Zhengyi Tianshi gao Zhao Sheng koujue
正一天師告趙昇口訣
The Celestial Master of Orthodox Unity Gives Zhao Sheng Oral Instructions: A Translation and Analysis

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Abstract

This study translates and examines an early Daoist text called "The Celestial Master of Orthodox Unity Gives Zhao Sheng Oral Instructions," likely written in the late 4th century C.E. It attempts to understand what the writing of this particular text reveals about its political and religious circumstances, including tentative attitudes among clergy, instability for members, and general political uncertainty, all of which are viewed in light of the two Chinese theocracies to have existed.

It is necessary to first establish an acceptable date of authorship in order to relate the text to the circumstances of influence. Specific attention is given to the themes most prominently developed in the text, such as Celestial Master Daoism; millenarian traditions; eremitism, and talismans and registers. Following is an original annotated translation of the text. Analysis compares this work with other Celestial Master Daoist texts, some earlier and some later than the central piece, all with similar themes, yet employing different tactics to convey their meaning.

It is the hypothesis of this study that there is an implicit connection between political action and early Celestial Master Daoism that is borne out in a variety of ways, this text being one of them.

La présente étude porte sur la traduction et l'examen d'un ancien texte taoïste intitulé « Le maître céleste de l'unité orthodoxe donne ses instructions orales à Zhao Sheng », lequel fut vraisemblablement rédigé vers la fin du quatrième siècle de notre ère. À plus forte raison, elle permet de mieux appréhender ce que le texte lui-même révèle à propos des circonstances politiques et religieuses ayant conduit à sa rédaction. Notamment, y sont abordées les attitudes au sein du clergé, l'instabilité de ses membres ainsi que le contexte d'incertitude politique, lesquels sont autant d'aspects interprétés à la lumière des deux régimes théocratiques chinois jadis instaurés.

Afin d'établir la liaison entre ledit texte et ses influences circonstancielles, il est dans un premier temps indispensable d'établir la date et la paternité de l'œuvre. Une attention particulière sera ainsi prêtée aux principaux thèmes abordés dans le texte, à savoir la tradition taoïste des Maîtres célestes, le millénarisme, l'hermétisme, les talismans ainsi que les registres. Par la suite, le lecteur trouvera une traduction annotée inédite du texte. Le volet analytique de la traduction consiste notamment en une comparaison entre cette œuvre et les autres textes hérités des Maîtres célestes, qu'ils fussent antérieurs ou postérieurs, lesquels, bien que discutant de thèmes similaires, emploient différents moyens pour transmettre leur sens profond.

L'hypothèse de cette étude est donc qu'il y avait une relation implicite entre l'action politique et la tradition taoïste des Maîtres célestes à ses débuts, une relation qui se manifestait de diverses manières, entre autres par le biais du texte au cœur de la présente enquête.

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Introduction

The following is an examination and translation of a text that, at the very least, purports to be a part of the Celestial Master Daoist tradition, called *The Celestial Master of Orthodox Unity Gives Zhao Sheng Oral Instructions* (*Zhengyi*

tianshi gao Zhao Sheng koujue 正一天師告趙昇口訣, 1273[1]) (hereafter referred to as *Oral Instructions*). The text predicts an apocalypse that will destroy the world by means of demon officials with a variety of horrific terrors at their command, who will leave behind a group of 240 000 people, called the seed people, most of whom will have received a talisman of great power, and they will go on to repopulate the world.

In personal communications with Terry Kleeman, a leading expert in this field, he posited that there was a possibility that this was the work of a splinter sect that took the name of the Celestial Master sect for the purpose of legitimacy, but that the practices at the core of the group may have differed from those associated with the central group. While this distinction is important, it is also necessary to note that there is a current of thought among those studying early Daoism at the moment, including Kleeman, that there was no unified sect, as it has been imagined up to now, but that there was a variety of different sects, constantly vying for power to a degree, but also autonomously operating within their own strictures.

For the sake of this study, and because of a paucity of publication on this matter, I will accept that the text is of the Celestial Master tradition, and will therefore undertake my analysis of the work by way of comparison with other Celestial Master texts, some earlier and some later than that translated below, assessing connections to politics and the state of the religious body during this time.

[1] All texts are numbered according to Schipper 2005.

Background

Without power, there is no society. At least, historically, that has always been the case. In any era of human history, it has been power that has motivated nearly all change. Power guides and determines human behaviour, at times inspiring prospective leaders to do great things in order to gain the trust of the people, and at others, corrupting the virtue of those who seek it. The tactics employed to gain power are a reflection of both the historical and geographical space in question. These tactics can also expose much about the belief system of the leader, and, perhaps more importantly, the living conditions, needs and thoughts of the people who that leader represents.

The Daoist religion began as a deeply political entity. A politics that emanated from its seminal work entitled the *Laozi* (老子), named for its putative, but likely mythical, author. The *Laozi* has been interpreted in many ways. The dominant academic camps that study the work are divided between claiming that it is a guide to mystical meditational practices, and that it is a political manual. At first glance, these purposes seem to be at odds with one another, but it is in the nature of the *Loazi* to call into question its own premises because of its understanding of the role of transformation in human existence, especially as it relates to power. Chapter 29 states:

> Sometimes things lead and sometimes they follow;
> Sometimes things breathe gently and sometimes they pant;
> Sometimes they are strong and sometimes they are weak;
> Sometimes they fight and sometimes they fall;

> This is why sages cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive.[2]

In this unornamented description of the natural order of the world, the author takes for granted the ineluctability of these transformations. Their potentially political implication is not difficult to draw out. The height of wisdom and epitome of power in Daoism is embodied by the sage, and it is through deft manipulation of tools of power, leading and following, recognising strength and weakness, that one is able to attain this highest achievement.

The figure of Laozi has been conceptualised as a manifestation of the very principles that are espoused in the text of his name, and in line with this, he, and his ideas, are said to have undergone a number of transformations. These range from the transformation of both himself and the fundamental tenets of Daoism in order to create Buddhism in India after having given his text to Yin Xi (尹喜) at the Western Pass, to taking on the form of various advisors to some of the most important kings in Chinese history.[3]

These transformations demonstrate that, at root, propagation of the central message undergirding Daoist thinking is more important than the label of *Daoism* itself. Because of this, it is interesting to consider to what ends this message is being disseminated, and by what means. Given that the seminal text itself defies standard interpretation, answering this question with any certainty is impossible; however, it is clear that there are arguments to be made that can be founded in historical fact and brought to bear through textual evidence.

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[2] Laozi, *trans*. Ivanhoe 2002: 29.
[3] Bokenkamp 1997: 168-71, 209-10.

Although scholars, such as Stephen R. Bokenkamp and Terry Kleeman, have thoroughly investigated the political aspects of the early movement of Celestial Master Daoists (*tianshi dao* 天師道); the intrinsic nature of politics within the tradition, and the willingness of Daoist clergy to transform its tactics are issues that have not been explicitly addressed, and it is these issues that are exemplified by this work that is yet to receive serious scholarly attention. *Oral Instructions* is a millenarian work that describes a society gone awry. Their main chance at salvation lies in a talisman that the Celestial Master, Zhang Daoling (張道陵), presents to his disciple, Zhao Sheng (趙昇). He is to find the most worthy subjects so that they can be saved from destruction and become the seed people.

The themes within are developed as little more than a means to support and further the idea that because of a decay in the social fabric that has impacted upon politics, the unity of the religious practice of Daoism, and the Dao itself, a profound transformation must occur so that at least some people can be saved to survive the coming apocalypse and thus repopulate the world in line with the Dao. While this may not seem distinctly political, it is clear upon further inspection of political history of China and those associated with the Celestial Master name at the time of writing, which will be shown to be the late fourth century C.E., that this is could well be a tactic employed by the author to draw people to the religion, bolstering numbers, and creating a broader base of support from which to draw in order to implement a system of power that could be likened to either of the Daoist theocracies that had already existed in China's past.

Terry Kleeman has put forth tremendous effort in his examinations of the only two true theocracies to have existed in China, writing several articles about Hanzhong (漢中), which lasted from approximately 191 C.E. until 215 and was ruled over by Zhang Lu (張魯), grandson of Zhang Daoling. His manuscript about the fourth century state of Cheng-Han (成漢), called *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom*, gives tremendous detail about the political landscape of the state and includes translations of the biographies of the leaders. In a recent publication, "Community and Daily Life in the Early Daoist Church," he explores the historical changes that can be shown to have happened in the daily lives of common people under the Celestial Master sect.[4] While he has undertaken a careful analysis of the ways in which Daoist theocracies were implemented, attending to everything from methods of governance to translation of biographies of the rulers of Cheng-Han, he has not, to my knowledge, attempted to directly connect any particular texts to any particular, and related, political activity.

The textual tradition associated with Daoism has certainly not been left unexamined by Western academics. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen edited the standard compendium in English to accompany the Daoist Canon. The purpose of this work is not, however, to develop in depth analysis meant to further understanding of social and political conditions in the times during which texts were written. The volumes are crucial to developing a broad view of the textual history that exists surrounding the Celestial Master cult, as well as all other Daoist

[4] Kleeman 2009: 395-436.

schools. While it would undoubtedly have been enlightening to have been able to have given space to all sixteen texts classified by Schipper as belonging to the same tradition as that presented below, the confines of this study do not allow this type of engagement.[5]

An extensive, but refined, collection of translations of essential Daoist texts was published by Stephen R. Bokenkamp in 1997, called *Early Daoist Scriptures*. The texts translated therein derive their influence from various sects under the rubric of the Daoist religion, including several Celestial Master texts, the group around which this study centres. The focus of this book is the textual tradition in and of itself, rather than an examination of these texts as possible political tools. While Bokenkamp does look at the social, religious and political ramifications of the all of the texts that he translates, the emphasis is not on this connection, and it is this unexplored field to which this study intends to draw attention.

By using two of the texts translated in Bokenkamp's book of translations as a point of comparison, one written in the dynasty that preceded that in which *Oral Instructions* was written, and one from the dynasty that followed *Oral Instructions*; this study aims to put forth both a translation and analysis of a Daoist text that illuminates struggles within the religious organisation, and presents the possibility that political aspirations were essential to its existence. The importance of this text lies in the fact that, while bearing some similarities to

[5] For further information about this tradition, there are brief descriptions of each of these sixteen texts in the *Taoist Canon* mentioned in the body above. The descriptions of texts associated with Celestial Master Daoists can be found between pages 120 and 137.

the other texts used herein, the differences suggest a great deal about the time during which it was written.

The connections that existed between the Daoist religious organisation and various dynastic rulers is integral to an understanding of the ways in which early Chinese dynasties manipulated the people, and the ways in which the people were able to exert influence upon the imperial court. Because of the success of the popular uprisings that were fundamental to the downfall of the Han (漢) dynasty, many of which were at least peripherally religious, it was impossible for successive dynasties to ignore growing religious movements, especially those, such as the Celestial Master Daoists, that could quickly supplant the roles that political bodies fulfilled.

The tense balance that had to be maintained between ruling powers and religious bodies could crumble and fall apart at any moment if either side detected even the slightest fissure. In the text translated below, it will become clear that the dynasty in power at the time, the Eastern Jin's (晉) Sima (司馬) family, was already succumbing to the challenges of a splintering empire. Likely capitalising on this situation, while at the same time attempting to repair the unity of the Daoist church, an effort had to be made to entice people to join the ranks of Celestial Master Daoists, and this text is at least one component of that attempt.

The connection between religious belief and political aspiration is uniquely brought to light in the context of this text, because it presents itself as being purely religious, tacitly devoid of political intention. As such, by

examining the history of the Celestial Master Daoists as well as the ways in which texts from eras both before and after *Oral Instructions* that have addressed similar issues, it is hoped that it will be possible to have a more comprehensive understanding of how this group, that continues to thrive, viewed itself as both a religious body, but also as a political entity.

Dating of the Text

The time in which a text is written inevitably determines a great deal about its content, making it necessary to locate this work in history as accurately as possible prior to examining any other factor. Like many early Daoist texts, the history of *Oral Instructions* is uncertain. There are numerous approaches used in attempts to date texts of uncertain historical origin, which include: mentions within the text of significant historical events or personages; references to the work in other sources and references in the work to other known sources; particular words being changed so that taboo characters are not used; [6] and finally, usage of terms and concepts unique to specific eras. While it would be possible to devote an entire study to the dating of this text, this is not the focus of this project; rather, the dating of the text is but one element that will assist in bringing about a fuller understanding of this apocalyptic work that has yet to receive the attention it deserves in scholarship. I will thus give a brief overview of some of the work that has already been put forth, most notably by Kristopher Schipper in *The Taoist*

[6] Taboo characters refer to words that are associated with the ruling house, and thus are not suitable to be written out of respect for the emperor.

Canon, and expand upon his conclusions with evidence discovered from within my own research.

Oral Instructions claims to be the words of the Celestial Master himself, Zhang Daoling (張道陵), who died in 156, which would mean that the text would presumably have been written prior to that date. This assumption, however, is not borne out by other elements of the text, and it is reasonable to conclude that the Celestial Master is used as the spokesperson for this prediction because it is his name that carries the most weight of any person associated with Celestial Master Daoism. The most obvious indication that that this text was written after Zhang Daoling's time is that there are references made, albeit somewhat coded references, to much later times, such as the prediction that the apocalypse would begin in "the first year of the sexagesimal cycle (jiazi 甲子) in the reign of the Golden Horse, *jinma* 金馬, a circumlocution for the Sima 司馬 family of the Jin 晉 dynasty, who ruled by the virtue of Metal (this date would correspond to 364)."[7]

The mention of this date locates what is often called 'the lower bound,' referring to the earliest possible date at which a text could have been written. Because of the reference to the *jinma*, the date must occur after the Sima family reclaimed power in 317 with the establishment of the Eastern Jin.[8] In order to refute the veracity of this claim, it would be necessary to accept that Zhang Daoling could have *known*, uncontestably, that the Sima clan would rise to power

[7] Schipper 2005: 124.
[8] Lewis 2009: 63.

in the future. If we are to accept Schipper's dating for the *jiazi* year in the rule of the *jinma*, there are several other dates mentioned within the text that must be considered to establish a timeline of events predicted, and using that information, to establish, as accurately as possible, what is meant as a prediction, and what could be taken as commentary on events that had already occurred.

The first date mentioned in the text is slightly different from the rest because it is stated as the year during which the conversation recorded took place behind the closed doors of Zhao's parish in the *renwu* year, which would correspond to 382 if it fit into the schema of the apocalypse that is supposed to begin in the *jiazi* year and proceeds chronologically from there. Because this date is connected to the predictors, rather than the prediction itself, its relevance to this discussion is diminished, and thus need not be further indulged.

The next date mentioned is the *jiashen* year, the twenty-first year in the sexagesimal cycle, corresponding to 384. It is at this time that the apocalypse is supposed to begin to take shape with flooding and multifarious other disasters inundating the unlucky masses who fail to join the ranks of those fortunate few who will be saved. The next date predicts the conclusion of the apocalypse in the successive *renchen* and *guisi* years, which correspond to 392 and 393. After this time, there will be no people left to be saved, and the success of the apocalypse will be complete.

If this is a prediction made in earnest, then it follows that the date at which the apocalypse is meant to begin, 384, must be in the author's future, otherwise he

would be aware that no such apocalypse had come, and there would be little reason to create such a document. It is possible that the author had seen what he believed to be the beginning of the collapse of the Sima reign of the Jin dynasty, and thus made this prediction in order to draw devotees to Celestial Master Daoism, with the intent of using the powerful numbers for political gains, leaving room for the possibility that it was written after 384, but still before 392.

If and when the dynasty weakened sufficiently to be able to take advantage of the disorder, these political gains could be used in the interests of establishing a new theocracy. This political hope, if it existed at all, would certainly have been rooted in the fact that the state of Hanzhong thrived for nearly thirty years at the end of the Han. This being so, it is possible that the text was written after 364, but still before 392. This brings us to a preliminary dating with a lower bound of 364 and an upper bound of 392. While these dates have been discerned by logical means, making them seemingly reliable, it is still important to examine external evidence, as any self-referential dating is marred by the machinations and intentions of its author.

