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## The Many Boats to Yangzhou: Purpose and Variation in Religious Records of the Tang

In Tang China during the seventh century, the official Dou Dexuan 竇德玄 (598–666) was once travelling on government business to Yangzhou when he met an otherworldly being who warned Dou of his impending death. Fortunately for Dou, this fate was avoided and he went on to become one of the highest officials in the empire.

Four texts agree on this core narrative but differ in their descriptions and details. The four texts – an item from an otherwise lost Daoist collection, a work describing the lineage of Shangqing Daoism, an anecdote attributed to a Buddhist collection of evidential miracles, and an entry in the compilation of a late-Tang Daoist master – display contrasting priorities in how they depict religious experience and practice. They all date to within a period of around two centuries, but their interrelations remain unclear. The contrasts, however, provide a window for examining the purposes that lay behind the creation of certain types of religious text, as well as contemporary perceptions of religious culture. Although not sharply divergent in terms of format, there are in fact differences among them that point to fundamental processes in the production of narrative and religious texts in China.

Through the history of Chinese writing and texts, a single narrative may occur in different guises. It may simply be that a writer imbued an existing narrative with a changed focus and thereby produced a different rendering. Alternatively, a tale could be updated to fit new social circumstances and expectations, or new developments in genre and performance. Fresh episodes could be introduced to suit a changing audience, while evolving methods of delivery could demand adaptations. In this way, a certain narrative could remain alive over several centuries, crystallizing in written form at various intervals but with new names and places.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, some writers deliberately lifted

<sup>1</sup> Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978); idem, “Tang Sources for the Study of Religious Culture: Problems and Procedures,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie*

material from existing sources for their own compositions.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the intentions and mechanisms behind such varied productions are not always clear.

This notion of mutability applies equally when investigating relationships among scriptures – a key undertaking for the study of religion in imperial China. As the complex history of Daoist and Buddhist works attests, texts were commonly reorganized and reworked. This process was sometimes a means of revitalization and renewal. Small changes in existing scriptures and doctrines could allow a religion to keep pace with social change or react to political demands; major revisions could bring about significant transformations in practice and belief. Creative editing was also a means of boosting the number of texts in circulation, which was often a matter of prestige and patronage. New scriptures could easily be produced by reorganizing a text or taking parts from several to create a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Textual production through the rewriting and elaboration of existing works became a significant part of the ongoing and complex interaction between Daoism and Buddhism. China's two great religious traditions influenced each other continually over the centuries. Even during periods of intensive competition in which proponents of both sides launched vehement attacks on each other, condemnation did not prevent extensive borrowing – perhaps we might say pilfering – in both directions. This occurred from Buddhism's earliest arrival in China.<sup>4</sup> Terminology, cosmology, iconography, principles and even

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12 (2001), pp. 151–52; Sarah M. Allen, “Tales Retold: Narrative Variation in a Tang Story,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66.1 (2006), pp. 105–43.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to having solicited material from his friends and relatives for *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) is also suspected of reworking material from *Taiping guangji* to boost his collection. See Alister David Inglis, *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 51, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984) 2, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” *T'oung Pao* 66 (1980), pp. 84–147; idem, “‘Prince Moonlight’: Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *T'oung Pao* 68 (1982), pp. 1–75; Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2008); Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, *Chūgoku kegon shisō shi no kenkyū* 中國華嚴思想史の研究 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppansha, 1965) pp. 253–321; idem, *Chūgoku bukkyō shisō shi kenkyū* 中國佛教思想史研究 (Tokyo: Shunshūsha, 1969), pp. 50–242; idem, *Dōzō nai bukkyō shisō shiryō shūsei* 道藏内佛教思想資料集成 (Tokyo: Daizō shuppansha, 1986); Stephen Bokenkamp, “Sources on the Ling-pao Scriptures,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institute belge des hautes études chinoises, 1981–85) 3, pp. 434–86; idem, “Stages of Transcendence: The *Bhūmi* Concept in Taoist Scripture,” in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 1990), pp. 119–47.

entire scriptures were appropriated, with varying levels of reworking. Texts that survived in the far northwestern region of Dunhuang have revealed much about this long relationship and how it evolved during the Tang dynasty. Notably, in her study of the relationship between texts on either side of the religious divide, Christine Mollier suggests that the seventh and eighth centuries were “the golden age for this scriptural mix-and-match game that was played out between Buddhism and Taoism.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to scripture, it would appear that the narratives of short evidential miracle tales were also subject to rewriting and inter-religious borrowing. Accounts of miracles provided evidence of religious efficacy to an audience that was much broader than that associated strictly with religious scriptures. Rather than explicating complex doctrine, they described miraculous events in the everyday world as examples of the efficacy of religious objects or acts of devotion. Buddhist collections appeared first, perhaps in the late fourth century, having evolved from Indian devotional literature and existing Chinese traditions of records of strange events.<sup>6</sup> Examples of the genre in Daoism followed later, probably as a response to Buddhist collections.<sup>7</sup> In the case to be considered here, what may be an original Daoist account is both rewritten into Buddhism and given a later Daoist revision. In addition, its inclusion in a Daoist biography, quite out of context, is further indication that it held some value for religious writers and audiences.

The malleable content of the narratives considered here reflects the varying purposes that can be involved in different renditions of an event. Although changes may be unremarkable or even predictable, they still reveal implications for the use of such texts in the modern study of religious culture. Anecdotal material is increasingly being used to illuminate aspects of religious belief and practice in imperial China, often in combination with other surviving texts, including scriptures and inscriptions.<sup>8</sup> Anecdotal material can overcome barriers

<sup>5</sup> Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Gjertson “The Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tale: A Preliminary Survey,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101.3 (1981), pp. 287–301; Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution: A Study and Translation of T'ang Lin's Ming-pao chi* (Berkeley: U. California at Berkeley, 1989), pp. 2–53; Robert Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Modern China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2012), pp. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Franciscus Verellen, “Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism’: The Inversion of a Buddhist Apologetic Tradition in Late Tang China,” *T'oung Pao* 78 (1992), pp. 227–33; Luo Zhengming 羅爭鳴, *Du Guangting Daojiao xiaoshuo yanjiu* 杜光庭道教小說研究 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005), pp. 267–300.

<sup>8</sup> Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai*

constituted by the remoteness of the times and the paucity of relevant sources, but attention must be paid to the nature of transmission and the powerful hold that genre had over content. In advocating the use of such material, Glen Dudbridge has argued that any reading of it is a highly complex act that requires consideration of all those who have in any way contributed to the text that has come down to us. The close relationship among the four texts creates a problematic tension that serves to illustrate just how the same narrative is played out in different contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The key figure in the events related in all the texts considered below is Dou Dexuan. According to official histories, Dou belonged to an important clan originating in a region located some fifty kilometers west of Chang'an. A number of men in the family served in the military under the Sui and Tang dynasties and both its male and female members intermarried with the imperial houses of the two dynasties. Prominent among these connections were his grandfather, who married a Sui princess, and his great aunt, who was the primary consort of Tang emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–26).<sup>10</sup> Dou Dexuan's brother Dou Deming 竇德明 (b. 587) had displayed talent in the army under the Sui and later served in the campaigns of Taizong during the early years of the Tang.<sup>11</sup> Dou Dexuan himself served under the first three Tang emperors, although seemingly with little distinction. Under Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–85), he reached the position of grand executive assistant (that is, minister) in the Ministry of Revenue in 662,<sup>12</sup> and was appointed to the joint position of acting grand councillor of the left (director of the chancellery) in 664. He died in 666 in his sixty-ninth year. Some records have it that his promotion to these positions was merely part of Gaozu's resolve to promote a new group of men to challenge the authority of influential elder statesmen such as Li Shiji 李世勣 (594–669) who had survived from the period of his father's reign. This may ex-

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*Fu's 'Kuang-i chi'* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995); Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2001); Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Dudbridge, "Tang Sources for the Study of Religious Culture," pp. 151–53.

<sup>10</sup> Liu Xu 劉詢 et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 61, pp. 2364–71; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 95, pp. 3844–51.

<sup>11</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 183, pp. 4723–24; *Xin Tangshu* 95, p. 3850.

