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The heavenly court: a study on the Iconopraxis of Daoist temple painting

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2 Ritual Foundations

This chapter will aim to reconstruct the conceptual framework on which painters based their compositions for Heavenly Court paintings. Heavenly Court paintings are intimately connected to Daoist ritual: the Chinese name of a Heavenly Court painting, *chaoyuan tu* 朝元圖 or *chaozhen tu* 朝真圖 (lit.: paintings of an audience with the origin or truth), is already an immediate reference to the liturgical foundation of the paintings, because they depict a court ritual, called a *chao*朝-audience, which is also the name of central ritual element in Daoist liturgy. The painting term is based on the liturgical term since earliest references to *chaozhen*, *chaoyuan* or other variations with *chao* already appeared from the fifth century onwards while the first known mentionings of *chaoyuan tu* or *chaoyuan tu* date to the early eleventh century.[1] In addition, Heavenly Court paintings are found only on locations where Daoist

[1] The earliest reference to *chaozhen* is found in the third chapter of the *Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱訣 DZ 421 compiled by Tao Hongjing (456-536) which quotes passages from an early Heavenly Master text, dating to the second or third centuries. I will deal with this audience ritual below. Many other references to various combinations with *chao* 朝 and denoting a Daoist *chao*-audience ritual are found in the *Zhengao* 真誥 DZ 1016, also compiled by Tao Hongjing and containing material from the fourth century, and in the *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, compiled in the early eleventh century but containing mostly material from the Tang or pre-Tang period. References to *chao*-audience rituals in the *Zhengao* are for example 14.2a: "*chao tiandihuang* 朝天帝皇" (on audience with the Heavenly Emperor Sovereign), 9.15a: "*chao taisu sanyuan* 朝太素三元" (on audience with the Three Original Ladies of Great Simplicity), and 2.9a "*bei chao wuhuang sanyuan* 北朝五皇三元" (on audience with the Five Sovereigns and Three Original Ladies); references in the *Yunji qiqian* are for example 45:12a: "*chengzhang chaozhen cun wufang qi* 呈章朝真存五方氣" (presenting a memorial, on audience with truth, and visualise the energies of the five direction), and 105:22b: "*Dadong zhenjing yi zhiyu chaoling zhi dao zhaoshen chengzhenren zhi fa ye* 大洞真經以致於朝靈之道招神成真人之法" (The *Dadong zhenjing* is a method to command spirits and become a veritable through the Way of going on audience with the numinous [deities]). References to Daoist *chao*-audience paintings are found in Huang Xiufu's *Yizhou minghua lu* (preface dated 1009), p. 131 recording a "*wuyue chaozhen tu* 五嶽朝真圖" (Painting of the Five Sacred Peaks on Audience with Truth) by Zhang Suqing (fl. 845-927); in Liu Daochun's *Songchao minghua ping* (before 1059), p. 49 recording a mural depicting "*wubai lingguan zhong tiannü chaoyuan* 五百靈官眾天女朝元" (Five Hundred Numinous Officials and an Assembly of Heavenly Maidens on Audience with the Origin) by Wang Zhuo (early 11th cent.); in Li Zhi's (1059-1109) *Hua pin* pp. 239, 259-260 recording a "*Ziwei chaohui tu* 紫微朝會圖" (Emperor of Purple Tenuity Heaven Holding Audience) by Zhang Tu (early 10th cent.) and a "*Yuhuang chaohui tu* 玉皇朝會圖" (Jade Emperor Holding Audience) and painted by Shi Ke (10th cent.); and the *Xuanhe huapu* (1119-1125) pp. 41, 89, 99 recording a "*liesheng chaozhen tu* 列聖朝真圖" (Painting of Exemplary Saints on Audience with Truth) by Wu Daozi, a "*changsheng chaoyuan tu* 長生朝元圖" (Painting of an Audience with the Origin for Longevity) by Wang Qihan 王齊翰 (ca. 961), and "*chaoyuan xianzhang tu* 朝元仙仗圖" (Painting of Immortals and Elders on Audience with the Origin) by Wu Zongyuan (d. 1050). These references to Heavenly Court paintings have been dealt with in the first chapter of this study.

liturgies were performed, either on open-air altars or in the central halls of temple complexes. The interrelationship between painting and liturgy provides us with great possibilities to investigate some important underlying principles for the composition of Heavenly Court paintings

The investigations will focus on four aspects which should provide the parameters for a conceptual framework: *chao*-audience ritual, altar layout, and cosmology. Daoist liturgy and in particular the *chao*-audience provides information on how paintings are addressed and used during a ritual performance. A traditional liturgy consists of first a *zhai* 齋-retreat during which a memorial is presented (called *jinbiao* 進表 in the ritual sequence) to an audience of deities in a Heavenly Court as visualised in the paintings of the ritual area, and is followed by a *jiao* 醮-offering, traditionally explained as a banquet (*yan* 筵), to thank the deities for their benevolence (*xie'en* 寫恩).[2] The altar setting gives detailed information on the location of paintings and images in a ritual area and its development is closely related to the development of Heavenly Court painting. Daoist cosmology is a fundamental issue of both Daoist ritual, altar layout and painting, and provides information on, in particular, the division of pictorial space.

Whereas the previous chapter mostly dealt with art historical sources and materials, this chapter will by contrast take Daoist scriptures, and in particular ritual manuals, as its source for investigation. The four surviving Heavenly Court paintings that form the subject of this study, supplemented with sources discussed in the first chapter, will serve as materials to which the information obtained from the ritual manuals can be compared. Although I will try to be comprehensive and pay attention to all periods, the main focus will be on the Middle Phase, or roughly the Song-Yuan period.

The conceptual framework culled from the ritual manuals, mainly those contained in the Ming Daoist Canon, only represents the view of the Daoist clergy, and probably only that of a selected few, on Heavenly Court paintings and their ritual praxis. No specific attempt is made to qualify this view further with regard to other social groups involved in the production of the paintings. These are discussed in the next chapters. So far as possible, the conceptual framework should represent a normative view of the Daoist clergy on the application and spatial division of Heavenly Court painting. No such normative view is ever pronounced in

[2] The first notable sequence of this kind is observed in Lu Xiujing's *Taishang dongxuan lingbao shoudu yi* 太上洞玄靈寶授度儀 DZ 528; the *xie'en* ritual is mentioned in a note (50b) explaining that its proceedings were recorded in a separate scroll. It seems however that a *jiao*-offering also could be performed independently and also contained a presentation of a memorial (*jinbiao*). From the Song onward, the names of *zhai* and *jiao* became confused and were often used interchangeably.

any Daoist text and therefore remains the product of this study, and is solely intended as a means to clarify the production process of Heavenly Court painting.

2.1 The *chao*-audience ritual

Daoist ritual is extremely broad and complex and may denote a wide variety of practices.[3] The Chinese term for Heavenly Court paintings, *chaoyuan tu* 朝元圖or *chaozhen tu* 朝真圖 (lit.: paintings of an audience with the origin or truth), however assumes that the paintings are a representation of what I designate as a *chao*-audience ritual.

This section will therefore specifically focus on the relationship between paintings and the *chao*-audience ritual, rather than attempting to provide a full account of the entire Daoist ritual history. I will investigate first the relationship between court ritual and Daoist liturgy, both of which ceremonies are called *chao*-audiences; I will then give a short overview of the ritual sequences and development of the *chao*-audience which began as a basic Heavenly Master ritual in the Later Han period and was integrated into Lingbao ritual in the fifth century which from then on became the standard tradition for performing Daoist liturgy; and in the last part of this section I will present a discussion on the unity between Heavenly Court paintings and *chao*-audience describing it as a fusion of cosmic energies.

Court ritual and Daoist liturgy

[3] Studies on Daoist ritual are numerous, most of these focus on ritual traditions in modern Taiwan, see for example Michael R. Saso, *Taoism and the Rite of Cosmic Renewal*. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1972; Kristofer M. Schipper, *Le Fen-teng: rituel taoïste*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1975; and idem, *The Taoist Body*. Translated by Karen C. Duval. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 (1994 reprint); Liu Zhiwan 劉枝萬, *Taiwan minjian xinyang lunji* 臺灣民間信仰論集. Taipei: Lianjiang chuban sheyi gongsi, 1983; John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*. New York: Macmillan, 1987;; Li Fengmao 李豐懋, Zhu Ronggui 朱榮貴 (eds.), *Yishi, miaohui yu shequ: daojiao minjian xinyang yu minjian wenhua* 儀式，廟會與社區：道教民間信仰與民間文化. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wen zhe yanjiusuo choubei chu, 1996; Ôfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾 (ed.), *Chûgokujin no shûkyô girei, Dôkyô hen* 中國人の宗教儀禮，道教篇. Tokyo: Fukyosha, 2005. For some recent studies on Daoist ritual in China mainland, see Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; and Chen Yaoting 陳耀庭, *Daojiao liyi* 道教禮儀. Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2003. Studies of ancient Daoist liturgy are less well represented, see for example Zhang Zehong 張澤洪, *Daojiao zhaijiao fuzhou yishi* 道教齋醮符咒儀式. Chengdu: Bashu chubanshe, 1999, and for a complete study of an eight century Daoist transmission ritual, see Benn, *The Cavern-Mystery Transmission*. The only full and annotated translation of a Daoist ritual texts is still Chavannes, "Le jet de dragons," pp. 55-220. A short survey of Daoist ritual including a comprehensive bibliography is found in Kenneth Dean, "Daoist Ritual Today." In Livia Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook*. Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 659-683.

Daoist liturgy is in its most basic structure a re-enactment of a court audience consisting of a ceremonial presentation of a memorial (*biao* 表) or petition (*zhang* 章) to a superior. The Daoist priest assumes the role of an official reporting his affairs by reading out a written memorial to the deities assembled in the Daoist Heavenly Court, the celestial counterpart of the imperial court on earth. Most importantly, the two court audiences are visualised as taking the same ritual layout, dating back supposedly to the times of the Zhou dynasty and recorded in the Confucian classics of ritual. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in ancient court ritual of the Zhou dynasty, the members of the audience were organised in two rows to the left (east) and right (west) facing north, while the emperor occupies the north and faces south, exactly the same arrangement found in Heavenly court paintings, as can be witnessed in a diagram of the Yongle gong murals (Fig. 24).[4] The emperor and audience members were all supposed to wear ceremonial robes and crowns, also in accordance with their rank.[5] A copperplate engraving of a court audience a the Qing court of 1830 demonstrates that this ritual format was still in practice at the end of the imperial period (Fig. 25). The close relationship between the ritual practice of this terrestrial imperial court and that of the imperial court in Heaven is aptly illustrated by the frontispiece of a Yuan woodblock print of the *Yushu baojing* 玉樞寶經 (Precious Scripture of the Jade Pivot), dated 1333, but in which the two rows have been transformed a bit to suit better the format of the frontispiece (Fig. 26).

The resemblance between court ritual and Daoist liturgy and the role of the Daoist priest as an official of a celestial bureaucracy would give credence to an interpretation of Heavenly Court paintings that ties in well with general conceptions of Chinese religion in imperial China and the role of Daoism therein. These general conceptions envisioned a supernatural world of palaces in multiple heavens inhabited by emperors and officials who rule over the affairs of the human world in a manner similar to the terrestrial emperor and his officials ruling over the Chinese empire. The celestial bureaucracy had strong judicial powers and kept track of one's good and bad deeds by recording these in registers, thus deciding disease, misfortune, and death of each person. In order to negotiate with the celestial bureaucracy and remedy a person's misfortunes, a Daoist priest could then in his capacity as an official of this celestial bureaucracy send up a memorial to a specific deity in a celestial department (often a constellation or star connected to the person's birthday) requesting the

[4] *Zhou li* 31.1b and *Li ji* 1.2a-b. For a study of memorials in Han bureaucracy, see Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006.
[5] *Yi li* 儀禮, second century, commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200). Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1984, 1.1a-b. Zheng Xuan's commentary provides the details on the dresses, presumably describing Han practices.

problem to be solved. In dealing with the official authorities on earth, a person would go through the similar process of presenting a petition – or rather finding an official presenting a petition on his behalf – in order to see a problem solved. Daoist liturgy with its central act of presenting petitions to a celestial bureaucracy, performed in the same fashion as at court, therefore tallied perfectly with the conceptions of its viewers and patrons, and undoubtedly reinforced the status of the Daoist priest as a representative of the celestial bureaucracy.

The resemblance between Daoist liturgy and court ritual can easily be interpreted as an imperial metaphor or allegory, and Heavenly Court paintings would readily support this view.[6] However, the imperial metaphor of Daoist religion presents only the outer surface, the part that is visible to the public eye. Such a metaphor presumes a direct correlation between an imperial court audience and Daoist Heavenly Court paintings, and although this may be intended to some extent, the relationship is only superficial, because the interpretation of an imperial metaphor could hardly explain the finer details of a Heavenly Court composition except for the division into a left and right audience focused on the north and an imperial iconography of most deities. In order to be able to define a ritual framework for a Heavenly Court composition, it is necessary to investigate the practice of a *chao*-audience a little bit closer.

Daoist liturgy is composed of an external and internal component, which are performed simultaneously during the liturgy.[7] The external component entails the various movements and actions of the priest in the ritual area and consists of all physical and material, and therefore externally visible, liturgical observances. The internal component is the part of the ritual that is played out inside the body of the priest and consists of all mentally visualised, and therefore externally invisible, liturgical observances. In both cases, the *chao*-audience is acted out as a presentation of a memorial, in the external ritual literally entailing the reading out of a memorial in front of the audience of deities represented in the Heavenly Court painting (or sculptures) and finally its burning symbolising its transformation and sending up to heaven; in the internal ritual this presentation is visualised as a spiritual journey to a palace in heaven where the memorial is handed over to the deities of the Heavenly Court.

In Daoist ritual, the internal component prevails over the external component. Although the external ritual requires only a minimum of altar settings and actions, any ritual would fail to accomplish its envisioned result without the proper command of visualisation

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[6] On this topic, see Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, and Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China. The Imperial Metaphor*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
[7] See also Kenneth Dean, "Daoist Ritual Today."

techniques. This stance also explains why Heavenly Court paintings are regarded, in Daoist texts at least, as tools for visualisation and why they can even be discarded with.[8]

Development and sequence

As far as can be judged from surviving materials, the *chao*-audience ritual originated with the Heavenly Master order of the Late Han and merged in the fifth century with the ancient Lingbao tradition to form the traditional Lingbao *zhai* 齋-retreat as performed to this day.

The earliest Heavenly Master rituals were called a *chaozhen* 朝真 or an "audience with truth." This audience ritual was always conducted inside an oratory where the liturgy consisted of a simple sequence of lighting the incense burner (*falu*), protecting the four directions by the four heraldic animals (of the four directions, *sishen* 四神), dispatching the (bodily) officials (*chuguan* 出官), presenting a memorial (*zouzhang* 奏章), and their reversal, returning the (bodily) officials (*naguan* 納官) and covering the incense burner (*fulu* 復爐).[9] There is no indication that ancient Lingbao ritual included a presentation of a memorial although a kind of Heavenly Court with assembled deities was visualised in the ritual area.[10]

The merging of liturgical procedures also meant a merging of ritual space. The ritual space of the Heavenly Masters was an oratory in which basically a visualised court audience took place while the Lingbao altar was closely associated in layout and conception to the Altar of Heaven, on which principally a sacrificial or offering ritual was held.[11] Heavenly

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[8] I will come back to this issue in the section below on ritual function.

[9] This sequence is culled from ancient Heavenly Master material collected in the *Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱訣 DZ 421 by Tao Hongjing (456-536). See Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, "Das Ritual der Himmelsmeister im Spiegel früher Quellen: Übersetzung un Untersuchung des liturgischen Materials im dritten chüan des *Teng-chen yin-chüeh*." PhD Dissertation, Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, 1987, reviewed in Anna Seidel, "Early Daoist Ritual." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 4 (1988), pp. 199-204. This information tallies with the descriptions found in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, compiled by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, j. 8, p. 264, and in Kou Qianzhi's 寇謙之 (365-448) *Laojun yinsong jie jing* 老君音頌戒經 DZ 785, 10a-13b. A more precise and original description of the early Heavenly Master *chao*-audience is found in two slightly different versions contained in the *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, 41.12b-14b and 45.7b-11a, both called *chaozhen yi* 朝真儀 or "rituals for going on audience with the truth." The Song ritual manual, *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀 DZ 508, chapter 22, contains a later elaboration on the Heavenly Master ritual but for a *jiao*-offering.

