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THE FOUR SAINTS  
INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE AND THE EVOLUTION OF THEIR  
ICONOGRAPHY

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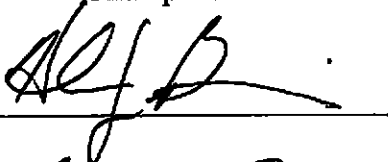
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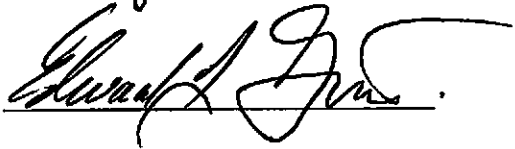
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## **Acknowledgments**

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## Abstract

Images of the Four Saints, a group of Daoist deities popular in the Song period, survive in a Buddhist context and display elements of Buddhist iconography. Though scholars have paid fair attention to the Four Saints' significance within Daoist ritual, none have accounted for their resemblance to Buddhist wrathful deities and their inclusion within the pantheon of the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land (*shuilu zhai* 水陸齋). Using ritual texts and anecdotal literature of the Song period, I will recount the history of this group and show that they flourished within an atmosphere of heightened Buddhist-Daoist ritual competition. I will furthermore argue that their eclectic appearance and their inclusion within Buddhist mortuary rites are products of such competition in the fields of exorcistic and mortuary ritual.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Though many scholars have documented the marked eclecticism of Daoist ritual in Song China (960-1276), its impact on the iconography of the Daoist pantheon has yet to be clearly delineated. The popularization of exorcisms and death rituals, the intermingling of Buddhist and Daoist ritual forms, along with the emergence of a ripe ritual market and a class of resourceful ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) made for a convoluted state of affairs. For this reason, its appeal to scholars of Chinese religious and social history is boldly manifest. Despite a noticeable peak of interest in this period of Daoist history, however, it remains a murky and commonly misunderstood area of inquiry. The depth of its complexity far surpasses the scope of any single study. It can only be explained in increments; step by step, piece by piece. The piece that this study strives to portray concerns the effect of this diverse atmosphere on the iconography of the Daoist pantheon, particularly the iconography of a group of deities known as the Four Saints (*sisheng* 四聖). Their culturally dichotomous semblance (two of them look much like Tantric Buddhist deities) reflects the intercultural milieu of Daoist ritual during the Song.

Originally utilized by exorcistic cults of the Song dynasty, the Four Saints emerged in the context of apocalyptic fervor that so exemplified new Daoist movements of that time. Each of them originated in their own distinct background, but by the Northern Song (960-1127) they would be associated *en masse*. The effective leader of this tetrad, the Perfected Warrior (*zhenwu* 真武), surfaced during the Later Han dynasty (25-221) as the animal of the Northern sky. At that time, he was portrayed in iconographic form as the reptilian dyad of a turtle and snake. Within the context of the

Four Saints, however, he takes on the anthropomorphic image of a spirit medium. The Supporter of Saintliness (*yisheng* 翊聖) also assumes this appearance, exhibiting the characteristics of unbound hair and bare feet so commonly documented of spirit mediums in China. Alone, he was hailed as the defender of the Song dynasty. In conjunction with the Four Saints, he is subordinate to Zhenwu as an agent of exorcistic power. The third member of this group, Tianpeng 天蓬, originated with a ritual incantation recorded by Tao Hongjing in his *Declarations of the Perfected* (*zhengao* 真告, completed in 499). His iconography derives from the Song period where he was first depicted with all the features a Tantric Buddhist deity. His story is central to this piece, as it marks the onset of a Buddho-Daoist iconographic style and pictorially documents the cross-cultural interaction of Buddhist and Daoist ritual practitioners. Tianyou 天猷, the final deity under investigation here, looks much like Tianpeng; he boasts four arms, three heads, and a plethora of trauma-inflicting weapons. In fact, he is intimately related to Tianpeng, as he also originates with the Tianpeng incantation of the *Zhengao*.

The goal of this study is to provide an overview of the Four Saints' hagiography and iconography. It seeks to chart their evolution from independent, solitary entities to their mutual identification within the group dynamic. As such, it starts in four distinct contexts—those of their individual origination—and ends in the shared context of the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land (*shuilu zhai* 水陸齋). This ritual, universal in its appeal, diffused variously as a memorial for the dead (its original purpose), a rite of protection, and a ceremonial festivity. Its great popularity eventually occasioned private performances in the homes of laymen and non-Buddhist temples. Consequently the *Shuilu* ritual pantheon, the series of gods portrayed on scrolls and hung in the altar, began



to accrue many deities from local religions and Daoism. It should come as no surprise, then, that the iconography of the Four Saints is well preserved in the scrolls of this Buddhist rite.<sup>1</sup>

Using the iconography of the Four Saints as a looking glass, I intend to examine the eclecticism of therapeutic ritual in the Song dynasty. Chapters two through four provide a critical examination of their respective hagiographies and iconographies. This will serve to establish the historical antecedents of their group affiliation. Chapters four and five account for the Tantric characteristics in their iconography, as well as for their inclusion, as a group, in the *Shuilu* ritual pantheon. Before we progress any further, however, let us set the scene with a brief examination of therapeutic rituals and ritual practitioners of the Song.

### *Daoist Ritual Traditions*

The Song dynasty gave rise to an era of unprecedented revelation and compilation of new Daoist texts. The subterranean discovery of divine scripture was a hallmark of Daoist apocalypse at that time. Many new ritual traditions, most of which promised the purgation of demons and the illnesses caused thereby, employed these scriptures and took on the nomenclature of their methods. Hence, many of them were designated by the character *fa* (method or rite 法), both the description of what they do, and the title by which they are known. Among the most popular of these ritual traditions were the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven (*tianxin zhengfa* 天心正法), the Rites of the Divine Empyrean (*shenxiao fa* 神霄法), and numerous modalities of Thunder Rites (*leifa*

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of such scrolls see fig. 1. For similar murals see also figs. 2 and 3.

雷法).<sup>2</sup> Common to each of them was an assertion of orthodoxy and a dedication to expelling demons. Most of them, moreover, cited continuity with the tradition of Zhang Daoling, founder of the Celestial Masters sect of Daoism. This association was not arbitrary, for within the celestial hierarchy, Zhang Daoling heads the Department of Exorcism. Therefore apparent by their titles and their affiliations, these new movements were concerned primarily with *ritual*.

Ritual was the defining aspect of Chinese religion in the Song. As anyone who has tried to summarize the tumultuous landscape of Daoism eventually discovers, one must do so by describing the details of its practice. Near-eastern religions, being much more cohesive and explicitly self-defining, lend themselves quite easily to clarification. Chinese religions, on the other hand, are notoriously evasive of definition and difficult to portray. The incongruity of their doctrines, even within the same religion (i.e., Daoism), restricts the usefulness of broad conceptualizations. They must be *described*, rather than *explained*. In the Song dynasty, the significance, and indeed survival, of a Daoist tradition depended wholly upon its perceived ritual efficacy. This fact says much about the devotional landscape of lay practitioners, who were the sponsors and recipients of these rituals, but even more about the functionality of ritual in Song China. Simply put, there was a demand for therapeutic ritual, and a supply to meet that demand.

The Four Saints emerged at the dawn of this therapeutic ritual economy. A product of the early Northern Song (960-1127), they typified the characteristics necessary

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<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to such sects see Lowell Skar, "Ritual Movements, Deity Cults, and the Transformation of Daoism in Song and Yuan Times," in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden and Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 432-448; Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen ed., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1056-1115 and 1188-1203; and Judith Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries*, China Research Monograph 32 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1987), 22-53.

for demonifugic rites. They were ferocious deities, who inflicted ferocious punishments on disease-causing demons. Practitioners of many therapeutic movements utilized them to varying degrees, but their main constituency resided with practitioners of the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven, or *Tianxin zhengfa*. Though they were also characteristic of the later Rites of Youthful Incipience movement (*tongchu dafa* 童初大法), this tradition inherited heftily from the *Tianxin zhengfa* legacy.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven*

The founding of the *Tianxin zhengfa* is traditionally attributed to two personages of the Northern Song. Tan Zixiao, the inaugural founder, was a native of Quanzhou who served the fourth ruler of Min, Wang Chang (r. 935-939). Though at that time and thereafter he was renowned as a Daoist priest, he also seems to have been a proficient spirit medium and healer. Referring to his time spent at the court of Min, *Xin Wudai shi* records, “[King] Chang was still fond of spirit mediums (*wu* 巫). He honored Daoist master Tan Zixiao as Elder of Orthodox Unity, and honored Chen Shouyuan as Heavenly Master.”<sup>4</sup> Ma Ling further records two episodes dated between 960 and 963 which demonstrate that he provided mediumistic services at a cost to wealthy individuals.<sup>5</sup> In this respect he greatly resembled, and even prefigured, the ritual masters (*fashi*) that came to dominate the Song dynasty ritual arena. They were resourceful ritualists who cusped

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<sup>3</sup> Skar, 442, 444. It is probable that many of the deities and rituals of the *Tongchu dafa* movement, a product of the early twelfth century, evolved from those of the *Tianxin* tradition, which surfaced as early as the tenth. By all accounts, the Four Saints were an elemental aspect of *Tianxin* rites long before this movement began.

<sup>4</sup> *Xin Wudai shi*, by Ouyang Xiu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 68.851.

<sup>5</sup> *Nantang shu*, by Ma Ling (in *Sibu congkan*, vol. 3010-3013), 24.2b-3a. In one such episode, he unbound his hair in the manner of a spirit medium (*pifa* 被髮) and conducted an exorcistic séance to heal the sickness of a prominent official.

the line between priest and medium, and who, for a low price, could perform a number of Buddhist or Daoist rites. Though the commerciality of ritual was not a new phenomenon in the Song, the great demand for therapeutic ritual caused it to flourish at that time. The second founder of the *Tianxin zhengfa*, Rao Dongtian, served as a minor official in the county of Linchuan. According to a text entitled *Shangqing tianxin zhengfa*,<sup>6</sup> in 994 he found buried beneath the soil a divine manual entitled “the secret formulas of the Heart of Heaven.” As he was unable to understand the instructions contained therein, he consulted with Tan Zixiao who quickly deciphered their mystery. The text ultimately affirms that the *Tianxin zhengfa* originated at Huagai Shan, the location of Rao’s retirement.<sup>7</sup>

Practitioners of the *Tianxin zhengfa* performed a number of rites, most of which were therapeutic in nature—that is they claim to cure illnesses, many of a mental sort, caused by the assailment of demonic forces. Accounts of Tianxin rites are legion in the anecdotes of Hong Mai’s *Yijian zhi* (*Record of the Listener* 夷堅志), collected and composed during the Southern Song (1127-1279). These accounts clearly depict the popularity and perceived efficacy of the rites, and have caused some scholars to suggest that Tianxin practitioners were “the first psychotherapists of China.”<sup>8</sup> Their eminence eventually gave rise to fantastic stories about the power of Tianxin rites. Take the quaint story of Song Anguo, whose persistence in the practice of Tianxin ritual resulted in one devastating case of deforestation:

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<sup>6</sup> Trans. “Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven of the Highest Purity Tradition” 上清天心正法.

<sup>7</sup> Poul Andersen, contributions to “Tianxin Zhengfa and Related Rites,” in *The Daoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1056-1081; esp. 1064-65.

<sup>8</sup> Boltz (1987), 38. For a discussion of therapeutic ritual as it relates to psychology see Edward Davis, *Society and Supernatural in the Song* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 43.

Song Anguo was the administrator of Zhexi, in Zhuhu Province. He performed the Rites of Tianxin incessantly. The people of Deqing were vexed on account of a bogy, and invited Song come to their residence. He treated [their affliction] unsuccessfully, and because of his defeat by the spirit, became disgraced. Song, indignant and enraged, went to lodge at Cundao Abbey. He fasted for seven days. He inscribed talismans and chanted incantations. He consummated his essence and concentration. Then, he took up a sword and unbound his hair. Under the big tree behind the people's residence, he walked the steps of Yu and circled the tree. All of a sudden rumbling thunder arose in the sky. The tree heightened by several *zhang* [a measure of 10 feet] and swelled by many spans. From crown to root it split in two. Again there rumbled several sounds [in the sky]. The stocks of the forest, incalculable, all rent open as though each were accounted for. [The pieces] amassed to the point that they concealed the ground. The demon was thereupon wiped away without a trace.<sup>9</sup>

If this story speaks to the popularity and perceived efficacy of Tianxin rites, it also speaks to the resourcefulness of Tianxin practitioners. The role of thunder in this narrative indicates that Song Anguo, a dedicated practitioner of Tianxin ritual, incorporated Thunder Magic into his practice. As the passage above indicates, Thunder Magic consisted mainly in the utilization of thunder to beckon rain and exorcise demons. It is difficult to speak of Thunder Magic as a uniform tradition, as the rites thereof diffused expansively among most therapeutic sects of the Song Dynasty. Elaborations on Thunder ritual occupy a considerable amount of room in the texts of the Shenxiao 神霄 and Qingwei 清微 traditions, as well as those of the Rites of Tianxin. This is, therefore, not to say that the passage above inadequately portrays the perceived efficacy of Tianxin rites—it only clarifies, in a very realistic sense, the eclecticism of therapeutic ritual in the

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<sup>9</sup> *Yijian zhi*, by Hong Mai (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981), 568.

Song. The lines between ritual traditions often overlapped, and the practices of one might also be used in another.

This picture is further complicated by the fact that many practitioners of therapeutic ritual were not ordained priests. They were lay ritualists who specialized in many different ritual traditions at once. In fact, the abundance of these practitioners in the Song accentuated the degree of overlap between various ritual modalities.

### *Professional Ritual Masters*

The eclecticism of Daoist ritual was also felt on another level—one outside of the established priesthood—that of the unordained ritual master (*fashi* 法師).<sup>10</sup> *Fashi* constituted a burgeoning class of vocational ritual practitioners who sought qualification to perform the rites of one or more ritual traditions at once. They were, above all, professionals, and their qualification to perform as many rites as possible ensured their ongoing employment. Much like Song Anguo, from the preceding story, many of them held an official post and performed exorcisms on the side. The degree to which they adhered to the Daoist precepts varied case by case. Some of them were akin to priests, and others were akin to spirit mediums. Their qualification to perform the rites of a specific ritual tradition, rather than depending upon ordination, depended upon whether one had received an appropriate qualifying register (*lu* 錄). Registers have held an essential function in the ordination of Daoist priests since the Han Dynasty, when the custom of elders passing on registers to young priests began. In the context of the Song

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<sup>10</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the title “*fashi*” and the categories of ritual practitioners implied thereby, see Davis, 45-66. I use the term here to distinguish only those *fashi* who were not officially ordained Daoist or Buddhist priests.

dynasty ritual master, however, the receipt of a register no longer implied an initiation into the mysteries of the Daoist church. More often, such qualification implied that one had received a supernatural vision, bestowed by one of many popular deities.<sup>11</sup> This new standard of certification allowed virtually anyone to take on the functions of an exorcist; both rich and poor, literate and illiterate. This is not to say, however, that *fashi* haphazardly entered this line of work. On the contrary, they seem to have taken very seriously the demands of their trade. Stories from the *Yijian zhi* indicate that the people who hired ritual masters greatly revered their attributed powers as exorcists and healers.

For an example of how registers functioned in the context of *Tianxin zhengfa* ritual, consider the story of military official Jiang Di. After suffering numerous wounds at the affliction of sibling female ghosts, he hired the “Official of Ministry” to exorcise his demons:

The next day when he returned to the outpost, two women [ghosts] each thrust their halberds forward. Thereupon he aged excessively, his strength greatly deteriorated, and he gradually became unable to eat. A little later, the Official of Ministry, Sun Gu, came to relieve the tax official of Tianchang county. Gu had received the Register of Highest Purity (*shangqing lu* 上清錄), and held [the ability to perform] the extreme interrogations of the Rites of the Heart of Heaven. Di’s family solicited Gu to heal him. He set up an altar to summon and investigate (*kaozhao* 考召), and used numinous talismans to adorn his waist. When Di departed the next day, the pair of halberd-bearing specters did not appear.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, this passage goes on to indicate that though Sun Gu successfully exorcised the sibling demons afflicting Jiang Di, a third demon later re-inflicted his illness. If the

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<sup>11</sup> See Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China 1127-1226* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 419-420.

prevalence of demons necessitated the efficacy of therapeutic ritual, it apparently also gave exorcists an excuse if their rituals did not heal.

The particular story of Ritual Master Wang exemplifies not only the methods of an illiterate *fashi*, but also his appeal to the general populous:

[Wang] daily practiced the rites of the Celestial Heart (*tianxin fa*), conducted purification ceremonies (*jiao*) for the presentation of memorials to Heaven on others' behalf, and wore the star cap and ritual vestments. But he was not an ordained Daoist practitioner (*daoshi*). The people preferred him to real Daoists, as his rates were one-third of theirs, and they therefore often hired him. Each time he had his neighbor Li write the petition or present the official prayer.<sup>13</sup>

Ritual masters were apparently an appealing alternative to Buddhist and Daoist priests, the rites of which many could not afford.

### *The Effect of Commercial Ritual in the Song*

As I alluded earlier, the commerciality of ritual was on the rise during the Song. Ritual consumers sought low-cost alternatives to institutional services, and lay practitioners provided them to the communities in which they lived. More and more people were turning to lay ritualists for the performance of not only exorcistic rites, but also funerary rites. Additionally, they were turning to them for Buddhist as well as Daoist ritual. Other low-cost alternatives to institutional worship surfaced at that time as well, including the burning of paper spirit money and the performance of private rituals within the home.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1101—as translated in Hansen, 46. The bracketed addendum is mine, while the parenthetical ones are hers.



The popularity of lay practitioners grew to such an extent that they sometimes gained a great following. Some of them formed societies for the practice of ritual, and made their living off of selling ritual necessities. For example:

Young men who are a little clever in Po-yang like to form associations to chant sūtras and make confessions. To perform Buddhist services they organize ten men into a unit. If any of them has a wedding, funeral, or special need, they go together to perform the ceremony. They fast, chant Sanskrit, strike the bell, and hit the drum, from the beginning of the night until the fourth drum, exactly like a Buddhist ritual. They all endeavor to be accurate and sincere, and there are no expenses for contributions or gifts [as there are to monks]. They will also go to those who are not members of their unit if the latter send a letter of invitation. In this region followers are very numerous, and as they often wear white robes, they are called the “white clothes associations.” The city resident Chiang Erh, a commoner, is their leader. He normally makes his living by manufacturing and selling incense.<sup>14</sup>

Not only was there an increase in the abundance of lay practitioners at this time, but there was also an increase in the production of paper spirit money, both of which offered private citizens a low-cost alternative to the funerary rituals of Buddhism and Daoism. Much like “Chiang Erh” above, who sold incense for a living, the vendors of spirit money found profitability in the funerary market. Others did too, as Stephen Teiser points out:

To purchase imitation money, one had to pay real money to people who printed and sold spirit money, who were probably connected to the newly emerging groups of artisans and merchants. There were undoubtedly other persons who found employment in the funerary economy by renting copies of their paintings of purgatory and by assisting in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1512-1513—as translated in Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Response of the Sung State to Popular Funeral Practices,” in *Religion and Society in T’ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993); 233, n. 29. The bracketed remarks are hers.

funerals. However, they had few affinities with Buddhist and Taoist priests and probably resembled more the newly emerging class of ritual and performance specialists, those people who could draw on a rich stock of liturgy and opera to entertain the living and to bring relief to the deceased at funerals.<sup>15</sup>

The deinstitutionalization and commercialization of ritual in the Song gave rise to an abundance of choices for the ritual consumer. It was correlated with an increase in lay practitioners and the production of ritual necessities such as spirit money and paper effigies. Ultimately, the resulting availability of low-cost rituals facilitated the dispersion of popular Buddhist and Daoist practices, as well as the interplay between them.

I will resist the temptation to draw conclusions as to what caused the deinstitutionalization and commercialization of ritual in the Song, and simply emphasize that within this atmosphere lay practitioners were able to take up and popularize a diverse range of practices, thus contributing to the eclecticism of Song ritual.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Edward Davis has shown that some of these ritual professionals could perform the rites of both Buddhists and Daoists, and that they furthermore had much in common with village spirit mediums.<sup>17</sup> The professionals to which he refers have a special relevance to our study of the Four Saints because they performed simultaneously a form of Daoist ritual called the Rites of Summoning for Investigation (*kaozhao fa* 考召法) and a form of Tantric ritual called the Rites of the Three Altars (*santan fa* 三壇法).<sup>18</sup> These two types of ritual had many practices in common, and the deities they utilized looked very much alike. It

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen F. Teiser, "The Growth of Purgatory," in Ebrey and Gregory (1993), 135.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, 130-135; and Hansen, 41-45. Teiser proposes that this situation is somehow due to the popularization of purgatory and its development apart from official religious institutions, whereas Hansen alternatively points to the limited availability of ordination certificates as the cause.

<sup>17</sup> See Davis, 141-152, 290 n. 57.

<sup>18</sup> This convergence of ritual involved a specific type of *kaozhao fa* called the Rites of Investigation by Illumination (*kaozhao fa* 考照法). It figured greatly into the practices associated with Tianpeng.

should prove useful to compare such Buddhist and Daoist rites and to examine how their convergence may have contributed to the assumption of Tantric iconography into the portrayal of the Daoist pantheon. For now, let us turn to some of the Buddho-Daoist elements of Song ritual, and examine how they relate to the iconography of therapeutic and funerary traditions in general.

### *Buddho-Daoist Elements of Song Dynasty Ritual*

The reciprocal influence that Buddhism and Daoism have exerted on one another started as early as the fifth century and extended well into the Ming dynasty. It began with the textual acculturations of Lingbao scripture, which mimicked to a large extent the structure of Buddhist sutras, and reproduced in a very unsystematic way Buddhist soteriological and cosmological concepts.<sup>19</sup> It continued in the sixth century with the intentional conversion of Daoist texts into Buddhist ones (and vice versa), as well as the mutual adoption of various ritual techniques including the use of seals and incantations for purposes of healing.<sup>20</sup> In the Tang, each of the processes thus mentioned can still be seen as well as another one: the adoption of each other's iconography into the respective representations of their pantheons. Thus, by the time of the Song dynasty, Buddhism and Daoism already coincided in a number of cultural fields.

In the Song dynasty, Buddhist and Daoist exorcistic ritual had a number of elements in common. First, there was the use of talismans, seals, and incantations to

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<sup>19</sup> See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1983): 434-486.

<sup>20</sup> See Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 89-193; Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 28-30; and Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Daoism Face to Face: Scriptural, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

ward off harmful demons and bring about the cessation of disease. Second, there was the utilization of child spirit-mediums to aid in such therapeutic endeavors. And third, there was the projection of a common iconography onto the deities that provided exorcists their demonifugic potency. The extent to which these commonalities represent a deliberate process of imitation and duplication differs for each one. The use of talismans and seals in the process of exorcism stretches back to the third century of China's history at the latest, indicating that it was most likely adopted by Buddhists after entering the country.<sup>21</sup> Incantations were likewise used by Daoists at an early date, though they may have been influenced by earlier Buddhist mantras and dhāraṇīs.<sup>22</sup> The first mention of the use of child spirit-mediums derives from a Buddhist source, though the practice has a long history in China.<sup>23</sup> Certainly the "ownership" of these customs is a moot point considering that Chinese Buddhism and Daoism grew together on Chinese soil for most of their respective histories. The third commonality above, however, clearly derives from a Buddhist context. The iconographic similarities included therein consist of deities with multiple arms, weapons, and ritual implements—all determinative of a Tantric background.

Tianpeng, one of the Four Saints under investigation here, exemplifies the Daoist adoption of Tantric iconography. Stemming from a purely Daoist context in the fourth century, he acquired a Tantric appearance sometime during the Song. His adoption of such an appearance in the Song must not surprise us too much; the rituals most associated with Tianpeng all had a Tantric counterpart at that time. From his famous incantation to his apotropaic seal, even the Rites of Summoning for Investigation (*kaozhao fa* 考召法)

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<sup>21</sup> Strickmann (2002), 141, 192, 317 n. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 103-122.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 194-227; Davis, 143-152.

—in which he figured so greatly—paralleled aspects of Tantric ritual. Anticipated in the Tang by Tantric *āveśa* rites, *kaozhao fa* often entailed the possession of child spirit-mediums who relayed messages on behalf of an afflicting demon.<sup>24</sup> In the Song dynasty this method was utilized by devotees of Tianpeng, and it bore a strong resemblance to the Rites of the Three Altars (*santan fa*). As mentioned before, some practitioners of the Song employed both of these modalities simultaneously, and I suspect that Tianpeng's iconography may derive from just such a context (see n. 18).