<sup>12</sup> *Siyuan taichangpo* 司元太常伯 was the title used instead of *hubu shangshu* 戶部尚書 in the years 662–70, as acknowledged by Sima Guang. The writ for this appointment gives his name as Dou Xuande 竇玄德 and has him moving to this position from censor-in-chief. *Xin Tangshu* and *Zizhi tongjian* have Dou moving from the position censor-in-chief to the joint position in

plain why *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 gives a rather underwhelming appraisal of Dou, stating that he “tried to please according to the times. He was without fault, but had no other redeeming attributes.”<sup>13</sup> The dearth of information concerning Dou in surviving sources only reinforces this assessment. Unfortunately for Dou, his position in history would not have been furthered by the 713 suicide of his son Dou Huaizhen 竇懷貞, who was implicated in a plot by the Princess Taiping (d. 713) to poison Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–56) soon after the latter succeeded Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 684–90, 710–12) to the throne.<sup>14</sup> A further complication is that his name is occasionally rendered Dou Xuande 竇玄德, reversing the characters of his given name. Judging from the accompanying details, these references are undoubtedly to the same person, as in the first of the texts considered below.

The other named individual to make an appearance in three of the four texts is Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知 (d. 635), a Daoist active under the Chen, Sui and early Tang dynasties. He is recorded as having enjoyed the patronage of a number of emperors, most notably Yangdi of the Sui and Taizong of the Tang, and died during the latter’s reign. Wang is named in mid-Tang times in a lineage of the transmission of Shangqing Daoist teachings that located him between Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) and Pan Shizheng 潘師正 (d. 684), but more on this later.

#### XUANMEN LINGMIAO JI

The earliest version of the narrative in question survives in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記. The title of the work to which it is attributed is *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* 玄門靈妙記, which would suggest a collection of Daoist miracle tales. *Taiping guangji* contains no other material attributed to this work, perhaps indicating this entry was taken from an earlier edited compilation rather than directly from the original work. I have

664. See Li Linfu 李林甫, *Tang liudian* 唐六典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992) 3, p. 63; Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956) 201, pp. 6336, 6340; Song Minguo 宋敏求, *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1959) 62, p. 340; *Xin Tangshu* 3, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 5, p. 90; 183, p. 4724; *Xin Tangshu* 3, p. 64; 95, pp. 3850–51; *Zizhi tongjian* 201, pp. 6336, 6340, 6349; *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1960) 67, p. 10a; 72, p. 20b. An account in which Dou Dexuan first received Gaozong’s approbation for being unable to answer a question, but then was later praised by another official for acknowledging that he did not know, is attributed to *Tan bin lu* 譚賓錄 by Hu Qu 胡璩 (fl. 9th c.?), in Li Fang 李昉 et al., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961) 174, p. 1287; reproduced in *Zizhi tongjian* 201, pp. 6345–46; *Xin Tangshu* 95 p. 3851.

<sup>14</sup> These events are explained in Denis Twitchett, “Hsüan-tsung (reign 712–56),” in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3, Sui and T’ang China, 589–906, Part 1*, ed. Denis Twitchett

been unable to locate any reference to a text of this name elsewhere, but two sources mention a *Xuanmen lingyan ji* 玄門靈驗記, a title with a difference of a single character.<sup>15</sup> Since this is possibly the same work, it is worthy of further consideration.

The first reference to *Xuanmen lingyan ji* occurs in a work by Zhang Wanfu 張萬福 (fl. 710–13), a Daoist priest in Chang’an who was active during Ruizong’s restored reign.<sup>16</sup> Zhang gives this text and *Daomen jiyuan ji* 道門集驗記 as works that provide evidence of the religious efficacy derived from possessing or using the Daoist text *Duren jing* 度人經.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately the account in question here contains no reference to *Duren jing*, as we shall see. Yet if *Xuanmen lingyan ji* is the same collection as *Xuanmen lingmiao ji*, the anecdote under consideration here would date from between 666, the year Dou died (since his death is mentioned in the text), and the early eighth century, when Zhang Wanfu was active. Dating a narrative of Dou Dexuan to this period is also attractive because it predates the dishonorable death of his son, after which Dou’s value as protagonist in religious literature might have diminished.

The second reference to *Xuanmen lingyan ji* appears in the preface to *Daojiao lingyan ji* 道教靈驗記 by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), that is discussed below. Once again there is the pairing of *Xuanmen lingyan ji* with *Daomen jiyuan ji*, since Du Guangting names the two works as precursors to his own collection of accounts of Daoist miracles.<sup>18</sup>

The account attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* reads as follows:

Dou [Dexuan]<sup>19</sup> was from Henan. During the Zhenguan reign period [627–49], he served as commissioner of waterways (*dushui*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 344–45. For a biography of Dou Huai-zhen, see *Xin Tangshu* 109, pp. 4100–2.

<sup>15</sup> This and the following details concerning the work have already been noted in Verellen, “Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism,” pp. 232–33.

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Wanfu, *Dongxuan lingbao wuliang durenjing jue yinyi* 洞玄靈寶無量度人經訣音義 (DZ 95), p. 9b.

<sup>17</sup> *Daojiao lingyan ji* (DZ 590); *Yunji qiqian* (DZ 1032), *juan* 117–22.

<sup>18</sup> Du Guangting gives the authors of these two works as Su Huaichu 蘇懷楚 of Chengji 成紀 and Li Qizhi 李齊之 of Shiping 始平, respectively. Shiping was located some 30 kilometers west of Chang’an, while Chengji was 300 kilometers west, in modern Gansu province. Franciscus Verellen has noted that these two locations lay on the route connecting Chang’an with Dunhuang and the wider Buddhist world, suggesting these men may have been inspired to compose their works due to the traffic in similar texts for the Buddhist faith passing through this region. The proximity of these locations to the capital also allows the possibility of familiarity with court figures or a person’s writing for an official audience. See *Yunji qiqian* 117, p. 3a; Verellen, “Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism,” p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> As noted above, this text actually renders Dou’s name as Xuande rather than Dexuan.

*shizhe* 都水使者). At the time he was in his fifty-seventh year. On official orders sending him to Jiangxi, he set out by boat. There was another passenger aboard. Whenever Dou had food left over, he always gave it to this passenger. This went on for several days. Before arriving at Yangzhou, the passenger took his leave. [Dou] asked him, “Why are you in such a hurry?” The passenger replied, “I am a messenger of the Director of Destinies (*siming* 司命).<sup>20</sup> Since Commissioner of Waterways Dou is heading to Yangzhou, the Director of Destinies has sent me to pursue him.” [Dou] replied, “I am the commissioner of waterways. Why didn’t you mention this earlier?”

Following this is an extended exchange between Dou and the messenger, dominated by two long utterances from the latter outlining the situation facing Dou.<sup>21</sup> The messenger explained that he had been unable to reveal his identity or mission previously because he was yet to arrive at his destination. He also expressed at length how he was now indebted to Dou for his kindness on board the boat. In recognition of this, he explained to Dou how to intercede in the workings of the otherworld and urged him to seek aid from the Daoist Wang Yuanzhi, resident in Yangzhou, in avoiding his impending death. The messenger praised Wang’s abilities, remarking on the efficaciousness of his petitions to the Celestial Offices (*tiancao* 天曹), an institution responsible for handling the fate of mortals.<sup>22</sup> The messenger concluded by promising to return the following evening to report on the results of any efforts by Wang on Dou’s behalf, should Dou have succeeded in finding and appealing to Wang. The account continues:

When [Dou] arrived in Yangzhou, the local administrator sent all the officials out in welcome. Before discussing any affairs, Dou

<sup>20</sup> The Director of Destinies was a deity responsible for determining the fate of individuals. The title first appears in pre-Qin works, but gained a new significance in early Shang-qing texts. A temple for this deity on Qianshan 灤山 was given imperial recognition under the Tang. See entry by Yamada Toshiaki in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), 914–15; Lei Wen 雷聞, “Wuyue zhenjun ci” 五岳真君祠與唐代國家祭祀, in *Tangdai zongjiao xinyang yu shehui* 唐代宗教信仰與社會, ed. Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003), pp. 35–50; Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*, pp. 103–4.