Further decisive evidence to support this initial hypothesis is unfortunately scant. There are no contemporary sources that I have encountered that mention the *Oral Instructions*. According to Schipper, this work "mentions a number of texts and talismans that are not encountered elsewhere,"[9] which complicates the question of establishing an accurate date for the work.

[9] Schipper 2005: 124.

There is yet another approach commonly used to date texts; the replacement of taboo characters with more obscure words that may seem out of place, which again yields nothing in this instance, as there are no such replacements found within the text.

Having exhausted the possibility of using some of the more conclusive approaches to dating, it is necessary to turn to a method, which is unfortunately more open to interpretation. It is axiomatic to state that terminology is continually evolving; however, this fact is an essential resource in the dating of a text. Central thematic terms, especially in philosophical and religious texts, are often the most prone to reappropriation and reshaping, as is the case with the concept of the "Nine Heavens," referred to throughout this text. Because concepts such as the Nine Heavens figure so prominently in the minds of devotees, reconfiguring the ways in which they are understood creates access to a unique power over the reader by means of that particular term. Because of this access to power, terms that are prone to this type of reshaping are used frequently, making it easier to attach relatively specific dates to certain meanings or understandings of these terms.

The idea of the nine heavens changed radically in early Chinese religious thought. In *Oral Instructions*, it is stated that there are three heavens that are in power and six that have been sent out by the upper three to govern. In other words, there is a clearly demarcated hierarchy set out among the heavens within the realm of this text, which is revelatory to the dating of the text, because,

according to Terry Kleeman the term Six Heavens, when used in direct opposition to the upper Three Heavens begins to occur around the late fourth century.[10]

While it is clear that definitively identifying the time at which this text was written is difficult, or perhaps impossible, it is imperative to the process of examination to accept the dating based on the most convincing evidence, and to thus conclude that, barring new evidence, the text was written between the years 364 and 392.

Political Conditions

Having established a working hypothesis for the dating of *Oral Instructions* that falls between the years 364 and 392, it is possible to begin unpacking the wide array of conditions that may have contributed to its composition. Although this is not an overtly political text in that it neither espouses an ideology, nor does it impugn the legitimacy of a ruler or dynasty; it is possible that there are political motivations that drive the work, and as such, an examination of the politics of the era.

This examination will begin with the downfall of the Han, which officially occurred in 220, but the crumbling of the dynasty began long before. The period in question coincides with the establishment of the first official Daoist religious institutions, and one of the only true theocracies in China's history: Hanzhong. From the dissolution of the Daoist state, in modern day Sichuan, at the end of the

[10] Personal communications with Terry Kleeman on April 9, 2012.

Han dynasty forward, there was a long period of division in China, which I will follow Mark Edward Lewis in referring to as the Northern and Southern Dynasties,[11] despite the fact that this study will not touch upon the period traditionally given this name. This study will instead conclude with the early indications of a crumbling Eastern Jin dynasty, as this is the period during which the *Oral Instructions* was likely composed.

The Han dynasty's demise was undeniably connected to a rise in peasant rebel groups espousing a "Taiping" (太平), or "great peace" ideology, influenced by, if not completely in line with, some strain of Daoist thought. It cannot be concluded with certainty which entity acted as the catalyst and which the reactant; however, it is clear that this period in history, between approximately 147 and the fall of the Han, was fecund ground for the actualisation of Daoist political theory.

Despite a plethora of attempts to wrest power from the Confucian-leaning Han dynasty by various rebel leaders, Zhang Lu, leader of the Celestial Master Daoists, also known as "The Way of the Five Pecks of Rice," or *wu dou mi dao* (五斗米道), was the only leader to establish a Daoist state under his own control. This state, located in the Hanzhong valley near the Sichuan (四川) basin, adhered to a particular interpretation of the political system described in the *Laozi* as understood through the *Xiang'er* (想爾) commentary, authorship of which is often attributed to Zhang Lu himself.[12]

[11] Lewis 2009: 1.
[12] Bokenkamp 1997: 58-9.

The significance of this theocratic state cannot be understated in relation to the text at the centre of this study. With such a precedent having been set by Zhang Lu, and Li Te and Li Xiong in their respective states of Hanzhong and Cheng-Han, it is possible that there was an extant hope that a religious state could be formed, or reformed, which would address the needs of the people. The apocalyptic images found in *Oral Instructions* mirror, to some extent, those that resounded during the rebellions that contributed to the downfall of the Han, but as will be explicated in the section dedicated to millenarian traditions, the images used in *Oral Instructions* differ in interesting ways.

The political atmosphere during the late Han was rife with speculation concerning the proliferation of a new age of great peace. Accompanying Wang Mang's (王莽) interruption to the Han dynasty, between 9 and 24 C.E., was a revival of hope among peasants that equality among people was possible. Wang Kuang's (王況) prophecy, in the year 21 C.E., that the Han dynasty would be returned to its former glory with the help of a man surnamed Li (李), who could trace his ancestry back to the figure of Laozi, recorded in the *Records of History* (*shiji* 史記) by Sima Qian (司馬遷) as Lao Dan (老聃) and Li Er (李耳), set the stage for a surge of messianic hopes among the people. While the prophecy was correct in its assertion that the Han dynasty would rule once more, the power that it had once held had already begun to decay irretrievably, leading to ever-growing numbers of people turning to alternative ideologies, one of the more prominent among them being *taiping*.

Beginning in 147 with Li Chen (李堅) in Chenliu (陳留) assuming the title of "August Emperor," or *huangdi* (皇帝), a spate of peasant rebellions spread across China, following a similar pattern of warlords assuming titles of a uniformly grandiose nature. Although these rebellions were not of an entirely religious nature at their cores, in both 165 and 166, two uprisings occurred that employed religious symbols and ritual practice to more broadly promote the legitimacy of their rule. Following this shift towards the inclusion of religious beliefs accompanying, and giving legitimacy to, the political aspirations of these rebellions, there was a period of inactivity between the years 167 and 184 that saw no uprisings worthy of noting in the annals of history. It is Anna Seidel's logical conclusion that this period of quiet was a time of preparation for the most well known group of peasant rebels of the age, the Yellow Turbans, who considered the year 184 most auspicious for attack. The year 184 was the beginning of a new sexagenary cycle, known in Chinese as the *jiazi* year, a year that has significance in *Oral Instructions*.[13]

The Yellow Turbans, a group that maintained strong connections to Daoist societies of the time, have often been connected to the Celestial Masters due to a number of somewhat dubious facts. The leader of the Yellow Turbans, who mobilised forces in Eastern China in 184, was named Zhang Jue (張角), creating speculation that there was a familial connection with the Zhang clan that ruled the Celestial Master cult. Further complicating matters is the fact that included among the sketchy details available about Zhang Lu's grandfather, respectfully

[13] Seidel 1969-70: 218-20.

referred to as Zhang Daoling, is the possibility that he was born in Jiangsu (江蘇) and migrated to Sichuan.[14] The Yellow Turbans were ultimately defeated; however, their attempt to overthrow the Han unquestionably contributed to the corrosion of control that the dynasty was able to maintain.

At the same time as the Yellow Turban rebellion was in progress in the east, a man named Zhang Xiu, also of no known relation to the Celestial Master Zhang Daoling, carried out a rebellion in the southwest with his group known as "the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice," which was not routed by Han forces. As previously stated, this group later came to be associated with Celestial Master Daoism, but this was not until Zhang Xiu joined forces with Zhang Lu in 191 at the behest of the Pastor of Yi (益) province, Liu Yan (劉焉), with whom Zhang Lu's mother had good relations, to take the Hanzhong valley in an effort to "safeguard" Hanzhong.[15] Despite the scantiness of detail, it is recorded in both the *Sanguo zhi* (三國志), and the *Hou Hanshu* (後漢書) that Zhang Lu killed Zhang Xiu in a power struggle for control over the area.[16] Following the death of Liu Yan, and a period of declining relations between Zhang Lu and the provincial administration, Zhang Lu made steps towards grasping for more complete independence from the province, a situation in which the Han state had little choice but to appease him.[17]

[14] Kleeman 1998: 66.
[15] Bokenkamp 1997: 34.
[16] Liu 2006: 195-6.
[17] Hendrischke 2006: 25.

With the state of Hanzhong established, it was necessary to attempt to implement, for the first time, Daoist forms of governance.[18] There were several salient features of this rule that will be touched upon only briefly here.[19] These included the division of the religious territory into twenty-four parishes, called *zhi* (治) each of which was administered by a Libationer, or *jijiu* (祭酒) although, in reality, many of the parishes were not within the bounds of Hanzhong. There were lenient rules governing the punishment of those who failed to adhere to the ordinances of the Celestial Master Daoists, which at the time encompassed the laws of Hanzhong. Often, three pardons would be granted prior to imposing any punishments; the most common form of which was the highly symbolic work of repairing roads.[20] [21] Finally, there was a strong emphasis on the community taking care of all of its members, which manifest in the form of "responsibility huts," or *yi she* (義舍). These were places where hungry travellers could eat their

[18] Despite the fact that this state is considered by most academics to have been a theocracy, and there was a great deal of weight given to Daoist thought, especially the *Laozi* and the *Xiang'er Zhu*, there is no formal Daoist political system. The *Laozi* is considered by many to be a political manual; however, there are those who see it as primarily a guide to meditational practices, others who view it as a purely philosophical treatise examining the intricacies of life in general, and still others have found a plethora of ways to interpret the work. All of this is simply to say that while the state of Hanzhong is widely considered to have been a Daoist state, and did indeed draw much of its inspiration from works that are considered Daoist, claiming that there is *one* truly Daoist political system is misleading and would require an argument that on its own would make for a lengthy study.

[19] Although, to my knowledge, there is yet to be a work dedicated entirely to this subject, there are a number of resources that have assisted in depicting the political systems that were implemented in both Hanzhong and Cheng-Han. Some useful resources include: Kleeman 1998, Levy 1953, and Levy 1960-61.

[20] Kleeman 1998: 70-1.

[21] The Chinese word for road is *dao*, (道), which is the same word used to mean the "Way" of Daoism.

fill, but were warned that they must not take more than that, lest the spirits take their revenge upon them.[22]

Hanzhong met its end when Cao Cao invaded in the year 215, and Zhang Lu, adhering to the Daoist principle articulated in the *Laozi* that yielding one's position is preferable to resisting inevitable defeat, quickly succumbed to Cao Cao's forces. Zhang Lu was rewarded for his wise choice to surrender, being given the titles of General Zhennan, which David C. Yu translates as "subduing the south," and Duke of Langzhong, a territory of 100 000 households.[23] His five sons and many of his key advisers were also given official positions as a means of showing gratitude and ensuring loyalty.[24]

His surrender to Cao Cao, while in line with the style of rulership described in the *Laozi*, cost him the security of his state. The people of Hanzhong were dispersed, according to two different accounts both found in the *Sanguo zhi*, to Changan (長安) and San Fu (三輔), both in central Shaanxi (*shanxi* 陝西), and also to Luoyang (洛陽) and Yicheng (翼城). The number of people spread throughout this diaspora could be well over one million, given that in the first account, it states that several hundred thousand people were sent to Shanxi, and in the second it claims that there were 800 000 people relocated.

Although the *Sanguo zhi* claims that the residents left gladly, other sources, such as the *Scripture on the Liturgy of the Orthodox-Unity Doctrines of the*

[22] Hendrischke 2006: 27.
[23] Yu 2000: 204.
[24] Bokenkamp 1997: 35.

Celestial Master Sect, claim that several hundred thousand people associated with the sect succumbed to the hardships inherent in this type of exodus to the north and east. For the next hundred years there was nothing that brought the same type of stability and religious governance as the state over which Zhang Lu had once presided, and further, the morale of the people was incredibly low due to the traumas suffered at the hands of their own leaders. [25] While Zhang Lu, and those close to him, enjoyed comfort and power, his subjects were left to consider the loyalty of those who had once ruled over them and their commitment to the ideals they had preached. It is quite possible that this blow struck to the core of the movement, driving people to slacken in their commitment to the orthodox church and to become more receptive to new and intriguing ideas and texts.

The official fall of the Han came five years after Hanzhong was seized by Cao Cao, beginning nearly four hundred years of general disunity, divided geographically between the north and the south, with fissures persisting within those bounds as well. The division between north and south was a centrally defining characteristic of this time, but this division is less important to the context of the Daoist text at the centre of this study. Despite the importance of the division between the north and the south in the grand scheme of history, the unease that pervaded the daily lives of common people is more significant to this work, and it is this unease that must be investigated, and traced through institutional reforms; military advancements, which undoubtedly gave rise to a

[25] Yu 2000: 206.

desire to undertake military action; and the tangible impacts that these two factors had on people, most specifically regarding famines and plagues.

While the Western Jin dynasty did manage to quell some of the unrest that had been building, and unified parts of China; however, the north splintered into sixteen kingdoms. One of these kingdoms is of particular relevance to the examination of this text, the second Daoist state to be established in China, which, like its predecessor, was also in Sichuan, called Cheng-Han. This provides further inspiration to followers of Daoism to attempt to deploy a state in the name of the religion.

The Wei (魏) dynasty, established after Cao Cao died when his son took the throne, was relatively short-lived, but in its approximately forty-five years of rule, it made one essential change that altered the political landscape of China, a change that began even before the official installation of the Wei dynasty. In an effort to remain militarily powerful, Cao Cao established military colonies that were hereditary, which meant that soldiers within those colonies could only marry from within other military families, and had to provide one heir to retain their position, be it a son or another young male relation willing to take the soldier's place. The military colonies also allowed the Wei dynasty to assume control of large amounts of land to be worked by tax-paying tenants when not training for armed excursions.

The benefits intended were manifold. There was a labour force that was essentially bound by law to people the colony for the future, providing tax

resources for the landowners and provincial governors, while also maintaining a large, strong military that could be called upon when needed. It was this system that created the circumstances that allowed for the military dynasticism that defines the Northern and Southern dynasties because it was also possible to co-opt these colonies given the right conditions.[26]

When the Jin dynasty officially took power in 265, having had near total control for close to two decades, an essential change was made to this system. The Jin dynasty placed great emphasis on the autonomy of its allies and followers, allowing them to dismantle the colonies that they controlled and take that land as their own. This was also intended to create a more centralised military force, but coupled with policies of decentralised administration that were put into place, their power eroded and China was once again broken apart into various kingdoms by the early fourth century.[27]

One of the kingdoms that broke away from the central control of the Jin dynasty was the state of Cheng-Han. The state was established in 302 by Li Te (李特), whose ancestors had lived in Hanzhong just under a century before. The states of Hanzhong and Cheng-Han had some fundamental similarities, such as lenient punishment under a simplified legal code, surviving by simple means rather than flaunting wealth, and finally, generosity towards the needy. Li Te was killed in battle in 303, after less than two years in power, and his third son, Li

[26] Lewis 2009: 54-7.
[27] Lewis 2009: 56-60.

Xiong (李雄) took control of the refugee soldiers, and declared himself the King of Sichuan, effectively beginning the era of Sixteen Kingdoms, in 304.[28]

Once the Sixteen Kingdoms era had begun, it was little more than a decade before the Jin dynasty had completely collapsed and the capital in Chang'an (長安) had to be moved to the south-eastern city of Jiankang (建康) near modern day Nanjing (南京), commencing the period known as the Eastern Jin, still ruled by the Sima clan and retaining many of the central features of government. While the Eastern Jin retained the name of the dynasty and managed to retain power in the hands of the same family, the strong unity that had defined the early years of the Jin were a fading memory.

Changes in administration that led to a system resembling feudalism and some major advancements made in the field of warfare, made this a period marked by violence and precariousness. While many advances in warfare take the form of improvements to weaponry, during this time it was a particular stride forward in the use of horses on the battlefield that forged ahead. Armoured horses are known to have been used as early as the Qin dynasty, evinced by the terracotta warrior statues; but this period saw this practice become widespread with drastic improvements.

