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Divine Codes, Spirit-Writing, and the Ritual Foundations of Early-Modern Chinese Morality Books

ABSTRACT:

In China's early-modern period (11th–14th centuries), a large number of divine codes (*guilü* 鬼律, or *tianlü* 天律) were revealed to adepts in the context of the new exorcistic ritual traditions (*daofa* 道法) of that period. Their texts prescribed how humans and spirits should behave; and laid out the mechanisms of divine punishments in case of any breach. After introducing the corpus of these codes, the article explores the moral charter they outline for priests. It argues that this moral discourse is contiguous with that of a genre called morality books (*shanshu* 善書), and shows how priestly codes gradually entered general circulation and thereby became morality books. An important link between the two genres is spirit-writing. During the early-modern period priests used spirit-writing for producing ritual documents (including moral exhortations from the gods), but later the technique became generalized and was used to mass-produce morality books.

KEYWORDS:

Daoism, morality books, spirit writing, daofa, exorcistic rituals, heavenly codes

The early-modern or Song-Yuan period (960–1368) in China was a time of effervescence and intense creativity for Daoism in terms of ideas, ritual, self-cultivation practices, art, and organization. Many new textual genres appeared and blossomed, continuing to develop down to the present. The present article is concerned with two of these newly-appeared genres: divine codes (typically titled “spirit codes,” *guilü* 鬼律,¹ or “Heavenly codes,” *tianlü* 天律 [a synonym being *tiantiao* 天條]) and morality books (*shanshu* 善書). They are usually studied separately; but the present article attempts to show their overlaps and the genealogy that links them conceptually, and in some cases textually. In so doing, it proposes a schema of historical development leading to the dissemination among laypersons (via morality books) of what used to be a narrowly priestly/official ethos and correlated self-cultivation

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¹ The term *yinlü* 陰律 is also found in later periods. As I explain, below, divine codes have existed in earlier times, but by the early-modern period they developed new contents and reached new audiences.

techniques, and their transformation into a universal moral norm. I analyze this process as the ritual foundations of late-imperial morality books and spirit-writing, that is, their origins in the ritual practices (such as exorcistic judgments and self-divinization) and liturgical texts of the early-modern priests.

The divine codes, following the format of the imperial penal law code, list crimes committed by either humans or spirits and the ensuing punishment at the hands of the Heavenly bureaucracy. Morality books explain the workings of moral retribution concerning actions (*baoying* 報應) and they enjoin humans to do good so as to save themselves; the most influential and prestigious one, *Taishang ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 (*The Supreme Lord's Tract on Action and Retribution*) comes with a memorial composed for its presentation to the throne. The latter was dated 1233, but it nonetheless mentions that the text was already part of the 1116–1119 Daoist canon.²

The two genres seem to share much: they both discuss the punishments of immoral actions, the role of the Heavenly bureaucracy in human lives, and the need for humans to discipline themselves and live good lives. Yet, the historiographical research into the two genres has largely bifurcated, and the two branches have even ignored each other. Because divine codes are closely associated with ritual traditions, they have been mostly studied in the context of the history of ritual; by contrast, morality books have largely been read outside of their Daoist context, and even interpreted as signs of the popularization of a Confucian, largely “secular” ethics.³ None of these interpretations is irrelevant or faulty in itself; indeed these complex texts can be fruitfully read from many different perspectives. I would like to show in this essay that bringing the two genres together, and in particular looking at the close connections they had from the earliest days, can shed new light on the wider social and religious meaning of both. I suggest

² *Taishang ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 (DZ 1167). DZ followed by a numeral indicates the title number in the Daoist canon, following the ordering of Kristofer M. Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang (Daozang Tongkao 道藏通考)* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2004). On the origins of this extremely influential text, see Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991), pp. 36–43; Li Yi 李冀, “*Taishang ganyingpian* wenben lai yuan jiqi chengshu shijian kaoxi” “太上感應篇” 文本來源及其成書時間考析, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 1 (2017), pp. 111–19; and Vincent Goossaert, ed., trans., *Livres de morale révélés par les dieux* (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 2012), pp. 1–13. Li Yi dates it to the years 1116–1118 based on close textual parallels with other texts composed in that period at Huizong’s court.

³ Yü Ying-shih 余英時, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen* 儒家倫理與商人精神 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004).

in particular that the new exorcistic ritual traditions of the Song-Yuan period were an important force that contributed to the emergence of morality books, before the latter became ubiquitous throughout society from the sixteenth century onward.⁴ This contribution occurred on several levels: conceptual (ideas first expressed in priestly codes that later became common in morality books); technical (priests having developed spirit-writing techniques that fueled morality-book production); and textual (notably, a 1302 revelation coming from a milieu of priests, later becoming a morality-book classic).

This article focuses on the divine codes and attempts to tease out their close kinship to morality books. In so doing, it must put aside many aspects of these codes that are less relevant to the topic at hand. Divine codes make up fascinating and understudied sources for a large variety of questions. They document theology; liturgical theory and practice; purity rules; the bureaucratization and judiciarization of the other world; the management of the dead and spirits by priests; a Daoist vision of society; and ideas of a good and moral life. It is on this last topic that I will dwell here, and consequently I will not explore the ritual practices that the codes underline.

The article starts with a brief historical overview of the notion of a divine code; it then introduces a corpus of Song-Yuan codes all related to new ritual traditions characteristic of this period. Rather than offering detailed descriptions of each text within this corpus, I will outline some of their shared characteristics most germane to the issue at hand – their moral message. The next section will develop the representation of the moral ideal of a good priest as found in the various codes, as well as in other types of texts also devoted to representing such priests. I will then introduce the ledgers of merits and demerits, *gongguoge* 功過格, that are usually considered as part of the morality-book genre, but which are very closely related to the practices of ritual promotion described in the divine codes. These promotions aim at the divinization of the priest. Another divinization-oriented practice that fueled both the development of the new ritual traditions and the writing of morality books is spirit-writing. Finally, I will attempt to show how the moral rules and practices outlined in divine codes and ledgers of merits and demerits, initially focused on the figure of the priest, gradually extended to all humans. In this process, they became a set

⁴ The historiography of morality books largely neglects the early phases. The most important references are Yau Chi-on (You Zi'an) 游子安, *Shan yu ren tong: Ming Qing yilai de cishan yu jiaohua* 善與人同, 明清以來的慈善與教化 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005); and Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, *Zōho Chūgoku zenshu no kenkyū* 增補中國善書の研究 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1999).

of moral self-cultivation techniques available to all, with their roots in the ritual traditions of the priests becoming gradually less apparent, but by no means irrelevant.

THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE CODE

The texts we are dealing with are called either Heavenly codes or spirit codes. The two terms seem to have had different origins and to have converged during the Song-Yuan period when they are sometimes considered as having become interchangeable.⁵ “Heavenly code” refers to a bureaucratic vision of the moral order – by contrast to the Buddhist naturalistic vision, where retribution intervenes spontaneously according to the law of karma.⁶ The term is rarely found before the Song period and denotes the belief in the existence of a set body of laws whereby Heaven and other gods mete out punishments or rewards. The idea of the existence of a Heavenly code that underlined all decisions of the Heavenly bureaucracy was acknowledged in early morality books. For instance, the early thirteenth-century commentary to the *Taishang ganyingpian* invokes it:⁷ “According to the Heavenly code, the crime of unfiliality cannot be pardoned even if the culprit performs penance 蓋天律，不孝之罪，不通懺悔故也。”⁸ It is unclear if the commentary refers here to a specific text, or to a more general abstract idea of Heavenly moral norms. No full-fledged Heavenly code seems to have existed before the late-Song-Yuan period; as we will see, further on, there is only one such text in our corpus of early-modern divine codes (the “Red Ink Heavenly Code”).

By contrast, spirit codes comprise laws that deal primarily with the spirits of the dead, as well as survivors’ relations with them, and propose ways to bind and control such dangerous entities. A major early example of such a code is *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (*The Spirit Code of Nüqing*), one of the key texts of the early Church of the Heavenly Master, that is, Tianshidao 天師道. The extant version has several textual layers, is incomplete, and has probably been modified; scholars disagree

⁵ For instance, the famed liturgist Jin Yunzhong 金允中 (fl. 1225) discusses the Tianxin code and writes: “their Heavenly code, titled Spirit code... 其天條鬼律”; see *Shangqing Lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (DZ 1223) 43, p. 17a.

⁶ For an overview of the ideas and ritual practices of divine justice in Chinese culture, see Paul R. Katz, *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁷ This commentary is attributed to Li Changling 李昌齡 (937–1008) but it is clearly a 12th-c. text.

⁸ *Taishang ganyingpian* 20, p. 4b.

on the dating of the original text, but it would fall between the second and fourth century.⁹ Whatever is the case, its continued importance during the medieval period is undeniable. Many of our Song-Yuan-period texts use the name Nüqing.