<sup>21</sup> Comparison of available editions of *Taiping guangji* reveals that two sections of the messenger’s speech are transposed in different editions. The content remains the same. Other differences among the editions appear to be relatively insignificant. See Zhang Guofeng 張國風 (comp.), *Taiping guangji huijiao* 太平廣記會校 (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2011) 71, p. 841, n. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Franciscus Verellen, “The Heavenly Master Liturgical Agenda According to Chisong Zi’s Petition Almanac,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004), p. 203.

simply asked whether the officials had seen the Venerable Master Wang. None of the officials understood the reason, but they quickly sent for him. The Venerable Master Wang soon arrived. After sending the others away, Dou explained the entire situation. The master said, "You do not internally nurture the orthodox rites, nor do you conduct offerings. [Yet] you are committed in your duties, and conscientious in your work. I dare not predict the outcome of the rites." At this he ordered an attendant youth to write a petition. He then mounted the altar and submitted it. The following evening, the messenger came and reported to Dou, saying, "You have not been pardoned."

The messenger told Dou to present another petition and burn paper to serve as money for the functionaries of the Celestial Offices. Dou agreed to this and approached Wang again.

The master was extremely displeased. Dou said, "We can only follow fate. I beg for your aid." Pitying him, the master dispatched another petition. The following evening the messenger returned and again reported, "You have not been pardoned." In despair, Dou sought the reason. At first unwilling to speak, the messenger finally lowered his head and replied, "The presentation of petitions by Daoists is just like petitions and memorials presented in the world of men. In the first petition, one of the characters was written incorrectly. In the second petition, the two characters *reng* and *qi* were written in running script. When you send a petition to a ruler of men, you must be neat and precise, so how can you be careless for the Great Way of the Celestial Venerable (*Tianzun dadao* 天尊大道)? The petitions presented were all cast aside. If not considered properly, how can you expect to receive aid?" Dou . . . informed the master of the issue. The master was extremely pleased. "Is that what happened? I had suspected that petitions and memorials would be futile. Could it prove to be as you have said?" Taking the dispatched petitions from upon the altar, he saw the incorrect character and the running script, just as Dou had explained. The master said, "The petition I send now will be written personally by my humble self, and on this third occasion it will meet the requirements." He dispatched the petition according to the rites. The following evening the messenger reported to Dou, "The affair has been resolved." The master said, "There is an extension of twelve years." Dou explained the affair to his family: "I had previously seen the rites of Daoists, but had

never believed in them. Now that I have received this reprieve, I understand their effectiveness. From this day on, I will seek to serve the Way until the end of my days.” Thereupon he went to Venerable Master Yin 尹 of Qingdu Abbey 清都觀 to receive the liturgical registers and his entire household served the Way. He died in his sixty-ninth year.<sup>23</sup>

Dou Dexuan is the focus of this narrative. As he attempts to resolve the bureaucratic and ritual problems he faces, dialogue occurs between Dou and either the otherworldly messenger or Wang Yuanzhi. But the messenger and Wang do most of the talking, especially the former. In addition, the attribution to Wang of his final statement regarding the extension of life that Dou received seems out of place and would perhaps be more comfortably attributed to the lips of the messenger.

Before considering the text as a whole, some specific details are worth comparing with information from other sources. The ages given for Dou are internally consistent – the text says he is fifty-seven *sui* when granted a reprieve of twelve years, making him sixty-nine *sui* at his death – and his final age of sixty-nine *sui* matches his age at death as recorded in the official histories. However, the year 654, twelve years before his death, is five years after the end of the Zhenguan reign period (627–49) – specified here as the setting for the events – and almost two decades after 635, the year given elsewhere for Wang Yuanzhi’s death (including that given in *Zhenxi*, a text to be considered below). Internal consistency, significant for the impact of a text on a careful reader, was apparently easier to maintain for the author inside this account rather than for details impinging on history more generally.

The position Dou is given here is not mentioned in official histories as being among those he held. As the title suggests, the commissioner of waterways was responsible for matters concerning rivers and other bodies of water. The position itself underwent a number of changes of title. The title *dushui shizhe* was first introduced during the reign of Yangdi of the Sui dynasty, only to be changed to *dushui jian* 都水監 in 609. This was followed by changes to two other titles before it returned to *dushui shizhe* in the Zhenguan reign period, when the events in this account are purported to have taken place, thus making it a plausible detail. The position was changed again to *sijinjian* 司津監 in 662, only to be changed back in 670.<sup>24</sup> A commissioner of waterways may well have had reason to travel around the empire, and any journey from

<sup>23</sup> *Taiping guangji* 71, pp. 444–45.

<sup>24</sup> *Tang liudian* 23, pp. 598–99.

the capital to Jiangxi would have involved a boat trip to Yangzhou. Standing at the confluence of the Grand Canal and the Yangzi River, this city was a key transport and communications hub.<sup>25</sup>

The account offers details potentially of interest to the modern student of Tang religious culture: the Daoist master Wang Yuanzhi has an acolyte in attendance who prepares the petitions; the dispatched petitions are later retrieved intact from the altar for examination; and paper is burnt to serve as money to grease the wheels of the otherworldly bureaucracy. This does not immediately suggest an austere portrayal of Daoist ritual according to rarefied ideal as put forward in religious scripture, but instead ritual as it was commonly performed, observed and understood. Rituals often bring resolution in Tang accounts of religious events, but their details – such as the objects used and the actions conducted – are often omitted. These details are introduced into the narrative here by the errors of procedure.

The portrayal of Wang in the account is also not the stuff of religious biography. An ordained Daoist, he appears to be residing in the city of Yangzhou and displays some reluctance to help Dou. He is at first unsure of the outcome of the ritual, makes errors in its execution, and appears to be surprised at his final success. His attitude and the uneven efficacy of his attempts to save Dou produce a picture of an imperfect individual with less than complete mastery of religious practice. This depiction suggests that the account was not produced primarily to promote reverence for the kind of venerated master that appears in esoteric religious texts but instead to portray the kind of religious professional that a reader of the time might come across in everyday life.

Yet through the events, the tale highlights important aspects of religious practice. The story acquaints lay readers with the requirements of Daoist ritual and gives evidence of its efficacy. In explaining why the first memorials fail through comparison with affairs in the world of men, the text does not portray Daoists rites as something obscure and remote, but rather as something recognizable to readers with experience of more mundane forms of bureaucracy. The petition communicates the supplicant's appeal to the Celestial Offices and is a primary factor in determining the ritual's success.<sup>26</sup> The tale emphasizes that the proper execution of procedure as described in scripture

<sup>25</sup> Li Tingxian 李廷先, *Tangdai Yangzhou shikao* 唐代揚州史考 (Yangzhou: Jiangsu guji, 1992), pp. 386–96.

<sup>26</sup> Verellen, “The Heavenly Master Liturgical Agenda,” pp. 297–301.

was essential to success of this fundamental Daoist means of achieving personal salvation.

In promoting Daoist ritual, the tale also fits into a more common form of religious belief and practice. On the journey, Dou is said to provide the messenger with food. Offerings of food to ghosts in Chinese religious practice establish mutual obligations between this and the otherworld.<sup>27</sup> The food that Dou provides can be interpreted as a form of offering to which spirits respond, just as with an offering to spirits in other circumstances. In their first exchange, the messenger explains at length that he is indebted to Dou, and this demands repayment. It establishes for the reader the wider relevance of the ritual described within potentially familiar experiences.

The anecdote would appear to owe much to a tradition of narratives that entertain as they instruct. The presentation of multiple petitions as Dou confers with the messenger and Wang Yuanzhi heightens the reader's anticipation for a satisfactory outcome, three being a number commonly employed for its narrative impact. The first two instances set the scene and build tension while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of conducting rites correctly before the third instance provides resolution.<sup>28</sup> This and the prolix dialogue, including the messenger's remarks on the workings of the otherworld, suggest a story told for dramatic effect and instruction without a concern for concision. Dou's final statement about his new found commitment to Daoism exhorts readers to do the same.