There was of course another type of iconographic adoption during the Song dynasty, that of Daoist deities into the pantheon of the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land.<sup>25</sup> The first known manual on the performance of this rite was written by the Song layman Yang E (1032-1098). Entitled *Shuilu yiwen*,<sup>26</sup> it lacks any mention of the presence of Daoist deities within the *Shuilu* altar. The eminent monk Zhipan (ca. 1220-1275) later wrote a treatise to rival that of Yang E entitled *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui*.<sup>27</sup> Though no copies of this text remain, a recodification by the reformer Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615) demonstrates that by the late Southern Song the *Shuilu* pantheon had been broadly expanded and made to incorporate a large number of popular Daoist deities.<sup>28</sup> Stevenson implies that the inclusion of these deities within the *Shuilu* pantheon may have been imposed by imperial decree. He notes that in 1106, Emperor

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<sup>24</sup> See Davis, 123-143, esp. 125; Strickmann (2002) 204-218. As Strickmann explains, *āveśa* is the standard Sanskrit word for spirit possession (p. 207). In the Tang it specifically referred to the voluntary possession of a child spirit-medium.

<sup>25</sup> Much of the information in this section is based on Daniel Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for the Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land," in *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001): 30-70.

<sup>26</sup> Trans. "Text for the Ritual of Water and Land" 水陸儀文 (ca. 1071).

<sup>27</sup> Trans. "Guidelines for performing the purificatory fast of the sublime assembly of saintly and ordinary beings of water and land throughout the Dharmadhātu" 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌 (ca. 1260).

<sup>28</sup> This recodification bears the same title as that in *ibid.*

Huizong demanded that an image of the Three Pure Ones, the highest gods of Daoism, be included in the rite, and that other Daoist deities included within the pantheon be elevated in status.<sup>29</sup> While his premise is logical enough (and indeed, very compelling), there are elements within the rite that challenge this assumption. First, it seems unlikely that Zhuhong, a renowned Buddhist reformer, would uphold an earlier imperial precedent to include Daoist deities within the altar, especially when his reforms were aimed precisely at the characteristics of the rite which pandered for elitist and imperial acclamation. Second, the presence of popular deities and local functionaries within the rite indicates more of a grassroots than imperial influence.

Such was the background in which devotion to the Four Saints thrived.

Understanding them within this deinstitutionalized and commercialized ritual context is key to understanding the dissemination and evolution of their iconography. As we proceed, we will continue to establish how these deities were utilized in ritual and how the sects in which they were idolized related to one another. Iconographically, the Four Saints stand at the intersection of two cultures; the interplay between them may just account for their eclectic appearance and their role in Buddhist liturgy.

### *Sources and Methodology*

My foremost goal is to relate the history of the Four Saints through an examination of their hagiography and iconography. In pursuit of this goal, I wish also to relate how they assumed a Tantric appearance and came to be included in the pantheon of a popular Buddhist ritual. The substance of this endeavor will begin with chapter two,

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<sup>29</sup> Stevenson, 54.

which relates the story of the Supporter of Saintliness, and highlights his dichotomous background of both imperial patronage and private veneration. It will continue with chapter three, which relates the story of the Perfected Warrior, examining the long history of his iconography and the changes it underwent as he began to be used for exorcistic ritual. Chapter four will serve a double purpose; to explain the practices associated with Tianpeng and Tianyou, and to account for the Tantric iconography that both of them embody. Finally, chapter five will examine the ritual pantheons of popular Daoist and Buddhist rites, and account for why the iconography of the Four Saints came to be preserved in the context of the Retreat of Water and Land. Naturally, this endeavor will necessitate voluminous contextualization; information about the traditions in which they were utilized, the practices associated with them, and the perceptions people had of them. Because each chapter is divided between the topics of hagiography and iconography, it will further necessitate the utilization of both written text and painted image. The following section explains the problems posed by the materials I have utilized, as well as how I have minimized these problems throughout.

Sources for the hagiographic portions of this thesis include canonical biographies, ritual texts, and anecdotal narratives; some in their original Chinese, and some that have been translated into English. Each of these literary genres presents problems with reliability and accuracy. Canonical biographies, by their very flattering and apologetic nature, provide only partial and usually embellished accounts. These embellishments, however, sometimes betray the author's intentions, and instead disclose their exact goals by virtue of mere exaggeration and obviousness. Ritual texts, though they provide detailed information as to how ritual is performed, often represent the ideological

enactment thereof, and thus cannot accurately portray the execution of such rituals. Fortunately, Daoist and Buddhist altars maintain a structural arrangement whereby a deity's rank within the pantheon may be easily ascertained according to where the deity is placed. As such, the researcher may gain valuable insight into the physical interaction between priest and deity, and the hierarchical tensions within the pantheon. Anecdotal narratives, as hearsay, often pose problems of reliability similar to those of canonical biographies. Nonetheless, whereas canonical accounts reveal the biases of literate authorities, anecdotes reveal the biases of commoners and the laity. Overall, if the researcher is informed by context and proceeds with criticism, he may gain valuable information while minimizing the effects of prejudice.

Sources for the iconographic portions of this thesis include published catalogs of murals, scrolls, and drawings; as well depictions within various texts of the Daoist canon. The foremost issue here is one of representativeness. As I have based my research on a handful of published images, it cannot technically be deemed a representative sample of Four Saints iconography in China. Many of these images derive from the area of Shanxi and Hebei, thus our ability to generalize outside of this geographical region is also limited.<sup>30</sup> A more accurate survey of their iconography would necessitate fieldwork in temples throughout the country. With that said, I do see striking continuity between these images and ones present in widely circulated texts of the Daoist canon.<sup>31</sup> Not only do their appearances correspond to a great degree, but so does their placement within the illustrated ritual area. This fact leads me to believe that the iconography of these deities

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<sup>30</sup> Images that come from this area include figures 1-7. Images that may come from outside of the Shanxi-Hebei area include figures 8 and 9.

<sup>31</sup> A copy of *Gaoshang yuhang benxing jijing*—a text which most likely dates to the Southern Song, and still figures prominently in the practice of modern Daoism—is on display at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. It contains a woodblock print of Daoist deities which includes an image of the Four Saints.



was quite standardized, and I eagerly encourage and anticipate more research in this respect.

## Chapter 2

### Yisheng: The Supporter of Saintliness

The earliest accounts of this deity refer to him as the Black Killer. This name would only endure to 981 when he received the official designation General who Supports the Saint (*yisheng jiangjun* 翊聖將軍). This change in identity (along with the addition of the suffix “Perfected Lord” [*zhenjun* 真君] by Zhenzong in 1014) marked the beginning of a courtly façade for an exorcistic deity who was largely popular among spirit mediums. His imperial significance compelled later scholars to affirm his reputation as a “cosmic agent who enforced the traditional values of the literati class.”<sup>32</sup> This new role, however, did not seal his fate as imperial envoy. In actuality, he remained very popular among rural exorcists and spirit mediums. Many of them practiced the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven (*tianxin zhengfa* 天心正法), a ritual tradition renowned for its effectiveness in dispelling demons and curing the illnesses caused thereby. He was also a member of the Four Saints, a group of martial divinities known for their ferocious demeanor. Yisheng’s iconography, furthermore, reflects this martial quality. Draped in armor, sword at the ready, he stands poised for battle. Iconographic similarities to the Perfected Warrior, Zhenwu 真武, suggest a common background of use for spirit mediumship. Though commonplace to assume that Yisheng’s iconography derives from that of Zhenwu, a closer examination will show the reverse to be more plausible.

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<sup>32</sup> Boltz (1987), 85.

### *The Official Biography*

Most information on the Supporter of Saintliness derives from his official biography, the *Yisheng baode zhenjun zhuan* (Biography of the Perfected Lord who Supports the Saint and Protects Virtue 翊聖保德真君傳), dated in its earliest form to 1016. It was compiled and edited by Wang Qinruo, an official at Zhenzong's court who, along with the emperor, shared an affinity for Daoism. Its composition reinforced an elaborate plan to prove the spiritual legitimacy of Zhenzong's rule. In his position as Commissioner for the Palace Secretariat (*shumi shi* 樞密使), Wang Qinruo orchestrated a series of spiritual revelations that sought to demonstrate Zhenzong's possession of the mandate of heaven. Essential to this task was the concealment of the god's prior identity, the Black Killer. We will revisit the details of these controversies in the sections that follow. For now let us examine the beginnings of this drama, which commence far from the comforts of the court, and appropriately near the birthplace of Daoism, in the forest of the Zhongnan mountains.

According to the *Yisheng baode zhuan*, the first person to encounter Yisheng was a commoner from Zhouzhi county, in modern-day Shanxi, named Zhang Shouzhen 張守真. This character would prove indispensable for Taizong's rise to power, and his story as recorded in this biography, would help sustain Zhenzong's possession of the mandate of heaven. He chanced fortuitously upon the deity one day while taking a stroll:

At the beginning of the Jianlong reign, in Zhouzhi county, Fengxiang Prefecture, a commoner named Zhang Shouzhen was strolling in the Zhongnan Mountains when he suddenly heard someone calling him from the sky. The voice was very clear and penetrating. Shouzhen was frightened and fearful. He looked all around, but there was nothing he could see. For several leagues, he walked silently and listened with terror.

Again, he heard a voice saying, “If you go first, then I will be right behind you.” It went on like this for several days. Shouzhen could not fathom it.

After he returned to his home, he again heard a voice in the room say, “I have received the command to send down my spirit. Why are you so obstinate and stubborn like this, not listening to what I say! If I were not engaged in the great work of the Song Dynasty, I would have already smashed you to pieces!”

Now Shouzhen considered this strange, and he became frightened by it. He then said, “I still don’t understand what star descends on me like this. I am fundamentally stupid and stubborn, and moreover, I am ignorant of the gods of Heaven and Earth. Please don’t intimidate me, I certainly have nothing to offer you.”

Then the voice said, “I am the assistant of the Jade Emperor, the great saint of the High Heaven. I have received the mandate to protect the times, and descend on the world riding on a dragon. Yet because there are no correct and true men, I have no one to receive my teaching. You have strange bones, not the same as ordinary people. You can sincerely receive my instruction on the Dao.”<sup>33</sup>

Zhang Shouzhen is then initiated as a Daoist priest (*daoshi* 道士) by an elder at the Abbey of the Ancient Tower; the reputed site of Laozi’s bestowal of the *Daode jing* to Yin Xi before exiting the country.<sup>34</sup> Thereupon, he exhausts his family fortune to construct the Palace of the Northern Emperor, and worships Yisheng day and night. Seeing that Shouzhen is an “upright and pure person, able of dispelling noxious influences,” Yisheng proceeds to teach him various methods of exorcism and libation, including the “three methods of the sword,” and the “nine methods for constructing an altar.”<sup>35</sup> The remainder of the text recounts the history of the Song dynasty’s relationship

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<sup>33</sup> *Yunji qiqian*, ed. Zhang Junfang (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2003), 103.2220.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.2221.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.2221-2222.

to the deity, and the performance of exorcisms by Shouzhen in the areas surrounding Chang'an.

The relationship between the Supporter of Saintliness and Zhang Shouzhen would last 36 years and span the rule of two emperors. Shouzhen's powers of divine communication proved instrumental in demonstrating the spiritual legitimacy of the empire. Particularly important to Emperor Taizong, Shouzhen revealed Yisheng's favor for him, and affirmed his possession of the mandate of Heaven. Though not explicitly stated, a short sentence from the biography clarifies this point, "The Prince of Jin [*jingwang* 晉王] has a benevolent heart."<sup>36</sup> The text also relates that, during an offering at the Palace of the Northern Emperor, Yisheng disclosed that a new emperor would build the Palace of Great Peace and Highest Purity. He also implied that Taizong would be the one to do so. Confirmation of this statement came on the eve of then-emperor Taizu's death (which incidentally took place soon after he had insulted Yisheng by employing spirit mediums to communicate on his behalf). Taizong commissioned the construction of the Palace of Great Peace and Highest Purity soon after he assumed control in 976.

Incredibly, support for dynastic insurgency did not define the extent of divine intervention in Song politics. A more obvious contrivance of revelation soon approached when Emperor Zhenzong promoted the compiler of the Yisheng's biography, Wang Qinruo.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 103.2223

*Wang Qinruo and the Heavenly Texts of 1008*

Less known, but more instrumental to Song politics than Zhang Shouzheng perhaps, was the figure who compiled the *Yisheng baode zhuan*, Wang Qinruo. Under his guidance, Emperor Zhenzong used Daoist revelation to divert attention from his political failures onto issues of spiritual efficacy. He coordinated the Heavenly Text Affair of 1008, which sought to establish the emperor's rightful possession of the mandate of heaven through the mysterious appearance of "heavenly texts" 天書 on palace grounds. These texts, produced at the hands of Qinruo, literally spelled out the Jade Emperor's approval of Zhenzong's sovereignty. Susan Cahill recounts these exploits in her study of the heavenly texts, where she concludes the situation was not a conspiratorial plan to rectify the emperor's poor approval rating, rather an innocent enactment of standard spiritual practices of the time.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the case, these texts reveal the importance of divine benediction to Zhenzong's authority.

After the Song dynasty's embarrassing defeat by the Liao and the resulting Shanyuan treaty, which bribed them to forgo their siege of the Northern regions, the kingdom was left questioning Zhenzong's competence as emperor. At the suggestion of Wang Qinruo, he devised a plan to produce spiritual documents validating his right to rule. When he expressed his shame regarding the Shanyuan treaty and requested Wang's advice on how to efface the humiliation it produced, Wang replied:

Only the Feng 封 and Shan 禪 sacrifices can subdue the four seas and amply impress the outlying kingdoms. However, from of old, performing the Feng and Shan sacrifices necessitate the attainment of an auspicious omen from heaven...How can one definitely

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<sup>37</sup> Suzanne Cahill, "Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair of 1008," *The Bulletin of Sung-Yüan Studies* 16 (1980): 23-44. As she has meticulously compiled the relevant texts and weaved them into one narrative, the following section largely relies upon her treatment of this topic.

attain an auspicious omen from heaven? Earlier dynasties have most likely used manpower to produce them...There is nothing strange about producing them in this manner.<sup>38</sup>

Qinruo asserted that even texts as revered as the *Hetu* 河圖 and *Luoshu* 雜書 (alt. 洛書), were manufactured by human hands.<sup>39</sup> When the scholar Tu Hao confirmed this claim, Zhenzong approved Qinruo's proposal. Sure enough, on the first day of the first month, 1008, a yellow scroll was found hanging from a tile on the court gate. An elderly court scholar broke the seals and read the inscription:

The Chao have received the mandate and brought it to glory with the Sung. It will be handed down in perpetuity. [As there is a pun here on Heng 'perpetuity' 恆, the emperor's personal name, the line could also be translated, 'It has been handed down to the present emperor.'] It dwells in their vessels. If you preserve it in the legitimate line, then (succession) will be assured for 799 generations.<sup>40</sup>

Over the next few years Zhenzong claimed to receive several messages from a spirit dressed in Daoist garb. Zhenzong claimed that, in one such message, the spirit said he had been commissioned by the Jade Emperor to impart the auspicious omen mentioned above.<sup>41</sup> The inscription from the Heavenly Text was thus the Jade Emperor's formal endorsement of Zhenzong's rule.

Cahill is sympathetic to the genuineness of this story, stating that the Heavenly Text Affair was not an attempt to rectify Zhenzong's sullied image, but instead reflected his sincere Daoist beliefs. She remarks, "For the emperor and others who took the Taoist

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<sup>38</sup> *Songshi jishi benmo*, by Feng Qi (1965); ch. 22, 128-129.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. Ancient cosmographical diagrams illustrating the operation of yin and yang, the *Hetu* and *Luoshu* serve as the foundation of many Chinese religious practices, including the Daoist ritual of *bugang*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*—as translated in Cahill, 26-27. The Wade-Giles romanization of 趙, "Chao," refers to the family name of the dynastic clan, i.e. Taizu, Taizong, and Zhenzong. It should be properly written in pinyin as "Zhao." The bracketed and parenthetical observations belong to Cahill.

<sup>41</sup> Cahill, 31.

religion seriously, the Heavenly Text and the visions which accompanied it were only in part a solution to the political problems of the day."<sup>42</sup> She also admits, however, that Song historians conspicuously disagree with her point of view. They would ultimately conclude that Emperor Zhenzong and Wang Qinruo were so determined to compensate for the empire's near-subservient position to their Liao neighbors, that they overstepped legitimate apocalyptic means.<sup>43</sup> To them, the production of heavenly texts by human hands meant the Feng and Shan sacrifices, rituals of dynastic legitimacy, were no more than unwarranted.

If Zhenzong did, in fact, wish to impress his audience with his divine approval, and thereby redeem his political status, why would he not link himself to the highest gods of the pantheon instead of gods such as the Jade Emperor and Yisheng? The popularity of these gods might provide us with a clue. During what Lagerwey referred to as the "gradual *rapprochement* of the dynastic and local cults of the Tao," relating oneself to popular deities such as the Jade Emperor and the Supporter of Saintliness would have greatly improved one's public and spiritual image.<sup>44</sup> Referring to Yisheng's chosen medium, Zhang Shouzhen, Lagerwey writes:

As we have seen, at the beginning of the T'ang and Sung, an illiterate and "dullwitted commoner" respectively had determined the structure and content of the official Taoist cult. Emperors were invested with Shang-ch'ing diplomas, but they gained access to divine benediction through plebeian seers—and their Taoist masters.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>44</sup> John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York and London: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 263.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 259-260.



Here Lagerwey refers to a gradual shift in the relationship between Daoism and the State, observable from the Tang to the Yuan Dynasty. During the Tang, he explains, the initiation of emperors fell within the responsibilities of the Shangqing Daoist tradition, based at Mount Mao. By the Yuan, however, the honor of imperial initiation resided within the repertoire of the Heavenly Masters tradition, based at Longhu Mountain.

Lagerwey recounts:

This shift from one Taoist mountain to another basically reflects a shift from aristocratic, eremitic Taoism to popular, communal Taoism, for the Shang-ch'ing Taoism of Mao-shan is from the very beginning as thoroughly aristocratic and individualistic a movement as Heavenly Master Taoism is popular and communal.<sup>46</sup>

The promotion of popular Daoism in the Song may account for why Zhenzong would emphasize popular deities over the supreme Daoist pantheon in his quest for divine approval. Nevertheless, the reconciliation of local and state religion did not come without a few hang-ups. Standards of stateliness deemed many practices associated with popular deities as inadmissible. Even the Jade Emperor met with considerable opposition when he became the recipient of Daoist ritual in the Song.<sup>47</sup> The subject of our present interest would also have to deal with his own problems. Yisheng's militant character as exemplified by his prior title, "the Black Killer," not to mention his association with spirit mediums, could have offended the statelier of ritual practitioners. The emperor and his diplomat would have to conceal a portion of Yisheng's past in order to preserve his reputation as "guardian of the Song."

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>47</sup> See *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* (DZ 508), 16.4b-5a.

*An Unsainly Past*

From the first production of the infamous heavenly texts to the time of Zhenzong's death, Wang Qinruo supported the spiritual agenda of the emperor, and sought to establish his rightful possession of the mandate of heaven. He was no doubt behind the canonization of as many as 25 deities during the peak of his influence, from 1007 to 1022.<sup>48</sup> In 1016 he composed the *Yisheng baode zhuan*, which emphasized the legitimacy of Song leadership through the patronage of Yisheng. He would need to give Yisheng a courtly makeover, however, for the title “perfected lord,” which was awarded him, is reserved only for the orthodox pantheon. In fact, the earliest texts do not refer to him as the “perfected lord,” rather the Black Killer—a designation that fails to meet the civil standards of orthodoxy. Qinruo understood this unfortunate fact, and within his composition he sought to conceal a portion of Yisheng's past.

The Supporter of Saintliness, as he is now known, did not always enjoy the dignity of such a decorated title. His former title, the Black Killer (*heisha* 黑殺, alt. 黑煞) recalls a class of deadly spirits that bear the same designation. “Killers,” as they are so intelligibly described, are the ghosts of deceased family members who, depending upon the circumstances of their death, will return on a specified day to take the lives of their own relatives. To this belief in such spirits is attached the tradition of fleeing the house on the specified day of return, so as to avoid any harm. Sources show that often people would leave offerings of meat in order to satiate the spirit and cause it to depart without incident. De Groot quotes one such case from Hou Dian's *Xiqiao yeji* (Vulgar Accounts from *Xiqiao* 西樵野記):

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<sup>48</sup> See Hansen, 176.

'My fellow-villager Ku Kang having died, his shah [*sha* 殺] came back to the house.

This occurred in the night. Incense, paper money, meat and dainties had been placed by his wife on the table of the soul; they had hung the apartment with ornamental curtains and closed the door, and concealed themselves in the adjacent houses, with the exception of one old woman, whom they left behind alone to guard the dwelling. This woman then saw a beast in the shape of a monkey and the size of a dog, leaning over the table to devour the meat. On perceiving her it dealt her a hail of blows, until her cries and yells brought the family to her rescue, who, however, saw nothing at all.<sup>49</sup>

Though menacing they might be, killers did not always work for the benefit of evil.

Mimicking the ironic function of many exorcistic deities, who were essentially demons recruited by Daoist gods to destroy their own kind, *sha* sometimes functioned much like a bailiff, charged with arresting other menacing *sha*.<sup>50</sup> De Groot quotes from another insightful source:

"I have heard people say, that when any one dies, specters performing the functions of lictors arrest him and bind him, so that the returning shah is accompanied by shah spirits [*shashen* 殺神]; how have you managed to come back alone?" On which P'eng, the ghost, answers: "Such shah spirits are specters acting as lictors charged with such arrests; guilty people are drawn along by them with a rope round their necks; but the chief of the nether world declared me guiltless; and as I had not broken the old ties that connect me with you, he allowed me to return home alone."<sup>51</sup>

In this story, the term "shah spirit" 殺神 might better be translated as "sha god," to emphasize the dichotomy of ghosts (*guei* 鬼) and gods (*shen* 神) commonly cited in

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<sup>49</sup> J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, repr. ed. (Leiden. 1882-1910; repr., Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, 1972), 5:773. The bracketed notation is mine.

<sup>50</sup> One example of such exorcistic deities is Zhong Kui 鍾馗. A former human being who committed suicide after failing to rank for a government position, his demon status was redeemed by his dedication to annihilating other demons. For an explanation of practices regarding Zhong Kui see De Groot 6:1170-1185.

<sup>51</sup> De Groot, 5:776. The bracketed notation is mine.

studies of Chinese popular religion—a dichotomy which exists not so much in the substantiality of said categories, but in the moral predispositions which characterize their behavior.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, a *sha* god 殺神, that is, a fierce spirit charged with the detainment of other malign spirits, alluringly accords with our image of Heisha 黑殺 as a fierce god charged with the detainment of devils and demons. The judicial metaphor is, likewise, not arbitrary. The rites of summoning for investigation, *kaozhao fa* 考召法, with which Yisheng is associated, often entailed the use of spirit mediums to arrest and imprison dangerous demons. Spirit mediums have long assumed exorcistic functions in China, and it is interesting that, as De Groot suggests, they may have been charged with exorcising *sha*-like ghosts on visits of condolence as early as the Zhou dynasty.<sup>53</sup> While it is not clear whether Heisha did, in fact, belong to the classes of *sha* described above, his name certainly evokes their image. In order to efface the reputation associated with Yisheng's former appellation, Wang Qinruo would have to dispute his association with dangerous spirits and spirit mediums.

As author of the *Yisheng baode zhuan*, Wang Qinruo sought vehemently to dissociate Yisheng from his prior identity. He attempted numerous times to refute his affiliation with ghosts and spirit mediums. Examples of this abound within the pages of his biography, even to the point of overcompensation. Indeed, his attempts at misdirection are so deliberate, they undermine their very purpose. A few examples from the text may better illustrate this point.

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<sup>52</sup> In the words of C. Steven Harrell, "Spirits that are ghosts to one person, are ancestors to someone else." See C. Steven Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 193-206.

<sup>53</sup> De Groot 5:774. Refer also to 1:36, 41; and 6:1189.

Soon after Zhang Shouzhen's first encounter with Yisheng, he mistakenly assumes the deity wants to possess him in an act of spirit mediumship:

Shouzhen said, "I have heard that in the case of men, they are called sorcerers (*xi* 覡), and in the case of women they are called witches (*wu* 巫). Although I am simple and ordinary, I am ashamed to become that type of person."<sup>54</sup>

Again the voice said, "I am a god of the Supreme Heaven, not a ghost or a goblin. I can employ the service of the five sacred peaks and the four sacred rivers! If you enter the way with a reformed heart and diligently offer incense, then I will compel you to comply with the decrees and commands of the great kingdom, and receive the favor of the perfected ruler. How could that be similar to the classes of witches and sorcerers?"<sup>55</sup>

Yisheng's outright denial of being a "ghost or goblin" echoes the common sentiment among Daoists that spirit mediumship is a heterodox practice. When assimilated in this manner, the phrase "ghost or goblin" may actually refer to regional gods, who amount to no more than revered ancestors and local heroes. Likewise, the implied dichotomy of Daoist masters and spirit mediums amounts to no more than the author's interpretation of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

After the above encounter, Shouzhen sets out to please the deity with an offering unfit for Daoist gods:

Shouzhen said, "Now that you have taught and guided me like this, would I dare not sincerely serve you?" He then set up a banquet of meat and alcohol and sacrificed it to him.