[10] *Dongxuan lingbao changye zhi fu jiuyou yugui mingzhen ke* 洞玄靈寶長夜之九幽玉匱明真科 DZ 1411. For the authenticity of this text and its use as a source for later Lingbao *zhai*-retreats, in particular the Golden Register Retreat (*jinlu zhai* 金籙齋) and Yellow Register Retreat (*huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋), see John Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao. Somme taoïste du VIe siècle.* Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981, pp. 161-165.

[11] On the relationship between the Daoist altar and the Altar to Heaven, see John Lagerwey, "Taoist Ritual Space and Dynastic Legitimacy." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995), pp. 87-94. See also the next section on altar space below. Interestingly, the description of the ancient Lingbao altar with five gates in *Taishang dongxuan lingbao chishu yujue miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶赤書玉訣秒經 DZ 352, 2.20a-22a is called a *jiao*-offering altar, suggesting that the ancient Lingbao altar was originally a sacrificial altar (to which deities descend) in contrast to

Court paintings thus depict the audience in heaven and is not an offering to deities who have descended to the altar site.

With the fusion of Heavenly Master and ancient Lingbao liturgy, which already had absorbed some elements of Buddhist ritual, probably during the time of Lu Xiujing (407-477), the *chaozhen* ritual transformed into a long sequence of ritual elements which were placed before (a-d, h) and after (e-g) the formal presentation of the memorial (*jinbiao* 進表). Important elements were, among others, (a) the distribution of lamps (*fendeng* 分燈) for inviting the deities to attend the ritual; (b) the installation of the ritual area defined by the placement of the Five True Writs (*wu zhenwen* 五真文) on five tables fixed (*zhen* 鎮) by five golden dragons appeasing the five directions; (c) several homage rituals such as to the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶, i.e. Dao, scriptures, and master), the ten directions (*li shifang* 禮十方) – a Buddhist element – and the Three Masters (*li sanshi* 禮三師); (d) a ritual dance of Pacing the Void (*buxu* 步虛)[12] always held prior to the presentation of memorial which was also identified with a report of merit (*yangong* 言功) - a term deriving from court ritual. After the presentation of the memorial there was further a (e) tossing of dragons and slips (*tou longjian* 投龍簡) to the Three Officials of Heaven, Earth and Water – a ritual element also adopted from the Heavenly Master order;[13] (f) after dismantling the ritual area (*santan* 散壇), (g) a *jiao* 醮-offering was finally held to thank the gods for their presence and benevolence.[14] In later times, this ritual sequence was further expanded with elements such as (h) the Rites of Deliverance (*liandu* 煉度) for the salvation of the soul from the Song onward, and the expanded *jiao*-offerings as codified by the Northern Song court. Rituals could last one, three,

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the Heavenly Master oratory which is based on a court audience ritual (to which the priest ascends). These two spaces (and in fact contradictory movements) are fused in the traditional Lingbao liturgy since the fifth century.

[12] The translation "pacing the void" was first made by Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977.

[13] This rite was moved to the end of the ritual sequence from the Tang onward. It was also an almost independent ritual when performed on behalf of the court on sacred mountains and rivers. See Chavannes, "Le jet de dragons," for a study of this ritual.

[14] Lu Xiujing's *Taishang dongxuan lingbao shoudu yi* DZ 528, an ordination ritual text, perfectly exemplifies the fusion between early Heavenly Master and ancient Lingbao ritual in the fifth century. Curiously, this ritual text contains no homage to the ten directions, a Buddhist element. See further *Wushang biyao* 無上祕要 DZ 1138, a Daoist encyclopedia of the late sixth century that contains many quotations and summaries of Daoist liturgy as codified after the time of Lu Xiujing. The *Wushang biyao* is studied in John Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao. Somme taoïste du VIe siècle.* Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981. Research on the earliest forms of Daoist liturgy is only at a preliminary stage and the development sketched here should be seen as a contribution to this research as seen from the development of Heavenly Court painting. See for example, Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism." *T'oung Pao* 66 (1980), pp. 84-147, Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-Bao Scriptures," in Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein*, Vol. 2. Brussels: Institute Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1985, pp. 434-486, and Lü Pengzhi and Patrick Sigwalt, "Les textes du Lingbao ancien dans l'histoire du taoïsme." *T'oung Pao* 91 (2005), pp. 183-209.

or more days and each day had three audiences (*chao* 朝) during which all kinds of written memorials were presented; the presentation of the memorial during the report of merit on the last day would however remain the most important one after which all memorials together with the True Writs were burned.

The development outlined here is of course a very general picture of Daoist liturgy, but in Lu Xiujing's time already many types of rituals existed, differentiated according to social class (court, commoner, Daoist clergy) and function (salvation of souls, confession of sins, seeking immortality, averting calamity and natural disasters etc.).[15] From the fifth century, these Lingbao rituals – and what I term the "traditional" Lingbao liturgy - were no longer called *chao*-audiences but *zhai*-retreats. In classical times, a *zhai*-retreat originally meant the purification period of fasting and bathing before a blood-sacrifice *(si* 祀 or *ji* 祭) of a victim, which was now replaced by a *jiao*-offering of vegetable substances like tea, flowers, fruit, and incense.[16] The two most important type of rituals were however the Golden Register Retreat (*jinlu zhai* 金籙齋) held for the well-being of the emperor and the state, and the Yellow Register Retreat (*huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋) performed for the salvation of the soul of the deceased. The functions of these retreats were largely expanded in later times, and their names were even confused with *jiao*-offerings which mainly had an exorcist function, resulting later on in a division of rituals for the living (the former Golden Register Retreat, today called a *jiao*-offering) and the dead (the former Yellow Register Retreat, today called a *zhai*-retreat),[17] a division already witnessed in the early fourteenth century ritual manual *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* 靈寶領教濟度金書 (Golden Book of Salvation of the Lingbao Tradition).[18]

Regardless of the type of liturgy or the order of its elements, the *chao*-audience of presenting a memorial remained the most quintessential part of the Daoist liturgy.[19] This part is variously termed *yangong* or *jinbiao* in the description of ritual sequences in ritual manuals.

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[15] For a convenient summary of the various types of Daoist ritual and their differences, see Chen, *Daojiao liyi*, pp. 72-88.

[16] *Jiao*-offerings could also be performed independently, often for exorcist or therapeutic purposes, but a presentation of a petition or memorial – the audience - would still form the central act of the ritual.

[17] The correlation with the former retreats is the situation in South Taiwan (and among the Yao). See Schipper, *Le Fen-teng: rituel taoïste*.

[18] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 1.25b and 2.1a-14a makes a division between exorcism (*qirang* 祈禳) for the living, and a Rite of Deliverance (*kaidu* 開度) for the dead. This division is repeated in the Ming ritual manual *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書, compiled in 1432 by Zhou Side 周思德 (1359-1451), chapter 25. In *Zangwai daoshu* 臧外道書 (hereafter abbreviated as ZWDS), Zangwai daoshu bianweihui 臧外道書編委會 (ed.). Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992, Vol. 17, pp. 71-105.

[19] See the remark on this subject in Kristofer M. Schipper, *Exposé de titres et travaux*. Paris, 1983, pp. 28.

In the ritual sequence where the presentation is mentioned, the ritual manual itself often provides no more information than a short note by the compiler that the presentation is performed in kneeling position in the direction of the Gate of Heaven (*tianmen* 天門), that is the north-western direction in the altar layout, followed by the instruction "to visualise the deities and the presentation [of the memorial] according to ritual" (*cunshen chengjin ru yi* 村神呈進如儀).[20] At this point it is perhaps of interest to note that both the Yongle gong and the Toronto murals have included a pictorial reference to this praxis. Namely, the Yongle gong has a depiction of a Daoist priest (101), one of the Three Masters, bowing in front of the Heavenly Sovereign (*tianhuang* 天皇, IV) – a deity traditionally identified with Heaven (*tian* 天) – aptly depicted on the northwest wall (Fig. 27), while the Toronto murals depict an image of a Daoist priest (B12) on the (northern part of the) west wall on the place where normally the Heavenly Sovereign is located, thus sublimating the two and attributing a divine status of the Daoist priest.

The particular information on the "visualisation of the deities presenting the memorial" is however found in the explanatory sections on visualisations of these ritual manuals, where they are referred to with different names, such as "audience with the origin" (*chaoyuan*), "presenting a memorial" (*jinbiao*), or simply "visualisation" (*cunsi*).[21] Almost all of these references appear in Song ritual manuals on Lingbao liturgy, but the oldest description is found in a repository of early Heavenly Master writings, the *Chisongzi zhangli* 赤松子章歷 (Petition Almanac of Master Redpine). Since it is also the most complete description I will provide here a translation:

> "*Visualisation*. The Ritual Codes state: after recollecting yourself, prostrate on the ground in front of the table and visualise a scarlet red *qi* rise form your heart to heaven. In a moment, you have traversed one hundred *li* (3 km) on the scarlet red *qi*. The road is winding and rolling and on both sides completely screened off by numerous precious trees. Suddenly you see the Yellow Way; that is the Yellow Way of the sun and moon. When you have travelled the yellow way for about five or six *li* (1500-1800 m), you see in the distance a purple cloud hidden and indistinct. Arriving at the purple

[20] Cf. *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi*, dated 1223, DZ 508, 18.7b.

[21] *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* 太上黃籙齋儀 by Du Guangting DZ 507, 49.7b-8a; *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 44.1a-3b; *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 by Wang Qizhen 王契真 DZ 1221, 3.13a-15b, 54.20b-21b, 26b-27a; *Lingbao yujian* 靈寶玉鑒 DZ 547, 13.2a-4a and 21.21b-24a; *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶無量度人上經大法 DZ 219, 46.7a-8a; and *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 283.5a-7a, 17a-22a.

cloud, you see the Gate of Heaven. The gate measures three *zhang* and eight feet (5.4 m) [high?] and is guarded on all sides preventing you from entering. The messengers and meritorious officers are allowed to hand over the petition only to General Zhou. A jade boy then takes the petition and memorial to the Portal (*que* 闕) gate below which he is ceremonially received on the west by the ritual master of the Three Heavens of Correct Unity surnamed Zhang and with the name Daoling. After bowing twice, he shows the petition and memorial and state the reasons of your affairs. He bows nine times for the Heavenly Master and proceeds to below the gate of the Phoenix Pavilion. Shortly after you have entered [the gate], an immortal boy will appear in a red robe and wearing a mystery-crown to whom you must hand over the petition. A jade boy will collect the petition and memorial and after entering for a while he will reappear and guide you inside where you see the Superior Supreme (i.e. Laozi).

The Superior Supreme is donned in a cape of nine-coloured cloud mists and wearing a nine-powers crown. He sits in the hall accompanied to his left and right sides by a mysterious veritable and guards. You also see Great Unity (*taiyi* 太一) wearing a red robe and a mystery crown.

The Superior Supreme [receives] the petition and memorial.

The Superior Supreme reads it once and hands it over to Great Unity.

The Superior Supreme notifies the relevant department [in charge of solving the problem mentioned in the petition], and descends from the jade steps of Great Purity [Heaven], writing [on the petition] the character for "approved'" (*yi* 依). You then see an immortal boy receiving the petition and memorial on the staircase to the right and distributing it among the officers and officials of that day making them bow in their hearts twice and bidding farewell.

The Superior Supreme leaves through a door and after bowing twice you bid the Heavenly Master farewell. Together with the true officials who [escorted] the presentation of the petition, you return walking to the place where you presented the immortal (i.e. the oratory). You get up [from the original kneeling position in which the visualisations took place] and make known [the result]."[22]

[22] *Chisongzi zhangli* DZ 615, 2.23b-24b. On this scripture, see also Peter Nickerson, "The Great Petition for Sepulchral Plaints." Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 230-274, and Franciscus Verellen, "Tianshidao shangzhang keyi: "Chisongzi zhangli" he "Yuanchen zhangjiao licheng li" yanjiu 天師道上章科儀: "赤松子章曆" 和 "元辰章醮立成曆" 研究." Li Zhitian (Lai Chi-tim) 黎志添, *Daojiao yanjiu yu Zhongguo zongjiao wenhua* 道教研究與中國宗教文化. Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 2003, pp. 37-71.

The audience at the Heavenly Court of the early Heavenly Master order is visualised as a spiritual journey of the Daoist priest through the Milky Way which comes to an end below a palace gate, generally referred to as the Golden Portal (*jinque* 金闕), where some formal transactions should take place before the priest can enter. Inside the palace, the Superior Supreme, or Laozi, assisted by Great Unity, finally reads and approves the memorial presented to him, bringing the audience to a completion and after which the priests returns to the oratory – the standard place where Heavenly Master priests conduct their *chao*-audience rituals - taking the same route back. Unfortunately, no detailed information is given on the representation of the interior of this Heavenly Court besides the mentioning of gates, a pavilion and a flight of steps below the throne of the Superior Supreme. The text neither gives detailed information on the iconography of the deities mentioned, only describing the colours and types of crowns and gowns, an idiosyncrasy of both Daoist iconography and Chinese imperial court ritual. The description is too terse to reconstruct a Heavenly Court painting but it is interesting to point out that the specific mentioning of one veritable to both the left and right side of Laozi tallies with surviving stele carvings from Shaanxi province from the late fifth and early sixth century, suggesting that both text and stele are representations of the same ritual praxis.[23] An illustrated ritual manual for visualisations made during the liturgy of the Tang dynasty and presumably of Heavenly Master origins, *Laojun cunsi tu shiba pian* 老君存思圖十八篇 (Lord Lao's Illustrations for Visualisation in Eighteen Sections), gives a depiction of a Daoist priest ascending with his retinue to the Heavenly Court supervised by the Superior Supreme (Fig. 28).

The explanations for a visualised *chao*-audience in Song ritual manuals are an elaboration on the Heavenly Master audience.[24] Most of them follow a basic structure and, taking the explanation in the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* as a basic source of reference, it can be summarised as follows:[25] 1) beginning in the oratory and transforming the body; 2)

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[23] See for example theYao Boduo 姚伯多 stele dated 496, the Yang Eshao 楊阿紹 stele dated 500, and the Feng Shengyu 馮神育 stele dated 505 in Stanley K. Abe, "Heterological Visions: Northern Wei Daoist Sculpture from Shaanxi Province." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996-1997), pp. 69-83, figs. 2, 7, 9.

[24] The *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 283.5a-7a, 17a-22a provides the longest and most detailed explanation and is clearly based on the *Chisongzi zhangli* described above, as are some parts of the *Lingbao yujian* DZ 547, 21.21b-24a. Du Guangting's annotation in *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* DZ 507, 49.7b-8a is copied verbatim in Jiang Shuyu's *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 44.1a-3b. The *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1221 by Wang Qizhen has many aspects in common with the *Lingbao yujian* DZ 547. Only the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* DZ 219 seems to be independent in outlook and uses much Shangqing terminology.

[25] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 283.17a-22a is divided into three sections, each which more or less describe the same audience. In the summary provided here, I have for convenience sake integrated the three sections into one sequence. In the text, for example, an audience takes first place in front of the Heaven's Gate

visualisations in front of the "curtains" of the Three Masters and the Mysterious Master; 3) fusing the *qi* in the colours green-blue, yellow, and white of the three cinnabar fields (of the lower, middle and upper body) in the middle cinnabar field (Yellow Court, or Red Palace); 4) entering the ritual area through the Royal Gate (*dumen* 都門) in the south on the lower tier, passing the Earth Door (*dihu* 地戶) in the southeast corner on the middle tier and moving to Heaven's Gate (*tianmen* 天門) in the northwest corner;[26] 5) performing the nine steps of Pacing the Void, each step ascending one step of the staircase of the Yuluoxiao Terrace 鬱羅蕭臺 (where the Superior Supreme resides) and each step accompanied by one stanza of the hymn, the tenth stanza for reaching the summit;[27] 6) crossing the Rainbow Bridge; 7) reaching the Three Gates of Heaven guarded by the three generals Zhou 周, Ge 葛, and Tang 唐; 8) entering the Golden Portal; 9) audience with the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning seated on a throne of five-coloured lions amidst rays of golden light and assisted on both sides by multitudes of veritables; 10) erasing sins from the purple register (of death) held by the veritable on the left side and adding one's name to the red register of life on the right side; 11) the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning signing the memorial with the character for "approved" (*yi* 依); 12) returning through the Three Gates of Heaven, the Rainbow Bridge, to the middle cinnabar field (Red Palace); 13) ending in the oratory.[28]

At first sight, a connection of the *chao*-audience with Heavenly Court painting seems difficult to make; paintings are not mentioned in the description and of the many deities depicted only a handful appears in the explanations. The most important deity in the text is the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning, the central deity of the Daoist Three Purities, which in the Lingbao *chao*-audience has replaced the Superior Supreme - in one other text the central deity is even identified as the High Emperor (*shangdi*) of the state cult.[29] Other deity

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on the altar while later almost the same audience is held on the separate Petition Presentation Altar, but this is only a later development. The sections also seem to have been compiled from different sources, i.e. Lingbao, Heavenly Master and Shangqing texts but this would need further study.