The concluding references carry hints of the provenance of this record. The naming of the Daoist master from whom Dou Dexuan later received religious instruction may be an attempt to enhance the reputation of a figure who represented an institution or teaching that was relevant in the years after Dou's death. The identity of Venerable Master Yin is unclear,<sup>29</sup> but Qingdu Abbey was a Daoist institution in the capital. It was visited by a number of officials during Dou Dexuan's

<sup>27</sup> Robert F. Campany, "Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dynasties *Zhiguai*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 13 (1991), pp. 25–26.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 229–35.

<sup>29</sup> One possible candidate is a Daoist named Yin Wencao 尹文操 (d. 683). A stele for him dating to 717 indicates that he served in the capital, but does not name any abbey. Yin Wencao hailed from Tianshui 天水, which was located in the same province as Chengji, the home of the possible author Su Huaichu, but with this the analysis moves too far into speculation. See Wang Chang 王昶, *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編 (Shanghai: Hongbao zhai, 1893) 71, pp. 5a–7a; Chen Tan 陳坦, *Daojiao jinshi lue* 道教金石略 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pp. 102–4.

lifetime, and Zhang Wanfu had some form of association with it.<sup>30</sup> The account was likely preserved in this form when the Daoist Master Yin was still alive or when his legacy was still important, perhaps during the lifetime of a religious heir. Even if these details were added to a tale already circulating in some form with the aim of securing benefit for interested parties, it may not have been very long after Dou's death and was perhaps during the living memory of his supposed contemporary, Master Yin.

By the time of the account's composition, Wang Yuanzhi would have been a notable figure dead for some decades, but during the late seventh and early eighth centuries – when the account may have been composed – Wang posthumously enjoyed attention due to his supposed connections with the Daoist Pan Shizheng and his successors, then receiving the patronage of the court. Yet details of the account do not immediately suggest that it was produced to elevate Wang's reputation. Furthermore, he is only referred to as “venerable master” and not by any of the more elevated posthumous titles he received around this time. Although praised by the messenger, the reputation of a man awarded the title of “master of ascent to perfection” (*Shengzhen xiansheng* 昇真先生) in 680, later changed to “master of ascent to mystery” (*Shengxuan xiansheng* 昇玄先生) in 691, is not likely to have benefited greatly from a story that has him fiddling with defective petitions.<sup>31</sup>

At the end, the devotion of Dou's household to Daoism could constitute an attempt to highlight the relevance to ordinary people, but could equally indicate attention to the religious credentials of Dou's descendants, perhaps relevant for Dou Huaizhen until his untimely death following his involvement in a failed attempt on the life of Xuanzong.<sup>32</sup> Events of the early eighth century suggest a possible motivation for the Dou family's interest in Daoism at around this time. Lady Dou, the consort of Ruizong murdered by Empress Wu in 692, was the daughter of Dou Xiaochen 竇孝謹 (fl. 693), a relative of Dou Dexuan in the same generation.<sup>33</sup> Lady Dou's daughters were the Princesses Jinxian 金仙 (d. 732) and Yuzhen 玉真 (d. ca. 762), who received Daoist

<sup>30</sup> Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960) 33, pp. 453, 455–57; 35, pp. 464–65; *Dongxuan lingbao daoshi sanding jing jiefu lu zeri li* 洞玄靈寶道士受三洞經誡法錄擇日曆 (DZ 1240), p. 1a.

<sup>31</sup> Chen Guofu 陳國符, *Daozang yuanliu kao* 道藏源流考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), p. 50; Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, “Dōkyō no shinkei to zen no hōkei” 道教の真系と禪の法系, *Tōyō gaku jutsu kenkyū*, supplementary volume 別冊 (1988), p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> If this was the case, this would also suggest a 713 *terminus ante quem* for the account, but as with the analysis of the work of a similar title, above, it remains speculation.

<sup>33</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 51, p. 2176; 61, p. 2371; 183, pp. 4724–25; *Xin Tangshu* 76, pp. 3489–90.

ordinations in 711 during the reign of their father.<sup>34</sup> Following these ordinations, Dou Huaizhen is said to have supported the construction of Daoist abbeys for the women despite opposition from other officials due to the expenditure.<sup>35</sup> An account of the Daoist investiture of the princesses was composed by the Daoist we have already met, Zhang Wanfu.<sup>36</sup> Some of the strands in this web of associations are tenuous, but they may provide a hint as to the background to some of the account's details. Members of Lady Dou's branch of the clan continued to receive imperial favour during the reign of her son Xuanzong, but they were more distantly related to Dou Dexuan.<sup>37</sup>

### ZHENXI

The second, and shortest, version of these events in Dou Dexuan's life exists in a text containing biographies charting a lineage of Daoists starting from founders of Shangqing Daoism. *Zhenxi* 真系, by Li Bo 李渤 (773–831), survives in the well-known collectanea *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤.<sup>38</sup> Its preface dates the text to 805. It traces the transmission of Shangqing teachings from their arrival in the world in the fourth century down to the late eighth century. Each figure in the line of transmission is given a brief biography, including details concerning how he received the doctrine. The lineage presents an idealized description of the transmission of texts recorded by Tao Hongjing in *Zhen'gao* 真誥 – here quoted by name – and continues it down to Li Hanguang 李含光 (683–769).<sup>39</sup> As a lineage for the revelations of Maoshan 茅山, it served the interests of the relevant Daoist masters of the Tang. The events of the narrative in question appear in the entry for Wang Yuanzhi.

At the outset, Wang's biography contains details of his parentage and early life as standard Chinese biographies demand. At the age of fifteen *sui*, he is said to have studied from Tao Hongjing and later Zang Jin 臧矜 (fl. 550–70). Wang served the last ruler of the Chen dynasty, met a transcendent, and was installed in a temple in Yangzhou by Yangdi 煬帝 (r. 604–17) of the Sui dynasty. In an encounter with Li Shimin, later to be Taizong (r. 626–49) of the Tang, Wang proph-

<sup>34</sup> Charles Benn, *The Cavern Mystery Transmission: A Taoist Ordination Rite of A.D. 711* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 1991), pp. 5–20.

<sup>35</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 183, p. 4725; *Xin Tangshu* 109, p. 4100.

<sup>36</sup> Benn, *The Cavern Mystery Transmission*, pp. 1, 19–20.

<sup>37</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 183, pp. 4725–26.

<sup>38</sup> *Zhenxi* constitutes *juan* 5 of *Yunji qiqian*.

<sup>39</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 5, pp. 3a, 4a, 5a; Michel Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy," *T'oung Pao* 63.1 (1977), pp. 15–40.

esized Li's ascension to the position of emperor.<sup>40</sup> Many years later, Wang requested permission from the emperor to return to seclusion on Maoshan, which he did in 635. Then the narrative suddenly breaks off with an "at that time" (*shiyou* 時有) into an account of Dou Dexuan on his way to Yangzhou.

At that time, Dou Dexuan was passing through Yangzhou and met a messenger of the Director of Destinies. [The messenger] told him that he was to have a major official salary [in the otherworld bureaucracy] and, according to his endowment of [the pure *yang* of] nine by nine (*jiu jiu shu* 九九數), he was soon to die. Dexuan appealed to the compassion of the messenger, who replied: "Chief of the Rites Wang the Perfected (*Wang zhenren fazhu* 王真人法主) is the Transcendent Earl of Shaoshi (*Shaoshi xianbo* 少室仙伯).<sup>41</sup> He has the task of investigating and recording [the affairs of] men and ghosts. If he petitions the Celestial Offices, then there will assuredly be a response." Thus Dexuan appealed to Wang. As a result, Wang had no choice but to plead for Dou's life. The messenger reported, "Your life has been extended by thirteen years." During the reign of Gaozong, Dexuan became grand councillor of the left.<sup>42</sup> On the day Dexuan relinquished government office [i.e. died], he told of all of these events. Consequently all the people of that time addressed Wang as chief of the rites, and knew that he had already received a post among the transcendents.<sup>43</sup>

After resolving Dou's difficulties, the text concludes the entry for Wang with his last purported words to Pan Shizheng, the next in the line of transmission of the Shangqing doctrine, along with the names of his other followers and details of the honours he received posthumously.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The date of the meeting is not specified in *Zhenxi* (*Yunji qiqian* 5, p. 12a), but *Jiu Tang-shu* 192, p. 5125, places it in 621 in Luoyang during the then Prince of Qin's attack on the Sui general Wang Shichong 王世充 (d. 621).