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<sup>54</sup> *Shuowen jiezi* defines *wu* 巫 as "Women who cause spirits to descend by dancing, and thereby can serve invisible forces." Though fittingly translated as witch, in China the term refers to a spectrum of professions involving spirit possession, usually contrasted with orthodox Daoist or Buddhist practices. *Xi* 覡, a derivative of *wu*, simply refers to its male counterpart.

<sup>55</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 103.2220.

Again he heard him say, "I am a divine being! Why do you insult me with putrid impurities? Because you do not yet understand, I do not wish to punish you. From now on, only use fragrant tea, vegetables, and fresh fruit as your offering. Even though I don't eat, I still appreciate the thought."<sup>56</sup>

In an effort to propitiate the deity, Shouzhen offers him a banquet befitting of an ancestral spirit. However, as an orthodox Daoist divinity, Yisheng may only accept pure offerings of incense, tea, and vegetarian fare. Just as Yisheng is not a "ghost or goblin," he likewise cannot accept "putrid impurities" of meat and alcohol. The suggestion that only undivine entities receive such offerings further distinguishes Yisheng as an orthodox divinity.

A similar misunderstanding ensues again when emperor Taizu attempts to commune with Yisheng. After a begrudging agreement to contact the deity, he employs a group of spirit mediums to communicate on Yisheng's behalf:

Taizu called upon some young eunuchs to whistle. Off to the side he addressed Shouzhen and asked, "Does the divine being's voice sound like this?" Shouzhen said, "Suppose the emperor declared his servant guilty of demonic falsehood, he would beg your pardon and be subject to judicial inquisition. The emperor would execute his subject in the marketplace. Do not adopt this type of communication, it profanes and defiles the saint on high."<sup>57</sup>

Davis contends that in the passage above, we have a "clear case of textual, if not also psychological, displacement."<sup>58</sup> Extra-canonical sources indicate that Qinruo plagiarized this encounter from elsewhere and "displaced" it into the context of the *Yisheng baode zhuan*. Compare it to the *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* (Expanded Chronicles for the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 103.2223.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, 79.

Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government 續資治通鑑長編), which relates:

In the beginning, a spirit descended before Zhang Shouzhen, a commoner in Zhouzhi subprefecture, and said, "I am a venerable god of Heaven. My title is 'General Black Killer' (Heisha Jiangjun). I support the Jade Emperor." Each time Shouzhen purified himself and invited the god with prayer, the spirit would always descend into the room. The wind would whistle, and his voice was like that of a small child; only Shouzhen was able to understand it.<sup>59</sup>

In the latter passage, Heisha's child-like voice coupled with whistling wind, recalls from the former passage, Taizu's employment of "young eunuchs to whistle" on behalf of Yisheng. Davis remarks, "Could it be that the voice of the Black Killer manifested itself as the voice of a small child precisely because it was a small child—a child medium—who embodied him?"<sup>60</sup> An association with spirit mediums does seem very likely. For instance, there is a strong possibility that Tan Zixiao, the first recorded devotee of the Black Killer, fulfilled the functions of a spirit medium in the court of Min in the late 930's.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, an inscription dating to 999 records that Zhang Shouzhen himself identified with Heisha to such an extent that he came to be known as "Zhang the Black Killer."<sup>62</sup> According to Davis, it was not uncommon for spirit mediums in the Song to take the name of the deity that possessed them most often.

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<sup>59</sup> *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 377-378, as translated in Davis, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of Tan Zixiao's status as a spirit medium (*wu* 巫), see John Didier, "Messrs. T'an, Chancellor Sung, and the *Book of Transformation (Hua Shu)*: Texts and Transformations of Traditions," in *Asia Major* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 11.1 (1998): 119. As shown by Didier, the implication that Tan Zixiao fulfilled the functions of a spirit medium comes from, among other places, *Xin Wudai shi*, by Ouyang Xiu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 68.851, which reads, "[King] Chang was still fond of spirit mediums (*wu* 巫). He honored Daoist master Tan Zixiao as Elder of Orthodox Unity, and honored Chen Shouyuan as Heavenly Master."

<sup>62</sup> As cited in Davis, 78.

The inclusion of such stories in Yisheng's biography reveals an important motive on behalf of the author. By courtly standards, Yisheng's past could be classified as no less than sordid, and his true identity, Heisha, still lurked in areas outside the capital. The relation of his two most devoted followers, Tan Zixiao and Zhang Shouzhen, to practices of spirit mediumship only heightened the need to reform his image. Wang Qinruo would try his best to maintain Yisheng's orthodox status, which entailed suppressing any semblance of his prior identity. Consequently, the *Yisheng baode zhuan* lacks any account of his transformation from the militant god we know as the Black Killer to the courtly divinity we call the Supporter of Saintliness. It does, however, document the development of Yisheng's present title, and in doing so, provides subtle clues about the existence of his alter ego.

### *The Roots of the Black Killer*

Despite Qinruo's efforts to conceal Yisheng's true identity, this fact remains: most of the books in the Daoist Canon that mention this deity still refer to him as the Black Killer. Though his biography counterfeited a new identity for him, by all accounts, Daoist practitioners maintained the Black Killer's individuality, and his significance to Daoist ritual. Thus we are not dealing with a drastically dissociated entity, but with a single, albeit influential, instance of disguise. In fact, his most significant following was among the practitioners of the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven, or the *Tianxin Zhengfa* 天心正法. Heisha's history is intimately attached to this tradition, for its founder, Tan Zixiao, was his earliest recorded devotee. His iconography also begins in this context; it first emerged as one of the fundamental talismans of the Tianxin tradition,



which bore his name, the great *Heisha fu* 黑殺符. Bearing in mind the Black Killer's significance to one of the most influential sects of the Song Dynasty, Wang Qinruo faced a formidable task in his attempt to overhaul his image as the Supporter of Saintliness.

According to the *Yisheng baode zhuan*, the development of Yisheng's present title came in two episodes, each providing important clues about his unfamiliar past. Emperor Taizong presented him with his first title, "General who Supports the Saint," *Yisheng jiangjun* 翊聖將軍, in 981. This designation offended the deity, who inquired which "saint" he was alleged to support. Soon after, Taizong placated him, explaining that it was none other than the Emperor on High, Shang Di.<sup>63</sup> This interesting qualification within the text implies that some believed, and perhaps correctly, that the intended recipient of the Yisheng's support was the emperor himself. In 1014, Zhenzong amended his previous title, expanding it to the form it takes in the title of his biography, "The Perfected Lord who Supports the Saint and Protects Virtue," *Yisheng baode zhenjun* 翊聖保德真君.<sup>64</sup> What Yisheng was called before 981, the biography leaves unmentioned. To account for this period of time, it designates him as "perfected lord"—clearly a posterior ascription of his subsequent titles. As we have already seen, outside sources may shed some light on the question. *Songchao shishi* (Facts about the Song Court 宋朝事實) records Zhang Shouzhen's first encounter with the divinity, where he is referred to as the Black Killer,

At the beginning of the kingdom, a spirit descended before the house of a Zhouzhi commoner, Zhang Shouzhen. He said, "I am a worthy divinity of heaven. My title is Great General Black Killer, assistant to the Jade Emperor. I have been imperially

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<sup>63</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 103.2225

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.2227

mandated to descend on the world, riding on a dragon, in order to protect and guard the Song Dynasty<sup>65</sup>

Another source, *Shiwu jiyuan* (Recorded Origins of Things and Affairs 事物紀原), identifies him as a member of a divine triad which foreshadows the group under investigation here:

*Yangyi tanyuan* says, ‘During the Kaibao reign period, a spirit descended before the ordained master of Zhongnan Shan, Zhang Shouzhen. He said, ‘I am a worthy divinity of heaven, titled General Black Killer. Together with the likes of Zhenwu and Tianpeng, we are the Great Generals of Heaven.’<sup>66</sup>

At least two other sources (including one already examined on page 33 above) corroborate these accounts.<sup>67</sup> The *Yisheng baode zhuan* is the only version that neglects to refer to this deity as “General Black Killer.” It does, however, acknowledge his first title as “*General* who Supports the Saint;” a name that embodies the tension of a deliberate change in identity. The martial quality of this title echoes the militaristic function of an exorcistic deity. The organization of the thirty-six generals of the department of exorcism (*quxie yuan* 驅邪院), to which Heisha is assigned, parallels the organization of a real-world military regimen. However as a “Saint,” and a “Perfected Lord,” *Yisheng* should represent the more administrative side of the Daoist pantheon. Representing the progression from “General Black Killer” to “Perfected Lord who Supports the Saint,” the title “*General* who supports the Saint” marks his transition from dangerous demonifuge to courtly custodian. Nevertheless, in spite of his transformation within this text, his identity as the Black Killer managed to prevail among most

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<sup>65</sup> *Songchao shishi* 7.13a-b.

<sup>66</sup> *Shiwu jiyuan* 2.22a-b.

<sup>67</sup> *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 377-378, and *Huangchao shishi leiyuan* 44.9a.

practitioners of Daoism. Despite the assertions of Wang Qinruo's hagiography, his true roots are firmly grounded with Tan Zixiao, the enigmatic founder of the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven.

Lu You (1125-1210) tells us that Tan Zixiao received the title "Elder of Orthodox Unity" from the fourth ruler of Min, Wang Chang, who ruled from 935 to 939.<sup>68</sup> After interpreting a set of talismans and seals, unearthed by his fellow spirit medium Chen Shouyuan, he claimed that he had "obtained the *Tianxin zhengfa* of Zhang Daoling."<sup>69</sup> Thereafter, Lu attests, all who claim lineage to the *Tianxin zhengfa* consider Tan Zixiao as the founder of the tradition. After retiring to Mount Lu (*Lushan* 廬山) in Northern Jiangxi, he acquired more than 100 students. Andersen surmises this may be the situation under which Rao Dongtian, the co-founder of the tradition, sought his initiation in 994.<sup>70</sup> According to *Shangqing tianxin zhengfa* (Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven, of the Shangqing Tradition 上清天心正法), Rao requested that Tan interpret a set of texts called "the secret formulas of the Heart of Heaven."<sup>71</sup> These texts comprised a method for exorcising demons which entailed the use of talismans to invoke, among various other demonifugic deities, the Four Saints. That the Four Saints, and thus Yisheng, figured largely into the rituals of the *Tianxin zhengfa* is widely known. That Tan Zixiao himself revered the deity Heisha, later to become Yisheng, is a lesser known fact. Ma Ling (fl. early twelfth century) records:

He possessed the Daoist arts and sacrificed to the stars. He served the divine worthy  
Black Killer. He walked the Steps of Yu along the Dipper constellation. He forbade the

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<sup>68</sup> *Lushi nantang shu* 14.3a-b. Also see *Mashi nantang shu* 24.2b-3a, and note 61 above. This paragraph is based primarily on the research of Poul Andersen, in *The Daoist Canon* (see n. 7 above), 1064-1067.

<sup>69</sup> Andersen, in *The Daoist Canon* (see n. 7 above). 1064.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1065

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 1064.

worship of ghosts and goblins. In matters of calamity or prosperity, he generally knew the time of one's demise.<sup>72</sup>

The Black Killer would come to play an integral role in the Rites of *Tianxin*—a foundational role, in fact—and it is most likely due to the early devotion of Tan Zixiao. When Tan Zixiao received his first revelation in the late 930's through the labor of his fellow spirit medium, Chen Shouyuan, it came as a set of talismans and seals supposedly unearthed from beneath the soil.<sup>73</sup> Centuries later, the most important texts of the *Tianxin* tradition emphasize the fundamentality of a set of three talismans and two seals.<sup>74</sup> It comes as no surprise that one of these esteemed talismans is that accorded to the Black Killer. As Andersen explains:

There is nothing to exclude the possibility that the Black Killer Talisman, *Heisha fu*, which later became so important in the tradition, may have formed part of the set of talismans introduced by Tan Zixiao in the 930's in the state of Min, or in fact that the existence of this talisman (with its unusual and striking appearance of a little black, fierce-looking figure) may have constituted the background for the emergence around 960 of the cult of the Black Killer, later to become the patron saint of the dynasty.<sup>75</sup>

Here Andersen refutes the conclusions of Judith Boltz that the Black Killer Talisman, which depicts a fierce deity with disheveled hair and bare feet (fig. 17), may have originally represented his Four Saints comrade, the Perfected Warrior. This is the subject of a discussion below (under the “Iconography” section) wherein I concur with Andersen and conclude that this talisman probably represents the earliest form of Heisha

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<sup>72</sup> *Nantang shu*, by Ma Ling, 24.2b

<sup>73</sup> *Nantang shu*, by Lu You, 14.3a.

<sup>74</sup> Andersen, “Tianxin Zhengfa and Related Rites” (see p. 6 n.7) 1059, 1067, 1069, and 1072.

<sup>75</sup> Poul Andersen, “Taoist talismans and the History of the Tianxin tradition,” *Acta Orientalia* 57 (1996), 149. The parenthetical remarks belong to Andersen.

iconography. As one of the most important elements of the *Tianxin zhengfa*, his very appearance originates within this context.

In the midst of this investigation into the origin of the Supporter of Saintliness, a complicated picture begins to emerge. On the one hand, we have a story of imperial patronage that begins with the remote revelations of a “dull-witted commoner.” On the other, we have the story of a demonifugic ritual tradition that originates with the practices of an enigmatic Daoist master and spirit medium. To this day, the exact relationship between Tan Zixiao and Zhang Shouzhen remains unclear. Nevertheless, a critical look into the *Yisheng baode zhuan* may help to clarify the situation. Within this narrative, Wang Qinruo concealed Yisheng’s true identity as the Black Killer, and began his story in 960 with his decent before Zhang Shouzhen. However, the excavation of the founding talismans of the *Tianxin zhengfa* in the late 930’s, and the fundamentality of the Black Killer Talisman to these rites, supports a high likelihood that the history of Yisheng begins with Tan Zixiao. We know from Ma Ling’s *Nantang shu* that Zixiao was a devotee of the Black Killer, and from *Xin Wudai shi* that he most likely performed the functions of a spirit medium.<sup>76</sup> The implication that Zhang Shouzhen himself served as a spirit medium only confirms the questionable nature of his story as presented in the *Yisheng baode zhuan*.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most compelling evidence of a link to spirit mediums and a history that begins with Tan Zixiao, however, is Yisheng’s iconography. Originating with the Black Killer Talisman, it depicts the likeness of a spirit medium in great detail.

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<sup>76</sup> See notes 72 and 61.

<sup>77</sup> See note 62.

## *Iconography*

The iconography of Yisheng begins, as stated above, with an early representation inscribed in the Black Killer Talisman. As, to my knowledge, the only surviving venue in which he appears solo, all other images depict him within the grouping of the Four Saints. He along with his comrades may be found in murals and scrolls, both Buddhist and Daoist, from Shanxi to Hebei. While murals from other locations may exist, most of those that have been documented by members of the academic community derive from this area of northern China. Though depictions of Yisheng have been published in several mural compilations, interpretations of his iconography remain scarce. Some scholars have insightfully pointed to spirit mediums as the inspiration for his appearance, but to a large extent, the origin of his iconography remains shrouded in mystery. At the center of this confusion is a longstanding case of mistaken identity. Alike in both image and function, Yisheng is commonly conflated with his Four Saints companion Zhenwu. Though it is common to assume that his appearance derives from that of Zhenwu—who also possesses the characteristics of disheveled hair, bare feet, and a sword—based upon the available sources, it is more likely to be the other way around.

Though Yisheng looks remarkably similar to Zhenwu, in many cases it is possible to distinguish between the two. Some features unique to Yisheng include the donning of a headband, the positioning of both hands together, and his appearance atop a dragon. Sources for this information include images which derive from *Baoning* Monastery, *Pilu* Monastery, the Palace of Eternal Joy, and a yet to be verified location called the Dragon Gate Monastery.<sup>78</sup> All of these locations are to be found in the Shanxi-Hebei area, three

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<sup>78</sup> The Dragon Gate Monastery, *Longmen si* 龍門寺, is the reported origin of two Daoist murals found in the Royal Ontario Museum, depicted in figs. 6 and 7.

of which derive from the former Province. Other sources of Yisheng's iconography include a scroll in the collection of Xu Beihong and a sketchbook fictitiously attributed to Wu Daozi called the *Daozi mobao* (Sketchbook of Wu Daozi 道子墨報). As all of these sources also depict the rest of the Four Saints, I will refer to them often in the following chapters.

For our purposes we need only discuss the sources that best display Yisheng's most unique features. In five of his six well-published depictions, he is shown with both hands positioned together. This is in sharp contrast to his divine look-alike, Zhenwu, who in most cases, is shown with one hand on his sword, the other positioned into the shape of an indistinct mudra. The depictions from *Pilu* Monastery (fig. 3) and the Palace of Eternal Joy (fig. 4) show Yisheng with both hands together, sword in the downward position. Those from the *Baoning* Monastery (fig. 1) and the *Daozi mobao* (fig. 9) show him with one hand grasping the wrist of his opposite arm. One depiction shows him with no sword and both hands clasped before his chest (fig. 8), as if in a position of reverential prayer, which seems typical of a Buddhist context.<sup>79</sup> Only one of the six depictions departs from this motif, actually reversing the features of Zhenwu and Yisheng to some degree. The mural purported to have come from the Dragon Gate Monastery, now held in the Royal Ontario Museum, shows him with one hand in the shape of a mudra, the other holding his sword (fig. 7).

While there is slight room for discrepancy with regard to the positioning of his hands, there is no such room regarding the presence of a headband. In each case wherein a headband is present, one may conclude with confidence that the deity is Yisheng.

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<sup>79</sup> Many depictions found in the collections of purported *Shuilu* ritual paintings, such as *Pilu si bihua* and *Baoning si Mingdai shuilu hua*, show deities in this position. Either Tianpeng or Tianyou (difficult to distinguish) also takes on this posture in fig. 3.

Though the appearance of each headband may differ slightly, the general trait distinctly belongs to him. The famous *Yongle gong* depiction (fig. 4) of Yisheng shows him in this manner, as do the *Pilu si* (fig. 3) and *Xu Beihong* (fig. 8) renditions. The headband worn by Yisheng in the *Xu Beihong* piece interestingly resembles the headdress worn by modern-day ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) in China (see fig. 16).

A final distinguishing characteristic of Yisheng, represented in only one of the depictions under investigation here, is his position atop a dragon. This characteristic recalls the opening story of his biography, in which he relates to Zhang Shouzhen the purpose of his arrival. He explains, “I have received the mandate to protect the times, and descend on the world riding on a dragon.”<sup>80</sup> Yisheng’s depiction from the *Yongle gong* (fig. 4) shows a small dragon standing at his feet. This depiction is also consistent with one form of the Heisha talisman, found in *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* (fig. 17).<sup>81</sup>

While the characteristics featured above distinguish Yisheng from Zhenwu, the characteristics featured below represent those which they share. Reflecting the likeness of a spirit medium, the traits of unbound hair, bare feet, and a sword persist in almost every depiction of these deities. Consistent with both Yisheng and Zhenwu’s exorcistic duties, De Groot maintains that unbound hair strikes fear among the harmful ghosts of the netherworld:

A courageous man while boldly fighting or trying to terrify by aggressive gestures, easily gets his hair disordered. Therefore flowing hair intimates intrepidity, and cannot fail to inspire the spectral world with fear...No wonder that to this day long-haired exorcists

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<sup>80</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 103.2220.

<sup>81</sup> *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* (DZ 220), ch. 25.



assuming this terrifying aspect and enhancing it by weapons brandished with vigour, are everyday appearances, also in spectre-expelling processions.<sup>82</sup>

He explains again, “The brethren also unbraid the pigtail of their *ki tōng* [乩童], so that his long hair flows in disorder down his shoulders and back, and by a sword they complete his exorcising equipment.”<sup>83</sup>

Zhenwu also fits this description, and for this reason, there exists much confusion with regard to whether he or Yisheng first established this iconographic trend. We need only look to his image to verify that his appearance resembles that of a spirit medium. Nevertheless, to emphasize how he came to be thus represented, we may turn to Davis for an explanation, “Zhenwu was the god par excellence of village spirit-mediums (*wu*); in a very concrete sense, he was their alter ego...In each and every epiphany of the god, he appears with ‘dishevelled hair and bare feet.’<sup>84</sup> Manifest in the form of a spirit medium, the iconography of Yisheng and Zhenwu reflects the image of those who personified their power.

Due to the inextricable link between Yisheng, Zhenwu, and any number of real persons who may have embodied them, a precise date for the emergence of their iconography is quite out of reach. However, based on the available evidence, one may with relative accuracy delineate the likely progenitor for this iconographic form. Though most agree that it was Zhenwu who set the standard, Yisheng more parsimoniously fits the bill.

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<sup>82</sup> De Groot, 6:1151.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:1275-1276. The term “*ki tōng*,” literally “divination youth” refers to the spirit-medium. In pinyin it is written as *jitong*.

<sup>84</sup> Davis, 77.

Many scholars seem to agree that the iconography of Yisheng derives from that of Zhenwu. For instance, Stephen Little, in his impressive study of Zhenwu iconography, attests, “The feet of both Yisheng and Zhenwu are bare, and both hold swords in their right hands; the image of Yisheng is completely derived from that of Zhenwu.”<sup>85</sup> Anning Jing asserts the following with regard to Yisheng:

In the Toronto pantheon he is portrayed with disheveled hair and a sword in his right hand, but the dragon and star are omitted. This depiction owes not so much to the god’s instruction to Zhang Shouzheng as to the influence of the well-known iconography of Zhenwu created in Liquan temple.<sup>86</sup>

Jing claims that Zhenwu’s standard iconography was not created for display in the aforementioned Liquan temple until 1075. This fact should restrict Yisheng’s iconography to a later date. However, he himself cites the account in *Huangchao shishi leiyuan*, which details the construction of a statue of Yisheng (then Heisha) commissioned around 981. In this story, Heisha descends before Zhang Shouzheng to outline the parameters of his appearance. It reads, “I have the form of a human, furious eyes, and hair that hangs down my back. I ride a dragon and hold a sword. I point forward to one star.”<sup>87</sup> As pointed out by Poul Andersen, the poet Su Shi confirmed this description of the statue when he visited the Palace of Great Peace and Highest Purity in 1062—thirteen years before the purported invention of Zhenwu’s iconography.<sup>88</sup> Even

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<sup>85</sup> Stephen Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the University of California Press, 2000), 298.

<sup>86</sup> Anning Jing, “Buddhist-Daoist Struggle and a Pair of “Daoist Murals,” in *The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 66 (1994), 147.

<sup>87</sup> *Huangchao shishi leiyuan* 44.9a-b. This description matches the appearance of the Heisha talisman in fig. 17.

<sup>88</sup> Poul Andersen, contributions to “Scandinavian Summer Course: Research Methods in pre-modern Chinese History,” in *Zhongguo gudai shi de yanjiu fangfa*. Seminar given in Oslo, Norway, June 19-27, 1990. Because Su Shi’s description fully accords with that of *Huangchao shishi leiyuan*, the date of 981 given in *Huangchao shishi leiyuan* represents a verifiable date for early Heisha iconography.

though the star and dragon are absent from the Toronto depiction, the characteristics displayed (i.e. disheveled hair and a sword) clearly originate with Heisha.<sup>89</sup>

As mentioned above, Stephen Little also stated that Yisheng's iconography derives from that of Zhenwu. A close examination of his sources, however, reveals that his information regarding the Baoning Monastery's depiction of the Four Saints comes from Judith Boltz.<sup>90</sup> As mentioned above, Boltz was at the center of a debate regarding the true subject of the Black Killer Talisman.<sup>91</sup> This debate stems from her preceding argument that Deng Yougong, the compiler of *Shangqing tianxin zhengfa* (DZ 566), should be identified as the same Deng Yougong who lived from 1210 to 1279. This contradicts the now common opinion that Deng Yougong's compilations date to the middle of the twelfth century. In support of her stance she states:

Moreover, a close investigation of the texts ascribed to Teng Yu-kung in the Canon suggests that they are works of the 13<sup>th</sup>, not the 12<sup>th</sup>, century. For example, Teng identifies Hei-sha 黑煞 (Black Killer) with the spirit Hsüan-wu 玄武 (HY 566, 3.6b), whereas the two cosmic forces were regarded as distinct in texts as late as the ritual corpus compiled by Lü Yüan-su 呂元素 (fl. 1188-1201) and a disciple in 1201.<sup>92</sup>

Her implication that in the twelfth century Heisha and Xuanwu were distinct entities, and that in the thirteenth they somehow became fused is based solely upon textual evidence. However, as Poul Andersen points out, canonical and extra-canonical sources show that these two gods were associated already in the Southern Song, and that they "subsisted with distinct identities (and distinct iconographies) to the present day."<sup>93</sup> The purported fusion of these two gods in the thirteenth century is no doubt responsible for her

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<sup>89</sup> See quote of Anning Jing above.