In *Nüqing guilü*, adepts are taught how to ward off the spirits by using their true names. The otherworldly bureaucracy is presented in a morally ambiguous light, and there is no discussion of promotion and rewards in it. The text also includes a section providing rules of conduct for the living adepts, titled “Daolü jinji” 道律禁忌 (“Prohibitions from the Code of the Dao”). If they disregard these rules, adepts will have years (counted in *suan* 筭) taken off their lifespan. The same idea was also developed in another code of the Tianshidao community, namely, *Xuandu lüwen* 玄都律文 (*Code of the Mystic Capital*). The text we now have was compiled from earlier material during the Tang and is also incomplete. There, Heaven 天 rewards and punishes the living according to their behavior. Punishments usually involve taking years off one’s lifespan, and rewards feature promotions to the level of transcendent: “If people have accumulated a thousand good deeds, after their death they will be promoted to god, [then higher] to immortal, and to transcendent 人有千善，後世出神仙真人。”¹⁰

As we can see from the very brief outline above, many of the ideas that underline our Song-Yuan codes were already present in the codes of the medieval Church of the Heavenly Master. Most important is that both the living and the dead were controlled by a bureaucracy that was just, dependable, and that followed set, knowable rules rather than whim and feelings. A second key idea is that by securing access to the codes (as initiated members of the Church), adepts could both control potentially harmful spirits (the codes are linked to exorcism), and ensure their own salvation. The latter goal was achieved by avoiding the commitment of crimes that would cut their life short and otherwise accrue merits that would eventually help them secure high status in Heaven after their death.

⁹ A recent analysis, arguing for an early date, is found in Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), pp. 146–48; see also Lai Chi-tim, “The *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* and the Problem of the Bureaucratization of the Netherworld in Early Heavenly Master Daoism,” *TP* 88.4–5 (2002), pp. 251–81.

¹⁰ *Xuandu lüwen* 玄都律文 (*DZ* 188), p. 2b.

THE EARLY-MODERN CORPUS OF DIVINE CODES

By contrast to the rare and incomplete medieval codes, extant early-modern codes are well-transmitted and numerous, clearly showing that the genre had gone through a new stage of development. While possessing a clear continuity with their predecessors, they also bring innovations in terms of both format and contents. They are much more closely related to the imperial penal code, and are more concerned with procedures of appointment and of promotion and demotion in the Heavenly bureaucracy. Also, as I will try to show, they became part of a movement of divine revelations aimed at saving humans through moral self-cultivation.

Early modern codes were part of the codification of the new ritual traditions called *fa* 法, or *daofa* 道法. The latter were considered distinct from the classical *zhai* 齋 and *jiao* 醮 liturgies that had coalesced during the late-medieval period. They were essentially exorcistic and apotropaic, and involved in some cases spirit-possession and the cult of meat-eating, violent, impure deities (some of them local gods of demonic origin) who, once they had submitted to Daoist law, could act as powerful enforcers of this law against malevolent spirits. Many of these martial gods were associated with thunder, and thus most of the ritual traditions are called “thunder rites,” *leifa* 雷法. These traditions first developed at the margins of institutional Daoism, in a zone shared with some vernacular Buddhist specialists. Their practitioners, as studied in detail by Edward Davis, were called *fashi* 法師 or *faguan* 法官 (which I translate as priest), and at least some *fashi* were not ordained *daoshi* 道士, and considered as ranking below them; conversely some *daoshi* were not initiated in a *daofa* tradition and did not qualify as *fashi* – many were both.¹¹ The most important element in the practice of a *daofa* was the knowledge and mastery of talismans, *fu* 符, used to summon martial gods who exorcise, heal, and generally do the work of the *fashi*.

Most of the extant divine codes are found in *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元, the great compendium of *daofa* compiled at the beginning of the Ming for inclusion in the Daoist canon. Each is linked to a specific *daofa* tradition and lineage, and was part of that *daofa*'s scriptural core, even though in some cases we do not have much else beside the code itself.

¹¹ Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: U Hawai'i P., 2001); Mark R.E. Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2015); Sakai Norifumi 酒井規史, “Nan-Sō jidai no dōshi no shōgō: Kyōroku no hōi to dōhō no shokumei” 南宋時代の道士の稱號, 經籙の法位と道法の職名, *Tōyō no shishō to shūkyō* 東洋の思想と宗教 25 (2008), pp. 115-34.

Most are undated; it is therefore near impossible to build a chronology of their compilation, except for the first one, below, which is likely an early case. I will briefly introduce these codes before taking a collective look at their shared features.

Certainly the best-studied divine code to date is *Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü* 上清骨髓靈文鬼律 (*Spirit Code of the Spinal Numinous Writ of the Shangqing Tradition*). This is the code of the Tianxin zhengfa 天心正法 tradition (Correct Liturgy of the Heart of Heaven), one of the earliest and most influential of all *daofa*, whose methods and codifications were largely adopted by later *daofa*.¹² It is found in two broadly similar versions, one as an independent text, the other as a chapter of a Tianxin zhengfa liturgical compendium.¹³ In both cases, the code itself is closely articulated with two other texts: the “Jade Rules,” *yuge* 玉格, that is, the administrative regulations stipulating the ranks and titles of officials in the divine bureaucracy and the procedures for promotions; and “Models of Documents” (*wenjian* 文檢) to be sent to the gods in the process of initiation and promotion. The version we have was edited for inclusion in the Daoist canon edited under the order of Sung emperor Huizong in 1116–1119, but its material is earlier. It thus most likely predates *Taishang ganyingpian* (likely composed shortly before the 1116 canon) and without doubt predates the earliest ledger of merits and demerits, revealed in 1171.

Probably later than the Tianxin code, we find other codes in various parts of the *Daofa huiyuan* collection. *Taishang hundun jiaotiao* 太上混沌教條 (*Rules of the Most High Hundun Teachings*) is short, with only fourteen entries, but offers original material, and is embedded in other documents (such as lineage genealogy, model petitions) of the Hundun ritual tradition, which was apparently specialized in rain-making.¹⁴

An important text is the second part of *Taishang tiantan yuge* 太上天壇玉格 (*Daofa huiyuan*, *juan* 250), which is the administrative code compiled by the Heavenly Master institution at Longhushan 龍虎山 as part of the process of building an integrated ordination system where

¹² Li Zhihong 李志鴻, *Daojiao Tianxin zhengfa yanjiu* 道教天心正法研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011); Poul Andersen, “Tianxin zhengfa and Related Rites,” in Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon*, pp. 1056–80; Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, pp. 21–24; Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2002), chap. 2.

¹³ *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* 太上助國救民總真秘要 (ca. 1116; *DZ* 1227), j. 6. For a detailed study of this code, see Li Zhihong 李志鴻, “*Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü* yu Tianxin zhengfa de zhajiao yishi” 上清骨髓靈文鬼律與天心正法的齋醮儀式, *Daoism Religion, History & Society* 道教研究學報 1 (2009), pp. 201–37.

¹⁴ *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (early 15th c.; *DZ* 1220) 110, pp. 6a–9a.

all the recognized *daofa* and their specific ranks and titles are placed within a grid of equivalences.¹⁵ Here, as in the Tianxin zhengfa codification, the penal code and the administrative code (*yuge*) are successive parts of one larger document. *Tiantan yuge* has become a widely disseminated document throughout the Chinese world, but in modern times it usually does not include the penal code. Here, the code is entirely devoted to the laws to be observed by priests; there is no section applying to gods and spirits. These laws cover both moral observances and ritual procedures.

Next are two related codes that refer especially to the punishments of malevolent spirits and their internment in the Fengdu hells: 1) *Beiyin Fengdu taixuan zhimo heilü lingshu* 北陰酆都太玄制魔黑律靈書 (*Divine Book of the Black Code to Subdue Demons, [edicted at] the Great Mystic (Capital) for Fengdu in the Northern Underworld*, shortened as, *Beidi heishu lü* 北帝黑書律, *Code in Black Ink of the Northern Emperor, Daofa huiyuan*, juan 265), and 2) *Taixuan Fengdu heilü yige* 泰玄酆都黑律儀格 (*Regulations, Procedures, and Black Code of Fengdu, [edicted at] the Great Mystic (Capital), Daofa huiyuan*, juan 267). Contrary to what the titles may suggest, both these codes deal not only with the spirits of the dead being imprisoned in Fengdu, but also with punishments and rewards for the priests and the spirits in their service.

Finally, the longest code, and likely a late comer, is *Taishang hundong chiwen Nüqing zhaoshu tianlü* 太上混洞赤文女青詔書天律 (*Nüqing Heavenly Code Proclaimed by Order (of the Jade Emperor) Written in Red Ink, of the Most-High Hundong Tradition*, henceforth “Red Ink Code”), which takes two chapters of *Daofa huiyuan* (juan 251–252). It is organized according to twenty-nine categories of beings, mostly gods and spirits, then ordinary humans (*shengmin* 生民), divinized priests (*xianguan* 仙官), and living priests (*faguan*). It is the only code in the corpus that includes a section on ordinary humans, and the only one to be titled “Heavenly code” – the one likely explaining the other. This was apparently the most widely distributed code from the early-Ming onward, and I will discuss, below, this distribution and its link to other genres.

Categories

Most codes are divided into sections that deal with separate categories of beings, even though some are not (and indeed, to whom the punishment applies is not always entirely clear). The main categories are: 1) the dead, *gui* 鬼; 2) demons, *yao* 妖; 3) instituted gods, *zhengshen*

¹⁵ Vincent Goossaert, *Heavenly Masters: Two Thousand Years of the Daoist State* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P. and Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, forthcoming), chap. 4.