<sup>41</sup> Correcting this text's *shan* 山 to *xian* 仙, is warranted due to the consistency of this title elsewhere, but the title would still read coherently as "Earl of Shaoshi Mountain," for Shaoshi referred to a mountain, but would lack the symmetry of paired characters.

<sup>42</sup> Here as elsewhere, for official titles I have referred to Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 5, pp. 12a–12b. Where it is reproduced in Chen Guofu, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, p. 49, eleven characters are erroneously inserted from the preceding sentence regarding Wang's age at death.

<sup>44</sup> Many of the details of Wang's life in *Zhenxi* match those given in his biography in *Jiu Tangshu* 192, pp. 5125–26.

The content of Wang's biography in *Zhenxi* is very similar to that of another biography for Wang attributed to *Tanbin lu* 譚賓錄, dating to the mid-ninth century, as well as to entries for Wang in both the Tang histories, dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>45</sup> These sources all contain the events that appear in *Zhenxi* on either side of Wang's meeting with Dou Dexuan, albeit with some differences, particularly in the content of correspondence Wang received on one occasion from Taizong. Yet none mentions the meeting with Dou or the brief assessment of Wang that precedes it: "The grand *qi* of the master was all enveloping; his speech and his silence were as one; his capacity for reflection was like a mirror; and his response to things was without partiality." This may suggest that material in these accounts of Wang's life was compiled from disparate sources, and the meeting with Dou Dexuan was inserted into the account in *Zhenxi*, but not into that of *Tanbin lu* and other works.<sup>46</sup> But the interlude with Dou appears to add little of immediate importance to the arc of Wang's life.

The general outline of Wang's career common to these texts broadly corresponds with the information given in one of the earliest sources for details of Wang's life, a stele written by Jiang Min 江旻 in 642. But this stele fails to mention some significant people who appeared in later biographies. For example, it lacks the close exchanges with Taizong both before and after he ascended the throne. Unsurprisingly, the stele also lacks any reference to Dou Dexuan, who presumably was yet in the middle of his career at the time of its composition. Wang's teacher Zang Jin is mentioned, but the stele has no reference to Wang having any relationship with Tao Hongjing or Pan Shizheng.<sup>47</sup> It claims that Wang died at the age of 126 years, which would have allowed an acquaintance with Tao Hongjing, who died over a century before Wang's own death, but takes no advantage of this.<sup>48</sup> It appears that no existing sources dating to before the late seventh century attest to any lineage linking Wang Yuanzhi with either Tao or Pan. References to these connections in the transmission of the Shangqing teachings first appeared late in the lifetime of Pan Shizheng, who enjoyed the patronage of Gaozong and his primary consort, the later Empress

<sup>45</sup> *Taiping guangji* 23, p. 153; *Jiu Tang shu* 192, pp. 5125–26; *Xin Tang shu* 204, pp. 5803–4.

<sup>46</sup> Another account of Wang's life complete with Dou Dexuan and the appraisal of Wang's attributes, indicating it was likely taken from *Zhenxi*, appears in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真僊體道通鑑 (DZ 296) 25, pp. 1a–3b.

<sup>47</sup> *Maoshan zhi* 茅山志 (DZ 304) 22, pp. 1a–10b; Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, "Ō Enchi den" 王遠知伝, *Tōhō gakuho* 東方学報 62 (1990), pp. 70–78.

<sup>48</sup> Chen, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, pp. 47–50; Kobayashi Masayoshi 小林正美, *Tōdai no dōkyō to tenshidō* 唐代の道教と天師道 (Tokyo: Chisenshokan, 2003), p. 169.

Wu (r. 690–705). Pan’s purported connections with Wang, and Wang’s with Tao Hongjing, were possibly fabricated to enhance the reputation of Pan and his patrons. For this, a link between Pan and Wang required only the insertion of Pan into existing material concerning Wang’s life. For example, the last exchange that Wang had with Pan Shizheng according to *Zhenxi* and other later sources has much in common with Wang’s last words to unnamed attendants in Jiang Min’s stele.<sup>49</sup> The title given to Wang in *Zhenxi*, chief of rites (*fazhu* 法主), also appears in the stele, but not in any other version of the narrative considered here, perhaps further indication of this account’s adaptation to existing biographical material.

Wang Yuanzhi’s supposed political connections made him a figure worthy of attention. In addition to serving in Luoyang under both the Sui and Tang dynasties, late records have him recognizing the talents of Li Shimin, the future Taizong, prior to his father’s taking the throne. This purported incident likely indicates a later attempt to legitimize Taizong’s succession, which was secured after eliminating two of his brothers, one being the heir apparent, and forcing his father Gaozu to abdicate. As a religious figure, Wang’s service under the dynasty undoubtedly made him a suitable candidate for the source of such endorsement. Through this association, Wang would have been a valuable link for Pan Shizheng and his imperial patrons – Gaozong and the future Empress Wu – to the early years of the dynasty and its founders as well as to the more remote roots of Shangqing doctrine.

The importance of such political ties is demonstrated elsewhere in the biographies in *Zhenxi*. The actions of the Daoists themselves are the focus of the narrative in each entry as they visit sacred mountains, receive texts and teach students before they depart this world through some form of Daoist transformation. But as the accounts progress, the amount of dialogue and anecdotal material increases, as does contact with major political figures. Furthermore, from Tao Hongjing onward, all figures are depicted as having contact with ruling emperors. The Daoists in the Shangqing lineage thus become political actors whose actions legitimize the rule of the court in question, and the Daoists have their own religious authority recognized in return. Despite a lack of historical veracity, this lineage became an important source of authority for Daoist figures during the Tang and appears to have gained

<sup>49</sup> *Maoshan zhi* 22, pp. 7a, 11a–11b.

widespread currency.<sup>50</sup> Its development may have been influenced by the contemporaneous interest in Buddhist Chan lineages.<sup>51</sup>

For the most part, elements in each biography are meaningful parts of a greater narrative of an individual's life. Only in the account of Wang Yuanzhi does an abrupt shift of focus occur with the appearance of Dou Dexuan's story of just over one hundred characters, and then the text returns to Wang's life. Even in this much abbreviated version of the events, the narrative surrounding Dou Dexuan involves lengthy interaction between Dou and the otherworldly messenger. The anecdotal nature of this section is matched by other parts of the text, but the shift of focus away from Wang, with dialogue not involving him, is atypical of *Zhenxi* as a whole. Yet compared with the version attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji*, this brief interlude is stripped down to a level where much of the narrative impact is lost. There is no mention of any meeting on a boat, and with that the indebtedness that the messenger feels for Dou's help is also absent. Here the messenger simply reports Dou's impending death and, following Dou's appeal, explains how it can be avoided. Similarly, no explanation of how Dou finds Wang is given. The narrative hints at reluctance on Wang's part to perform the rite, perhaps an indication of the greater reluctance demonstrated in the earlier version, but dialogue in the events here is limited to two brief statements by the otherworldly messenger. Since no reason is given, Wang's apparent reluctance to help Dou in *Zhenxi* is perplexing. This lack of clarity might suggest that *Zhenxi*'s account of the Dou story was abbreviated when taken from another source, although this other source need not have been *Xuanmen lingmiao ji*. More notably, gone are the abortive attempts to submit petitions and the ensuing exchanges. These errors would not sit easily in a laudatory account of Wang's religious achievements.

In contrast, some details in *Zhenxi* are absent from the longer version, including the messenger's reference to Dou's impending position in the otherworldly bureaucracy, his use of Wang's title of Transcendent Earl of Shaoshi, and the concluding reference to Wang's achievement of transcendence. These details accord with the biography's subsequent account in which Wang tells Pan Shizheng the title he is to have following his departure from the mortal world; the latter detail also appears in a stele for Wang attributed to Li Bo, the author of *Zhenxi*.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> It appears in steles by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–83) and Li Bo 李白 (701–62). See *Maoshan zhi*, 23.6a, 24.17b; Kobayashi, *Tōdai no dōkyō to tenshidō*, pp. 153–54.