<sup>90</sup> See Little, 298.

<sup>91</sup> See pp. 38-39 above.

<sup>92</sup> Boltz (1987), 265-266 n. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Andersen (1996), 148.

contention that the Black Killer talisman originally referred to Zhenwu (see fig. 17). In describing the three fundamental talismans of the Tianxin tradition, she writes:

A triad of talismans is the essential feature of this and all other T'ien-hsin codifications. The three talismans elicit the potency of the San-kuang 三光—the three sources of radiance, i.e., the sun, moon, and stars; Chen-wu 真武; and T'ien-kang 天罡, the astral spirits of Ursa Major.<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to her statement, most texts designate the *Heisha fu*, not the *Zhenwu fu*, as the talisman that fills out the triad mentioned above.<sup>95</sup> Following her reasoning, since the earliest text of the *Tianxin zhengfa* tradition labels the talisman in question as the “Zhenwu talisman,” Zhenwu must have been the original deity depicted in its image.<sup>96</sup> However, this text dates only 1116, long after the aforementioned statue of Heisha (see pp. 44-45) was commissioned for the Palace of Great Peace and Highest Purity, literally setting his iconography in stone. It is more likely that the image in this talisman, which depicts a figure with disheveled hair holding a sword, came from the already established iconography of Heisha.

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<sup>94</sup> Boltz (1987), 35.

<sup>95</sup> Andersen, “Tianxin Zhengfa and Related Rites” (see p. 6 n.7) 1059, 1066, 1067, 1069, and 1072.

<sup>96</sup> The text in question is *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* (DZ 1227). See esp. 2.15b-16a.

## Chapter 3

### Zhenwu: The Perfected Warrior

Of all the Four Saints, the Perfected Warrior (*zhenwu* 真武) has the longest and most prominent history of veneration. Much like the rest of them he originated in obscurity; he was one of the four animals of ancient Chinese astronomy. Symbolized as a turtle and snake, he represented the northern sky, and correspondingly, the northern section of the Middle Kingdom. During the Northern Song he assumed the role of an exorcistic deity and the appearance of a spirit medium. At that time he also joined the ranks of the Four Saints, and as we noted in the preceding chapter, he closely resembled his partner Yisheng. In the Southern Song, Zhenwu separated from his Four Saints comrades and developed a cult of his own centered at Mount Wudang in modern Hubei province. The Daoist cannon dedicates several hagiographies to Zhenwu, but certainly his most famous story derives from the “secular” realm as a novel entitled *Journey to the North* (*beiyou ji* 北游記).<sup>97</sup> As a product of the sixteenth century, *Journey to the North* betrays nothing of his affiliation with the Four Saints. Though we will cover the implications of this popular hagiography, for most of this chapter we will remain focused on the pre-*beiyou ji* Zhenwu. As much has been published on Zhenwu already, I must extend my gratitude to those whose studies guided much of this chapter.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Though popular novels of this period gained wide acceptance as a form of secular entertainment, the religious leanings of their authors remain highly conspicuous.

<sup>98</sup> Shin-yi Chao, “Zhenwu: The Cult of a Chinese Warrior Deity from the Song to the Ming Dynasties (960-1644)” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2002); Stephen Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the University of California Press, 2000); and John Lagerwey, “The Pilgrimage to Wudang Shan,” in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 293-332.

### *A Brief History*

Before Zhenwu joined the Four Saints he belonged to a different four-god group known as the Four Beasts (*sishou* 四獸).<sup>99</sup> Together they represented the four cardinal directions. They were each conceptualized as an animal: a turtle entwined by a snake for the North, a dragon for the East, a tiger for the West, and a bird for the South. Each direction encompassed seven constellations of the total twenty-eight that constituted the lunar belt of ancient Chinese astronomy. Useful for tracking the moon as it made its way around the earth, the origin of their divinity may lie with the simple utility of astronomical observation.<sup>100</sup> Within this context he was known as Xuanwu 玄武, or the Dark Warrior. He would retain this designation until 1012, when the more-common “Zhenwu” became the official usage. As the Dark Warrior, he was first mentioned in a passage from the third chapter of the *Huainanzi*, which reads, “The North is Water. Its god is Zhuan Xu. His assistant is Xuan Ming. He grasps the plumb-weight and governs winter. His spirit is the Chronograph Star [Mercury]. His animal is the Dark Warrior. His musical note is *yu*; His days are *ren* and *gui*.”<sup>101</sup> The appellation “Dark Warrior” comes from the image of the turtle and snake, commonly shown locked in battle (see fig. 10).

The passage from the *Huainanzi* quoted above attributes little religious significance to Xuanwu; cogent evidence for such significance dates only to the Tang

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<sup>99</sup> They were also sometimes referred to as the Four Numina (*siling* 四靈). See Lagerwey (1992), 295.

<sup>100</sup> See Edward Schafer, *Pacing the Void* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1977), 75-84.

<sup>101</sup> *Huainanzi* 3.3—as translated in John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 72.

dynasty.<sup>102</sup> For instance, Yu Di's *Lingyi lu* relates the story of a boy who reaped Xuanwu's divine punishment after he killed a turtle and snake with a garden tool. After many of the boy's family members died, a character in the story relates that Xuanwu is a god (玄武神也).<sup>103</sup> Xuanwu's influence on Daoism was felt at this time as well.

Lagerwey notes "By the early eighth century (and probably before), these four animals play a significant role in Taoist ritual as the guardians of the person of the high priest and of the purity of the sacred area."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, they continue to serve this function in Daoist ritual today under the designation the "Four Numina."<sup>105</sup>

During the Northern Song the Dark Warrior underwent an identity change and became the Perfected Warrior, or Zhenwu.<sup>106</sup> The name *xuan* 玄 was rendered taboo on account of Emperor Zhenzong's proclamation that Zhao Xuanlang 趙玄郎 was the name of a dynastic ancestor. Nevertheless, the name "Xuanwu" continued to designate the northern entity symbolized by a turtle and snake. Now split into two personas, the designation "Zhenwu" correlates with the anthropomorphic deity that we would come to recognize as leader of the Four Saints.

Much like the Supporter of Saintliness, who became the patron saint of the Song dynasty, the Perfected Warrior enjoyed the favor of the Song imperial family. During the reign of Zhenzong, the miraculous appearance of a turtle entwined by a snake inspired

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<sup>102</sup> Willem A. Grootaers did note that Wang Yi (89-158 C. E.) stated with regard to Xuanwu, "It is the name of the god of the northern region." See Grootaers, "The Hagiography of the Chinese God Zhenwu," in *Folklore Studies* 11.2 (1952): 142. Shin-yi Chao, however, has shown that Wang Yi's commentary may be unreliable, and is confusing at the very least. See Chao, 16-17.

<sup>103</sup> As cited in Chao, 23.

<sup>104</sup> Lagerwey (1992), 295.

<sup>105</sup> See Lagerwey (1987), index: "four potentates."

<sup>106</sup> Grootaers cites the year 998 for this name change (p. 142), whereas Chao cites 1012 (p.27).

the construction of a Zhenwu temple in the capitol city of Kaifeng.<sup>107</sup> In the year 1018, after a healing spring surfaced next to the temple, the emperor ordered the construction of a grander temple to be named the Abbey of the Auspicious Spring. Wang Qinruo oversaw the entire project. Zhenwu's royal endowment was also accompanied by a new title, "Perfected Lord of Numinous Response" (*lingying zhenjun* 靈應真君).<sup>108</sup> This title would not be his last. He received many more in the following decades, even attaining the supernatural status of a "supreme emperor" (*Xuantian shangdi* 玄天上帝).<sup>109</sup> So famous was this deity, in fact, that his worship spread beyond the borders of the Song empire. During the Tianxi period (1017-1021), the Western Xia requested from the Song a portrait of Zhenwu in exchange for lasting peace. The portrait was given along with full instructions on how to conduct his worship.<sup>110</sup> Though Zhenwu received an unprecedented amount of attention in the Song, his most vigorous period of imperial patronage would arise along with the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

Whereas the first two emperors of the Ming bore only minor allegiances to Zhenwu, the third emperor, Chengzu (r. 1403-1424), devoted much time and energy into promoting this deity and reestablishing his cultic center at Mount Wudang (*wudang shan* 武當山).<sup>111</sup> His adoration for this god began even before his assumption of the throne. In preparation for the siege of his nephew Huidi 惠帝, Chengzu reportedly saw a vision of Zhenwu, armored with hair unbound. Reverently, he reciprocated by mimicking the deity's iconography; he untied his hair and grasped his sword (*pifa zhangjian* 披髮仗

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<sup>107</sup> Lagerwey (1992), 295.

<sup>108</sup> Chao, 58-59.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>110</sup> *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lu* (DZ 961), 2.13b-14b—as cited in Lagerwey (1992), 295; and translated in Chao, 51.

<sup>111</sup> Chengzu is better known as the Yongle Emperor, after the title of his reign period, *Yongle* 永樂.



劍).<sup>112</sup> After he assumed control of the empire, he began an unparalleled renovation of Mount Wudang's five major monastic palaces and over twenty smaller temples. The herculean project took twelve years to complete and lasted until the final year of Chengzu's reign, when he died in 1424.<sup>113</sup> Its status as one of the great pilgrimage sites of China has been well documented.<sup>114</sup>

Besides the imperial patronage given to Zhenwu in the Ming, he was elsewhere honored through a novel that combined his various hagiographies and embellished his status as a popular hero. Written in the late Ming, *Journey to the North* portrays Zhenwu as a deified human who overcomes demons and takes them under his command.<sup>115</sup> Each successive chapter maintains the same general outline: Zhenwu and his retinue travel to a specific location to quell a demon, and though not always successful the first time around, they eventually succeed and enlist it as a god (usually a general [將軍] or marshal [元帥]). In this way, the novel explains that many Daoist deities were originally demons subdued by the Perfected Warrior.

Such an elaboration implies that the author intended to sublimate the demonic nature of his characters, most of which stem from the popular pantheon of the Song. Many of the so-called demons that Zhenwu converts in the novel are in fact thunder gods, some of which have their own temples on Mount Wudang.<sup>116</sup> Embodiments of the power of nature, during the Song dynasty these deities were at once considered an element of

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<sup>112</sup> Chao, 73-74. She cites Gao Dai, *Hongxian lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), ch. 7; and Fu Weilin, *Mingshu*, ch. 160, pp. 3156-7, in *Congshu jicheng chubian*, vol. 3929-3958 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936).

<sup>113</sup> Chao, 74-74.

<sup>114</sup> Lagerwey (1992) is the preeminent study of this subject.

<sup>115</sup> All references about this novel are to Gary Seaman's translation, *Journey to the North* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>116</sup> The mountain contains temples dedicated to the Duke of Thunder (*leigong* 雷公) and Marshal Zhao aka. Zhao Gongming 趙公明.

sorcery, and a means with which to fight it.<sup>117</sup> Because they straddled the ethical guidelines of Daoism, authors such as the one who wrote *Journey to the North* accounted for their ambiguous status by presenting them as reformed demons. Yet, if orthodoxy was in some cases denied to these gods, what of Zhenwu himself? Sources indicate that he was not always seen as the “prince” the novel portrays him to be. In fact, at the end of the twelfth century, the magistrate of Jiangning, Liu Zai 劉宰 (1166-1239), forbade practices associated with Zhenwu on account of their sorcerous nature.<sup>118</sup> On Zhenwu’s status as a semi-heterodox deity, Kristofer Schipper elaborates:

Among the latter, we find the major saints of the popular pantheon: Lord Kuan, Ma-tsu, the God of the North [Zhenwu], et cetera. These gods do not belong to the Taoist pantheon proper, that is, the abstract powers of the inner universe...These popular gods entered the covenant in order that they might progress in the merit system of the *k’o* (liturgy)...Any of their actions favorable to mankind are duly recorded so that they may gradually transcend their demoniacal identity.<sup>119</sup>

As in the case of the thunder gods mentioned above, *Beiyou ji* recounts Zhenwu’s sublimation of his own inner demons. His battle against a demonic turtle and snake—which, according to the text, formed from the entrails cut from his own body—quite literally represents this process. As Davis explains, “In view of the ancient iconographical representation of Xuanwu as a turtle/snake, the mythological

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<sup>117</sup> See Judith Magee Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone: New Weapons in Battles with the Supernatural,” in *Religion and Society in T’ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993), 272-286.

<sup>118</sup> *Songshi* 401.12167-12168. The passage reads, “In Jiangning, practices of spirit mediumship were abundant...There were some who held to demonic arts called the Rites of Zhenwu, Penetrating the pattern, and Master of the jeweled flower. [Liu Zai] entirely abolished them.”

<sup>119</sup> Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993; first published in 1982 as *Le corps taoïste* by Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris), 69. The bracketed addendum is mine, while the parenthetical one is Schipper’s.

representation of these animals as his defeated assistants suggests that Xuanwu has overcome his own demonic nature.”<sup>120</sup>

As Schipper implied above, Zhenwu’s admittance into the Daoist pantheon was due, not to his originally divine status, but to his popularity amongst the laity. Much like Yisheng, who also had to overcome his demonic past, Zhenwu’s repute lay mostly with practitioners of the popular religion.

### *Zhenwu and the Popular Religion*

In the Song period, Zhenwu was associated with a number of popular ritual practices. Popular religion, as this term applies to the Chinese context, refers to a set of practices performed by clergy and laymen alike, which contains elements of occultism and syncretism, and is performed locally in the home or city temple. In the case of Zhenwu, these practices take two main forms: household protection and spirit mediumship. In this section we will examine the rural character of Zhenwu’s earliest known temple and his utility in household protection. We will reserve a discussion of his association with spirit mediumship for the following section.

Though Zhenzong established the Abbey of the Auspicious Spring by 1018, its construction did not predate the timely dedication of a Zhenwu temple on Mount Yasong. The little-known Temple of General Zhenwu was appropriately constructed in a district known as Xuanwu. It was already in ruins by the year 1017, which means its construction presumably occurred at least several years before that.<sup>121</sup> Its location was memorialized by one of the earlier hagiographies within the Daoist canon called *Xuantian*

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<sup>120</sup> Davis, 267 n. 40.

<sup>121</sup> Chao, 28.

*shangdi qisheng lu* (Account [of the Revelations] Conveyed to the Sages by Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven 玄天上帝啓聖錄). This text relates:

Zhongjiang district [in Sichuan, 20mi. southeast of Deyang], in Tongchuan prefecture, was anciently named Xuanwu district. It has a mountain named the Mountain of Battling Perversity, and in times past the Dark Emperor [Zhenwu] chased demons to this mountain. [Here] he took the two likenesses of fire and water [the turtle and snake] under his feet. Because of this [the mountain] took its name. Today the residents still call it that.<sup>122</sup>

Later hagiographies place the site of Zhenwu's battle with the turtle and snake at Mount Wudang (NW Hubei). This passage, however, places the battle in the area of Zhongjiang (Central Sichuan). It also implies that this occurrence inspired a common element of his iconography—the portrayal of a turtle and snake under his feet. The connection of this hagiography—arguably the most influential Zhenwu hagiography of the Daoist canon—with Mount Yasong in Zhongjiang implies that from early on this deity had a significant following of rural devotees.

Along with Zhenwu's set of rural devotees came a set of popular ritual practices. During the Song period, he was commonly used for purposes of household protection. Second only to spirit mediumship, stories from the *Yijian zhi* portray this as his most common function. They show that people often hung images of Zhenwu within the home and worshipped him on the domestic altar. Although the Four Saints were used together in this fashion, more commonly it was practiced with Zhenwu alone. Richard von Glahn relates, "Ordinary people chiefly venerated Zhenwu as a guardian angel who protected

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<sup>122</sup> *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lu* 1.12b-13a. This Tongchuan prefecture, *Tongchuan fu* 潼川府, should not be confused with the present-day Tongchuan prefecture-level city, *Tongchuan shi* 銅川市, of Shaanxi. Today it is known as Tongchuan town, *Tongchuan zhen* 潼川鎮, and is located forty miles east of Deyang, in Sichuan.

their persons and homes from demonic invasion. Therefore they carried small statues of the god, or placed paintings of Zhenwu at the door to their homes.”<sup>123</sup> A few examples should suffice.

Take the story of the mariner Ye Fang. After fishing a miraculous image of Zhenwu from the ocean, he passed it on to his nephew for use on his domestic altar.

Hong Mai relates:

Now, he ascended his boat and saw something floating along with the current, approaching the boat's location. He tried to fish it out and look at it. It was in fact a breadth of old paper. It depicted Zhenwu grasping a sword and sitting upon a stone. A divine general, very virile and fierce, held an ax and stood in reverence at his side. On the back were written the two characters *dao* and *zi* [as in Wu Daozi 吴道子, the famous Tang dynasty painter]. He did not believe that it was Master Wu's pen. The slightest bit of paper was not wet; like one that, from the beginning, had never touched water. Ye changed his residence to Jiahe, and the portrait was an appropriate gift for his nephew. He made offerings and served it in his deity shrine. It was numinously-responsive to the utmost degree.<sup>124</sup>

Whether Zhenwu or Wu Daozi is responsible for the miracle in this passage remains unclear. What is very clear, however, is that a portrait of Zhenwu was placed in the household altar of Ye's nephew. The commonality of this practice is demonstrated by its suitability as gift, presumably, for staying in one's home. The statement that it was “numinously responsive” implies that the author or storyteller was familiar with Zhenwu's reputation of efficacy.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Richard von Glahn, review of Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton University Press, 1990) in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53 (1993): 640 n. 52.

<sup>124</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 905.

<sup>125</sup> The title given him by Zhenzong in 1018 (Perfected Lord of Numinous Response 靈應真君) reflects this reputation of efficacy.

Elsewhere in the *Yijian zhi*, Hong Mai tells the story of Mr. Chao. Though the passage is somewhat inexplicit, he was presumably a member of the clergy. After a terrifying encounter with a frog demon, his only relief came from the domestic worship of a Zhenwu image:

Mr. Chao of Jibei lived at the Monastery of the Five Blessings in Wuzhou. He was taking a stroll next to the pond behind the monastery when he saw a frog concealed in the grass. It was big as a plate; it scared him to death. Thereupon he returned to his quarters and heard a magpie cawing on the eaves. It continued until it filled the sky like thunder. As time went on, it did not stop. He went out to look at it. It was hidden so that there was nothing he could see. The sound that filled his ears, however, was the same as it was from the start. He did not yet think it was a demon. That night, his son was reading a book beneath the window, when the lamp suddenly went out by itself. There was something standing to the side. In the dark, his son struck it with a ruler, but the ruler was snatched away. He fled outside. Chao began to realize that the frog was a demon. . . . At this point, he painted an image of Zhenwu. Morning and night he burned incense and adjured [Zhenwu] exceedingly. After several months it consequently stopped.<sup>126</sup>

The passage also relates that before Chao painted the portrait of Zhenwu, he had called upon some local practitioners (*shiwu* 師巫) to exorcise the demon, but they failed. The alleged superiority of Zhenwu's portrait thoroughly demonstrates the demonifugic function and purported preeminence of Zhenwu imagery.

The use of images within the home was not restricted to Zhenwu alone. Less commonly, images of the Four Saints together are said to have been used in the same manner:

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<sup>126</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 777.

Yan Fu practiced the “Rites of the Five Thunder Gods” (*wulei shu*) just after his father passed away in the yamen of Poyang, where his grandfather had moved the family from Kaifeng in order to take up an official post. The members of this official family, we learn later, were enthusiastic devotees of the Four Saints (i.e., Tianpeng, Tianyou, Zhenwu, and Heisha), whose effigies adorned their residence.<sup>127</sup>

Though in this passage Zhenwu and the rest of the Four Saints were memorialized as images within the home, they were more commonly utilized together under the pretext of exorcistic ritual. As has been well established, usually these exorcisms involved the use of spirit mediums, and it is to his relationship with spirit mediumship that we will now turn.

#### *Zhenwu and Practices of Spirit Mediumship*

Zhenwu’s demonifugic powers were not limited to rituals of household protection; they were also utilized in the context of therapeutic ritual. Barring the usual crossover between Song-dynasty ritual traditions, Zhenwu was primarily utilized by practitioners of the Tianxin zhengfa. Speaking of Tianxin ritual, Schipper relates, “Four saints identified with a constellation around the Pole Star—Tianpeng 天蓬, Tianyou 天猷, Yisheng 翊聖, and Zhenwu 真武—were at the center of these exorcisms. One of the characteristics of the method is that the talismans used to expel demons are made in the likeness of the four saints.”<sup>128</sup> Expelling demons was precisely the function that Zhenwu filled most often. To this end, he would animate the bodies of entranced spirit mediums and daoist priests. What follows is a record of such rituals, and an explanation of how they relay his importance to popular religion.

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 837—as translated in Davis, 58. The parenthetical annotations belong to Davis.

<sup>128</sup> Schipper and Verellen, 1056.

While the rituals that transpired in official Zhenwu temples often entailed prestigious forms of liturgy, those that transpired within the home were less glamorous. With respect to the difference between elite and popular ritual, von Glahn relates, “Zhenwu temples built in the Song period usually were closely connected to Daoist institutions, and played a relatively minor role in the religious life of lay persons.”<sup>129</sup> Whereas the domestic atmosphere could host a ritual (at least nominally) identified as a *jiao* 醮 (the quintessential form of Daoist liturgy, often performed on a much grander scale), usually it was the site of more erratic forms of practice, such as spirit mediumship. For example:

In the spring of the year 1197, Liu Zhuhai of Leping sub-prefecture in Nanyuan [Jiangxi] set up a Daoist offering within his household. When it was completed, his small son Mingge suddenly began talking like a lunatic, as if he were possessed by a demon (*ru wu pingfu*). He said, “The Jade Emperor has ordered Zhenwu, Spirit-lord of the North, to bring down into our household an imperial edict [such that] today’s offering-feast and memorials were completely without sincerity... The priests addressed the group, saying, “How could we dare not be completely sincere and reverent?!”<sup>130</sup>

The contrast between official and popular religious devotion to Zhenwu is starkly manifest in this passage. On the one hand, a child spirit-medium goes into an ecstatic trance and accuses the Daoist priests of botching their ritual. On the other (the rest of the passage tells us) Daoist priests, angry that the boy has made such accusations, perform a ritual of their own and find that it was not Zhenwu who possessed the boy, but three serpentine demons imitating him. The uninhibited manner with which Mingge entered his trance is emblematic of popular ritual in the Song. Whether he or the Daoist priests

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<sup>129</sup> von Glahn, 640 n. 52.

<sup>130</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 1260—as translated in Davis, 168. All annotations belong to Davis.



prevailed is of little consequence. We need only appreciate that a child spirit-medium spontaneously chose Zhenwu as his god, implying that he had done it time and time again.

While the passage above epitomizes the *general* practices of popular Daoism in the Song, the ones to follow outline Zhenwu's *specific* relationship with those of the Tianxin zhengfa. As noted in the last chapter, Zhenwu's association with this sect began in the Northern Song, with his temples and iconography dating to the eleventh century. The earliest text of the Tianxin tradition devotes an abundance of space to his utility, outlining talismans and incantations for beckoning his power, and providing directives for transforming one's body into his. Dating to 1116, this portion describes the "Northern Dipper ritual of protection for entering the door":

The ritual master arrives at the afflicted house, enters the door, and walks several steps. He actualizes himself as Zhenwu (*cunshen wei zhenwu* 存身為真武), unbinds his hair, and grasps his sword. Four upright attendants follow along with the ceremonial armaments (*yizhang* 儀仗) of Heaven's Gate and Earth's Axle. He uses his left hand to impress the seal of the dipper and silently recites the [accompanying] chant three times. He reaches the afflicted person's living room and takes a seat. He commandingly dispels the afflicting evil, causing the demon to come out. Its cross-examination is carried out with care.<sup>131</sup>

Here we find a ritual process very similar to that of the "transformation of the body" (*bianshen* 變身), found in modern Daoist liturgy as well as contemporary texts of the Song period. As implied above, this ritual entails transforming one's body into that of a specific deity, in order to perform the functions in which that deity specializes. In the case of the Tianxin tradition, this often entails assuming the identity of what Poul

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<sup>131</sup> *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* (DZ 1227), 7.23a.

Andersen calls “the prototypical performer of the rite.”<sup>132</sup> For exorcistic ritual, this refers to Zhenwu, or more commonly, Zhang Daoling. Speaking of such a Tianxin ritual, Andersen explains:

We find there that the priest begins a rite for expelling mountain goblins (*shanxiao*) by impersonating the True Warrior (*Zhenwu*), the god of the northern cosmic pole, and that the elaborate rite of writing the three basic talismans of the Tianxin tradition opens with his impersonation of the first Celestial Master, Zhang Daoling, the founding father of the tradition.<sup>133</sup>

Though this process is technically different from that of spirit mediumship, both practices—as performed by practitioners of the Tianxin zhengfa—actually have much in common. Note in the “Northern Dipper ritual of protection for entering the door” that Zhenwu is followed by attendants yielding the “ceremonial armaments of Heaven’s Gate and Earth’s Axle.” Today, such attendants commonly populate the streets of local festivals during exorcistic performances, waving banners and brandishing ceremonial weaponry. These festivities, seldom performed by liturgical Daoist priests, are mainly the work of ritual masters and spirit mediums. Furthermore, the ritual master’s instructions to “unbind his hair and grasp his sword” reflects the common appearance of spirit mediums, which the iconography of Zhenwu was based upon from the start.