正神 (that is, spirits who have been given a formal rank and title in the bureaucracy); 4) priests, *faguan* (or *xingfaguan* 行法官); and 5) ordinary humans, *shengmin*.

I am particularly interested in the last category that appears only in the Red Ink Code. I assume that codes originally dealt entirely with the interaction of priests and spirits in the course of exorcist work, and later gradually extended over all aspects of human life. In such a process, the Red Ink Code would be a late development. This cannot be substantiated with hard chronological evidence, and it will have to remain a hypothesis for now.

Punishments

The system of punishments varies among codes. The most common ones are those of the imperial code, with its five degrees: whipping (*chi* 笞), caning (*zhang* 杖), penal servitude (*tu* 徒), exile (*liu* 流), and death (*si* 死). Certain codes add other punishments, including taking years away from a lifespan, various types of death, punishments for one's ancestors, and relegation in the worst hells, such as Fengdu. The legal language is maintained throughout but close reading reveals ambiguities and even contradictions among separate entries. Presumably, the gods mete out the punishments but nothing is said about how. In my reading of these texts, it is less the process of punishing than the moral vision behind the definition of the crimes that matters.

Themes

The actions and behaviors prescribed or prohibited in the laws of the divine codes can be broadly divided into four main types. First is the conduct of the rituals, and exorcism in particular. Both humans and spirits of all kinds are enjoined to follow precisely the procedures (including how to write petitions and other documents, the time allowed to answer them, and so forth) and the hierarchical chains of command. Ignoring orders and summonses is repeatedly prohibited.

Second is the interaction between the living and the spirits (including the souls of the dead, gods, and other entities). This includes cult and sacrifices offered by the living to the spirits as well as how the latter may be present around humans and intervene in their lives. Not only are spirits that harm humans punished, but a god can be punished even for bringing blessings if he has acted out of his own initiative and without having secured authorization from above. Under this type are also found complaints and lawsuits, and requirements that both humans and gods report when witness to anything improper.

Third is the ordination and promotion of humans, from initiation (the rights and duties of both masters and disciples are discussed at length) to further promotions in the bureaucracy, which are conditioned by mandatory reports on one's merits. The fourth and last type concerns moral behavior in general and the rules of purity in particular, especially as they apply to humans.

Cognate Texts

Their format – lists of laws – made the divine codes clearly recognizable; however, when considering both their contents and the way they were integrated with other material into books, they had close relations with various types of cognate texts. First, the imperial law code 律 was an obvious model; indeed, Deng Yougong 鄧有功,¹⁶ who wrote a preface to his compilation of the Tianxin zhengfa code, said that it was edited (but not written, since the contents were originally revealed) following the model of the this-worldly code, by the founder of the tradition Rao Dongtian 饒洞天 (fl. 994), who himself was a model clerk in the local court.¹⁷ Second, as already said, the code in several cases is part of a larger codification together with administrative rules and liturgical model documents, *yi* 儀. I discuss, below, the relationship with morality books. Last but not least, there are also scriptures, *jing* 經, that develop very similar themes. For instance, a Song- or Yuan-period scripture devoted to the Thunder gods, *Taishang shuo Chaotian xielei zhenjing* 太上說朝天謝雷真經 (*True Scripture on Petitioning Heaven for the Propitiation of Thunder [gods], Preached by the Most High*), includes a set of twelve laws, which are general morality rules:

The twelve laws of the Heavenly Thunder are (prohibitions against): lack of loyalty toward one's lord; lack of piety towards one's parents; lack of deference to the Three Treasures (the Dao, the scriptures, and the rituals); throwing away the grains; insulting wind and rain; appearing naked in front of sun, moon, and the stars; revealing bad actions but concealing good ones; lacking respect toward the Dao; forgetting Heaven and Earth; having trust in sorcery; annihilating other people's blessings; and destroying the scriptures and the teachings. Those who break these Heavenly laws will be judged by the Heavenly Thunder (gods). 天雷十二條

¹⁶ Deng Yougong was a major compiler of Tianxin liturgy; his life is not documented, but his redaction of the code seems to be dated 1116 at the latest, so he must have lived around that time.

¹⁷ “Xu” 序 (before 1116), *Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü* 上清骨髓靈文鬼律, Deng Yougong 鄧有功 (*DZ* 461).

者：不忠君主，不孝父母，不敬三寶，拋擲五穀，訶風罵雨，裸露三光，揚惡掩善，不遵正道，心昧天地，信巫魘祝，滅人福果，毀壞經教。犯此天條，則天雷檢察。¹⁸

This outline of general morality is entirely similar to the contents of both our codes and morality books. This, furthermore, is a living tradition: Mark Meulenbeld has studied a modern ritual manuscript from Hunan in which the talismanic names used for summoning the Thunder gods are followed by the various moral failures they punish, expressed in identical language to morality books.¹⁹ Indeed, the sentence preceding the above extract from the *True Scripture on Petitioning Heaven* reads: “People know that the teaching of the *Taishang ganying (pian)* is identical to (the present text) 庶凡人則知太上感應，如此立教也。” It shows how identical textual content is found in different genres (devotional scriptures, morality books, divine codes, and liturgical manuals). The contents themselves are for the most part not new: they can be found in medieval precepts, *jie* 戒. What is new is their inclusion in our brief, authoritative, outlines of universal moral law.

What Usage?

One of the most intriguing aspects of the divine codes is how they were supposed to be used as a text. I have not found so far any evidence that the codes were read aloud or otherwise used in the process of the exorcistic rites, even though the priest acted in the name of enforcing them. They do not tell about the process of their composition, but describe themselves as revealed, and part of the secret liturgical documents for the eyes of the priest only. As just said, the only text to have a preface, the Tianxin code, tells us that it was received as a revelation by the movement’s founder, Rao Dongtian. The various codes often list themselves among the “secret” documents, that is, transmitted during initiation and therefore off-limits to ordinary people. This stands in partial contrast to the imperial law code the public status of which was rather ambiguous; its diffusion beyond officialdom was not encouraged before the early Ming, when the Hongwu emperor promoted its reading by all subjects.²⁰ The last three entries of the Red

¹⁸ *Taishang shuo Chaotian xielei zhenjing* 太上說朝天謝雷真經 (DZ 17), p. 2a.

¹⁹ Mark Meulenbeld, “Vernacular “Fiction” and Celestial Script: A Daoist Manual for the Use of *Water Margin*,” *Religions* 10 (2019), pp. 1-28.

²⁰ Hilde De Weerd, “Byways in the Imperial Chinese Information Order: The Dissemination and Commercial Publication of State Documents,” *HJAS* 66.1 (2006), pp. 145-88; Jérôme Bourgon, “Chine (culture juridique),” in Stéphane Rials and Denis Alland, eds., *Dictionnaire de la culture juridique* (Paris: PUF, 2003), pp. 188-94. I am grateful to Bruce Rusk, Luca Gabbiani, and Jérôme Bourgon for discussing this matter with me.

Ink Code prescribed a highly ritualized reading, preceded by rituals of self-protection and invocations of the gods; it severely punishes the person who will look at more than one line at a time.²¹ But, its partial inclusion (the law regulating its reading not being included) in later Ming- and Qing-period books in open circulation, discussed below, suggests that some readers considered it not secret.²² Certainly, the divine codes never were widely disseminated texts like the morality books – and yet, the two genres share more than first meets the eye.

A MORAL CHARTER

The contents of the divine codes are extremely rich and can be studied in different perspectives and with different questions in mind. This essay is not concerned with ritual procedures, but with the moral charter that they outline for their initiated reader – in the other words, their idea of the good life. All of the various codes enumerated above share a vision of what the adept should be: not an ascetic living in pure isolation, but a man (very few priests were female) actively in the service of all humans. Codes enjoin disciples and other priests to report to the gods if they witness a priest being selfish, refusing to offer help, or disrespectful.

Another remarkable point is that while priests acquire merits mostly through saving the living or the dead through their rituals, they can also adduce merits towards their divinization through acts of general goodness. One code details how priests should pay for and organize the marriage of the poor girls in their family or community:

Priests, whether male or female, must hire a trusted matchmaker to arrange for the marriages of orphaned girls as well as the sons and daughters of the various branches of one's lineage. Fifteen concluded marriages will earn one a promotion to the next higher rank. Fifty to sixty will earn a promotion to Transcendent. A hundred will earn one an appointment among immortal officials. One cannot raise any lewd thought (while arranging these marriages). If one indulges in inappropriate sex, he will be expelled from the ranks of immortals, will not be able to gain appointment (in Heaven) ever again, and after he dies, will fall in the dark netherworld forever. 諸法官毋問男子女人，許憑良媒嫁人孤女或親族內外子

²¹ *Taishang hundong chiwen Nüqing zhaoshu tianlü* 太上混洞赤文女青詔書天律; *Daofa huiyuan* 252, pp. 23b–24a.

²² On the distinction between books in open circulation and books transmitted during initiation (or “general circulation” vs. “restricted circulation”), see Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, introduction, pp. 49–50.

