals of general Cui Fen 崔芬 in Linqu 臨朐 (Shandong) dated 550,¹⁶ clearly attesting to this common visual culture. A description of palace murals in the Southern Qi capital dated 501 almost reads as a description of a Daoist Heavenly Court painting: after a fire had destroyed the palace, it was rebuilt in 501 and “among [the palace halls] was a Jade Longevity Hall which was adorned with curtains (*zhang* 帳) of embroidered damask on all four sides depicting flying immortals; the walls between the windows were painted with deities and immortals and with images of the Seven Sages [of the Bamboo Grove] assisted by beautiful ladies. Gold and silver were chiselled into the form of characters, and numinous animals, divine birds, drifting clouds, and flowering torches were rendered into playful decorations.”¹⁷

The existence of a common visual culture of the supernatural in the Early Phase further suggests that Heavenly Court painting is an elaboration on an existing theme. Since Heavenly Worthies, immortals, and veritables are lacking in these other representations, they should be considered as the key-defining element of Heavenly Court painting in the Early Phase. This assumption is corroborated by surviving sculptured images of Heavenly Worthies and veritables who are represented in the costumes of Daoist priests. Several carved steles erected by local Daoist communities (*yi* 邑) in the Shanxi area from the fifth and sixth centuries portray the Heavenly Worthy either wearing a three-pointed Daoist cap in the shape of the Chinese character for “mountain” (*shan* 山), or a *bangu* 斑轳-cap, an official’s headgear of the fourth century, which as a means of archaism, became the attire of Daoist priests in the centuries thereafter who were similarly regarded as officials but of a celestial bureaucracy.¹⁸

Transitional Phase, 700-1000

¹⁵ Wang Yi’e 王宜娥, *Daojiao yu yishu* 道教與藝術. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1997, pp. 122-124.

¹⁶ Shandong sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 山东省文物考古研究所 (ed.), “Shandong Linqu Beiqi Cui Fen bihua mu 山东临朐北齐崔芬壁画墓”. *Wenwu* 文物 4 (2002), pp. 4-26.

¹⁷ *Nan shi* 南史, compiled by Li Yanshou 李延壽 (618-676). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, j. 5, p. 153.

¹⁸ The largest collection of Daoist stele carvings is discussed in Liu, “Manifestations of the Dao,” pp. 72-156, see also Stanley K. Abe, “Heterological Visions: Northern Wei Daoist Sculpture from Shaanxi Province.” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 10 (1996-1997), pp. 69-83, and idem, *Ordinary Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 270-313.

In the Transitional Phase, an imperial representation gradually supersedes the Daoist representation of the Heavenly Court. The eighth century marks a new era in the attitude of the court toward Daoism, during which Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756) initiated a whole series of reforms that established Daoism as a *de facto* state religion. As already mentioned, the Tang imperial family was surnamed Li and claimed descendency of Laozi, also surnamed Li 李, but it was not until the High Tang that Emperor Xuanzong initiated on unprecedented scale a state cult of Laozi and concomitantly a personality cult to enhance his status as divine ruler. In 741, Xuanzong ordered the building of temples to Laozi in the two capitals Chang'an and Luoyang as well as in every prefecture in the empire, 331 in total, and in 744 he further ordered that his personal image should be cast in bronze and placed in every Daoist and Buddhist monastery throughout the realm.¹⁹ Emperor Xuanzong further had Daoist scriptures, such as the *Daode jing*, selected as compulsory texts for the state examinations, and he established Daoist schools in which these texts were taught to students. Perhaps the most single important event that instituted Daoism as a state religion was the establishment of the Taiqing gong 太清宮 (Palace of Great Purity) that functioned as and factually replaced the Confucian Taimiao 太廟 (Great Temple), the official site where the emperor sacrificed to his ancestors. The Taiqing gong was installed with images of Laozi, the Tang imperial ancestor and dressed as an emperor with a so-called *mian* 冕-crown, (a mortar-board shaped crown, called *mian* 冕, with pendants of jade beads, called *liu* 旒, hanging from the front and back rims),²⁰ and other Daoist sages but also of Confucius, Emperor Xuanzong, and some ministers such as Li Linfu 李林甫. Laozi's statue was unearthed from a place nearby the capital Chang'an 長安 (Xi'an), the location of which was disclosed to Xuanzong in a dream by Laozi himself.²¹

The fervent state support of Laozi and Daoism had a great impact on Daoist art and the representation of the Heavenly Court. Daoism became closely associated with the imperial court and it is no surprise to find Daoist deities attaining a more imperial demeanour, even though this transformation seems only to have been limited to court-related art.

¹⁹ The Daoist reforms under Tang Emperor Xuanzong have been the subject of a detailed study in Charles D. Benn, "Taoism as Ideology in the Reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung (712-755)." PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977. For his personality cult and references to images, see also Liu, "Manifestations of the Dao," pp. 283-285.

²⁰ For a study of the *mian*-crown, see Zhou Cibao 周錫保, *Zhongguo gudai fushi shi* 中國古代服飾史. Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1984, pp. 13-46.

²¹ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, compiled by Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, p. 589. Liu Yang surmises that a white marble statue of Laozi now in the Beilin Museum in Xi'an is the statue in question. Yang, "Manifestations of the Dao," pp. 264-266.

The history of Daoist Heavenly Court painting in the Tang dynasty is closely related to Wu Daozi 吳道子 (fl. 685-758), China's most celebrated painter, and as far as can be judged from the historical record, the painter who may be solely held responsible for the imperial transformation of the Daoist Heavenly Court. In 749, Wu Daozi painted on imperial order a Heavenly Court painting in a Laozi temple on Mt. Beimang 北邙山, north of Luoyang 洛陽 (Henan), depicting the first five Tang emperors accompanied by a retinue of officials on audience with Laozi, their first ancestor. Although the murals have been lost, a poem by the Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) gives an evocative description of the scene: "Painters look up to their predecessors,/but Master Wu [Daozi] leaves them far behind./Dense and numerous, [his images] rotate the earth,/subtle and refined, they move the palace's walls./The Five Saints line up in dragon robes,/a thousand officials march in goose file./Mian-crowns tower high [above the multitudes],/flags and banners rise up [in the sky]." ²²

Du Fu's poem not only gives an apt description of Wu Daozi's dynamic painting style "rotating the earth" and "moving the walls," it also demonstrates that the Daoist Heavenly Court was now equipped with all the regalia of an imperial court, with emperors wearing "dragon robes" and "mian-crowns", officials, and banners and flags. These images we rather know from imperial donor scenes such as those found in the Buddhist cave carvings of Longmen of the sixth century. ²³ The so-called Daoist representation of the Early Phase has been transplanted by an imperial representation under the aegis of the Tang court, thereby not only imperialising the divine image, but also deifying the imperial image. In previous ages, portraits of emperors were included in Buddhist, and probably Daoist, painting and sculpture compositions but always as donors and never as deities.

The emergence of an imperial representation, i.e. deities in imperial costumes, of the Daoist Heavenly Court in the High Tang did not immediately supplant or substituted the former Daoist representations with its many auspicious motifs. In 727, Emperor Xuanzong bestowed upon the Shangqing patriarch Sima Chengzhen 司馬承貞 (647-735), Xuanzong's personal master who had ordained him into the Dao in 724, an event which was also recorded in a painting by Wu Daozi, a monastery on Mt. Wangwu 王屋 (Henan), the Yangtai guan 陽臺觀 (Sunlight Terrace Monastery). In the Heavenly Worthies Hall, Sima Chengzhen thereupon painted himself the walls with images of "immortals, dragons, storks and cloud-

²² Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), *Du shi xiang zhu* 杜詩詳注, annotated by Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (1638-1717). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979, pp. 91-92. On the date of the temple, see Yuan Yougen 袁有根, "Wu Daozi de bihua chuangzao 吳道子的壁畫創造." *Xin meishu* 新美術 1 (2002), pp. 54-55.

²³ For the Longmen reliefs, see Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 185-257.

vapours,” clearly continuing the earlier tradition of Daoist Heavenly Court paintings.²⁴ The paintings are no longer extant.

Although Early Phase representations were continued, a greater emphasis was being placed on deity figures and the anthropomorphisation of natural forces. A good example of this new tendency are the Heavenly Court sculptures of the Nanzhu guan 南竺觀 (Southern Bamboo Monastery) and dated to 749, a still-existing cliff site with numerous other niches, most of them Buddhist, located in Niujiaozhai 牛角寨 in Renshou 仁壽 County (Sichuan). The Nanzhu guan consists of two caves. Cave 40 depicts an audience of 26 figures (See Fig. 1). It has large statues of the Three Treasures (one of them with a triple-pointed beard and holding a fly-whisk or *zhuwei* 麈尾 identifiable as Laozi), five Daoist priests holding court-tablets placed behind them (probably representing the deities of the five directions, the *wudi* 五帝), two deities with sun and moon discs above their heads, and a series of warriors, officials and court ladies at the sides. To the east side is a seated figure (now beheaded) who is generally identified as Tang Emperor Xuanzong, a sole surviving trace of his personality cult. An adjacent Cave 63 has further images of thirty-five male and female Daoist priests in a similar carving style and showing great variety in facial representation.²⁵ Importantly, all the main deities, including the alleged Xuanzong image (which is also seated in a Daoist armrest), are portrayed as Daoist priests rather than imperial figures; yet, no signs of auspicious motifs or animals is witnessed, underscoring the tendency of emphasising deity figures rather than supernatural phenomena in the Transitional Phase. The fact that the beheaded image is represented in the costume of a Daoist priest represents Emperor Xuanzong is corroborated by evidence from the Song poet Lu You 陸游 (1125-1200) who wrote in his travelogue, *Ru Shu ji* 入蜀記 (Record of Traveling into Shu) that when he visited a Daoist monastery in

²⁴ The murals painted by Sima Chengzhen measured five meters (1.6 *zhang*) in height and over twenty-eight meters (95 *chi*) in length, see the *Ci Baiyun xiansheng shushi bing jinshan chibei* 賜白雲先生書詩並禁山敕碑, by Tang Emperor Xuanzong 唐玄宗, dated 733. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 182-183. The part on the murals in the stele inscription is damaged but a short reference to the contents of the Tang murals is found in a Yuan stele, the *Chongxiu Wangwushan Yangtai gong bei* 重修王屋山陽臺宮碑, by Li Junmin 李俊民, 1275. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 1074-1075. That Sima Chengzhen painted the murals himself, can be inferred from Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji* p. 241, translated in Acker, *Some T'ang*, p. 257. For the reference to Wu Daozi's painting of Emperor Xuanzong receiving the Daoist registers, i.e. his ordination as a Daoist priest, see *Lidai minghua ji* p. 237.

²⁵ Cave 40 measures 4 meters in height, 2.9 meters in width, and 2.1 meters in depth. The adjacent cave measures 2.5 meters in height, 5.4 meters in width, and 1.6 meters in depth. The site has been extensively studied in Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Zhongguo daojiao shike yishu shi* 中國道教石刻藝術史. Vol. 1. Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004, pp. 169-222; Anning Jing, “Yongle Palace,” pp. 172-191; Liu, “Manifestations of the Dao,” pp. 285-287, and idem, “Cliff Sculpture: Iconographic Innovations of Tang Daoist Art in Sichuan Province.” *Orientalia* 28.8 (1997), pp. 90-92. For reproductions see *Zhongguo meishu quanji* 中國美術全集, *Diaosu bian* 雕塑編 12, *Sichuan shiku diaosu* 四川石窟雕塑. Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988, p. 100.

Jiangzhou 江洲 (Jiangxi), he saw a clay image of Laojun accompanied by veritables and attendants, and a gold-plated bronze image of Xuanzong with the cap and dress of a Daoist priest, thus confirming the Xuanzong image in the Nanzhu guan.²⁶

The Nanzhu guan sculptures of the Heavenly Court are a visual testimony of the close connection between the court and the Daoist clergy. The statues of Cave 40 were commissioned by a Daoist high priest, as recorded in a stele inscription on the west side of the assembly, an event further materialised by the two rows of donor figures in Daoist dress on the bottom lintel. Since Daoist priests received a land stipend from the state upon ordination, it could explain the wealth of the priest for commissioning such a cave and is further evidence how other monasteries in this period could have commissioned Heavenly Court paintings. The indirect imperial connection could then also explain the presence of the Xuanzong image.

The Transitional Phase also coincides with a long period of great social and economical changes taking place in China, changes that also had their bearing on the representation of the Heavenly Court. From the end of the Tang dynasty to the beginning of the Song dynasty in the tenth century, a period of division commonly referred to as the Five Dynasties (907-960), many new social classes emerged making Chinese society creating more social mobility and more socially complex. Technical innovations and greater economical independence gave rise to artisan and mercantile classes, while bureaucratic careers and master-student relationships ensuing from state examination preparations formed a powerful literati class. A wealthy bourgeois class of local landlords moved to the cities from where they managed their rural estates, especially in the Jiangnan 江南 area (the area of the lower Yangtze 長江 river) where new sorts of rice imported from South-East Asia caused bumper harvests and greatly enhanced the economical development of the area. In the meantime, the central power of the state was undermined by a change from conscription to private armies which in turn drained the treasury, and social and economical power was more and more transferred to the local level. In the religious field, the economic power of Buddhism was in a steep decline after the Huichang persecution of 844-845, that destroyed most of its monasteries and assets and sent its clergy back to lay-life. The Daoist ordination system supervised by the state had also declined, the Daoist priests - as ritual specialists – became more and more dependent on local communities and their wealthy leaders. In addition, many of the newly emerged social classes were organised in guilds and networks, often along strong religious lines, and in this new complex, socially instable constellation people vied with each

²⁶ Chun-shu Chang and Joan Smythe, *South China in the Twelfth Century: A Translation of Lu Yu's Travel Diaries July 3-December 6, 1170*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1977, p. 99.

other for social legitimation and recognition, a state of affairs under which the representation of the Heavenly Court also achieved a new role.

The new social state of affairs affected the whole nation but the artistic endeavours in the Sichuan area – then called Shu 蜀 Kingdom after the fall of the Tang – are particularly noted. One reason is that a detailed account of Shu painters and their activities from the late Tang and the Five Dynasties have survived in the *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (Record of Famous Painters from Yizhou, preface dated 1009) by Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (end 10th – early 11th cent.).²⁷ Another is that the Shu kings saw themselves as the rightful heirs of the Tang legacy and employed Daoism as a state religion in the same vein as the Tang rulers, a feature that may be attributed to a single Daoist priest, Du Guangting 杜廣庭 (844-911), who was first in the service of the Tang court and after that of the Shu.²⁸ A third reason may be that because of two flights of the Tang court to Chengdu 成都 during the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion of 755-756 and the Huang Chao 黃巢 rebellion of 878, it is often suggested that the court painters, or else large collections of paintings and calligraphies in the imperial collection, fled with them and that there was therefore a direct link between the painting traditions of the Tang and the Shu Kingdom, but without extant paintings from both traditions, this assumption remains very difficult to attest.²⁹ The *Yizhou minghua lu* contains two references to Heavenly Court painting, both of which are exemplary for the changing state of social affairs in this period.

The first is a reference to a Daoist Heavenly Court painting by the painter Zhang Nanben 張南本 (ca. 885). Highly indicative of the social changes that involved more and different classes of peoples in the commissioning of Heavenly Court paintings is the fact that this Heavenly Court painting is found in a Buddhist monastery, the Baoli si 寶歷寺 (Monastery of Cherishing History). The hall with the paintings is called the Water-and-Land Hall (*shuilu yuan* 水陸院), which is named after and intended for a famous type of Buddhist ritual, the Water-and-Land Assembly (*shuilu fahui* 水陸法會), a big offering ritual held in order to save all the creatures living in water or on land. Despite the Buddhist location and the

²⁷ *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄, written by Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (end 10th – early 11th cent.), preface dated 1009. In Yun Gao 雲告(annotator), *Songren huaping* 宋任畫評. Changsha: Hunan renmin meishu chubanshe, 1999, 116-211.

²⁸ On Du Guangting and his role at the Shu Court, see Franciscus Verellen, *Du Guangting (850-933) - Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale*. Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1989, and idem, "Liturgy and Sovereignty: The Role of Taoist Ritual in the Foundation of the Shu Kingdom (906-925). *Asia Major* 3rd series 2.1 (1989), pp. 59-78, and idem, "Shu as a Hallowed Land: Du Guangting's *Record of Marvels*." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 10 (1998), pp. 213-54.

²⁹ See Huang Xiufu's comments on this subject in his *Yizhou minghua lu* p. 143.

Buddhist rituals connected to the hall, Huang Xiufu's description of the paintings leaves no doubt that the contents are fully Daoist and completely tally with a Daoist Heavenly Court painting. He writes that Zhang Nanben painted "the images of the heavenly deities and earthly spirits, the Three Officials and Five Emperors (*sanguan wudi* 三官五帝), Father Thunder and Mother Lightning (*leigong dianmu* 雷公電母), the divine immortals of the Sacred Peaks and Marshes (*yuedu* 嶽瀆), and the emperors and kings of ancient times."³⁰ From another, slightly later text we know that the paintings were a set of hanging scrolls rather than murals, which means that the paintings were not permanent wall paintings but scroll paintings put on display only during the ritual in this specifically designated hall.³¹ It must further be noted that this is the earliest known reference to Water-and-Land paintings, albeit only indirectly to the name of a hall, predating the earliest references to this type of ritual in any Buddhist source.