The next passage also describes a ritual similar to the transformation of the body, and like the preceding one, also signifies a connection to spirit mediumship. It is described by Chao as a military ritual, and it mentions another of the Four Saints:

The master, in a black garment, should loosen his hair, recite the incantation, hold a brush-pen to write the talismans, and think of himself in the image of Zhenwu. When the

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<sup>132</sup> Poul Andersen, “The Transformation of the Body in Taoist Ritual,” in Jane Marie Law, ed., *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 195-196.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

talismans are done, prick your tongue, spit blood along with the water and the talisman ash, bite the drum and wave the banners toward the north. Command the soldiers to call the sacred name together. A black wind will come from the north covering the army; all the soldiers will turn into ten feet tall, blue faced spirit generals of the “black killer.”<sup>134</sup>

Here again the practitioner is instructed to “loosen his hair” and “think of himself in the image of Zhenwu,” all in preparation to inscribe the ritual talismans. Zhenwu’s affiliation with spirit-writing cults has been well documented, and I think the process outlined above mirrors such practices.<sup>135</sup> Even more telling, however, are the instructions that follow. Demonstrations of self mutilation and blood spitting, as in the Song dynasty, are a common occurrence among Chinese spirit mediums today. Commenting on this specific text, Andersen relates, “the practitioner is described in several places as having the appearance of a popular exorcist, performing barefooted and with loosened hair, and using techniques such as biting the tongue and spurting the blood out.”<sup>136</sup> The reference to the Black Killer (Yisheng) reflects a similar process; however, here I think we have a mistranslation. The last line of the passage should read, “The soldiers all change into a ten-foot tall spirit-being, the blue-faced General Black Killer.” They do not change into generals of the Black Killer, but the General Black Killer himself.

The next couple of examples highlight Zhenwu’s connection to spirit mediumship proper. Recall from the last chapter that Tan Zixiao was the founder of the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven (*Tianxin zhengfa*), and Zhang Shouzhen was the progenitor

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<sup>134</sup> *Guigu zi tiansui lingwen* (DZ 867), 2.16a—as translated in Chao, 142. This text dates to the Southern Song (1127-1279) or later.

<sup>135</sup> See Boltz (1987), 87; and Seaman, 12-23. Though Seaman thoroughly establishes the religious function of *Beiyou ji*, he falls short of proving that it was a product of spirit-writing cults. Nevertheless, he does show that spirit-writing cults play a significant role in Zhenwu devotion (see esp. 22-23).

<sup>136</sup> Poul Andersen, “*Guigu zi tiansui lingwen* 鬼谷子天髓靈文,” in *The Daoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1239.

of the imperial cult of the Black Killer. It is interesting to note that each of them also seem to have a minor connection to Zhenwu. In the case of Tan Zixiao, this should come as no surprise, for he himself became a deity within the Tianxin and Thunder Magic traditions. The connection to Zhang Shouzheng—who bore no technical affiliation with these sects, but who nonetheless epitomized the practitioners found therein—however, is a bit more novel. In the first case, if Zhenwu’s utilization by spirit mediums is not direct, it is very much implied:

Zhao Zujian, a Daoist priest (*daoshi*) from Heng prefecture, once practiced the Rites of the Celestial Heart (*Tianxin fa*) and would cure demonic illness for rural folk (*xiangren*). Suddenly he could no longer perform...After several years, Zhao again practiced “rites of summoning and investigating [demons]” (*kaozhao*) for people. At the time he compelled a boy to investigate by illumination (*shi tongzi zhaoshi*). Suddenly the youth jumped up, and with his hair disheveled and his feet bare, he shouted angrily, “I am Tan the Perfected. I have taken pity on your diligence and industry. Therefore I will instruct you in ritual. Have you heretofore obtained anything?” Zhao responded, “only four talismans that were transmitted to this world by the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwu).”<sup>137</sup>

As the passage continues, Tan the Perfected—who is, in fact, the spirit of Tan Zixiao—transmits a series of seventy-two talismans to Zhao Zujian, via the hand of his child spirit-medium. As Davis exclaims, “What is so fascinating here is that the means of the transmission from Tan Zixiao was nothing less than the automatic writing of a possessed spirit-medium!”<sup>138</sup> Presumably the talismans “transmitted” to Zhao by the Perfected Warrior were relayed in the exact same fashion. Much like the passage above, this signifies a tradition of spirit writing so often emblematic of Zhenwu devotion.

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<sup>137</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 831-832—as translated in Davis, 80-82.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

In the following story, Zhang Shouzhèn oversees the trance of a spirit medium who, while possessed by the Perfected Warrior, announces the birth of a prince. Recall that soon after Song Taizong gained control of the empire, he constructed the Palace of Great Peace and Highest Purity, dedicated to the Supporter of Saintliness. A major portion of the complex was also dedicated to Zhenwu, and none other than Zhang Shouzhèn resided as its administrator.<sup>139</sup> It was there, in the Temple of Zhenwu, that a priest named Fu Hong became possessed by the Perfected Warrior. Mirroring the long-standing relationship between ritual masters (*fashi*) and spirit mediums, Zhang Shouzhèn was there to oversee his ecstatic trance. The text relates this process:

And so he bathed and changed his clothes. He ascended the Daoist altar and received Zhenwu's instruction. The Perfected Lord [Zhenwu], dwelling in him, sent down his words, "The present moment is for me to announce the [future] emperor of the Song Dynasty: Sometime in the third month [the month of Renzong's birth], the myriad auspicious omens of the Heaven of Peach Blossom Scenery will bring through a maidservant the precious fortune of a golden branch [a metaphor for royal offspring], and thus renew the mandate. The barefoot immortal [Renzong] will be invited to the spring festival...Zhang Shouzhèn, because he had procured the words sent down by the Perfected Lord, did not dare conceal them."<sup>140</sup>

It seems probable that Zhang Shouzhèn's function within this narrative is that of the trance officiant, or what Schipper calls the "master of the mediums."<sup>141</sup> In this role, the officiant guides and interprets the spirit-medium's trance experience. Ultimately, he is

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<sup>139</sup> See *Yisheng baode zhenjun zhuan*, 103.2224.

<sup>140</sup> *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lu* 3.6a. Note that the character *pin* 姘 (illicit relations with a maidservant) is incorrectly written as *yan* 妍 (beautiful).

<sup>141</sup> For a thorough discussion of the meaning of this passage and its relation to Zhang Shouzhèn as trance officiant, see the source of this reference, Davis, 76 and 266 n. 33.

the one responsible for “procuring” the deity’s participation in the event, as well as its successful completion. Schipper explains:

The masters of the mediums, these discreet celebrants of the vernacular rites, are shamans. They invest their strength in their assistants [the spirit medium] and make them their instruments...The master’s ritual costume is essentially the same as the medium’s for the simple reason that the medium is none other than the alter ego of the officiant.<sup>142</sup>

As we noted in the last chapter, Zhang Shouzhen was not a novice in areas of the occult. Despite his connection to the imperial family and the temples they built, he nonetheless maintained the reputation of a popular exorcist. In the end, Zhenwu’s rise to imperial patronage took place for the same reasons as Zhang Shouzhen’s: the widespread legitimization of popular religion in the Song.

Near the end of the Southern Song dynasty, the cult to Zhenwu expanded at the expense of devotion to the Four Saints. As Zhenwu’s images and temples became increasingly individual, those of the Four Saints dwindled in number. Despite this fact, their influence, as a group, had already made a permanent contribution to Daoist ritual. On the western side of the outer altar of a modern Daoist ritual there is a station called “Wudang Shan”; behind it, an image of Zhenwu.<sup>143</sup> His centrality within this section of the altar reflects his raised significance within this group. Nevertheless, all ritual announcements voiced toward this station are addressed to the Four Saints.<sup>144</sup> Though Zhenwu’s preeminence among them cannot be denied, the Four Saints are the true

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<sup>142</sup> Schipper (1993), 48-49. The bracketed notation is mine.

<sup>143</sup> Lagerwey (1987), 299.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, index: “four saints.”

recipients of the priest's request. The tension embodied in such a configuration—that of the dynamic autonomy of Zhenwu and the inert mutuality of the Four Saints—may also be seen in the history of Zhenwu's iconography. While his individual iconography changed throughout the centuries, his portrayal among the Four Saints stayed in its original form.

### *Iconography*

Reflecting his long history of veneration, Zhenwu's iconography portrays the development of a stellar spirit who became a Daoist divinity. It documents his gradual evolution from reptile to human, warrior to emperor. Because we have already examined his depiction among the Four Saints (see Ch. 2, "Iconography"), here we will focus mainly on the history of his individual portraiture. A macro look at his changing imagery provides a new context in which to evaluate the significance of his role within Four Saints iconography. Ultimately, it will reveal that the evolution of his individual iconography did not corrupt the consistency of his portrayal among the Four Saints. By all accounts, his depiction within the grouping of the Four Saints has stayed remarkably similar from the Song to the Ming.

The earliest of Zhenwu iconography dates to the Han dynasty (206BCE.-220CE). At that time, he was represented as a turtle and snake, and known as Xuanwu. Usually depicted among the other of the Four Beasts (see p. 48), he commonly appears on sarcophagi and roof tiles of the period.<sup>145</sup> Richard Rudolf and Wen Yu, in their study of Han tomb art, showcase a sarcophagus which depicts Xuanwu, and dates to before the

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<sup>145</sup> Little, 291.

third century (fig. 10).<sup>146</sup> Corresponding with his role as a deity of the North, he adorns the northern end of the coffin. Another relief from their study, which occupies the same northern position, confirms the contention that Xuanwu was originally symbolized as a turtle alone (fig. 11).<sup>147</sup>

Xuanwu continued to play a role in burial art at least until the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). Two depictions dating to this period portray him as a turtle and snake, and include the additional figure of a human being. One resides in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Kansas City, and dates to c. 525. Carved in intaglio, it shows a man holding an object, which could be construed as a club or a sword.<sup>148</sup> A similar piece in Little's *Taoism and the Arts of China* shows Xuanwu accompanied by someone resembling a court official (fig. 12). As to the meaning of this extra figure, Little relates, "While the significance of this figure is not yet clear, it may represent an early personification of this powerful deity of the north."<sup>149</sup> While his contention presents an intriguing possibility, there is, as yet, too little evidence to support it conclusively.

Zhenwu most likely assumed an anthropomorphic appearance during the Song dynasty. Though sources from this period are scarce, one depiction portrays him as one of the Four Saints. The aforementioned *Daozi mobao* displays him with his two most common features: disheveled hair, and a sword (fig. 9). This manner of depiction is representative of his portrayal among the Four Saints, and it endures in each published depiction of these gods dating from the Song to the Ming.<sup>150</sup> Some variation on this

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<sup>146</sup> See also Richard C. Rudolph and Wen Yu, *Han Tomb Art of West China: A Collection of First- and Second-Century Reliefs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 18 and 32.

<sup>147</sup> See Chao, 15 on this point.

<sup>148</sup> Little, 293.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> See figs. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9.



theme includes the addition of a third eye, and the exposure of bare feet. Furthermore, artists commonly depict his free hand bent into the shape of an indistinct mudra.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, Yisheng sometimes displays characteristics of Zhenwu, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. Occasionally, certain variations in their iconography make identification possible. With regard to Yisheng, the presence of dragon or the donning of a headband will conclusively indicate his identity. With regard to Zhenwu, it is the addition of a turtle and snake (usually found beneath his feet) that makes a conclusive identification possible.

While depictions of Zhenwu among the Four Saints were commissioned for rituals well into the Ming dynasty, most of his surviving iconography presents him alone.<sup>151</sup> From the Yuan to the Ming, his individual iconography became much more thematic. He was no longer just a member of a larger group, but a significant entity in his own right (see figs. 13, 14). In this context, a few motifs stand out. He is often shown in the seated position, and often with a flagman standing behind him. In each case he retains his disheveled hair; in many, he loses his sword. The turtle and snake remain a common theme. These depictions differ greatly from his depiction among the Four Saints, where he always stands with his sword in hand. While the departure from this motif signifies the ongoing evolution of his individual iconography, it also highlights the marked consistency of his depiction among the Four Saints.

When we look at the history of Zhenwu's iconography, we see the ongoing evolution of a popular deity who became a part of the Daoist pantheon. In the beginning he was Xuanwu and in the end, Xuantian Shangdi. His evolution, however, did not take the course of a straight line. From the Han to the Tang, he was portrayed as a turtle

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<sup>151</sup> Little, 290-311. All references in this paragraph are to this study.

entwined by a snake. In the Song dynasty he was one of the Four Saints. At this point, his evolutionary path forked. On the one hand, his individual iconography continued to change. Some elemental features faded away, while some new ones emerged. On the other hand, his portrayal among the Four Saints remained remarkably consistent. Many Yuan and Ming dynasty depictions of the Four Saints, though contemporary with his new look, depict him in the exact same manner as they did in the Song.<sup>152</sup> This, I think, is evidence of a sustaining group identity. I would like to suggest that when interpreting the significance of Four Saints iconography, we consider them as a group; that is, as one iconographic unit. As we already know, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Zhenwu from Yisheng, and Tianpeng from Tianyou. When conceived as a group, however, the likelihood of distinguishing their identity increases. In the group context, there are certain contrasting features that stick out; subtle features that, when seen in relation to the group as a whole, become all the more prominent. Recall from the last chapter that, in pictures of the Four Saints, Zhenwu's hands perform different functions. One hand holds a sword, while the other forms a mudra. When distinguished against Yisheng's common trait of having both hands positioned together, an identification can usually be made. When seen individually, however, such hand positions do not constitute an identifying trait. We will see in the next chapter that Tianpeng and Tianyou also have such distinguishing characteristics.

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<sup>152</sup> See figs. 1,2,5,6, and 8.

## Chapter 4

### Tianpeng and Tianyou

The names of Tianpeng 天蓬 and Tianyou 天猷 were first mentioned in a fourth-century incantation used for dispelling demons called the “Method of the Northern Emperor for Killing Demons.” A popular spell, it was used for exorcistic purposes ever after. Its recitation gained great eminence from the Tang (618-907) to the Song (960-1279), due in part to the resurgent popularity of the cult of the Northern Emperor. Whereas Tianpeng is the main deity within this spell, Tianyou occupies just one line of the text. Seldom mentioned alone, his only significance was gained vicariously through attachment to his greater counterpart Tianpeng. Aesthetically, these deities look very much alike. Each of them has multiple arms and faces, which indicates that their appearance was greatly influenced by the iconography of Tantric Buddhism.

Within this chapter, I intend to show that the iconography of Tianpeng became tantric at a time of heightened Buddho-Daoist ritual exchange. Originating squarely within the context of Daoist cosmology, he assumed his tantric appearance when he became popular among exorcistic cults of the Song dyansty. A close examination of the rituals associated with Tianpeng will further reveal that his tantric characteristics were not restricted to the realm of iconography. From his exorcistic seal to his association with child spirit-mediums, the rites of Tianpeng all had a Buddhist counterpart at that time. The iconography of Tianyou, through his association with Tianpeng, is also the product of Buddho-Daoist ritual exchange.

*Hagiography from the Six Dynasties to the Tang*

In the middle of the fourth century, deep in the mountain forests of modern-day Jiangsu, one of Daoism's most influential incantations was revealed to a spirit medium named Yang Xi (330- c.386).<sup>153</sup> It was included among a host of other ritual techniques which were later compiled by Tao Hongjing (456-536) in his *Declarations of the Perfected*, or *Zhen 'gao* 真誥.<sup>154</sup> Considered among the highest scriptures of the Daoist Canon, these texts were mainly concerned with visual meditation and personal practices. Nevertheless, among their pages one can still detect the slight influence of local religion and occultism. The incantation in question is the "Method of the Northern Emperor for Killing Demons" (*beidi shagui zhi fa* 北帝煞鬼之法), and inscribed among its thirty-six lines of text are the names of Tianpeng and Tianyou.

Though Tao gives few details about the provenance of this incantation, some contextual observations can still be made. This text clearly derives from the early cult of the Northern Emperor. Around the time of Yang Xi's revelations (364-370), spells concerning the Northern Emperor were quite prevalent.<sup>155</sup> Allusions in the text, to him and to the names of the Six Palaces of Fengdu, indicate a relation to this independent ritual tradition.<sup>156</sup> In fact, Tao elaborates on the cult of the Northern Emperor elsewhere in the *Zhen 'gao*, even going so far as to mention some of the deities featured in the spell.<sup>157</sup> This fact confirms my suspicion that the spell introduces an elaborate pantheon,

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<sup>153</sup> See Michel Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy," in *T'oung Pao* 63.1 (1977): 1-40. These revelations would mark the beginning of the *Shangqing* (上清) sect of Daoism.

<sup>154</sup> *Zhen 'gao* (DZ 1016), 10.10b-10.11b.

<sup>155</sup> See *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwai shenzhou miaojing* (DZ 49), dating to the Eastern Jin (317-420).

<sup>156</sup> See *Zhen 'gao* 10.10a, which directly precedes the Tianpeng incantation; and Christine Mollier's commentary on this subject in Schipper and Verellen, 513.

<sup>157</sup> See *Zhen 'gao*, ch. 15 and 16. Some of the deities mentioned include: *yandi* 炎帝 (15.3a), *siming* 四明 (15.6a), *tianding lishi* 天丁力士 (15.13b), *weinan* 威南 and *weibei* 威北 (15.13b-14a).

of which Tianpeng seems to be the ranking deity. Note that starting on line seven, there is a physical description which most likely refers to him. As for the other deities in the pantheon, most of them represent various celestial bodies that have been divinized and utilized for exorcistic purposes. The text reads:

Tianpeng ! Tianpeng!  
Killer Youth of the Nine Primordials,  
Commander of the Five *Ding* 丁,  
Northern Duke, lofty and cunning,  
Seven Governors, Eight Numina<sup>158</sup>  
The Most-High Grand Malignity,  
Tremendous beast with an elongated skull,<sup>159</sup>  
Hand grasping the imperial bell,  
Screeching thrice, like a white owl,  
Fiercely riding a one-legged dragon,  
Spirit-lord of the awful sword,  
Beheading evil, eradicating its traces,  
Ascending Heaven on purple vapor,  
A blazing road of red-cloud cinnabar,  
Consuming devils, devouring demons,  
Broad body harnessing the wind,  
Blue of tongue, green of tooth,  
The four-eyed ancient,  
Strongman of the Celestial *Ding* 丁,  
The Awful South opposing malevolence,  
Heaven's cavalry wreaking havoc,  
The Awful North holding back the lance,

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<sup>158</sup> These terms refer to a group of celestial bodies including the sun, the moon, and the five planets.

<sup>159</sup> An elongated skull denotes the physiology of an immortal.

Three hundred thousand troops,  
 Protect me in nine echelons,  
 Driving corpse-specters a thousand leagues away,  
 Abolishing the inauspicious,  
 Then should any piffling demon,  
 Wish to come and stand accused,  
 Seizing Heaven's great ax,  
 They'll chop him into five pieces,  
 The Flaming emperor tear into his blood,  
 The Northern Dipper burn his bones,  
 The Four Luminaries snap his skeleton,<sup>160</sup>  
 The Heavenly Mastermind [*Tianyou*] exterminate his kind,  
 When his spirit-sword drops a single time,  
 All demons spontaneously disperse.<sup>161</sup>

Thus, among the highest scriptures of the Daoist canon, there sits a bloodthirsty spell for killing demons. Tianpeng himself sounds much like a demon. A malignity though he might be, he is obviously on the side of orthodoxy. Evidence both within and without the text testify to its derivation from a purely Daoist context. Allusions to the imagery of immortality (i.e. red-cloud cinnabar, an elongated skull), and also to the cosmology of popular Daoist traditions (the Northern Dipper, the Four Luminaries, Celestial *Ding*) point in this direction. Perhaps the greatest indication of its Daoist background, however, is its inclusion among the writings of the ninth patriarch of the Shangqing tradition, Tao Hongjing. He included it in two of his compilations, the *Zhen'gao* quoted above, and *Dengzhen yinjue*.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly, though he devotes two

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<sup>160</sup> The Four Luminaries are the sun, the moon, the stars, and the constellations.

<sup>161</sup> *Zhen'gao* 10.10b-11a. This translation benefited from that of Michel Strickmann (1980), 228.

<sup>162</sup> *Dengzhen yinjue* (DZ 421), 2.11a-13b

whole chapters to the administration of Fengdu (over which the Northern Emperor rules), he nonetheless ranks them at the bottom of the divine hierarchy.<sup>163</sup>

Notice that Tianpeng's name occupies the opening line of the spell. Its prominent position would later win the spell a newer and simpler title—one that would no doubt contribute to Tianpeng's subsequent popularity—the Tianpeng Incantation (*tianpeng zhou* 天蓬咒). Notice again, however, that the name of Tianyou falls only on line thirty-four. This somewhat less prominent position is indicative of Tianyou's continued subordination to Tianpeng. Mirroring his lesser status, a text from the Song dynasty labels them respectively as, "Great Marshal Tianpeng" and "Assistant Marshal Tianyou."<sup>164</sup> By all accounts, it seems that Tianyou won his veneration vicariously through his inextricable attachment to Tianpeng.

From the fourth century to the Tang there is little evidence of a sustaining movement dedicated solely to Tianpeng. In the sixth-century *Wuxing dayi*, however, *Tianfeng* 天逢 (an alternative pronunciation of the second character also allows for this term to be pronounced "*tianpeng*") was the name given to one of stars of the nine-starred dipper.<sup>165</sup> This star is an essential element of the *dunjia* method of divination and *bugang*, which survived well into the Song dynasty. Though their names differ slightly, we may identify Tianpeng the deity with Tianfeng the star. As early as the fourth century, Ge Hong designated this star, in the vicinity of the dipper, as *fengxing* 逢星. In the Song, a

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<sup>163</sup> See Tao's *Dongxuan lingbao zhenling weiye tu* (DZ 167), and its description in Strickmann (1977), 6 n.13.

<sup>164</sup> *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* (DZ 1227), 3.10a. This text dates to 1116.

<sup>165</sup> *Wuxing dayi* ch. 5. par. 20.

number of texts designate the same star as *tianpeng* 天蓬.<sup>166</sup> Tianpeng (the deity)'s association with the Northern Dipper, Celestial *Ding*, and a number of other entities in the Tianpeng incantation echoes this tradition of *dunjia*. Furthermore, the fact that the Tianpeng star is suited to purposes of "security and defense" makes this association all the more plausible.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, the *Wuxing dayi* of the sixth century makes no mention of the exorcistic tradition of the Northern Emperor or Fengdu. This fact leads me to conclude that Tianpeng, representing a star in the handle of the Northern Dipper, was a common element of two separate ritual traditions. Indeed, other deities from the Tianpeng incantation also appear in the *Wuxing dayi* as celestial entities.<sup>168</sup>

By the time of the Tang dynasty (618-907), the prestige of the Tianpeng incantation had inspired a number of myths relating its awesome power. None other than Du Guangting (850-933), the great contributor to Daoist ritual and text, recorded three such stories in his *Record of Daoist Miracles (Daojiao lingyan ji 道教靈驗記)*. These stories show that by the time of their record, the Tianpeng incantation had been utilized for functions as diverse as killing spirits, alleviating nightmares, and summoning rain.<sup>169</sup> They also show that by that time, an important ritual instrument had developed in relation to Tianpeng, the Tianpeng seal (*yin* 印). Used for exorcisms and liturgy, seals were an essential implement for Buddhists and Daoists in the Tang and Song dynasties. Du's text itself mimics the genre of the Buddhist miracle tale (*lingyan ji* 靈驗記), and as such, the

<sup>166</sup> On this point see Poul Andersen, "The Practice of Bugang," in *Cahiers d' Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-1990): 15-53; esp. 33-37, and 35 n. 40.

<sup>167</sup> *Wuxing dayi* ch. 5. par. 20. See also Michel Strickmann, "History, Anthropology, and Chinese Religion," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40.1 (1980): 201-248; esp. 228-229, 228 n. 32.

<sup>168</sup> For instance, the Seven Governors (*qizheng* 七政) are the subject of ch. 4, par. 16. The Flaming Emperor (*yandi shen* 炎帝神) is mentioned in ch.5, par. 21.