姪者十五人，升一等。五十人六十人，升真人。一伯人，升仙官內任用。毋得因而心起邪念。淫汙者，仙籍除名，永不任用，身歿之後，永墮幽陰。²³

The next entries explain how they may also become gods by building bridges and roads, burying abandoned corpses, and giving to the poor (all typical injunctions found in *Taishang ganyingpian* and later morality books).

The key moral virtue of the priests as reflected in the codes is their disinterestedness (in other words, no interest in money): they do not covet riches, never ask for payment, gifts, or favors: they can accept reasonable payment but must not ask for anything.²⁴ Discussions of money are omnipresent. A related theme is altruism: many laws in our codes condemn self-interest, *si* 私; priests must help anyone who asks (unless the person harbors dubious intentions) – whomever, under whatever circumstances. He is entirely at the service of society, without any concern for his own comfort and welfare. This is the same ethos as that of civil service officials, and it is no coincidence: priests are divine officials from the moment of their initiation.²⁵

These moral virtues are not unique to the divine codes; they are also found in the various sets of precepts, *jie* 戒, taken by adepts at each new ordination (whether lay or priestly), both composed in earlier times (the canon has a large amount of medieval precepts) and as part of the *daofa* traditions themselves.²⁶ While the contents of codes and precepts overlap to an important extent, the two types of texts remain distinct. Precepts are vows written and taken by humans as tools in their self-cultivation, while the codes are revealed and describe how gods make decisions on the divinization of humans.

The codes' vision of the priest as a good man selflessly helping, curing, and saving people fits perfectly with the image found in the other major source for studying the *daofa* exorcists – hagiography. I am separately publishing a book-length anthology of translations of such

²³ *Taishang hundun jiaotiao* 太上混沌教條; *Daofa huiyuan* 110, p. 7b.

²⁴ On the medieval rule of priests not receiving payment, see Kristofer M. Schipper, "Le pacte de pureté du taoïsme," *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses* 109 (2000–2001), pp. 29–53.

²⁵ We can also recall that some civil officials were also ordained as *fashi* priests: Judith Magee Boltz, "Not by the Seal of Office Alone: New Weapons in Battles with the Supernatural," in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 1993), pp. 241–305.

²⁶ For examples of sets of *daofa* precepts, see "wajie 外戒," in *Hunyuan liutian miaodao yiqi ruyi dafa* 混元六天妙道一炁如意大法; *Daofa huiyuan* 154, p. 5a–b; and *Wushang xuan-yuan santian yutang dafa* 無上玄元三天玉堂大法 (*DZ* 220) 2, pp. 1a–4b, which discusses the connection between code and precepts, and introduces precepts for priests and for laypeople (focused on self-control).

priestly hagiographies, and will only briefly mention them here.²⁷ In these stories, priests as well as Thunder and other martial gods (they are sometimes not differentiated, because priests become gods in the Thunder administration after they die) are sometimes punished by the gods for their moral failures: because they are judges who pronounce punishments, they must be shown not to be above the law themselves.²⁸ Yet, they are always depicted as evincing the true moral qualities of public service and altruism. They do have flaws and foibles (a weakness towards the bottle or a hot temper, for instance) but they answer all calls for ritual help and heal all who ask them, near or far, rich or poor. The theme of money is as omnipresent in the whole hagiographical tradition of *fashi* priests as it is in the codes. Several of the best-known narratives about exorcists explicitly mention Heavenly codes in the context of a moral test they undergo (unknowingly) at the hands of the gods. I will only take two examples here.

My first example is taken from the hagiography of Sa Shoujian 薩守堅, a probably mythical figure, who became by the late-Song period the founding patriarch of several major exorcistic lineages.²⁹ The myth is built around the meeting of Sa, a young itinerant exorcist, with a fierce god (the future Wang Divine Officer 王靈官) whose temple Sa destroys. The god follows Sa for years, waiting for him to commit a sin, which will allow Wang to take revenge. Sa comes to a river when he finds an empty boat. He crosses the river with the boat, and leaves three cash in it to pay the owner. Then Wang appears and says:

(The Jade Emperor) told me that I must follow you, and that if your transcendent lordship committed a crime against the Heavenly code, I could immediately (take my revenge on you) and only report to Him after. I have followed you for three years but you have not breached the code a single time. Today, crossing the river, you have left cash in the boat: I now (clearly see that) I will never (be able to fault and) repay you. 令我相隨，遇真官有犯天律，

²⁷ Vincent Goossaert, *Vies des saints exorcistes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, forthcoming); on the disinterestedness of priests as a key theme in hagiography, see idem, “Scorched Head Daoists: Exorcist Priests and Divine Generals in Jiangnan Lore” (forthcoming).

²⁸ Consider for instance the fascinating story of Lu Boshan 盧伯善, who was sent to the Fengdu hells for three sins (lack of filial piety, sexual immorality, and initiating an unfit person into the ritual tradition) and was only saved by the intervention of his disciple Liu Yu 劉玉: “Liu Qingqing shishi” 劉清卿事實, *Daofa huiyuan* 253, pp. 10a–12a.

²⁹ An analysis of the myth is in Goossaert, *Heavenly Masters*, chap. 4. See also Li Fengmao 李豐楙, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian: Deng Zhimo daojiao xiaoshuo yanjiu* 許遜與薩守堅, 鄧志謨道教小說研究 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1997).

令得便宜施行後奏。我隨真官三年，并無犯律者，今日渡舟，真官乃置錢舟中，則真官無可報之時矣。³⁰

Wang thereupon abandons vengeance and becomes a divine general in the service of Sa Shoujian; they henceforth become a pair whose destinies are linked: in modern times, they are found in countless temples and summoned in many oft-performed rituals. It is his strict pecuniary honesty that convinces the god of the priest's moral perfection, and embarks them both on a path to divine careers. Noteworthy is that this centrality of disinterestedness in the moral requirements of the code is not proved in the context of Sa's ritual trade (like performing a ritual for free) but in the course of everyday life.

The second example concerns Wen Qiong 溫瓊, best known as Marshal Wen 溫元帥, a major Thunder god whose book-length hagiography has long attracted the attention of historians of Daoism.³¹ Wen begins as a failed soldier, who ends up in the most despicable station of a butcher of bovines.³² The third son of the Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak comes to him disguised as a Daoist and tells him:

“I can fathom that the *qi* in your bones is divine; you will in the future receive ever-lasting worship. How can you break the law and butcher bovines, severely violating the Heavenly code?” Wen Qiong answered: “If that is the case then I should enter the mountain (Taishan) and practice Daoism, waiting for someone to initiate me and lead me on the way to immortality.” The Daoist said: “You do not have the bones of an immortal, it would be useless to practice in vain.” 觀子之相，骨氣通神，他日必有香火萬世，豈可冒法宰牛，深犯天律。瓊曰：如此則我不若歸山修道，恐有人度我成仙。道人曰：君無仙骨，豈可強修。³³

³⁰ *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian xubian* 歷世真仙體道通鑑續編 (*DZ* 297) 4, pp. 1a–3a. In another early version of the myth (in *Soushenji* 搜神記), the test is not described. Note also that the test is related to the question of facilitating transport (building roads, bridges, ferries, etc.), a key theme of morality books.

³¹ Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: SUNY, 1995); Gao Zhenhong 高振宏, “Wen Qiong shenhua yu dao-jiao daotong: cong Liu Yu dao Huang Gongjin de *digifa*” 溫瓊神話與道教道統，從劉玉到黃公瑾的“地祇法”，in Hsieh Shi-wei 謝世維, ed., *Jingdian Daojiao yu difang zongjiao* 經典道教與地方宗教 (Taipei: Zhengzhi daxue renwen zhongxin, 2014), pp. 189–249; Goossaert, *Vies des saints exorcistes*.

³² Beef had by that time become a taboo (found in almost all morality books), and the *daofa* traditions played a significant role in its development: Vincent Goossaert, *L'interdit du bœuf en Chine: Agriculture, éthique et sacrifice* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2005). One law in the Red Ink Code spells out the prohibition on butchering bovines and eating beef: *Taishang hundong chiwen Nüqing zhaoshu tianlü; Daofa huiyuan* 252, pp. 12b–13a.

³³ *Diqi shangjiang Wen taibao zhuan* 地祇上將溫太保傳 (mid-13th c.; *DZ* 780), pp. 1b–2a.

Wen then understands that his way is not that of ascetic self-cultivation and transcendence, but ritual service to humanity, and of becoming a Thunder god. He enters the temple of the Eastern Peak as an exorcist priest, then when he dies he becomes a hugely successful Thunder god.