The social-historical background of these Water-and-Land paintings is enormously complex. The Daoist subject-matter of the paintings suggests a Daoist origin of the paintings (and the ritual). In addition, despite their Buddhist connotation, it is fairly sure that the early Water-and-Land rituals were transmitted in a local oral tradition;³² that is, not as an "official" Buddhist ritual but within the spheres of lay-Buddhists. In these spheres of lay-religion, there was less emphasis on orthodoxy and practices much more eclectic, as for example is demonstrated for lay-Buddhist-Daoism for the fifth century, and during the Five Dynasties, it were these lay movements that gained more power and influence resulting in the inclusion of

³⁰ *Yizhou minghua lu* p. 139.

³¹ This is inferred from the comment made by Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (last half of the 11th cent.) in his *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志. In Mi Tianshui 米田水 (annotator), *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, *Huaji* 圖畫見聞志, 畫繼. Changsha: Hunan meishu renmin chubanshe, 2000, p. 58. The passage in question explains that the paintings in circulation in the Song attributed to Zhang Nanben were in fact copies made of Zhang Nanben's originals and then replaced. cf. Alexander C. Soper, *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting*. Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951, p. 25. Marsha Weidner and Daniel B. Stevenson both assume that Zhang Nanben painted one hundred-twenty scrolls – a number also witnessed in later references to the number of Water-and-Land paintings – but this is probably inferred from misreading a sentence in the *Yizhou minghua lu* where the number should belong to the next sentence: "in Shu [Kingdom] he [painted] in all the temples altogether over one hundred-twenty paintings 蜀中諸廟一百二十餘幀." *Yizhou minghua lu* p. 139. See Marsha Weidner (ed.), *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850*. Kansas: Spencer Museum of Art, 1994, p. 282 and Daniel B. Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of the Creatures of Water and Land." Marsha Weidner (ed.), *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, p. 38.

³² The early history of the Buddhist Water-and-Land ritual (*shuilu fahui*) is precarious. It is discussed in Makita Tairyô 牧田諦亮, *Chûgoku bukkyôshi kenkyû* 中國佛教史研究 (Study on the History of Buddhism in China). Tokyo: Taitô, 1984, pp. 213-223, Weidner, *Latter Days of the Law*, pp. 280-282, Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins. Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996, pp. 369-411, and Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation." The study by Petra Klose on the *shuilu* ritual and its paintings is, albeit comprehensive, outdated, believing that the Water-and-Land ritual, or some prototype of it, originated with Emperor Wu of the Liang (502-549) simply following the legend that Buddhist sources state on its origin. Petra Klose, "Der *Shuilu* Ritus und seine Bilder." PhD Dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1992. The general consensus is that the *shuilu* ritual emerged during the tenth century or perhaps a bit earlier.

not only there deities in the Daoist and Buddhist pantheons but apparently also their rituals for which even specific halls were built in the monastery complex. The name of the monastery, “cherishing history,” and the inclusion of portraits of “former emperors and kings,” which undoubtedly denote the uninterrupted transmission of imperial sovereignty from previous dynasties to the Shu rulers, furthermore suggest that the site also functioned as a quasi-state temple, adding an imperial connotation to the paintings.³³ We may therefore surmise that the Daoist Heavenly Court travelled far beyond its own social and religious boundaries and was adapted by Buddhists, lay people, as well as members of the Shu court.

A second reference in the *Yizhou minghua lu* pertains to a set of Heavenly Court paintings painted by the Daoist priest-painter Zhang Suqing 張素卿 (fl. 845-927) in the Zhangren guan 丈人觀 (Monastery of the Senior) on Mt. Qingcheng 青城山 (Sichuan) employed by the Shu rulers for state legitimating purposes, this time not to purport a genealogy between past rulers and the Shu kings as in the Baoli si painting, but by asserting a claim on imperial sovereignty.³⁴ Zhang Suqing painted the Five Sacred Peak deities³⁵ – the deities of the five holy mountains of China, each one ruling over one dominion of the five directions – going on audience with the deity of Mt. Qingcheng, normally an auxiliary mountain to the Five Sacred Peaks but by the Shu rulers, in oblique reference to themselves, designated as the Sacred Peaks’ senior. Huang Xiufu gives a short description of the murals: “The first ruler of the Shu kingdom, Wang Jian 王建 (r. 908-918) had the Zhangren Monastery at Mt. Qingcheng repaired and invited Zhang Suqing to paint the Hall of True Lord Zhangren with the images of the deities of the five Sacred Peaks and the four Sacred Streams, the twelve Brook Maidens, mountains and forests, water torrents and trees and bushes, as well as the Officials and Messengers of the Peaks and Streams. Strange and bewildering forms sprang from the tip of his brush, and nobody who went up the hall and saw the images was not struck with fear.”³⁶ This Heavenly Court painting undoubtedly repeats a standard tradition in Daoist wall paintings in the five Sacred Peak temples – and probably the

³³ The imperial connotation is further corroborated by overall contents of the Baoli si murals which in my reckoning suggest that they were painted for the performance of a Golden Register Retreat (*jinlu zhai* 金籙齋), a Daoist ritual held for the benefit of the emperor and the state which also had its basis in the disposition (and depiction) of the deities of the five directions. For example a comparison of the contents of the Baoli si murals with the deities portrayed in the Beiyue miao murals shows a great overlap in focus and function.

³⁴ On the painter Zhang Suqing and the Zhangren guan murals, see Evelyne Mesnil, “Zhang Suqing et la peinture taoïste à Shu.” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996-1997).

³⁵ The Five Sacred Peaks are China’s holy mountains located in the four directions and in the centre, called Taishan 泰山 (east, Shandong), Hengshan 衡山 (south, Hunan), Huashan 華山 (west, Shaanxi), Hengshan 恆山 (north, Hebei), and Songshan 嵩山 (centre, Henan). For a discussion of these mountains in Chinese art, see Munakata Kiyohiko, *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.

³⁶ *Yizhou minghua lu* p. 131, Mesnil, “Zhang Suqing,” pp. 133-134.

same tradition from which Wu Daozi found inspiration for the Laozi temple murals on Mt. Beimang - which were also the venue of Daoist rituals since they were officially placed under the supervision of the Daoist clergy by an imperial decree of 721.³⁷ The Zhangren guan murals are however heavily politicised and as representations of an ideal that the Shu kings would be the future rulers of China deeply imbedded in sentiments of local identity, thus making them apt illustrations of the social changes taking place during the late Transitional Phase. Heavenly Court paintings were no longer only representations of supernatural and cosmological realms but also political statements with claims on imperial sovereignty.

The two examples curiously do not give evidence of local deities incorporated in the Daoist Heavenly Court painting, and it seems that the general representation remained fairly consistent over the period. The *Yizhou minghua lu* however gives evidence of a gradual emergence of such local deities in the spheres of Daoist art and liturgy but still separated from the Heavenly Court painting. One example are the so-called Four Saints (*sisheng* 四聖) who became stock-in-trade images, and even the beginning of a whole new type of deities in Heavenly Court painting. The *Yizhou minghua lu* records that Cheng Chengbian 程乘辯 (fl. 935-965) painted one hall of the Dongming guan 洞明觀 (Monastery of Cavern Light) images of “Tianpeng, Black Killer, Dark Warrior, and Fire Bell” (*tianpeng* 天蓬, *heisha* 黑殺, *xuanwu* 玄武, *huoling* 火鈴)³⁸ We know from their later images that they are represented as frightening warrior deities with multiple arms and heads, weapons, barefooted, wild flowing hair, fangs, and bulging eyes in the case of Tianpeng and Tianyou, and as barefooted generals with long hair and holding a sword in the case of Dark Warrior (from the Song onward renamed True Warrior, *zhenwu* 真武) and Black Killer. Fire Bell is otherwise unknown but later replaced by another terrifying figure called Tianyou 天猷. They are basically the protective gods of exorcists and shamans who are invoked to quell, expel or destroy demons hold responsible for illness, natural disasters, etc. Due to the localisation of economical power and the disintegration of the Daoist ordination system and monastery network at the end of the Tang, Daoist clergy had to compete with many other and new ritual specialists offering the same kind of remedies and catering to the same local communities. Several new Daoist lineages emerged, many of them specialised in exorcist rites, thus taking over existing local deities or promoting new ones cast in traditional Daoist ritual lore. The fact that the Four

³⁷ *Tang huiyao* 唐會要, compiled by Wang Pu 王溥 (822-882). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991, p. 1029. The passage is translated in Édouard Chavannes, “Le jet de dragons.” Senart (ed.), *Mémoires concernant l’Asie orientale*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1919, p. 200, n. 24.

³⁸ *Yizhou minghua lu* p. 184.

Saints were painted in a separate hall in the Dongming guan underlines their alien and local background.

The *Yizhou minghua lu* also gives evidence of another new feature gradually emerging in Daoist ritual art and which would soon become, or perhaps already was, a standard asset of Daoist Heavenly Court painting, namely images of stellar deities. The text makes several references to paintings of stellar deities in the biographies of painters. For example, Zhang Suqing also painted the Five Planets (*wuxing* 五星) and the Old Man Star (*laoren xing* 老人星) and Shi Ke 石恪 (active tenth century) also painted the Five Planets, the Southern and Northern Dippers (*nanbeidou* 南北斗) as well as the Long Life Star (*shouxing* 壽星, the same as the Old Man Star).³⁹ It is unsure how these stellar deities were introduced into Daoist art and eventually into the Daoist Heavenly Court. Daoism knows stellar deities for long but these do not seem to appear in Heavenly Court paintings before the Transitional Phase. The imperial state cult worships stellar deities on the Altar to Heaven since the Han dynasty, and the utilisation of Daoism as a state religion initiated by Tang Emperor Xuanzong must have led to a fusion of state cult deities into the Daoist cult, meaning that Daoist priests took over or doubled ritual responsibilities normally supervised by Confucian ritual specialists. On the other hand, local cults may also have a hand in their rise since many stellar deities are connected to exorcism.⁴⁰

The Four Saints would eventually be hierarchised under the power of the Northern Pole Star (*beiji* 北極 or *beidi* 北帝), since old the celestial equivalent of the Chinese emperor on earth, and become one powerful exorcistic force reigning over the northern quadrant. The precise origin of stellar deities and their ritual practices need further study. The stellar deities are nevertheless perfect examples of the growing complexity of Chinese society and the coping of Daoist religion in dealing with these complexities.

The importance of stellar deities during the Transitional Phase is documented more clearly in a later source, the *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜, the catalogue of the imperial painting collection of Emperor Huizong (r. 1101-1125) during the Xuanhe-period (1119-1125). It lists a total of 218 titles for paintings of Daoist deities and immortals by 37 painters from the sixth to the eleventh centuries, and incorporated in Table 2.2 in Appendix 2. The majority of the deities listed are stellar deities indicating that such paintings were fairly common and may have been used in ritual layouts of the Daoist altar. Some of the exorcist deities such as

³⁹ *Yizhou minghua lu* pp. 131, 180.

⁴⁰ I will come back to this issue in the next chapter on ritual foundations.

Tianpeng and Zhenwu are also mentioned. We should however be careful to draw any further conclusions from the table, because attributions may be incorrect, the catalogue probably reflects the preferences of collectors rather than the veritable situation of Daoist deity paintings for each period, and some deities such as the Five Planets are also common to Buddhism. The catalogue's exact value for the history of Heavenly Court painting is perhaps difficult to determine, but it remains however a valuable document on a thriving painting tradition of early Daoist deities, paintings of which sadly not a single one has survived.

The several tendencies lined out above culminated at the end of the tenth century in a representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court incorporating standard Daoist deities such as veritables, immortals, golden boys and jade maidens, the Three Officials and Five Emperors, but which was expanded with the Four Saints of the local cults and various stellar deities of the state cult or otherwise such as the Five Planets, the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions (28 *xiu* 宿), the Twelve Zodiacal Palaces (12 *gong* 宮), the Northern and Southern Dippers, the Five Sacred Peaks and Four Sacred Marshes (*wuyue sidu* 五嶽四瀆), and some traditional deities such as those of lightning and thunder. It can hardly be assumed that this is a perfect linear development, but we at least have evidence that in the tenth century Heavenly Court paintings existed pertaining to this subject-matter. We have evidence from a Northern Song art critic, Li Zhi 李廌 (1059-1109), who wrote the *Hua pin* 畫品 (Evaluations on Painting), a descriptive catalogue of the private collection of an imperial family member.⁴¹ It contains two descriptions of such unified Heavenly Court paintings.

The first painting is titled “[Emperor of] Purple Tenuity [Heaven] Holding Audience” (*Ziwei chaohui tu* 紫微朝會圖) and was painted by Zhang Tu 張圖 (active in the first half of the tenth century).⁴² Li Zhi provides the details: “The Emperor is dressed in a ceremonial robe and clasps a jade tablet in front of his chest while [the deities of] the Five Planets, the two Luminaries (Sun and Moon), the Seven Primes, and the Four Saints attend him on his left and right. The deities of the Twelve Zodiacal Palaces and the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions each take up positions behind them. They descend carried by clouds, their faces grave and respectful, their robes majestic and elaborate. The Daoists say that just as the Great Jade

⁴¹ *Hua pin* 畫品, written by Li Zhi 李廌 (1059-1109). In Yun Gao 雲告 (annotator), *Songren huaping* 宋任畫評. Changsha: Hunan renmin meishu chubanshe, 1999, pp. 241-273. pp. 241-273. Translated in Alexander C. Soper, “A Northern Sung Descriptive Catalogue of Paintings. (The Hua P'in of Li Ch'ih).” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 69.1 (1949), pp. 18-33.

⁴² According to the *Tuhua jianwen zhi* p. 77, translated in Soper, *Experiences in Painting*, p. 32, Zhang Tu once held a position at the Later Liang 候梁 (907-923) court of the Five Dynasties, which would mean that he lived during the first half of the tenth century.

August Emperor is the Son of Heaven for all the immortals, so the Great Heavenly Emperor of Purple Tenuity is the Son of Heaven for all the stars. If one observes this painting, one readily understands the meaning of the proper relationship between ruler and subject. From the top of the Nine Heavens, he never falters.”⁴³

The second painting is titled “Jade Emperor Holding Audience” (*Yuhuang chaohui tu* 玉皇朝會圖) and painted by Shi Ke, the aforementioned follower of Zhang Nanben. Li Zhi records that the painting consisted of images of “heavenly immortals and numinous officials, golden boys and jade maidens, the Three Officials, Taiyi 太一 (Great One), the Seven Primes (of the Northern Dipper), the Four Saints, the Planets and Lunar Mansions of all directions, the deities of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, the Lords of the Sacred Peaks and Marshes, as well as the rulers above and underground, who all gather around the seat of the Emperor. The Great Jade August Heavenly Emperor sits upright facing south while the audience of Veritables lift their heads in wonderful expectation. Anyone seeing [this painting] feels bright and aloof as if present in the Hall of Penetrating Light (*tongming dian* 通明殿).” Li Zhi adds the detail that Shi Ke, always keen on playing distasteful jokes, portrayed the Official of Water with a crab hanging from his belt, a gesture not very appreciated by his superiors.⁴⁴

It is not known when these paintings were painted and if they were done after wall paintings. There may be a small possibility that both painters, or perhaps only one of them, decorated the halls of a Daoist state temple built in 977 on Mt. Zhongnan 終南山 (Shaanxi 陝西) on the order of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (976-997) in the Shangqing taiping gong 上清太平宮 (Palace of Great Peace from Highest Purity [Heaven]). It was dedicated to Black Killer, one of the Four Saints and who was the protective deity of the Song, and from this deity’s hagiography preserved in the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Seven Bambooslips in the Bookbag of the Clouds), a Northern Song Daoist encyclopedia, we know that the temple complex comprised a hall to the Jade Emperor called Tongming dian and a hall to the North Pole Emperor called Ziwei dian 紫微殿, reminiscent of the two paintings by Zhang Tu and Shi Ke; the text also states that there were wall paintings but gives no details.⁴⁵ In addition, Shi Ke is known to have been commissioned to paint murals in other Song state temples such as the Buddhist Xiangguo si 相國寺 (Monastery of the Realm of Xiang) after his native Shu had

⁴³ *Hua pin*, p. 263; cf. Soper, “Descriptive Catalogue,” pp. 27-28.

⁴⁴ *Hua pin*, pp. 259-260; cf. Soper, “Descriptive Catalogue,” pp. 26-27.

⁴⁵ *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 DZ 1032, j. 103, compiled by Zhang Junfang 張君房 (11th cent.).

been conquered by the Song and many of its painters were enlisted by the Song court.⁴⁶ The case of Zhang Tu seems less plausible because he would have been over seventy years old in 977. If one or two of the paintings were sketches or miniature copies of wall paintings of the Shangqing taiping gong, and because we know that such sketches were preserved in the palace, it could explain how they ended up in the private collection of an imperial family member.⁴⁷

During the Transitional Phase, the Daoist Heavenly Court was gradually transformed from a single or triple deity assembly accompanied by veritables and immortals set in a blissful landscape setting to an impressive court audience of royal figures. A Daoist, supernatural representation had slowly given way to an imperial representation, and small numbers of deities were expanded with hosts of other deities who were chiefly organised and depicted in groups. This transformation, which should basically be interpreted as an imperialisation of Daoist art, was completed in the tenth century and would become the main characteristic of Daoist Heavenly Court representations in the Middle Phase and even to the present day.

Middle Phase, 1000-1400

The Northern Song court was one of the greatest sponsors of Daoist wall painting and it commissioned a great many Heavenly Court paintings for Daoist state temples erected in the capital Bianliang 汴梁 (Kaifeng 開封 in Henan) and in the provinces. Many written records survive, comprising art critical texts, official history writings and some stele inscriptions, from which the themes and contents of the temple paintings can be reconstructed and in several cases even can be assigned with painters' names. Most of the temple projects have in common that they were instigated as part of a larger project of providing the state with a powerful vehicle for state legitimation.