<sup>169</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 119.15, 119.26-27, 120.11-12, respectively. This text is also found in the Zhengtong Daoist canon as DZ 590.



current stories testify, on two levels, to a beginning upsurge in Buddho-Daoist relations.<sup>170</sup>

A further testament to such relations in the Tang is a text that I will refer to as *The Marvelous Book of Divine Incantations of Tianpeng*.<sup>171</sup> As the title implies, this text relates not just the original Tianpeng incantation, but another one as well. It begins with a frame story, much as one might find in similar Buddhist texts, where the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning (*yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊) describes an age in which virtue has disappeared and calamities have increased. In a place described as the Garden of the Fragrant Forest, he expounds to his disciples the impending doom and its only remedy—recitation of the Tianpeng incantation and the names of the six heavenly palaces.<sup>172</sup> What is alarming about this text (aside from the fact that these rituals closely resemble those of the *Zhen'gao*) is that Tianpeng here already wields a number of weapons and ritual implements. Added to his bell, are a seal, a sword, and an ax.<sup>173</sup> The text does not, however, go so far as to describe the multi-limbed, multi-headed Tianpeng that we know today. In fact, it mentions only two hands in relation to Tianpeng. Nonetheless, the text epitomizes the kind of textual adaptations prevalent in many genres of Buddhist and Daoist literature of the period, and represents an antecedent of Tianpeng's current iconography.

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<sup>170</sup> This subject is the topic of Franciscus Verellen's "Evidential miracles in support of Taoism': The inversion of a Buddhist apologetic tradition in late T'ang China," in *T'oung Pao* 78 (1992): 217-263.

<sup>171</sup> The entire Chinese title is *Taishang dongyuan beidi tianpeng huming xiaozai shenzhou miaojing* (DZ 53). It was most likely composed in the late Tang.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 2b-4b.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 6b-7a.

*The Emergence of a Tantric Façade in the Song*

The rites of Tianpeng reached a state of heightened popularity in the Song dynasty. Recitation of the Tianpeng spell continued to proliferate, and Tianpeng himself became one of the period's most important exorcistic deities. Especially important to the Rites of Tianxin, their texts greatly expanded his role within the religious sphere. Whereas previous generations emphasized recitation of the Tianpeng spell and usage of the Tianpeng seal, the Song-dynasty Rites of Tianxin emphasized Tianpeng's more deific qualities. He was described as a virtual arsenal, wielding several varieties of axes alone. With multiple arms and multiple heads, it would seem that he could dispel demons by virtue of his mere appearance.

Rituals associated with Tianpeng continued to evolve in the Song dynasty. An early text of the *Tianxin zhengfa* dedicates half of one chapter to him, and greatly expands on previous Tianpeng traditions.<sup>174</sup> Even the rites of Zhenwu and Yisheng lack such an extensive elaboration within this text. "The Rites of Tianpeng for Saving and Curing People," as they are called, claim that he was originally "the ninth star of the Northern Dipper."<sup>175</sup> Among these rites, one finds a rather intricate ritual for reciting the Tianpeng incantation. In this version, each of the thirty-six lines of the incantation is paired with a talisman, and used to summon the power of a specific deity. For instance, the line that reads, "The Heavenly Mastermind [Tianyou] exterminates his kind," is accompanied by an explanation that reads, "This is the great spirit-general Tianyou. Actualize the green breath of the dipper's fifth star and write out the entire talisman. [In doing so] you will be able to pursue and capture demonic spirits that fly through the sky,

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<sup>174</sup> *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* (DZ 1227), 3.15-28.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.15a.

such as flying birds that commit evil.”<sup>176</sup> Another text from the *Daofa huiyuan* bears a similar enumeration.<sup>177</sup>

The Tianxin text mentioned above also provides the first indication of Tianpeng’s newly tantric appearance. In the midst of one ritual, the practitioner is instructed to actualize (*cun* 存) the image of Tianpeng. The text reads, “Actualize the Adorned Great Saint, Tianpeng. He has four faces, eight hands, and his body is 500 feet tall. He wears armor and his hands grasp a sword, a halberd, the imperial bell, and his divine seal. His soldiers equal three hundred thousand cavalry.”<sup>178</sup> Notice that this description of Tianpeng elaborates on the preexisting description from the Tianpeng spell, as well as that of the *Book of Divine Incantations* (see p. 75). He still grasps the imperial bell (*dizhong* 帝鐘), and still commands three hundred thousand cavalry. Now, however, he has multiple faces and multiple arms, and greatly resembles a tantric deity. Another text entitled *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* (The Great Rites of Tianpeng for Subduing Demons 上清天蓬伏魔大法) takes this description to another level; it actually illustrates the imperial bell, and assigns it its own talisman.<sup>179</sup> This illustration, vividly ornate, depicts the bell in the shape of a tantric *ghaṇṭā*. Also known as a *vajra*-bell, the three-pronged handle portrays a stylized thunderbolt. Michel Strickmann explains this staple of Tantric Buddhism:

In this case, as with the *vajra*, we have to do with an accessory of specific provenance within the Indian cultural sphere, for whether we find it among Chinese Buddhist monks,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 3.27b-28a.

<sup>177</sup> See *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*, in *Daofa huiyuan* (DZ 1220), 163.1a-25a.

<sup>178</sup> *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* 3.15b.

<sup>179</sup> *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*, in *Daofa huiyuan* 156.20a-21a. See fig. 15.

Taoist masters, or vernacular exorcists, the bell with a three-pronged *vajra* handle (the *vajra-ghantā*) is drawn from the properties of tantric Buddhism.<sup>180</sup>

The use of such bells by Daoist masters is just one of many acculturations absorbed from tantric ritual. Nevertheless, it is particularly interesting that an image of a *vajra*-bell appears within a manual dedicated to the rites of Tianpeng. The presence of such an image implies that elements of tantric ritual had a direct influence on Tianpeng's iconography. Upon examining his iconography we will further discover that the tantric description mentioned above greatly corresponds with his painted image. Though Tianyou was not distinctly mentioned in this narrative, it seems that, through his association with Tianpeng, he also absorbed its iconographic effect.

Before we get into the particulars of Tianpeng and Tianyou's iconography, I would like to briefly introduce the kind of tantric iconography that each of them embody. It is an imagery of extreme wrath; one that is meant to instill fear and trembling into those who threaten the Dharma. Speaking of the *dharmapālas* (defenders of the Dharma) painted at the Kumbum in Gyantse, Franco Ricca explains:

The wrathful deities in the Kumbum...have stocky bodies and massive limbs which indicate their great strength. Their faces are distorted into masks of wild wrath with disheveled and flaming hair. The eyes, wide-open and bloodshot, bulge so that the eyeballs appear circular, barely covered at the top by the pointed inflexions of the eyelids. Their noses wrinkle at the bridge and the flattened nostrils are contracted; their mouths gape in terrible roar, baring protruding fangs.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Michel Strickmann, "The Seal of the Law: A Ritual Implement and the Origins of Printing," in *Asia Major*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 6.2 (1993): 1-83; esp. p. 4.

<sup>181</sup> Franco Ricca, "Stylistic Features of the Pelkhor Chode at Gyantse," in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, ed. Jane Casey Singer and Philip Denwood (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1997), 204.

While depictions of Tianpeng and Tianyou differ from case to case, all display some of the aforementioned characteristics. One image, from the *Daozi mobao*, showcases their muscular limbs and flaming hair (fig. 9). Another, from the *Longmen Si*, highlights their bulging eyes and wrinkled noses (figs. 6, 7). The *Yongle Gong* depiction, in particular, draws attention to their roaring mouths and protruding fangs (figs. 4, 5). While Tianpeng and Tianyou do look sufficiently alike to cause problems with identification, there are some traits that belong more often to one or the other.

Tianpeng and Tianyou, much like Zhenwu and Yisheng, are a mutually-identifying pair. In order to identify one, you need first reference the other. Because of his greater abundance of significant features, it is generally best to begin with Tianpeng. As mentioned before, both of these deities have multiple faces and multiple arms. Tianpeng, however, sometimes has more arms than Tianyou. In the *Daozi mobao*, for instance, Tianpeng has six arms, whereas Tianyou has four (see fig. 9). The *Longmen Si* and *Xu Beihong* renditions similarly reflect these numbers (figs. 6, 7, and 8). A more unique case, the *Baoning Si* scroll depicts Tianpeng with four arms, and Tianyou with only two (fig. 1). Because of the strong association between Tianpeng and his imperial bell, one might think this feature to be a staple of his iconography. Indeed it is, however, Tianyou sometimes also carries a bell. In cases where they both have one, its presence hampers the identification process. When only one has a bell, however, it is most certainly Tianpeng. Another staple of his ritual repertoire, the Tianpeng seal, can provide a more definite identification. If present, its rectangular shape appears only within Tianpeng's hands.

All evidence seems to suggest that Tianpeng's tantric iconography first emerged during the Song dynasty. The tantric description from the Tianxin text above (see n. 178) dates to this period, as does his portrait from the *Daozi mobao* (fig. 9).<sup>182</sup> Though images of him were probably produced as early as the tenth century, the *Daozi mobao*, which dates to the twelfth, represents his earliest extant depiction.<sup>183</sup> Just how he came to be portrayed in this manner will occupy the rest of this chapter. Though Tianpeng's transformation ultimately occurred in the Song, the rites most associated with him had long been utilized by both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners. Indeed, by the beginning of the Song dynasty he already fit well within an emerging Buddho-Daoist ritual environment.

#### *The Antecedents of Tianpeng's Tantric Appearance*

Tianpeng's transformation did not happen overnight. It was the last chapter of a centuries-long story that had begun by the time the Tianpeng incantation had been recorded in the *Zhen'gao*. Already in the fourth century a major synthesis of Buddhist and Daoist ideology had gotten underway. In the town of Jurong, just south of Nanjing, a grandnephew of the famous Ge Hong, Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫 (turn of fourth and fifth centuries), wrote the first of a long line of Buddho-Daoist scriptures. They would lay the foundation for Daoist liturgy as we know it, and their success would inspire many such scriptures in the centuries that followed. Since then, numerous syntheses of varying

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<sup>182</sup> *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* dates to 1116. Susan Huang and Stephen Little both date the *Daozi mobao* to the Southern Song period. See Susan Huang's dissertation, "The Triptych of *Daoist Deities of Heaven, Earth, and Water* and the Making of Visual Culture in the Southern Song Period (1127-1279)" (Yale University, May 2002), 154 and 227; and Little, 298.

<sup>183</sup> We must assume that an image of Tianpeng was erected in the eastern pavilion of the *Shangqing taiping gong* 上清太平宮, completed in 980; and also the *Beiji sisheng guan* 北極四聖觀, completed during the reign of Taizong (r. 976-998).

degrees have been produced; some of which we will examine below. It is clear that by the Song dynasty, owing to this line of Buddho-Daoist precursors, the conditions were ripe for Tianpeng's tantric makeover.

Three centuries after Buddhism first entered China, its presence sufficiently challenged the endurance of the Daoist faith and prompted some of its more creative adherents to compose the highly syncretic Lingbao scriptures. The general atmosphere of religion at this time was one of intense competition and creativity. The Shangqing scriptures had gained great eminence among Daoist circles, and the threat of Buddhism had prompted the production of the *Huahu jing* 化胡經 (Classic of the Conversion of the Barbarians).<sup>184</sup> The scriptures produced capitalized on the ideology of Buddhism in order to contend with the foreign faith and the indigenous Shangqing school of Daoism. Stephen Bokenkamp has shown that the Buddhist borrowings included the use of pseudo-Sanskrit terminology, the assimilation of Buddhist precepts, and the adaptation of the imagery of the Western Land.<sup>185</sup> The value of Bokenkamp's article, however, lies not only in its revelation of textual exchange, but of ritual exchange as well. It clarified the beginning of a long history of ritual competition between Buddhist and Daoist practitioners; a history visually manifest in the liturgy of today. Bokenkamp relates:

It has often puzzled students of Chinese religions to note that identical rites may be performed by both Buddhist and Taoist practitioners. An examination of the Ling-pao scriptures shows that this may indeed be a very early phenomenon...it seems safe to say that the earliest form of the rite of Universal Salvation (*P'u-tu* 普度), currently performed

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<sup>184</sup> This text, extant only from the sixth century, depicts Laozi's travels in the west. He is said to have converted the "barbarians" to Taoism by presenting it in diluted form, as Buddhism.

<sup>185</sup> See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1983): 434-486.

by both Buddhist and Taoist practitioners, is to be found in *Ordinances of the Luminous Perfected* [a Lingbao scripture].<sup>186</sup>

In the centuries that followed, Buddhists would perform similar borrowings in their own texts. Christine Mollier, in a recent publication, draws attention to a series of such actions which took place in medieval times.<sup>187</sup> In one chapter she examines the Buddhist and Daoist versions of a text prescribed for “increasing the life account.”<sup>188</sup> It centers on the use of talismans and incantations for protecting one’s person, and thereby maximizing the life span. The method clearly derives from a Daoist tradition, for it requires invoking the generals of the six *jia* 六甲 as well as the astral spirits of the Dipper constellation. The Buddhist talismans are completely derived from their Daoist counterparts. Mollier explains:

The two texts, Buddhist and Taoist, are almost perfectly identical. Both versions are centered around the same incantations and the same two sets of talismans—one set of five prophylactic, astrological talismans and a second set of ten talismans for the exorcism of demons. The aim of these ritual implements is to guarantee full protection to the faithful so that they can achieve the optimal term of longevity, a span of 120 years.<sup>189</sup>

Of course, Daoists were not innocent of such doings themselves. In the sixth century, the Buddhist monk Zhen Luan 甄鸞 accused Daoists of producing forgeries of the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>190</sup> In fact, we find that a Daoist text entitled *Spirit Spells of the Abyss*, treated at length by Michel Strickmann, assumes many of the miraculous qualities

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 477-478. The bracketed remark is mine.

<sup>187</sup> Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Daoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 100-133.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 12.



attributed to the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>191</sup> It asserts that anyone to hear the scripture would survive the worst of calamities, and anyone to obtain a copy would certainly achieve immortality.<sup>192</sup> This text further borrows from the *Lotus Sutra* a term important to the study of Daoism—that is, “Master of the Law,” or *fashi* 法師. In the Daoist context, “*fashi*” is usually translated as “ritual master,” and as noted in the Introduction, it denotes a wide range of popular ritual practitioners—especially those that perform exorcisms.

The original Buddhist connotation is not far off the mark. Strickmann explains:

Here is yet another example of a Taoist technical term and ritual function that cannot be fully understood without reference to contemporary Buddhist sources...According to the *Lotus*, the transmission and explanation of this most popular of all Buddhist scriptures was assigned to a class of missionary monks who wandered up and down the land entering households, expounding the scripture, casting out demons by means of its spells (*dhārāṇi*), and confirming laymen and laywomen in its assurances of a better rebirth.<sup>193</sup>

“*Fashi*” is precisely the term used in Daoist texts of the Song dynasty to denote the person of the exorcist. It refers to the speaker of incantations, the writer of talismans, the wielder of seals, and the master of mediums—in short, all the rituals most associated with Tianpeng. Of course, these rituals were at one time themselves the stuff of ritual exchange. By the beginning of the Tang dynasty they were each central to a number of Buddhist and Daoist exorcistic techniques.

At the moment, the history of Chinese spell-recitation remains a languishing area of inquiry. This is due, in part, to the reality that parsing the etiology of spirit spells proves to be no easy task. Michel Strickmann has shown that by the fifth century

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<sup>191</sup> Regarding the date of *Spirit Spells of the Abyss*, Michel Strickmann notes, “Its earliest sections were written at the beginning of the fifth century, but the later parts were completed only in the tenth century.” See Strickmann (2002), 89.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

Buddhist and Daoist spells were completely imbued with elements from both religions.<sup>194</sup> Highly eschatological, they each present vicious pantheons that kill vicious demons in an age of moral decay. The deities introduced are invariably depicted as converted demons themselves, who have been recruited to kill their own kind. We have already noted this ambivalence in Daoism with respect to Yisheng and Zhenwu (see pp. 28-30, 52-53).

Strickmann notes it here again, in a Buddhist context:

Those who come forward with spells for the protection of Buddhists in the times of approaching travail are usually either pagan gods or demons who have been subdued, converted, and bound by oath as protectors of the faithful: They are clearly all elder members of the same family as the devil-kings [*mowang* 魔王] and Kings of Malignant Wraiths whom we find exercising identical functions in Taoist scriptures.<sup>195</sup>

The character ‘*mo*’ 魔 in the term *mowang* 魔王 (devil-kings), was originally a transliteration of the name “*Mara*,” the Buddhist tempter. As such, the devil-kings are a Daoist assimilation of a Buddhist class of demon.

The history of ensigillation is a bit easier to decipher than that of spells.<sup>196</sup> As early as the fourth-century, the Daoist Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343) prescribed the use of seals for warding off mountain demons.<sup>197</sup> By the fifth century, Buddhists and Daoists made extensive use of the practice. With seals they expunged evil and restored health. They adjured rain and diverted thunder. Indeed, they employed them to innumerable ends. A Buddhist text compiled circa 450 suggests the extent to their utility (note here that the seal is quaintly referred to as a *mudrā*):

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<sup>194</sup> See *Ibid.*, 89-122.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. The bracketed notation is mine.

<sup>196</sup> “Ensigillation,” as Strickmann has coined it, is the application of a seal for therapeutic purposes.

<sup>197</sup> Strickmann (2002), 141.

If one impresses this *mudrā* on a mountain, the mountain will crumble; if on any tree, it will be overthrown. If impressed on rivers, seas, ponds, or springs, their waters will dry up. If impressed in the direction of fire or flood, they will vanish. If in any of the four quarters violent winds should arise, raising the dust before them, lift the seal toward them and they will stop. If you direct the seal toward the earth, the earth will tremble.<sup>198</sup>

A Song-dynasty text dedicated to Tianpeng (compiled before 1225) gives similar enumeration regarding the Tianpeng seal:

If I point it toward the sky, the sky will fall.  
If I point it toward the earth, the earth will crack.  
If I point it toward a person, the person's lifespan will increase.  
If I point it toward a demon, the demon will utterly perish.  
If I point it toward a mountain, the mountain will collapse.  
If I point it toward water, the water will dry up.  
If I point it toward a cloud, the cloud will expand.  
If I point it toward wood, the wood will snap.  
If I point it toward wind, the wind will desist.  
If I point it toward rain, the rain will stop.<sup>199</sup>

According to Strickmann, it is not uncommon to find this rhetorical device in texts describing ensigillation. Despite the very hyperbolic idiom, we would not error in assuming that the seal was actually used for many of these purposes. While exorcism and healing are its main functions, the manipulation of nature and prolongation of life are certainly not out of the question. The “Divine Rites to Prolong Life,” in a text dedicated to the tantric deity Ucchusma (*Huiji jingang* 穢跡金剛), recommends using seals for these exact purposes.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Passage from *Guanding jing* (T. 1331), as translated in *Ibid.*, 135

<sup>199</sup> *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*, in *Daofa huiyuan* 156.19a.

<sup>200</sup> *Huiji jingang jin baibian fa jing* (T. 1229), as cited in Mollier (2008), 105.

Clearly by the time of the Song dynasty the conditions were already in place for Tianpeng to begin his gradual assumption of the tantric characteristics that so clearly distinguish him from the rest of the pantheon. The truth is, ever since his inception, he exhibited traits familiar to tantric devotees. He was the ferocious god of a demonifugic spell. He carried a bell and beheaded demons on behalf of the virtuous. As mentioned above, the deities of Buddhist spell-books were often envisioned as reformed demons. Though we cannot go so far as to call Tianpeng a demon, his own spell ambivalently refers to him as the “Most-High Grand Malignity.”<sup>201</sup> It should also be clear that by the Song dynasty he belonged well within the Buddho-Daoist milieu that characterized the rites of ensigillation. Actually his seal was being used to similar ends already in the Tang. At that time, a man by the name of Fan Xiyue used it to adjure rain.<sup>202</sup> Also in the Tang, *The Marvelous Book of Divine Incantations of Tianpeng* thrust him into the realm of scriptural exchange. Recall from above (p. 75) that it contains an element common to Buddhist spell-books—the apocalyptic frame-story. Though his course was set for change, his full transformation was yet to come. In the Song he would encompass the center of a whole new set of Buddhist-inspired rituals. The texts of that time would also embellish his still latent Buddhist characteristics.

### *Song Dynasty Influences*

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<sup>201</sup> We should note, however, that the class of astral spirits to which he belongs is often attributed a number of inauspicious, and sometimes malefic, qualities. See Ching-lang Hou, “The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars,” in *Facets of Daoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1979), 193-228. In this article also note the classes of astral “*sha*,” a category of demon we have already referred to in relation to Yisheng/Heisha (pp. 28-30).

<sup>202</sup> See *Yunji qiqian* 120.11-12.

Though he showed signs of Buddhist influence as early as the Tang dynasty, Tianpeng's façade became fully tantricized only in the Song. This is apparent not only by his earliest extant depiction from the *Daozi mobao*, but also by an abundance of tantric descriptions which date to this period. The emergence of this façade was further accompanied by the assumption of tantric ritual implements and the use of child-mediums in the rites associated with Tianpeng. Thus it seems that, despite the decline of institutional Tantrism in China, the Song remained a time of heightened Buddho-Daist ritual exchange.

Despite the tantric similarities mentioned in the preceding section, Tianpeng's appearance does not seem to have been affected until the Song dynasty. In addition to his depiction in the *Daozi mobao*, which dates to this period, a number of contemporaneous scriptures describe him with overtly tantric characteristics. I have already quoted one such text, dating to 1116, which derives from the *Tianxin zhengfa* tradition (see p. 77). Another, dating to 1225, derives from the Rites of Youthful Incipience movement (*tongchu dafa* 童初大法). In the midst of an esoteric ritual the practitioner is instructed to actualize the appearance of Tianpeng, "Actualize the prime marshal's numinous appearance. He is dressed very elegantly in fire-red feathers, deep red garments, cloud-pattern embroidery, and a kilt of cinnabar-red...He is grasping a jade halberd and holding a seal. He has four faces and eight arms."<sup>203</sup> *The Great Rites of Tianpeng for Subduing Demons*, a text that most likely dates to the Song dynasty, relates a slightly different description. It reads, "He has three heads and six hands. He grasps a hatchet, a rope, a bow, an arrow, a sword, and a halberd—these six things. He wears black clothes and a

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<sup>203</sup> *Shangqing tongchu wuyuan sufu yuce zhengfa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 171.22b.

dark hat. He leads a group of three hundred thousand troops.”<sup>204</sup> This text actually describes him in two different places. The other description reads, “He is the first *tanlang* star of the northern dipper. He has four faces and eight arms, and grasps a hatchet, a battle ax, a bow, an arrow, a sword, a halberd, a seal, and a bell. He leads a group of ten thousand troops.”<sup>205</sup> For one final description, *Huntian feizhuo sisheng fumo dafa* relates, “He has three heads and six arms. He wears armor and red robes. His hair resembles rosy clouds.”<sup>206</sup>

Before the Song, each text that mentioned Tianpeng lacked such vivid characterizations. Even the Tang-dynasty *Marvelous Book of Divine Incantations of Tianpeng*, which mentions some of the more common items above, makes no reference to multiple heads and multiple arms (see p. 75). It is not arbitrary that so many tantric descriptions would proliferate at this time, for in the Song dynasty practitioners of the rites of Tianpeng began to use tantric paraphernalia within their rituals.

A text that I have cited several times above, *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* (The Great Rites of Tianpeng for Subduing Demons 上清天蓬伏魔大法), gives us our first indication that the rites of Tianpeng incorporated the use of a tantric *vajra*-bell. Though it lacks a solid date of composition, it most likely derives from the Song dynasty.<sup>207</sup>

Among the first rites of the text, one finds detailed instructions for producing Tianpeng’s

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<sup>204</sup> *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 156.3b.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.5a.

<sup>206</sup> *Huntian feizhuo sisheng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 170.5b.

<sup>207</sup> Its opening chapter makes reference to the founder of the *Tongchu dafa* movement, Yang Xizhen 楊希真 (1100-1124). As such, it was composed no earlier than the early twelfth century (*Daofa huiyuan* 156.14a). The text itself is said to derive from the recorded revelations of one Dong Daxian 董大仙, a perfected master from Sichuan’s *Ximing Shan* 西明山 (*Daofa huiyuan* 156.2b-3a). Dong Daxian is mentioned again in Jin Yunzhong’s 金允中 (fl. 1224-1225) conclusion to *Shangqing Tongchu wuyuan sufu yuce zhengfa* (*Daofa huiyuan* 178.5a-b). Here it is said that his method combines elements of the Tianxin tradition with elements of the rites of Tianpeng—a claim easily confirmed by the content of *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*. Thus the text most likely dates to before the date of Jin Yunzhong’s composition, or 1225.

imperial bell (*dizhong* 帝鐘).<sup>208</sup> The instructions read, “Smelt pure metals from mined ore. Assume [this practice] from the fifth day of the fifth month to the ninth day of the ninth month. Use [the resultant] copper and cast [the bell] with seal script on four sides. When the casting is complete, shudder and shake it nine times.”<sup>209</sup> Adjacent to these instructions one finds an illustration of the bell, where it has been portrayed in the image of a tantric *vajra-ghaṇṭā*—made clear by the prominent three-pronged handle (fig. 15). This illustration is followed by meticulous instructions on how to use the bell for exorcistic purposes. One line relates, “with one sound of its shaking motion, all evils utterly perish.”<sup>210</sup> In addition to shaking the bell, the practitioner is also instructed to inscribe its accompanying talisman (*dizhong fu* 帝鐘符) and recite its accompanying incantation (*dizhong zhou* 帝鐘呪).