<sup>51</sup> Yoshikawa, "Dōkyō no shinkei to zen no hōkei," pp. 11–34.

<sup>52</sup> *Maoshan zhi* 22, pp. 11A–11B.

The earliest surviving reference to Wang as the Transcendent Earl of Shaoshi (one of the peaks of Songshan) may be in Li Bo's work, since Jiang Min's stele of 642 states only that Wang knew of his impending ascent to the title of "transcendent earl." In addition, the messenger now explains the looming death of Dou in numerological terms significant to Daoism, nine by nine signifying pure *yang*, the exhaustion of which results in death.<sup>53</sup> And here it is the messenger, not Wang, who announces the period by which Dou's life is extended.

The problem between Dou's lifespan and the dates of the events – as identified in the earlier version – remains. Despite being granted thirteen more years of life in the received version of *Zhenxi*, Dou's death in 666 (as recorded elsewhere) is thirty-one years after Wang is reputed to have passed away. An inversion of the characters, producing thirty (*san shi* 三十) from thirteen (*shi san* 十三), would rectify this problem, placing it neatly in the year of the four-month window of Wang's residence in Yangzhou in 635, but the "twelve years" in *Xuanmiao lingyan ji*, and the resulting precision in the mathematics of Dou's ages, suggests that the thirteen may in fact more accurately preserve the original.<sup>54</sup>

Yangzhou, Dou Dexuan's destination, would appear to have been a location of significance in Wang's life. His father is said to have served as the magistrate of the city under the Chen dynasty and Wang himself was called there by the emperor under the Sui dynasty (one source suggests this was in 592) although he returned to Maoshan soon afterwards. Jiang Min's stele provides details of Wang's movements in later years, a similar outline of his whereabouts being followed by Li Bo. In 611 Wang Yuanzhi responded to an imperial summons and proceeded to Zhuojun 涿郡, from where Yangdi engaged in a campaign against Koguryō. In 612 Wang went to Luoyang 洛陽 when Yangdi returned there. During his two decades in the capital, Wang performed religious rituals for the court. He returned to Maoshan in the fourth month of 635, just as *Zhenxi* has it, and died there in the eighth month. *Zhenxi*, the stele, and other sources for Wang's life contain no reference to his being away from Luoyang between 612 and 635.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the position of Dou Dexuan's encounter with Wang in the narrative in *Zhenxi* implies that it occurred after his return to the south. *Zhenxi* allows a brief refer-

<sup>53</sup> Isabelle Robinet, "Le rôle et le sens des nombres dans la cosmologie et l'alchimie taoïstes," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 16 (1994), pp. 98–103.

<sup>54</sup> "Thirteen years" also appears in the passage likely taken from *Zhenxi* that appears in *Lishi zhenxian taidao tongjian* 25, p. 2b.

<sup>55</sup> Chen, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, pp. 47–50; Yoshikawa, "Ō Enchi den," pp. 79–83.

ence to Dou's future career only by flagging it for the reader with the words "during the reign of Gaozong," before returning to Wang. The compiler of the biography was careful on this point, since Yangzhou is named as Dou's destination in all versions of the account considered in this analysis. Since the meeting occurs in Yangzhou, it is located in the biography at the only time when Wang was there, and Dou could conceivably have had high position, Dou being but a teenager when Wang left Maoshan in 612. But this leaves only a four-month window of opportunity for Dou to have met the Daoist in the city between his arrival and death. Paradoxically, this perhaps betrays care in compilation by whoever first included this episode in a biography of Wang Yuanzhi. While Wang's return to the south, his last conversations with his followers, and the manner of his transformation are all important to his legacy, the meeting with Dou seems not only superfluous but an intrusion that detracts from more significant matters.

Why is the record of Dou's encounters included in the biography of Wang Yuanzhi? It appears as an awkward interlude grafted on to a basic narrative of Wang's career, with attention given to time and geography. Even without other evidence, from the text of *Zhenxi* alone we might surmise that the account of Dou Dexuan circulated independently of any depiction of Wang's religious career, to which its inclusion adds very little of significance. While *Zhenxi* promoted reverence for Wang and others in the Shangqing lineage, the encounter with Dou clearly had a separate meaning perhaps as an independent miracle tale, but a zealous compiler felt that its inclusion was warranted, perhaps for the sake of completeness.<sup>56</sup>

### BAOYING JI

A different manner of achieving salvation is seen in a third version of the narrative, taken from a Buddhist collection entitled *Baoying ji*. The full title is *Jingang jing baoying ji* 金剛經報應記, or *Records of Retribution for the Diamond sutra*, possibly by Lu Qiu 盧求 (*jinshi* 826). *Baoying ji* consists of anecdotes that demonstrate the efficacy of reciting the *Diamond sutra*, and the story about Dou Dexuan accords with this type of salvation.<sup>57</sup> The vocabulary and phrasing of this work's content, in-

<sup>56</sup> Another example of the results of such inclusive compiling is considered in Russell Kirkland, "A World in Balance: Holistic Synthesis in the T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 23 (1993), pp. 49-65.

<sup>57</sup> Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄, *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* 中國古代小說總目提要 (Beijing: Renmen wenzue chubanshe, 2005), p. 88.

cluding Dou's story, is simple and straightforward, perhaps indicating a broad intended audience.

Events in items attributed to *Baoying ji* date from the mid-sixth century through the late ninth. Since a number of them are set in the second half of the seventh, especially during the reign of Empress Wu, the account of Dou fits well temporally.<sup>58</sup>

Dou Dexuan served as minister during the Linde 麟德 reign period (664–65). On official orders, he went to Yangzhou. When crossing the Huai River, after the boat was several dozen paces from the bank, he saw a man of very poor appearance sitting on the ground on the shore with a small bundle. Dexuan said, "It will be soon be dusk and there will be no more boats crossing." As a result, he ordered that the man be taken aboard. In the middle of the river, Dexuan noticed that the man appeared hungry and gave him food. After crossing, Dexuan mounted a horse and went on his way. The man followed him. After several *li*, Dexuan thought it odd and asked, "Where is it that you wish to go?" The response was, "I am not a man, but a ghost messenger (*guishi* 鬼使). I am currently heading for Yangzhou to pursue Commissioner-in-Chief (*dashi* 大使) Dou." [Dexuan] said, "What is the given name of the commissioner-in-chief?" [The messenger] said, "His name is Dexuan." Dexuan was startled and afraid. He dismounted to pay obeisance, saying, "I am that person." Through tears he begged for [instruction in] a course of action. The ghost said, "I am deeply grateful to you for taking me aboard and giving me food, so I will release you. If you make haste to read the *Diamond Sutra* one thousand times, I will come to you to report." Over a month later when his readings of the sutra were sufficient, the ghost indeed came and said, "Your readings of the sutra are sufficient. I assure you there is nothing to worry about. Now to finish this affair you must come with me to see the king." Dexuan thereupon took to his pillow and died. After one night he returned to life, and said, "I first followed the messenger into an imperial citadel. The messenger said, 'You stay here. I must first explain to the king.' The messenger then entered. From behind the screen, I heard from afar the king say, 'You and he schemed together. You revealed my affairs.' Thereupon he received thirty lashes. The messenger then came out and removed his clothes to show me, saying, 'I have already endured the rod.' I

<sup>58</sup> Many records attributed to *Baoying ji* are clustered in *juan* 102–108 of *Taiping guangji*.

repeatedly expressed my gratitude. I then entered and saw a man in purple robes descend stairs to greet me. He said, 'You have much merit, and it is not yet the appropriate time for you to come.' He asked me to return. I then left and fell into a pit, and with that I returned to life." The messenger came again, saying, "I am hungry and seek food. I also beg for money and wealth."<sup>59</sup> Dexuan gave him these and asked about his future office and emolument. [The ghost] said, "I have remembered all. From here you will become director of palace administration, and then censor-in-chief, then companion to the heir apparent, then grand executive attendant in the Ministry of Revenue, then grand councilor of the left. You will reach your sixty-fourth year." As soon as he finished saying this, he took his leave and departed, saying, "I will not be able to come again." Later, all was as he said.<sup>60</sup>

Most notable in this account is the means by which Dou achieved salvation. The Daoist master Wang Yuanzhi is nowhere to be seen, and instead Dou follows the ghost's instructions by repeatedly reading the *Diamond sutra*, an act of Buddhist devotion and the key element in accounts attributed to *Baoying ji*. Throughout material attributed to this text, people are saved from their predicaments by reciting the sutra: a boat finds safe passage through a storm; prison shackles are broken; pursuers are blind to their quarry. Most commonly, those fated to die are granted an extension of their lives.