Daoist temple projects were initiated under Emperor Taizong (r. 976-997), the second emperor of the Northern Song, such as the aforementioned Shangqing taiping gong at Mt. Zhongnan, but state-sponsored temple building took a flight under Song Emperor Zhenzong

⁴⁶ Shi Ke also painted murals in the Buddhist Xiangguo si. *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, p. 121, cf. Soper, *Experiences in Painting*, p. 49. On the Xiangguo si and its murals, see Alexander C. Soper, "Hsiang-Kuo-Ssu. An Imperial Temple of Northern Sung," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 68.1 (1948), pp. 19-45; Duan Yuming 段玉明, *Xiangguo si: zai Tang Song diguo de shensheng yu fansu zhijian* 相國寺: 在唐宋帝國的神聖與凡俗之間. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2004; Emanuelle Lesbre, "Étude topologique et thématique des scènes peintes dans les galeries du Xiangguo si sous les Song du Nord." *Sanjiao wenxian* 4 (2005), pp. 141-163.

⁴⁷ On sketches kept in the Song palace, see Xu Bangda 徐邦達, "Cong bihua fuben xiaoyang shuodao liangjuan Song hua – Chaoyuan xianzhang tu 從壁畫副本小樣說到兩卷宋畫: 朝元仙仗圖." *Wenwu* 文物 2 (1956), pp. 56-57.

真宗 (r. 998-1022) who issued a whole series of political and religious measures, very reminiscent of those issued by Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756) of the Tang, with the aim of installing Daoism as a state religion and providing it with a network of monasteries maintained by the state and overseen by state officials. Most of the measures were preceded by a miraculous event initiating the measures. The measures were almost in every case followed by large temple building projects of which temple paintings, and in particular those of the Daoist Heavenly Court, were an integral part. I will highlight here two such events.

In 1008, a yellow silk scroll had descended from the sky, interpreted as a Heavenly Text (*tianshu* 天書) announcing Heaven's approval of Emperor Zhenzong's rule. In order to give the celestial text a suitable place for veneration, Zhenzong ordered the building of an enormous temple complex, possibly one of the largest in entire Chinese history, the Yuqing zhaoying gong 玉清昭應宮 (Palace of Bright Response from Jade Purity [Heaven]).⁴⁸ Furthermore, the next year Zhenzong ordered a Tianqing guan 天慶觀 (Monastery of Heaven's Celebration) to be built in every county throughout the empire where on set dates, selected as national holidays, Daoist priests would perform offering rituals.⁴⁹ In the Yuqing Zhaoying gong, lavish murals decorated the walls of the temple complex and historical records mention that some three thousand painters were invited from all over the empire for this task; from these three thousand painters eventually one hundred were selected to grace the walls with murals, their numbers underscoring the scale and magnitude of this particular project. The records further mention that Wu Zongyuan 武宗元 (d. 1050) and Wang Zhuo 王拙, both followers of Wu Daozi of the Tang and belonging to the best muralists of their time, were in charge of the left and right groups and responsible for the murals of the east and west walls respectively. The hall had wall paintings depicting a Daoist Heavenly Court, since we know that Wang Zhuo painted a mural with "Five Hundred Numinous Officials and an Assembly of Heavenly Maidens on Audience with the Origin" (*wubai lingguan zhong tiannü chaoyuan* 五百靈官眾天女朝元) on the west wall.⁵⁰ From this we can further infer that Wu

⁴⁸ On this temple and the Heavenly Text affair, see Suzanne E. Cahill, "Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair of 1008," *Bulletin of Sung and Yuan Studies* 16 (1981), pp. 23-44, Wang Shengfeng 汪聖鋒, *Song Zhenzong* 宋真宗. Jilin: Wenshi chubanshe, 1996, pp. 87-115, and Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁹ *Tianqing guan bei* 天慶觀碑, no author, dated 1015. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lue*, pp. 249-250.

⁵⁰ See *Songchao minghua ping* 宋朝名畫評, by Liu Daochun 劉道醇 (11th cent.), before 1059. In Yun Gao 雲告 (annotator), *Songren huaping* 宋任畫評. Changsha: Hunan renmin meishu chubanshe, 1999, pp. 15-16, 49, translated in Charles Lachman, *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown: Liu Tao-ch'un's Sung-ch'ao ming-hua p'ing*. Leiden: Brill, 1989, pp. 25-27, 51.

Zongyuan would have painted the other half of the Heavenly Court on the east wall, but its title is not recorded. The temple was destroyed by fire in 1029.

Most intriguingly, a long handscroll now in the C.C. Wang Collection, New York, attributed to Wu Zongyuan and titled *Chaoyuan xianzhang tu* (Painting of Immortals and Seniors on Audience with the Origin) could be related to the murals of the Yuqing zhaoying gong; it is also our oldest example of a Daoist Heavenly Court painting (See Plate 12).⁵¹ It is a drawing on a long scroll in ink on silk, basically a design.⁵² and depicts a procession of two deities assisted by officials and court ladies (i.e. golden boys and jade maidens in Daoist terminology) and guarded in the front and rear by fierce warriors crossing a bridge; the majority of the figures are accompanied by a colophon identifying their titles. Another version, presumably a copy of the first one but without the colophons, on paper and with a few figures less, is kept in the Xu Beihong Museum in Beijing. Since the deities all face left, or the northern direction in a Heavenly Court composition, we can conclude that the sketch depicts a scene intended for an east wall, the same wall Wu Zongyuan did at the Yuqing zhaoying gong, and if the attribution to Wu Zongyuan is correct, the scroll would be a valuable example of what the murals in one of China's largest and most prestigious temples may have looked like.

Worthy of note, a *chaoyuan tu* (Painting of Going on Audience with the Origin) would become the standard name for Heavenly Court painting in China from this period on. This name does not appear in textual sources before the eleventh century.

Another major event that led to the sponsoring of large temple building projects was the apparition in a dream to Emperor Zhenzong in 1012 of the Song imperial family's first ancestor, Holy Ancestor (*shengzu* 聖祖), the title of the Yellow Emperor.⁵³ Consequently, the emperor ordered the building of two temples, both called Jingling gong 景靈宮 (Palace of the Radiant Divine), one in the capital Bianliang and one in the birthplace of the Yellow Emperor, Shouqiu 壽丘 near Qufu 曲阜 (Shandong), the home of Confucius and his ancestral temple. The temple in Kaifeng was modelled after the Taiqing gong of the Tang dynasty, the Daoist ancestral temple of the Tang imperial family substituting the Confucian ancestral temple

⁵¹ The title of the Wu Zongyuan scroll is found in the entry on Wu Zongyuan in the *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜, no author, dated to 1119-1125. In Yue Ren 嶽仁 (annotator), *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999, p. 99. The attribution to Wu Zongyuan is made in a colophon by the Yuan scholar and artist Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322) who apparently took the title from the *Xuanhe huapu*. The scroll is reproduced in *Zhongguo meishu quanji* 中國美術全集, *Huihua bian* 繪畫編 3, *Songdai huihua* 宋代繪畫. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987, pp.19-24.

⁵² I will deal with the question of designs in detail in chapter three.

⁵³ On the identification of Holy Ancestor with the Yellow Emperor, see the stele inscription *Taiji guan tizi erzhong* 太極觀題自二種, no author, dated 1015. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lie*, pp. 248-249. For the official title of the Holy Ancestor, see the stele inscription *Tianqing guan bei*, Chen, *Daojia jinshi lie*, pp. 249-250.

(*taimiao* 太廟), and would fulfil that same function in the Song.⁵⁴ The Yuqing zhaoying gong was expanded with a hall to the Holy Ancestor in the same year, as were the Tianqing guan. The Jingling gong in the capital was profusely decorated with narrative and historical scenes, and although no concrete information is known about any Heavenly Court paintings in the Jingling gong, the fact that Daoist priests supervised the rituals in the hall to the Holy Ancestor suggests that, like a traditional Three Purities hall, the hall had murals depicting a Heavenly Court.⁵⁵ After all, the Saint Emperor was considered a Daoist deity. The Tianqing guan also had murals and although concrete evidence on their subject-matter is lacking, a stele inscription indicates that the halls were decorated with statues and paintings of “Heavenly Emperors” (*tiandi* 天帝) who are Daoist deities.⁵⁶

It is important to note that Emperor Zhenzong also had his portrait statues as well as those of his predecessors incorporated in many of these temples and thus started a personality cult in imitation of Tang Emperor Xuanzong.⁵⁷ This example was also continued by his successors.

Daoist state temples continued to be built and decorated with murals after the reign of Zhenzong. A stele inscription on one of these later projects, the Zhong Taiyi gong 中太醫宮 (Palace to the Great One of the Centre) built in 1073 under Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1068-1085), records some important views on Daoist Heavenly Court painting in this period rarely seen elsewhere. The text reads: “The four walls of the halls and corridors were painted with an audience of hundreds of deities, from heaven the Five Emperors, the Sun and Moon, and the Planets and Constellations, from earth the Five Sacred Peaks and Four Sacred Marshes, none of whom was not taking a position according to his rank and title. The differentiation in clothes and attributes of high and low rank, the altar layout, and the rites for making prayers and sacrifices, all took the teachings on [the divination of] the Great One (*taiyi*) 太一 as their basis and were supplemented with the sayings of Daoism.” The inscription further specifies that because the (Confucian) rites had declined, the methods of diviners had come into use

⁵⁴ *Shiwu jiyuan* 事物記源, written by Gao Cheng 高乘 (fl. 1078-1085) and revised by Li Guo 李果 (15th cent.). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p. 364.

⁵⁵ *Yangzhou Tianqing guan shengzu dian ji* 洋州天慶觀聖祖殿記, by Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁, 1214. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 398-399, and *Yuhai* 玉海, compiled by Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223-1296), j. 100. In *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, *Yingyin wenyuan ge* 影印文淵閣 edition, 1983, Vol. 945, p. 651.

⁵⁶ *Guangzhou chongxiu Tianqing guan ji* 光週天慶觀記, by Dihua Jialuo 地華伽囉, dated 1080. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, p. 287.

⁵⁷ For imperial portraiture during the Song dynasty, with references to the personality cult of Zhenzong, see Patricia Ebrey, “Portrait Sculptures in Imperial Ancestral Rites in Song China.” *T’oung Pao* 83 (1997), pp. 42-92.

and “that the images [of the deities] were depicted according to the [sayings of] Daoism, for which were used the differentiations between their ranks and titles, clothes and attributes, and the methods of their altars and rites for making prayers and sacrifices.”⁵⁸

The inscription underscores some important elements in the representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court in the Middle Phase. It rightly acknowledges the direct link between the images of Daoist deity images and the layout of the Daoist altar and Daoist liturgy; it further stresses the imperial representation of the deities who are dressed according to their ranks, and indeed, most of the deities stemmed from the state cult and were worshipped on the Altars to Heaven and Earth. Although the grouping of deities is not new, the author’s emphasis on a hierarchical structure, the differentiation between high and low, is however a view not borne out in Heavenly Court representations and their descriptions of the Early and Transitional Phases, which chiefly pertain to a cosmological order. This emphasis on hierarchy in Heavenly Court painting should be seen as a result of the merging of the Daoist and state cults, a phenomenon which I termed above the imperialisation of Daoist art and which thus comprises not only the aspect of Daoist deities taking on an imperial appearance but also their organisation in a hierarchical order.⁵⁹

The fervour and support of the Northern Song emperors for Daoism remained largely unchanged. This support reached a climax under Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1101-1125) who finished the task set by his forebear Zhenzong and installed Daoism as a state religion, a feat symbolised by the official merging of the highest (Confucian) state cult deity, the Emperor-on-High (*shangdi* 上帝), with the Daoist Jade Emperor (*yudi* 玉帝 or *yuhuang* 玉皇) in 1116.⁶⁰ In the same or next year, Huizong was told by Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1075-1119), a ritual specialist of the Divine Empyrean (*shenxiao* 神霄) thunder rites, that he (Huizong) was a reincarnation of a Daoist deity, the Great Emperor of Long Life (*changsheng dadi* 長生大帝), basically another name for the South Pole Emperor (*nanji* 南極) who is traditionally associated with long life, thus merging the Daoist celestial spheres with the terrestrial spheres even further. In 1118 and 1119, the Buddhists were also subsumed under this Daoist state

⁵⁸ *Song Zhong Taiyi gong beiming* 宋中太乙宮碑銘, by Lü Huiqing 呂惠卿, dated 1073. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 282-283.

⁵⁹ The hierarchical order and proper positions of deities on the Altar of Heaven was one of the main preoccupation of Confucian ritualists during the Tang and Song periods, see *Song shi* 宋史, compiled by Tuotuo 脫脫 (1315-1355). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, j. 104, p. 2436.

⁶⁰ *Song shi* j. 104, p. 2543. Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1025), in his hagiography of the Black Killer of 1016, the *Yisheng baode zhenjun zhuan* 翊聖保德真君傳, already hints at the merging of the Emperor-on-High with the Jade Emperor, but this was never officially recognised. *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, chapter 103.

model when Buddhist deities and monks were all renamed in Daoist fashion and even ordered to dress as Daoist deities or priests, which made them virtually indistinguishable from Daoists, or at least that was the aim.⁶¹ Although Huizong's goal was undoubtedly the unification of China under one ideology, rather than three conflicting and opposing teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism), his efforts were met with fierce resistance and were not continued. Huizong's support for Daoism was also translated in many temple building projects but not much is known about their mural decorations. He also ordered grand ritual reforms which would have an effect on the representation of the Heavenly Court but this topic will be addressed in chapter two.

In 1127, the Northern Song capital Kaifeng fell to the invading Jurchen and the Song court fled to Hangzhou where it established the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). The Southern Song emperors showed less favour to Daoism, or at least, their favour was not translated in large temple projects as their ancestors had done. Clearly, Daoism had lost its leading role in the state legitimization efforts of the Southern Song emperors (Daoism was of course easy to blame for the fall of the Northern Song). Only the first Southern Song emperor, Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127-1162), is known to have initiated large temple projects, the building of a Jingling gong in 1143 and a Taiyi gong 1147, the last of which had 195 images comprising amongs others the Three Sovereigns (*sanhuang* 三皇), the Five Emperors, the Eleven Luminaries, and the local True Officials; Gaozong also personally wrote the calligraphy of the title board.⁶²

Whereas Daoist temple paintings depicting a Heavenly Court on the state level are very well documented for the Song era, their presence on the local level is almost absent in the historical record, both in official texts and in stele inscriptions. The vast corpus of Song poetry and “pen jottings” (*biji* 筆記) still remain a largely unexplored source of information in this respect.

The lack of textual references is remedied by a sole surviving and, presumably, non-state-sponsored representation of a Heavenly Court carved in stone in Sichuan and dating to the end of the Northern Song dynasty. Cave 4 of the Yuhuang guan 玉皇觀 (Jade Emperor Monastery) at Nanshan 南山 near Dazu 大足 is shaped as a temple hall with a two-tiered niche occupying the centre ornamented with the Three Purities and two imperial figures on the top tier and four imperial figures and four donors on the lower tier; donor figures also

⁶¹ On Huizong and Daoism, see Patricia Ebrey, “Taoism and Art at the Court of Song Huizong,” Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 94-111.

⁶² *Yuhai*, j. 100, *Siku quanshu* Vol. 945, pp. 656-657.

decorate the side posts of the central niche (see Fig. 2). The east flank of the niche has further a carving of an imperial figure escorted by an entourage on a cloud above, and a large coiled dragon below. The east, west, and north (behind the niche) walls of the cave are carved with 365 official and general figures (only 231 have survived due to damages) in six tiers, and twelve small niches with representations of the Twelve Zodiacal Mansions (*shi'er shengxiao* 十二生肖) arranged vertically on opposite walls adjacent to the entrance. The six imperial figures, four male and two female, are generally referred to as the Six Sovereigns (*liuyu* 六御) but scholars differ on their identities. The Six Sovereigns may either represent August Heaven (*tianhuang*), North Pole (*beiji*), Jade Emperor (*yuhuang*), Earth Goddess (*houtu*), Holy Ancestor (*shengzu*) and Holy Mother (*shengmu*); or idem, but the last two replaced with King Father of the East (*dongwanggong*) and Queen Mother of the West (*xiwangmu*).⁶³ Iconographical attributes are lacking for precise identification. The entrance of the hall is marked by two stone pillars carved with coiling dragons.⁶⁴

The Yuhuang guan illustrates two important aspects of Heavenly Court representation during the Middle Phase. First, the addition of six imperial figures presiding together with the Three Purities over the Heavenly Court. At the end of the Northern Song dynasty, the number of imperial figures was even expanded to nine, the Nine Sovereigns (*jiuyu* 九御 or *jiuhuang* 九皇), but both combinations were used during the Middle Phase, although there has been a preference for the Six Sovereigns (mainly in North and West China). Such sovereigns are not witnessed in the Early or Transitional Phase Heavenly Court paintings. Some of them have a Daoist history but others are clearly introduced from the state cult. Secondly, the patron of the sculptures was a local landlord and his family from Dazu, also responsible for several other sites – both Daoist and Buddhist – in the Dazu area, and belonging to the new class of wealthy landowners making their fortunes by managing their land and estates from their city residences rather than from homes in the countryside.⁶⁵ They too represent a new exponent of the social changes that had been taking place during the ninth and tenth centuries and had solidified during the Northern Song. In the Song period, these kind of families, not only local landowners but also local warlords, had taken charge of Daoist monastery building in the

⁶³ See Hu, *Daojiao shike*, Vol. 2 pp. 265-267, and Jing, “The Yongle Palace,” pp. 245-248.