The rites of Tianpeng seem to have had more in common with tantric ritual in the Song than they did in the Tang. Seals and spells were obviously still being used, but other tantrically-inspired rituals had gained popularity as well. Another of these rituals was the rite of “summoning for investigation,” or *kaozhao fa* 考召法. Though this ritual was not unfamiliar to Daoists of the Song dynasty, its origins can be traced to the earlier Tantric rites of *āveśa*.<sup>211</sup> Translated as “voluntary spirit possession,” *āveśa* refers to the practice of summoning spirits and causing them to enter the bodies of young children.<sup>212</sup> A look into the similarities between *āveśa* and *kaozhao fa* may help clarify the extent to which the rites of Tianpeng had been influenced by tantric ritual in the Song.

<sup>208</sup> *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 156.20a-b.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.22a.

<sup>211</sup> *Āveśa* was performed in classical-Indian Tantrism as well as Indian Tantric-Buddhism. It was brought to China during the Tang.

<sup>212</sup> See *Ibid.*, 204 and 207-218.

Based on several dozen sources, Edward Davis describes the Daoist ritual of *kaozhao fa* as proceeding in four basic stages. For purposes of clarity I will enumerate them as follows:

- 1) The first stage he calls “The Metamorphosis of the Master.” In this stage the ritual master transforms himself into one of several cosmic powers, most often a divine spirit-general, through a process of visualization.
- 2) The second stage he calls the “Rites of Detection.” In this stage the ritual master will have his subordinate deities force an afflicting demon into some object such as a mirror or basin of water. Afterward, the patient (victim of a demonic illness) is asked to look into the object (we will use the example of a mirror) and describe what he or she sees.
- 3) The third stage he calls the “Rites of Seizure.” In this stage the ritual master will bid his subordinate deities to bring the demon out of the mirror and into the patient. In doing so, the master will spit water on the head of the patient, causing him or her to tremble. This signifies the onset of a trance.
- 4) The final stage he calls “The Possession of the Afflicted or a Surrogate.” In this stage the demon identifies itself through the speech of the patient or a surrogate spirit medium, which is usually a child. This process equates to an interrogation, after which the demon’s fate will be decided.<sup>213</sup>

The following example of a Tantric *āveśa* rite bears great resemblance to the practice of *kaozhao fa* as Davis explains it. It is performed under the auspices of Acala vidyaraaja (Ch. *Budong mingwang* 不動明王), and dates to the late seventh or early eighth century. Please note its resemblance to stages two through four of the *kaozhao fa* sequence above:

In the front of an icon of the Immovable One, cleanse the ground and burn Parthian incense. Then take a mirror, place it over the heart (presumably, the heart of the painted

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<sup>213</sup> See Davis, 97-100 for a detailed explanation of stages 1-4.



image), and continue reciting the spell. Have a young boy or girl look into the mirror. When you ask what they see, the child will immediately tell you all you want to know [stage 2]. You should then summon a dragon-spirit; once you have its name in mind, stand the young boy or girl in the purified place and recite the spell over him or her. The spirit will then enter the child's heart [stage 3], and when the officiant discusses matters pertaining to past, present, or future, all questions will be answered [stage 4].<sup>214</sup>

Another early example of an *āveśa* rite highlights a different aspect of *kaozhao fa*. Note the use of water and the trembling of the child, reminiscent of stage three above:

Next he should burn sandalwood incense and recite Kuan-yin's spirit-spell; he should recite it three times over the flowers and then cast them in the child's face. The child's body will begin to tremble. If you wish it to speak, pronounce another spell [given in the text] over pure water and sprinkle it in its face...If you ask about good or evil things in the past, future, or present it will be able to answer all your questions.<sup>215</sup>

The practice of *kaozhao fa* concerns a large portion of the *Great Rites of Tianpeng for Subduing Demons*. In fact, it is the most commonly mentioned ritual within the text. One might even say that it is the most prominent ritual within this text. At a certain point it relates a scenario that sounds much like the third and fourth stages of the *kaozhao fa* sequence above. In the portion of the rite entitled "the secret art of causing the youth's body to shake and tremble," the practitioner recites this spell:

Cold wind blow blow, shake the youth's body. Send forth freezing water, freeze the youth's body. Holy rain fall everywhere, sprinkle the youth's body. Transform the General's sweet dew, moisten the youth's throat. Cause the youth to shake and tremble, disclose the demon's name.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Passage from *Budong shizhe tuoluoni bimi fa* (T. 1202), as translated in Strickmann, 206-207. The parenthetical remarks are his; the bracketed ones are mine.

<sup>215</sup> Passage from *Bukong juansuo tuoluoni zizaiwang* (T. 1097), as translated in Strickmann, 204-205.

<sup>216</sup> *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 167.1b-2a.

Soon after, he is also instructed to “gather the breath of the northwest and blow on the youth’s body.”<sup>217</sup> I suspect that the term “breath of the northwest” might refer to the practitioner’s own breath blown onto the body of the child, and that the term “holy rain” (*fayu* 法雨, lit. “rain of the law”) might refer to water actually be dispersed onto the body of the child.

Despite the many similarities between *āveśa* and *kaozhao fa*, we must proceed with caution when assessing how direct an influence the one had on the other. By the time of the twelfth century, the practice of summoning for investigation had absorbed influences from sources as varied as Buddhism, Daoism, and traditional Chinese spirit-mediumship. As Davis has explained, there is more continuity in form than in substance.<sup>218</sup> That *āveśa* was an early precursor to Daoist *kaozhao* rites seems fairly certain however—the practice of *kaozhao fa* itself first surfaced in a Buddhist context. A ninth century text presents “*kaozhao*” as a Buddhist rite that entailed the possession of eight young boys and their subsequent interrogations. On this text Michel Strickmann comments, “The *āveśa* rites thus came first in the Tantric practitioner’s repertory when immediate and dramatic proof of supernatural efficacy was required. It is significant that in this text, written in 826, the term used is ‘summoning for interrogation’ (*kaozhao*), for this is the most common name for the ritual in the context of Taoism.”<sup>219</sup>

Thus, Tianpeng’s iconography in the *Daozi mobao* and his numerous descriptions in the texts mentioned above date to the same era as his association with tantric *vajra*-bells and tantrically-inspired *kaozhao* rites. It would seem that there was much room for iconographic exchange in the Song dynasty. In fact, Edward Davis has shown that

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 167.2b.

<sup>218</sup> Davis, 125.

<sup>219</sup> Strickmann (2002), 274-275.

popular exorcists of the Song sometimes practiced the rites of both Buddhist and Daoist deities at the same time. An example of particular interest to our discussion is the Buddhist Rites of the Three Altars (*santan fa* 三壇法). Stories from the *Yijian zhi* show that practitioners of this tradition performed a type of *kaozhao fa* practiced by devotees of Tianpeng.<sup>220</sup> Called the rites of Investigation by Illumination (*kaozhao fa* 考照法), it subsumes a major portion of the *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*.<sup>221</sup> Another significant example of Buddho-Daoist interplay may be seen in the rites of the Tantric god Ucchusma. Among his devotees one finds both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners—among his rites, Buddhist and Daoist style-exorcisms.<sup>222</sup> The texts dedicated to this deity, moreover, exhibit a number of Daoist-inspired talismans and seals.<sup>223</sup> In the next chapter we will also see that the Four Saints shared a space with Ucchusma in the context of Buddhist mortuary ritual. My point is not to emphasize a relationship between Tianpeng and Ucchusma specifically, rather to demonstrate the association Tianpeng may have had with any number of Tantric deities like him. An observation of Paul Katz about the Daoist deity Marshal Wen and the Tantric deity Ātavaka proves relevant here, “I can only hypothesize that Marshal Wen’s similarities to Ātavaka may represent one form of Tantric Buddhism’s influence on Taoism (and local cults) described by scholars such as Michel Strickmann and Rolf Stein.”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> See particularly, *Yijian zhi* 1396-1397—translated in Davis, 115-117.

<sup>221</sup> Davis, 100-101. See *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 166.1b-2a, 16a. Here the differences between the Rites of Summoning for Investigation and the Rites of Investigation by Illumination are elaborated.

<sup>222</sup> See Davis, 141-143 and 151.

<sup>223</sup> See, for example, *Huiji jingang jin baibian fa jing* (T. 1229), 21.160a-161a.

<sup>224</sup> Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 80.

## Chapter 5

### Popular Religion and the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land

As we have seen from the previous chapter, religious practices were becoming increasingly eclectic during the Song dynasty. Buddhist and Daoist texts contained similar vocabularies and spell patterns; their rites contained similar rituals and ritual implements. This is due, in part, to an increasing abundance of lay practitioners. Whereas Buddhist monks and Daoist priests strictly performed Buddhist or Daoist rites, lay practitioners often mixed elements of both religions. What emerged was a popular pantheon far more syncretic than in past generations. It was a pantheon perfectly suited to the ecumenical practices of the people.

In this eclectic ritual environment the Retreat of Water and Land (*Shuilu zhai* 水陸齋) became popular and thrived. The Retreat of Water and Land is a Buddhist mortuary ritual for the release of souls from purgatory. It is a rite of salvation on par with the Daoist Retreat of the Yellow Register (*huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋), with which it shares many features. The scrolls hung in its altar are painted with gods from Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and the popular religion. Among those represented are the Four Saints. Within this chapter we will look into the circumstances surrounding the Four Saints' induction into this most diverse of Buddhist rites. We will see that an increasing prevalence of lay practitioners sparked new competition between Buddhists and Daoists in the fields of therapeutic and mortuary rites. As consumers became increasingly eclectic in their ritual needs, Buddhists diversified the *Shuilu* pantheon to reflect their tastes.

*The Syncretic Pantheons of Exorcistic and Funerary Ritual*

In the Song dynasty, people increasingly turned to lay practitioners for the performance of ritual. As a result, Buddhist and Daoist practices seamlessly flourished among the laity. Stories from Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi* routinely document the syncretic practices of ritual consumers. Very often they exhausted the therapeutic services of spirit mediums, Daoist masters, and Buddhist acolytes, before finding a cure for their ailments. Many times the practitioners they hired had little or no affiliation with official religious institutions. The same scenario applies to the practice of mortuary ritual in the Song. A range of practitioners, from geomancers to officiants at Buddhist and Daoist death rites, performed without any official qualifications. Such pluralism in the ritual market eventually resulted in the convergence of Buddhist and Daoist pantheons within therapeutic and mortuary rites.

Therapeutic rituals were often performed by lay practitioners unaffiliated with official religious institutions. These practitioners often held government positions and performed exorcisms on the side. Recall from the Introduction, the exorcist Song Anguo (p. 6-7). In one story from the *Yijian zhi* he is described as the administrator of Zhuhu province; in another, a magician.<sup>225</sup> Sun Gu, also mentioned in the Introduction (pp. 9-10), typifies this category of bureaucrat-exorcist. In that story, he performed the Rites of Tianxin while on duty as the "Official of Ministry."<sup>226</sup> These two figures were not ordained monks or priests; they were laymen who completed a period of ritual training, and who occasionally returned to the cloister for purification and preparation. The story of Zhao Ziju may help clarify the process by which a layman becomes an exorcist. After

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<sup>225</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 568 and 691 respectively.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 419-420.

suffering from extreme depression following the loss of his wife, he took up with a mendicant to learn the Rites of Tianxin:

A man of the way (*daoren* 道人) passed by the door on his way to beg for food. He happened to see him [Zhao Ziju] and sighed, “Dear Sir, you are willingly taking up with ghosts, and not fulfilling your life’s potential! I can perform the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven. I will now take it upon myself to impart them to you. If you exert yourself to this end, the ghosts will not assail you. They will withdraw on their own.” Ziju was awakened afresh. He immediately bowed twice and accepted his transmission. He painted a portrait of the six *jia* 甲 and the six *ding* 丁, and fastidiously abstained and made offerings.<sup>227</sup>

Though the happenstance initiation proposed in this passage may not reflect actual practice, the story certainly betrays a tradition other than that of an official religious institution. Throughout the *Yijian zhi*, Hong Mai consistently identifies the affiliation of religious professionals and their temples. The wandering ascetic in this case bears no title at all; he is ambiguously referred to as a “man of the way” (*daoren* 道人). If it were not for the fact that he practiced the Rites of Tianxin, even his basic religious affiliation would be called into question. This story, along with many others in the *Yijian zhi*, implies a growing presence of lay ritualists in the Song. Though most of the examples given here have been of lay Daoist practitioners, there were certainly Buddhist ones as well. In some cases, even the labels “Buddhist” and “Daoist” are difficult to apply.

In the last chapter, we were introduced to a ritual tradition called the Rites of the Three Altars (p. 93). There we noted that adherents of this tradition sometimes practiced a form of *kaozhao fa* utilized practitioners of the rites of Tianpeng. Besides appropriating

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 235-236.

this ritual, practitioners of this Buddhist tradition began to display other behaviors typical of Daoist priests as well. One story from the *Yijian zhi* introduces a man named Ritual Master Peng (*Peng fashi* 彭法師), who was versed in the “Orthodox Rites of the Three Altars.” In the course of treating a demoniac, it is said that he “inscribed talismans, spit water, paced the stars of the dipper, and recited incantations.”<sup>228</sup> This elaboration recalls the basic repertoire of a Daoist priest. Here again, however, it seems that Ritual Master Peng bears no affiliation with a specific religious institution. He is a professional exorcist “versed in” (*jing xi* 精習) performing nominally Buddhist rites, in the fashion of a Daoist priest.<sup>229</sup>

More blatantly syncretic practices existed in the Song dynasty as well. It seems that Zhenwu himself was once at the center of a Buddho-Daoist practice of exorcism. In this passage, Hong Mai relates the customs of his younger brother:

In my village there are many mediums (*liwu*). Reciting spells, they can enter boiling water and fire (*dao tanghuo*). Yuanzhong, my younger brother, received their instructions (*jue*). He cures illness for people without any mistakes. The spell (*zhou*) he employs goes as follows: “Nāgārjuna (Longshu wang) authorized me to practice and maintain ‘the Great Method for Exorcizing Fire of Beifang Rengui’ (*Beifang Rengui jinhuo dafa*). Nāgārjuna, I am Beifang Rengui! With water I execute all the fire stars under Heaven! The fire stars within a thousand miles must surrender! Hastily, do as the law decrees!” When the spell is finished, he grasps in his hand the Seal of Zhenwu

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 814-815.

<sup>229</sup> Further complicating this scenario, a text entitled *The Great Rites of the Four Saints for Subduing Demons* (probably dating to the Song dynasty) uses the epithet “the heavenly constellation of the three altars” (*santan tiangang* 三壇天罡) to refer to a method of *bugang*. It is performed in conjunction with the establishment of altars graded into three levels, and its goal is to summon a plethora of exorcistic deities to fly and seize (*feizhuo* 飛捉) demons. It bears at least a superficial connection to the practice of *kaozhao fa* in that it introduces the Four Saints as deities who “summon and investigate all demons and devils.” See *Huntian feizhuo Sisheng fumo dafa* in *Daofa huiyuan* 169.1a-24b; esp. 169.1a.

(*Zhenwu yin*) and blows on it. He uses a little water to wash them. All those with blisters on their hands and feet can be cured.<sup>230</sup>

There is no better example of syncretism among lay exorcists of the Song dynasty.

Edward Davis rightly demonstrates that “Befang Rengui” mentioned above is none other than Zhenwu himself.<sup>231</sup> I would like to place a particular emphasis on the syncretic pantheon demonstrated in this passage. It shows that members of the Four Saints shared more than just iconographic traits with Buddhist deities; they sometimes also shared devotees.

Mortuary practice also had its share of lay ritualists in the Song. Fueled by the ideology of purgatory and the obligations of the living to take care of their deceased, the funerary market burgeoned at this time. Recall from the Introduction the “white clothes associations” from Poyang (p. 11). They performed weddings and funerals, chanted sūtras in Sanskrit, and played ritual music. Their popularity stemmed from their ability to perform rituals exactly like Buddhists, but for little or no cost. Lay associations are also credited with establishing so-called “grave cloisters.”<sup>232</sup> Usually constructed on behalf of a deceased family member, they housed religious professionals who performed various merit-accruing rites. They were undoubtedly modeled on Buddhist practice, as their goal was to ensure the deceased a better rebirth. Though geomancers usually perform a very specific function within the mortuary sphere, choosing the burial site and time, they too sometimes exceeded this solitary end. Occasionally they recited incantations, prepared

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<sup>230</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 996—as translated in Davis, 149.

<sup>231</sup> Davis, 149-150.

<sup>232</sup> Barend J. ter Harr, “Buddhist-Inspired Options: Aspects of Lay Religious Life in the Lower Yangzi from 1100 until 1340,” in *T'oung Pao* 87 (2001): 92-152; esp. 118-119. See also B.J. ter Harr, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 42, 57, 81.



mock deeds, sacrificed to the gods, and arranged facets of the subsequent procession.<sup>233</sup> Geomantic manuals, furthermore, advised against hiring Buddhist monks to these ends; they probably viewed them as unwanted competition.<sup>234</sup> Reacting to droves of lay functionaries in the Song, Buddhist monks themselves performed death rituals outside of monastery walls.<sup>235</sup> The authenticity of these monks, however, was occasionally called into question. One observer noted peculiarity in some of their chants, “During their recitations, they sometimes repeat a few phrases over and over, using the Sanskrit as though it was a song tune.”<sup>236</sup>

By the time of the thirteenth century the popularity of one death ritual in particular, the *Shuilu zhai*, had grown to momentous proportions. A reflection of filial piety, sponsoring a *Shuilu* for deceased family members became a virtual obligation.<sup>237</sup> The rite was practiced so often, and in so many locations, that there was great fluctuation in its style and quality.<sup>238</sup> One Buddhist in particular voiced criticism over its practice in the states of Wu and Yue (*wuyue* 吳越). Tiantai master Zunshi (964-1032) noted that the monasteries of this area often had separate halls attached to them, wherein “vulgar” (*fan* 凡) rites of food distribution (*shishi* 施食) took place under the heading of *shuilu*.<sup>239</sup> Other monks of the Song dynasty voiced criticism over the popularity of this rite as well. Daniel Stevenson paraphrases their concern, “The *shuilu* is *too* popular, to the point where the universality of its appeal threatens to render invisible the very boundaries that

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<sup>233</sup> Ebrey, “The Response of the Sung State,” 215.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>235</sup> For references to the residential performance of a *Shuilu zhai* see *Yijian zhi*, 1259 and 1464.

<sup>236</sup> *Chuijian lu*, 4.125—as translated in Ebrey, “The Response of the Sung State,” 214.

<sup>237</sup> See Stevenson, 30.

<sup>238</sup> See *Yijian zhi*, 17-18, 120-121, 422-423, 456, 457, 461, 465, 497, 1602, and 1742.

<sup>239</sup> *Shishi tonglan* 101.427b.

make Buddhism distinct.”<sup>240</sup> No where else is this fact as evident as it is in the contents of the *shuilu* pantheon.

The earliest known manual of a *Shuilu* rite was written circa 1071, by a layman named Yang E 楊鏗 (*jinshi* degree 1034). Titled *Shuilu yiwen* 水陸儀文, it was based on the liturgical traditions of Yang E’s native Sichuan.<sup>241</sup> A later emendation of this text became “the most widely consulted *shuilu* manual of the Song and Yuan periods.”<sup>242</sup> No Daoist deities were included within the *shuilu* altar. Another popular *shuilu* manual was written circa 1260, by the Tiantai master Zhipan 志盤 (ca. 1220-1275). Titled *Shuilu yigui* 水陸儀軌<sup>243</sup>, it is the most popular *shuilu* text in China today. It includes numerous Daoist deities within the *shuilu* altar. Though the Buddhist reformer Zhuhong 祿宏 (1535-1615) emended this text at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, its pantheon clearly derives from the Song dynasty.<sup>244</sup>

The eclectic pantheon of the *Shuilu yigui* reflects the ecumenical beliefs of Song dynasty ritual consumers. Unfortunately, a complete survey of this pantheon is beyond the scope of this study. Here I only want to emphasize the Daoist gods included in the rite. Among these gods one finds the Solar Emperor, the Lunar Emperor, the Northern Extremity, the Southern Extremity, the Seven Primordials of the Northern Dipper, the Six

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<sup>240</sup> Stevenson, 32.

<sup>241</sup> Excerpts of this manual are preserved in a thirteenth-century encyclopedia on “food distribution” rituals called *Shishi tonglan*. See *Wanzi xu zangjing*, Dai Nippon zokuzōkyō, 150 cases (Reprint, Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1968-1970), 101.

<sup>242</sup> Stevenson, 35.

<sup>243</sup> The full title is *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui* 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌. It may be found in *Wanzi xu zangjing* 129.527-604.

<sup>244</sup> The roster of Daoist deities greatly reflects the liturgical pantheon of the thirteenth century. See Huang, 207-212. Daoist gods have been included in some forms of the *shuilu* since as early as 1106, when emperor Huizong demanded that the Three Pure Ones (the highest gods of Daoism) be included in the rite.

Administrators of the Southern Dipper, the Nine Planetoids (*jiuyao* 九曜)<sup>245</sup>, the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions, Tai Sui, the Heavenly Officers (*tiancao* 天曹), Zhang Daoling (*Han tianshi* 漢天師), the Three Officials (of Heaven, Earth, and Water), the Emperors of the Five Peaks, the Kings of the Four Seas, the Four Confluences, the Duke of Thunder, the Mother of Lightning, the Rain Master, the Earl of Winds<sup>246</sup>, and the Four Saints, just to name a few.<sup>247</sup>

The arrangement of these gods within the altar provides valuable information regarding their purpose in ritual. The altar of the *shuilu zhai* is divided into two sections, the upper altar (*shangtan* 上壇) and the lower altar (*xiatan* 下壇). The terms “upper” and “lower” signify value judgments more so than they do spatial relations. While it is true that these sections constitute separate areas with separate ritual protocols, they also serve to divide the “saintly group” (*shengzhong* 聖眾) from the “vulgar group” (*fanzhong* 凡眾). All of the aforementioned gods were relegated to the lower altar, and were thus considered vulgar beings, in need of karmic merit. Thus, the inclusion of Daoist deities within the *shuilu* altar accomplished two ends. It assimilated the visage of popular Daoist rituals (such as retreats [*zhai* 齋] and offerings [*jiao* 醮]), and it asserted the superiority of Buddhist gods over those of the liturgical Daoist pantheon.

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<sup>245</sup> This term could refer to the nine-starred dipper or the nine planets of Indian Astrology. I suspect, however, that it may also be related to the “six planetoids” (*liuyao* 六曜) of the Lingbao pantheon, to which all of the other deities also belong.

<sup>246</sup> With regard to the last four gods, the text reads “*Lei ting feng yu* 雷霆風雨.” “*Leiting* 雷霆” could also refer to the Lord of the Thunderclap, Xin Tianjun 辛天君. Within this context, however, it seems that the character “*ting* 霆” should have been inscribed as “*dian* 電,” which would indicate the Mother of Lightning, who is usually represented along with the other three gods mentioned.

<sup>247</sup> *Wanzi xu zangjing* 129.560a-b.

### *Modes of Induction*

How are we to account for the inclusion of Daoist gods in the pantheon of the *shuilu zhai*? Under what circumstances were they actually inducted into the representation of the altar? Daniel Stevenson has argued that the Daoist gods of the *shuilu* pantheon signify a representation of the cosmos heavily patronized by the imperial court. While he is correct in his assessment, this fact alone cannot account their assimilation into the ritual space. Other indications within the *shuilu* pantheon suggest a more homegrown influence. By the thirteenth century, it encompassed imperial deities as well as popular ones. Collectively, their presence within the *shuilu* pantheon is better accounted for by influences from the sphere of popular religion.