Sa succeeds as a priest by never breaching the code; Wen is instructed by the gods to stop breaching it so that he can become a priest. In these two stories, mentions of the code come at a crucial moment when the hero's (or the heroes', in the case of Sa and Wang) trajectory decisively shifts towards becoming first an exorcist priest, and then a god. All the *fashi* narratives are indeed built around the process of divinization. A passage in Wen Qiong's hagiography discussing later generations of priests within his ritual lineage explains how a certain number performed well and became gods, while those who had breached the Heavenly code were killed by Marshal Wen.³⁴ If we now return to the text of the codes, we see that they do not only promise that those who abide by the code will become gods, they precisely spell out the procedures for nominations and promotions in the divine hierarchy, and in some cases, plan for the divine apotheosis to take place at the priest's death. The final entries of the Tianxin zhengfa code constitute a fascinating description of the death of the priest, and the duties of all around him (disciples as well as local gods) to make sure the master, having received notification from above of his imminent departure, can prepare himself properly and rise to Heaven.³⁵

THE BIRTH OF THE *GONGGUOGE*

The divine codes provide a charter for the moral life of priests that conditions their divinization. They also document a specific practice for moral self-cultivation, namely, the keeping of ledgers of merits and demerits, *gongguoge* 功過格. The codes do not include ledgers, which are separate documents, but occasionally mention them. These ledgers list good and bad deeds, and precisely quantify the amounts of merits or demerits accrued thereby; they enjoin people to practice daily self-examination, to note down the actions of the day, and to compute their moral balance. They are based on the idea that destiny, including divinization, depends not on decisions of the gods, but on precise accounting of the moral value of persons. These ledgers be-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 10a.

³⁵ *Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü* 2, p. 4a-b.

came by late-imperial times a major subgenre of morality books, with large numbers of different ledgers getting circulated throughout society. Cynthia Brokaw has provided an excellent history of this genre and its social meanings, and introduced her study with an examination of the earliest known ledger, namely *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* 太微仙君功過格 (*Ledger of Merits and Demerits Revealed by the Immortal Lord of the Taiwei Star*), revealed through a dream in 1171, only a few decades after *Taishang ganyingpian*.³⁶ She has shown that the idea of quantifying merits and the connection thereby to becoming a god, as developed in both these texts, continued upon a medieval Daoist discourse. I would like to point out, however, that the medieval sources focus on having accumulated enough merits before one can reach transcendence. By contrast, our early-modern texts (including *Taishang ganyingpian*, the Taiwei ledgers, and the divine codes) discuss continuous processes of promotion and demotion in a divine bureaucracy where most positions are for gods not (yet) transcendent and are submitted to the unrelenting scrutiny of an upper hierarchy. This reflects a new development in Chinese theology, discernible from the very late Tang onwards, when people of education aspired to becoming divine officials.³⁷

Furthermore, the Taiwei ledger is part and parcel of the liturgical manuals of the Jingming (zhongxiao) fa 淨明忠孝法, one of the most successful of the *daofa* during the Song and beyond.³⁸ The Jingmingfa is famous in the historiography for its focus on morality, but its moral teachings do not differ significantly from those of the other *daofa*. The Taiwei ledger's relation to our divine codes is plainly in evidence: it is divided between a "ledger of merits 功格" and a "code for demerits 過律." Furthermore, this text is first and foremost addressed to *fashi* priests. See, for instance, this entry: "To heal a severe illness with talismanic rituals, acupuncture, or drugs: ten merits; if it is a light illness, five merits. If you have received undue payment from the patient's family, no merit. The same for exorcisms. 以符法針藥救重疾一人爲十功, 小疾一人爲五功, 如受病家賄賂則無功, 治邪一同."³⁹ This entry makes sense only for priests (ordinary laymen cannot use talismanic rituals

³⁶ Brokaw, *Ledgers*, chap. 1.

³⁷ Vincent Goossaert, *Bureaucratie et salut: devenir un dieu en Chine* (Genève: Labor & Fides, 2017), chap. 2.

³⁸ Admittedly, the connection is not very explicit, and it was rejected by Barend ter Haar in his review of Cynthia Brokaw's *Ledgers of Merits and Demerits*, *TP* 79.1-3 (1993), pp. 160-67, but I find sufficient overall coherence between the Ledger and the Jingming corpus to maintain it.

³⁹ *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* 太微仙君功過格 (*DZ* 186; dated 1171), p. 1b; Goossaert, *Livres de morale*, p. 38.

or exorcise). One of the most meritorious acts listed is to ordain a new priest: “to ordain a *faguan*, one hundred merits; to confer the ordination registers on a (lay) adept, fifty merits; to confer the precepts on a (lay) adept, thirty merits 傳受行法官一人爲百功, 度籙生弟子一人爲五十功, 度受戒弟子一人爲三十功.”⁴⁰

The Ledger does usually not distinguish between priests and ordinary humans;⁴¹ likely it was intended mostly for priests, if not only for them, like all *tianlü* except the Red Ink Code. The moral values discussed therein are identical to those of the codes – meticulous attention to ritual procedures, altruism, disinterestedness, and service to others. Certain items can be found in some of the codes, not in the same words but with the same meaning, as shown by the following two examples.

[1.] *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*: If a man afflicted by severe illness requires healing but you do not (try to) save him, two demerits for each patient; one if it is a minor illness. If you treat him in a way contrary to the correct method, one demerit. If your treatment does not work but you still receive excessive payment, one demerit for each hundred cash; one thousand is ten demerits. 凡有重疾告治, 不爲拯救者, 一人爲二過, 小疾一人爲一過, 治不如法爲一過, 不愈而受賄百錢爲一過, 貫錢爲十過.⁴²

Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü: the priests who will have healed over twenty patients suffering from severe illnesses in a year will be promoted to the upper rank. 諸行法官, 每歲拯救危篤病, 及二十人, 轉一資.⁴³

[2.] *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*: In the preparation of the pledges and offerings in the course of a communal ritual, if one item is missing, one demerit; if one character is miswritten in the memorial, one demerit; if one action contravenes the rules, laws, and models, one demerit. 齋醮供聖鎮信之物, 一物不備爲一過, 章詞一字差錯爲一過, 誤違科律格式, 一事爲一過.⁴⁴

Taishang hundong chiwen Nüqing zhaoshu tianlü: Priests or Daoists who present a memorial to Heaven but do not conform to the model format, will serve two years of penal servitude. If they

⁴⁰ *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*, p. 3b.

⁴¹ One entry distinguishes the cases of officials and *faguan* priests: *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*, p. 7a.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6b.

⁴³ *Shangqing gusui lingwen guilü*, 2, p. 2a.

⁴⁴ *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*, p. 9b.

miswrite two characters, the punishment will be increased by one degree. If they miswrite three characters (or more), and fail to inform the chief officiant or the main donor, they will serve nine years of penal servitude. 法官道士進章上表, 而不合格式者, 徒二年, 錯二字者, 加一等. 錯三字者, 不達高功醮主, 並徒九年.⁴⁵

The close resemblance of the Taiwei Ledgers and our divine codes is no coincidence. Indeed, the codes mention repeatedly that the priests must keep a record of their good and bad actions and to submit it regularly to the gods in view of their promotion in the Heavenly bureaucracy. The Red Ink Code punishes the sin of “omitting to note down one’s crimes when recording one’s merit, 錄功不書過.”⁴⁶ Just as remarkable, the priests are not only required to keep their own ledgers, but are also involved in the keeping and examining of the ledgers of the spirits in their service. A Fengdu code details how divine officials keep ledgers for their subordinates:

Laws Concerning the [Recording of] Merits and
Demerits of [Spirit] Generals 諸將功過條品

The Inspector of Fengdu [Hells] descends in this world once every seven days to inspect the merits and demerits of all priests and to verify the records of the [spirit] clerks and soldiers (in the priests’ service). On the 5th and 25th of each month, which are the days when Tianpeng (an exorcistic deity linked to the Tianxin zhengfa and heading the Bureau of Exorcism) descends in this world, and when the inspector is ordered by Tianpeng to go and inspect the demerits and demerits of clerks and soldiers, the priests must submit a memorial (with the records). 酆都御史大夫, 七日一次巡察天下法官功過, 檢點吏兵. 諸法官, 當於每月初五日二十五日天蓬下降日, 乃御史奉天蓬命巡察吏兵功過, 總投詞.⁴⁷

The code then comments: “if you want to be able to command to divine generals, you must first be able to discipline yourself 夫欲令將, 先戒自己.”⁴⁸ Such a comment points to the close connection between keeping records of good and bad actions of one’s subordinates, as a bureaucratic exercise, and moral self-cultivation through daily examination, as a spiritual exercise.

⁴⁵ *Taishang hundong chiwen Nūqing zhaoshu tianlü*, *Daofa huiyuan* 252, p. 22a.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14a.

⁴⁷ *Taixuan Fengdu heilü yige* 泰玄酆都黑律儀格; *Daofa huiyuan* 267, p. 3a–b.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Of course, the idea that gods check the records of the good and bad actions of all humans and spirits is very old and widespread. The practice also has clear connections with the imperial bureaucracy's procedures of keeping detailed records of the accomplishments and faults of the officials, in order to decide on their promotion, and asking officials to submit such reports themselves. What is new here, in both the *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* ledger and the codes, is the use of formalized ledgers as a daily practice for moral self-cultivation, an exercise that was originally the preserve of officials (in this or the other world) but was eventually extended to all humans.