In the Han dynasty soldiers rode on what are described as "pads of hide"[29] likely similar to the leather "cushions" fastened with simple straps seen on the

[28] Kleeman 1998: 94-9.
[29] Lewis 2009: 60.

terracotta warriors. With the addition of simplistic saddles that supported the legs and hips whilst riding in the Three Kingdoms period, and the further innovation of stirrups in this era, the ability for a rider to effectively challenge an enemy was greatly increased.[30]

These advances in equestrian military engagement can be counted among the many irritants impeding any hope of a central control being achieved, making the Easter Jin's hold on power tenuous at best. Splinter kingdoms in the north and the constant threat of being on the brink of collapse in the south created a situation in which the daily lives of average people were certainly in need of external spiritual bolstering. This coupled with internal unease within the Celestial Master movement, to be discussed below, combined to make conditions ripe for the type of apocalyptic writing that we see in the *Oral Instructions*.

Zhengyi Tianshi gao Zhao Sheng koujue 正一天師告趙昇口訣**:**

The Celestial Master of Orthodox Unity Gives Zhao Sheng Oral Instructions:

An Introduction to the Text

There are a number of purposes served in creating a text of this nature if we accept, as I propose, that it is not meant to be taken literally. To the people for whom the text was intended, the faithful adherents and the less devoted lay people of the Daoist religion, this serves respectfully as both reminder and warning. To historians centuries later, this text opens a window into the lives of the people of this time. And finally, because the text indisputably espouses devotion to the

[30] *Ibid*: 59-62.

Daoist religion, it illuminates insights not only into the practice of the religion, but into its ideology and the state of the religion as an institution as well.

The text aims at recreating a conversation that is supposed to have occurred between two of the foundational personages from Celestial Master Daoism's history, Zhao Sheng, a dedicated disciple about whom the historical record shares little direct information, but who is occasionally referred to in relation to the more well-known character in this text, the foundational Celestial Master himself, Zhang Daoling. Zhao Sheng was the Libationer at the historical Cloudy Gate Parish, mentioned in the text, perhaps to convey its veracity, but also potentially to stress the integrity of the twenty-four parishes to Daoist religious administration as a whole, a feature exclusive to the Celestial Master Daoism, as well as the master-disciple relationships that developed therein.

Once the characters are introduced, the Celestial Master begins to describe the terror that will be inflicted upon the world's people, save for the seed people. Reasons that support the destruction of the followers of heterodox cults include the separation of the Six and the Three heavens, while commoners are painted as dishonest, prideful, and greedy, all of which greatly anger the heavens. Even devotees of Celestial Master Daoism are not safe from the floodwaters that are to inundate the world, unless they are among the chosen, and highly dedicated adherents.

Certain elements of the text expose a number of external forces that seem to have been threatening the survival of Celestial Master Daoism at the time of

writing, forcing the hand of the writer to strike fear into the hearts of readers through the extreme verbiage of the text. These tactics were likely employed in order to draw the already existent flock closer together; embolden the leadership to take a stronger moral stand; and also, inspire new followers to swell their ranks, all of which would empower the group in tenuous times. There are numerous references to the instabilities of the then current imperial dynasty, as well as extended passages that delineate the trend towards empty exaltation of orthodoxy as opposed to the unstructured, but successful order of the past.

It is only the purest of heart who will receive the talisman that is central to the text, called "The Living Talisman of the Ten Thousand Named Nine Luminants of Great Mystery." These people will then go on to become the seed people who will replenish the world following the annihilation of the apocalypse.

The Celestial Master and Zhao Sheng are unique in the text, as it seems that they are more than mere seed people. The Celestial Master declares that this is no age for a worthy person to live, presumably referring to himself, and that he must ascend to heaven in broad daylight.[31] In order to do so, he will go with Zhao to hide away from the world and practice alchemy, creating an elixir that brings them long life. Although this segment makes up very little of the sum total of the text, the impact is profound, partially because it is so different in tone from the

[31] This is a common phrase to be found in many similar texts, translated from the Chinese, *bairi shengtian* (白日昇天). In Robert Ford Campany's *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, he points to the hagiography of Yin Changsheng in which this technique is juxtaposed with another technique, described in more detail in the section on eremitism, called *shijie* (尸解), generally translated as corpse liberation. The difference between these two methods of transcendence is that the former is performed, as the name indicates, quite openly, whereas the latter is performed in secret. For more information please see Campany 2002: 59.

rest of the work, but also because of the significance that the quest to become a *xian* held in Daoism.

Balancing the darkness found elsewhere, here the vision is light, perhaps appealing to followers of newly forming groups. The commonly employed term "sects" can be misleading, implying an intentional division. It is becoming clearer, through the research of, among others, Terry Kleeman, Stephen R. Bokenkamp, and Gil Raz that the communities that called themselves Celestial Master Daoists, at this time existed in relative isolation, especially when compared with the formative years of the religion in Hanzhong. The power of the clergy was decentralised, which enabled an array of new textual traditions. Most associated themselves with the Celestial Master group, but endorsed a ritual and textual tradition that differed, but this is likely because there was little contact between groups. Some of these groups are still known today, the Upper Clarity (*Shangqing* 上清), which formed following revelations to Yang Xi between the years 364 and 370,[32] the soon to coalesce Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao* 靈寶), and Way of the Clear Water (*Qingshui* 清水). Because all organised Daoist practice emanates from the originary Celestial Master, and it is him who is shown to be escaping to the woods to search for the alchemical cure for aging, the legitimacy of this practice within the Celestial Master group is resounding.

[32] Bokenkamp 1997: 275.

It is these themes that demand exploration and contextualisation in an attempt to understand this text as it was meant to be read when it was written, but also to understand what it reveals about that time as well.

Celestial Master Daoism

There has long been debate among scholars about the differences between "religious" and "philosophical" Daoism. When Herlee Creel wrote his influential work in 1970 entitled *What is Taoism?*, he identified the two strains bearing the same name as entirely discrete, one being *xian* Daoism, the other being philosophical Daoism. Isabelle Robinet argues in her work, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, that there is no concrete difference between the two, but that religious Daoism is merely the manifestation of the philosophy that antedates it.

This distinction is important because what is often referred to exclusively as the "philosophy" undeniably exerted influence upon the political decisions made in the two Daoist states to have governed territories, the first of which was overseen by the grandson of the first Celestial Master who himself was visited by the Most High Lord Lao.

Because of the intersections between what some consider two separate entities, within the scope of this project I have chosen to refer to Daoism as an umbrella term. Subsumed under this rubric are the seminal works commonly referred to as the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), as well as all of the commentaries and texts that have aimed at expanding and honing the messages

intended within; also included are all texts that have emerged from the religious bodies that have based their ideas on these works, however loosely. Because the text around which this study centres is of the Celestial Master group, it is this school that will receive the most dedicated attention here. However, the Upper Clarity was in its nascent form, the Numinous Treasure arose shortly after the publication of this text, and the group that authored the "The Classic on the Transformations of Laozi" (*Laozi bianhua jing* 老子變化經) had existed for nearly two hundred years,[33] lending credence to theories that groups arose independently, but also evincing the logic of one group attempting to unite all groups around a common cause, to their political and religious benefit.

The official formation of the Celestial Master school of Daoism, according to much of the scholarship, is historically placed at 142 C.E. when the deified form of the putative author of the *Laozi*, the Most High Lord Lao, *taishang laojun* (太上老君) appeared to Zhang Ling on Crane-Call Mountain or *Heming Shan* (鶴鳴山) possibly equivalent to Mount Quting (渠亭).[34] At that time Zhang was warned that the people of his time lacked awe for the True and Correct, and in order to reverse the negative trend, Taishang Laojun "honored Zhang as the 'Master of the Three Heavens of the Correct and Unified Pneumas of the Grand Mystic Metropolis' and entrusted to him the Way of the Covenanted Authority of Correct Unity, to govern in the name of the Newly Emerged Lord Lao."[35] It is possible that the Celestial Master sect had already been in existence for upwards

[33] Seidel 1969-70: 225.
[34] Bokenkamp 1997: 227n.
[35] *Ibid*: 215-6.

of one hundred years, if the analysis of recently found archaeological evidence, put forth mainly by Zhang Xunliao of Sichuan University, is to be accepted. A number of items including several talismans and other sundry items that could be related to the Celestial Master Daoist tradition were unearthed and shown to have been from as early as 58 – 75 C.E.[36] Despite this new evidence, I will examine the tradition as it has been accepted prior to these discoveries because evidence is still too scant to trace a convincing lineage in the way that has been achieved with information previously available to scholars.

Following his divine encounter, Zhang set out to draw people to the faith and to establish an administrative system as commanded by Lord Lao. This administrative system, like much in the Daoist world, had a cosmological counterpart, creating a divine logic that reified the legitimacy of the system. According to Daoist thought there are twenty-four *qi* (氣),[37] which are interconnected with the division of cosmic time into nodes, called *jieqi* (節氣). These divisions of each season into six parts, making up all twenty-four in total were intended to be terrestrially represented by the administrative parishes. It is noted in a number of sources, including *Oral Instructions*, that each parish was headed by a Libationer, a position that Zhao Sheng held in the location where the text is supposed to have taken place, Cloudy Gate parish.[38] While the parishes are peripheral to the ideas in the text, they are mentioned several times and connect

[36] Bai 2009: 1036-7.
[37] This is a term that, because of the inaccuracy of translations such as "pneumas" or "energies" is often rendered simply as *qi*, a choice that I have chosen to accept and follow here.
[38] Verellen 2003: 16-25.

some of the less earthly images to the world known to the reader. There is also a substantial record of the parishes, that outlines roughly where the parishes were, although this is vague, and also details some of the people who were initially charged with their operation.

The parishes created a hierarchy of holy places. There were three levels of importance, each of which containing eight different parishes. It is unclear what exactly these distinctions in the hierarchy mean, given that the parish in mentioned in this text, Cloudy Gate parish, was one of the lesser parishes, and yet, it was from here that the Celestial Master himself, Zhang Daoling ascended to Heaven in broad daylight in front of his disciples Zhao Sheng and Wang Chang (王長). The parishes were so central to the organisation's operation that Zhang Daoling himself oversaw one of the parishes called Yangping zhi (陽平治), originally located near Pengxian (彭縣) in Xinxing (新興), but was moved when the area of Hanzhong came under the rule of Zhang Lu so that it could be within that territory.[39]

It is clear that the parishes functioned as a central means of organisation for the Celestial Master sect, and each parish maintained records on their parishioners updated three times each year at the assemblies, or the *sanhui* (三會), later called the *sanyuan* (三元), at which time the five pecks of rice was collected. This was not only an excellent means of organisation, but it also served to undermine the authority of the empire, because record keeping and tax collection

[39] *Ibid*: 22, 31, 46.

were official duties of the province.[40] With these institutions in place, secession from the state was a less daunting challenge because there was infrastructure established to maintain such a state were it to succeed in gaining independence.

The parishes also performed numerous "spiritual" duties including transcribing the sins of the people to be delivered to the Three Offices, Heaven, Water, and Earth, so that the sinner may be absolved of all of his sins.[41] The parishes were also the site of a rich variety of rituals, both individual and communal. The rituals generally emphasised the confession of sin and the collection of rice for taxes, as well as gathering of household information.[42]

An examination of the history of the parishes also serves as an informal hagiography of Zhang Daoling, as many of the locations at which the parishes were established held special meaning the quest upon which Zhang embarked to become a *xian*. Many of his most renowned accomplishments as a Daoist adept are eternally associated with particular locations, including feats accomplished at his own parish, Yangping zhi, where he is said to have learned to fly, developed the ability to hear at great distance, and commune with the spirits, all owing to "spiritual exercises and absorption of drugs."[4344]

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[40] *Ibid*: 20, 40-1.
[41] Bokenkamp 1997: 32, quoting the *Record of the Three Kingdoms*.
[42] Verellen 2003: 40.
[43] *Ibid*: 29.
[44] The absorption of drugs, according to a number of sources, but perhaps most vividly described by Ge Hong, is essential to the development of a Daoist adept. In the *Inner Chapters* of his *Baopu zi* (抱朴子), chapter 11, as translated by James Ware on pp. 177-99, entitled "The Genie's Pharmocopeia," Ge describes innumerable drugs to be ingested in order to bring about various desired effects ranging from living for a thousand years to "entering fire without being burned." For more information, see Ware 1966, Pregadio 2006, Campany 2002 and Campany 2009.

At other parishes he gained the abilities to make himself invisible, to feed on breath, and even to tame wild beasts. At the parish mentioned in the *Oral Instructions*, he ascended to the heavens in broad daylight.[45] These accomplishments are interesting in that they both demonstrate the legends that are associated with the parishes, but they also establish a solid ground for understanding some of the beliefs that were inherent in the Celestial Master sect of attributes that could potentially accrue to the most dedicated practitioners of the religion.

The parishes were also places in which a master would train his disciples as Zhang trained Wang Chang and Zhao Sheng. In Zhang Daoling's biography in the *Shenxian zhuan* (神仙傳), it is said that at the Cloudy Gate parish, he challenged the two disciples to test their faith by leaping from a cliff in order to retrieve a peach growing in a chasm.[46] This type of relationship between master and disciple, while not at the forefront of the *Oral Instructions*, is an essential feature to recall when reading it because it illuminates a core feature of the Celestial Master community.

The relationship between the master and disciple, as featured in *Oral Instructions*, is somewhat playful, counterposing the images of death and destruction with a master who seems to have the utmost faith in his disciple, but still continues to test him. It is curious that at first the Celestial Master tantalises Zhao Sheng by telling him that he has oral instructions that he wants to give him,

[45] Bokenkamp 1997: 29-30.
[46] *Ibid*: 30-1.

but he simply cannot bear to do so. Zhao Sheng begs for the instructions, but Zhang replies with "Furthermore and to conclude," which could be translated colloquially as "Enough already," after which he makes Zhao wait for an entire year before giving him the instructions. This elucidates the nature of the relationship between Zhang Daoling and Zhao Sheng and is surely something of a model for the bonds between masters and disciples throughout the religion at the time. Zhao is also told that he will choose the seed people, which is undoubtedly an incredible honour, unfortunately, his powers are limited to making an initial selection only, which will then be scrutinised not only by twelve immortal officials, but also by the sage-king himself. It is likely that these details are included in the text not only to highlight the extreme lengths to which the heavenly administration will go in order to select the proper candidates to become the seed people, but also to remind people of the difficulties inherent in the master-disciple relationship. Liu Ts'un-yan (柳存仁), in his in-depth examination, entitled "Was Celestial Master Zhang a Historical Figure?", quotes *Wushang biyao* (無上祕要, 1138) 84:10b, saying: "There were twenty-four disciples; those who were granted instruction were Wang Chang and Zhao Sheng; the rest did not shine."[47] The success rate for disciples seems to have been quite low, and even as one of only two successful disciples, the challenges extend to the very limits of the relationship.

The master-disciple relationship underscores the political nature of the parishes as well. On the one hand, this reinforces the existent hierarchy and the

[47] Liu 2006: 214.

power the master holds, but it also instantiates an ideology of loyalty under vigilant supervision, encouraging the disciple to some day pass along his knowledge along with this system. This is further evinced by the term employed, *zhi*, which had long been used in Chinese political philosophy to embody meanings such as "order, security, control and the beneficent, civilizing effects of government. The latter included control of the forces of nature, especially water control, as well as those of the supernatural realm, that is keeping demonic possessions and baleful influences at bay."[48] The parishes served as the people's spiritual and administrative nerve centre, providing an infrastructure that brought people together as a community and further allowed them to feel confident that there was leadership that considered their interests and acted with them in mind.

Despite the sound organisation of the Celestial Master sect centred around the parishes, there was little that could be done to stop Cao Cao in 215 when he arrived in Hanzhong to restore the small state to the empire, and ostensibly to Han rule. Although Zhang Lu, his family, and his closest allies were enfeoffed by Cao Cao, and treated with dignity according to historical accounts, the people of the state were still dispersed across the empire, presumably in order to pre-empt attempts to return power to the Daoist sect in years to come.