[26] For a description of the Daoist altar, see the next section on altar space.

[27] On the hymn of Pacing the Void (*buxu*) and its use in Daoist liturgy as a means to accessing a different space-time continuum, see Kristofer M. Schipper and Wang Hsiu-huei, "Progressive and Regressive Time Cycles in Taoist Ritual." J.T. Fraser (ed.), *The Study of Time*. Vol. V. *Time, Science and Society in China and the West*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986, pp. 185-205, idem, "A Study of *Buxu*: Taoist Liturgical Hymn and Dance." Pen-yeh Tsao and Daniel P.L. Law (eds.), *Studies of Taoist Rituals and Music of Today*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1989, pp. 110-120, idem, "Progrès et régression ou l'immortalité sans peine." *Piste* 2 (1990), pp. 61-72. See also, Poul Andersen, "The Practice of *Bugang*." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-1990), pp. 15-53. Many different versions of this important hymn of Pacing the Void exist but to date only one has been translated, Edward H. Schafer, "Wu Yün's 'Cantos on Pacing the Void.'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981), pp. 377-415.

[28] Cf. *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 319.11a.

[29] *Lingbao yujian* DZ 547, 22.21a.

figures mentioned are the Three Generals Zhou Wu 周武, Ge Yong 葛雍, and Tang Hong唐宏, three meritorious generals of the Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-771), who are depicted in the Yongle gong murals on the southern part of the east wall (197-199) (Plate 3).[30]

Yet, while not all deities seem to play a role in the Heavenly Court audience or receive memorials, their inclusion is significant for the performance of the visualised *chao*-audience.

Fusion

The deities represented in Daoist Heavenly Court paintings are the cosmological counterparts of the deities residing inside the priest's body.[31] The whole *chao*-audience is a ritual during which the deities of the outer cosmos are fused with the deities of the inner cosmos. This process is "translated" in the liturgy, in the visual setting of the Heavenly Court painting, and in various ritual attributes as an imperial metaphor of court ritual. However, the sequence of dispatching the (bodily) officials (*chuguan*) and presenting a memorial (*jinbiao*) is basically an allegory itself for a re-creation of the cosmos in its original state (*yuan* or *zhen*). The Chinese name for the Heavenly Court paintings as *chaoyuan tu* or *chaozhen tu* is therefore very aptly chosen.

The *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶無量度人上經大法 (Great Method of the Immeasurably High Salvation Scripture of the Lingbao Tradition, ca. 1200) makes the most explicit statements, in distinct Shangqing terminology in which it differs from the other manuals, that the deities visualised inside the body of the priest fuse (*hunhe* 混合) with the deities of the outer cosmos. In a paragraph on *Methods for sending up memorials in a flight* (*feizou zhi fa* 飛奏之法) the text states for example that:

> "The energies of the human body fuse with the energies of all the heavens. From his conception in the womb, man's correct energies are muddled with false energies,

[30] The names of the Three Generals together with iconographic descriptions of crown, gown and attributes are found in *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* DZ 219, 46, 5b-6a. These descriptions do not match their representation in the Yongle gong murals. The Three Generals were also incorporated in the registers of the early Heavenly Masters, see *Jiao sandong zhenwen wufa zhengyi mengwei lu licheng yi* 醮三洞真文五法正一盟威籙立成儀 DZ 1212, 12b-13b, edited by Zhang Wanfu 張萬福 (fl. 700-742). Interestingly, paintings of the Three Generals are still used among Heavenly Master Daoist priests of the Yao minority, see Pourret, *The Yao*, pp. 230-231.

[31] This practice probably stems from Heavenly Master ritual in which the Register of the Covenant of the Allied Powers of Correct Unity (*zhengyi weimeng lu*) in twenty-four parts (which also correspond to twenty-four grades of initiation) constitute all the powers residing in one's body, visualised as in total 1200 officials, that merge with their counterparts in heaven (also numbering 1200). See the "Explanation on the Correct Unity Registers" (*ming zhengyi lu* 明正一籙) preserved in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, 45.2a-4a.

therefore the human body has twelve knots (four in each cinnabar field) and thirty-nine death gates (thirteen for each cinnabar field). If one can dissolve the twelve knots and thirty-nine death gates, then man's true energies will rise and communicate with heaven."[32]

The text continues with explaining that all these energies fuse and return as one unified body called "Emperor One" (*diyi* 帝一) who returns to the Yellow Court. This procedure is explained in more detail in a section titled *chaoyuan* in the same text: the deities of the three cinnabar fields of the priest's lower, middle and upper body rise to the Clay Pill (*niwan* 尼丸), the upper cinnabar field in the crown of the head, where they fuse with the Three Purities, and unified as one (i.e. Emperor One) return to the middle cinnabar field, the Yellow Court (*huangting* 黃庭).[33] An illustration of this visualisation of the Emperor One is found in an illustrated version of the *Dadong zhenjing*大洞真經 (True Scripture of the Great Cavern) the central text of the Shangqing tradition and first compiled in the fourth century and appended with illustrations on a later date (Fig. 29). An illustration of the visualisation of the Three Purities is also found in the *Laozi cunsi tu shiba pian* (Fig. 30).

Although steeped in Shangqing lore, this particular manual fills in a lacuna on the inner visualisation of deities left open in our previous discussion on the *chao*-audience: the deities depicted in Heavenly Court paintings are exactly those representing the deities of all the heavens and not those of ones body. This finding could easily relate to other Daoist orders and traditions as well, even though the numbers and names of the deities may differ.

It is even possible to narrow down the relationship between paintings and the *chao*-audience even further. The *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* relates the just mentioned thirty-nine death gates, together with the twenty-four life-diagrams (*shengtu* 生圖, eight for each cinnabar field) of an ancient Lingbao text, to the ritual of dispatching the officials (*chuguan*). The text specifies that these deities are the deities of the five organs and all other body parts. In other words, amalgamating both Shangqing and Lingbao tradition, the ritual of dispatching

[32] *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* DZ 219, 46.9b-10a.
[33] *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* DZ 219, 46.8a. Cf. *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 54.20b-21b where this sequence is performed inside the oratory in preparation of the presentation of the memorial. These visualisation can be compared to the Shangqing meditation technique of the "Audience with the Three Original Ladies" (*chao sanyuanjun* 朝三元君) as described in considerable detail in the *Dongzhen gaoshang yudi dadong ciyi yujian wulao baojing* 洞真高上玉帝大洞雌一玉檢五志寶經 DZ 1313, 27a-31a and the *Shangqing sanyuan yujian sanyuan bujing* 上清三元玉檢三元布經 DZ 354, 40a-47b, and paraphrased in *Zhengao* 真誥 DZ 1016, 9.14b-15a. The method also appears in the *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, 41.14b-15a and 21b-23b. Another, slightly different explanation of the technique and its main deities, however without any reference to the *chao*-audience, is found in Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, pp. 128-129, 132-133.

the officials entails the gathering of all the bodily deities – those of the five viscera being the most prominent – and having them fused with all the deities of the outer cosmos. The visualisations for the ritual of dispatching the officials, as explained in the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*, entails a formation of deities that is very similar as the one found in a Heavenly Court composition; namely, the Daoist priest calls forth all the deities of his body (which he fuses with their counterparts in heaven – the deities of the Heavenly Court paintings) and arranges them in a cortege surrounding his body.[34] Transforming them into a single great procession of officials, clerks and soldiers (the bodily deities are mostly minor officials), they accompany the priest on his ascend to Heaven's Gate where the officials will handle the affairs of transmitting the memorial, the part described in the *Chisongzi zhangli* translated above. In the Heavenly Court paintings, a similar procession of deities (unmistakably all high-ranking deities) is witnessed on its way to the Three Purities, sometimes depicted in active motion such as in the Toronto murals (Plates 4 and 5). Again, the proceedings of court ritual – I am inclined to believe that such descriptions of dispatching officials are based on actual court ritual practice – are an allegory or imperial metaphor for meditations on cosmological processes.

The imperial metaphor continues in fact with the images of the Three Purities that in a Heavenly Court composition receive the audience or procession of deities. We have seen above that the Three Purities are fused with the deities of the three cinnabar fields of the Daoist priest's body. This is the last preparatory stage before the priest fuses the Three Purities into one deity. This final stage is however not reflected in the Heavenly Court paintings, but entails a reversal of the creation of the cosmos during which the priest returns from a pluralist to a unified state. The deity of this final stage has several names, such as Emperor One in the Shangqing tradition, the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning of the Lingbao tradition, or the Superior Supreme (Laozi) in the Heavenly Master order, but the most important aspect is that this deity is the "original deity" (*yuanshen* 元神) of the Daoist

[34] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 282.22b-23b. For another example, see Lu Xiujing's *Taishang dongxuan lingbao shoudu yi* DZ 528, 4b-6b, also quoted in Du Guangting's *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* DZ 507, 1.3a-5a. These are probably an elaboration of Heavenly Master visualisation for the *chuguan*-ritual, cf. *Zhengyi chuguan zhangyi* 正一出官章儀 DZ 795, 1-3b.

priest him- or herself.[35] It is even possible to liken this original state to the Dao itself: the priest is the Dao.[36]

The *chao*-audience is therefore played out on two levels: first, a liturgical level on which the Daoist priest is on audience with the deities of a Daoist Heavenly Court presenting his memorial; and second, a visualised level on which the deities of the cosmos, as manifestations of his own bodily deities, become subordinated to his power and are in fact on audience with him, the memorials acting instead as orders rather than requests or prayers.[37] Regardless the paradox of the visible and visualised, both spheres adhere to the same ritual or cosmological structure, and understanding this structure allows us to understand the pictorial structure of Daoist Heavenly Court paintings. We will therefore now first look at Daoist altar space and its structures.

2.2 Paintings in altar setting

The most concrete information on the use of Heavenly Court representations in Daoist liturgy is found in descriptions for the correct layout of a ritual area. Ritual manuals, mostly dating to the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) often give descriptions and diagrams for the correct layout of an open-air altar, usually conceived as a three-tiered mound set with gates made of bamboo poles and cordoned by coloured ribbons, flags, curtains, and from the Transitional Phase also by paintings. Although ritual manuals may differ in content and outlook – differences that can often be explained by different regional or lineage traditions - the liturgical elements and altar layouts they describe are remarkably consistent for each period. This is important, because the consistency in text allows us to connect aspects of the ritual performance to compositional structures in Heavenly Court paintings.

It should be noted however that nowhere in the ritual manuals is any reference made to the standard Chinese term for a Heavenly Court painting, *chaoyuan tu* 朝元圖, let alone wall paintings. Only in very few instances, direct references are made to "images" (*xiang* 像),

[35] *Lingbao yujian* DZ 547, 17.1b writes: "the ruling god is called Cinnabar Original Lord, i.e. your own original spirit (*ziji yuanshen* 自己元神)." See also Wang Qizhen's *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1221, 55.1a where it says: "visualise the deities and transform your body into the Heavenly Worthy of Original Beginning."

[36] The relationship between Dao and the self is the subject of a study by Kristofer M. Schipper, "Dao yu wu 道與吾" (The Dao and I). *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 15 (1999), pp. 399-403.

[37] As suggested by the textual sources, the liturgical level seems to be more valued in the Lingbao traditions and the Heavenly Master order, while the visualised level is more emphasised in the Shangqing tradition.

which may refer to both paintings and statues, or to "paintings" (*hua* 畫). The term "picture" (*tu* 圖) is not encountered in connection to Heavenly Court paintings in ritual manuals (the term was introduced most probably by painting critics of the Song we must remember). *Tu* can generally denote any type of drawing, including paintings, diagrams, illustrations in texts, and even talismans. The term is mostly encountered in the titles of Daoist scriptures. Context determines the exact meaning of a term, sometimes even without mentioning any painting or image. For example, from the word "hanging" (*xuan* 懸) we can infer that hanging scroll paintings are intended. In the specific case of altar descriptions, paintings – but sometimes also statues or tablets - are indicated by the word "curtain" (*mu* 幕, *zhang* 帳), a tent-like structure which shielded paintings of deities on three sides, at least in the Southern Song (1127-1279) and Yuan (1260-1368) dynasties.[38] Lastly, in some instances paintings are indicated by the term for a "seat" (*zuo* 坐 or *wei* 位) which may either be represented by an image, a tablet (*ban* 版or *pai*牌) or a banner (*fan* 幡). The context then makes clear which type is intended.

Besides a survey of the layout and development of the Daoist ritual area, this section will further discuss some issues related to paintings in altar settings. These issues are: *jiao* 醮 -offering lists and memorial lists which provide the names for the deities incorporated in the ritual area; the increase of the ritual pantheon of deities as reflected in the altar layout and explained in ritual manuals; the relationship of the Daoist altar with the temple space which started out as two separate spaces but which were gradually merged; the viewers of the Heavenly Court paintings or who was allowed in the ritual area and who was therefore allowed to see these paintings; and the question of the ritual function of Heavenly Court paintings.

Layout and development

The layout and development of the Daoist altar (*daotan* 道壇) or ritual area (*daochang* 道場 lit. "area of the Dao") closely follows the development of Heavenly Court paintings and I will employ here the same division in four phases to describe the development. I will only present a historical development for the so-called Lingbao altar, the tiered open-air altar, which forms the mainstay of Daoist liturgy up to the Middle Phase when it was gradually incorporated into the ritual space of temple architecture, and with that in wall paintings of the Heavenly Court.

[38] The word *zhang* 帳 can mean "curtain" or "canopy" and is a metonym for "painting." See the explanation in a Song ritual manual, the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 1.23b.

Early Phase (400-700). The earliest descriptions of Daoist open-air altars give no reference to any paintings but instead represent deities in the form of tablets (*pai* 牌). The traditional Lingbao altar in the Early Phase consists of five gates hung with tablets for the deities of the five directions, five tables on which the Five True Writs (*wu zhenwen* 五真文) written on five coloured silk ribbon and fixed (*zhen* 鎮) by five golden dragons, and one additional gate called the "royal gate" (*dumen* 都門), which was hung with a tablet to the deities of the Three Offices (*sanguan* 三官, i.e. the Three Officials) and immortals of the five Sacred Peaks (*wuyue* 五嶽).[39] At the centre of the altar sometimes a pole with nine lamps was placed, while outside the gates also lamps or candles were placed in varying numbers corresponding to the season when the ritual was held. This layout was the standard altar setting up to the times of Lu Xiujing (406-477).[40] During or after his time, two changes had taken place. First, the number of gates was augmented to ten, dedicated to Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions (*shifang tianzun* 十方天尊). Second, the altar was erected on a three-tiered mound instead of at ground level.[41] More types of Daoist altars seem to have existed, but the three tiered Lingbao altar in the five directions would remain the basic and most commonly applied layout.[42] A short description of a Lingbao altar has survived in the *Sui shu*: "[The Daoists] make an altar of three tiers, and each tier they set off with silk ribbons in order to create a restricted area. On the sides, they erect gates which all have ritual images (*faxiang* 法像)."[43] By the late sixth century, paintings had become a standard part of the open-air altar. The

[39] Since a circular altar has only four directions, the gate of the centre and the royal gate were placed to the left and righ side of one selected gate, called seasonal gate. Each season is also emblematically related to a direction, e.g. east is spring etc. and if a ritual is held in spring, the centre gate and royal gate are thus placed to the left and right side of the east gate.

[40] This altar layout is found in two ancient Lingbao texts, *Taishang dongxuan lingbao chishu yujue miaojing* DZ 352, 2.20a-22a, the *Dongxuan lingbao changye zhi fu jiuyou yugui mingzhen ke* DZ 1411, 26b-26a, both dating to the fourth century, and in Lu Xiujing's transmission ritual *Taishang dongxuan lingbao shoudu yi* DZ 528, 2b-3b. The Lingbao altar is modelled on the archaic altar of Later Han Daoism, recorded in *Taishang lingbao wufu xu* 太上靈寶五符序 (Preface to the Five Talismans of the Superior Supreme Lingbao Tradition) DZ 388, 3.3a-5a.

[41] The ten gates are mentioned in Lu Xiujing's *Dongxuan lingbao wugan wen* 洞玄靈寶五感文 DZ 1278, 5b-6a presenting in an appendix to the text twelve types of *zhai*-retreats accompanied by a commentary in which the altar layouts are discussed. However, the first line (1a) of the main text by Lu Xiujing mentions only six *zhai*-retreats and the appendix should therefore be treated with caution and may not be representative of altar layouts of Lu Xiujing's time.