MORALITY FOR ALL

So far, we have discussed how the divine codes outline an ethical charter as well as moral self-cultivation practices for priests. However, even though most of the contents of the codes are focused on priestly life, one of them, the Red Ink Code, extends to humanity in general. The seventeen laws that form the section on "ordinary humans" in that code (out of 29 sections and 471 laws) combine two types⁴⁹ – general morality and access to gods and liturgical texts. The first type presents an uncanny similitude to passages of the *Taishang ganyingpian*, with almost identical wording, albeit in a different order, of certain phrases. One entry (the last) bundles together the main moral rules (loyalty, filial piety, respect for masters, charity, and so forth) and another bundles the main rules of ritual purity and respect for the gods (prohibiting nudity outdoors, disrespect for Heaven and earth, stars, wind and rain, and so on), in both cases with wordings almost identical to that in *Taishang ganyingpian* (and to several medieval-period sets of precepts):

Taishang ganyingpian: 呵風罵雨 (...) 夜起裸露.

Red Ink Code: 裸露三光, 呵風指雨.

The second type of laws prohibits non-ordained persons to have unauthorized access to gods, sacred texts, and to defile them. One entry specifically bans people from imitating priests who dance on the stars of the Northern Dipper (a practice widely known as *bugang* 步罡). Such laws clearly refer to widespread lay interest in and practice of all kinds of rites. In the codifiers' worldview, *daofa* rituals, gods, and revealed texts are the most sacred things and are key to salvation: any disrespect (including reading a text one is not qualified to obtain) is

⁴⁹ *Taishang hundong chiwen Nüqing zhaoshu tianlü*; *Daofa huiyuan* 252, pp. 8b–10a.

extremely immoral and forfeits any hope of salvation. This aspect is not present in the *Taishang ganyingpian* exhortations.

Another remarkable feature of these laws for ordinary persons is that they identify four categories of humans: ordinary people, those who have been ordained (*peiluzhe* 佩籙者),⁵⁰ exorcist priests (*faguan*), and Daoist priests (*daoshi*); this is entirely similar to the moral hierarchy of the Taiwei ledgers, mentioned above.⁵¹ Several entries punish disrespect for either *faguan* or *daoshi*. Furthermore, beings in the latter three categories are punished more severely than are ordinary persons for the same crime – in the same way that the gentry are held to higher standards in the imperial code. What the code describes then is not a close-knit community of believers, but a society where common moral rules apply to all, but people having undergone lay ordinations, and, to an even higher degree, practicing Daoists (officials) are held to higher moral standards.

The presence of a section on ordinary humans in the Red Ink Code certainly explains its much wider distribution when compared to other codes. It was adopted beyond the Hundong tradition (which is itself hardly known).⁵² Two important texts attest to this diffusion. The first is *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* 天皇至道太清玉冊 (*Most Pure and Precious Books on the Supreme Dao of August Heaven*), compiled in 1444 by Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378–1448), the seventeenth son of the founding Ming emperor Taizu who was, like most Ming princes,⁵³ a Daoist adept. This Daoist encyclopedia provides comprehensive codification (texts, liturgy, institutions, objects); the eighth of its nineteen sections is entitled “Red Ink Heavenly code” and consists of only the two sections on living priests and ordinary humans (the introductory sentence to the section says explicitly that the other sections of the code have not been included).⁵⁴ This shows that for Zhu Quan, a Heavenly code was a key aspect of general Daoist knowledge, that it represented the

⁵⁰ This category primarily refers to people having undergone a lay ordination that grants them protection in this world and salvation in the next, but no capacity to perform rituals.

⁵¹ As said above, some *daoshi* (including many monastics) were not initiated as *fashi*, and some *fashi* were not ordained *daoshi*. The Red Ink Code is the only one in our corpus to list “*faguan* and *daoshi*” as one category.

⁵² It is partially quoted in *Daofa huiyuan* 49, pp. 6a–7b; 55, pp. 19a–24b.

⁵³ Richard G. Wang (Wang Gang), *The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2012). On this encyclopedia, see Bony Braga Schachter, “Nanji Chongxu Miaodao Zhenjun: The *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* and Zhu Quan’s (1378–1448) Apotheosis as a Daoist God,” Ph.D. diss. (Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2018).

⁵⁴ *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* 天皇至道太清玉冊 (pref. 1444; *DZ* 1483) 3, pp. 34b–47a. The order of the laws is entirely different from that of the *Daofa huiyuan*, but the text itself only offers minor variants.

moral teachings of the religion,⁵⁵ and that the Red Ink Code was the one reference text in this regard. By doing so, Zhu Quan also took the Red Ink Code out of a context of highly-controlled initiation and included it in an open-circulation encyclopedia. However, he did not publish the twenty-seven sections on laws for spirits, which presumably continued to be “secret” material. He thus changed the nature of the text, without significantly altering its contents.

A similar reappropriation took place some two centuries later: the same simplified version of the Red Ink Code (the two sections on ordinary humans, here called *minjian* 民間, and living priests) is included in the 1673 *Qionglongshan zhi* 穹窿山志 (*Gazetteer of Qionglong Mountain*) devoted to a hill between Suzhou and the shores of Tai Lake, which had then become a major center of Daoism for the Jiangnan region.⁵⁶ The rise of Qionglongshan was entirely due to a charismatic leader and exorcist, Shi Daoyuan 施道淵 (1617–1678) and the rich narratives found in the gazetteer are all about his glory.⁵⁷ The rationale for inserting the code in a genre (mountain gazetteer) that very rarely includes liturgical material is explained by a short document that introduces it. This was a memorial to Heaven submitted by Shi Daoyuan in 1651, where he declares that he wants to remedy the current decline of Daoism through the *fa* rituals, themselves entirely based on the code. He now seeks Heaven’s approval for disseminating the essentials of the Red Ink Code. The following text carries the signature of a lay adept of Shi Daoyuan who served as editor.⁵⁸ Here again, exorcism and the rejuvenation of humanity through moral self-cultivation are closely intertwined. As the gazetteer’s compilers, as well as many other famed Suzhou literati of the time, were Shi’s personal disciples, it is likely that they received the Red Ink Code from him as part of the rules that they should obey.

⁵⁵ The next section in *Tianhuang zhidao taiping yuce* provides purity rules for Daoists within a ritual area or in a monastery, but our section is the only one to deal with morality in general.

⁵⁶ *Qionglongshan zhi* 穹窿山志 (1673), Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1672), Xiang Qiu 向球, and Li Biao 李標, rpt. in vols. 14–15 of *Zhongguo daoguan zhi congkan* 中國道觀志叢刊 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2000), j. 3, pp. 401–27. See also Fan Enjun 范恩君, “Shi Daoyuan yu ‘Zhengyi conglin’ zhi” 施道淵與“正一叢林”制, *Hongdao* 弘道 3 (2014), pp. 93–101.

⁵⁷ Vincent Goossaert, “Daoism and Local Cults in Modern Suzhou: A Case Study of Qionglongshan,” in Philip Clart, ed., *Chinese and European Perspectives on the Study of Chinese Popular Religion(s)* 中國民間宗教民間信仰研究之中歐視角 (Taipei: Boyang, 2012), pp. 199–228.

⁵⁸ This person, Shen Zhibin 沈志斌, unknown elsewhere, signs as having received the Wenchang ordination registers 文昌寶籙, which were conferred by Heavenly Masters and other Daoists on literati and officials; many eminent Suzhou literati had received such an ordination from Shi Daoyuan.

The text itself, in the part on ordinary humans, follows the rewording of Zhu Quan's encyclopedia but in yet another sequence, and adds five more laws, which are all about general morality (respect for grains and for animal life, sexual morality) and introduce various punishments in hells: in other words, typical morality-book language is inserted to supplement the code. It reads as if the compiler identified the major themes of morality books not included in the earlier version of the Red Ink Code and added them.⁵⁹

SPIRIT-WRITING

The connections that have become apparent concerning priestly divinizations, morality books, and divine codes are explained by more than the circulation of ideas: they may also have something to do with the way texts were composed. Indeed, a crucial link between the divine codes and their practitioners, on the one hand, and morality books, on the other, is spirit-writing (*jiangbi* 降筆, *fuji* 扶箕, *fuluan* 扶鸞, *feiluan* 飛鸞, *zhaoxian* 召仙, and many other terms, among which *fuji* 扶乩 became predominant from the late Ming onward). These Chinese terms refer to different techniques and writing implements, but they all imply a god who possesses the implement or the medium wielding it and writes texts: they gradually emerged between the tenth and twelfth century.⁶⁰

For the Song and Yuan periods, spirit-writing is documented by narratives (notably anecdotes), revealed texts, and liturgical manuals. These sources refer to three main types of contexts, which are absolutely not mutually exclusive: divination and communications with the dead; the formal communication between priests and gods during rituals (notably the priests' request for written answers to their requests submitted to the divine bureaucracy, *baoying* 報應), and the production of doctrinal scriptures and hagiographies. It seems that all of these were primarily performed by *fashi* priests (including many literati initiated as *fashi*) organized in altars (*tan* 壇, that is, ritual troupes), who used

⁵⁹ One extra entry, on the kinds of incense allowed or restricted, is taken from the section on priests but now placed in the section of ordinary humans.