Other new elements here are also commonly found elsewhere. The otherworldly figure (here given the title of "ghost messenger") reports to a king within a citadel. Dou meets with this king after "dying" and recounts the experience – to no one in particular – after returning to life. *Baoying ji* and other, similar, collections of Buddhist literature often have protagonists returning to life after a meeting with a king who presides over judgment in the underworld, presumably Yama (*yanluo wang* 閻羅王). The ubiquitous messengers of the Tang's ghostly bureaucracy also serve this Buddhist deity by bringing people for judgment.<sup>61</sup> This is in contrast to the Director of Destinies, a deity more closely associated with Daoism.

Dou's merit in aiding the messenger is greater in this account. In contrast to the record attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* in which Dou

<sup>59</sup> The translation of the messenger's utterance here follows a text based on various editions as suggested in Zhang, *Taiping guangji huijiao* 103, p. 1361.

<sup>60</sup> *Taiping guangji* 103, pp. 695–96.

<sup>61</sup> Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution*, pp. 135–44.

simply finds the man already on the boat, Dou here invites the man aboard. Here it is not a passage along a waterway; instead, Dou is “crossing” (*du* 渡) the Huai River, perhaps suggesting the notion of salvation that this term held in Buddhist contexts. The boat trip ends quickly, followed by the messenger pursuing a mounted Dou. Upon learning of the messenger’s identity, he immediately dismounts from his horse to show his piety. He understands his predicament and begs for his life through tears. Dou is here quick to recognize the ghost’s authority, and by extension the efficacy of Buddhism. In contrast to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji*, the ghost also speaks with brevity and precision.

Dou Dexuan’s tale is unusual for *Baoying ji* as a whole, in that the initial merit he gains is only on a personal level, derived from a boat ride and food given to a ghost. To repay his debt, the ghost tells Dou to read the sutra to avoid his fate. This form of reciprocity produces a level of complexity one step beyond the content of most accounts in this collection, which simply have the protagonist reading or reciting the *Diamond sutra* of their own accord before or when something untoward happens. The messenger here is indeed overstepping the bounds of his position by recommending to Dou that he read the text, which leads to the beating that the messenger receives before Dou’s audience with the king. This turn of events does not appear in other accounts attributed to *Baoying ji* that have the living escorted to the world of the dead. Yet the messenger’s repayment of a personal debt to Dou is common to all three long versions of Dou’s boat trip on the way to Yangzhou (the last to be introduced below), and is absent only from the abbreviated telling in *Zhenxi*. Due to this, it seems probable that an existing account has been rewritten with a ready-made set of Buddhist narrative devices. Notably, an individual’s account of events after death in the otherworld in Buddhist accounts is often made to other witnesses, but here there are none and so no one is named when this narrative device is used. Differences in language and style do not immediately point to a close textual relationship between the accounts attributed to *Baoying ji* and *Xuanmiao lingyan ji*, but if a Daoist narrative already existed, a Buddhist version based on it would almost compose itself. It is more difficult to envisage the invention of Dou’s engagement with Wang Yuanzhi and the submission of the three petitions from the adaption of a Buddhist original.

Recurrent reference to the provision of food may be the result of the account’s Buddhist reinvention. On the boat, Dou gives food to the messenger since he “appeared hungry”. The messenger explicitly refers to this food in his first dialogue with Dou, as he does in *Xuanmen ling-*

*miao ji*. But in the Buddhist account, after Dou returns from his visit to the king of the underworld, the messenger requests food again. Since Dou has already had his audience with the king of the underworld, this visit is not necessary for learning of his immediate fate. The messenger's final visit also introduces information about Dou's future, but only after Dou gives the messenger what he asks for. While the feeding of ghosts permeated Chinese religious practice, in lay Buddhism it represented a path to salvation. By the Tang, rituals and festivals for the presentation of offerings had become a significant part of common Buddhist practice.<sup>62</sup> What appears in the Daoist works as offerings to this lesser spirit may here be transformed into a religious act of greater significance for the supplicant.

Some details in this Buddhist version suggest it was not casually composed. The list of official positions predicted for Dou at the end are absent from the Daoist renditions above, yet agree with those given in a stele for Dou dated the eleventh month of 666, some three months after his death.<sup>63</sup> Their inclusion demonstrates a concern for veracity, but problems arise yet again with the dating of events and Dou's age. He is said to be sixty-four *sui* at death, but as pointed out above, other records have him die at sixty-seven *sui*. Events now occur in the period 664–65, the exclusion of Wang Yuanzhi freeing the narrative from the reign of Taizong. Even so, the positions listed for Dou's future career would have to be compressed into the two years remaining before his death in 666. Furthermore, at the time the events were set, Dou was already progressing through the listed titles. In the eighth month of 664, Dou as censor-in-chief received the concurrent ranks of grand executive attendant in the Ministry of Revenue and acting grand councillor of the left.<sup>64</sup> If details of Dou's positions were added to an existing narrative, it may be that the source providing them did not record his age at death, or gave a different age. Notably, the specificity of these details in the account are at odds with the general term used for Dou's position at the beginning of the account, namely, *qing* 卿. This contrasts sharply with the precise position of commissioner of waterways given in the Daoist texts. Anyone moving it from the Zhenguan reign period to Linde reign period with less than complete knowledge of his

<sup>62</sup> Charles Orzech, "Saving the Burning-Mouth Hungry Ghost," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 278–83; Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988); Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 1987).

<sup>63</sup> Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠, *Jinshi lu* 金石錄 (SBCK edn.) 4, pp. 5a–5b; 24, p. 5b.

<sup>64</sup> *Jiu Tangshu* 4, pp. 85–86.

career may have judged it prudent to remain vague on the exact position Dou held at the time.

An attractive but faint resonance for the dating offered in this account can be found in another source. An ordinance dating to 663 ordered Dou Dexuan to Henan Circuit 河南道 for consultation with officials following the hardships suffered throughout the empire after a conflict with Koguryō.<sup>65</sup> A trip from the capital to Henan Circuit would not have taken Dou to Yangzhou, which lay to the south of the capital in neighboring Huainan Circuit 淮南道. But entrusted with this mission, Dou may well have been on the road to other destinations in the mid-660s or in earlier decades. This may perhaps be where the tale of a travelling Dou Dexuan originated, since even the Daoist versions were written after his death.<sup>66</sup>

Regardless of the exact nature of the relationship between the texts attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* and *Baoying ji*, their existence is evidence for the ongoing circulation, adaptation, retelling and appropriation of stories in Tang China. The Buddhist account shares with the version in *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* an attention to the provision of details likely to engage the reader, including the ongoing exchanges between Dou and his otherworldly interlocutor. The events and dialogue in both lend them to oral delivery, which may perhaps have been a means by which Dou's encounters circulated. This contrasts with the last version to be considered, which is less accommodating to the interests of such storytelling.

#### DAOJIAO LINGYAN JI

The fourth version of the events to be considered occurs in Du Guangting's *Daojiao lingyan ji*. Du Guangting was a court Daoist who served first the Tang and later the state now known as Former Shu, which arose in Sichuan.<sup>67</sup> This work appears to have been compiled around the turn of the tenth century when Du Guangting was resident in Sichuan.<sup>68</sup> In the introduction, Du explained that in its compilation he had made use of existing materials.<sup>69</sup> How he used them is not

<sup>65</sup> *Tang da zhaoling ji* 121, p. 578.

<sup>66</sup> Sima Guang has "Dou Dexuan and others" dispatched to the twelve circuits in this year. See *Zizhi tongjian* 201, p. 6336.