[42] A Daoist encyclopedia of the late sixth century, the *Wushang biyao* DZ 1138, contains descriptions of several other altar layouts.

[43] *Sui shu* j. 35, p. 1092.

description does not specify what types of paintings were used but these most probably depicted supernatural elements and landscape motifs and no deities.[44]

Transitional Phase (700-1000). During the Transitional Phase, the change was mainly in representation rather than in content and layout, and from this period on images of deites appear in the open-air altar other than the central deity (a Heavenly Worthy or Laozi) as codified in ritual manuals. A Southern Song ritual manual, the *Daomen dingzhi* 道門定制 (The Order of Daoism, preface dated 1188) by Lü Yuansu 呂元素 discusses an altar which he claims follows the layout of former masters of the Tang dynasty (Fig. 31). He explains in a note: "When I look down at the diagrams for the altar layout by the two masters Zhang Wanfu (fl. 700-742) and Du Guangting (850-933), I see that they only established an [open-air] altar mound in three tiers for the performance of a liturgy and make no mention of regulations for the placement of images in halls. Therefore, the method of establishing images of the Three Worthies (i.e. Three Purities) on the upper tier and tents (*wo* 幄) to the Three Officials and Five Masters (*wushi* 五師) to the left and right is uniform with the court rituals on the Altar to Heaven (*yuanqiu* 圓丘) and follows the ancient practices."[45] The mentioning of the Five Masters in the text is a bit curious and is probably an error for the Five Emperors.

The accompanying diagram shows a three-tiered altar mound of which the upper tier is round and set with three tables, the central one for the images and scriptures of the Three Purities (not depicted but only mentioned in the colophon on top), the middle tier is octagonal, set with tablets (*pai*) of the eight trigrams, and the lower tier is square, the four corners representing the four gates: Earth Door (*dihu* 地戶) in the southeast corner, Heaven's Gate (*tianmen* 天門) in the northwest corner, Sun Gate (*rimen* 日門) in the northeast corner, and Moon Gate (*yuemen* 月門) in the southwest corner. The colophon mentions that the lower tier also has ten gates to the ten directions (not depicted). The lower tier furthermore has characters for the twelve earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支), three for each side. The altar mound is finally set with a fence made of decorated poles and coloured ribbons and surrounded by lamps in emblematic numbers following the seasons, as indicated by the two colophons to the left and right.

Although unverifiable because of the absence of such diagrams in surviving texts by Zhang Wanfu and Du Guangting, Lü Yuansu's descriptions tallies with our information on

[44] See my discussion on Early Phase Heavenly Court representations in the first chapter of this study.
[45] *Daomen dingzhi* DZ 1224, 8.29a-30b.

Daoist Heavenly Court painting from the Transitional Phase, in particular those painted by Zhang Nanben (ca. 885) in the Water-and-Land hall of the Baoli si in Shu Kingdom (Sichuan) which closely follow the division in three and five deities, as discussed in the first chapter. The Beiyue miao murals, which also depict the Five Sacred Peak deities and the Three Officials, would also fit neatly in this development. A more or less contemporaneous text, the *Xuantan kanwu lun* 玄壇刊誤論 (Discussion on Correcting Mistakes of the Mysterious Altar, dated 943) by Zhang Ruohai 張若海, further suggests a standard practice of employing images of the Three Officials and Five Emperors. It states, although without explicitly referring to paintings, that "in order to hold a *zhai* 齋 -retreat, the most high Three Purities are on the highest level [of a three-tiered altar]; next are all the veritables of the ten extremities; on the lowest tier are the categories of the Three Officials, Five Emperors and the divine immortals and numinous officials"[46] Interestingly, the veritables of the ten extremities – probably a substitution for the Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions – may also have been represented by paintings. The *Xuanhe huapu* lists a hanging scroll painting (*xiang* 像) of the Ten Veritables by Zuo Li左禮 (late 9th cent.) and a copy (of the same painting?) by the Shu (Sichuan) painter Huang Quan 黃荃 (903-965).[47]

Middle Phase (1000-1400). The Middle Phase saw a stunning increase in the number of paintings installed on an open-air altar. The altar itself was also expanded with numerous side-altars thus greatly expanding the scope of the ritual area. In order to describe the situation, I will rely on the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*靈寶領教濟度金書 (Golden Book of Salvation of the Lingbao Tradition) attributed to Lin Lingzhen 林靈真 (1239-1302), but probably of an early fourteenth century date, which is very explicit on the location and use of images in the altar layout and illustrates its text profusely with diagrams.[48] The *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀 (On Performing the Ritual of the Unsurpassed Yellow Register Retreat, dated 1223) compiled by Jiang Shuyu 蔣叔輿 (1162-1223) contains similar diagrams and explanations which I shall use for comparison.[49] I will start with a description of the main three-tiered altar mound and then expand to the outer spaces.

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[46] *Xuantan kanwu lun* DZ 1280, 10a, 12a.
[47] *Xuanhe huapu* 3.69, 16.332. According to Lu You (1125-1200) a painting of the Ten Veritables was painted in the Taiping xingguo gong 太平興國宮 on Mt. Lu 盧山 (Zhejiang) by Wu Daozi. See Chang and Smythe, *Lu Yu's Travel Diaries*, p. 107.
[48] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466 chapter 1.
[49] *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508 chapter 2.

The three-tiered altar mound follows with some minor additions the same layout as the ancient Lingbao altar. The upper-tier has ten gates with tablets to the deities of the ten directions and is placed with the tablets of the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶, i.e. Dao, scriptures, and master), a five-coloured canopy (*huagai* 華蓋), a Cavern Table (*dongan* 洞案), and ten other tables on which the Five True Writs are installed, although these last tables are not mentioned in this particular manual.[50] Outside the ten gates, an additional thirty-two talisman-banners are installed representing the Thirty-two Heavens. The middle-tier has the standard four gates in the four corners but also additional tablets for the Five Sacred Peaks, the Three Radiances (*sanguang* 三光, i.e. Sun, Moon, and Stars), the Water Department (*shuifu* 水府), and the Scripture Treasure (*jingbao* 經寶).[51] The mid-tier further has a chime stone on the right and a bell on the left. The lower-tier, on ground-level, has one main gate on the south side as well as eight gates to the Eight Trigrams, an inversion of the arrangement on previous altars where the latter were located on the mid-tier while the four gates were located on the lower-tier. All the tablets further receive offerings of incense, flowers, lamps, and candles according to sacrificial ritual (*gongyang rufa* 供養如法). A wide array of lamps is placed in the shape of the constellations of the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions (*ershiba xiu* 二十八宿) surrounding the altar mound, an elaboration on the original seasonal configuration. The altar mound, which has only two actual tiers (the third tier equals the ground floor), would measure one meter in height and nine meters in width, the upper-tier being fifty centimetres high and over five meters wide. Since the poles measured at maximum over three meters, the total height of the altar could reach over four meters.[52]

The altar mound, resembling a mountain, would be the centre of a giant visual spectacle. A magnificent display of paintings is installed inside the temple hall behind the altar mound creating a Heavenly Court audience of Daoist deities; in addition, two rows of paintings concealed in curtains are installed to the left and right sides of the pathway leading up to the altar; while various smaller altars, halls, and curtains were erected to the left and right of the altar. Almost all of these other halls had paintings or statues of deities as well. The *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* provides diagrams for each of these external ritual areas, but I will restrict myself here to those in front of and behind the altar, and only give a short

[50] Cf. *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 1.7b.
[51] On the origin of these additional positions, see *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 17.30a-31b.
[52] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 1.1a-21b.

description of the other altars. I have compiled the various illustrations in the ritual manual into one diagram (Fig. 32).

The paintings and curtains in front of the altar seem to be an elaboration of the practice described in the *Daomen dingzhi*. In Southern Song times, the number of paintings was increased to six. To the left of the central pathway to the altar, paintings are hung of the Mysterious Master (*xuanshi* 玄師), the Heavenly Master (*tianshi* 天師, i.e. Zhang Daoling), the Supervisor of the Retreat (*jianzhai* 監齋), and to the right side paintings of the Five Emperors (*wudi* 五帝), the Three Officials (*sanguan* 三官), and the Three Masters (*sanshi* 三師). The order of the paintings however differs among other Song ritual manuals. The paintings all receive the standard offerings.[53]

The Song and Yuan altar layout is an expansion of the Tang altar. A diagram and a long explanation detail the location of the paintings hung on the walls of a temple hall: "In ancient times, the two tiers of a *zhai*-retreat altar imitated heaven and resembled earth. After its construction in the open-air was completed, all the veritables of the Three Realms (*sanjie* 三界) assembled on this one altar. Later generations simply constructed it indoors. Therefore it is necessary to distribute them over the three walls in the north, left (east) and right (west). The Jade Emperor is the highest venerable in the myriad heavens and ruler of the Three Realms. How could his hanging image (*xuan xiang* 懸像) be ranked below the Three Purities? Therefore, only the seven images of the Three Purities, North Pole, Heavenly Sovereign, East Pole, and South Pole hang on the north wall. On the left (east) wall only hang [the images of] the Nine Heavens, Six Luminaries (*liuyao* 六燿, probably a mistake for Six Masters, *liushi* 六師),[54] Northern Dipper, Three Provinces (*sansheng* 三省), Three Officials, and the Five Sacred Peaks. On the right (west) wall hang [the images] of the Five Elders (*wulao* 五老), Five Planets, Southern Dipper, Celestial Officers (*tiancao* 天曹), Four Saints, and the Two Departments [of Earth and Water] (*erfu* 二府). All receive offerings of incense, flowers, lamps, and candles according to ritual." This particular layout of paintings is not known in any source or among surviving Heavenly Court painting, which is demonstrative of the

[53] It states rather curiously that the "curtains are hung on two walls to the left and right." What type of walls is not indicated. Ibid. 1. 23a. Cf. *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 2.7a-10b which has the paintings of the Mysterious Master, Heavenly Master, and Three Officials on the right and the paintings of the Five Emperors, Three Masters, and Supervisor of the Retreat on the left side.

[54] The Six Luminaries do not exist as an entity. The Nine (or Eleven) Luminaries are the Sun, Moon, Five Planets, Ketu and Rahu (and Yuebo and Ziqi), see for example the Yongle gong murals nos. 90-100. But since the Five Planets are depicted on a painting hanging on the west wall in the diagram, the Six Luminaries cannot be a writing error for the Nine or Eleven Luminaries. A standard entity of six figures are the Six Masters (*liushi*).

selective character of Heavenly Court paintings. The exclusion of an image of the Jade Emperor in the text seems to constitute a peculiar practice not followed in extant Heavenly Court paintings.

A bit further on in the text, a similar diagram appears, but for a *jiao*-offering altar (Fig. 33).[55] The diagram of the *jiao*-offering altar and its explanation demonstrate that the deities are all indicated by tablets and organised in rows to the left and right walls and against the north wall. This is very important because it shows that the offerings to the deities were not made to the paintings but to the tablets. The diagram gives the names for the tablets placed against the north wall: the seats (*zuo*) of the Three Purities are on top, then separated by a few feet of open space to allow passage, is a row of high tablets (*pai*) for the Jade Emperor in the centre, North Pole (here called Purple Tenuity) and South Pole to its left (east), and Heavenly Sovereign, Earth Goddess, and East Pole to its right (west).[56] Then, to the side walls are the left and right rows with positions for the *jiao*-offering. No deity names are given in the diagram or in the explanation. These are found in the following chapters of the manual where long lists are divided in a left row (*zuoban* 左班) and a right row (*youban* 右班) with names to be written on the tablets for the *jiao*-offering. The lists vary greatly in length and number as few as 24 or as many as 3600 deity names, the most common number of positions seems however to have been 360.[57]

The *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* lists nine other external altar sites distributed to the left and right and front of the central altar mound.[58] One is an Oratory (*jingmo tang* 靜默堂 or *jingshi* 靜室) which has images of the Daoist priest's scriptural, lineage and transmission masters (*jingjidu shi* 經籍度師). All ritual procedures start and end in this oratory. Two is a Concentration Pavilion (*jingsi ge* 精思堂) where the priest writes talismans and registers and chants scriptures. It also has a hanging scroll painting of a Lingbao official. Three is a Supervision Curtain (*jianlin mu* 監臨幕) for the judicial spirits of the Eastern Peak, the City God temple of the district and the local temple. The deities are represented by either images or tablets shielded by a curtain positioned to the left and right outside the central southern gate of the central altar. Four is a Generals and Clerks Curtain (*jiangli mu* 將吏幕) for the deities that

[55] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 1.25a-26a.
[56] Curiously, the explanation to the diagrams mentions the Seven Sovereigns (*qiyu*) but in fact there are only six. It is not sure if the diagram is incomplete or altered, or if the explanation is incorrect.
[57] The lists are found in *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466 chapters 4-7.
[58] *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 1.23a-27b.

act as messengers for the priest. They are represented either by images or tablets and the altar is also positioned in front of the central altar.

Five is a Petition Officials Curtain (*zhangguan mu* 章官幕) for the deities that hand over the petition. They are indicated by tablets. Six is a Petition Presentation Altar (*shangzhang tan* 上章壇). It is a small open-air altar in three tiers and one meter in height. It is erected in front of the central altar in the location of the constellation Heavenly Well (*tianjing* 天井). This is where the petition is burnt and sent to heaven, i.e. in the direction of Heaven's Gate in the northwest corner of the central altar.[59] Seven is a Divine Tiger Curtain (*shenhu mu* 神虎幕) for the deities responsible for the assimilation (into the Dao) of the soul of the deceased. The deities are indicated by hanging scroll images and tablets and are shielded by curtains on a position to the right (west) of the central altar. Eight is a Correct Salvation Curtain (*zhengdu mu* 正度幕) for the deities responsible for the purification of the soul of the deceased (*lianhun* 練魂). They are represented by either statues, hanging scroll paintings, or tablets and are located to the left (east) of the central altar. Nine, a Deliverance Curtain (*liandu mu* 練度幕) for the Officials and Clerks, deities which assist in the salvation of the soul of the deceased. They are represented by tablets. Eight other minor curtains are listed and various layouts for lamps. An explanation to a lamp diagram for the Nine Prisons of Hell interestingly notes that no hell paintings are to be used. Hell paintings are almost standard to Heavenly Court painting in the Late Phase. The *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* provides names for the deities represented by statues, paintings, and tablets in four of the external altars, among which the Curtains for Salvation and the Divine Tiger seem to be the most important.[60]

Late Phase (1400-present). Attempting to give a description or thorough analysis of the altar layout during the Late Phase (1400-present) and its relationship to Heavenly Court painting is an almost impossible task, mostly for the lack of comparative sources and the diverse and largely unstudied state of Daoist liturgy in this period (with the exception of the last few

[59] The use of a separate petition altar seems to be later development. Cf. *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 49.8a-b where the burning of the petitions takes place on the central altar on the priest's original position (i.e. his birth date in geographical directions) in the direction of Heaven's Gate.
[60] *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 38.1b-5b. Compare also the detailed explanations of the various external altars in Wang Qizhen's *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1221, 55.21a-35a.

decades of the modern period),[61] and I will restrict myself to making some general remarks, leaving the precise development in this period for future scholarship to investigate.

Before listing some cases of interest, it is at this point perhaps worthwhile to note a curious parallel between the development of the Daoist Canon and Daoist Heavenly Court painting. Recent research on the various compilations of the Daoist Canon through history shows a radical break in terms of content and composition with the publishing of the final compilation of 1447 and its supplement of 1607,[62] a break which can also be recognised in Late Phase Heavenly Court paintings. Whereas the previous compilations followed a set order, the so-called Three Caverns (*sandong* 三洞) and Four Supplements (*sifu* 四輔) each one containing the texts of one scriptural tradition as introduced by Lu Xiujing, the Ming Canon only followed this organisation in name but filled in the Caverns and Supplements with texts almost at random. More importantly, many ancient and original scriptures were discarded – a decision partially corrected with publication of the supplement in 1607[63] - while on the other hand a great number of texts of Daoist exorcist lineages and local cults that had emerged since the late Tang were incorporated; in Song and Yuan editions of the Daoist Canon, there presence was not yet recognised even though they played a central role in Daoist liturgy and in the layout of the ritual area. The particular compilation of the Ming Canon is understood as a reconciliation with the contemporaneous status of ritual practice in the field for which the division of the former Canons was outdated.[64] It should also be understood as a wholly new definition of Daoism as a religious entity in Chinese society.