⁶⁰ On the origins of spirit writing, see Judith Magee Boltz, "On the Legacy of Zigu and a Manual on Spirit-writing in her Name," in Philip Clart and Paul Crowe, eds., *The People and the Dao: New Studies in Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 2009), pp. 349–88; Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, "Song-Ming shiqi de fuji, fuluan yu qingxian; jiantan fuji, enzhu deng ci de qiyuan" 宋明時期的扶箕、扶鸞與請仙, 兼談扶乩、恩主等詞的起源 (forthcoming); Hsieh Tsung-hui 謝聰輝, *Xin tiandi zhi ming: Yuhuang, Zitong yu feiluan* 新天地之命, 玉皇、梓潼與飛鸞 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), chap. 4. I am currently working on a monograph on the history of revelations in China, where the ideas proposed in this section will be developed.

spirit-writing for their own ritual needs and for divination services to the laity, and who sometimes produced longer scriptures.

The best-documented stage in the history of the production of spirit-written full-fledged scriptures (as opposed to short poems) occurred in Sichuan beginning in the late twelfth century. A network of devotees of Imperial Lord Wenchang 文昌帝君, began at this point to produce various texts, including hagiographies of the god and scriptures. Wenchang's revealed hagiography (*Huashu* 化書), while not a morality book strictly speaking, is closely related to this genre and to our codes: it expounds how the moral behavior of a model official over many lives ensured his continued promotions among gods.

The groups that produced these texts are characterized by three elements that would later become constant features of late-imperial, modern, and contemporary spirit-writing groups. The first element is the affiliation of adepts to the god producing the revelations, their being disciples, *dizi* 弟子, within an altar or shrine. Disciples receive from the god an ordination name, and thus are inscribed in Heavenly registers. The second element is the representation of the revealing god as both a full-fledged member of the Heavenly bureaucracy, and a personal savior playing a unique role in the salvation of humanity and caring individually for each of his devotees. The third element is an eschatological inspiration: early Wenchang texts present him as sent by the Jade Emperor to help humans avoid the apocalypse – a basic theme elaborated by all subsequent groups.⁶¹ Such groups have been continuously active and have produced enormous numbers of texts ever since; many texts that were composed between the twelfth and early fifteenth century became included in the *Daozang*.

Spirit-writing quickly became the main way of producing morality books. The earliest classics of the genre (*Taishang ganyingpian*, *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*) state that they were revealed through other means (a dream for the latter, an unspecified revelation for the former), but spirit-writing seems to have become the medium of choice during the Mongol-Yuan period. We do not know how the divine codes themselves were composed. As spirit-written texts are typically explicit about their mode of revelation, and the practice is not mentioned in any of the codes discussed above, it is unlikely that it played a large role. However, spirit-writing contributed significantly to the spread of

⁶¹ Terry F. Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: SUNY, 1994); Hsieh, *Xin tiandi zhi ming*; Vincent Goossaert, "Modern Daoist Eschatology: Spirit-writing and Elite Soteriology in Late Imperial China," *Daoism: Religion, History & Society* 6 (2014), pp. 219–46.

the *daofa* rites, their textual development, and their moral worldview – even though there were also Daoist voices criticizing uncontrolled revelations through spirit-writing. Some of the *daofa* liturgies were indeed revealed by spirit-writing, the most explicit being those of the Jingming tradition as soon as 1131 and the contemporary Yutang dafa 玉堂大法.⁶²

There are several traces of claims by Song-Yuan-period *fashi* priests that spirit-writing was their preserve. First, *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* lists various techniques of spirit-writing within its enumeration of *daofa* traditions, showing that they were considered then as knowledge proper to the *fashi* priests (and therefore not be transmitted to lay people, as is the case with all such ritual knowledge).⁶³ This is hardly surprising when we realize, reading the divine codes, to what extent the rites hinged on written communications between priests and gods. Daoist priests used various spirit-writing techniques to expedite formal, written communications with the gods in the course of conducting rituals, especially within the exorcistic liturgy. The most common term in that context is *jiangbi* 降筆 (“causing gods to descend in a brush”); other terms include *pjiang* 批降 (“obtaining a god-written response on a document submitted to him”) and its synonym *pibao* 批報. Judith Boltz has indeed shown that the earliest known detailed liturgical instructions for spirit-writing (including talismans and spells to conjure the gods) appear in a canonical collection of *daofa* rites, probably dated to late in the Yuan.⁶⁴ She argues that this liturgy was clearly meant for *fashi* priests; however, later versions of these instructions, albeit in general continuity with the Yuan text, appear in general circulation and do not refer to the role of the priest anymore.⁶⁵ We would seem to have here a development parallel to that of the divine codes and ledgers: priestly knowledge gradually entering general circulation. Of course, priests did not hold an effective monopoly on spirit-writing at any point in history – the Song-period evidence proves the opposite – but the point is that they felt they should.

The text analyzed by Judith Boltz is not the only one among the vast corpus of *daofa* liturgies to describe spirit-writing. Another case is that of *fengbi* 封臂 or *jiebi* 借臂 or *fubi* 附臂, “consecrating/borrowing/

⁶² Xu Wei 許蔚, *Duanlie yu jiangou: Jingmingdao de lishi yu wenxian* 斷裂與建構, 淨明道的歷史與文獻 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2014), chap. 2; *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* 無上玄元三天玉堂大法 (DZ 220).

⁶³ *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* 3, p. 31b.

⁶⁴ “Zhao Zigu xian fa” 召紫姑仙法, in *Fahai yizhu* 法海遺珠 (late Yuan? DZ 1166) 20, pp. 1a–4b.

⁶⁵ Boltz, “Legacy of Zigu.”

possessing the arm (of a medium)”: the *fashi* priest causes the arm of the medium to be possessed by a god who can then write his orders and responses.⁶⁶ Mentions of such practices are common in Daoist texts from the twelfth century onward.

Second, as we have seen, the divine status of the properly ordained *fashi* priest and his apotheosis when he dies are a major element of all the divine codes. Confirming the divine status of their deceased masters and predecessors was a key concern in all the *daofa* traditions. Self-divinization was also a central goal of all the spirit-writing groups, and has continued to be so to the present day. Through spirit-writing, high gods could confirm the canonization in the Thunder ministries of apotheosized *fashi*, and the latter could also communicate directly with their disciples and continuators. An early example of such a phenomenon is provided by the figure of Ning Benli 寧本立 (1101–1181) a major codifier of the Lingbao dafa tradition; once punished by the gods for having disrespected ritual procedures (he goes blind) he nonetheless undergoes posthumous apotheosis confirmed by spirit-writing.⁶⁷

Another case is that of Lei Shizong 雷時中 (Moan 默庵, 1221–1295), a central figure in a *daofa* ritual tradition well documented in the Daoist canon (*Daofa huiyuan*, *juan* 154–155). It focuses on the ritual use of the *Durenjing* 度人經 scripture for the salvation of the dead. Lei’s personal Thunder deity was Lord Xin 辛天君. His hagiography concludes with:

After his death, Thunderclap god (Xin) produced several spirit-written revelations, saying “Shangdi (Heaven) has promoted Transcendent (Lei) to the position of Minister of the Arcane Capital, and to the titles of Hunyuan mystic tradition Transcendent Lord saving all humanity, as well as Heavenly Worthy who spreads the teaching of the Noisy Thunder.” 後雷霆累降筆云：上帝已陞真人爲玄都上相、混元妙道普濟真君、雷聲演教天尊。⁶⁸

These spirit-written teachings from Lord Xin are documented. Lei Moan’s commentary to *Durenjing* includes a spirit-written exhortation, dated 1290, in which Xin admonishes the priests under his authority to be morally upright and at the service of humanity, and promises them a career in the divine bureaucracy.⁶⁹ While this revelation does not

⁶⁶ See, notably, descriptions in *Daofa huiyuan* 151, p. 6a, and 255, pp. 12b–13a; and *Fa-hai yizhu* 37, pp. 8b–9a.

⁶⁷ “Zanhua xiansheng Ning zhenren shishi” 贊化先生寧真人事實, in *Daofa huiyuan* 244, pp. 3a–8a; similar text in *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* 靈寶領教濟度金書 (DZ 466), “Sijiaolu” 嗣教錄, pp. 1a–6a.

⁶⁸ *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian xubian* 5, pp. 11b–14a.

⁶⁹ On the revelations of Xin tianjun and his various *daofa* traditions, see Xu Wei 許蔚, “Xin

mention directly the divine codes, it shows how a discourse on morality and divinization was part of spirit-written exhortations from Thunder gods to their priests, as well as lay devotees: Xin's exhortations address first his descendants in the *daofa* (priestly lineage), the *fazi* 法子, then the lay adepts, or *xinshi* 信士.⁷⁰ Note that this revelation from Lord Xin was published as part of a commentary on the *Durenjing* text, that is, a book for open circulation. It is characterized by the god speaking in the first person ("I adjure you ...") and directly addressing his adepts, telling of his own divine career as an example to follow, and promising help and eventual divinization. A shorter similar text where Lord Xin also speaks in the first person was declaimed by priests in the course of the rituals as an oath, *shizhang* 誓章, and specifically refers to the Heavenly code.⁷¹

A comparable, but much more widely disseminated, case that explicitly invoked the Heavenly code is a moral tract revealed by spirit-writing, apparently in 1302, by Zhenwu 真武 (a.k.a. Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝), one of the highest-ranking deities of the *daofa* traditions beginning with Tianxin zhengfa.⁷² It was largely circulated during Ming and Qing times and has often been included in anthologies as one of the four "classics" of morality books.⁷³ This short, powerful exhortation, deeply tinged with apocalyptic overtones, is titled *Wudangshan Xuantian shangdi chuixunwen* 武當山玄天上帝垂訓文 (*Instructions Sent Down by the Supreme Lord of Dark Heavens from Wudangshan*), or alternatively

tianjun fa yu Hunyuan daofa de gouzao" 辛天君法與混元道法的構造, *Daoism Religion, History & Society* 9 (2017), pp. 141–59.