In a recent outstanding article, Daniel Stevenson explains how the protocols for the performance of the *shuilu zhai* were continually reworked at the discretion of various ritual traditions.<sup>248</sup> He has succeeded, in the span of a relatively short article, in providing a near-comprehensive introduction to *shuilu* text, image, and performance. In the course of this work he analyzes the pantheons of various textual and iconographic traditions, and suggests (however subtly) a mode for understanding how they assumed the contents they exhibited in the Ming dynasty. During the Song and Yuan periods, the most elaborate performances of the *shuilu zhai* were attributed to a tradition based at Jinshan Monastery (Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province). This tradition was later criticized by the Buddhist reformer Yunqi Zhuhong (editor of Zhipan's *Shuilu yigui*) for excessively appealing to elite and imperial audiences. Nonetheless, during the Ming dynasty, lavishly outfitted performances continued to proliferate. Stevenson locates the

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<sup>248</sup> The title of this article is "Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for the Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land." See note 25 for a citation.

scrolls of the Baoning Monastery within this context. Concerning the pantheon of these scrolls and a Korean *shuilu* manual, he writes:

We cannot be sure how closely the Korean *Ch' nji my ngyang suryuk chae' i* manuals reflect developments associated with court-sponsored traditions of the Yuan and Ming. However, they and the Baoning Monastery scrolls give striking prominence to deities and structures of the indigenous Chinese celestial and terrestrial bureaucracies, not to mention members of the royal family and exemplary figures from the official history of Chinese dynastic succession. Given the *shuilu* rite's long-standing mythical and rhetorical connection to the "unrestricted or unimpeded assemblies" of the Buddhist rulers Asoka and emperor Wu, it is not difficult to envision how the rite might be enlisted as a vehicle of imperial ideology.<sup>249</sup>

Stevenson elaborates on the imperial significance of the pantheon elsewhere in the article, and makes a convincing case for such an influence. It is a sustainable argument to be sure, however, the inclusion of the "Chinese celestial and terrestrial bureaucracies" within this narrative seems unnecessary. The presence of "royal families" and "exemplary figures" supports his point, but I suspect that the other gods derive from a separate source. Elsewhere he enumerates the gods so mentioned:

The Baoning Monastery scrolls and Chiwon's *Ch' nji my ngyang suryuk chae' i pom' m ch'aek chip* are even more densely packed with minions of the celestial and terrestrial bureaucracies, their middle ranks swelled by the likes of the Jade Emperor; the gods of wind, rain, thunder, lightning, sprouts, and growth; the God of the Five Roads; gods of the sun and moon; the Realized Lord of the Northern Dipper; and a plethora of lesser deities of the celestial realms, terrestrial realms, and underworld, variously headed by the three bodhisattvas heavenly Store Bodhisattva (Tianzang pusa), Bodhisattva Sustainer of the Earth (Chidi pusa), and Bodhisattva Earth Store (Dizang pusa); ancient

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<sup>249</sup> Stevenson, 46-47.

sage kings and cultural heroes; exemplary officials; and paragons of chastity and filial piety. It is a pantheon perfectly suited to a tradition of ritual performance heavily patronized by the imperial court.<sup>250</sup>

His assumption is not off the point, but barring the last three categories (as separated by semicolons) there is no clear reason to attribute the inclusion of these figures to the influence of imperial patronage. In fact many of these deities first appear in the *Shuilu yigui*, mentioned above (p. 100), along with a number of popular gods that bear no relation to the imperial pantheon whatsoever, such as the Ten Kings of Hell. I would like to suggest that in parsing the history of the *shuilu* pantheon, we remain open to the prospect that it may have absorbed influences from the realm of popular religious practice. We may gain insight into this problem by viewing it within the long-standing tradition of ritual competition between Buddhists and Daoists—specifically, in the field of mortuary ritual.

By the thirteenth century, the two most popular and renowned forms of mortuary ritual, the Buddhist *Shuilu* and Daoist *Huanglu zhai*, had entered an advanced stage of convergence.<sup>251</sup> They corresponded in their intent to save souls from purgatory, and they shared a similar ritual sequence. Each performance entailed an elaborate process whereby the officiant would descend into the underworld and release souls from confines known as earth prisons (*diyu* 地獄). After their release the souls would be invited to bathe, eat, and hear readings of scripture. In the end, the souls would be assisted in their transition to a Heavenly realm. Whence these practices originate is up for debate. The feeding of souls certainly recalls the Buddhist practice of “distributing food” (*shishi* 施

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>251</sup> On this point see Davis, 172-173, 227-241, 298 n. 3. See also Huang, 184-197.

食), made popular by the circulation of the Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī for Saving the Flaming-Mouth Hungry Ghosts. Of course, indigenous Chinese mortuary practice had established a similar procedure before the introduction of this scripture. Others have pointed to the bathing sequences as a sign of Buddhist influence.<sup>252</sup> Given Daoism's postponed significance in the mortuary sphere, it would seem that this argument has merit. Lu You suggested that Daoist mortuary rites were invented to compete with Buddhists in making money.<sup>253</sup> Regardless of who can lay claim to this legacy, one fact is clear. The pantheon of the *Shuilu zhai* reproduces a large portion of the deities utilized in the *Huanglu zhai*, and places them in the inferior space of the lower altar. While details remain admittedly oblique regarding the inclusion of Daoist gods within the *Shuilu* pantheon, placing the development of this ritual within the context of Song-dynasty popular religion may prove beneficial. A growing ritual market caused increased competition between Buddhist and Daoist practitioners at that time.

#### *Ritual Competition in the Sphere of Popular Religion*

Despite the immense popularity of the *huanglu* and *shuilu zhai*, their expense kept them out of reach for many mourning families. These lavish rites represent the legacy of a medieval system of ritual economics, whereby the merit achieved for the soul in underworld was in direct proportion to the money paid by the family above ground. In the Song dynasty, new forms of mortuary practice began to displace this system. Low-cost alternatives to Buddhist rites gave consumers more choices and flexibility in helping their loved ones traverse the underworld. Lay practitioners flourished and non-

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<sup>252</sup> See Davis, 298 n. 3.

<sup>253</sup> See Ebrey, "The Response of the Sung State," 232 n. 18.

institutional rites, such as burning spirit money, gained widespread acceptance. As a result, Buddhist and Daoist practitioners experienced greater competition.

Stephen Teiser precisely characterizes the funerary rites of medieval China:

The medieval circuit of exchange between descendants and ancestors depended on the involvement of the Buddhist church (and, to a lesser extent, the Taoist church) as mediator. Rather than sending goods directly to the ancestors to assist them in the afterlife, offerings were made directly to the Buddhist sangha, an action that multiplied many times the blessings that then accrued to the ancestors.<sup>254</sup>

Offerings to the sangha took the form of donations for ritual performance and scripture recitation. Very often the sponsor of these services did not participate in the actual event.<sup>255</sup> The imbursements they rendered signified enough their goodwill toward the sangha, and accordingly, they accrued karmic merit that could be dispersed among the living or the dead. With reference to mortuary ritual, such offerings generally took place every seven days for the first forty-nine days after someone's passing, and then three more times on the hundredth day, the first year, and the third year. They would be accompanied by feasts in which the deceased's family would offer them nourishment for their stint in the underworld. Very often the cost of these services exceeded the patron's means.

The *shuilu* and *huanglu zhai* were among the most expensive of mortuary rites. Stories from the *Yijian zhi* demonstrate that people went to great lengths to attain the merit of these services. For example, the ghost of Wu Wang once asked Chen Zu'an to sponsor a *shuilu* ceremony on his behalf:

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<sup>254</sup> Teiser (1993), 119.

<sup>255</sup> See Miriam Levering, "Ta-hui and Lay Buddhists: Ch'an sermons on Death," in David W. Chappell ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society: Buddhist and Taoist Studies II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 182.



“Bestow a favor on me sir. I beg you [to set up] a *Shuilu*, an assembly whereby you pay money to attain life.” Chen said, “This is an extravagant affair. I am too poor to manage it.” Wu Wang responded, “Then merely say my name among the people at the Water and Land Assembly. Have someone go to the front of the stone pagoda and secretly call out “Wu Wang,” so that the official of the Earth-prison knows of it. I will then receive merit and attain rebirth.”<sup>256</sup>

This method of participation was not an uncommon occurrence. The Song-dynasty Chan master Zongze once observed, “Hence people with wealth and means will sponsor the rite on their own, while the impoverished will pool their resources and sponsor it collectively. [Tales of] miraculous response connected with these performances are too numerous to relate.”<sup>257</sup> The *Yijian zhi* relates a similar story with respect to Daoist rites. Zhong Demao, a man of Leping, allowed strangers to participate in his “Nine Obscurities Offering” (*jiuyou jiao* 九幽醮) for the salvation of their own deceased family members.<sup>258</sup> Another story records that as many as one thousand people pooled together 1200 dollars to sponsor a *huanglu zhai* in Raozhou.<sup>259</sup> While all of these accounts testify to the expense of such rites in the Song, they also demonstrate the resourcefulness with which people lowered the cost of services. Many times they opted to forgo these rites altogether and instead to employ a new means of transferring merit.

The use of paper money as an otherworldly currency had gained widespread acceptance by the twelfth century. It had, however, already been used for burial as early as the Later Han dynasty (25-220CE).<sup>260</sup> Teiser attributes the resurgence of this practice

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<sup>256</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 465-466.

<sup>257</sup> As translated in Stevenson, 30.

<sup>258</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 1422.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 1319.

<sup>260</sup> Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 203.

in the Song to the emergence of a “new morality” wherein the economic structures of religion and society coincided and fostered an optimistic outlook on the repayment of debt. Loans were given above ground by banks, and below by the Earth Treasury. Every human’s karmic debt was repayable though burning spirit money which had been guaranteed by the officials that presided over the underworld—the Ten Kings of Hell. Presumably this more direct method of merit transfer was cheaper than the institutional services of Buddhist and Daoist priests.<sup>261</sup>

The practice of burning spirit money represents one of many low-cost alternatives to purchasing institutional Buddhist and Daoist rites. The examples above show that people could pool their money to sponsor a ritual, or simply participate without paying. We have seen numerous times that lay practitioners provided economical choices as well. Altogether, people in the Song exhibited greater autonomy in their choices of rituals and ritual practitioners. In order to compete in the marketplace, ritual practitioners had to advertise themselves and widen their range of services.

By the twelfth century the rationale for performing Buddhist and Daoist death rituals, much like that for burning spirit money, was fully affixed to the conception of purgatory as a gruesome tribunal before ten judges. One could post bail with banknotes or enlist a priest to break them out of prison. The story of Wei Liangchen demonstrates that Buddhist and Daoist methods were equally popular in this regard.<sup>262</sup> After his wife died he set up a *huanglu zhai* on her behalf. His twelve-year old son, serving as a spirit-medium, was visited with a vision of the underworld. A divine spirit-general informed him of the correct procedures for executing not only the *huanglu zhai*, but the *shuilu zhai*

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<sup>261</sup> Teiser, 133-135.

<sup>262</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 448-451.

as well. He explained that often when people set up a *shuilu* ritual they do not announce the name of the deceased. The result is an abundance of unknown prisoners wallowing in purgatory.

Stories from the *Yijian zhi* demonstrate that practitioners of Buddhist and Daoist death rituals were often in fierce competition with one another. In the following story one such practitioner styled his own brand name, and vehemently advertised his services:

Chang Luohan, a monk from Jiazhou, was a strange person. He liked to encourage people to set up the “Luohan” feast-assembly (*luohan zhathui* 羅漢齋會). Over time it acquired this name. Old lady Yang was addicted to eating chickens. The amount that she killed in her lifetime adds up to I don’t know how many hundred thousands. Now she died, and her family was doing the feast of the sixth seven. They had prepared a Yellow Register Retreat (*huanglu zhai*). Just as the Daoist priest offered the document, the monk [Chang Luohan] suddenly arrived and called out to her son. He said, “I can perform the repentance for you!” The Yang family was very happy. They prepared a seat and invited him to do so.<sup>263</sup>

This story is telling in many ways. First, it shows that competition between the practitioners of death rituals sometimes approached outrageous limits. Chang Luohan, well known for his persuasive tactics, had no qualms about advertising himself in the middle of a Daoist funerary service. Second, it shows that the jobs of ordained priests were at risk of being outsourced to less qualified individuals. As the story proceeds, we find that Chang Luohan 常羅漢 is in fact not a monk at all. Rather he is a self-styled monk who, as his name suggests, unabashedly plays up his qualifications (as *luohan* means arhat, he has essentially called himself “Chang the Enlightened One”).

Sometimes the preference of Buddhist or Daoist services was voiced by a ghost,

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<sup>263</sup> *Yijian zhi*, 385-386.

through the mouth of a spirit medium. In order to expedite the rebirth of a ghost who had been afflicting illness among the living, one man asked what type of death ritual the ghost preferred:

Xing asked what he wanted them to do, turn the wheel of scripture (*zhuan lunzang* 轉輪藏, i.e., recite Buddhist texts) or offer gold and silver paper money to him. He did not allow either. He said, “These have no benefit. I want you to invite a Daoist priest [to submit] many divine documents of transmigration. I also want you to burn black paper money for me. Then I will [be able to] leave. Xing did as he requested. Right after this, the girl they hired [the spirit medium] lay down and did not talk. [The patient’s] ailment improved three days later.

As this passage demonstrates, spirit mediums sometimes recommended Daoist services over Buddhist ones, and vice versa. It is interesting that in this case the death services provided functioned as an exorcism. Usually intended for the passage of death, these rites were now utilized for the appeasement of restless souls.

Given the usefulness of death rituals to exorcistic endeavors, many exorcists not accustomed to providing mortuary services added them to their repertoires. In the Introduction we were introduced to a practitioner of the Orthodox Rites of the Heart of Heaven named Song Anguo (pp. 6-7). In that story he eradicated a tree demon by calling upon the power of thunder. His reputation as an exorcist was well known. In another story, we find that has widened his services to include death rituals. After his normal methods proved inadequate, he decided to perform a *huanglu zhai* in order to exorcise an onslaught of malicious ghosts:

Song had already exerted his powers to exhaustion, and he was fatigued. He told the Xing family, “This area was the site of a revolt by prisoners of war. The number of people who have been killed is incalculable. Today I cannot overcome them. Instead

you will need to establish a Great Offering of the Yellow Register (*huanglu jiao*). I will preside over it.<sup>264</sup>

Other stories from the *Yijian zhi* attest to the use of both Buddhist and Daoist death rituals for exorcistic purposes. In one story a woman was reunited with her husband, whom she had assumed drowned at sea. Upon seeing him she admitted that she had been in mourning for some time, divined a burial spot, and interred a symbolic coffin. Then she offered to arrange a Water and Land ceremony (*shuilu*) or an “enclosure of the Dao” (*daochang* 道場) to expedite the passing of his soul.<sup>265</sup> Another story tells of a man who was afflicted by illness-causing ghosts. In order to encourage their crossing he offered to set up both a Daoist offering (*jiao* 醮) and a Buddhist *shuilu zhai*.<sup>266</sup>

The circumstances outlined in this chapter were ultimately responsible for the Four Saints’ inclusion among the surviving scrolls of the *shuilu zhai*. Though it would be easy to assume that their Buddhist façade (i.e., Tianpeng and Tianyou) was responsible for their induction into the *shuilu* pantheon, this is surely not the case. The Four Saints were included in the *shuilu zhai* by virtue of their role in Daoist liturgy, as part of a larger group of Daoist gods. Almost every god mentioned from the *Shuilu yigui*<sup>267</sup> above (pp. 100-101) belongs to the Lingbao liturgical pantheon. Some of them are so particular to Daoist liturgy, in fact, that they bore no popularity outside of this context (e.g., the Heavenly Officers, *tiancao* 天曹). For this reason, it seems that Buddhists deliberately assimilated these gods in order to diversify the *shuilu* pantheon.

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 1710-1711.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 1741-1742.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 1601-1602.

<sup>267</sup> The full title is *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiuzhai yigui*. It may be found in *Wanzi xu zangjing* 129.527-604.

The pantheon of the *shuilu zhai* reflects a conception of the cosmos held by most people in the Song dynasty. In an increasingly competitive ritual market, that saw a rise in lay practitioners and eclectic practices, Buddhists needed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. By diversifying the *shuilu* pantheon to include Daoist deities, popular gods, and Confucian heroes, they sought to accomplish this task. The Four Saints, as part of a larger group of Daoist deities, were included in the rite as a corollary to these endeavors.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an introduction to the Four Saints by locating them within the broader historical context in which they were worshipped and utilized. In doing so, a couple of important themes emerged. First, we have seen that each of them underwent an individual transformation in response to environmental influences. Second, we have seen how these influences dictated the appearance and survival of their iconography. In both text and image, they wholly document the eclecticism of popular religion in the Song.

Each of the Four Saints underwent a drastic transformation over the course of their veneration. Yisheng, originally a god of occult practitioners, became the protector of the Song dynasty. Over the course of his makeover, he took on a new name and a courtly persona. Zhenwu, originally an asterism in the northern sky, became anthropomorphized and crowned as emperor. The imperial patronage given to him by the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties is no doubt responsible for his enduring significance even today. Tianpeng, who originated in a Daoist incantation, took on a Buddhist appearance after he became popular among eclectic exorcists of the Song dynasty. This striking appearance, showing multiple arms and multiple heads, recalls that of the wrathful deities most often utilized in Buddhist forms of exorcism. Finally, Tianyou, who also originates in the aforementioned incantation, became tantricized along with Tianpeng.

The transformations endured by each of the Four Saints reflect the changing landscape of religion in the Song period. The stories of Zhenwu and Yisheng show that popular deities gained a new-found importance within Daoism and the religion of the

imperial court. Their acceptance into the state pantheon signifies the growing influence of popular religion, and underscores the extent to which officials utilized religion as a means of political legitimation. The stories of Tianpeng and Tianyou show that interaction between Buddhist and Daoists exorcists continued to flourish in the Song. Buddhist elements in their iconography show that, despite a decline in institutional Tantric-Buddhism, Tantric rituals survived among circles of popular exorcists. The Four Saints' collective presence within the paintings of the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land, furthermore, demonstrates the unlikely role of Daoist gods in Buddhist liturgy.

The iconography of the Four Saints exhibits two kinds of Buddhist influence. First, with regard to the appearance of Tianpeng and Tianyou, it shows elements of Tantric Buddhist iconography. Second, with regard to its preservation among the scrolls of the *shuilu zhai*, it indicates their inclusion in Buddhist mortuary ritual. Bearing more than just artifactual significance, it actually documents innovations of Daoist and Buddhist ritual in the Song. From its composition to its preservation, it provides useful information about how the Four Saints evolved within the eclectic atmosphere of Song religion.





Figure 1. *The Four Saints*. From Wu Liangcheng ed., *Baoning si Mingdai shuilu hua* (Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 1985), pl. 78.



Figure 2. *Zhenwu and Tianpeng or Tianyou*. From Chen Yaolin and Wang Haihang ed., *Pilu si bihua* (Shijia zhuang: Hebei meishu chuban she, 1984), pl. 37.





Figure 3. *Yisheng and Tianpeng or Tianyou*. From Chen Yaolin and Wang Haihang ed., *Pilu si bihua* (Shijia zhuang: Hebei meishu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 74.



Figure 4. *Tianpeng and Yisheng*. From Jin Weinuo, *Yongle gong bihua quanji* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 1997), pl. 107.





Figure 5. *Zhenwu and Tianyou*. Jin Weinuo, *Yongle gong bihua quanji* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 1997), pl. 138.





Figure 6. *Zhenwu and Tianpeng*. From William Charles White, *Chinese Temple Frescoes: A study of Three Wall-paintings of the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940), fig. 49.





Figure 7. *Yisheng and Tianyou*. From William Charles White, *Chinese Temple Frescoes: A study of Three Wall-paintings of the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940), fig. 65.



Figure 8. *The Four Saints*. Liao Jingwen and Xu Qingping, *Xu Beihong zanghua xuanji: Selections from Xu Beihong's Collection of Paintings* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chuban she, 1991), pl. 57.





Figure 9. *The Four Saints*. From Fredrick Robert Martin, *Zeichnungen nach Wu tao-tze aus der gotter- und sagenwelt Chinas* (Munich: F. Bruckhmann, 1913), pl. 11; aka *Daozi mobao*

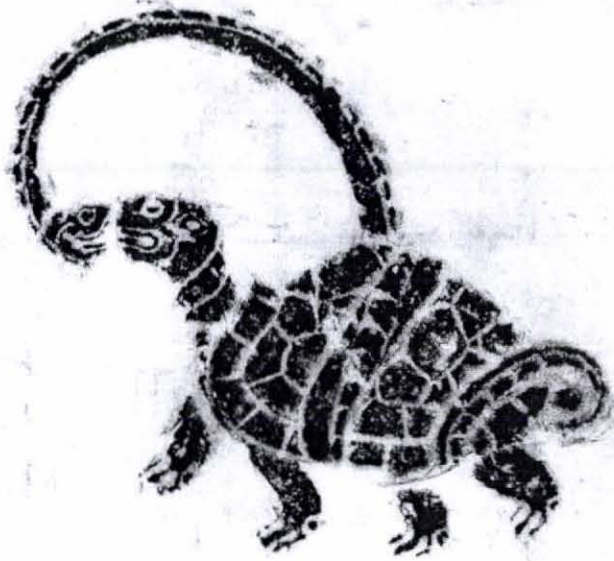


Figure 10. *Xuanwu* (The Dark Warrior). From Richard C. Rudolph and Wen Yu, *Han Tomb Art of West China: A Collection of First- and Second-Century Reliefs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), pl. 74.



Figure 11. *Xuanwu* (turtle at far right). From Richard C. Rudolph and Wen Yu, *Han Tomb Art of West China: A Collection of First- and Second-Century Reliefs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), pl. 37.

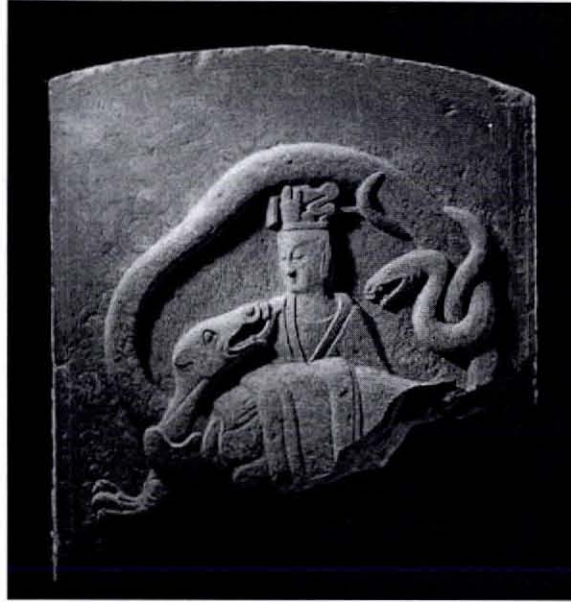


Figure 12. *Xuanwu with Human Figure*. From Stephen Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the University of California Press, 2000), 293.



Figure 13. *Zhenwu as Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven*. From Stephen Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the University of California Press, 2000), 294.

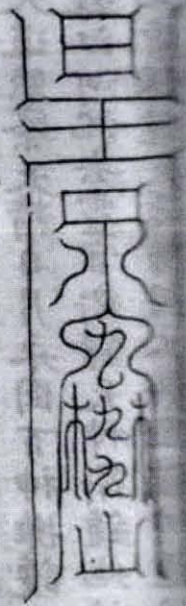
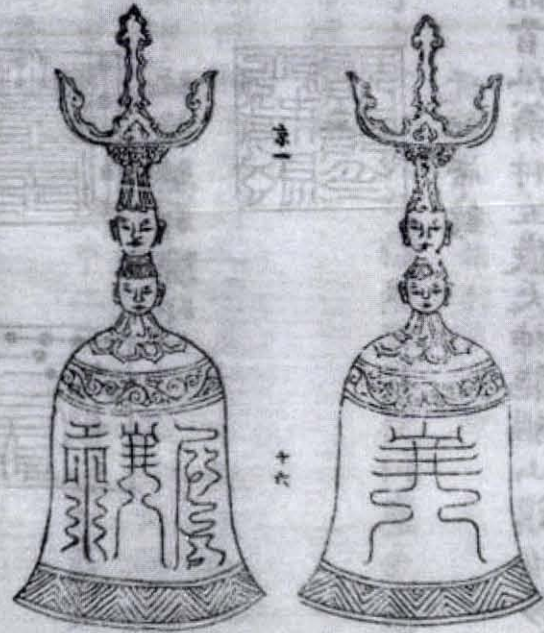




Figure 14. *Zhenwu as Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven*. From Stephen Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the University of California Press, 2000), 300.

用銅鑄四面篆文鑄訖撼振九通

帝鐘符



帝鐘呪

山川百靈聞我須驚浩劫大道照天之精日  
 月永固百魅石神山嶽隨我江河拱迎急急  
 如律令

Figure 15. Tianpeng's Imperial Bell with Talisman. From *Shangqing Tianpeng fumo dafa*, in *Daofa huiyuan* 156.20a-21a.

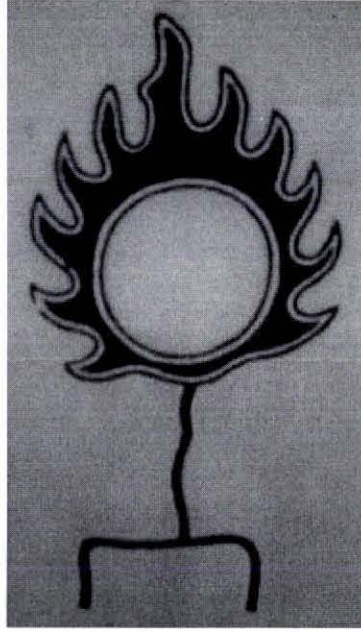


Figure 16. *Head dress of a modern fashi*. From J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, repr. ed. (Leiden. 1882-1910; repr., Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, 1972), 6:1267.



Figure 17. *The True-Form Talisman for Inviting the Black Killer*. From *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* (DZ 220), ch. 25.

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