As compilations directed and sanctioned by the state, the various editions of the Daoist Canon through history represent a canonical or orthodox view, an orthodoxy (or rather orthopraxy) that did not change much until the publishing of the Ming Canon in 1447. Daoist Heavenly Court paintings show a similar emphasis on orthopraxy up to the Middle Phase and only from the Late Phase we see this rigid framework in which Heavenly Court paintings are conceived to be breaking down, giving way to a wide variety of different formats which are

[61] Daoist liturgy of the Ming, Qing and Republican (1912-1948) periods is still unstudied. Several ritual manuals are preserved in the *Zangwai daoshu*. It contains works not included in the Ming Daoist Canon and works published after that. Many ritual texts dating to the Qing and the modern period are still in the hands of Daoist priests. Several of these Qing and modern ritual texts were used in field studies, for example, by Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, and Ôfuchi Ninji, *Chûgokujin*. See also the instructive article on such field work by Poul Andersen, "The Transformation of the Body in Taoist Ritual." Jean Marie Law (ed.), *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 186-208. Several late imperial ritual texts, mostly from South China, have been photomechanically reproduced in Wang Qiugui 王秋桂 (ed.), *Zhongguo chuantong keyiben huibian* 中國傳統科儀本彙編. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1999.
[62] Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*.
[63] Apparently, many scriptures at the disposal of the editors were for some unknown reason not included in the 1447 edition of the Daoist Canon. *Ibid*. pp. 32-40.
[64] *Ibid*. p. 34-35.

not easily related to one unified system – similar to the structure of the earlier Daoist Canons - probably owing on the one hand to a greater disparity in ritual observances now firmly established in the religious practices of local cults and regional Daoist lineages, and on the other to a certain formal distancing between the government and the Daoist clergy in the Ming and Qing dynasties.[65]

This development in the Late Phase can be demonstrated with surviving descriptions of altar layouts and Heavenly Court paintings. For example, the *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書 (Complete Golden Book of Salvation of the Lingbao Tradition of Highest Purity Heaven) compiled in 1432 by the Daoist priest Zhou Side 周思德 (1359-1451), active at the Ming court in the capital Nanjing and disciple of the forty-third Heavenly Master Zhang Yuchu 張宇初 (1359-1410) who was the editor-in-chief of the Ming Canon, contains a description of a ritual area very akin to the one in the late Southern Song *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*, with which it presumably formed one tradition as the title suggests.[66] There are only minor changes, one is the greater profusion of external altar sites, especially lamp altars judging from the numerous diagrams included in the manual, and the other is smaller number of central deities from nine to seven (now comprising the Three Purities, Jade Emperor, North Pole, Heavenly Sovereign, and Earth Goddess) (Fig. 34) yet the manual contains similar long lists with the names for *jiao*-offerings with 3600, 1200, and 360 positions continuing the tradition established in the Northern Song.[67] Interestingly, the central deities listed in the manual are nearly the same as those on hanging scroll paintings dated to the Qing period preserved in the collection of the Baiyun guan in Beijing, suggesting that the Quanzhen order in North China in its turn preserved, at least in part, the ritual tradition of the early Ming.[68]

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[65] At least, no Daoist Canon was published by the Qing court suggesting this formal distancing between court and Daoist clergy. *Ibid.* p. 2. However, recent research also demonstrates that the Qing court and the Daoist clergy were closely allied. See Vincent Goossaert, "Bureaucratic Charisma: The Zhang Heavenly Master Institution and Court Taoists in Late-Qing China." *Asia Major* 3rd series 17.2 (2004), pp. 121-159, and Liu Xun, "General Zhang Buries the Bones: Early Qing Reconstruction and Quanzhen Daoist Collaboration in Mid-Seventeenth Century Nanyang." *Late Imperial China* 27.2 (2006), pp. 67-98. This topic needs further study.

[66] *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* chapter 25, DZWS 17/71-105.

[67] For the *jiao*-offering lists, see *ibid*. chapters 39-40. The fact that the diagram depicts a *zhai*-retreat altar layout but mentions a left and right group, obviously referring to the positions of the left and right groups of deities in a *jiao*-offering ritual strongly suggests that at this point, i.e. in 1432, no clear distinction was made between a *zhai*-retreat and a *jiao*-offering while this distinction was still made a century earlier.

[68] The paintings of the Baiyun guan Collection comprise eight central deities, including Three Purities, Jade Emperor, Heavenly Sovereign, North Pole, South Pole, and Earth Goddess, thus adding South Pole. The last four form the Four Sovereigns (*siyu* 四御). See Zhongguo daojiao xiehui, *Daojiao shenxian hua ji*, pp. 2-11, 14-17 . The architecture of the Baiyun guan is similarly organised as a ritual area presided in the north by a hall dedicated on the top floor to the Three Purities and the ground floor to the Four Sovereigns.

Altar layouts in the late Ming and Qing dynasties by contrast show a bewildering variety and not all of them can be readily explained from their relationship to changes in ritual practice. For example, the Ming Heavenly Court paintings in the Taifu guan (Shanxi), the Dadao guan (Hebei), and the closely related album of sketches in the Junkunc Collection, not only include a vast array of marshals used in exorcist rituals but also have pantheons presided over by the Three Sovereigns without any of the other central deities such as the Jade Emperor present. An emphasis on all kinds of marshals is also witnessed in the Qing paintings preserved in Baiyun guan Collection, such as the Thirty-Six Marshals and the Thirty-Two Marshals[69]. It is however not clear if all paintings in the collection were ever part of a ritual setting with Heavenly Court paintings.

Research in recent decades on ritual practice in Taiwan and southern China demonstrates an even greater variation in altar layouts and in deities incorporated in them. Although some may have been the result of the political upheavals in the twentieth century during which liturgical performances were practically halted and much knowledge was lost, as suggested by a modern altar layout in Qing'an County (Zhejiang) consisting only of Hell paintings.[70] Some overlap is however seen in South China where the Heavenly Master order seems to provide an overarching system in altar layouts. For instance, the Taiwan and Yao Heavenly Court paintings all group various deities together in four single hanging scroll paintings representing the Prefectures of Heaven, Earth, and Water (*tianfu* 天府, *difu* 地府, *shuifu* 水府), and the Human World (*yangjian* 陽間) which are doubled on the left and right walls of a temple hall (in rites for cosmic renewal). It is not known if this arrangement of the Heavenly Master ritual area is transmitted within the order and therefore much older or that the arrangement is a derivation of the Middle Phase Lingbao altar.

The most radical change in altar layout is witnessed in the Heavenly Court paintings of the Yao. In an altar layout used for rituals of salvations of the dead,[71] the Yao Daoist priests arrange the hanging scroll paintings in a very unorthodox L-shape in the corner of a room. An ancestral shrine, also hung on the sides with smaller paintings, occupies the corner of the L-shape. I have already noted the introduction of many narrative elements in the paintings as well as several local Yao deities, but the most astonishing new element is a long horizontal scroll painting called "Bridge of the Dao" that depicts the crossing over, represented as a long procession, of the soul from this world to the Daoist heavens; in earlier

[69] Ibid. pp. 24-27.
[70] Wang, *Zhongguo chuantong keyiben huibian*, p. 153.
[71] Different altar-layouts for rituals for the dead are not known anywhere else. Pourret, *The Yao*, pp. 214-243.

ritual manuals, this bridge is an actual physical structure in the ritual area but in this case it has been incorporated in the representation of the Heavenly Court in a pictorial format. Because of the fact that this painting is hung above the other paintings, usually beginning above the ancestral shrine in the corner and ending at the short side of the L-shape to the right, the entire layout is suddenly imbued with narrative significance, portraying the soul leaving the ancestral shrine and crossing the bridge to heaven. This narrative structure is absent in other representations of the Heavenly Court. Furthermore, the Yao altar setting, probably merging with an originally Yao type of altar, totally departs from the traditional Lingbao altar which always follows a division in a left and right side and the four directions, a basic principle of a court audience (*chao*).

Jiao-*offering lists and memorial lists*

There is a strong correlation in names between the *jiao*-offering lists and memorials on the one hand and the paintings of the *zhai*-retreat altar on the other. *Jiao*-offering lists, as explained above, provide the titles and hierarchical order of the deities that had been invited to attend the audience in the Daoist Heavenly Court. Numbers vary depending on the type of offering and the social status of the person or community for whom the offering is ordered. The different listings already existed but were codified, in the early Northern Song. The Song Chancellor Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1025), who most probably initiated these ritual codifications, devised a Great Offering for Universal Heaven (*putian dajiao* 普天大醮) with 3600 "positions" (*wei*) or tablets, a Great Offering for Entire Heaven (*zhoutian dajiao* 周天大醮) with 2400 positions, and a Great Offering for Matrix Heaven (*luotian dajiao* 羅天大醮) with 1200 positions. Several categories with smaller numbers of positions up to 81 follow.[72] These three main *jiao*-offerings are linked to the three main *zhai*-retreats, the Golden Register Retreat (*jinlu zhai* 金籙齋) held for the benefit of the emperor and the state, the Jade Register Retreat (*yulu zhai* 玉籙齋) for the ministers and officials, and the Yellow Register Retreat (*huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋) for the common people.[73] This last retreat was also used for smaller offerings, the one with 360 positions being the most standard. The ritual functions of the Yellow Register Retreat were also greatly expanded from the Song onwards encompassing all

[72] See Wang Qinruo's *Yisheng baode zhenjun zhuan* contained in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, chapter 103. The relevant passage is studied in Chavannes, "Le jet de dragons," pp. 215-220.
[73] *Lingbao yujian* DZ 547, 1.19b-21a.

kinds of exorcist functions against natural disasters etc. as well beside its main purpose of salvation of the dead.[74]

The *jiao*-offering lists as comprised in Song ritual manuals are handy tools for identifying deities in Heavenly Court paintings but they do not form the basis for such paintings as thus far has been suggested.[75] Nor are they ritually related. The *jiao*-offering lists records all the names and titles of the deities that are thanked with a banquet for their attendance and help, and are represented in the ritual area by spirit-tablets made from wood or paper installed in the ritual area of the *jiao*-offering altar. They constitute a different ritual area from the Heavenly Court paintings which rather belong to the *zhai*-retreat altar and whose number is not fixed. However, the *jiao*-offering lists can give great insights in the organisation of the ritual pantheon depicted in Heavenly Court paintings, because they group deities together in clear numbers and list the titles and ranks of these deities. The images of the deities reflect these same categorical aspects and always depict deities in their fixed numbers as a group, for example six deities for the Southern Dipper (*nandou* 南斗), and depicts deities – mostly – in the ceremonial costume corresponding to their rank, such as the imperial *mian*-crown, only worn by emperors, for example the Great Emperor of the North Pole (*beiji dadi* 北極大帝). The correspondence in costume and rank seems to hold well for all the major and well-known deities, but appears to be less well enforced for lesser deities.

The same correspondence with title and number is however found in memorial lists. These lists of model-memorials directed to a certain deity or group of deities also contain the specific ranks and numbers of deities addressed. Contrary to the *jiao*-offering lists, which are complete inventories of all the deities invited for the ritual, the memorial lists contain only a selection of important deities who were probably most frequently addressed in the Heavenly Court audience. The memorial lists are found in separate chapters in ritual manuals, where they are organised in the same hierarchical structure.[76] The names of the types of memorials (*zou* 奏or *biao* 表, *shen* 申, *die* 牒) follow this hierarchical structure, a feature adapted from court practice but which only seems to have started in the Song dynasty. The *biao*-memorial was used for example to address the central deities, i.e. the Three Purities and the six or eight sovereigns as depicted in the Toronto, Nan'an, and Yongle gong murals. The *shen*-memorial

[74] *Ibid.* 1.20a where it says that the Yellow Register Retreat is for everyone, from emperor to commoner, and helps to remedy all kinds of problems, regardless if these are astromical, climatological, or salvational, by restoring them to their natural order.
[75] See my discussion on the Yongle gong murals in Appendix 1.
[76] Cf. *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, chapters 5-8 and *Daomen dingzhi* DZ 1224, chapter 2.

was directed at stellar and terrestrial deities, while the *die*-memorial was used to address local earth deities such as the City God and the Earth God.

The memorial lists are however ritually related to Heavenly Court images. Comparison between these lists and the deities depicted in Heavenly Court paintings or mentioned in descriptions thereof indicate a great overlap between the two, suggesting that there is a direct correlation between an image of a deity and a memorial. In other words, deities frequently memorialised needed to be visually represented in Heavenly Court paintings.

The difference in type of ritual is reflected in the difference of ritual area and therefore representation. During the *zhai*-retreat, the priest directed his memorials to the images, during the *jiao*-offering he made offerings to the tablets.

Increase of the ritual pantheon

One of the most obvious changes in the layout of the Daoist altar is the great increase in the number of deities incorporated in various representations in the ritual area. The development of the Daoist altar starts off as a relatively simple affair, which gradually grew in the Middle Phase into a huge visual spectacle involving numerous different altar sites, almost all placed with statues, paintings, and tablets indicating the presence of deities. Where do these deities come from and why should they be represented on the Daoist altar?

The increase in the number of deities is best seen in the *jiao*-offering lists, long registers recording the names and titles of all the deities thanked for their attendance to the ritual. It is these lists that form the source for the number of tablets – or paper slips - that are placed on the side walls in a temple hall during the *jiao*-offering. The increase was not unnoticed even among Song ritual specialists, and Jin Yunzhong 金允中 (fl. 1225), the author of the ritual manual *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (Great Lingbao Method of the Highest Purity Heaven), explains the increase as owing to the proliferation in writings addressed to deities (during a *zhai*-retreat) which consequently also had to be accorded a position (i.e. tablet) during the *jiao*-offering.[77] In other words, an increase in the number of memorials and other written communiqués led to an increase in the number of offering positions, which means that the ritual pantheon was expanded with more and different

[77] *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 39, 4a. The same text is found in a ritual manual by the same title, *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1221, 59.22a but compiled by Wang Qizhen (12th cent.). A similar explanation is given in *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 319:18b.

numinous powers that had previously been absent. A similar reasoning is expressed by Jiang Shuyu in his *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi*.[78]

Jin Yunzhong's explanation – although not explicitly mentioned - tallies with the general view that newly-emerged lineages and local cults had a major impact on Daoist liturgy from the end of the Transitional Phase onward. Whereas in previous times Laozi or the Three Purities were sufficient to remedy all kinds of illnesses and misfortunes, great and small, the new lineages brought in their own deities - which often already had a Daoist background or were identified with a certain deity of Daoist legend and lore – for more specific ritual tasks and were often attributed with special numinous powers (*ling* 靈) differentiating them from each other.

Most conspicuous in this respect are deities introduced from the so-called Rites of Deliverance (*liandu* 練度), an exorcist rite that originated with the many new Daoist lineages of the tenth and eleventh centuries, as demonstrated by Edward L. Davis, and that constituted from the Southern Song onward the main part of the rituals for the salvation of the dead, the traditional Golden Register Retreat (*huanglu zhai*). The Rite of Deliverance entailed the liberation of a soul from its hell prison and its subsequent purification and salvation in Daoist Heaven through inner alchemical meditations and the personal transformation of the Daoist priest into a specific deity.[79] Major deities of this rite comprised for example the Four Saints, (*sisheng* 四聖) Tianpeng 天蓬, Tianyou 天猷, True Warrior (*zhenwu* 真武) and Black Killer (*heisha* 黑殺) who play essential roles in exorcist rites, the Heavenly Worthy of Great Unity, Saviour in Distress (*taiyi jiuku tianzun* 太乙救苦天尊), the King Father of the East (*dongwanggong* 東王公) and Queen Mother of the West (*xiwangmu* 西王母), these last two already being connected to death and salvation since ancient times, as evidenced by depictions of these two deities in Han tomb murals.[80] Their presence, and their images, were therefore already much longer in the eye of the general public and their adaptation in Daoist ritual procedures is a clear sign of the influence of such popular practices in the Daoist liturgy of the Middle Phase. Great Unity, King Father of the East, and Queen Mother of the West

[78] *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 38.20a-b.

[79] For a study of these rituals in the Song and their relationship with the ritual specialists (*fashi*) of the tenth century, many of them influenced by exorcist Tantric ritual, see Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, pp. 115-152. See also Judith M. Boltz, "Opening the Gates of Purgatory: A Twelfth-Century Taoist Meditation Technique for the Salvation of Lost Souls." Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies*, Vol. 2. Brussels: Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1983, pp. 487-511; and idem, "Singing to the Spirits of the Dead: A Daoist Ritual of Salvation." Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawsky, and Rubie S. Watson (eds.), *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 177-225.