⁷⁰ *Duren shangpin miaojing tongyi* 度人上品妙經通義, Zhang Yuchu 張宇初 (1361–1410), comp. (*DZ* 89) 4, pp. 28a–30b. One of Lei's disciples, Xue Jizhao 薛季昭 (fl. 1303) relates in his own commentary to *Durenjing* how he himself received revelations from both Lord Xin and divinized Lei Moan, some through spirit-writing and some in dreams, also confirming their divine apotheosis; see *Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing zhujie* 元始無量度人上品妙經註解, Xue Jizhao (*DZ* 92), *houxu* 後序. There is also a spirit-written revelation from Lord Xin, discussing Quanzhen self-cultivation, in the late-Yuan anthology *Minghe yuyin* 鳴鶴餘音.

⁷¹ *Fufeng mengli Xin tianjun dafa* 負風猛吏辛天君大法; *Daofa huiyuan* 81, pp. 2a–3a; Xu, "Xin tianjun fa yu Hunyuan daofa de gouzao," p. 155. These oaths that bound priest and gods were a theological innovation of the *daofa*, and especially the Shenxiao tradition; see David Mozina, "Oaths and Curses in Divine Empyrean Practice," *Journal of Chinese Religions* (forthcoming).

⁷² On the emergence of the Zhenwu cult, see Chao Shin-yi, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices: Zhenwu Worship from Song to Ming (960–1644)* (London: Routledge, 2011); Pierre-Henry De Bruyn, *Le Wudang shan: histoire des récits fondateurs* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010); and Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, "Zhenwu xinyang zai jinshi Zhongguo de chuanbo" 真武信仰在近世中國的傳播, *Minsu yanjiu* 民俗研究 3 (2010), pp. 90–117.

⁷³ On this text, see Goossaert, *Livres de morale*, pp. 57–67, and Wang, "Zhenwu xinyang," pp. 106–10. The "four classics" are *Taishang ganyingpian*, *Wenchang dijun yinzhixun* 文昌帝君陰鸞文, *Guansheng dijun jueshi zhenjing* 關聖帝君覺世真經, and the Zhenwu Instructions.

Xuantian shangdi jinke yülü 玄天上帝金科玉律 (*Jade Code and Gold Law of the Supreme Lord of Dark Heavens*); the text itself claims that it is known in Heaven as a code. Like the revelations of Lord Xin, Zhenwu speaks in the first person, recalls his own divine career and exhorts his adepts to act morally, quoting *Taishang ganyingpian*; unlike them, he does not explicitly mention priests as recipients of the revelations, but the text still presents itself as revealed in the most important temple of the most important exorcistic god. One passage articulates Heavenly codes, the god's mission as cosmic moral enforcer, and ledgers of merits and demerits:

- 吾受玉帝敕命 I have been nominated by an edict from the Jade Emperor.
 長生治世福神 To the rank of god granting blessings, governing the world and granting long life.
 佛中即無量壽 Among the Buddhas, I am Amitâyus,
 道乃金闕化身 In the Dao, I am an emanation of the Golden Gate (or, Jade Emperor).
 統轄天神天將 I command Heavenly gods and generals,
 天上天下遊巡 And I make inspections tours up and down the universe.
 糾察神人功過 I adjudicate on the merits and demerits of both gods and humans,
 一月一度奏呈 And I submit a report (to the Jade Emperor) once a month.
 所作有功必錄 I note each and every meritorious action,
 所作有過必懲 And I punish each and every demeritorious deed.
 賞罰定依天律 My rewards and punishments strictly conform to the Heavenly code,
 分毫不順私情 And I cannot let the slightest personal inclination come into play.
 神若有功保奏 When gods acquire merits, I submit a memorial to recommend their promotion,
 名依玉格擢陞 And they are elevated to a higher rank according to the Jade Rules.
 人若有功錄用 When humans acquire merits, I enroll them in my service,
 即與仙籍標名 And have them enlisted among the immortals.
 神過罰爲下鬼 When gods acquire demerits, I punish them by relegating them among lowly spirits,⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Gui* 鬼 here, as often, refers to the spirits of the dead who are still in the netherworld, rather than demons.

- 鬼過滅跡分形 And when spirits acquire demerits, I annihilate
and dismember them.
- 人過各依輕重 When humans acquire demerits, according to the
seriousness (of the sin),
- 水火瘟疫官刑 I punish them to death by fire, drowning, illness,
or torture at the hands of officials.
- 若有十分重罪 For the gravest crimes,
虛空霹靂一聲 Thunder will break out in the sky.
- 不以奉吾私庇 I will not protect a sinner because he had wor-
shipped me,
- 不以不奉生嗔 And I will not get angry at someone because he
has not worshipped me.⁷⁵

In this and countless later spirit-written morality books, the existence of divine codes and the role of Thunder and other martial deities in their enforcement are repeatedly affirmed together with the salvific value of the practice of moral self-cultivation through ledgers of merits and demerits. Here all of our five elements come together: a moral ethos of selfless service to others; spirit-writing; divinization; *daofa* exorcism and their martial gods; and explicit reference to divine codes (*tianlü*) and bureaucratic regulations (*yuge*). A 1236 commentary on a cognate Zhenwu scripture also quotes spirit-written instructions and the *Taishang ganyingpian*, claiming that following the teachings of the latter text allows one to avoid demons.⁷⁶ In brief, we do not know how many early divine codes and morality books were composed through spirit-writing, but we know that all three of them were prevalent in the same milieu of priests and frequently referred to each other.

CONCLUSION

This essay does not argue that there existed a direct one-way causal relationship between *daofa* exorcistic rites and their divine codes, on the one hand, and the rise of morality books, on the other. Rather, I have tried to show how these two important aspects of Chinese religious life since early modern times share much in terms of both contents and context. During the formative period that extends between the eleventh and fourteenth century, numerous revelations by Daoist deities, notably

⁷⁵ A critical edition of the text (based on a Ming copy reproduced in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, vol. 22, and several Qing-period morality books), is in Goossaert, *Livres de morale*, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁶ *Taishang shuo Xuantian dasheng Zhenwu benzhuo shenzhou miaojing* 太上說朝天謝雷真經, Chen Zhong 陳侗 (fl. 1236), comm. (*DZ* 754) 5, p. 15b.

those linked to the new exorcistic *daofa* rituals, appeared, often through dreams or spirit-writing – the latter becoming increasingly prevalent over time. These revelations included divine codes, ledgers of merits and demerits, and morality books. While some of these (most of the codes and probably the Taiwei ledger) were only destined for ordained priests and others (*Taishang ganyingpian*, the Zhenwu instructions, eventually the Red Ink Code) for the general public, they shared the same idea: promotion in the divine bureaucracy can be ensured by moral self-cultivation based on service to others, and this promotion follows strict procedures enforced by the higher gods. Until the early Ming, this literature was mostly focused on the divinization of the priests, and was part of documents circulated only among priests, with the exception of *Taishang ganyingpian*.

By Ming times, the Red Ink Code had entered general circulation and was understood as a type of morality book. The same thing happened on a larger scale to *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*, which from the sixteenth century onward was reprinted and included in numerous morality books aiming at a general audience. As a result, the purity rules and self-divinization practices of priests expanded and provided much of the material for texts that define a universal ethics. The priestly/official ethos was gradually reformulated as a universal moral norm for the whole of humanity, and ideas of divinization of priests were reformulated as divinization of all good men – at the same time as divinization of priests as local gods continued unabated. Publishing the divine code, once considered restricted as to access, was now a major way of helping humans find salvation.

By the sixteenth century, when they become near-universal, both the spirit-writing techniques and the morality books genre's original close connections with *daofa* exorcistic rites become much less visible. The *Taishang ganyingpian* might be considered as the earliest and most influential result of this process of priestly discourse as it becomes universal. Yet, the moral ideas contained in the priestly divine codes continued to have large currency in later times, as attest the compilation of new codes in late-imperial times. The best-known is the massive *Yuding jinke jiyao* 玉定金科輯要 (*Compilation of the Golden Rules, on Order of the Jade Emperor*, a highly apocalyptic code revealed through spirit-writing during 1856–1859 – the time of the Taiping War), and its continuation, *Tianlü shengdian* 天律聖典 (*Holy Canon of the Heavenly Code*, revealed 1919–1934). These texts, that proved influential and very broadly circulated, should be read in the context of modern eschato-

logical revelations and moral discourse;⁷⁷ yet, they also show how the earlier history that linked divine codes, spirit-writing, demonological and eschatological discourses, and moral reform continued to develop through modern times and legitimize new revelations that elaborate on formats and styles first developed by early-modern Daoist priests.

⁷⁷ Vincent Goossaert, “Competing Eschatological Scenarios during the Taiping War, 1851–1864,” in Hans-Christian Lehner, ed., *End(s) of Time(s)* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).