⁶⁴ The cave, measuring 5.08 m. in width, 5.58 m. in depth, and 3.91 m. in height, is discussed in Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Sichuan daojiao, fojiao shiku yishu* 四川道教佛教石窟藝術. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1994, pp. 99, 190, 197-198, Hu, *Daojiao shike*, Vol. 2 pp. 88, 99-115, 116, and Jing, “The Yongle Palace,” pp. 234-249.

⁶⁵ The patrons are identified in an inscription: “He Zhengyan 何正言 (d. 1154) and his wife née Yang 楊 donated the land and excavated the hill to gain merits; Zhang Quan and his wife née Zhao excavated the hill and cave.” The family background of the first couple and their other artistic exploits are discussed in Jing, “The Yongle Palace,” pp. 236-238.

provinces, taking over the role of the state; the pillars with coiling dragons that are normally a sign of imperial stature in Chinese architecture, could be understood as a representation of local landlords enhancing their status and position with imperial regalia, of which the Daoist Heavenly Court as a whole was of course a most shining example.⁶⁶

The imperial representation of deities under the aegis of the Song court was not only restricted to the Daoist Heavenly Court but also extended to the level of local deities that had emerged during the Transitional Phase. Local deities were granted noble titles such as duke or prince and received state offerings and financial aid thereby incorporating them in a nationwide network of a sacrificial system that started at the court with the sacrifices at the Altars of Heaven and Earth and went down via the City God temples (*chenghuang miao* 城隍廟) and Earth God shrines (*tudi ci* 土地祠) to the local deities. Local deities were promoted on the basis of their numinous power (*ling* 靈) to response to prayers and perform miracles. These numinous acts were verified and reported to the throne upon which a title was granted. This practice started during the mid Northern Song dynasty and reached a peak under Emperor Huizong but continued unabated in the Southern Song.⁶⁷ One consequence of the promotion of a deity, considered as an honour by a local community petitioning for it at court, was that the deity's dress but also his temple would be adjusted to a level befitting his new status, and although Song examples of local deities are hard to come by, the imperial representation became a compulsory asset in the depiction of local deities – sometimes in strange hybrid forms – in the Later Period. The spheres of the Daoist pantheon and the popular pantheon however remained firmly separated in the Middle Phase.

Early images of several important local deities of the Song and Yuan are incorporated in the woodblock prints of the *Xinbian lianxiang soushen guangji* 新編連相搜神廣記 (Newly Edited and Fully Illustrated Complete Recording of the Search for the Gods), edited by Tai Zijin 泰子晉 and printed in Fuzhou 福州 in the Yuan dynasty, but only few of them are actually found in Heavenly Court paintings of this period or in textual references thereof (See Fig. 3).⁶⁸ One reason may be that these deities often belong to the new Daoist lineages of exorcists (*fashi* 法師, “master of rites”) that emerged during the Song but who did not

⁶⁶ Similar coiling dragons on entrance pillars are found in the imperially-sponsored Jinci 晉祠 (Jin Shrine) near Taiyuan (Shanxi). Nancy Steinhardt, “Taoist Architecture,” Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 63. For a detailed study of this site's architecture, see Tracy G. Miller, “Water Spirits and Ancestor Spirits: Reading the Architecture of Jinci,” *The Art Bulletin* 86.1 (2004), pp. 6-30.

⁶⁷ The promotion of local deities is extensively studied in Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. See also the review of this work by Richard von Glahn, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53.2 (1993), pp. 616-642 for additional information.

perform the traditional rituals of the Daoist priests (*daoshi* 道士, “scholar of the Dao”) and who would therefore not have the authority to decorate a ritual area with Heavenly Court paintings let alone include the images of local deities. We may infer that Heavenly Court paintings – their possession and their employment in a ritual area – was a prerogative of a Daoist priest.

Middle Phase local cult temples became the most standard venue for the performance of Daoist rituals, and its communities as the Daoist clergy’s most common clientele. Mobile altars with hanging scroll paintings were necessarily the preferred format above wall paintings, and the three paintings in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts of the Three Officials (*sanguan* 三官) are exceptional instances of this tradition in painting, even though the high quality of the paintings betray an imperial workshop provenance (see Plate 13).⁶⁹ They depict the Official of Heaven seated behind a desk in the sky, the Official of Earth riding a horse across a bridge, and the Official of Water seated on a dragon above billowing waves all three with respective entourages of attendants, court ladies, and demon soldiers. Although references to Daoist rituals performed on the local level abound, in particular in the stories of the *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (Record of Hearsay) noted down by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202), as are many references to the Buddhist Water-and-Land rituals, not one makes any mention of paintings, but one may assume that these undoubtedly have been part of the ritual setting. It is not sure if the lack of references is due to the minor role played by Daoist paintings in these rituals - that is, the paintings should be understood purely as decoration and not as loci of divine power – or a supposed lack of interest in liturgical art on the part of the literati author. The text in question however clearly demonstrates that “local communities” consisted of members of all layers of society sponsoring the rituals, including officials.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Xinbian lianxiang soushen guangji* 新編連相搜神廣記, by Tai Zijin 泰子晉, Yuan dynasty (1260-1368). *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* 繪圖三教源流搜神大全. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990, pp. 445-574; and in *Xinbian lianxiang soushen guangji* 新變連相搜神廣記. Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989.

⁶⁹ The paintings of the Three Officials are studied in Shih-Shan Susan Huang, “Summoning the Gods: Paintings of Three Officials of Heaven, Earth and Water and Their Association with Daoist Ritual Performance in the Southern Song Period (1127-1279).” *Artibus Asiae* 61 (2001), pp. 5-52, and idem, “The Triptych of Daoist Deities of Heaven, Earth and Water and the Making of Visual Culture in the Southern Song Period (1127-1279).” PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2002. The paintings have further been published and discussed in Wu, *Tales from the Land of the Dragons*, 1997, pp. 63-65, 149-150, and Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 233-236.

⁷⁰ *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202). Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 1997. The *Yijian zhi* and its wider religious ramifications during the Southern Song is studied in Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, and in Barend J. ter Haar, “Buddhist-Inspired Options: Aspects of Lay Religious Life in the Lower Yangzi from 1100 to 1340.” *T’oung Pao* 87 (2001), pp. 92-152. See also Ter Haar’s review of Davis’ work in *Song-Yuan Studies*, 32 (2003), pp. 155-163 for additional and comparative sources on the *Yijian zhi*.

The above described situation mainly pertains to the Southern Song and South China, but also applies to North China, where after the fall of the Northern Song in 1127 the Jurchen, originally nomadic people but who had already adopted Chinese lifestyles, established the Jin dynasty (1127-1234). Although textual references should exist, I have not been able to locate stele inscriptions of this period mentioning Heavenly Court paintings and the existence of a continuous tradition in Daoist, and Buddhist, temple painting can only be inferred from the flourishing of Daoist temple painting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in north China.

The end of the twelfth century saw the rise of a new Daoist order in North China called Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Truth) which would have a great impact on Daoism in China and which still constitutes, together with the Heavenly Master order, one of the two main Daoist orders to this very day. The Quanzhen order officially begins with Wang Zhe 王嘉 (Veritable Chongyang 重陽真人, 1112-1170) who had been initiated into the Dao by the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓,⁷¹ and who introduced a “modern” Daoism advocating self cultivation through inner alchemy, the unity of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教) of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, and a (celibate) monastic life as the order’s main objectives, in contrast to the “traditional” orders such as the Heavenly Masters that focused on (secret) textual transmission, liturgical prowess, and marital life among the people. The differences may never have been that clear-cut since Quanzhen clerics never profiled themselves as “reformers” or “modernisers”; on the contrary, Quanzhen priests also performed rituals and, as the Heavenly Court paintings of this period show, were eager to manifest themselves as yet another “traditional” order.⁷²

The most significant characteristic of the Quanzhen order is the establishment of a nation-wide temple network, and in this respect the order can be regarded as continuing an imperial tradition of the Tang and Song dynasties, and it basically took over the former Song network of Daoist state temples. In fact, the temple network acted almost as a “state” in itself since it was autonomous with an independent patriarchate, yet closely allied to the Yuan court, and a clergy that made a career by moving from temple to temple in the empire almost in the

⁷¹ Lü Dongbin allegedly lived during the Tang but, being an immortal, made countless appearances, often in disguise, among the populace in the following centuries. On Lü Dongbin, see Isabelle Ang, *Le culte de Lü Dongbin des origines jusqu'au début du XIVème siècle: Caractéristiques et transformations d'un Saint Immortel dans la Chine pré-moderne*. Lille: A.N.R.T., 1993, and idem, “Le culte de Lü Dongbin sous les Song du Sud.” *Journal Asiatiques* 285.2 (1997), pp. 473-502.

⁷² On the Quanzhen order, see Yao Tao-chung, “Ch’üan-chen: A New Taoist Sect in North China during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries.” PhD Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1980; Vincent Goossaert, “La création du Taoïsme moderne: l’ordre Quanzhen.” PhD Dissertation, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, 1997; and Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

same fashion as state officials took up their administrative posts. The institutionalised aspect of the Quanzhen order also has a direct bearing on the social-religious history of the period. Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (Veritable Changchun 長春真人, 1148-1227), Wang Zhe's youngest disciple and the *de facto* founder of the order, explained once that the chief goal of the order was the conversion (*hua* 化) of people and temples to the Dao.⁷³ Quanzhen priests travelled in the wake of marauding Mongol armies and brought relief to the people in the devastated areas, performed therapeutic and purgatory rituals, and made repairs to irrigation systems, mills etc. after which local landlords or warlords donated temples to the Quanzhen order in the priests' honour. The Quanzhen priests organised the local communities in congregations (*hui* 會) which were not only dependent on the monastery and its clergy for religious services, such as rituals and the teaching of Quanzhen meditation techniques, but also for more practical matters such as loans in grain, labour, and the renting of equipment.⁷⁴

When such temples were renovated under the supervision of the Quanzhen clergy, often financed by the concerted efforts of the local populace and leaders, the layout of the rebuilt monastery would ideally follow the traditional layout as established in the early Tang and continued in the Song: the monastery would have one central hall dedicated to the Three Purities behind which a (lecture) hall was built dedicated to the Seven Veritables (*qizhen* 其真), i.e. Wang Zhe and his six disciples, and/or the Five Patriarchs (*wuzu* 五祖), i.e. Wang Zhe and four spiritual masters.⁷⁵ The monastery further had an altar platform in front of the central hall and the usual refectories, dormitories, shrines to guardian deities, and other halls. The temple or shrine to the original local deity was often, but not always, placed to the side in

⁷³ *Quanzhen diwudai zongshi Changchun yandao zhujiao zhenren neizhuan* 全真第五代宗師長春演道主教真人內傳, by Li Daoqian 李道謙 (1219-1296), dated 1281. Chen, *Daojia jinshivv lüe*, pp. 634-637. Qiu Chuji had won the privilege of freely distributing ordination certificates (*dudie* 度牒), together with the exemption of taxes and corvée labour for the Quanzhen clergy, after his visit to Chinghis Khan in Samarkand (north Afghanistan) in 1223, and the order kept this privilege, despite protests by officials, until the end of the Yuan dynasty. Goossaert, "L'ordre Quanzhen," pp. 29-30.

⁷⁴ The congregations were normally organised around a festival for a local deity or immortal and mainly involved artisans and merchants. Goossaert, "L'ordre Quanzhen," pp. 362-363. The social-economical aspects are less known but can be culled from stele inscriptions, for example from stele inscriptions extant at the Yongle gong. See for example the research on these stele inscription in Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

⁷⁵ The Seven Veritables are Wang Zhe 王嘉 (Veritable Chongyang 重陽真人, 1112-1170), 馬鈺 (Veritable Danyang 丹陽真人, 1123-1183), Tan Chuduan 譚處段 (Veritable Changzhen 長真真人, 1123-1185), Hao Datong 郝大通 (Veritable Taigu 太古真人, 1140-1212), Wang Chuyi 王處一 (Veritable Yuyang 玉陽真人, 1142-1217), Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄 (Veritable Changsheng 長生真人, 1147-1203), and Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (Veritable Changchun 長春真人, 1148-1227). The female disciple Sun Bu'er 孫不二 (Hermit Qingjing 清淨散人, 1119-1182), Ma Yu's wife, is a later addition in place of Wang Zhe. The Five Patriarchs are Wang Xuanfu 王玄甫 (also called *Donghua dadi* 東華大帝), Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, Liu Haichan 劉海蟾, Lü Dongbin, and Wang Zhe.

the monastery complex in a more subservient position. An additional Quanzhen element were the many *huandu* 環堵 (lit. “enclosed walls”), cells or little huts with only one window for prolonged meditation retreats, sometimes lasting up to several years.⁷⁶

As a principle, the central hall to the Three Purities would have wall paintings depicting a Heavenly Court. Stele inscription of this period attest to this practise and show furthermore that Heavenly Court paintings were not confined to any specific areas but appeared all over North China and in monasteries of different status and scale.⁷⁷ In fact, the four surviving Heavenly Court paintings of this period are not mentioned in any stele inscription, and the same is true for surviving Buddhist murals, indicating that wall painting was much more common than the written record would suggest. At the end of the thirteenth century the Quanzhen order had a network of about 4000 monasteries in North China – for comparison, there were about 12-15,000 Buddhist monasteries in North China and about 42,000 Buddhist monasteries in the whole of China in 1291⁷⁸ – giving a rough indication on the number of Heavenly Court paintings during that period. The case of Daoist hanging scroll paintings in the same period is less clear, but since local cult temples were supplanted by Quanzhen monasteries already equipped with paintings, hanging scroll paintings were perhaps in lesser demand in North China than in South China where the Heavenly Master order and other, new orders or lineages of ritual specialists held sway.

Four sets of murals have survived and perfectly illustrate the above described development of the Quanzhen order and its relationship with the (local) community to which it provided its services. Although adhering to basic principles with regard to layout and content and all located in temples managed by Daoist clergy, the four surviving sets clearly demonstrate that there exists a considerable variation in the representation of a Heavenly Court with regard to the number of deities, which deities should be included, and how they

⁷⁶ For the basic layout of Quanzhen monasteries, see Goossaert, “L’ordre Quanzhen,” pp. 171-219. For the *huandu*, see Vincent Goossaert, “Entre quatre murs: un ermite taoïste de XIIe siècle et la question de la modernité.” *T’oung Pao* 85 (1997), pp. 391-418.

⁷⁷ See for example *Chuangjian Yunfeng guan ji* 創建雲峰觀記, by Xu Dezhen 徐德真 and Wei Zhizhong 魏志衷, 1272. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, p. 604; *Chuangjian Qingzhen an ji* 創建清真庵記, by 厲志元, 1272. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, p. 605; *Chuangjian falu tang ji* 創建法籙堂記, by Zhang Daokuan 張道寬, 1288. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 658-659; *Dadu lu Huozhou Longxi guan beiming* 大都路涿州隆禧觀碑銘, by Wang Yun 王惲, 1275. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 697-698; *Zhangde lu Tangyin xian Luloucun chuangxiu Longxing guan beiming* 彰德路湯陰縣鹿樓村修隆興觀碑銘, by Sima Deyi 斯馬德義, 1313. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 738-739; *Chongjian Xiuzhen guan ji* 重建修真觀記, by Ouyang Zhizhen 歐陽志真, 1322. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 759-762; *Taihuashan chuangjian Chaoyuan dong zhi bei* 太華山創建朝元洞之碑, by Jing Daoquan 井道泉, 1325. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 769-770, which is a cave on Huashan with “four hundred statues big and small.” *Chongjian Yuquan guan ji* 重建玉泉觀記, no author, 1354. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lüe*, pp. 810-811.

⁷⁸ Goossaert, “L’ordre Quanzhen,” p. 320.

should be represented. They further demonstrate that there was a close relationship between the representation of the Heavenly Court and the local community allied to the monastery, often accounting for the differences among the several wall paintings.

The set of Heavenly Court paintings in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, (hereafter referred to as the Toronto murals) should date from the first half of the thirteenth century and originated from central Shanxi province, the former Pingyang Prefecture 平陽府. The wall paintings depict a procession in two rows on the east and west walls of a large hall and feature a total of sixty-two deity figures (See Plates 4 and 5). The deities comprise the Six Sovereigns (one of them actually a portrait of Qiu Chuji),⁷⁹ the Four Saints, the Northern Dipper, the Five Planets, the Five Elders, the Nine Heavens, the Twelve Zodiacal Mansions, and female and male assistants, the so-called jade maidens and golden boys.

The Yongle gong 永樂宮 (Palace of Eternal Joy) was originally located in Yongle 永樂 on the northbank of the Yellow River at the site of Lü Dongbin's shrine, but it was moved to its present location in Ruicheng 芮城 (southwest Shanxi) some ten kilometres to the North because of the building of a dam. The monastery is built according to the traditional layout: a central hall to the Three Purities with a high altar platform in front and two other halls, to Lü Dongbin and Wang Zhe (in fact the Seven Veritables), behind it. Originally there was also a fourth hall to Qiu Chuji closing the row, but this and several other halls on either side of the main axis have disappeared. The shrine to Lü Dongbin is on the west side of the complex. The central hall has wall paintings of a Heavenly Court comprising in total 290 deity figures painted in 1325 who line the walls in four or five rows deep as if attending a court audience (Plates 1-3), and the two rear halls have wall paintings with narrative scenes depicting the lives and wondrous deeds of Lü and Wang, painted in 1358 and 1368 respectively. The Yongle gong murals also comprise some irregular deities who would rather be identified as "popular" in the sense that they belong to local cults. Another peculiar feature is the inclusion of portraits of Quanzhen priests in the Heavenly Court. Some deities still await identification.