[80] Cf. Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, pp. 126-141, and Li Song 李凇, *Lun Handai yishu zhong de Xiwangmu tuxiang* 論漢代藝術中的西王母圖像. Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.

also figure prominently in the first and second days of a three-day Yellow Register Retreat when they were addressed with memorials according to Jin Yunzhong's *Shangqing lingbao dafa*.[81]

Not all new deities of the Middle Phase ritual pantheon can be traced back to the incorporation of the Rites of Deliverance. One new group of "deities" consists of Daoist masters and patriarchs. Their images are incorporated in numerous places of the ritual area: in the Oratory, as part of the Six Curtains, and in the Heavenly Court paintings on the *zhai*-retreat altar. Interestingly, the *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* specifies that the Oratory should have images of Lu Xiujing, Zhang Wanfu and Du Guangting, the three main liturgical codifiers before the Song dynasty.[82] The emphasis on visual representations of Daoist patriarch and lineage masters could be explained as owing to the social and religious transformations of the Song dynasty that warranted priests of lineages to identify themselves more visibly in order to differentiate themselves from other Daoist lineages and local cults. In addition, incorporating images of Daoist priests in the visual arena of the altar space of course also grants a divine legitimation and authority to the performing priest as a direct spiritual inheritor of the ritual legacy passed on through his or her Daoist masters depicted in the paintings.

Another group consists of deities introduced from the state cult and from the Altar to Heaven in particular. The incorporation of state cult deities pertains foremost to the major deities, such as the Jade Emperor/Emperor-on-High, Heavenly Sovereign, Earth Goddess, and North Pole, who do not appear in any early description of a Lingbao altar before the Middle Phase. Descriptions of the Altar of Heaven in the dynastic histories of the Han and the Jin demonstrate that these deities have a much longer history outside the Daoist Lingbao liturgy,[83] and on this basis I would argue that their introduction in Heavenly Court painting is the result of the merging of the state cult and Daoism which began in the Tang dynasty under Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756) and reached its completion under Song Emperor Huizong (r. 1101-1125). The origin of certain deities and images in the state cult is also hinted at in Lü Yuansu's description of the Tang Daoist altar mentioned above, claiming that it followed the ancient practices of the Altar of Heaven. Although it is not verifyable if the ancient Altar of Heaven had images, the most important deities were those of the Three Sovereigns and the

[81] *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 16.12b-13b.
[82] *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 38.20b. Cf. *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 319.13a.
[83] See the description of the Altar of Heaven in the *Houhan shu* 後漢書. Compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965, j. 7, pp. 3159-3160, translated in John Lagerwey, "Taoist Ritual Space and Dynastic Legitimacy." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995), pp. 90-91, and the description of the Altar of Heaven in *Jin shu* 晉書, compiled by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578-648). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974, j. 19, pp. 584-585.

Five Emperors. In Lü Yuansu's Tang altar, these have been substituted by images of the Three Officials and Five Masters/Emperors.

A final new group consists of lesser stellar and terrestrial deities but whose provenance is a much more complicated affair. Deities such as the Northern and Southern Dippers, the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions, the Five Planets, the Five Sacred Peaks etc. already appeared on the Altar of Heaven in the state cult of the Han and Jin dynasties. Yet, they also appear in independent *jiao*-offering rituals from at least the sixth century, and judging from surving sources in the Daoist Canon, it seems that these *jiao*-offerings to all kinds of stellar and terrestrial deities was the specific affair of the Heavenly Masters[84] (the Heavenly Court paintings under discussion all bespeak the ritual practices, in particular the *zhai*-retreat, of the Lingbao tradition which formed the mainstream in Daoist liturgy). The end of the Transitional Phase saw a great increase in the number and types of *jiao*-offerings rituals,[85] all performed independently of the *zhai*-retreat – the majority of them being apotropaic or exorcist rituals[86] - and their origin and introduction may be attributed to the Heavenly Masters. The Chinese liturgists of the Song period even seem to have seen it in this way because Daoist priests would change to a type of robe worn by the Heavenly Masters when a *zhai*-retreat had finished and they began a *jiao*-offering. The sharp increase in these *jiao*-offerings rituals, in which Heavenly Master priests also used petitions, would thus explain the increase of the ritual pantheon of deities in the late Transitional and Middle Phases. The fact that the same stellar and terrestrial deities also belonged to the state cult, may only

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[84] See the sixth century Heavenly Master ritual recorded in *Yuanchen zhangjiao licheng li* 元辰章醮立成曆 DZ 1288, and discussed in Verellen, "Tianshidao shangzhang keyi." See also the ritual manual edited by Zhang Wanfu 張萬福(fl. 700-742) *Jiao sandong zhenwen wufa zhengyi mengweilu licheng yi* DZ 1212. Many of these stellar deities were later incorporated in Du Guangting's *jiao*-offering list, *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* 太上黃籙齋儀 DZ 498, chapter 50.

[85] The *Daomen dingzhi* DZ 1124, 6.1a-6a of the early twelfth century states that Du Guangting (850-933) had seventeen types of *zhai*-retreats and fifty types of *jiao*-offerings, also stating that the majority of the *jiao*-offerings were used for exorcism. The *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 15.2b speaks of forty-two types of *jiao*-offerings and the *Shangqing lingbao dafa* of twenty-seven *zhai*-retreats and forty-two *jiao*-offerings in Du's ritual system. The ritual manual *Daomen kefan daquan ji* 道門科範大全集 DZ 1225 which is attributed to him but probably edited much later in the fiftheenth century, contains many outlines for these various new *jiao*-offerings.

[86] This connection between exorcist or atropaic rituals and *jiao*-offerings is already witnessed in the *Sui shu* j. 35, pp. 1092-1093. After the description of the three-tiered *zhai*-retreat altar, a description follows of what is seemingly one ritual sequence; first an exorcist or apotropaic ritual centred on the presentation of petitions followed in the night with a *jiao*-offering to "the Heavenly Sovereign, Taiyi, Five Planets, and the exemplary Zodiacal Mansions." These are also addressed with petitions. Because of the emphasis on petitions and the differentiation with the first *zhai*-retreat, which belongs to the Lingbao tradition, we may assume that the exorcist ritual and the *jiao*-offering are part of Heavenly Master liturgy during the Sui period. De stellar deities mentioned in the *jiao*-offering are the same as those of the Altar of Heaven of the state cult. They also appear as such, with Taiyi replaced by North Pole (but who have the same axial function), in Du Guangting's *jiao*-offering list *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* DZ 507 50.2a-b.

have facilitated the merging of state cult and Daoism by the Tang and Song courts, creating one unified pantheon of deities, now placed under the divine rule of the Three Purities.

Altar and temple space

Many correlations exist between the models of Daoist ritual areas presented above and the architecture of Daoist temples with Heavenly Court paintings. It is possible on the basis of these correlations to reconstruct the ritual areas of these temples.

The altar layout presented in the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* would perfectly fit the architectural layouts of the Yongle gong and Beiyue miao. These two temples have large central halls decorated with wall paintings and a high platform projecting from the front of the halls that could function as a foundation for an altar. Importantly, both central halls have a façade consisting of huge folding doors which when opened create one unified space connecting the interior of the hall where the wall paintings are located with the altar on the platform in front. Interestingly, this layout is in accordance with the prescriptions of the early Tang manual for Daoist monasticism, the *Fengdao kejie*, which also places an altar "constructed of wood in three, five or up to twelve tiers on top of a platform of rammed earth, layered brick or piled stones" in front of the central hall dedicated to the Three Purities.[87] One can further imagine that the tablets for the *jiao*-offering are all arranged against the north wall and in two neat rows against the east and west wall below, presumably placed on the ground or on tables below the paintings; the six curtains and other ritual areas would then be distributed in front and to the sides of the platform, while the Oratory and perhaps the Concentration Pavilion could consist of existing rooms or buildings on the monastery terrain.

Paradoxically, the composition of the Yongle gong murals suggest that the arrangement of tablets on the altar mound and the layout of the six curtains in front of the altar have been integrated into the organisation of the wall paintings. Figure 35 shows the integration of these deities in the Yongle gong murals in a diagram. The central altar niche occupying the back of the hall in which the three statues of the Three Purities are located is decorated on the two outer side walls with paintings of the Ten Veritables or Immortals (9-13, 19-23, Plates 1 and 2) and the Thirty-Two Heavenly Emperors (24-55, Fig. 36) on the rear. The Ten Veritables are probably substitutions for the Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions or perhaps have a double function, similar to the description of an altar layout by

[87] *Dongxuan lingbao sandong fengdao kejie yingshi* DZ 1125, 1.18a. See also Livia Kohn, *The Daoist Monastic Manual. A Translation of the* Fengdao Kejie. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 95 where *shi'er* ("twelve") is erroneously translated as "twenty."

Zhang Ruohai mentioned above. The two numerological rings of ten and thirty-two deities are also found for the upper-tier of the Lingbao altar, albeit represented by tablets. In addition, the deities of the six curtains are represented on the side walls of the temple hall: on the northeast wall Mysterious Master (57), the Heavenly Master (Zhang Daoling, 58), and the Supervisor of the Retreat (59), while on the northwest wall the Three Masters (101-103) are located. The Three Officials (132-134, Fig. 37) are represented a further down the northwest wall, and the Five Sacred Peaks (164-168, Plate 3) are located a bit off-side in the centre of the east wall.

A similar observation where curtains are incorporated in the murals can be made with regard to the murals at the Nan'an and the Beiyue miao. The Nan'an murals have the Three Officials and Five Sacred Peak deities on the upper-register of the east wall and on the exact position on the opposite wall we find the Six Masters, this time placed together (Plates 6 and 7). The Beiyue miao murals has on its side walls images of Five Sacred Peak deities and the Three Officials reminiscent of the location of such curtains in front of the central altar mound as described by Lü Yuansu and Zhang Ruohai, thereby reflecting an earlier composition and development. Any such correlations are curiously absent in the Toronto murals.

The integration of the altar mound and curtains in the wall paintings suggests that the entire ritual space, including the altar mound, was integrated into the space of the temple hall. It is unclear if this also meant that the ritual was therefore performed inside the hall rather than outside on the platform or that the painters only used the model of the altar to organise their composition of the Heavenly Court.

Viewers

A paramount question with regard to the paintings in the Daoist ritual area is the nature of the audience. For whom are the paintings intended?

The simple answer should be for the Daoist priest and his acolytes who performed the ritual. In the end, Daoist ritual, although intended for communal or even universal benefit, is the private affair of the priest. Ritual texts preserved in the Daoist Canon reiterate from the earliest beginnings that no spectators are allowed, mainly for reasons of purity.[88] The ritual area could only be entered after fasting and cleansing for a set period prior to the ritual (the proper *zhai*-retreat).

[88] See for example *Taishang dongxuan lingbao chishu yujue miaojing* DZ 352, 1. 29b, and *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* DZ 508, 16.18b. See also the explanation by Ge Hong (283-243) in his *Baopuzi* 抱朴子. In Wang Ming 王明, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子内片校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985, j. 4, pp. 84-85.

It is generally assumed in Daoist texts that the presence of ordinary people or their slander would prevent the deities from descending to the altar site thus causing the ritual and its meritorious outcome to fail. Only representatives of the community or the family of the deceased who ordered the ritual (*zhaizhu* 齋主) were allowed in the ritual area and only after prior fasting. In the same context, the curtains used in the external altar settings are probably used for shielding the deities from public view.[89] On the other hand, it seems that such regulations were not always rigidly enforced. Wall paintings are permanently on display; poems of Heavenly Court paintings (e.g. the one by Du Fu on the Laozi temple murals) demonstrate that temples were accessible for everyone; and painters learned from copying old masters demonstrating that they also could view the paintings. It therefore seems that Heavenly Court paintings, although primarily intended for the Daoist priest, were accessible to anyone but only outside the period of a liturgical performance. One important reason for this view is that the deities are only present during the ritual while in all other times they are not.[90]

Ritual function

Functions of religious images are a thorny issue not easily solved, notably because images can have many functions. Functions depend on the sources used to investigate these functions, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the viewers watching, using and interpreting images, the intentions of donors or persons who commissioned the images, and the usages and practices involved in the production and display of images. Research on Daoist imagery is only in a preliminary stage and although it would be easy to find evidence for the various functions of Daoist imagery in general, similar to those of Buddhist images as for example already investigated by Erik Zürcher, T. Griffith Foulk, and Robert H. Sharf,[91] I will restrict my discussion here to the view on the function of Heavenly Court paintings in their ritual context, namely the context found in Daoist scriptures.

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[89] See also Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, p. 193 where he explains how curtains or screens are erected around a medium representing the deceased after which relatives are admitted one at a time, preventing people from "coming and going."

[90] In Daoist liturgy, the consecration of the ritual area (not the consecration of the images, which is nowhere mentioned) begins with the Nocturnal Announcement (*suqi* 宿啓) or, in later times, with the Inaugeration of the Altar (*qitan* 啓壇) and ends with the Dismantling of the Altar (*santan* 散壇) followed by a *jiao*-offering.

[91] Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Art in Medieval China: The Ecclesiastical View." K.R. van Kooij & H. van der Veere (eds.), *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995, pp. 1-20, T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 7 (19931994), pp. 149-219, and T. Griffith Foulk, "Religious Functions of Buddhist Art in China." Marsha Weidner (ed.). *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: Universtity of Hawai'i Press, 2001, pp. 13-29

The general view in Daoist texts on images is that they serve as tools for visualisation (*cunsi* 存思 or *cunshen* 存神) – a Daoist type of meditation conjuring up a mental representation of a deity's form and colours as a manifestation of one's bodily energies (*qi* 氣). Importantly, no Daoist scripture supports the assumption, as proposed in many modern studies on religious images, that they served as objects for offerings. Such a view is for example presented by Paul Katz with regard to the Yongle gong murals.[92] Zhang Wanfu (fl. 700-742), the Tang Daoist court priest and liturgical codifier, has already made this clear in a manual for a *jiao*-offering stating that "the divine Dao is without form and only with the utmost sincerity one gets response. The true numinous powers have no image and can only be addressed by the proper method [of visualisation]. Practitioners of the Dao should therefore place the altar with seats to be able to receive an answer on their prayers for blessings."[93] The division between two diagrams in the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*, one for a *zhai*-retreat with paintings and one for a *jiao*-offering with tablets, also corroborates this view, with the *zhai*-retreat constituting the part of Daoist liturgy where memorials are presented to the deities assembled in an audience at the Daoist Heavenly Court.[94]

The fact that ancient Daoist texts refute offerings to images of course does not mean that the practice did not existed – as Zhang Wanfu's fierce criticism seems to imply, and modern observation of Daoist ritual, e.g. among the Yao or on Taiwan (where I presume Katz found inspiration for his theory), readily suggests that paintings serve as the object for offerings. This was however not the standard way, and although even an occasional ritual manuals may state that "images should be re-installed and positions laid out" for a *jiao*-offering,[95] the general idea ventured in Daoist texts seems to have been that in order to communicate with deities and invoke their presence, one does not make offerings but instead should visualise them.

The early seventh century text *Fengdao kejie* in a section on "making images" explains the instrumental role of Daoist images as follows: "The Great Image (i.e. the Dao) is without form and the highest Veritables are incorporal. In their profundity, they are empty and still. Because sight and hearing are insufficient to see their bodies changing in response to the transformations, now visible and then hiding, anyone who wishes to visualise (or preserve,

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[92] For details of Paul Katz view, see my discussion on scholarship on the Yongle gong in Appendix 1.1.
[93] *Jiao sandong zhenwen wufa zhengyi mengweilu licheng yi* DZ 1212, 2a.
[94] The curious fact that the same text states that *gongyang*-offerings should be made to each tablet and painting in the ritual area should probably understood as acts independent of the proper ritual proceedings; at least, *gongyang* is not a ritual element (such as *chuguan*, *jinbiao*, *tou longjian* etc.) in traditional Lingbao liturgy. The use of the term *gongyang* further suggest a Buddhist origin. This topic needs further study.
[95] *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1221, 59.21b by Wang Qizhen.

cun 存) the Veritables, should first learn to recognise the appearances of these saints. Therefore, it is necessary to draw images (*motu* 摸圖) representing those Veritables' appearances using cinnabar-red and azure blue and gold and jade, decorate them with lead-white powder and engage with them mentally."[96]

Because of the possibility to invoke a deities presence through visualisation, paintings are, paradoxically, not absolutely prerequisite for the performance of a ritual. Jin Yunzong in his *Shangqing lingbao dafa* explains for example that "[if you wish to hold an audience with the origin] in a monastery, then install the seats of the highest Veritables of the Three Realms and those of the high emperors of all the heavens. In the case of an ordinary dwelling, place the Three Treasures (i.e. Dao, scriptures, and masters) in the centre and only visualisation (*cunsi*) of the Veritables in files on the [left and right] sides going on audience and gazing up to the [Golden] Portal will do."[97] Although only "seats" (*wei*) are mentioned, it is evident from elsewhere in the manual that paintings are intended.[98] The differentiation between sacred and profane space seems to imply that common spectators are not allowed to see the deity images.