Many of these people dispersed to the far north, including approximately five hundred families led by Li Hu, whose grandson Li Te, would later go on to establish the second Daoist state in China, Cheng-Han.[49] The significance of this

[48] Verellen 2003: 19.
[49] Kleeman 1998: 5, 89.

state to Daoism as a source of political inspiration and its history have already been discussed, but it is important to note both what caused its downfall, and also to mention important developments that occurred contemporaneously. Li Xiong, who was the second official ruler of Cheng-Han, but is generally considered to be the most important insofar as commitment to Daoist ideals, died in 334 when "ulcers formed on [his] head."[50] His death created a political, and perhaps spiritual, void in the Daoist state, which led to a series of power struggles. Xiong's nephew, Li Ban, ruled briefly before he was killed by Xiong's own sons, Li Yue and Li Qi. Li Qi took the throne between the years 334 and 338, when Li Te's nephew, Li Shou returned from abroad having been given the title King of Han and deposed Li Qi, renaming the state Han, thus bringing about the nomenclature generally used today for the state: Cheng-Han. Shou died in 343 and was replaced by Li Shi, who is described in historical accounts as vicious and unrelenting.[51] While the account given here is overly brief, it is intended merely to serve as a representation of the greed for power prevalent following the time of Li Te and Li Xiong, generally agreed to be the leaders to most closely follow the example of Zhang Lu.

The power hungry chaos prevalent in Cheng-Han serves to demonstrate important characteristics of both the state of Daoism and the general atmosphere of the time. Given the willingness with which the rulers of Cheng-Han were willing to kill their own family members, it seems clear that power meant more than family. This is not to say that this quality is exclusive to this time period or

[50] *Ibid*: 179.
[51] *Ibid*: 95-107, 117-207.

to this family; rather, it is to demonstrate a difference between the values of this era with those of a little more than a century earlier, when Zhang Lu ruled peacefully for nearly thirty years, until external forces made that impossible. Even when Cao Cao was pressing upon his power, Zhang Lu chose to sacrifice as little human life as possible, and to step aside with humility and preserve the dignity of his house; and, although this turned out not to be the case, perhaps he believed that he would be able to sustain the basic living standard of the people over whom he had ruled. Whereas Hanzhong was well-ordered, followed the fundamental precepts of Daoist thinking, and also acted in the interests of the people rather than for the sake of power, Cheng-Han eventually followed the whims of those seeking power, allowing them to do violence and subjecting the people to a condition generally in line with other states throughout China at the time.

It is possible that the instability in the state of Cheng-Han contributed to the people's wavering faith in Celestial Master Daoism, given that it was around this time that Upper Clarity appeared. Yang Xi (330 – 386?) was a medium to whom several scriptures were revealed, which eventually served to reposition Daoist thinking, both incorporating elements of religious traditions of China, and also emphasising language and thus "elevating" Daoism so that Yang's elite patronage could conceivably practice the new faith, [52] which was at this time probably little more than a re-envisioning of Celestial Master Daoism. Among the contents of these revelations were instructions about alchemy and methods for

[52] Bokenkamp 1997: 6.

meditation, both of which were already closely associated with Daoist practice. Also important to this study is the prevalence of apocalyptic imagery found in at least some of the texts attributed to Yang, reinforcing the uncertainty of the time, demonstrated by the state of Cheng-Han, and also setting a ground for the *Oral Instructions*. Antithetical to the newly-revealed texts and its patrons, the Numinous Treasure began to form in the early fifth century, which refigured popular concepts from both the Upper Clarity and also from Buddhism, which the Numinous Treasure school believed to be merely a foreign form of Daoism, delivered to India after Laozi left through the Western Pass. Around the same time that *Oral Instructions* was written, a group called the Three Caverns, or *Sandong*, put forth a text called the "Scripture of the Divine Spells of the Cavernous Abyss," or *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* (洞淵神咒經, 335), which espouses a similar imagery of apocalypse to *Oral Instructions*, but identifies itself with this independent Daoist group. While these are among the most clearly defined "new groups" whose texts and traditions have survived through history, it is integral to an understanding of this time to realise that they are just three out of a plethora of textual and ritual traditions, all based to some degree on the Celestial Master vision, that were likely developing at the time.

Given the conditions presented above, there was a clear need to re-establish the authority of the Celestial Master school of Daoism. Political conditions were deteriorating, along with the stability of Daoist institutions, making it necessary to attempt to draw people back to the faith by any means necessary, including the invocation of an apocalypse that had been predicted by

the earliest leader of the faith, that was to come as the current dynasty crumbled, thus allowing for the possibility not only of religious, but political domination as well.

Millenarian Traditions

The most pervasive and coherent theme found in the *Oral Instructions* is that of apocalypse,[53] which has a powerful history in China taking form in the Han dynasty and continuing through to the late Imperial period.[54] Some of the reasons for which this tradition might have been employed in the context of this text have already been explored, but it is important to understand the roots of this theme in the Chinese context in order to fully assess the value that this tactic might have had, and also to understand with totality the reasons that may have driven the author to choose these particular means to accomplish this particular end.

It is a mistake to assume that apocalyptic thinking was limited to the Daoist tradition, although Daoist writings do make up a large portion of the writings on this theme in China.[55] The Confucian scholar and court attendant, Dong

[53] The term apocalypse is laden with Western religious connotations, as is the term millenarian; however, due to a lack of terminology specific to the Chinese phenomenon that bears strong resemblances to that of the phenomenon in the West, I have chosen to use these terms, while attempting to shed any of the Western connotations, and thus referring only to the idea of the world as we know it coming to an end to be followed by a time of harmony and peace.
[54] Ownby 1999: 1513-6.
[55] As Norman Cohn points out on page 15 of his 1970 book *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, the term "millenarianism" was initially used to refer specifically to a particular type of Christian vision of apocalypse that denoted a time after Christ had returned to earth and had saved a select few who would repopulate the planet in a kind of earthly utopia. Cohn goes on to declare that the term has

Zhongshu (179 – 104 B.C.E.), while not directly referencing an apocalypse, did discuss the outcome of such a cataclysmic event in describing a time of Great Peace, much like that created by the mythical Yellow Emperor. In Dong's utopian vision, natural phenomena long associated with destruction including thunder, wind and lightning, would respectively call people to action, open seed pods in order to germinate new plants, and illuminate the skies.[56] These ideas are inextricably tied to the notion of the Mandate of Heaven, prominent among Confucian thinkers of the time who believed that natural disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, and famines were all signs that the emperor had lost the favour of heaven and that a new ruler, or perhaps even an entirely new dynasty needed to be established.

What eventually came to be known as the dominant image of apocalypse in China started to take shape in the later Han dynasty when instability rippling out from within the dynasty spread throughout the country, owing to the proliferation of untenable conditions for the commoners of the time, and thus leading many of them to believe that the Mandate of Heaven had been taken away from the Han. The seeds of this discontent can be traced back to at least 5 B.C.E. when conditions deteriorated to the point where then Emperor Ai took the name, now commonly associated with all rulers of Chinese Empires, "August Thearch" in

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taken on much broader meanings, generally including the following five characteristics: 1) the faithful reap their rewards; 2) they occur in this domain and no other; 3) they are always about to happen with swift rapidity; 4) utter transformation of life on earth for the better; 5) accomplished by heavenly beings. This describes in perfect detail the path to redemption as described by *Oral Instructions*. Although the contexts for the rest of the millenarian traditions that Cohn discusses throughout the book are different, the underlying imagery remains constant despite distinct geographical, historical, political and religious conditions.

[56] Seidel 1984: 163.

order to reiterate his intimate connection with Heaven and the idea of Great Peace. This fact is important because several peasant rebellions that occurred closer to the downfall of the Han involved leaders who also adopted this name in order to create a similar connection. [57]

At the same time that these rebellions were taking place, some of the first well-known apocalyptic texts were being written. One such text was the *Laozi bianhua jing*, in which the Lord Laozi is depicted as becoming enraged by the misdealings of the era's rulers who allowed for famines and destruction, and declares that he "will shake the Han reign."[58] This is a slightly different approach to the basic premise of the apocalyptic text, as it deals with a problem already plaguing the people, rather than predicting imminent disaster, but nonetheless takes the calamities of the time and turns them into the possibility of salvation in the form of Great Peace for devotees of Daoist principles, similar to what is seen both in *Oral Instructions* and other apocalyptic texts of the time.

The emphasis here on Great Peace is the primary connection between traditional apocalyptic images and Daoist apocalyptic writings. As Barbara Hendrischke points out in her in-depth study of the *Tai Ping Jing* (太平經, 1101), thought to have been partially completed in the later Han dynasty, the work is not actually Daoist, but belongs to the "common religion" of China instead.[59] Much of the inspiration for the rash of rebellions that spread across China from the late 140s until the end of the dynasty in 220 came from this work and, because of

[57] Seidel 1984: 164.
[58] Seidel 1969-70: 225.
[59] Hendrischke 2006: 3.

political and philosophical commonalities, it was taken up by Daoists to strengthen their fundamental message.

A critical shift occurred late in the fourth century when apocalyptic texts similar to the one translated below began to appear with greater frequency, in which there was no longer just a benevolent saviour who comes to relieve the struggles of people who have been abused by power hungry rulers, but instead there were grave warnings about the chaos of the time bringing about utter destruction, wreaking havoc on those people who were anything but the purest followers of Daoist teachings. Although demons had been a part of the Daoist pantheon of imagery from at least the time of Zhang Lu, who used demons to teach his people,[60] their function transformed from teacher to enforcer.

In Erik Zürcher's " 'Prince Moonlight' Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism", he enumerates what he considers to be the basic stages of apocalypse as set out by apocalyptic Daoist texts. This begins with the crisis, which in the case of the *Oral Instructions* refers to the commencement of destruction, and in line with Zürcher's analysis is given a semi-specific year, in this case the *renwu* year corresponding to 382. The next phase is the coming of what Zürcher calls the messiah, which, despite the overly charged appellation is presented in this text as Lijun coming to tend to the people. The "helpers" are the next to participate in bringing the apocalypse to fruition, in this case, the celestial officials who will both assess and refine the work that Zhao Sheng has done in handing out the talisman. Having determined who is worthy of being saved the

[60] Kleeman 1998: 75.

phase of all out battle arrives, leaving in its wake nothing other than the seed people. According to Zürcher, it is only now that judgement occurs, which seems out of step with *Oral Instructions* because Zhao Sheng is to distribute the talisman before the apocalypse begins, but this could be read as when the final decision about who remains on earth is handed down from the sage-king himself. Finally, the dust settles and the seed people are living in a world of great peace, called the "New Jerusalem" by Zürcher.[61] This detailed guide assists in considering the apocalyptic images presented in this text as a means of orienting the text within the broader scope of Daoist scriptures of the time and of similar themes.

The text below will assist in bringing to light how apocalyptic texts in China grew darker and more prophetic in tone, revealing the evolving *need* for more creative tactics. This need then begs the question as to whether these changes occurred because of internal struggles within the Daoist church, instability in the political arena, eroding values within the population of commoners, or a combination of all of these. It may be impossible to delineate, with certainty, the impact that each of these factors had on the author's choice to write this, but it may become clear that the religious and political body known as the Celestial Master Daoists saw a golden opportunity in a negative situation and decided to take advantage of it for the betterment of all involved. It is also possible that the text aims to encourage certain people to withdraw from society and political involvement, at least in the traditional sense, as a form of protest, a tradition to which we turn now.

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[61] Zürcher 1982: 2-6.

Eremitism

The tradition of eremitism in China evokes images of both political action and the practice of becoming a *xian*, finds its roots not only in the fecund tradition of Daoism, but in Confucian thinking as well. The two schools address and support the practice in their own ways. It is impossible to delineate clearly between the two without making some generalisations that are not either overly simplistic, or that serve to obfuscate the subtleties of the ideas espoused. This owes to the fact that within both schools there are varying conceptions of what it means to be a hermit, and also the reasons for which one ought to undertake such an endeavour.

Alan Berkowitz points out in his study of eremitism in China called *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China*, that the confluences in theoretical reclusion and its practice by those claiming to follow one school of thought or the other are undeniable, even in the case of Laozi. According to *standard* conceptions of Daoist reclusion, the hermit chooses disengagement out of disdain for worldly affairs; whereas under the rubric of Confucian thought the reasoning stems more particularly from a feeling of moral unease with current governing tactics. It was for both of these reasons that Laozi retreated to the West, making such distinctions between schools unhelpful and distracting.[62]

[62] Berkowitz 2000: 3-5.

Ge Hong, author of a work often referred to as the *Baopu zi* (抱朴子, 1185), a sobriquet by which he was known in his village, blurs even further into oblivion the line between Daoist and Confucian eremitism in a unique fashion by writing two separate, but related works, one Daoist and the other Confucian, and at the same time arguing passionately for the tradition of retreat. The topic that was foremost among the section titled the "Inner Chapters," made up of twenty chapters dealing with what he considers to be Daoist themes, was that of eremitism and the pursuit of immortality, two subjects that are inextricably united. In this, he attempts to dismantle the traditional conception that becoming a *xian* is impossible, positing logical arguments to disabuse his reader of ill begotten beliefs. He describes methods and processes by which people can attain various types of longevity and even ascension to the heavens, as is said to have been the case for Zhang Daoling, and throughout relates these processes to the Dao, which he calls the trunk from which Confucian branches sprout. One of the key elements to becoming a *xian* according to Ge is that the practitioner have a calm and quiet environment suitable for breathing exercises, alchemy and study with a master who has vast knowledge, tacitly acknowledging the necessity of becoming a hermit in order to achieve this ubiquitous Daoist goal.[63]

Division into schools aside, becoming a hermit plays a small, but vital role in the *Oral Instructions*. At one point in the text, the Celestial Master tells Zhao Sheng that he plans to "hide away from the world and live in secret." While reclusion does trace its roots deep into Chinese history, the prevalence of this

[63] Ge Hong, *trans*. Ware 1966: 11-14, 43.

choice seems to have increased in the Wei and Western Jin dynasties according to the written record, just before Ge wrote in approximately 320. An intellectual fervour developed around reclusion at this time, along with increased attention being dedicated to religion as opposed to matters of state, because of the volatile and uncertain nature of the times.[64]

There are many manifestations of reclusion discussed in various sources, as well as attested to in the historical record. One of the foundational attempts to explicate the phenomenon is found in the Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi*. Here, eremitism is described not as a necessarily physical withdrawal, but as a mental concealment of the true self, so as not to disrupt the balance of the age, keeping in line with the basic Daoist principle of the weak succumbing to the strong and by so doing eventually overcoming. The text, discussing the sagely hermits of old, explains that when "the fate of the times was against them and brought them only great hardship in the world, and therefore they deepened their roots, rested in perfection, and waited. This was the way they kept themselves alive."[65] This is of particular interest in relation to the *Oral Instructions* because it seems clear from the above quote that this is not a mere mental withdrawal, but a physical reclusion that is intended, much more in line with the reclusion intended by Ge Hong.

[64] Berkowitz 2000: 8-13.
[65] Zhuangzi, *trans*. Watson 1968: 173.

This fact is of special interest to this study because at this time, there was an escalation in what Berkowitz refers to as "noetic disengagement,"[66] which allowed the "recluse" to participate in the affairs of the governing body, while maintaining distance in his mind, and thus retaining his virtue. This seemingly contradictory engagement with political affairs is embodied by two officials during the Eastern Jin dynasty, including Deng Can (鄧粲) and the relatively high ranking Sun Chuo (孫綽), who was governor of Guiji (會稽) and was also the minister of justice.[67]

The act of going into reclusion is in itself a political statement, and therefore brings some clarity to the logic of remaining engaged physically while claiming a mental divide. If one is to make a political decision that in some way accedes involvement in the institution against which one feels they ought to make a moral stand, it is possible to accept that some may feel this is most effectively achieved by being on the inside.

Unfortunately, this assumes that all decisions to withdraw from society are entirely political, which is certainly not the case. To return to the false dichotomy discussed above, the mere fact that there are varying visions recorded in the philosophical canon regarding what may drive someone into reclusion, indicates that the genuine reasons for doing so must have diverse motivations.