The Nan'an 南庵 (Southern Hermitage) located in Yaodian 耀縣 (central Shaanxi) is a large temple complex distributed over two small hill tops and dedicated to Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581-682), a famous Daoist priest and physician of the early Tang dynasty. Contrary to the more traditional layout of the Yongle gong temple complex, the Heavenly Court paintings at Nan'an take only a peripheral position in the entire layout of the temple complex and are located in one of the many small halls on the south hill; the central hall to Sun Simiao takes

⁷⁹ See chapter four on the identification of the Qiu Chuji portrait.

the most prominent position on the north hill, indicative of the position he takes up in the local cult that surrounded him and still thrives today. The Heavenly Court paintings are of an equally modest size as the hall and comprise a total of eighty-nine deity figures depicted as groups amidst clouds (Plates 6-9). They comprise the Six Sovereigns, the Northern and Southern Dippers, the Five Sacred Peaks and Four Sacred Marshes, the Twelve Zodiacal Mansions, the Twenty-Four Heavenly Emperors, the Three Officials, the Six Lineage Masters, the Four Spirits, and several unidentified figures. Some parts of the murals are heavily damaged.

The Beiyue miao 北嶽廟 (Northern Peak Temple) is the official temple dedicated to Hengshan 恆山 in the north, one of the Five Sacred Peaks of the state cult worshipped in the state cult. The temple is located in Quyang 曲陽 (Hebei) actually some one hundred kilometres south of Hengshan and presently consists of a main hall with a large altar platform in front, the Hall of Virtuous Tranquility (*Dening zhi dian* 德寧之殿), the foundations of another hall, a pavilion, and three gates, all located on a north-south axis with the main hall to the north end. Despite being a state temple, the site was supervised by Daoist priests since the mid-Tang dynasty, and the central hall where the murals are located was renovated on imperial commission by the Quanzhen clergy in 1270. The murals would date to the same period, but their subject-matter and style would rather date them a few centuries earlier; their composition and selection of deities would easily fit them in with types of Heavenly Court paintings of the Transitional Phase (Plates 10 and 11). They are also known as paintings closest to the style, or even by the hand of the famous Tang painter Wu Daozi (fl. 685-758); but this attribution is only found from the Ming onwards. For reasons of convenience we will consider the murals as a Yuan product painted after earlier models. The Heavenly Court painting comprises a total of eighty-one figures, most of them attendants, warriors, and court ladies. The deity figures are the Five Sacred Peaks, the Two Auxiliary Mountains, the Three Officials, the Thunder Ministry, the Five Planets, and Immortals of the Sacred Peaks (including a donor-figure). When the state sacrifices were moved to another place in 1660 after another mountain was identified as Hengshan, the temple gradually went into decline.

Beside these four temple paintings, two other representations of the Heavenly Court have survived from the Middle Phase but in an incomplete, damaged state. The Longshan 龍山 cave sculptures, located near Taiyuan 太原 (central Shanxi) were carved in 1234, a project managed by the Quanzhen priest Song Defang 宋德方 (Veritable Piyun 披雲真人, 1183-1247) - the same person who in 1242 would “convert” Lü Dongbin’s shrine and local

community in Yongle and start the building of the Yongle gong for which he designed the architectural layout – and comprise statues of the Three Purities and the Six Sovereigns in one cave and in another those of many veritables, most of them probably portraits of Quanzhen priests. The site has a total of nine caves with statues but which are presently almost all severely damaged or eroded. Fortunately for us, the complete statues have however “survived” in photographs taken by Japanese scholars in the early twentieth century on the basis of which the original site can be reconstructed.⁸⁰

Another site, the Three Purities Hall of the Wanshou gong (Longevity Palace) in Gaoping (south-eastern Shanxi) has two fragments of a Heavenly Court painting dating to 1307. The north, east, and west walls originally all had murals, but these and the images of the Three Purities were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The surviving mural parts have images of the Three Officials and two of the Six Sovereigns (a third sovereign is damaged) followed by attendants and two generals.⁸¹ Although incomplete or damaged, the two sites are valuable, early examples of Heavenly Court representations that can help solve questions of dating, style, and content in other murals.

Worthy of note in respect to Heavenly Court paintings of the Middle Phase are the Buddhist Water-and-Land paintings which are closely related in content and iconography and of which two examples have survived. The oldest, the Qinglong si 青龍寺 (Green Dragon Monastery) located in Jishan 稷山 County (southwest Shanxi), depicts a most interesting proto-version of a Water-and-Land painting dated to the late Yuan period (Fig. 4).⁸²

It is designed as two Buddha assemblies focused on both east and west walls yet containing a pantheon of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian deities as in a Water-and-Land assembly (*shuilu fahui*), rather than as all other known Water-and-Land paintings focused on the north similar to Daoist Heavenly Court paintings. Sadly, some parts of the murals are damaged or have been removed by dealers. Another Buddhist monastery with Water-and-Land wall paintings is the Pilu si 毗盧寺 (Vairocana Monastery) near Shijiazhuang 石家莊 (south Hebei). A large pantheon of figures crowds the walls in multiple rows and since one

⁸⁰ The Longshan cave sculptures are published, including the Japanese photographs, and studied in both Zhang Mingyuan 張明遠, *Taiyuan Longshan dao jiao shiku yishu yanjiu* 太原龍山道教石窟藝術研究. Taiyuan: Shanxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 2002, and Hu, *Daojiao shike*, Vol. 2 pp. 322-408.

⁸¹ Chai Zejun, erroneously, identifies the deities as the Gods of Rain and Thunder, and Taiyi. Chai, *Shanxi siguan bihua*, pp. 78-79, 234.

⁸² On the Qinglong si, see Chai, *Shanxi siguan bihua*, pp. 57-66.

group among them is depicted in Mongol dress (Fig. 49), the murals are generally believed to date to the early Ming (late fourteenth century). This issue should await further study.⁸³

Heavenly Court representations of the Quanzhen order generally followed the imperial format set in the Northern Song dynasty. In some cases though, portraits of Daoist priests and images of local deities were added. The inclusion of portraits of Daoist priests must have been a particular Quanzhen trait, and seen for example in the Yongle gong and the Toronto murals, and is probably an elaboration of the Quanzhen practice of making images of their patriarchs for commemorative and worship purposes. For example, already in 1182, Ma Yu had an image made for his master Wang Zhe.⁸⁴ It is unsure if the incorporation of local deities in the Yongle gong murals is a popular trend in Quanzhen Heavenly Court paintings, because other examples are simply lacking, but the fact the Quanzhen order was not a “traditional” order defined by the transmission of registers as in the Heavenly Master order would certainly give more leeway to the absorption and depiction of local deities in the Daoist Heavenly Court. The inclusion of images of local cult deities would however become a defining characteristic of Late Period Heavenly Court representations.

Late Phase, 1400-present

The beginning of the Late Phase largely coincides with the advent of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The new Ming government issued a series of measures to curb the powers of the religions; for example, both Buddhist and Daoist rituals were strongly simplified, and the number of ordinations each year as well as the number of establishments and clergy per region were strictly regulated.⁸⁵ As a consequence, the Quanzhen temple network virtually ceased to exist in the Ming period, and the order seems to have survived thanks to the Heavenly Masters. The order of the Heavenly Masters had established close ties with the Ming court, and it became the head of the Daoist ecclesia in China; from that moment all the other orders, lineages, schools and their deities were subsumed under the authority of the Heavenly Masters.

Although this process may have started much earlier, probably in the Song, the integration of various orders, lineages and cults under one authority had far reaching

⁸³ The murals are reproduced in Kang, *Pilu si qun hua*. For the figures in Mongol dress, see plate 207.

⁸⁴ *Wang Chongyang huaxiang shi ke* 王重陽畫像詩刻, by Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 (1123-1183), 1182. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lue*, p. 431.

⁸⁵ *Da Ming xuanjiao licheng zhajiao yi* 大明玄教立成齋醮儀 DZ 467, compiled by Song Zongzhen 宋宗真, prefaces dated 1374; and Duan Yuming 段玉明, *Zhongguo simiao wenhua* 中國寺廟文化. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 1994, p. 98 quoting the *Ming shi* 明史, *zhiguan zhi* 職官志.

consequences for the representation of the Heavenly Court in the Late Phase. The Late Phase should be characterised as a popularisation of the Heavenly Court, meaning that many so-called popular deities attained positions in the Daoist Heavenly Court. The representation of these popular deities is “popular” insofar they are depicted as scholars, officials, and generals; a commoner is still not found anywhere depicted in the Daoist Heavenly Court. A deity could receive a Daoist canonisation (*daofeng* 道封) and/or a state canonisation (*guofeng* 國封). The relation between these two, their influence on the representation of the deities, and the question if members of a local cult differentiated between them still remain interesting topics for research. In the Late Phase however, an imperial title and representation were seemingly considered to be the highest possible ideal for a local cult deity and its community. A model deity who perfectly illustrates this rise from popular deity to imperially canonised Daoist deity is Wenchang, who started as a viper god and after being identified with a star ended as the god of literature, being depicted as a scholar wearing a long robe and a *putou*-hat with the distinct horizontally projecting wings.⁸⁶ Regardless of official canonisations, a great variety existed in the representation of popular deities, and judging from the surviving examples, it seems that only a very selected part of all canonised deities were incorporated in Heavenly Court representations.

Beside the introduction of popular deities dressed as scholars and magistrates, the most imposing new change in the representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court was the inclusion of numerous generals, often referred to as marshals (*yuanshuai* 元帥). Since the Daoist priest (*daoshi*) could also perform the rites of the exorcist (*fashi*), many exorcist deities found their way into the Heavenly Court. The Four Saints of the Middle Phase were the first of this kind of deities but their number grew rapidly in the following centuries. One major difference with the Four Saints is however that the generals are almost all historical or quasi-historical figures, such as Marshal Wen 溫, Marshal Deng 鄧, Marshal Yue 嶽, China’s revered general, Yue Fei 嶽飛, who was betrayed and killed in the Southern Song, and Marshal Guan 關, the loyal general of the Three Kingdoms period (220-265), Guan Yu 關羽, who arguably became the most famous of them all. Worship of these historical figures had their origin in the local cults of the Tang and Song, and they became the protective deities of exorcists, who in the same fashion as tantric priests identified themselves with these spirits during their rituals. It is therefore important to note that many of these divine marshals, beside

⁸⁶ On the history of Wenchang, see Terry Kleeman, *A God’s own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

their representation as a general, portray many elements of a performing exorcist, such as dishevelled hair, barefooted, and carrying all sorts of terrifying weapons associated with exorcising and punishing demons.⁸⁷ The weapons are often the most characteristic iconographic motifs defining the identity of each general in Daoist art.

A unique album with drawings for Daoist Heavenly Court paintings in the Junkunc Collection in Miami (recently acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art), and reprinted in a Chinese pirate edition in 1965, the *Daozi mobao* 道子墨寶 (Ink Treasures of Wu Daozi) datable to the early Ming, is a visual testimony to the integration of traditional Daoist ritual order with that of local cults.⁸⁸ The album consists of single sheets of paper with drawings in black-and-white of emperor deities seated on thrones, single local cult deities dressed as scholars and officials assisted by attendants, more traditional deities such as the Emperors of the Five Sacred Peaks, and a long series of thunder generals, many of them in demonic appearances. Many of the deities are identified by colophons but the majority of the local deities still remain to be identified. A second section of sheets depicts a narrative of “Clearing out the Mountains” (*soushan tu* 搜山圖).

The Junkunc Album demonstrates that wall paintings of the Daoist Heavenly Court were still practised in the Late Phase, evidently continuing the tradition set by Wu Daozi in the Tang and passed on in North China during the Song and Yuan. A close variant of the Junkunc Daoist Heavenly Court painting is found in the Dadao guan 大道觀 (Great Dao Monastery) in Dingzhou 定州 (central Hebei), which was rebuilt in 1512.⁸⁹

The two south walls depict thirty-six thunder generals (some severely damaged), eighteen for each side; the east and west walls have the traditional series of imperial and Daoist deity figures such as the Northern Dipper and the Five Sacred Peaks depicted in two rows (Fig. 5); the northern wall has three emperor figures seated on thrones in a palace setting assisted by all kinds of attendants and officials. The three main deities should represent the Three Sovereigns (*sanhuang* 三皇), who are traditionally identified as the first three rulers of

⁸⁷ See also Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Zhu Zhangchao 朱章超 (ed.), *Daozi mobao* 道子墨寶. Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963. The first page has a spurious seal of the Xuanhe-period (1119-1125) as well as a spurious signature of Wu Daozi. Caroline Gyss already demonstrated that some of the marshals depicted and named in the album only appeared in the thirteenth century and she further pointed to a blue-and-white porcelain vase in plate 35 which, suggesting a date not earlier than the fifteenth century. Caroline Gyss, “Les Messagers divins et leur iconography.” *Arts Asiatiques* 46 (1991), p. 101.

⁸⁹ On the date of the hall, see Liu Dunzhen 劉敦楨, *Liu Dunzhen wenji* 劉敦楨文集. Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1982, p. 201. The murals are provisionally dated to the same year of the hall, 1527, but this is pending further investigation. The hall is closed to the public.

the China, Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神農, and the Yellow Emperor 黃帝.⁹⁰ The Three Purities are absent in this Heavenly Court painting, as in the Junkunc Album, which probably depicts (two of) the Three Sovereigns as well.

The emphasis on imperial deities – rather than Daoist-styled deities such as the Three Purities – presiding over the Heavenly Court and therefore acting as the highest power in the Daoist pantheon is apparently a defining element of Heavenly Court representations of the Late Phase, probably owing to the greater influence of local cults in this period. It is a curious fact that in the Transitional and Middle Phases such imperial representation was attributed to the introduction of the state cult deities in the Daoist Heavenly Court, but that the same imperial representation became a hallmark of popular religion in the Late Phase. There is however no indication that local cults represented their deities as emperors much earlier than the Late Phase.⁹¹

With regard to hanging scroll versions of the Daoist Heavenly Court, only a small number have survived for the Ming period. They may however be representative of a much larger phenomenon knowing the closer association of Daoism with local cults in the Late Phase. The collection of the Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (White Cloud Monastery) in Beijing has hanging scroll paintings of two of the Three Purities dated to the sixteenth century, but the majority of the paintings in the collection date to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) (see Fig. 6).⁹² A hanging scroll in the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, depicting an unidentified empress and emperor with two attendants, is another rare example of a Daoist Heavenly Court painting of the Ming.⁹³ A painting of Marshal Wen in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, dated to around 1400, and one of Marshal Wang 王 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York dated 1542 could be other examples of Heavenly Court paintings but since such paintings were also used as private objects of devotion and probably figured in rites of

⁹⁰ A Heavenly Court representation headed by the Three Sovereigns carved in stone is found in Cave 10 at Shimenshan in Anyue County (Sichuan), dated to the early Southern Song before 1178. See Hu, *Daojiao shike*, Vol. 2 pp. 119, 280-284.

⁹¹ The earliest example of an imperial representation of a local cult deity to my knowledge, is a late Yuan painting of Zhenwu who was canonised as an emperor (*shangdi* 上帝) in 1304. It must be noted that the title granting of 1304 and its imperial representation are used as a criterion for dating the painting. A similar painting, dated to the fifteenth century is owned by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University. Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 300.

⁹² For the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning (*yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊), see Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 228; for the Heavenly Worthy of Numinous Treasure (*lingbao tianzun* 靈寶天尊), see Zhongguo daojiao xiehui 中國道教協會 (ed.), *Daojiao shenxian huaji* 道教神仙畫集. Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1995, p. 5.

⁹³ Wai-kam Ho et al., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980, p. 152. In this work the painting is dated to the fourteenth century for its similarity to the Yongle gong murals. I would suggest a Ming date on the basis of the figure proportions, such as the shape of the faces and short torsos.

exorcism – which in both cases were not ritual settings with Heavenly Court paintings – their exact status remains uncertain.⁹⁴

Although no complete sets of hanging scroll paintings of a Heavenly Court have survived from the Ming period, very similar paintings may be observed in sets of Water-and-Land paintings that contain many Daoist deities. The imperially commissioned hanging scroll paintings of the Baoning si 寶寧寺 (Monastery of Precious Tranquility) near Datong大同, now kept in the Shanxi Provincial Museum are the best known (Fig. 7). They comprise 139 scrolls including three scrolls with inscriptions and can be dated to 1460 on the basis of stylistic features and information obtained from two later colophons. A similar set of thirty-five paintings dated 1454 and also commissioned by the Ming court is found in the Musée Guimet in Paris. Two paintings in the Cleveland Museum of Art have been verified as belonging to the Guimet set,⁹⁵ while another painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York probably also belongs to the same set.⁹⁶ A second set of seventy-four paintings in Musée Guimet would date to around 1600.⁹⁷ Much less known are the twenty-four scrolls in the Xilai si 西來寺 (Monastery of Western Arrivals) in Ledu 樂都 (Qinghai) and which are also believed to date to the Ming.⁹⁸ Many of these paintings are still unpublished and largely unresearched.⁹⁹

During the Qing period, the political situation seem to have become less favourable for the Heavenly Master order, but the Quanzhen order was revived under the names of different lineages such as Longmen 龍門. The Quanzhen order spread over the empire and in southern China it set up a dense network of lay congregations organised around medium altars (*tan* 壇).¹⁰⁰ It is however doubtful if the order regained the same economical strength and independence of its heydays in the Yuan period. Without a large temple network firmly locked in the local society and consequently secured with a fixed income, wall paintings of

⁹⁴ Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 264-266.