It is possible to further specify the instrumental role of paintings in Daoist liturgy. Although texts in the Daoist Canon are generally silent on the use of images in ritual practices, a rare and early reference to such practices is made in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (Scritpure of Great Peace), a compilation of texts of mixed dates but in general reflecting the thought and practices of the devotees of the Taiping order of the Later Han. On several places in the work, mention is made of images of deities of the five viscera painted on silk banners which are hung in the five directions of an oratory. The five paintings each measured one foot and each depicted five deities and Veritables flanked by ten boy or girl attendants, depending on the adept's gender. The deities were identified by the emblematic colours of their specific direction and corresponding viscera; the attendants wore clothes in the colours of the corresponding season. The visualisation procedures were described as follows: after the paintings had been installed, the adept would first concentrate (*si* 思) on them and then, lying down, approach the images in his mind, visualising the deities entering his or her viscera.[99]

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[96] *Dongxuan lingbao sandong fengdao kejie yingshi* DZ 1125, 2.1a. Cf. Kohn, *The Daoist Monastic Manual*, p. 97.

[97] *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 5.5a-b. The Golden Portal (*jinque* 金闕) is the entrance to the Heavenly Court, visualised as an imperial palace.

[98] *Ibid.* 16.6b.

[99] *Taiping jing*, annotated by Wang Ming 王明, *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997, pp. 14, 21-22, 292, 459-460. Sickness in the Taiping order also had a distinctive moral connotation. Immoral behaviour of the adept caused the bodily deities to leave in disgust thus resulting in illness. The visualisation

Sickness was believed to be caused by the deities leaving the organs and summoning them back would restore health. A strikingly similar practice of deploying five silk banners (called *lingfan* 靈幡 or "numinous flags") in the five directions of an oratory is also found in a fourth century Daoist scripture of the Shangqing tradition.[100]

Curiously, nowhere in the description is it stated that the deities actually dwell in the images, they rather serve as media that should facilitate the deities' return to the adept's body. Nor does the text make any mention of prolonged focusing on the image; rather, the image, after having been seen, is conjured up mentally while lying down. This "indirect gaze" also conforms to the general practice in Daoist liturgy of visualising deities with eyes "half-closed" (*linmu* 臨目).[101]

The emphasis on an instrumental function of images in Daoist liturgy and the absence of any reference to any numinous power (*ling* 靈) or to the presence of the deities in images is striking. Worship of images, in particular in Buddhist ritual, presumes a divine presence in images, and although Daoist ritual manuals make mention of *gongyang*-offerings to both paintings and tablets invoking the deities' presence, they generally do not attribute any numinous status to images. The absence of any reference to or even rituals for attracting the presence of deities in images may be linked to the Daoist denial of offerings to images. The presence of a deity in an image, one would assume, is the whole reason for presenting offerings to an image. Why else would one present food and gifts to an image? In popular and Buddhist religious practice, images, divine presence (*ling*) and offerings are dissolubly connected. In Daoist religious practice, these relationships are severed and images are rather understood as being interconnected with visualisation techniques and presentations of memorials.

Visualisation practices are at the core of Daoist ritual and images of deities were from the very beginning a supplementary tool facilitating the practices. The instrumental function of images is witnessed for example in texts such as the official registers (*lu* 籙) of the early

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exercises were therefore accompanied by rites of confession. See Isabelle Robinet, *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of Great Purity*. Translated by Julian F. Pas and Norman J. Girardot. New York: State University of New York, 1979 (1993 reprint), p. 64 and Tsuchiya Masaaki, "Confession of Sins and Awareness of Self." Livia Kohn & Harold D. Roth (eds.), *Daoist Identity: Cosmology, Lineage, and Ritual*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp. 39-57.

[100] *Shangqing gaoshang yuchen fengtai qu su shangqing* 上清高上玉晨鳳臺曲素上經 DZ 1372, 7b, 12b-13a. Although the images depicted in the scripture are actually talismans in calligraphic script the accompanying text describes the deities, the Five Emperors (*wudi*), in human form, and the Shangqing text may be a later elaboration of the Taiping practice. The Ming edition of the text also has an illustration of a standing emperor in frontal view and flanked by ten young court ladies enshrouded by clouds. The number of ten attendants also appears in the *Taiping jing*.

[101] Cf. *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 5.6b.

Heavenly Master order,[102] the *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Middle Scripture of Laozi) of the Late Han (images now lost),[103] the *Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經 (True Scripture of the Great Cavern),[104] the *Laojun cunsi tu shiba pian* 老君存思圖十八篇 (Lord Lao's Illustrations for Visualisation in Eighteen Sections), an illustrated ritual manual of the early Tang and presumably for Heavenly Master ritual (Figs, 28, 30),[105] and a similar *Lingbao xingdao chaoli sishen tu* 行道朝禮思神圖 (Illustrations for Visualising Deities during the Performance of an Audience Ritual) for Lingbao ritual of the Song period (lost after the Yuan).[106] The deities of these visualisation texts are mostly bodily deities while those of Heavenly Court paintings are stellar and nature deities suggest at least that the texts did not serve as models for paintings. Visualisation texts however place the same emphasis on grouping, type of crown, and colour of robe as is found in the Heavenly Court paintings, implying some underlying principles common to both paintings, illustrations, and visualisation techniques, even though the identities and the representations of the deities may differ entirely.

Having introduced the organisation, development, and conceptions of the Daoist altar, and the role Heavenly Court paintings play in this ritual setting, I will now venture to explain some cosmological principles that underly the altar layout and the compositional structure of a Heavenly Court painting.

2.3 Cosmology

Daoist cosmology provides fundamental principles for the composition of Heavenly Court painting and the particular arrangement of deities in pictorial space. Not all principles are witnessed in each and every Heavenly Court representation and they may differ over time and

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[102] Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments – Taoist Roots in the Apocryphia." In Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of Rolf Stein*. Vol. 2. Brussels: Institute Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1985, p. 329.

[103] The *Laozi zhongjing* is preserved in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, 18-19 and as *Taishang laojun zhongjing* 太上老君中經 DZ 1168. The text is studied in Kristofer M. Schipper, "The Inner World of the *Lao-tzu chung-ching*." Chun-chieh Huang and E. Zürcher (eds.), *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 1995, pp. 114-131.

[104] *Shangqing dadong zhenjing* 上清大洞真經 DZ 6. For the authenticity and contents of this text, see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, pp. 97-119.

[105] The *Laojun cunsi tu shiba pian* has survived in two versions, one complete but without illustrations in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, 43.3a-22b, and the other, titled *Taishang laojun da cunsi tu zhujue* 太上老君大存思圖注訣 DZ 875, as a separate scripture with illustrations and small notes but missing the first eight paragraphs.

[106] *Daozang quejing mulu* 道藏闕經目錄 DZ 1430, 1.11b. This text is referred to and quoted in Song ritual manuals, *Wushang huanglu dazhi licheng yi* DZ 508, 32.6b-7b and *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* DZ 466, 282.18a-b.

according to region. Yet, it is possible to signal some general principles that clarify compositional themes within surviving Heavenly Court representations.

Daoist cosmology is closely related to Daoist liturgy. Daoist liturgy on the surface is a re-enactment of imperial court ritual or the court audience (*chao*), and its internal visualisations are a re-creation of the cosmos and, most importantly, a reversal to an original state of the Dao, a process which in Daoist liturgy is also designated by the term audience (*chao*). Some principles at work in Daoist liturgy are also valid for Daoist cosmology and we will see that the cosmological structures of Heavenly Court painting are strongly interrelated with issues of altar layout and liturgical performance. I will therefore mainly rely on ritual texts as a source for investigating Daoist cosmological principles, rather than having recourse to ideological scriptures preserved in the Daoist Canon, which are not only largely under-represented in Daoist writings but which also often bespeak the intellectual, if not political, interests of a selected few and hardly have any bearing on ritual practice in a given period or area.[107]

In this section I will discuss several issues of Daoist cosmology - cosmological division, the three realms of Heaven, Earth and Water, the northwest-southeast axis, and the eight trigrams – and put them into relationship with extant examples of Heavenly Court paintings.

Cosmological division

In Daoist cosmology, everything in this world originated from the Dao which first formed a primal energy (*yuanqi* 元氣), further dividing into three energies which created the Three Heavens manifested in the outer cosmos as the Three Realms (*sanjie* 三界) of Heaven, Earth and Water, also called the Three Primes (*sanyuan* 三元) or the Three Departments (*sanfu* 三府), and in the inner cosmos as the three cinnabar fields (*dantian* 丹田) of the human body, located in the crown of the head, in the chest, and in the abdomen. After this initial stage, the universe divided in various other levels, the most fundamental being the five directions, manifested as the Five Planets, the Five Sacred Peaks, and the five organs in the human

[107] Daoist textsthat aim to provide a unifying ideology for Daoism, often compilations of older texts and always adjusted to the social and political needs of the time, are for example the *Wushang biyao* DZ 1138 of the sixth century and studied in Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao*, the *Daojiao yishu* 到教義樞 DZ 1129 by Meng Anpai 孟安排 (late 7th cent.) and studied in Wang Zongyu 王宗昱, "Daojiao yishu" *yanjiu* 《道教義樞》 研究. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2001, and the *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032 of the Northern Song dynasty, studied in Kristofer M. Schipper, *Index du* Yunji qiqian. 2 Vols. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981-1982, pp. I-XXIX. The *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* could also be classified as ideological works because of their role in later intellectual discourse, even though the works themselves refrain from making any ideological statements.

body.[108] In short, the creation of the world is envisioned as a process from unity to plurality, both in terms of time and space. The *chao*-audience, known to all Daoist traditions and the mainstay of Daoist liturgy, is a liturgical device to reverse this process and gain access to an absolute continuum – in Daoist cosmology often referred to as the Great Matrix Heaven (*daluotian* 大羅天) - in which space and time are folded back into one.

The cosmology is reflected in the Daoist altar settings as well as in Heavenly Court paintings. Spatial divisions inherent to the cosmology are often rendered visually in the altar layout or in the pictorial space of a painting composition. The altar layout in its most basic form can be found in the Early Phase and is a representation of the cosmos divided vertically in an altar mound with three tiers and further ordered in a horizontal plane in the five directions by the placement of five gates and five tables, among other things. The Beiyue miao murals are also the most immediate pictorial representation of this Daoist cosmology similarly dividing the images of the Five Sacred Peak deities in their approximate directions in the lower register of the two side walls, and those of the Three Officials of Heaven, Earth, and Water in the upper register (Drawings 3A and 3B). The sculptural representation of a Heavenly Court at Nanzhu guan with its statues of the Three Treasures (the precursors of the Three Purities) accompanied by the deities of the five directions positioned behind them could also count as a fine example of this division even though it lacks the spatial orientation of a temple painting (Fig. 1).

In the Middle Phase, the increase of the pantheon of deities, the introduction of ritual elements (and deities) from the state cult, local cults, and newly emerged Daoist lineages, the compelling presence of an impressive body of material, both written and visual, of Buddhist cosmology, all these aspects warranted a conceptual refurbishment of Daoist cosmology, resulting in additional layers of heavens structured in complex, and often contradictory, spatial relationships. The chapter on cosmology in the imperially commissioned Daoist encyclopedia, the *Yunji qiqian*, is a good example of an attempt to provide Daoist cosmology with a rationalistic ideology.[109] The possible influence of such intellectual efforts are difficult to gauge, but in ritual practice the most fundamental change to the concept of Daoist cosmology is the introduction of the thirty-six heavens divided in first the Great Matrix Heaven on top, followed by the Three Heavens or the Three Purities, all in a vertical plane,

[108] *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 40.1a-5a and 23b-25a contains essays on the Daoist cosmology of three and five and their various manifestations.
[109] *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032 chapter 21.

and then concluded by the thirty-two heavens distributed in a horizontal plane thereby substituting for and superimposing themselves on the former five directions.[110]

This "refurbished" cosmology of the Middle Phase is witnessed in the placement of thirty-two tablets on the central altar mound described in the *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* described above, and for example pictorially represented by the images of the Thirty-Two Heavenly Emperors (24-55) on the rear wall of the altar-shrine in the Yongle gong murals. The Ming Daoist Canon has also preserved an illustrated text, the *Sancai dingwei tu* 三才定位圖 (Illustrations of the Fixed Positions of the Three Powers), by the Song statesman and ritual codifier Zhang Shangying 張商應 (1043-1121) for the proper visualisation of the Three Purities and the thirty-two heavens. Annotations in small script to the right of the images give explanations on the specific colours of their robes and the types of crowns (Figs. 38 and 39).[111] The images of the Three Purities are compositionally reminiscent to a wall painting of the Three Purities painted in about 1368 on the rear wall of the central altar-shrine of the Chongyang Hall at Yongle gong, such as the double haloes behind the deity, the armrest and the throne and the positioning of two rows of attendants in front (Fig. 40).[112] The Three Purities of the *Sancai dingwei tu* however lack the traditional attributes (the illustrations seem to simply repeat one woodblock print adding only minor variations, probably for economic reasons) and have moustaches. The version in the Canon is probably a Ming reproduction of a Song original, but more research is needed on this topic. The thirty-two heavens are represented as palaces arranged in a circle on a horizontal plane around the Jade Emperor (or Emperor-on-High) seated in a palace and flanked by attendants. The deities of the thirty-two

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[110] The thirty-two heavens are subdivided in four and twenty-eight heavens, the last part called the Three Realms of desire, form and the formless (*sanjie* 三界) after Buddhism but which by contrast consists of in total thirty-two heavens. The Daoist thirty-two heavens have however a different interpretation and are understood as being horizontally oriented in the five directions. The five directions correspond to the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansion (*xiu*), seven for each direction, and four for the centre, the so-called four Brahma heavens (*fantian* 梵天) where the elected people of the Dao (*zhongmin* 種民) are reborn. These stars and heavens of the five directions are collectively called the Five Dippers (*wudou* 五斗). This seems to be a Song invention, or perhaps Tang. In other versions the thirty-two heavens are divided in four directions of each eight heavens. Regardless the precise ideology – which probably does not exist – the Daoist thirty-two heavens derive from an important ancient Lingbao scripture, the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經 DZ 1, chapter one, in which they are superseded by one superior heaven, Great Matrix Heaven. Song cosmology is arguably an elaboration on the ancient Lingbao structure interspersing the heavens of the Three Purities, that had become fully codified by that time, between the Great Matrix Heaven and thirty-two heavens. Both the ancient Lingbao and the Song cosmologies seem to have been directed at demonstrating that the thirty-two heavens of the Buddhist cosmos all originate in – and are therefore inferior to – the Dao.

[111] *Sancai dingwei tu* DZ 155. The text also contains (6b) an illustration of Saint Ancestor for which the introductory text seems to be missing, indicating that the text is incomplete. The illustrations of the following text, the *Shangqing dongzhen jiugong zifang tu* 上清洞真九宮紫房圖 DZ 156, are probably misplaced and should be included in the *Sancai dingwei tu*.

[112] Jin, *Yuandai daoguan*, p. 168.

heavens, depicted in groups of four, leave their palaces and approach the Jade Emperor borne on clouds. Zhang Shangying thus provided an illustration for visualising the Daoist cosmos.

Heavenly Court paintings are however not the symbolic representation of the cosmos: they only represent one half of the Daoist cosmos, the outer cosmos. Only when they are matched with their bodily counterparts can the cosmos be considered complete. This may also be reason why normal humans, narrative elements, or other affairs related to the mundane, ordinary world are, principally, absent in Heavenly Court painting, as if the viewer is attending a court audience held in the imperial palace where only the nobility, courtiers, officials, generals, Daoist priests, and attendants were allowed to attend, a place completely sealed off from the world of ordinary people. Presumably, the universe created from the Dao and contained in the outer cosmos of the stars, mountains, and rivers and the inner cosmos of the inner body (of the priest) is that of nature in a pure and perfect state, untainted by the world of man.

The Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Water

Daoist deities organised in Daoist ritual belong to one of the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth and Water. This division is most clearly witnessed in the lists of names for *jiao*-offerings preserved in Song ritual manuals.[113] These *jiao*-offering lists start off with an enumeration of the titles of the Three Purities and four, six, or eight imperial deities, the exact number depending on regional differences and specific time periods, then followed by all the deities associated with Heaven, such as all the stellar deities, and then the deities associated with Water such as the deities of the Five Sacred Peaks and Four Sacred Marshes, and finally all the deities associated with Earth, comprising hell deities as well as the Earth God (*tudi* 土地) and the City God (*chenghuang* 城隍). It should be noted that the realms of Earth and Water seem to be inversed as one normally would order them, but the reason for this inversion will become clear further below. In some *jiao*-offering lists, the realms of Water and Earth are also headed by two imperial deities, the Mulberry Emperor (*fusang dadi* 扶桑大帝) governing

[113] The *jiao*-offering lists in *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, chapter 39, and *Daomen dingzhi* DZ 1224, chapter 3, provide the best examples of this division into three realms. The first contours of this type of division are demarcated in Du Guangting's list in *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* DZ 507, chapter 50, but lack any division among the central deities. The same division of the Three Realms is found in *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 5.1a-2b, where it is used to make a division of the celestial offices of the Three Realms where the deities reside, thirty-nine for the Upper Realm, twenty-seven for the Middle Realm, and twelve for the Lower Realm. Interestingly, the section is followed by a discussion on the private *chao*-audience ritual in an oratory.

over the realm of Water, and the Fengdu Emperor (*fengdu dadi* 豐都) ruling over the Chinese Hades.[114]

The cosmological division of the Three Realms is also reflected in Heavenly Court painting. This division is witnessed in its most basic form in the Beiyue miao murals which has the Official of Heaven depicted on the upper register of the west wall, and those of Water and Earth on the east wall.

A much more complex but still similar arrangement is found in the Yongle gong murals (Fig. 41). The Three Purities and other imperial deities, collectively called the Sovereigns (*yu* 御 or *huang* 皇) are depicted in distinctively large images on the foreground of the Heavenly Court composition – I generally refer to these large images as "central deities" in this study – while deities of smaller size and rank (with some exceptions such as the deities of the Sacred Peaks which had been promoted to emperors and were depicted as such) take position in rows behind them – termed "subordinate deities." Mapping out the realms of Heaven, Water, and Earth on the Yongle gong murals, a linear progression from the highest realm to the lowest emerges: the realm of Heaven corresponds to the deities depicted on the west wall, the two north walls, and the northern section of the east wall.

The realm of Water corresponds to the deities on the mid section of the west wall (Plate 3), that is the deities positioned between King Father of the East (V) and Queen Mother of the West (VI) and some behind her and presided in front by the imperial image of the Mulberry Emperor (160). The Mulberry turns his head, as if looking back to the deities of his realm and demarcating the border between the realm of Heaven and that of Water. The subordinate deities of the realm of Water are those of the Five Sacred Peaks (164-168) and the Four Sacred Marshes (169-172), and the three water deities Zhao Yu 趙昱 (177), Li Bing 李冰 and Erlang 二郎 (188, 189) (Fig. 54).[115]

The realm of Earth corresponds to the southern section of the east wall (Plate 3), that is all the deities following after the Queen Mother of the West and headed by the Fengdu Emperor (178). The subordinate deities of this realm are the Ten Kings of Hell (179-180, 182-186, 189-191), the City God (181) and his general (192), the Meritorious Officers Guarding Time (193-196), the Generals of the Three Primes (197-199), and the Earth God (201). Not all deities in this group are identified (200, 202, 203).

[114] See *Shangqing lingbao dafa* DZ 1223, 39.15a, *Daomen dingzhi* DZ 1224, 3.39a, 41b.
[115] On the identification of these deities, see Appendix 1.1.

The division of the Three Realms is less obvious in the Nan'an murals but still present. Deities belonging to the realm of Heaven are depicted on the northern parts of the east and west walls as well as on the mid-section of the west wall, similar to the Yongle gong murals, while deities of the Five Sacred Peaks and four Marshes – which I consider here as representative of the Realms of Earth and Water – are depicted following the standard analogy on the southern part of the east wall (Plates 6 and 7). Curiously, the Toronto murals only seem to depict (subordinate) deities from the realm of Heaven.

The NW-SE axis

The particular distribution of the Three Realms in two-dimensional space follows the cosmological division of the Daoist altar layout with Heaven's Gate positioned in the northwest (NW) and Earth's Door in the southeast (SE) (Fig. 31). Instead of a division of space orientated from south to north as in traditional Chinese architecture, Heavenly Court paintings follow a cosmological division around a NW-SE axis. The *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* explains the particular location of these two gates as follows: "Because *yang* reaches its extremity in the southeast, it will give birth to *yin*. That is the reason why Earth's Door is in the southeast. Because *yin* reaches its extremity in the northwest, it will give birth to *yang*. That is the reason why Heaven's Gate is in the northwest. The methods for practising [the Dao] and going on audience with the truth (*chaozhen*) all proceed from *yin* to *yang* (*qu yin jiu yang* 去陰就陽)."[116] A similar passage explaining the locations of the Gate of Heaven and Earth's Door on the basis of the cyclical development of yin and yang is found in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 of the Han dynasty.[117] According to the Chinese scholar Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, the *Taiping jing* paraphrases the so-called "weft-texts" (*weishu* 緯書) of that period, and correlates to other contemporaneous texts.[118] The NW-SE axis seen in the Daoist altar layout and in the composition of the Heavenly Court paintings therefore continues practices already prevalent in the Han period.

It is my contention that the particular arrangement of the Three Realms in the horizontal plane is based on this NW-SE axis, locating the deities of the realm of Heaven (or Heaven's Gate, or the Heavenly Sovereign) in the northwest and the deities of the realm of

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[116] *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* DZ 219, 46.5b.
[117] Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, p. 227.
[118] *Rao Zongyi* 饒宗頤, "*Taiping jing* yu *Shuowen jiezi* 《太平經》與《說文解字》." Rao Zongyi 饒宗儀, *Rao Zongyi shixue lunzhu xuan* 饒宗頤史學論著選. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993, pp. 262-263.

Earth (or Earth's Door, or the Earth Goddess) in the southeast. A diagram illustrates the NW-SE axis for the Yongle gong murals (Fig. 42). This would also explain why the realm of Water is interspersed between the realms of Heaven and Earth in Heavenly Court paintings, thus inversing the assumed standard order of first Earth and then Water.

Most Heavenly Court paintings comprise this NW-SE axis in their composition. The Toronto murals, albeit indistinct in the portrayal of the deities of the Three Realms, places the Heavenly Sovereign (B12, the Daoist priest) and the Earth Goddess (A13), identified by the trigram for earth (*kun* 坤, three broken lines) in her headdress in opposite directions on the east and west walls, constituting this cosmological axis (Plates 4 and 5). The same is true for the Beiyue miao murals where the Official of Heaven is located in the north-western direction and the Official of Earth in the south-eastern direction in the upper register of the east and west walls (Drawings 3A and 3B). Interestingly, their cosmological directions are matched by the images of the Five Sacred Peak deities in the lower register. The Northern Peak Emperor (black, heaven) is located in the northwest and the Central Peak Emperor (yellow, earth) is located in the southeast. The painters could have opted for placing the Southern Peak Emperor on that place, which would have been in line with the traditional sequence of the five phases (east-south-centre-west-north), but they apparently chose to follow a cosmological division.[119]

The Yongle gong murals demonstrate that the location of deities seemingly associated with a certain cosmological direction is not fixed. They indeed portray the Heavenly Sovereign (IV) (Fig. 27) on the northwest wall but contrary to what one would expect, there is no trace of Earth Goddess on the southern part of the east wall. Instead, we find the Queen Mother of the West (VI) on this spot (of the Earth's Door) (Plate 3) while the Earth Goddess (VIII) is found on the opposite position on the west wall (Fig. 72). Why is that? Apparently, there are yet other cosmological divisions at work. In parenthesis, the location of Queen Mother of the West as a main representative of the Earth's Door or the realm of Earth is not out of place since first of all the subordinate deities behind her all belong to the realm of Earth and we should further remember that she, together with her husband King Father of the East, play an important role in the Rite of Deliverance during which the soul of a deceased person was liberated from the earth prisons.

The Eight Trigrams

[119] The deities of the five directions are addressed in the sequence east-south-centre-west-north following the "generative cycle" of the five phases. See *Taishang dongxuan lingbao chishu yujue miaojing* DZ 352, 8a-16a.

Another type of cosmological division found in the pictorial arrangement of Heavenly Court painting – and in the layout of the ritual area as well - is the circular distribution of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) from the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) in the so-called King Wen arrangement. The King Wen arrangement is also referred to as the *Luoshu* 洛書arrangement since legend has it that the patterns (*shu* 書) were written on the shell of a turtle that surfaced from the Luo River and transmitted them to King Wen the founder of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1050-221). The patterns that make up the *Luoshu* arrangement are understood since antiquity as a magic square divided into nine fields with the numbers from one to nine rendered as imaginary constellations (i.e. dots marking the stars which were then connected by lines). The *Luoshu* arrangement has been correlated with the eight trigrams (omitting the centre, 5) since at least the Han dynasty. This arrangement in nine fields is also at the basis of the Bright Hall (*mingtang* 明堂),[120] a royal temple or sacred palace with nine rooms of which the design is attributed to King Wen.[121]

The Yongle gong murals follow the King Wen arrangement of the trigrams, an arrangement in which the eight trigrams are mapped onto the eight directions, as illustrated in the diagram (Fig. 43). The particular order of the trigrams explains the inversion of Queen Mother of the West with that of the Earth Goddess on the opposite wall: the Queen Mother of the West has an emblem with the trigram for wood (two broken lines and one complete line, *zhen* 震, also denoting east) depicted on her chest, akin to its position in the east in the King Wen arrangement (Plate 3); the trigram for earth (three broken lines, *kun* 坤) should be located in the southwest according to the King Wen arrangement, the approximate position of the Earth Goddess (VIII) on the southern part of the east wall, an identification further reinforced by the emblem with the *kun*-trigram in her crown (Fig. 72). Although without a trigram, the Heavenly Sovereign – representing the trigram for heaven (three complete lines, *qian* 乾) – is found on its appropriate place in the northwest as in the King Wen arrangement. The remaining five trigrams are not identified, but it should be noted that the sidewalls of the Yongle gong murals have altogether eight central deities, corresponding in number to the eight trigrams. The identification of three "trigram" deities strongly suggests that the

[120] Because in Daoism the character for "bright" (*ming* 明) is sometimes read as *meng* 盟 meaning "alliance" such as in *mingzhen ke* 明真科 "ritual for an alliance with truth," I wonder if we should not read *mingtang* in a similar way, thus meaning "Hall of Alliance," i.e. a hall where the Zhou kings established an alliance with (the deities of) heaven, which would make more sense with regard to its layout and fuction than simply translating it as Bright Hall.

[121] Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise*. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1968 (1988 reprint), pp. 145-157.

remaining five central deities should also be understood as pictorial manifestations of the eight trigrams.

Interestingly, the King Wen arrangement of the eight trigrams contains a similar NW-SE axis, from north-west-west to south-east-east to be more precise. The four trigrams in the upper half are traditionally understood as belonging to yang and the four trigrams in the bottom half as belonging to yin.[122] This phasing between *yin* and *yang* perfectly fits the explanation given in the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* on the positions of Heaven's Gate and Earth's Door translated above.

The correlation with King Wen arrangement of trigrams is highly significant also because of its relationship to Daoist ritual practice and inner alchemy (*neidan* 内丹). The King Wen arrangement is considered to be an abstract representation of the cosmos after it was created, called "posterior heaven" (*houtian* 後天). The cosmology of the Daoist Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Water precisely represents the universe after its creation and the division of energies from the Dao. The Three Realms and the trigrams in the King Wen arrangement therefore represent, ontologically speaking, the same cosmos, namely that of posterior heaven. Daoist liturgy and in particular the *chao*-audience and its preparatory visualisations are focused on reversing this state of posterior heaven, fusing its deities from the plurality to unity, thereby returning to the Dao. This original state of the cosmos, called "anterior heaven" (*xiantian* 先天), is represented by another circular arrangement of the eight trigrams, the so-called Fuxi 伏羲 arrangement of the eight trigrams. The Fuxi arrangement has the trigram for earth in the north and the trigram for heaven in the south, and should be understood as the complement of the King Wen arrangement (Fig. 44).

The use of trigrams and their two complementary arrangements was a central part of inner alchemy, a Daoist type of meditation which focused on the transformation of ones body from a state of posterior heaven to anterior heaven not through a liturgical performance but through rigid meditation techniques phrased and envisioned in an abstract *Yijing* terminology mixed with (outer) alchemical terminology of processing elixirs from mineral substances. Much of these meditation practices - not their terminology - go back to arcane Shangqing lore.[123] The meditations of inner alchemy also have interesting parallels in Daoist liturgy. The nine alchemical transformations correspond to nine phases (*xing* 行, lit. "steps"), and they

[122] *Ibid*. pp. 157-163.
[123] For a study of Daoist inner alchemy in general, see Isabelle Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste: De l'unité et de la multiplicité. Avec une traduction commentée des Versets de l'éveil à la Vérité.* Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995.

could well be likened to the nine steps of Pacing the Void (*buxu* 步虛) and its hymns performed before the presentation of a memorial in Daoist liturgy: both the inner alchemical and the liturgical practice are a prelude to the final climax or the return to the state of "anterior heaven" or the Great Matrix Heaven. [124]

Not surprisingly, the *chaoyuan* or *chaozhen* also formed the final stage in this alchemical transformation process, even though *neidan*-texts seem to be less explicit on how this *chao*-audience should be visualised in comparison to Song ritual manuals.[125] One *neidan*-diagram visualises it as the deities dressed as Daoist priests rising up from the five organs, and the commentary to the diagram further explains that they "become a deity and enter the Heavenly Court" (*chengshen ru tiangong* 成神入天宮).[126] This Heavenly Court is however left undepicted (Fig. 45). Discussions in the *neidan*-text *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (Six Books on Cultivating Truth, 13th cent.) on *chaoyuan* and "inner vision" (*neiguan* 内觀), visualisations made during inner alchemical meditations, rephrase the liturgical *chao*-audience in alchemical terms while retaining some elements; for example, the Three Passages (*sanguan* 三關, located on the spinal column) substitute the Three Gates and are similarly surrounded by guards and soldiers. There is however no reference to a presentation of a memorial.[127]

From the Song dynasty onward, inner alchemy was particular popular among scholars and many of its practices and texts seem to have been widely available.[128] The deities related to inner alchemical practices – that is, the deities transmitting the secrets of inner alchemy and not the bodily deities – are not found in the traditional ritual pantheon of gods of Daoism, but rather belong to local cults that worship immortals such as Lü Dongbin and Zhongli Quan, who often in disguise roamed the country instructing and initiating people into the Dao. Inner alchemy also occupied a foremost position in the religious life of the members and lay members of the Quanzhen order, an order established by the same social group of scholars and which took Lü Dongbin as its spiritual patriarch. The Yongle gong was one of the main

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[124] The *Lingbao yujian* 1.9a-10a further explains that the nine steps correlate to the nine stars of the Big Dipper, seven visible and two invisible. Diagrams for Pacing the Void or Walking the Dipper (or the Mainstay, *gang*) on different days are found in the first part of chapter 21 which is then followed by instructions for visualising the presentation of the memorial in the last part.

[125] See the *Michuan Zhengyang zhenren lingbao bifa* 秘傳正陽真人靈寶祕法 DZ 1191, studied in Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés secrets du joyéous magique: traité d'alchimie taoïste du XIe siècle.* Paris: Les deux océans, 1984, esp. pp. 41, 167.

[126] *Xiuzhen taiji hunyuan zhixuan tu* 修真太極混元指玄圖 DZ 150, 7a-b.

[127] *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 DZ 263, 10b-22b.

[128] See Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, "Alchemy and Self-Cultivation in Literary Circles of the Northern Song Dynasty – Su Shi and his Techniques of Survival." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996-1997), pp. 15-53.

centres of the Quanzhen order and was built next to the shrine to Lü Dongbin's alleged grave. Having these inner alchemical processes in mind, it may therefore not be entirely coincidental to find Heavenly Court paintings which are based on cosmology of the eight trigrams at this site. At least, the allusions to inner alchemy contained in the wall paintings should not have been difficult to grasp for an audience of Quanzhen followers.

Thus far, only the Yongle gong is known to have Heavenly Court paintings following this type of arrangement based on the eight trigrams. As I will demonstrate in chapter 4, the Yongle gong murals follow a ritual format introduced during the reign of Song Emperor Huizong (r. 1101-1125), and it is therefore plausible that the murals accompanying these rituals would also have appeared for the first time around this time.

Many other views however exist on what ideas Heavenly Court paintings should advocate. In this chapter we have discussed the orthodox (or orthopractical) view of the Daoist clergy as culled from Daoist ritual texts, thus providing a conceptual, ritual framework on which painters would base their composition. The next chapter will deal with the views and practical ideas of the painters on how to organise and apply a wall-painting composition.