Robert Campany has presented a somewhat different view of the reasons that one might become a hermit in the first place, and perhaps more importantly,

[66] Berkowitz 2000: 141.
[67] *Ibid*.

he has presented an image of eremitism as being, ironically social. In his book, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's "Traditions of Divine Transcendents"*, he discusses the social groups that formed not only among adepts who were attempting to learn and practice alchemy in order to transcend the physical world in pursuit of immortality,[68] but also, he examines the close connections that many of these recluses had with society, often dealing directly with those in positions of great power, positing that the act of becoming a hermit could actually propel one, in particular ways, to higher social status.[69]

Campany's interest in eremitism is derived of his interest in the practice of alchemy, and his discussion thus centres around those people who had chosen to live apart as a means to accomplishing this end. The act of becoming a hermit is, in itself, quite complicated, according to his account. For many, it involved a process referred to as *shijie* (尸解), which Campany translates as "escape by means of a simulated corpse."[70] This "escape" can be accomplished in two ways, the first involving the hopeful adept tricking the gods into thinking he or she is dead. This is carried out by placing a brief with all pertinent information, including name, birthdate, and place of residence into a grave, performing an incantation, and finally, changing both given and family names so that according to all records that person has already died, hence the name given to the process. By another method, the adept leaves his clothes along with a talisman in his place

[68] Campany 2002: 92.
[69] *Ibid*: 87.
[70] *Ibid*: 52.

with the words "died of sickness" (*bingsi* 病死) written in legible characters and runs off to the mountains, here again changing his name.

Although only the second process leads to a formal retreat from society, both allow the adept to disappear in a way, creating similar, but different outcomes, and also drawing a parallel to physical and noetic disengagements discussed above.[71] Having undergone these tribulations, the adept is now able to begin pursuing immortality. In order to achieve success in this realm, it is clear from evidence presented by Campany that adepts discussed their methods and assisted each other in spreading anecdotes that would garner them the status needed so that commoners would come to them for the various services offered.[72]

In the scope of this text, it seems likely that there is a combination of reasons, primarily related to the reasons put forth by Campany relating to transcendence, but also moral and political, that drive the Celestial Master to choose seclusion rather than involvement. The political motivations of the Celestial Master are revealed almost immediately following upon the fact that he intends to become a hermit. Although his instructions to Zhao are vague, telling him that he will become a close adviser to an emperor, this makes it clear that the motivation for his retreat is at least partially political.

It is evident that this text was written during a time of political turmoil given the descriptions of the court collapsing as well as the repeated mentions of the "evils" of the world. Times of instability, such as the Northern and Southern

[71] *Ibid*: 52-5.
[72] *Ibid*: 92.

Dynasties are undeniable lightning rods for surges in eremitism and its discussion in the intellectual realm. In order to retain one's virtue and be unsullied by the excesses and corruption of an age, vowing to live outside of the official sphere provides a viable alternative that is not only accepted within Chinese society, but hailed as exemplary to varying degrees throughout its history.[73]

Talismans and registers

At the centre of the imagery evoked by *Oral Instructions* are a pair of symbols that enjoy a unique place in Daoist history that is seemingly insignificant, yet demands close attention, much like the objects themselves. These objects are "the ten thousand named talisman of the nine luminants" and its accompanying register, which, similar to its counterpart, is referred to by several names over the course of the text.

The names for the talisman vary only slightly. The basic name, as mentioned above is "the ten thousand named talisman of the nine luminants," and perhaps fittingly, there are several different forms of the name found in the *Oral Instructions*. The most notable variation is found in its first iteration, when it is called a "living" talisman, an appellation that occurs only one other time in the text, out of a total of eight utterances presumably all referring to the same talisman. It is also referred to in this first iteration as being of Great Mystery, an element in the name of an accompanying register. Beyond these intriguing

[73] Berkowitz 2000: 113-4.

variances in the name of the talisman, the other differences have mainly to do with word order.

There are several registers mentioned in the text, some seem directly connected to the talisman, a relationship that will be explicated below, while others are separate. One register that is not connected to the talisman is the *Red Register of Huang-Lao*, which seems to give Zhang power to extend his life. It is also possible that Zhang is not the only one to receive the register, as there are instances in which Zhang indicates that other people are wearing this register. Zhang also mentions registers connected to duties three times in the text, but without explanation as to the significance of these registers. They are likely unconnected to the talisman, and are probably more pedestrian than the others discussed herein, generally recording the duties of concerned people.

The most important written material in the world of this text, other than the talisman, is something usually called the *Purple Book of Great Mystery*, or *Taixuan zi bu* (太玄紫簿). Although not a register, this is a book that contains the names of those who are to survive the coming apocalypse. Confusion arises from the fact that it is once referred to as the "great book" or *da bu* (大簿) and once as the *Book of Life of Great Mystery* or *Taixuan sheng bu* (太玄生簿). From the context, it seems clear that both of these refer to the book in which people's names are inscribed to survive the apocalypse so long as they are in possession of the talisman, and it is clear that this book is kept in Heaven. There is a another instance in which a text is mentioned that serves the same purpose, but here the

appellation is intriguing because it uses the word "register" rather than "book," calling it the *Jade Register of Great Mystery* or *Taixuan yu lu* (太玄玉籙). The first mention of this book says that there will be 100 000 names already inscribed, although it goes into no detail regarding whose names will have been included, nor does it account for who will have inscribed them, but 140 000 more names will be added and in each following instance, there is some detail given about the names that will be entered.

The historical connection of talismans and registers in Daoist history evolves out of the way in which talismans gained popular use in Chinese imperial history. In pre-Han China, it was common for a message to be split into two parts, so that when the two parts were reunited, the authenticity of the message and its two carriers was verified. Daoists appropriated the term *fu* and the idea of joining two halves in order to achieve their full power. [74] While talismans are often completed by registers, it is often the case that there are talismans embedded into registers as well, further strengthening the unity needed to be able to communicate effectively with the divine. Because talismans and registers are created for this purpose of petitioning and entreating divinities, they are generally made up of two types of symbols, recognisable Chinese graphs, as well as other symbols illegible to humans; however, all script found on these pieces of wood, metal, or paper, is intended to be read only by the gods.[75]

[74] Bokenkamp 2008: 35 and Despeux 2000: 532.
[75] Bokenkamp 2008: 36.

The most important early ancestors of talismans and registers in the Daoist tradition include the *hetu* (河圖), which came out of the Yellow River on the back of a dragon-horse (*longma* 龍馬) and the *luoshu* (洛書), which was carried out of the Luo River by a turtle. Although they are no longer extant, there is much discussion of them, and approximations have been made to replicate the original forms, which were supposed to have been representations of the cosmos, giving some sense of how to order them, and thereby assisting the mythical emperor Yu (禹) to reroute floods and divide the world into nine territories.[76] In the apocryphal Han text, *longyu hetu* (龍魚河圖), the history of talismans and registers has been attributed directly to an incident in which heaven interceded on Huangdi's (皇帝) behalf, by sending a fish bearing a sacred talisman that assisted him in defeating the Wormy Rebel (*chiyou* 蚩尤).[77] Regardless of the role that each of these actually played in the development of talismans and registers, the importance of all three lies in the fact that they were sent from heaven to bestow power upon one who was seen as fit to rule, and that power was borne out in a form that resembled script. This function of talismans is further evinced by the fact that both clergy and laypersons have been found to include talismans among the funerary objects included with them at burial when they must have believed that they were to imminently meet with celestial beings.[78]

[76] Robinet 2008: 483.
[77] Despeux 2000: 499.
[78] Bai 2009: 991-3.

Talismans have since been used in the Celestial Master Daoist tradition in a number of ways. One use that has received a great deal of attention is the burning and ingestion of talismans as a means to cure illness.[79] While this use of talismans seems to have garnered the bulk of scholarly attention paid to the objects, the function that is more relevant to this study involves talismans and registers being used together as protection from demons and other forces sent from heaven to destroy evil forces on earth.

One of the primary functions of talismans for the Celestial Master Daoists related to the development of a disciple becoming an adept. Central to this practice was the document entitled the Chart of the Energy of Unity (*yiqi tu* 一氣圖) which depicted the twenty-four energies of the year upon which the parishes discussed above were modelled. The Chart of the Energy of Unity was made up entirely of talismans, which would be allotted to each adept according to his personality and the corresponding energy. The reception of these talismans would make the candidate an official member of the community of Orthodox Unity, otherwise known as the Celestial Master sect. A register that listed the powers vested in the newly confirmed adept by the talisman would also accompany the talisman, the combination bringing the powers to fruition.

The powers that talismans can impart to worthy bearers are quite impressive. Some of these powers are practical, such as those claimed to be imparted by the *Divine Lingbao Talismans of the Five Sacred Mountains* (*lingbao*

[79] *Ibid*: 500, 535.

wuyue shenfu 靈寶五嶽神符, 390). These talismans stabilize and protect the state, while also creating peace and prosperity among the people. One of these talismans is even touted as having been essential to Fan Li's (范蠡) defeat of the state of Wu (吳) in the Spring and Autumn period.[80] Other talismans, including those found in *Three Divisions of Talismans of Mystery Prime, Revealed by the Highest Lord Lao* (*Taishang laojun hunyuan sanbu fu* 太上老君混元三部符, 673), a collection of 742 talismans, can assist in quelling familial or social strife, mitigate the impact of predators upon livestock, and promote agricultural fertility.[81]

Not all powers derived of talismans are quite as quotidian as those described above, making them less useful to common people, and more specifically geared towards the most dedicated Daoist adepts, assisting them in their pursuit of the otherworldly. There are talismans, such as the *River Chart Talisman of Invisibility* (*hetu yincun fu* 河圖陰存符), which, as the name implies, gives its bearer the ability to become invisible.[82] Other talismans, including some found in the *Great Methods of the Highest Scripture of Salvation* (*duren shangjing dafa* 度人上經大法, 219), have a similar function to the "ten thousand named talisman of the nine luminants" in *Oral Instructions*, protecting the adept from both disaster and demons.[83]

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[80] *Ibid*: 523-4.
[81] *Ibid*: 525.
[82] *Ibid*: 504.
[83] *Ibid*: 526.

The constant that defies categorisation among all of these multifarious talismans is simple: a connection is created between the earthly world and the divine using talismans and registers. Every detail of a talisman is aimed at creating a stronger connection between these two worlds. In the Pure Subtlety, or *Qingwei* (清微) tradition especially, there is an emphasis on the type of writing that is employed when creating talismans, a particularly free-flowing script that is often described as "cloudy-style,"[84] this quality emphasising the intended celestial readers of the texts. Talismans, therefore, can be understood as a means of accessing something that cannot be understood or expressed through conventional means; that, further, imparts abilities that are beyond the realm of human intervention.

Despite the talisman's ability to bestow unimaginable powers upon those worthy of its receipt, the reality of political conditions, disunity within the religious institution of Daoism, and a common people whose morality was being eroded by false belief systems. In order to combat these trends and possibly bring about some semblance of stability, all tools available to the author were used in the text to which we turn our attention now.

Translation

天師告趙大夫曰， 吾欲告子口訣，不忍言。

[84] *Ibid*: 514-5.

The celestial master spoke to Zhao Dafu, saying, “I want to tell you these oral instructions, but I cannot bear to speak them.”

昇叩頭千下，願見哀憐，賜昇一言。

Sheng performed one thousand koutous, [and said] “I hope to see compassion in our shared grievance, please bestow upon me, Sheng, your one saying.”

師曰：且止，須明年相告。

The master said, “Furthermore and to conclude [your deferential verbiage], [wait until] next year, and I will tell you.”

至壬午年正月七日中時，於雲臺治閉房， 昇叩頭千下。

On the seventh day of the *zheng* month of the *renwu* year in the middle of the day,[85] at Cloudy Gate parish, behind closed doors, Sheng [again] performed one thousand koutous.

師曰：太上有吾，吾有汝，然官契至要，難可具宣， 道重理妙， 不可妄傳，今九天俱立， 使六天出治，隨世分布， 三道治正，轉亂不能中正。

The master said, “*Taishang*[86] has me, and I have you.[87] This being so, this official contract fulfills all requirements, despite being difficult to relay in

[85] Chinese dating operates on a sexagenary cycle, the *renwu* year being the 19th in the cycle, this year represents the year 382, and the *zheng* month represents the first month of the year, so this would be the seventh day of the first month at noon.

full.[88] The Dao is important and its principles are subtle. It is not permissible for it to be falsely spread. Today, the Nine Heavens are all established.[89] I sent the Six Heavens out to govern [the heterodox cults] and successive generations were divided. The three Daos (must be) governed by the orthodox.[90] Revolving and chaotic forces cannot be fair and just.

三五之氣上三天恚怒， 無本父母臨正，使太上老君絕世，更立正一盟威之道， 太上開化， 不以吾輕賤小人，受吾真法為百鬼主者， 使開二十四治以應二十四氣， 置署職籙，以化邪俗之人， 黃老赤籙以修長生， 吾言大道永畢。

"The *qi* of the three and the five ascend to the three heavens in an angry rage.[91] Without root mothers and fathers imitate orthodoxy. The [Three Heavens] send *Taishang Laojun* to end the age, and to once again establish the Dao of the

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[86] It is interesting to note that *Taishang Laojun*, the high god of Daoism has yet to be introduced in this text, yet Zhang Daoling refers to him, not by his full title, but by a seemingly familiar sobriquet of just *Taishang*.

[87] Although this is a curious sentence, it seems clear that its purpose is to both remind Zhao Sheng of his position, and also to instill the awe due to the Celestial Master for his intimate relationship with *Taishang*.

[88] This term, *guanqi* 官契, is not found elsewhere in the Daozang, so it is difficult to understand exactly what is meant by it, but it seems to imply that there is a contract, either oral or written, that is being agreed upon by Zhang Daoling and Zhao Sheng.

[89] The nine heavens had been established for quite some time, but what is important here is the opposition between the upper three heavens and the lower six heavens, which was, until this point, not a common concept within Daoist writings.

[90] According to Max Kaltenmark in "The Ideology of T'ai P'ing Ch'ing," on page 26, he states that the three Daos refers to heaven, earth and humans. However, according to personal communications with Terry Kleeman, he believes that this refers to the three types of *qi*, mystic, primal and the inaugural, which according to Bokenkamp 1997 in a note on page 207 precede creation; although it is also possible that this refers to the three religions discussed in the *Santian neijie jing*, the text being translated in the note mentioned above.

[91] The "three and the five" could refer to a number of different things, both numbers being used often in Daoist numerology. Stephen R. Bokenkamp, while noting several other uses for both, claims on page 177 of *Early Daoist Scriptures* that, at least in *Admonitions*, to be discussed in greater detail below, the three and the five refers to the "three pneumas and the five viscera."

Covenant with the Powers of Orthodox Unity. *Taishang* civilizes [the people], and in spite of the fact that I am I am lowly and mean, he transmits this true law to me in order to become the ruler of the one hundred demons. [He does this so that I can] be sent to open the twenty-four parishes in order to answer to the twenty-four *qi*.[92] [I must also] appoint people to duties and [assure that] registers are set in place in order to change the heterodox common people. The *Red Register of Huang-Lao* is used to cultivate long life.[93] I speak of the great Dao and forever keep my peace.

太上老君前與尹相吾臨孟津河上，告吾天有常運大期行交，先不治三天清遵父母大神， 今躬臨正統，理三天上治，使李君下牧萬民， 吾欲不就事，上官命嚴，命放六天〔，〕故氣，三官百鬼，以大兵大病虎狼蛇虺百毒驅除天下， 當爾之時，枉暴者眾，銜痛泉壤，善惡不分， 莫不可言天帀地盈都停。

"In the past, *Taishang Laojun* was with Yin[94] facing me on the shores of the *Mengjin* river,[95] and told me, 'There are the constant revolutions of Heaven, and the great conjunction of the seasons is about to connect together. In the past, the three heavens were ungoverned and there was pure respect for the great mother and father spirits. Now, facing an orthodox system, [in order to] regulate the upper administration of the Three Heavens, Lijun will be sent down to tend to

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[92] These are the seasonal pneumas referred to as the *jieqi* 節氣.