⁹⁵ On these Water-and-Land paintings, see Shanxi sheng bowuguan 山西省博物館 (ed.), *Baoning si Mingdai shuilu hua* 寶寧寺明代水陸畫. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988, Caroline Gyss, “Démon et merveilles: vision de la nature dans une peinture liturgique du XVe siècle.” *Ars Asiatiques* 43 (1988), pp. 106-122, and idem, “Les Messagers divins,” Weidner, *Latter Days of the Law*, pp. 280-287, Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, pp. 369-373, and Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 242-245, 250-251, 258-259, 270-271.

⁹⁶ Depicted in Little *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 248.

⁹⁷ See Gyss-Vermande 1991 and Little 2000: 260-262, 280-281.

⁹⁸ Bai Wanrong 白萬榮, “Qinghai Ledu Xilai si Ming shuilu hua xi 青海樂都西來寺明水陸畫析.” *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1993), pp. 57-63.

⁹⁹ For other and later examples of Water-and-Land paintings see the PhD dissertation of Petra Klose, *Der Shuilu Ritus*.

¹⁰⁰ Goossaert, Vincent, “The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700-1950.” John Lagerwey (ed.), *Religion and Chinese Society*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press & Paris, EFEO, 2004, pp. 699-772.

the Heavenly Court number only very few. The only example to my knowledge is found at the Taifu guan 台符觀 (Great Talisman Monastery) in Fenyang 汾陽 County (central Shanxi) which has murals depicting a Heavenly Court repainted in the Qing period but probably representing a Ming format because of its close similarity in content to the Dadao guan murals in Dingzhou. The central hall of the Taifu guan has statues of the Jade Emperor accompanied by two female and four male attendants; the north wall has images of the Three Sovereigns while the east and west walls depict 365 deities in 134 groups.¹⁰¹ Local gazetteers of the Qing period mention in fact many Daoist monasteries but nowhere is any mention made of wall painting. The majority of these monasteries were destroyed during the vicissitudes of the twentieth century, making verification difficult. A recent survey of extant Ming and Qing wall paintings in Shanxi province in north China mentions no Daoist Heavenly Court paintings but only wall paintings in local temples dedicated to deities such as the Dragon King (*longwang* 龍王) and Saint Mother (*shengmu* 聖母).¹⁰²

Hanging scroll paintings of the Heavenly Court from the Qing period have survived in greater numbers than from earlier periods, and probably number into the thousands despite the wars, social upheavals, anti-religious measures, and more recently mega state building projects of the twentieth century. Perhaps one part remained in the private possession of Daoist priests or were replaced with modern replica's, while another part ended in the hands of private collectors and museums.

Although greatly varying in style and quality, the paintings have in common that they are mostly painted, or better, traced, with the help of stencils or pounces. This feature is at odds with wall paintings in which all proportions are adjusted by hand, and is neither visible in the few high quality scroll paintings that have survived from the Song to the Ming. But we can surmise that this procedure was the most common type of representation from at least the Song onwards and that it was also related to the artisan and guild practices at a local level, where most Daoist priests, especially the Heavenly Masters, were performing their liturgies.¹⁰³ The Qing paintings are therefore a valuable testimony to a once thriving local visual culture. Let me discuss some important collections.

¹⁰¹ Data found in Shanxi sheng Fenyang xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 山西省汾陽縣誌編纂委員會 (ed.), *Fenyang xianzhi* 汾陽縣誌. Beijing: Haihu chubanshe, 1998, p. 801.

¹⁰² The murals of the Taifu guan are not specified but dated to the Ming. Chai, *Shanxi siguan bihua*, pp. 84-99.

¹⁰³ Good examples of such paintings are the Southern Song period hell paintings of the of the workshop of Lu Xinzong, studied in Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 163-185.

One of the greatest collections is owned by the Baiyun guan in Beijing. Only a small number of them have been published and none have been studied.¹⁰⁴ The paintings are very valuable because they present a rare view on Daoist scroll paintings of a Heavenly Court as practised in northern China, that were probably used during rituals performed by Quanzhen priests. One of the striking elements is the inclusion of Four Sovereigns, instead of the six or nine of the Middle Phase.

The majority of the extant scroll paintings originate from the south of China, and belong to the liturgies of the Heavenly Masters. Probably best known are the so-called Yao 瑶 ceremonial paintings, which are basically Heavenly Court paintings and should be considered as part of the same tradition.¹⁰⁵ The people of the Yao minority live in the secluded and mountainous region comprising Yunnan province in southern China and northern Laos and Thailand across the Chinese border. Already at an early stage, probably during the Southern Song, they were converted to Daoism which, combined with their own pre-Daoist conceptions on the supernatural, became the central religion of the Yao people up to the present time. The Yao have attracted considerable attention from anthropologists, who during their fieldwork could hardly fail to notice the omnipresence of Daoist paintings and other ritual paraphernalia in the religious life of the Yao people. These scholars have provided important studies and observations on the rituals and production techniques involved with the Heavenly Court paintings, revealing practices that must have existed in earlier periods and in other areas of China as well. The Yao Daoist Heavenly Court comprises only Two Sovereigns, the Jade Emperor and *xingzhu* 星主, probably another name for the North Pole Emperor. The Two Sovereigns are also found in modern Taiwan ritual practice. The Heavenly Court paintings also include images of deities not found anywhere else, such as the Great Sea Banner (Chinese: *da hai fan* 海帆, Yao: *tom hoi fan*) (Fig. 8), and often show interesting narrative scenes related to the rituals they are used for.¹⁰⁶ Some paintings included in the ritual layout are strictly speaking not even Heavenly Court painting but genealogies of deities or family forebears, thus underscoring the important role the Daoist Heavenly Court paintings played for the Yao identity.

The private collection of Kristofer M. Schipper, himself ordained as a Daoist priest in the Heavenly Master order in south Taiwan, includes a complete set of Heavenly Court

¹⁰⁴ Published in Fu, *Daojiao shenxian huaji*.

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982, and Jess G. Pourret, *The Yao. The Mien and Mun Yao in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ For pictures of Hai Fan, see Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*, pp. 83-96.

paintings originating from Quanzhou 泉州 (Fujian) dating to the eighteenth century. The paintings have already received some public exposure during exhibitions in Marburg and Cologne in Germany in 1980-1981, and in Chicago in 2000.¹⁰⁷ The set of ritual paintings show two striking elements. First is the inclusion of two Buddhist bodhisattvas, Manjusri (*taiyi jiuku tianzun* 太一救苦天尊) and Samantabhadra (*leisheng puhua tianzun* 雷聲普化天尊) identified by their respective animals, a lion and an elephant, in addition to the Two Sovereigns seen in the Yao paintings and in northern Taiwan paintings mentioned above. They are represented in the guise of Daoist priests.¹⁰⁸ The two bodhisattvas entered the Daoist scene as exorcist deities with putative tantric origins in the Song dynasty, but apparently found their way into the Daoist Heavenly Court paintings at a much later period, completing the integration of some peculiar Buddhist elements otherwise absent in representations of the Heavenly Court. The two Buddhist deities also appear among the Yao ceremonial paintings but as a different set of three, together with Zhuling 朱鈴, used especially in cases of funerary rituals; the Taiwan versions may have a similar origin.¹⁰⁹ A second element is the organisation of the paintings on the east and west walls in four spheres of heaven, earth and water – the three traditional spheres – and the human world (*tiangong* 天宮, *difu* 地府, *shuifu* 水府, *yangjian* 陽間). This organisation is also found among the Yao paintings.

The period after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 is still a field open for exploration and investigation. The vicissitudes of the twentieth century have left deep marks not only on Daoist art but on the entire cultural heritage of China. With anti-religious rules gradually relaxed and many temples being renovated since the 1980s, the situation is improving and the Daoist clergy and their communities are slowly restoring their former lives and practices. The re-establishing of Daoist rituals and the accompanying artefacts will no doubt lead to new additions, transformations, and modifications of the representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court, but that is a history to be written in the future.

¹⁰⁷ Some of the paintings of the Schipper Collection are reproduced and studied in Ebert, Kaulbach, and Kraatz, *Religiöse Malerei aus Taiwan*. The paintings were also on display hung in their ritual order during the Daoist art exhibition in Chicago but were not included in the catalogue.

¹⁰⁸ Ebert, Kaulbach, and Kraatz, *Religiöse Malerei aus Taiwan*, pp. 56-57. Another source rather speaks of Kṣitigarba and Samantabhadra, see Schipper and Verellen (eds.), *The Taoist Canon*, p. 637. *Taiyi jiuku tianzun* is also a Daoist avatar of Guanyin according to Franciscus Verellen, “‘Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism’: The Inversion of a Buddhist Apologetic Tradition in Late Tang China.” *T’oung Pao* 78 (1992), pp. 234-235.

¹⁰⁹ Three Yao paintings of Manjusri (*taiyi jiuku tianzun*), Samantabhadra (*leisheng puhua tianzun*), and Zhuling are reproduced in Pourret, *The Yao*, p. 237.

1.2 The development of the *chao*-audience theme

In this section, I will venture to demonstrate that the *chao* 朝 -audience theme developed from the Han homage scene through Buddhist donor scenes and tomb processions of the mediaeval period into Heavenly Court paintings. This, I want to emphasise, is not a linear development; it should demonstrate that the *chao*-audience theme was adopted by Chinese artists, with some modifications, for Daoist Heavenly Court representations from an existing, or perhaps “stock-in-trade”, repertoire in Chinese pictorial art. This adoption could very well fall together with the emergence of the Heavenly Master order that similarly adopted the *chao*-audience for its liturgy at the end of the Later Han.

Regardless the actual historical situation, my point is that the *chao*-audience theme in its many different applications should be understood as a representation of the same basic practice of court ritual, which itself is a typical “Chinese” format used for addressing a superior in many different kinds of situations. The composition and format of a representation depicting a *chao*-audience follows the same basic principles of court ritual practice, called *chao* 朝 and hence the name of the theme. Confucian classics on court ritual such as the *Zhou li* 周禮 (Rituals of Zhou) and the *Li ji* 禮記 (Notes on Ritual),¹¹⁰ stipulate that when the ruler is addressed, the members of the audience should be organised in two rows divided to the left (east) and right (west) facing north. The ruler would always be seated in the north and face south. I will argue that this compositional scheme is found in many other representations such as the homage scene, the tomb procession scene, and the donor scene, to name the most important ones. In this section I will therefore first deal with these three types of representations, followed by a discussion of the Heavenly Court as a representation of this theme.

Homage scene

The so-called “homage scene” in Han stone reliefs and carvings is basically a *chao*-audience. I would define a *chao*-audience as consisting of two rows divided to the left and right addressing a ruler facing south who is positioned in the north. Not all homage scenes would readily fulfil these criteria as often only one row is depicted, as for example can be seen in the

¹¹⁰ *Zhou li* 周禮, pre-Han (206-8 BC), commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200). Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1966, 31.1b, and *Li ji* 禮記, pre-Han, commentary by Zheng Xuan. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1985, 1.2a-b. On the dates of these works, see Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*. Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993, pp. 24-32, 293-297.

more well-known Wu Liang Shrine stone reliefs (Fig. 9). However, that this example should represent a “reduced” or “flattened” format (i.e. without a sense of three-dimensional space) of a homage scene is demonstrated by other Later Han (25-220) carvings. For example, a carving on a tomb stone slab from Qianliangtai 前涼臺 in Zhucheng 諸城 (Shandong) depicts, in a rare perspective style, two rows of figures in various sizes (denoting differences in status and hierarchy) to the left and right in front of a terraced pavilion in which a large frontal figure is seated accompanied to his sides by attendants and some other kneeling figures (Fig. 10).¹¹¹ On a stone slab from Beizhuang 北莊 in Linyi 臨沂 (Shandong), similarly two rows of figures are depicted kneeling before a large, central figure placed on the left side (Fig. 11).¹¹² In addition, a related arrangement for a homage scene but which rather looks like a banquet is witnessed in the wall painting in Tomb no. 2 in Dahuting 打虎亭, Mi 密 County (Henan) of the end of the Later Han, depicting a large tent on the left in which the host is seated and two long rows positioned to the left and right side of the host on the bottom and top register of the painting. Between these two rows, musicians, acrobats and dancers entertain the audience. There is also a kneeling figure in front of the host, similar to homage-scenes (Fig. 12). Significantly, the banquet-scene is represented on the north wall of the central tomb chamber, the same location where homage-scenes are usually depicted.¹¹³

Beside the more common two-dimensional representations of homage scenes in a single pictorial plane, one Later Han tomb has a homage scene that follows the three-dimensional architectural layout of the tomb, thereby visually re-creating a court audience. The murals on the east and west walls of the front chamber of tomb No. 1 at Wangdu 望都 County (Hebei) depict officials and soldiers in three-quarter view and of various sizes raising their court tablets and spears in front of their faces while bowing to the northern direction (the host is located in a separate rear-chamber in the north) (Fig. 13).¹¹⁴ The official titles are written in characters beside the figures reinforcing the re-creation or continuation of a court administration in the after-life of the tomb host. The architectural division of a homage scene

¹¹¹ The stone slab carving and a drawing are reproduced in Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 208. See also Xin Lixiang 信立祥, *Handai huaxiang shi zonghe yanjiu* 漢代畫像石綜合研究. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000, pp. 58, 83-102.

¹¹² Reproduced in Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, p. 206.

¹¹³ The mural is over six meters in length. Reproduced in Jan Fontein and Wu Tung, *Han and T'ang Murals*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1976, pp. 52-53.

¹¹⁴ The Wangdu tomb murals are reproduced in Beijing Lishi bowuguan, Hebei sheng wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 北京歷史博物館, 河北省文物管理委員會(eds.), *Wangdu Han mu bihua* 望都漢墓壁畫. Beijing: Zhongguo gudian yishu chubanshe, 1955. See also Yang Hong 楊泓, “Handai de bihua mu 漢代的壁畫,” in his *Han Tang meishu kaogu he fojiao yishu* 漢唐美術考古和佛教藝術. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2000, pp. 20-36.

composition over two walls makes the Wangdu murals an excellent example of a proto-Heavenly Court painting.

A similar homage scene divided over two walls which resembles a Heavenly Court painting even closer is found not in China but in Korea. A tomb from the Koguryŏ kingdom dated 408 at Tŏkhung-ri in South P'yong'an Province has a frontally-seated tomb host receiving two rows of standing officials depicted in three-quarter view on the east and west walls. Characters identify again the titles of the figures. According to Nancy Steinhardt, the Korean tomb closely follows models from the former Yan state covering present Liaoning province in Northeast China and the Korean peninsula,¹¹⁵ demonstrating that the homage scene remained for over two centuries a standard type for tomb decoration in East and Northeast China.

Based on the above, we can draw the conclusion that the depiction of homage scenes in Later Han offering shrines¹¹⁶ and post-Han tombs were modelled after sacrificial ritual or rituals for commemorating the dead which in turn were conceived and performed in the typical arrangement of a court audience ritual: the *chao*-audience. The fact that a homage scene is sometimes also rendered as a banquet further suggests that banquets in those days were conceived and organised in this format. It is therefore my contention that the *chao*-audience arrangement, as a theme, formed a typical way of arranging space when addressing a superior, being an emperor, ancestor, host or deity.

If we consider the homage scene as a representation of the *chao*-audience theme, it is possible to trace the development of the homage scene into history and witness its adaptation in donor scenes depicted in Buddhist murals and reliefs above ground, and in tomb procession scenes underground.

Donor scene

Donor scenes are generally interpreted as “offering pictures” (*gongyang tu* 供養圖) or “paying homage to the Buddha pictures” (*lifo tu* 禮佛圖) since the donors who commissioned the work are seen worshipping and offering gifts to a Buddha image represented above them.

¹¹⁵ Nancy Steinhardt, “Changchuan Tomb No. 1 and Its North Asian Context.” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1-2 (2003), pp. 270-271.

¹¹⁶ According to an iconographic study by Jean James, the homage scene had developed from Early Han painted silk banners via reliefs on stone coffins to the Later Han offering shrine. Jean M. James, “The Eastern Han Offering Shrine: A Functional Study.” *Archives of Asian Art* 51 (1998-1999), pp. 16-29. Since the practice of the Chinese court audience ritual also predates the Later Han, we may assume that the *chao*-audience theme would also date to before the Later Han, but the examples presented by James do not provide evidence to support this assumption.

In this arrangement, the Buddha image is depicted in large size in frontal view dwarfing the small figures of the humble donors at the bottom of the composition depicted in three-quarter view or sometimes *en face*. This basic composition is maybe not immediately connected to the homage scene – it may for example be inherited from Indian prototypes - but when we investigate these donor scenes in their spatial compositions such as cave paintings and stone reliefs or on the foundation stones of statues, its reliance on the *chao*-audience theme becomes more evident.