[93] As expressed in Schipper 2005, *Oral Instructions* mentions a number of texts that are not mentioned elsewhere in the Daoist canon. The *Red Register of Huang Lao* is no exception to that rule.

[94] This most likely refers to Yin Xi (尹喜), the keeper of the pass to whom Laozi gave his scripture before exiting through the Western Pass.

[95] According to the Hanyu da cidian (漢語大辭典), this is in modern day Henan province in the northeast of China, a ford of the Yellow River.

the myriad people. If my desires are not carried to completion, the upper offices[96] will strictly decree that the Six Heavens and the ancient *qi* be released.[97] The hundred demons of the Three Officers[98] will use great armies, great illnesses, tigers, wolves, and great venomous snakes along with the hundred poisons to expunge all under heaven. In that time the false and the violent that suffer in the underworld will be numerous. Good and evil are not delineated. There is no one who cannot say that heaven is round, the earth is full, and that all are coming to an end.

二十四萬人為種民， 先得道神仙者不在其例， 聖人前敕三陽比算， 南至大江，北至北濱，東至東夷，西至濛氾， 已逆注十萬人名上太玄紫簿， 餘十四萬人於三代之中索之。

" '240 000 people will become the seed people. The transcendent spirits and those who were first to attain the Dao will not be counted among their ranks. The sage previously decreed that the *sanyang* were to be mutually evaluated as far south as the Yangtze river, as far north as the northern bank, as far east as the Eastern *Yi*, and as far west as the place where the sun sets.[99] The names of one

[96] This could refer to the Three Officers, or to the Upper Three Heavens, but most likely refers to the upper administration mentioned in the line before.

[97] It would also be possible to translate the phrase 命放六天故氣 as "strictly decree that the ancient *qi* of the Six Heavens be released." The importance of this distinction rests in the laden understanding of the ancient qi of the Six Heavens. When new revelations began to appear and mentions began to be made of an upper three, and lower six, heavens, the gods associated with each of the levels of heaven began to be divided into a hierarchy. It is impossible to endeavour to give a comprehensive account of this division here, but suffice it to say what is being referred to here bears a negative presence in the contemporary pantheon.

[98] The Three Officers refers to the Officers of Heaven, Earth, and Water, who command demon armies with great power.

[99] These four limits seem to describe the boundaries of the kingdom according to the conception of *Taishang Laojun*, meaning that this text must derive from the north.

hundred thousand people were retroactively recorded in the *Purple Book of Great Mystery*. Seek from within the three ages to find the remaining 140 000 people.

遣十二仙乘飛龍， 官從二十四人，十二玉女周旋天下，考校州郡里域，求清貞慈孝忠信朴實之人以充種民。

" 'Twelve transcendents riding flying dragons will be dispatched, along with twenty-four subordinate officials and twelve jade maidens; and they will all travel about the entire empire examining the provinces, the cities, the villages and the towns, searching for pure, chaste, loving, filial, loyal, faithful, simple and true people to be used to fill [the numbers of] the seed people.'

使吾先授職籙化看人情，後授黃老赤籙，分別善人以補種民， 仙官周行考求，吾所分別善人以補種民。

"I was sent first to bestow duties and registers and to change and observe people's characters. After I was given the *Red Register of Huang-Lao*, I determined the good people in order to amass the seed people. The transcendent officials all sought to examine the people who I had determined to be good people who were to become the seed people.

大期將盡， 金馬甲子日既西傾，我立不停，德應人主， 先為世相，此甲子為斷， 自此大簿既定， 不須受籍。

"The great conjunction is about to reach its end. Already, in the *jiazi* year, the court of the Golden Horse will be collapsing in the west, and I am unable to stop it. Virtue will correspond to the ruler of man. I had previously served as a

minister for this generation, and this *jiazi* will serve as the end. From this [time on] the great book will already have been settled, and there will no longer be any need to be registered.

甲申大水蕩沃穢濁， 仙官乘龍日不進寸不見種人，但見佩黃老職治之人與三官百鬼。

"[In the] *jiashen* [year] the great waters will pool to wash away the turbid filth. The transcendent official will ride a dragon and the day will not advance one inch. He will not look for the seed people; [rather], he will seek out only those [false] people wearing the *Huang-Lao*, whose duty it is to govern, and hand them over to the hundred demons of the Three Officers.

文墨紛紛，更相毀鄙，濁亂清文， 多佩籙職， 自稱真人，賣術自榮，妖惑愚人， 貪尺帛十錢斗米聚斂， 人物求目下之安，不顧大命將至三官條狀，受贓[?]不恥，名曰劫盜之物， 信義不送，亦同其罪，中犯不正，名曰奸淫，三官皆錄為奸盜，身入三塗，名編黑籍，太玄紫簿，未得一人。

"The ink of their writings is chaotic and muddled. They defame and despise each other. This muddies and makes chaotic the pure writings. Most of the people wear the register and hold office. These people call themselves 'true' people. They sell their arts and glorify themselves; and wickedly confuse foolish people. Coveting bolts of silk, tens of cash, and pecks of rice, they assemble [their goods]. People seek immediate peace, but do not look back at the conditions of the great fate that will arrive with the three officials. [Those who

have] accepted bribes without shame[100] should be called robbers and thieves. Those who do not give forth duty and righteousness also share in the same crimes, and they do the wrong thing, doing nothing to rectify their behaviour. Their names are labelled as licentious and wanton. The three officials all record those they have named as wicked robbers [so that] their bodies enter the three earth prisons[101] and their names are recorded in the edition of the black register. Not one of them will be included in the *Purple Book of Great Mystery*.

吾親在事尚復如此， 後世當以黃赤相傳以為常事，不可分別， 太上憐愍百姓，愛念善人，甚若赤子， 且上期急促，太上求申至壬辰癸巳為料種民，應備事急。

"I was present and close to these affairs, and it is still the same. The following generations use the yellow and red[102] and transmit them as normal matters, and cannot distinguish. *Taishang* feels pity for the common people, and loves the good people as deeply as if they were babies. Furthermore, the high time [of the great conjunction of the seasons] anxiously approaches. *Taishang* seeks to extend [the time before the apocalypse] until the *renchen guisi* years, and will thus provision the seed people [during that time], who should respond by preparing all affairs urgently.

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[100] This refers to offerings that Daoist masters would receive, which, at first, were very practical items needed to carry out their duties, including ink, silk or paper and perhaps food, but as time passed, people began to bring offerings of gold and other valuables, disregarding the precepts of the religion.

[101] Although the term *santu* 三塗 has been translated above as the "three prisons," it is quite possible that this refers to a Buddhist concept implicating the three paths of rebirth.

[102] The colours yellow and red are associated with the ritual of uniting qi, *heqi* (合氣), a ritual involving sexual practice, which is hotly contested among academics of early Daoism.

今出太玄九光{，}萬稱生符， 以簡料真一，甄別種人， 太上敕十二仙官遊行天下，見有佩吾萬稱九光符者，便以種民定數注上太玄玉籙，壹無所復。

"Today, the living talisman of the ten thousand named nine luminants of Great Mystery emerged. Use it to select the true one and to distinguish the seed people. *Taishang* decreed that twelve immortal officials should walk about the entire empire to see who is wearing my talisman of the ten thousand named nine luminants, and in those cases, [use them] as the seed people and settle the number and record them in the *Jade Register of Great Mystery*. There will not be one [name] that is repeated.

問至太平之時，聖君自當簡料隨德， 分敕天下億鬼兵將百毒，皆衛護種人，使至太平之世， 舉家完全， 如有毀傷，檢校所得即斬。

"As for the time when the age of Great Peace arrives, the sagely ruler himself must select them according to virtue. [Having selected,] he decrees separately to each of them in the world, that the one hundred million demon soldiers and generals carrying the one hundred poisons will protect the seed people, and ensure that they reach the world of Great Peace. All families will be whole and complete. If anyone damages or injures [another], he will be investigated and immediately beheaded.

今三災之世交爭方興， 太平在金馬之末年歲尚爾， 世非賢人所處。

"Now is the generation of the three disasters associated with contention, [all of which] are on the rise. Great Peace [will arrive] at the end of the [reign] of

the Golden Horse court,[103] and that year is still to come. Such a world is no place for a worthy person to dwell.

吾不忍先經土戶，白日昇天， 當須神丹，便與昇長避世隱居， 採精石髓玉瑰羅珠鳳腦芝英，奇異絕殊， 隨四時能合，千日丹成各服刀圭，身變五色，毛羽立生，體融金光。

"If I cannot bear first passing through the headquarters of the earth,[104] then I must ascend to heaven in broad daylight.[105] I must take the elixir, and thereupon, with you, [we will have] long life[106] and hide away from the world and live in secret. We will choose stalactites, rare jades, nets of pearls, petrified wood, and mushrooms, all of which are strange, different, unusual and unique.[107] If one is able to follow and merge with the four seasons, the elixir can be completed in one thousand days.[108] With each ingestion, the body changes the five colours.

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[103] According to Schipper 2005, the appellation Golden Horse refers to the Sima (司馬) family, although this is a reference that I have not found in any other sources.

[104] This seems to be a name for a world to which one goes, perhaps only for a short time, in the afterlife, unique to this text.

[105] This is a common expression amongst Daoist adepts who have completed an alchemical process creating an elixir that will grant them the status of *xian*. To ascend to heaven in broad daylight was the ultimate achievement for which many Daoist adepts strove.

[106] While *sheng* has been taken to refer to the main character of the text, Zhao Sheng and thus translated as such, and *chang* has been taken to mean long life; it is possible that this *chang* actually refers to the other disciple with whom it is clear that Zhang Daoling had a close relationship, Wang Chang 王長.

[107] These are ingredients found in alchemical recipes.

[108] Following the seasons and merging with them implies the ability to understand the inner workings of the natural world and the patience required to undertake the process of becoming a *xian*.

The hair and the feathers stand straight up. The body melts into golden luminescence.[109]

太上遣仙官乘鶴鹿來迎， 昇天翠羽登騎輕翔英稚二生， 攀龍俱舉，趙昇侍從，俱至無極之崖，青雲之中，躍龍踟躊，徘徊天路， 顧呼趙生，吾今即位，眾事敬積料生別死， 大運期近，不得中還，以太平為期， 汝且還料理治中，普告清信男女諸弟子忠貞者大運已促勤， 以忠信為務，勿貪財色，夫天生萬物皆有終始。

"*Taishang* will then dispatch the immortal officials riding cranes and deer. They will come and welcome you. Rising to heaven, the two of us, on kingfishers and geese, soaring and swooping lightly and bravely.[110] The climbing dragons will all rise up, with you Zhao Sheng serving and following, all to reach the limits of the limitless in the midst of the turquoise cloud. The emperor, ascending the throne with hesitation, paces back and forth on the heavenly road. [He] looks back and calls out to you, Zhao Sheng, [saying] 'Today I ascend the throne. In multitudinous affairs I reverently accumulate materials to provision the living, and separate the dead. The time of the great revolution draws near. I cannot go back in order to bring about the time of Great Peace.[111] Widely notify the pure and faithful male and female disciples of your parish that for those who

[109] While this may not be a literal description of the process of becoming a *xian*, the importance of the transformation that follows the ingestion of the elixir is nonetheless vital.

[110] This appears to be a description of the means by which Zhang Daoling intends to ascend to heaven in broad daylight, with Zhao Sheng in tow, although Zhao will have to return to the earthly realm in order to carry out Zhang's orders of giving out the talisman and amassing the seed people.

[111] This implies that the Celestial Master has done all that he is able to do, and that is why he is passing the reins on to Zhao Sheng.

are loyal and chaste, the time of the great revolution is already urgently [approaching]. Diligently use loyalty and faith as your service. Do not be covetous of wealth and fortune.' For heaven gave birth to all the myriad things and all have their beginning and their end.

老子隨時改易，皆應大運， 人生滿百二十，要當還土戶， 十鍊九轉，名上太玄紫簿者，命終亦經土戶， 魂魄即登紫府，侍衛聖君， 須至太平之世，魂精還其故形，白骨更起，血氣更流， 始經宿昔之間，暮卧朝起， 化示世情。

"*Laozi* followed the times and changed [accordingly]. All of this was in response to the great revolutions. His life reached its maximum capacity at one hundred twenty [years], and he was then required to return to the headquarters of the earth to undergo the ten sublimations and the nine transformations.[112] As for those names that are entered in the *Purple Book of Great Mystery*, at life's end, they too will pass through the headquarters of the earth, their *hun* and *po* immediately ascending to the Purple Office, as protecting attendants for the sagely lord. Upon arrival of the world of Great Peace the *hun* and essence will return to its ancient form. White bones will rise again, the blood and the *qi* will flow once more. First, passing through the space of the past, in the evening [one] sleeps, and in the morning [one] rises. Change reveals the character of the world.

[112] It seems that this refers to a specific practice, however, I have not found other references to this particular practice in any of my research.

當斯之時，明此符真， 雖受職治黃老大要紫黃金剛， 不見九光萬稱之符，不兔三官驅除， 死沒黃泉， 不得過土戶， 骨肉灰腐， 魂魄付三官拷楚，荼毒難言， 不欲尸解者，當合神丹，故須九光萬稱生符， 不得此符不得名上太玄生簿。

"[You] must, at this time, understand the truth of this talisman. Supposing you receive the office of a parish, the great essentials of *Huang-Lao* are purple and the yellow, precious and hard. Those who do not see the talisman of the ten thousand named nine luminants, cannot avoid removal by the Three Officers and [they] die, sinking into the world of the dead. They do not move past the headquarters of the earth. Their flesh and bones rot and decay. The *hun* and the *po* are handed over to the three offices to be beaten and flogged, afflicted with suffering too great to describe. Those who do not want to be released from their corpses, must complete the alchemical pill, and must therefore have the ten thousand named living talisman of the nine luminants. Those who do not receive this talisman do not have their names entered in the *Book of Life of Great Mystery*.

此符如天子有玉璽，三公有黃鉞，諸侯有印綬，若有清賢志士死者，生時未見此符，追授死人，至太平之世，死尸更生，與聖君同出。

"This talisman is like the emperor having his jade seal, the three dukes having their yellow axes, and the marquises having their tasselled seals.[113] If there is a pure and wise scholar of determination who has died already, and during

[113] Each of these refers to a symbol that reifies the power that the title bears. In much the same way that having the talisman and register come together completes their power, each of these symbols completes the power associated with that title.

his lifetime he did not see this talisman, then someone will be dispatched to bestow it upon those dead people. When the world of Great Peace arrives, their corpses will live once again, and they will emerge with the sagely master.

吾說此符口不忍言不忍以付弟子， 非世所見， 得吾此符但當修行潔己， 慈孝忠貞精誠自守。

"I cannot speak the words of this talisman, nor can I bear to pass it on to my disciple. None of this world has seen it. [Those] who receive this talisman of mine, must use it only to cultivate their behaviour and to purify themselves. Those who are kind, filial, loyal, chaste and honest must protect themselves.

信真任道，考官日日門至戶達，視看人心， 若有厄急，懸命漏刻，但正心向道， 把九光萬稱符至尊救度人也。

"Be faithful to the true, and give free reign to the *Dao* when investigating officials come to the doors each day to observe and watch people's hearts. When there is difficulty or stress, as though fate is hanging in the drippings of an instant, merely rectify the heart and face *Dao*. Those who take the ten thousand named talisman of the nine luminants [must use it] with respect and save people.

此際會之恩，聖君屈節，日近所稟， 未至聖君垂出，不復經土戶，自然得壽萬八千歲， 但聖君當簡料其中各有所在爾， 其是壬辰癸巳前得吾九光萬稱符者，皆在種人之例， 壬辰癸巳後受符無復及也。

"In the grace of this meeting, the sagely ruler hides himself, as the day on which commands will be received approaches. It is not until the sagely ruler has descended that they will be able to pass through the earthly headquarters and naturally achieve long life to the age of eighteen thousand years. Only the sagely ruler should choose from among the living, and each shall have what is his own. Before the *renchen guisi*, those who have received my ten thousand named talisman of the nine luminants, are all counted in the ranks of the seed people. After the *renchen guisi*, there will be none who receives the talisman.

眾官集紫府仙官還天曹，復不得受人也， 此是聖人心口中祕言， 祕符平常不忍出也， 今事促不得不空囊傾心也，遣侍郎一人度世，玉女一人隨此符，不慈不孝不忠不貞不誠不信之人脫得見吾此符， 侍郎玉女迷塞其心，不使得受， 應合之人，神開其心趣，得見勤苦求請。

"A multitude of officials will gather at the purple offices and the transcendent officials will return to their heavenly offices, and no other people will be selected. This is the secret saying of the sagely person's heart. The secret talisman cannot normally bear to be exposed. Now that the matter is pressing, we cannot but empty out our bag and spill out our hearts, dispatching one gentleman in waiting to examine the world with one jade maiden to follow this talisman. People who are not loving, not filial, not loyal, not chaste, not honest and not faithful do not see this talisman of mine. The good lad and the jade maiden cover over their hearts and do not allow them to receive it. The spirits engage the interest of those who are suitable and they diligently beg for the talisman.

三一有百人，萬稱九光有一人，三一有千人，萬稱九光有十人爾。

"If the *sanyi* is known to one hundred people, then the ten thousand named nine luminants would be known to just one person. If the *sanyi* is known to one thousand people, then the ten thousand named nine luminants would be known to just ten people, and that is all.[114]

形影天下眾靈，共祕此符，故使希見， 世間不明吾言， 子看後世萬人受道者，約無一人得佩此符者， 今以付子，是吾極耳。

"Forms and shadows, along with the multitude of spirits in the empire, all hide this talisman, and therefore it is rarely seen. The world does not know the meaning of my words. You will see that in the generations to follow, out of ten thousand people to attain Dao, there will be but one who has received and wears this talisman. Today, I give it to you. It is my utmost [treasure], and that is all.

子勑後人推擇忠良清貞一心者，依科盟， 授千金勿示也， 三十年吾遣人迎汝， 趙昇稽首再拜，銜命奉辭。

"Issue an edict to the people who follow, [that they are] to select the loyal, the worthy, the pure, the upright, and those of one heart to comply with the order of the oath. Even if someone gave them one thousand gold, do not give it away. In thirty years I will dispatch someone to welcome you."

Zhao Sheng kowtowed and bowed twice and carried out the orders.

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[114] It is unclear what is meant by the *sanyi*, but it seems that it is another secret talisman that is not mentioned in any other extant texts, and this sentence is said so that the level of secrecy surrounding the ten thousand named nine luminants can be understood.

Analysis

A text such as this is best understood in the context of other contemporary works in conjunction with an understanding of the historical circumstances under which it was written. The historical conditions of the period in which *Oral Instructions* have already been presented, thus opening the possibility to begin assessing the work in relation to other Daoist texts that have been attended to in previous scholarship. Stephen R. Bokenkamp undertook a translation and analysis project that resulted in the publication of the scholarly work entitled *Early Daoist Scriptures* in 1997. In this book, Bokenkamp translates several texts that shed light on issues relevant to the text at hand.

There are two texts in particular that deal with similar concepts and themes, both of which were written under similar historical conditions, and both are attributed to the Celestial Master sect. The first is entitled *Da dao jia ling jie* 大道家令戒, translated as *Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Dao* (789; hereafter *Admonitions*), which comes from the longer text called *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jie ke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經, which can be translated as *Scripture of Precepts and Codes Taught by the Celestial Master, from the Texts of the Law of Correct Unity*.[115] The second text is the first chapter

[115] Bokenkamp 1997: 450.

of the *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經, translated as *Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens* (1205; hereafter *Inner Explanations*).[116]

Chronologically, the first of these texts is *Admonitions*,[117] which was, according to the text itself, presented on February 1, 255 C.E. by Zhang Lu. The question of authorship and dating of the text are indeed, like many Daoist works from this era, somewhat dubious. It is possible that Zhang Lu, having given up Hanzhong to Cao Cao forty years earlier, was still alive to write the text, but there are sources that claim Lu's date of death, albeit without certainty, as being before this time.[118] All potentially erroneous factual matters relating to authorship and dating aside, the subject matter and style of the work are pertinent to this study.

Admonitions presents an overview of history as seen through the eyes of Daoists, beginning with the manifestation of life from the pneumas of the Dao. There is a brief description of a time during which people were able to live without losing the Dao, and were thus able to change with it. This implies a "purity" or "simplicity" of life, without deceit and without concern for name or status. The text goes on to describe a fall from this purity beginning in the age of the Yellow Thearch, demonstrated by arrogant human domination of other animals such as oxen and horses.

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[116] *Ibid*: 186.

[117] The following is a summary of *Admonitions* based upon the 1997 translation by Stephen R. Bokenkamp.

[118] Bokenkamp examines the issue of this text having been written by Zhang Lu in some detail on pages 150-2 in his 1997 book, in which he outlines the unlikeliness of Lu himself having written the text, citing the above mentioned texts and also internal evidence from the text to say both that spirit mediums would often speak for a deceased member of the community, and also that it seems to suggest that Lu died in 231 because from this date forward parishioners could no longer be chosen by Lu. Further, Liu Ts'un-yan suggests in note 112 on page 248 of his essay, "Was Celestial Master Zhang a Historical Figure?" that, according to the *Zhen'gao*, Lu died in 216.

Despite the attempts of the Dao to teach the thearchical kings, the kings were unable to serve and revere the Dao, plunging people deeper into chaos. The Dao is described as making repeated attempts to save the people in various forms beginning with a text bestowed upon Gan Ji (干吉) called the "Dao of Great Peace," in the Zhou dynasty; next through Laozi, in the stricter text presented to Yin Xi (尹喜) at the western pass; and finally, moving to the west into what is now known as India, where texts embodied the Dao's most severe form in "the land of the barbarians."[119] Each iteration of the Dao became more severe in order to account for the degradation in people's behaviour over time.

Moving ahead to the time at which the piece was written, the Dao causes the "Heaven to bestow its pneuma called the 'newly emerged Lord Lao' to rule the people."[120] Lord Lao is said to have visited Zhang Daoling, honouring him with the title of Celestial Master, the name that was later to be appropriated by the religious cult of which he was the founder and leader. The Dao's intention in all of these attempted connections to humans is to implement change in the character of the people, and further to return their nature to its inceptive state in which there was little to no differentiation between people and the Dao; however human arrogance continually thwarts these attempts, angering the Heavens and bringing about catastrophes that result in devastating loss of human life.

No longer attending to historical circumstances, the text addresses its readers directly. There are a number of moral pronouncements that convey the

[119] *Ibid*: 169.
[120] *Ibid*: 171.

patterns by which the people are supposed to live if they desire a life free of the dangers of a wrathful heaven. There are condemnations of frivolity and pride followed with exhortations to "perform good deeds" while "practicing humanity and duty."[121] Those people who are able to follow these instructions will become the seed people who will survive the terrors that are to befall the world if the changes prescribed are not effectuated. Although there is no explicit discussion of an apocalypse like that described in *Oral Instructions*, which explicitly declares that the conjunction of the seasons is imminent, it is clear that many will lose their lives and that the population is on the precipice of a near complete cleansing. The details are relatively similar in both texts, the main difference being that in *Admonitions*, there is little mention of the involvement of the spirit world in these affairs.

The conclusion of *Admonitions* returns its attention to worldly affairs, going so far as to reservedly praise the Wei dynasty, without allying the Celestial Master cult too closely with them, which is understandable given that the Sima family had already begun to control affairs in 249, six years prior to the date of the text, despite the fact that the Jin dynasty would not officially take power until 265. Praise for the Wei house is tempered with contempt for those ministers who have used lies and deceit to attain their ends, bringing plagues and slaughter upon the evil souls of the world. Without openly calling the Wei dynasty into question, it seems likely that in the eyes of the author, there is need for change if they want to avoid the wrath of the Heavens and lose the mandate of Heaven, all of which

[121] *Ibid*: 173.

can be accomplished by adhering to the Dao and following the precepts of Celestial Master Daoism.

If the dating of *Oral Instructions* presented above is accurate, then it is, chronologically, the next text to be dealt with in this analysis and despite the fact that the translation is presented above, it is of such a unique and unusual nature, that an outline of the most important details and structure will be presented here so that there is a concrete frame of reference to which to refer in the analysis.

The text begins by establishing the power dynamic between Zhang Daoling and one of his closest disciples, Zhao Sheng. Their relationship is borne out in the way that Zhao, who is dutifully deferential towards his master, shows his dedication through repeated bowing. Once the ritual, but sincere, obeisance has sufficiently demonstrated Zhao's commitment to understanding and carrying out the master's orders, the "oral instructions" are disclosed.[122]

The instructions that Zhang reports to Zhao can be difficult to follow. The underlying message communicated throughout is that an unacceptable and dangerous chaos has arisen that must be rectified by violent supernatural means. One of the root causes of this chaos is that there are people who have begun to believe perverse heterodox texts, abandoning the clear orthodox ones sanctioned by the official Celestial Masters sect. This incoherence of texts confounds the purpose of the Dao, thus angering the spirits, creating divisions among the

[122] 口訣 here translated as "oral instructions" is a term often used in Daoist texts and, although not explicitly stated, implies a level of secrecy inherent in the instructions to be given. They are only passed from master to disciple and only with the highest level of respect. The term is also used in "Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Dao," found in Bokenkamp 1997, p. 169.

population, and within the spirit world itself. This is further evinced by the division of the nine heavens into the upper three and the lower six.

Consistent with the Daoist world vision, this incoherence has also manifest itself in the realm of worldly officials, causing the imminent collapse of the ruling Eastern Jin dynasty, here referred to by the ruling Sima family's sobriquet, the "Golden Horse," creating a gathering void in the organisation of people everywhere. Without the structure of a well-ordered society, there are those who have begun to prey on the weak, calling themselves by false names and deceiving people in order to take their riches and lead them into further darkness and confusion.

Zhao is charged with dispensing the sacred "living talisman of the ten thousand named nine luminants of Great Mystery," which bears the power to provide each recipient with the official documentation needed to begin the process of joining the coveted ranks of the seed people. The talisman is to be bestowed upon only the most faithful adherents of the religion who have demonstrated a dedication that penetrates to the core of their beings. The seed people will be the only ones left in the wake of destruction that is promised and they will then repopulate the world. It can be assumed that because these people have shown the highest quality of character and commitment to the Dao that they will remake the world in this vein, eliminating the trappings of human folly that have led to the apocalypse predicted here. Those followers of Celestial Master Daoism who are worthy of receipt of such a holy talisman must be carefully examined, not only by Zhao Sheng, but having been selected by him, they will have to be re-examined

by the twelve immortal officials. Even having passed these rigorous trials will not necessarily garner them a place among the seed people, as it is ultimately up to the sage king to determine who has virtue enough to be chosen to repopulate the world.

The final work to be addressed here is the *Inner Explanations*.[123] The text is similar to *Admonitions* in that it presents the pattern of peaceful beginnings that have been brought into peril by the interference of human beings in the workings of the Dao. Referring to previous disastrous outcomes resulting from similar concerns about the general population, the text promises that if actions are not taken to mitigate the already dire circumstances, then destruction will follow. This text deals much more specifically with previous historical examples than *Admonitions*, discussing the names of people who have both been responsible for the downfall of people as well as those who have been sent to attempt to assist in the rebuilding process.

The text begins by outlining the undergirding relationship that exists between human beings and the Dao, emphasising the fact that without people, there could be no heaven and earth, and without heaven and earth, there could be no people. A brief discussion on the origin of the pneumas underscores the delicacy of this balance and the introduction concludes by positing that this balance has been thrust into precariousness owing to the proliferation of various false practices arising from deviant ways.

[123] The following is a summary of *Inner Explanations* based upon the translation by Stephen Bokenkamp.

The text goes on to give a detailed description of the origins of the Dao; the three pneumas; the jade maiden, who appears in *Oral Instructions*, and is said to have given birth to the first incarnation of Laozi when he emerged from her left side; and Laozi's transformation into Lord Lao, one of the most important symbols to the Celestial Master tradition.[124] The many transformations of Laozi, and those transformations for which Lord Lao was responsible, are enumerated, demonstrating the lengths to which the Dao has gone in its attempts to redirect humanity towards a path that will allow people to continue to thrive. For example, there is a list of ten thearchs to whom Laozi is said to have instructed as "Master to the Kingdom" or "sagely adviser"[125] beginning with Fu Xi (伏羲) and ending with Tang (湯) of Yin (殷). This list of sagely advisers shows that the Dao has many tactics at its disposal to save humanity, but when all else fails, there may be no choice but violence to restore the balance that once existed.

The idea that Laozi transformed himself and traveled to the west to civilise the people of India in the form of Buddha did not originate in this text, but it is developed in some detail here. Laozi first transforms himself into an elder named Mijia (彌加), who is able to convert the barbarian king of Kashmir. He then transforms an elephant into a titmouse that flies with the keeper of the pass, Yin Xi, into the mouth of a consort of the king of India named Maya, who is then born from her right side as Buddha. The significance of Laozi being born from the left side of the Jade maiden, while Buddha is born from the right side of Maya hinges

[124] In *Oral Instructions*, the Jade maiden is not a portrayal of the mother of Laozi; rather, she is a minor guardian of the talisman sent to protect the Seed People.
[125] Bokenkamp 1997: 209.

on the Daoist emphasis of left over right with the related concepts of yang, light and life associated with the left while yin, darkness, and decay are associated with the right.

The Han dynasty is treated with reverence, but also with a sense of regret because the Liu family was initially in line with the Dao, but eventually lost that connection leading to the interregnum of Wang Mang. Despite the fact that the Han regained power relatively quickly, the decline was irreversible creating the need for Lord Lao to bestow upon Zhang Daoling the title of "Master of the Three Heavens of the Correct and Unified Pneumas of the Grand Mystic Metropolis"[126] so that he could bring about a new age of Daoist adherence in which people returned to simplicity and truth.

Limited success is described as having followed the revelation to Zhang Daoling, but once his son and grandson had ascended to the Heavens, again there was disarray among the disciples of Daoism. Proper care was not taken to investigate the authenticity of scriptures and heterodox texts were again treated with reverence. The introduction of Buddhism contributed to the decline, but because it was rooted in the tradition that Laozi conceived, it was tolerable. That being said, the text concludes by claiming that the only true solution to all problems was memorisation and chanting of what is referred to here as the *Five Thousand Character Text*, better known today as the *Laozi*.

[126] *Ibid*: 215-6.

All three of these texts share the themes of instability within the religious organisation known as Celestial Master Daoism, mirrored in the political institutions by which the people are ruled. There is a span of approximately two hundred years that separates these works, and yet, it is clear that many of the same problems torment all three of these authors, and the people for whom they speak. While the tactics that are used to attempt to remedy these problems differ somewhat, at root, the basic approach remains the same. Both *Admonitions* and *Inner Explanations* take the form of historical accounts that rely upon images of unity between the Dao and people in an almost forgotten age, a unity that has been destroyed by arrogance and a lack of attention to following the true and proper Dao, which can only be expressed through orthodox texts. What makes *Oral Instructions* unique is the fact that the fundamental message remains the same, but the tactics used to accomplish its expression are quite different. Rather than emphasising the past and what has been done, here the focus rests on what will happen if the changes needed are not undertaken, with far more detail about the horrors of the impending apocalypse. It is likely that the stylistic difference found in this text, as compared with the others, indicates a heightened sense of danger felt by its author and perhaps other people in the Celestial Master movement at the time of writing. Based on internal evidence found within the text to be discussed below, it is possible that this danger arises out of a feeling of unease with regard to either the political situation or the state of the religious organisation itself, both of which are clearly unstable and in need of a new direction.

The first problem identified in *Oral Instructions* is that the Dao is being falsely spread. This idea is one that is common to all three texts, and its significance cannot be understated. There are two main reasons why textual homogeneity is a prime concern to the Celestial Master, both of which have to do with controlling the followers of Celestial Master Daoism to some degree. On the one hand, it is important to be certain that all followers adhere to the principles as designated by the original Celestial Master, because it is upon these tenets that the religion is based, and on the other, when heterodox texts begin to arise, as was the case at the time when *Oral Instructions* was likely written, then separate cults arise, several of which have been named previously, thus calling into question the supremacy of the originary church of the Celestial Master, potentially creating power struggles both within religious circles, but also in the political arena as well.