The Mogao 莫高 caves near Dunhuang 敦煌 present a unique case where the development of wall paintings on one site can be witnessed spanning almost a thousand years. The development of Buddhist donor scenes at this site can be summarised in the following table, selecting caves from several successive dynasties:

Cave	Date or period	Description
285 (north-wall)	N-Wei 538-539	Two rows of small donor figures, male and female clansmen divided to the left and right, depicted in three-quarter view and meeting below a frontal Buddha image. ¹¹⁷
428	N-Zhou (557-581)	Three tiers or a single band of small donor figures at the bottom of the walls and central pillar, all monks depicted in three-quarter view and facing the main image of the central pillar. ¹¹⁸
390	Sui (581-618)	Two tiers of small donor figures, the lower larger than the upper tier, at the bottom of a wall below a frontal Avalokiteshvara preaching scene, all monks depicted in three-quarter view (Fig. 14). ¹¹⁹
220 (east-wall)	Early Tang (618-704)	Imperial audience of donors in medium size and three-quarter view below the debate scene between Vimalakirti and Manjusri. ¹²⁰
107	Late Tang (848-906)	Donor ladies of medium size in three-quarter view around the lower part of two walls. ¹²¹

¹¹⁷ See Roderick Whitfield, *Dunhuang, Caves of the Singing Sands: Buddhist Art from the Silk Road*. London: Textile & Art Publishers, 1995, p. 42.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 49-51.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 64.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 71.

98	Five Dynasties (907-960)	King and Queen of Khotan and monks of large size in procession at the bottom of a wall (Fig. 15). ¹²²
61	Five Dynasties (907-960)	Donor queen and court ladies of large size making two processions divided over the north, east, and south walls. ¹²³

On the basis of the images and the development of the depiction of donor figures as laid out in the table, we can make four conclusions:

1) In contrast to Buddha images in the murals which all take a frontal pose, donor figures are all depicted in three-quarter view and at the bottom of a wall.

2) Donor figures are usually depicted in facing directions, one left and one right, often on opposite walls, in contrast to Buddha images which are without direction because of their frontal position. Such a contrast between the frontal view of the Buddha images on the one hand and the three-quarter view of the donor figures on the other are normally explained as owing to conventions on differentiating between divinities and mortals. However, these conventions are exactly the criteria for a *chao*-audience theme, and we can presume that the painters adopted a native programme for depicting the donors, while the Buddha images and narrative scenes represented above the donor scenes seem more related to Buddhist (and therefore foreign?) conceptions of imagery, a spatial and artistic division that the painters often reinforced by a line separating the two spheres.

3) Donor figures increased in size over the centuries.

4) Secular rulers gradually supplanted monks as donor figures, their importance also emphasised by their size. This development has no direct bearing on the topic of homage-scene, and probably refers to a change in patronage of the Mogao caves over the centuries, but it is of significance in the respect that the development coincides with the so-called imperialisation of the Heavenly Court during the Transitional Phase, or the merging of the Daoist cult with the state cult that occurred during the Transitional Phase. Apparently, the imperialisation of art was a much wider phenomenon that also implicated Buddhist art and that was due to the self-aggrandisement efforts – literally witnessed in the Mogao cave paintings – of the ruling clans from the Tang period onward, contesting with Buddhist and Daoist deities for space and attention if not devotion. Yet it must be noticed that these secular

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 111.

¹²² Ibid. p. 116.

¹²³ See Roderick Whitfield et al., *Cave Temples of Mogao: Art and History of the Silk Road*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000, p. 89

donors, in contrast to the imperial deities of Daoist temple paintings, are all historical figures and often identified by cartouches and inscriptions and are not deities. The codification of imperial images for Daoist nature deities in Daoist liturgy in the Northern Song would therefore be an appropriate development following the aggrandising images of secular donor figures of the Five Dynasties.

Besides the donor scenes in the Mogao cave paintings, donor figures also appear in many stone reliefs and carvings such as in the Longmen 龍門 cave shrines, on the bases of statues, steles and on tower gates (*que* 闕). Each one of these sites adds important information to the development from Han homage scene to Buddhist donor scene and their possible relationship to later Heavenly Court paintings. The Longmen caves near Luoyang abound in donor scenes carved in two opposite rows below a Buddha statue as in many niches in the Guyang 古陽 Cave (Fig. 16), or the large carved limestone reliefs from the Binyang 賓陽 Cave, now separately on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.¹²⁴ It was Wang Xun 王遜 in his seminal article of 1963 on the iconography of the Heavenly Court painting of Yongle gong who first drew attention to the stylistic and compositional relationship between the donor scenes in the Binyang Cave carvings of Longmen and Heavenly Court painting.¹²⁵ We now know how correct his assumption was, since the two are depictions of the same *chao*-audience theme and representations of the same praxis of addressing a superior.

Because many of the caves were patronised by the Northern Wei imperial family or their close associates in the late fifth century and early sixth century, the Longmen donor scenes are not only exquisitely executed, we also see here for the first time that imperial figures take place among the homage scenes. From the accompanying dedicatory inscriptions in the Guyang cave we further know that the imperial donors and monks recorded in these texts were the same as the figures in the donor scenes.¹²⁶ It would be difficult though to

¹²⁴ The Metropolitan Museum relief shows Northern Wei Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (r. 471-499) and his entourage, and the Nelson Atkins Museum relief shows Empress Zhao 昭 (d. 494) and her female companions. For a reproduction of the first, see Yang, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, p. 54; for a reproduction of the latter, see Robert L. Thorp and Richard E. Vinograd, *Chinese Art & Culture*. New York: Abrahms, 2001, p. 169. The Binyang reliefs have been thoughtfully studied in Amy McNair, "The Relief Sculptures in the Binyang Central Grotto at Longmen and the "Problem" of Pictorial Stones." Wu Hung (ed.), *Between Han and Tang: Visual and Material Culture in a Transformative Period*. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003, pp. 157-189. For examples of donor scenes at the Guyang Cave at Longmen, see Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 185-257.

¹²⁵ Wang Xun 王遜, "Yongle gong Sanqing dian bihua tica shitan 永樂宮三清殿壁畫題材試探." *Wenwu* 文物 8 (1963), p. 35.

¹²⁶ These texts are discussed and translated in Katherine R. Tsiang, "Disjunctures of Time, Text, and Imagery in Reconstructions of the Guyang Cave at Longmen." Wu Hung (ed.), *Between Han and Tang: Religious Art and Archaeology in a Transformative Period*. Beijing: Wenwu Press, 2000, 319-328.

identify these images as portraits. The traditional representation of patrons in these donor scenes as Chinese emperors may be deemed even more significant when we take into consideration that the Northern Wei rulers were of Turkish (*tuoba* 拓拔) origin and evidently attached great importance to being represented in a Chinese fashion, or at least wished to be remembered as such by later generations. Indeed, the imperialisation of the donor figures (as well as some of the Buddha figures) coincide with other historical events, such as an imperial decree of 486 ordering all courtiers to wear Han-style dress and the moving of the capital from Pingcheng 平城 (Datong 大同, Shanxi) to Luoyang (Henan) in 493 (Luoyang was the capital of the former Western Jin empire, 265-316), and such emphasis on Chinese imperial imagery should be understood as clear indications of the imperial aspirations of the Northern Wei rulers, rather than as sinicisation efforts as official dynastic history had always made believe us.¹²⁷

Donor scenes in the Guyang Cave at Longmen furthermore provide technical evidence that the *chao*-audience scene constituted an independent tradition in Chinese art. Several modern scholars have already noted the discrepancy between the “Chinese” carving style of the homage scenes (and some other decorative motifs) on the one hand, and the “Western” style of the much larger Buddha images occupying the niches in the cave on the other.¹²⁸ In contrast to the high-relief sculptural forms of the Buddha images, the donor figures - beside their Chinese-style robes - are rendered in a flat Chinese drawing style that finely delineates the drapery folds of their gowns and long sleeves. Such contradicting styles suggest that two different types of workshops operated in the same cave, one specialised in Western, i.e. Gandhara, style Buddha images (Chinese-style Buddha images were executed too at Longmen) with carvers perhaps hailing from that region, and the other specialised in traditional Han style imagery, in particular the homage scenes, and these carvers may have come from the east of China (Shandong area) where such images had a long history.¹²⁹ All in all, the *chao*-

¹²⁷ Stanley Abe persuasively points out that for the Northern Wei rulers issues of racial differences were subordinated to issues of politics and status. Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 180-185. See also Katherine R. Tsiang, “Changing Patterns of Divinity and Reform in the Late Northern Wei,” *The Art Bulletin*, 84.2 (2002), pp. 222-245.

¹²⁸ Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 203-204, Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*. London: British Museum Press, 1992, p. 154, and Tsiang, “Disjunctures of Time,” p. 339. It must be noted that there is quite some controversy on the precise style of the Buddha images at Longmen, discussed in Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 173-180.

¹²⁹ Stanley Abe suggests that the artists may have come from “not-too-distant areas of northern Henan and Hebei” however without specifying his choice. Abe, *Ordinary Images*, p. 208. This area is adjacent to Shandong province, thus providing support for my assumption that the donor scenes are elaborations of the Han homage scenes that were popular in East China.

audience scene and its various pictorial adaptations formed a distinct Chinese or indigenous artistic tradition with its own iconography and techniques.¹³⁰

It appears that the donor scene travelled from the Shandong area further west. The motif of the donor scene travelled further south and appeared for example also on a Han tower gate (*que* 闕) in Mianyang 綿陽 (Sichuan), which were carved in a much later period with Buddhist and Daoist deities in niches and flanked with donor scenes depicting royal figures and attendants approaching from the left and right sides (Fig. 17).¹³¹ More to the west, it also appeared in this same format in Mogao Cave 285 dated to AD 538-539 as seen above.

Some representations of donor scenes suggest a more architectonic or spatial division which could be related to ritual practices reminiscent of a *chao*-audience. A votive pagoda dated 466 but of unknown provenance and now in the National Museum of History in Taipei has a square stone base with in front an incense burner flanked by two standing monks and two lions; and on the left and right sides two processions of donor figures moving to the front of the base.¹³² Again, the carvings of the Thousand Buddhas on the nine floors of the pagoda and the Many Treasures Buddha flanked by Shakyamuni Buddha at the foot of the pagoda are all exquisitely carved in high relief; the donor scene on the base by contrast is carved in the flattened low-relief style already seen in the Later Han homage scenes from the Shandong area. The particular division in two rows is in this case spatially rendered, suggesting that the composition reflects actual ritual practices, namely a *chao*-audience ritual. For example, the carver could also have depicted the donors making one full circle moving in one direction on the base of the pagoda – the circumambulation ritual (*pradakshina*) – the standard way of worshipping the Buddha inherited from India and particularly used for pagodas and stupas representing the Buddha or containing his relic stored inside the pagoda.¹³³ The carvers however did not, and followed an established indigineous composition.

¹³⁰ Amy McNair points in her article to the strong sculptural qualities of the relief in the Binyang Cave not seen in similar scenes of the Guyang Cave. See McNair, “The Relief Sculptures in the Binyang Central Grotto at Longmen.” Perhaps the Binyang reliefs, which were produced later, were modelled after “Western” examples with regard to their more pronounced sculptural style, and may even have been made, designed, or supervised by sculptors hailing from that region. According to Amy McNair (p. 185 n. 41), thousands of foreigners, mainly merchants, lived in Luoyang during that time. The composition however remained “Chinese”.

¹³¹ Sun Hua 孫華, “Sichuan Mianyang Pingyang Fujun que qeshen zaoxiang - jiantan Sichuan diqu Nanbeichao Fo Dao kanxiang de jige wenti 四川綿陽平陽府君闕闕身造像 – 簡談四川地區佛道龕像的幾個問題.” Wu Hung (ed.), *Between Han and Tang: Religious Art and Archaeology in a Transformative Period*. Beijing: Wenwu Press, 2000, pp. 89-137.

¹³² For the 466 votive pagoda, see Abe, *Ordinary Images*, p. 152.

¹³³ A scene of Buddhist monks circumambulating a stupa is depicted in an eighth century mural at Mogao, Cave 23. See Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005, pp. 274-277, 376-380. It must be admitted that not all western Buddhist representations of circumambulations would depict the worshippers proceeding in one direction only, in Gandhara sculpture there is also one example of worshippers facing each other in opposite directions. See W.

Simply than just seeing two rows of donor figures as being positioned in a single linear file from left to right, they rather should be envisioned in a three-dimensional, spatial relationship opposite each other and approaching a central Buddha image. The practice of worshipping the Buddha in the format of a court audience is most convincingly depicted in a stele carving of the early sixth century from the Wanfo si 萬佛寺 (Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery), Chengdu (Sichuan). Organised into two registers, the upper register depicts a *chao*-audience scene of two rows of seated monks worshipping a centrally positioned Buddha, pictorially emphasised by the triangular format of the composition which creates a sense of depth and renders the characteristics of a *chao*-audience all the more visible. The lower register depicts narrative scenes culled from the Lotus Sutra set in an undulating landscape (Fig.18).¹³⁴ Although the upper register does not necessarily depicts donors, we however see that images of worshipping the Buddha and donor scenes are compositionally related and adopted the same format of the *chao*-audience ritual.

A similar reference to this type of *chao*-audience ritual is witnessed in the donor scenes on odd mixtures of Buddhist-Daoist steles from the late fifth and early sixth century in southern Shanxi province. For example the Feng Shenyu 馮神育 stele from Lintong 臨潼 and dated to 505 has a donor scene of figures not depicted in one linear horizontal file relegated to the bottom of the composition, as we are used to see from other representations, but in two vertical rows which occupy more than half of the lower part of the stele, the upper part occupied by a seated Buddha in front and a Daoist deity (a Heavenly Worthy) as identified by the fly-whisk held in his hand on its reverse side (Fig. 19).¹³⁵ In a similar fashion as the 466 votive pagoda, it is possible to view the stele carving as a flattened three-dimensional representation – similar to those pop-up children books where figures cut out in cardboard rise up from the book when opening a page - in which an audience of donor figures divided in a left and right file worship a large Buddha image in front of an incense burner. Visualised in this way, the donor scene resembles closely the three-dimensional architectonic layout of a temple hall with a Heavenly Court painting.

Zwalf, *A Catalogue of Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum*. Vol. 2. London: British Museum Press, 1996, pl. 299. Even though the circumambulation format does not rule out or contradict an audience format, yet, seen in the light of the examples presented below, I would argue that the artists adopted a specifically Chinese tradition for representing a donor scene.

¹³⁴ The front side of the stele, which dates to 425, has similar carvings on the lower register but the upper register is unfortunately damaged. It may well be possible that the damaged part equally depicted a *chao*-audience theme. For a reproduction of the Wanfo si stele, see Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, pp. 220, 222.

¹³⁵ For the Feng Shenyu stele, see Abe, *Ordinary Images*, pp. 274-281.

Another instance where ritual practice seems to be reflected in the pictorial programme of a stele engraving is the Wei Wenlang 魏文朗 stele dated to ca. 424 (but probably later)¹³⁶ at Yaowangshan 藥王山 (Shaanxi) (Fig. 20). The *chao*-audience scene, as a prototype, is integrated into this pictorial programme which most interestingly takes the form of a narrative distributed over all four sides of the stele (front, back, and two sides), and depicts the journey of the soul of the deceased from this world to that of the Western Paradise of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future (unwinding from right side via front and left side to back). The narrative enfolds on two registers of the stele. One is an upper register with Buddha images seated in niches – their hand gestures (*mudras*) aptly evoke the transit from present to future world.¹³⁷ The other is a lower register where the soul is depicted travelling in a procession consisting of a horse drawn cart accompanied in front by a camel and an courtly figure on horseback (depicted on the front side) and behind by a (female?) horse rider and two cavalry soldiers (on the right side). The caravan cuts through a donor scene of female attendants below, divided to the left and right (although depicted horizontally) of a small incense burner, and what seems to be a Daoist priest wearing a cap and a bold-headed Buddhist monk also positioned to the left and right of a larger incense burner above.¹³⁸ The journey continues over the left side of the stele and ends on the back where a Daoist priest is waiting to receive the soul in a palace hall, as suggested by the tiled floor, presided over by Maitreya Buddha.

The pictorial narrative of the Wei Wenlang stele can be interpreted as depicting an entirely visualised journey, but it is my contention that the iconopraxis of the stele engravings suggest that it is also a representation of early fifth-century lay-Buddhist mortuary ritual in which the deceased is transported by means of a carriage and accompanied by relatives and perhaps brought to different temple halls where mortuary services were conducted, in this case, by both the Daoist and Buddhist clergy.¹³⁹ The mortuary ritual, as in the Later Han

¹³⁶ The characters for the year-reign are damaged and probably misread, a view presented by a Japanese scholar during the Daoist art conference “Homage to Laozi” held in Xi’an, China, in May 2007.

¹³⁷ Cf. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, pp. 45-46.

¹³⁸ Opinions differ on the identities of the two deities in the front niche of the stele which may be either two Buddhist deities or one Buddhist and one Daoist deity. Eugene Wang argues for two Buddhist deities. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, pp. 41-44. Liu Yang provides an extended discussion on the *fodao* 佛道 or Buddhist-Daoist issue in fifth and sixth century sculptures and argues that on the basis of its iconography the Wei Wenlang stel should depict a Daoist deity. Liu, *Manifestation of the Dao*, pp. 121-126. The parallel presence of one Daoist priest and one Buddhist monk below the two deities suggests to me that a Daoist and Buddhist deity are intended.

¹³⁹ For the use of carriages in early mediaeval mortuary ritual, see Wu Hung, “Where Are They Going? Where Did They Come From? – Hearse and ‘Soul-Carriage’ in Han Dynasty Tomb Art.” *Orientations* 29.6 (1998), pp. 22-31. It should be noted that a procession, sometimes including a carriage, also precedes the presentation of

period, would follow the format of a *chao*-audience ritual. If the pictorial programme was merely a representation of an ideology or of past-time practices with no connection to the world of the viewer, one wonders how contemporary viewers could in any way relate to and understand such pictures. No indications are given that the artists depict themes from Buddhist sutras and would therefore rely on texts for their pictorial programme; by contrast, I would argue that in this intriguing case they rely on ritual practices, ritual practices that also already had been laid down in prototypes of the *chao*-audience scene of which they created an evocative elaboration.¹⁴⁰

Tomb procession scene

While aboveground donor scenes decorated many Buddhist images, a variant of the Later Han homage scene continued to develop in the same period underground, the tomb procession scene. I would argue on the basis of their compositional characteristics that they are not distinct types but rather another elaboration of its prototype, the *chao*-audience scene. In other words, painters adopted and modified the *chao*-audience scene to give visual expression to the ideas and practices on the after-life of a deceased family member.