If people begin to manipulate the principles of the religion, then the consistency of belief will vary from parish to parish, and there will be no unity. This is integral to the potential political aspirations of the group, but it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a matter of faith. Whether or not Lord Lao literally came to reveal the Way of the Covenanted Authority of Correct Unity to Zhang Daoling and charged him with rule in the name of the Newly Emerged Lord Lao is almost irrelevant because it can never be proven, nor can it be disproven. The fact remains that this is the myth upon which this religion is founded, and presumably that Zhang genuinely believed, at least to some degree. This being so, it follows that any textual material that does not cohere completely with his

vision would be utterly offensive to him because it would be in opposition to the spoken word of the Dao itself, given that Lord Lao is considered to be a physical manifestation of the Dao. As such, all heterodox texts jeopardise the lives of those followers taking their words to heart.

This issue is undeniably at the centre of all three of these texts, and while there may be other matters that are dealt with in more detail, each and every one could certainly be connected to this concern at least to some degree. This is exemplified by the *Inner Explanations* final declaration that the one true answer to all problems is memorisation and recitation of the *Five Thousand Character Text*. According to the *Oral Instructions*, it is because of these "chaotic and muddled" writings that people falsify themselves and take advantage of the weak and foolish. It is because of these writings that there is chaos and disorder. It seems at first that there is a sentiment of blame being levelled against those who are responsible for these texts, but upon careful reading it seems more likely that sympathy for those who have been deceived by these writings is much more of a driving force than vengeance and spitefulness. The tone of the text matches the morality it espouses, and expands upon it through continued pursuit of truths that will enlighten people.

Similar to *Inner Explanations*, *Oral Instructions* claims that salvation will come through a type of text, a talisman combined with a register, which while the significance of a talisman may not lie in the words written on it, the fact that there is text there is relevant. It is through these words and the power that they invoke that the people who are chosen may be led to salvation. The salvation that comes

from the *Five Thousand Character Text* in *Inner Explanations* does seem to have a different quality because it is actually through those words that the person is changed rather than by receiving the words because one has the qualities needed to be saved, but it is still important to note the relevant importance of textual materials in the process of saving the people in both texts. *Admonitions* emphasises a different text that could set people on the path to salvation, called the *Seven-Character Verses of the Wondrous Perfected on the Three Numina*, or alternately, *Seven-Character Verses on the Three Numina and the Yellow Court*.[127] It is claimed that this text, which was "composed through" Zhang Lu, glosses and explains the basic scriptures. This will illumine for the reader how to recognise the Dao, and the wise will then be able to recognise it anywhere that it exists. Being able to recognise the Dao is fundamental to a life lived in accordance with its precepts, thus like the other two texts already discussed, *Admonitions* claims that there is a text that could assist in people's salvation, but unlike the other two, it is not as explicit in claiming that its absolute necessity.

This emphasis on textual unity in each of these works underscores the probable fear that the clergy of the Celestial Master church might have been feeling due to the emergence of the Upper Clarity and Numinous Treasure schools of Daoism. It is also interesting to note that *Admonitions* is the only one of the three texts to have been written prior to the existence of these two schools, and is also the text that least attends to this issue of textual corruption. Maintaining a strong base of support is the only means by which it is possible to continue to

[127] Bokenkamp explains that these two names likely refer to the same text in the note on p. 175 of *Early Daoist Scriptures*.

exert political influence. If political power is among the goals that motivate the leaders of the movement, then it is reasonable to assert that not only maintaining, but also increasing the number of followers would be a compelling force in the religion.

To claim that a religion exists, even in part, to curry political favour, or even more contentiously, that it exists mainly as a means to assert its own political influence and thereby gain power, is potentially inflammatory, and must therefore be examined carefully. However, the *Laozi* is an undeniably political text. To what degree the work aimed at delivering a strong political message has been, and continues to be, debated by scholars; but there is no question that political motivations factored into the inception of the text. This being so, it seems logical that a religion that is based upon this work would have some political aims at the core of its principles. It is also important to acknowledge the political role that the Celestial Master movement played from early in its existence, beginning concretely in 191 when the state of Hanzhong was established, the political influence of which did not cease in 215 when the state was dismantled by Cao Cao, rather Zhang Lu and five of his sons were given fiefdoms under what would later become the Wei dynasty. In 302 Li Te established the state of Cheng-Han, which fell in 347, having set another precedent for a Daoist state within China, and yet a further support for the possibility that Celestial Master Daoism blurs the traditional boundaries of what it means to be a religion, because it is a political entity as well.

The political implications of *Oral Instructions* are varied because it seems that there is critique of the current situation, but there are no suggestions for change developed in the text. Both *Admonitions* and *Inner Explanations* go into much more specific detail regarding the political errors that have been made and the attempts that the Dao has put forth to assist in these matters. In *Admonitions*, the decay is chronicled as having begun in the time of the Yellow Thearch, with a steady decline occurring throughout the generations that followed, all of which contributed to a loss of faith in the Dao. The scripture of Great Peace is brought to mind as having been given to Gan Ji in order to assist in the people's return to faith in Dao, but to no avail. It is difficult to delineate clearly in this context between the strictly political and the strictly religious because it seems that there is an inexorable connection, which appears to strengthen both the religion and the associated political system. The problem remains, at the time when Gan Ji was given the scripture, that there has not yet been a Daoist theocracy. Obviously, because the text is supposed to have been written by Zhang Lu, the successes of Hanzhong are exaggerated; however, it is impossible to deny that its success was limited in its twenty-four years of existence.

It is difficult to overlook the fact that following this short success, the general population of Hanzhong was dispersed throughout the country, cut off from the parishes that were able to minister to them thereby creating a unified religion, while the leadership of the movement enjoyed the benefits of close ties with the administration of the incoming dynasty. It is quite possible that it is because of these close ties with the Wei dynasty that much of the political

criticism levelled in the *Admonitions* is aimed at previous generations, while the harshest assessments of its contemporary times are of Daoists in the Celestial Master organisation who therefore shoulder the blame.

Similarly in *Inner Explanations*, previous generations of rulers are censured for their inability to heed the attempts of the Dao to return them to faithfulness, while contemporary leadership is not only indemnified against blame, they are actually praised as being descendants of the Han household, and therefore responsible for the large numbers of people possessing the Dao. The tone of the text is, in general, much less severe than the other two examined in this study, and rather than claiming that all texts that are not within the narrow category considered part of the orthodox textual tradition are dangerous and must be abandoned, it is instead claimed that it is through the *Five Thousand Character Text* that people will have compassion and find the ability to maintain the Dao and attain longevity. This text is the tamest in its critique of politics of the three examined, and it is possible that this is in fact a political manoeuvre in and of itself. The Liu-Song dynasty had Buddhist leanings at the very least, so it is possible that this text's emphasis on the similarities between the two religions, while still maintaining that Daoism, being indigenous to China is the religion more suited to it, is presented in this way in order to persuade the rulers of the country to re-examine their faith and perhaps devote their attentions, and resources to Daoism instead.

Oral Instructions differs politically from both of the aforementioned texts in that it seems to mitigate its criticism less and deals a more direct blow to the

people of its time in terms of its attack against their moral character, and also in saying that the dynasty is already crumbling, rather than tempering its criticism so as to avoid possible repercussions from those in power. Whereas it seems evident that the Celestial Master Daoists writing at the time of *Admonitions* and *Inner Explanations* had some political favour to lose, this appears not to be the case in *Oral Instructions*. Another major difference exists that separates *Oral Instructions* from the other two texts is its claims that the end is near, which may not seem like a political element of the text, but it is quite possible that this is a tactic used to draw people into the movement so that they can take power and establish a third Daoist theocracy in China.

The tone found in each of the three texts discussed herein provide helpful clues in understanding the position of Celestial Master Daoists with relation to the dynastic rulers at the various times of writing. *Oral Instructions* being the most direct and pointed of the three seems to indicate the lack of sway held in court at the time. The Eastern Jin had little interest in Daoist affairs, and further it is likely that there was some animosity felt towards Daoists because of the fact that it was the Cheng-Han state that was responsible for crumbling the limited unity that existed prior to 302 and that eventually created the political environment that allowed for the 16 Kingdoms to exist while the Eastern Jin's power was limited mainly to the south. In *Admonitions*, there is definite support for the Wei dynasty because there had been some degree of patronage received from the elite of the dynasty, but it is also evident that this is tempered by the fact that power had already begun to transition to the Sima family by the time the text was written. In

Inner Explanations, it is evident that the court did not favour the Daoists, but also that there seemed to be a possibility that the Daoists could win them over by identifying the similarities between Buddhism and Daoism, and further denigrating Buddhism as a lesser religion created for barbarians, emphasising the right, associated with yin and death and decay. The more direct tone of *Oral Instructions* might indicate a direr political situation that could only be resolved by first swelling the numbers of Celestial Master Daoists and eventually overthrowing the ruling family and replacing them with the seed people.

Apocalyptic imagery abounds in *Oral Instructions*, and although there are other Daoist texts that utilise similar themes, neither of the texts that have been examined here employ the overtly violent imagery found in *Oral Instructions*. This being so, it is important to question what prompted the use of such potentially terrifying language from a text that was written between two texts so similar to each other. There are two probable reasons that could answer this question. It is likely that there was discontent and concern among the leadership of the Celestial Master sect that arose from the emerging Upper Clarity school; however, the fact remains that the texts that paved the way for this sect were just beginning to come to light at the time that *Oral Instructions* was most likely written. Even if this was one of the reasons for which the author chose these extreme apocalyptic symbols to carry the weight of the issues that needed expression, it is also quite likely that drawing people towards Celestial Master Daoism for political purposes was a factor in the decision as well. By forecasting all manner of terrors for those who were not lucky enough to have received the

"living talisman of the ten thousand named nine luminants of Great Mystery" and thus be eligible to join the ranks of the seed people, the incentive for joining the cult for those not already among the members increases drastically. The cleverest element of this tactic is that even if someone joins the church, there is still a long way to go before being selected as one of the seed people. This creates the feeling of exclusivity surrounding membership, making it all the more appealing.

With all of these features considered, it is difficult to see the Celestial Master Daoists as anything other than a political religion. This is not intended to detract from the religion itself, rather it is a factor that could be seen to enrich the scope of influence that a religion could have. While it is a feature of Western democracies to separate "church" and state, that does not make it "right" nor does it eliminate the possibility that another system could have *other* benefits. A religious organisation, such as the Celestial Master Daoists, already undertakes many of the functions that are considered to be the purview of government, including maintaining records, collecting taxes in order to provide social services, education, and health care. Because of the existence of this infrastructure and the strong moral code inherent within the religion, it is understandable that many of its leaders were prone to political ambitions. It is also important to reiterate the successes that were enjoyed, limited though they may have been by both Daoist theocratic states. These successes would certainly create a suitable foundation upon which to build for future leaders of the movement, despite the fact that no other Daoist leader was ever able to establish a Daoist state again.

It is clear that *Oral Instructions* served a dual purpose, but more importantly, it seems likely that these purposes were intended to work together in concert bringing about a better future not only for the religious institution known as Celestial Master Daoism, but also for the Chinese people in general in the political arena. The tenuous mix of religion and politics that Daoism is successful in achieving is exemplified through this text, which, it is hoped, brings a more complete understanding of the movement as a whole to the fore.

Conclusion

The place of Daoism within the wider scope of Chinese history has certainly been a topic of much discussion within the realm of Western scholarship, but it is too often relegated to the position of the little brother chasing behind its older, more regimented siblings: Confucianism and Buddhism. Confucianism is often seen as the paradigmatic system that guided dynastic thinking, and while this is not untrue, it does not portray the complexity of the influences to shape courtly matters. Buddhism, as the main foreign import of China for a number of centuries, has fascinated and tantalised scholars, who have revelled in the manipulations that are evident in comparisons of Chinese Buddhism with that of its native Indian form. Daoism is multifarious and its influence penetrates well beyond the sphere of mere spiritual enlightenment, while still developing systems that aim at bringing this about. There is a confluence between the individual's spiritual well being and the way in which this

will affect his interactions with the world in which he lives, and an emphasis on connection to other people and the natural world. These factors unite to set forth a system of thought that, if enacted properly, could be a political system with great value.

It has been the intention of this analysis to elucidate the political ramifications of such religious texts as the *Oral Instructions*. This is not to say that the sole purpose in its writing was to amass political power, but to say that this goal is indeed among the driving forces influencing this author to write a text that utilises such extreme, violent imagery. While it is certainly beyond the scope of this study to press this issue to its limit, it is hoped that more penetrative studies will undertake comprehensive analysis of early Celestial Master Daoist texts in order to discern the level to which political motivations factor into their creation. If the driving force behind the bulk of early Daoist texts is discovered to be weightily political, it would then be necessary to re-evaluate the extent to which Daoism actually impacted upon the political landscape of China as a whole throughout history.

Oral Instructions presents a stark image, a world that is already beyond the pale of salvation. Destruction is imminent, so a small portion of the population must be extricated from the heterodox and muddled masses for the purpose of recreating the world in the image of the Dao. It is possible to argue that the intention here is solely to draw people towards Celestial Master Daoism so as to unify the Daoist movement as a whole and to repel the advances being made by the Upper Clarity sect. There is merit to this because these revelations

were beginning to occur contemporarily, and it is clear that heterodox texts are of concern within the scope of this text. There is extensive discussion involving the chaos and disorder that have arisen as a result of these texts, and the splitting of the heavens into the upper three and the lower six. All of this could lead the reader to believe that this is nothing more than a plea to current followers to stay the path, so to speak, and to those on the periphery, yet to commit to a faith, a guiding light bringing them to the only faith that will outlast impending doom. These arguments would be persuasive if there had never been a theocracy in China, and if there were no mention of the collapsing Sima family led Eastern Jin dynasty.

Two somewhat successful theocracies were still relatively fresh in the minds of Daoists at the time of writing, allowing the author to serve two purposes with but one text. The advantages of a Daoist theocracy seem obvious when examined from such a distance. The moral precepts that govern the religion were parlayed into legal codes in both Hanzhong and Cheng-Han. While there are not extensive records detailing the lives of people within these states, what records are available describe a world in which there was lenience in judicial punishment; charitable attitudes towards those less fortunate during times when it seems that most anyone could easily and unexpectedly find themselves in such difficulty; and perhaps above all, there was a comprehensive infrastructure in place to service the people's needs without impinging upon their freedoms, unlike many dynastic rulers.

The Daoist means of governance, like *Oral Instructions*, draws upon various influences in order to draw in the most people possible. The image of apocalypse, and its accompanying moral prescription for the people to be "pure, chaste, loving, filial, loyal, faithful, simple and true," form the basis for its platform of reform. While it may not overtly declare its political nature, it is conceivable to think that the author understood that the values espoused therein would not only map well onto a religious platform, but that they matched the values desired in the political arena as well. It is clear that governance is not taken lightly and that the weight of power rests heavily upon the Celestial Master's head, creating the sense that power is a responsibility, rather than a privilege. The Celestial Master sees the perils of power, but wants Zhao Sheng to accept the responsibility for the sake of the people who will be saved because of his selfless act. It is made clear that the distribution of this talisman will be difficult for Zhao Sheng, and ultimately, his choices may be rejected following the scrutiny of the officials and the sage-king himself.

Ultimately, it is never possible to recover authorial intent, nor is that the aim of this study. The fact that this research is being carried out nearly two thousand years after the text was written, and on a different continent, means that any understanding that may come from this study is disconnected in every way from the writing of the text itself. Further, authors often write with intentions that are hidden even to themselves, with social, political, and religious conditions influencing them in ways that are beyond their own understanding. The importance of this text in understanding not only early Daoist writings, but the

political aspirations of Daoist leaders is massive and because of this text, it is hoped that this connection becomes a central point of examination for future specialists in their examination of Daoist texts.

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