The Han homage scenes are continued in tomb procession scenes of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) but with modifications bespeaking changing concepts on the afterlife and probably changing mortuary practices as well. The tomb host, often accompanied by his wife, is seated in the northern end while receiving homage from his courtiers (or perhaps descendants), but whereas in previous homage scenes horses and carriages were racing around the walls in circles and often depicted in separate registers, the horses and carriages became fixed parts of the homage scene and follow the procession towards the host of the tomb, as for example witnessed in the Daogui 道貴¹⁴¹ tomb murals of the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577) in Ji'nan 濟南 (Shandong) and in the donor scenes on Buddhist images

memorial (*jinbiao* 進表) in a Daoist *chao*-audience ritual, a part or ritual element corresponding the dispatching of the officials (*chuguan* 出關), as for example in Du Guangting's commentary on a *chao*-audience ritual, *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* DZ 507, 49.7b where the carriage is described as a "feathered chariot" (*yuche* 羽車) (for the Daoist audience ritual and its terminology, see the next chapter). This would let us surmise that a procession with a carriage would also be a part, or better, a preamble to the Han court ritual of presenting a memorial during a *chao*-audience. The notion of a presentation of a written memorial seems however to be absent in the lay-Buddhist mortuary ritual adaptation of the *chao*-audience ritual. My preliminary assumption would be that it was substituted by offerings (made to images) in Buddhist ritual, but this remains still to be researched.

¹⁴⁰ The *chao*-audience provided a conceptual framework. This does not mean that there is exact iconographical overlapping between representation and contemporaneous ritual practice. Representations tend to evoke anterior styles, yet the underlying structures remain the same or change only very slowly.

¹⁴¹ Surname lost.

such as the one dedicated by Cao Wangxi 曹望禧 and dated 525 from Linzi 臨淄 (near Ji'nan in Shandong) (Fig. 21), subscribing to the interaction of Buddhist art aboveground and native tomb art underground, and their probable common origin in the *chao*-audience scene.¹⁴² Apparently the ox cart, that replaced the horse carriage of the Han, was always paired with female donors or the hostess of the tomb, and the horse with the male donors or the host of the tomb. Its appearance can also be traced back to tomb murals in the Western Jin (256-316).¹⁴³

The most drastic changes in tomb mural composition occurred during the sixth century. First, the direction of the figures was inverted from a procession into the tomb to a procession leaving the tomb. The Xu Xianxiu 徐顯秀 tomb dated 571 near Taiyuan 太原 (Shanxi) has murals preserved in a remarkably good condition depicting the ox-cart and horse on the left and right of the tomb hostess and host, i.e. leaving rather than approaching them.¹⁴⁴ A similar change in direction, but without the horse and ox-cart, is witnessed in the Cui Fen 崔芬 tomb murals dated 551 and located in Linqiu 臨朐 (Shandong), the “homeland” of the homage scene. Above the entrance/exit door, an imperial procession is depicted of presumably the host and hostess and their retinue leaving the tomb. The postures of the lead-figures with their arms spread upholding their long sleeves is in perfect key with similar depictions of donor scenes seen in the Mogao cave paintings, the Longmen cave sculptures or the Buddhist stele engravings discussed above (Fig. 22).¹⁴⁵ Secondly, the procession was extended to the passage way which now came to be decorated with files of guards and riders, as seen for example in the Xu Xianxiu tomb murals (Fig. 23) as well as in the Lou Rui 婁叡 tomb murals also located near Taiyuan and dated 570.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² The same format continued into the Sui dynasty. Reproduced and discussed in Zheng Yan 鄭岩, “Qingzhou Beiqi huaxiang shi yu ruhua Suteran meishu: Yu Hong mudeng kaogu xin faxian de qishi 青州北齊畫像石與入華粟特人美術：虞弘墓等考古新發現的啟事.” Wu, *Cultural and Artistic Interaction*, pp. 91-93.

¹⁴³ Zhao Yonghong 趙永洪, “You daoshi dao mudao: Nanbeichao muzang suojian zhi yizhang biao xian yu sangzang kongjian de bianhua 由墓室到墓道：南北朝墓葬所見之儀仗表現與喪葬空間的變化.” Wu, *Cultural and Artistic Interaction*, pp. 434-440.

¹⁴⁴ On the change in direction, see Jessica Rawson, “Creating Universes: Cultural Exchanges as Seen in Tombs in Northern China Between the Han and Tang Periods.” Wu, *Cultural and Artistic Interaction*, p. 131, and for other references Steinhardt, “Changchuan Tomb No. 1,” pp. 248-249, and Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, pp. 37-38. For the Xu Xianxiu tomb murals, see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo 山西省考古研究所, Taiyuan shi bowuguan kaogu yanjiu suo 太原市博物館考古研究所 (eds.), “Taiyuan Beiqi Xu Xianxiu mu fajue jianbao 太原北齊徐顯秀墓發掘簡報.” *Wenwu* 文物 10 (2003), pp. 4-40, and Taiyuan shi wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 太原市文物考古研究所 (ed.), *Beiqi Xu Xianxiu mu* 北齊徐顯秀墓. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Shandong sheng, “Cui Fen bishu mu,” pp. 4-26.

¹⁴⁶ On excursion paintings, see Xin Lixiang 信立祥, “Handai huaxiang zhong de che ma chuxing tu kao 漢代畫像中的車馬出行圖考.” *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化, 1 (1999), pp. 47-63. For the Lou Rui tomb murals, see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo 山西省考古研究所, Taiyuan shi wenwu guanli weiyuan hui 太原市文物管理委員會 (eds.) “Taiyuan shi Beiqi Lou Rui mu fajue jianbao 太原市北齊婁叡墓發掘簡報.” *Wenwu* 文物 10

The relationship in subject-matter – probably with regard to the horses and guards but not as much to the tomb host - with very similar excursion paintings depicting an emperor making an expedition tour found in early tomb murals have led Chinese researchers to identify these tomb murals also as excursion paintings (*chuxing tu* 出行圖).¹⁴⁷ Although different opinions on the origin and function of this tomb excursion scene exist,¹⁴⁸ I would argue that on the basis of iconopraxis it should represent a changed mortuary practice in which the soul of the deceased was no longer worshipped in a *chao*-audience ritual, but probably was conceived as going on expedition in his dominion protected by his soldiers and riders in the after-life as he did in real life. It is therefore mainly a change in the conception and exertion of sovereignty in this period and region that should have introduced the change in composition.¹⁴⁹ Research on mortuary practices of this period are still in an initial state.¹⁵⁰

Alternatively, it is also possible that no excursion is intended and that the tomb murals simply depict an inverted procession of officials, guards and riders guiding the host on his way to paradise. This could be correlated to the Chinese (and Daoist) cosmology of life and death, death corresponding to the tenebrous regions located in the north and symbolised by Fengdu, the Chinese Hades, life and immortality corresponding to the south symbolised by the South Pole star which Emperor deity keeps the registers of life. It is however not known if this representation corresponds in any way to mortuary ritual of this period.

Regardless the correct name, origin, and interpretation, the practice of depicting long files of soldiers and riders depicted on the passageway leaving the tomb became a standard and independent theme for Tang imperial tomb paintings, as recognised by many scholars.¹⁵¹

Modified into a tomb procession painting, tomb murals of the sixth century had seemingly lost their connection with Heavenly Court paintings. The painting had changed in compositional structure and in function. Yet, it maintained two important aspects: the division

(1983), pp. 1-23. The Lou Rui tomb murals seem to depict the riders going out on the east wall of the passage way and returning on the west wall. See Wu, “Where are They Going?” p. 31.

¹⁴⁷ Zhao, “You daoshi dao mudao,” p. 432.

¹⁴⁸ Zhao Yonghong suggests that the excursion scene was inherited from tomb decoration in South China. Zhao, “You daoshi dao mudao,” pp. 448-455.

¹⁴⁹ Such change in emphasis from audience ritual to excursion ritual may for example have been enticed by Buddhist rituals of carrying around statues on festival days, when the display of wealth and power could have led the emperor and local rulers to emphasise a similar display of wealth and power. The expedition tour already existed a long time but in the face of growing Buddhist presence it may have come more to the front. Evidence for such practices is for example found in Liu Shufen, “Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties,” *Asia Major* 3rd series 8.1 (1997), 19-47.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Yang Hong 楊泓, “Tan Zhongguo Han Tang zhijian zangsu de yanbian 談中國漢唐之間葬俗的演變” (A Discussion on the Development of Chinese Burial Customs of the Han-Tang Period). *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1999), pp. 60-68.

¹⁵¹ See e.g. Rawson, “Creating Universes,” p. 131, and Zhao, “You daoshi dao mudao,” p. 430.

over two walls and the display of an imperial court audience with soldiers, officials, court ladies, and attendants extending all the way from the inner tomb chambers to the outer passageway.

Heavenly Court paintings

No Heavenly Court representations survive from the period under discussion here, overlapping with the Early Phase (400-700), making it difficult to trace an exact development. However, I hope I have convincingly argued that the main characteristics of Heavenly Court paintings such as a unified composition divided over two walls depicting two processions facing north and the inclusion of officials and guards was a standard theme in various formats since at least the Later Han dynasty, and that all these various formats rely on or derive from the practice of court ritual, the *chao*-audience. I therefore term this theme a *chao*-audience theme. The shared structural and compositional characteristics of Heavenly Court representations as we know them from much later examples with the *chao*-audience theme, as well as their relationship with the *chao*-audience ritual, should demonstrate that painters worked with themes and modified them accordingly depending on the circumstances and the conceptions of the time and area.

Although a development from Han Homages scenes via donor scenes and tomb procession scenes to Daoist Heavenly Court paintings should be easily envisioned, determining when Heavenly Court representations emerged in this development is not. It seems that they were introduced in two stages.¹⁵² The first stage was when artists adopted the *chao*-audience theme as a vehicle for portraying a Daoist Heavenly Court representation in painting or sculpture, substituting the court officials in the representation with images of Daoist priests holding court tablets, such as in the Nanzhu guan 南竺觀 sculptures representing immortals and veritables (Fig. 1). This type of composition would still follow the spatial division over two walls and would be mostly adopted in the rectangular layout of a Daoist temple hall, even though there may have been only relatively few Daoist temples in the Early Phase. Yet, supernatural elements and a largely cosmological division of ritual space in the altar area seem to have dominated over the characteristics of court ritual, such as a more hierarchical and linear division of space.

¹⁵² The development sketched here remains hypothetical and is based on the information provided in this chapter in conjunction with the data provided by the historical outlines of Heavenly Court painting and Daoist ritual in the previous two chapters.

The second stage occurred during the mid-eighth century and is heavily implicated in the social and political changes of that time. The first exact reference to a Heavenly Court painting as witnessed in later examples is the set of murals by Wu Daozi 吳道子 in the Laozi temple on Mt. Beimang 北邙山 near Luoyang 洛陽. It seems very improbable that Wu Daozi invented the theme, and I would argue that he rather adopted an existing theme which he then modified to the changing needs of the time. The representation of the murals conjured up by the words of Du Fu's 杜甫 poem "The Five Saints line up in dragon robes,/a thousand officials march in goose file./Mian-crowns tower high [above the multitudes],/flags and banners rise up [in the sky]" could easily apply to the tomb procession theme of the Cui Fen tomb murals of 551 or the numerous donor scenes at Longmen and Mogao as well. It should however be noted that representations of Daoist deities in the guise of emperors are not known before this event – Tang Emperor Xuanzong was represented as a Daoist priest and not as an emperor, lest we forget – and even the procession type of composition is nowhere accounted for in early descriptions of Heavenly Court paintings in which there seem to have only a very few (main) deities. Although Wu Daozi may not have invented the theme of Heavenly Court painting, we can attribute to him the introduction of new aspects of an imperial presentation and a linear (hierarchical) arrangement of the procession in Daoist Heavenly Court painting.

The Laozi temple on Mt. Beimang represents an odd case where Daoism and state politics intertwine. Although a much older site dedicated to the Laozi cult, the temple on Mt. Beimang was "requisitioned" during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong as an ancestral temple of the Tang imperial family which worshipped Laozi as its first ancestor. Crucially, Wu Daozi depicted the portraits of the first five Tang emperors rather than paint deities in the costumes of Daoist priests.¹⁵³ In addition, as an imperial ancestral temple, it is perhaps not entirely surprising for Wu Daozi to adopt a *chao*-audience theme with its strong connotations to worship of ancestors and mortuary ritual.¹⁵⁴ Wu Daozi's murals should therefore be seen in

¹⁵³ The five Tang emperors were Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618-626), Taizong 太宗 (r. 627-649), Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650-683), Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 684, 705-710), and Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 684, 710-712). An imperial decree of 748 gave them and their consorts the title of Saint (*sheng* 聖). See Yuan, "Wu Daozi," p. 54. Interestingly, the *Xuanhe huapu*, p. 41 lists a painting titled "*Liesheng chaoyuan tu* 列聖朝元圖" under the heading of Wu Daozi. Since the title saint is only applied to ancestors (i.e. living persons) and never to Daoist deities, with the exception of Laozi and the Yellow Emperor who were considered to be the first ancestor of the imperial Tang and Song families, and also because Wu Daozi painted the Five Saints at Mt. Beimang, we could wonder if the painting in the Northern Song imperial collection was, or was thought to represent, a copy or drawing of Wu Daozi's murals at Mt. Beimang. The coincidence is striking and no other paintings of a Heavenly Court are known by Wu Daozi.

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, Mt. Beimang was already the designated location for imperial tombs since the Northern Wei after the court had moved to Luoyang and many tombs have been unearthed containing wall paintings.

the light of the appropriation of Daoism by the Tang imperial court, and the intended merging of the Daoist cult with the state cult.

One could further wonder if the adoption of an imperial representation of the Daoist Heavenly Court as well as the merging of the state cult and Daoism were perhaps induced by anti-Buddhist sentiments at the Tang court, sentiments shared by Confucians and Daoists alike.¹⁵⁵ The adoption of an imperial representation was aimed at providing the state with an image, both figuratively and literally, strong enough to compete with the omnipresence, wealth and opulence of Buddhist imagery, which was increasingly felt as a threat to the authority and integrity of the state.¹⁵⁶ The performance of Daoist rituals¹⁵⁷ as well as the supervision by Daoist clergy at this site and other Laozi temples in each prefecture then ensured that the imperial image became imbued with divine authority, a necessary weapon in the battle against the Buddhist visual hegemony.

It is uncertain if the imperial image immediately gained divine status, and probably this was a process that was only completed under the Northern Song. It is worth noting that the same scheme of adopting a Daoist deity as the first dynastic ancestor, in this case the Yellow Emperor, and having him worshipped with Daoist rituals, was continued in the Northern Song dynasty.¹⁵⁸ Our oldest painted example of a Heavenly Court painting is the drawing attributed to Wu Zongyuan (d. 1050), similarly depicting a procession of imperial figures assisted in a long file by court ladies and attendants (Plate 12), very reminiscent of the Cui Fen tomb murals (Fig. 22). One major difference is however that the imperial figures in the procession are no longer emperors but Daoist deities.

Unfortunately, the paintings are in too bad a state to provide any concrete information. See Zhao, *You mushi dao mudao*, p. 434.

¹⁵⁵ For anti-Buddhist sentiments in the Tang era, see Jan de Meyer, *Wu Yun's Way: Life and Works of an Eighth-Century Daoist Master*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 103-146.

¹⁵⁶ For the wealth of Buddhism in the Tang dynasty, the role of Buddhist imagery in displaying this wealth, and the threat of Buddhist wealth to the Tang court resulting in the Huichang persecution of Buddhism (841-846), see Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*. Translated by Franciscus Verellen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

¹⁵⁷ Daoist rituals not coincidentally also focused on the deities of the five directions. Rituals performed in these temples was the Golden Register Retreat (*jinlu zhai* 金錄齋). A stele inscription commemorating this type of ritual held in 743 in another Laozi temple has survived mentioning the Five Elders (*wulao* 五老), the Daoist deities of the five directions, but not the five Tang emperors. A much later stele inscription recorded in a local gazetteer mentions that the temple had murals depicting the portraits of six Tang emperors and survived up to 1916 when they were destroyed during a fire caused by recklessness while holding a ritual. Alas! See *Qingtang guan jinlu zhai song* 慶唐觀金錄齋頌. By Cui Mingyun 崔明允, 743. Chen, *Daojia jinshi lue*, pp. 137-138. A monograph on the history of this site, including this inscription, has been preserved in the Daoist Canon, *Longjiaoshan ji* 龍角山記 DZ 968. For the stele inscription in the local gazetteer, see *Fushan xianzhi* 浮山縣誌, 16.1b-2a. *Zhongguo fangzhi congshu* edition, reprint of 1935, Vol. 416. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1976, pp. 882-883.

¹⁵⁸ *Yuhai* j. 100. *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 945, p. 647.

Having established Heavenly Court painting as a fixed theme in Chinese painting history, we will now look at the ritual foundations that provided a conceptual framework for the painters to work from.