<sup>67</sup> Franciscus Verellen, *Du Guangting (850–933): Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> For a study of this work, see Verellen, "Evidential Miracles".

<sup>69</sup> *Daojiao lingyan ji* 1, pp. 2b–3a.

made clear, but another account in Du Guangting's *Daojiao lingyan ji* bears a close resemblance to an account in an earlier Buddhist collection.<sup>70</sup> Du also reused existing material in his other works.<sup>71</sup> This practice may explain the following story in *Daojiao lingyan ji* under the title, "The miracle of Dou Dexuan seeking a petition for pardon due to a celestial writ."

During the Zhenguan reign period, Commissioner of Waterways Dou Dexuan followed an imperial order to travel to the famous mountains in the Huai-Zhe 淮浙 region to collect scriptures of the [Daoist] Perfected. On the Bian River 汴河<sup>72</sup> he came upon a messenger who was travelling on foot with a sore leg and having severe difficulties. Seeking passage in the stern of the boat, the messenger said to one of Dexuan's attendants, "I have a long road on an official errand. The pain in my leg has suddenly become worse but time is short for travel on this business and I cannot afford to tarry here. I would like to be placed at the stern of the boat so I can rest for thirty or fifty *li*. Would that be possible?" The attendant explained this to Dexuan. Taking a look through a window, Dexuan felt a deep sympathy for the man, and as a result had him settled in the stern of the boat. Every day Dexuan gave him food and drink. By the time they were about to pass into the Huai River, the man had recovered. As he sought leave from Dexuan to disembark, Dexuan asked where he was going. He replied, "I am a messenger of Taishan 太山. I am not a person of this world. I have received a celestial writ ordering me to Yangzhou to pursue [Commissioner of] Waterways Dou." When Dexuan heard this, he was extremely surprised. Asking to see the celestial writ, he found that it was just like an official document of the world of men, but he dared not open it. Instead he said, "I am Dou Dexuan, commissioner of waterways. Since I am the one you are after, what need is there to go to Yangzhou?" The messenger replied, "I do not know the person. I simply act according to official instructions. After I deliver the celestial writ to its destination, the earth spirits there will assist in your pursuit and capture. Before arrival, it is strictly forbidden to reveal [the contents of my mission]. But since you are the commissioner of waterways as named in this of-

<sup>70</sup> Verellen, "Evidential Miracles," p. 230.

<sup>71</sup> Luo, *Du Guangting Daojiao xiaoshuo yanjiu*, pp. 173-87.

<sup>72</sup> The Bian canal was the main transportation route linking the Yellow and Huai Rivers. See D. C. Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the Tang Dynasty*, 2nd edn. (London: Cambridge U.P., 1970), map facing p. 84 and discussion p. 187.

ficial correspondence and I have enjoyed your kindness for several days, I should repay you. If you want to avoid this calamity, you should proceed directly to Transcendent Earl Wang Yuanzhi in Yangzhou to submit a petition to beg your case. If a petition is sent up before I deliver the celestial writ, there will be an order [of reprieve]. There is no other way you can escape it.” After Dexuan arrived in Yangzhou and received a lavish welcoming, he went to see Transcendent Earl Wang and told him of the pressing matters of his fate and entreated him to send a petition. The transcendent earl replied, “I have already retired for self cultivation. I do not engage in petitions and memorials. But as there is urgency in your fate, how could I not venture to do this for you?” Thereupon he wrote out the petition himself before submitting it. That evening the messenger returned to explain that the petition had already been received and the Most High (*Taishang* 太上)<sup>73</sup> had issued an order. [Dexuan’s life] would be extended by thirty years and he would reach the rank of grand councilor of the left. Later Dexuan’s years and official position were just as the messenger had reported.<sup>74</sup>

This version is shorter than the account attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiaoji* and displays a marked difference in interpretation. The problems of date and age are resolved. Dou’s life is extended thirty years from the Zhenguan reign period, which at least allows the historical possibility – if we really needed it – of Dou meeting Wang before he died. This may indicate that the two characters denoting the years are reversed in the surviving edition of *Zhenxi*, or alternatively that Du Guangting, more careful with his calendar, noted the problem and corrected it.

Despite being the commissioner of waterways, Dou is now heading to sacred mountains in search of Daoist scriptures. Having Dou on such a mission may be a reflection of Du Guangting’s own priorities. Living through the fall of the Tang, Du expended significant effort in the preservation and consolidation of texts, undoubtedly a critical task in his eyes due to the general disorder.

The account also broadens the reason for the messenger’s gratitude. While *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* has the messenger already aboard the

<sup>73</sup> *Taishang* refers to the Lord of the Dao (*taishang laojun* 太上老君) of Lingbao texts who attends to humanity at the behest of the Celestial Worthy. *Taishang* is also the addressee of petitions in texts of the Celestial Master tradition. See Yamada Toshiaki, “The Lingbao School,” in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 245–46, and Peter Nickerson, “The Southern Celestial Masters,” in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, pp. 278–79.

<sup>74</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 121, pp. 17a–18b.

boat and the account of *Baoying ji* has Dou inviting him aboard, here the messenger requests passage. The messenger also suffers from a sore leg, and Dou's kindness toward him includes both allowing him onboard and feeding him, thus giving the messenger better reason to help Dou in return. Description of Dou's interaction with his hosts in Yangzhou is limited to a single phrase, but more details are given for the bureaucratic workings of the otherworld, as explained by the messenger and undoubtedly a matter of interest for Du Guangting himself. Dou is instructed to make his appeal before the delivery of this document, a significant bureaucratic distinction.

In comparison to the first version above, dialogue here is slightly shorter and more precise. The conclusion of Du Guangting's account is also abrupt, without the embarrassment of the failed memorials and the resulting exchanges between the three characters involved. Wang's appearance is brief and fewer details of the rituals performed are provided, although Du gives Wang his later posthumous title. Wang's reluctance to perform the rite is also explained differently, here due not to any doubts as to efficacy, but rather to his retirement from such tasks to engage in self-cultivation. After he consents to submit a petition on Dou's behalf, the narrative is as brief and efficient as Wang's dispatch of the petition, as befits a Daoist master of repute and who is, we might note, Du's own spiritual ancestor. Wang's method is effective and the otherworld's bureaucracy responsive. Intended to display the power of Daoism and the lineage to which he belonged, Du's recounting of these events has no room for ambivalent or extraneous details. Just as the promotion of Daoism and the court are themes common to Du's surviving works, Du here presents a more ideal depiction of the procedures and performance of Daoist practice and the behavior of Tang officials.<sup>75</sup> Evidence for the efficacy of the Daoist ritual this time comes not from the correction of errors in the petition but through Dou seeing the celestial writ with his own eyes. This shifts the focus of the account away from the ritual the Daoist performs and toward the authority of the otherworld's bureaucracy with which the Daoist engages.

Accounts in Du's work primarily relate to events of the Tang, although some precede the dynasty. Many date to the late ninth century, but the entry for Dou does not unduly stand out for being set in the seventh.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Franciscus Verellen, "A Forgotten T'ang Restoration: The Taoist Dispensation after Huang Ch'ao," *Asia Major* 3d ser. 7.1 (1994), pp. 107-54; Verellen, "Shu as a Hallowed Land: Du Guangting's Record of Marvels," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 10 (1998), pp. 213-54.

<sup>76</sup> Verellen, "Evidential Miracles," p. 217; Luo, *Du Guangting Daojiao xiaoshuo yanjiu*, p. 277.

Yet the sole factor prompting Dou's salvation – his generosity to the messenger – makes for an underwhelming reason in comparison to those in other accounts in the same section of *Daojiao lingyan ji* which recount major acts of devotion such as performing a retreat, among which the Yellow Register Retreat features prominently.<sup>77</sup> As with the Buddhist version, this may suggest changes to an existing narrative to allow for the inclusion of this account in Du's collection.

Du Guangting's version is likely based on an earlier written text. If Du had adopted it purely from some form of oral transmission, we would expect greater changes in the flow of events and how they are told.<sup>78</sup> This in turn may give an indication of the degree to which Du felt he was able to re-present past material. If Du did base his account on the record in *Xuanmiao lingyan ji* or a related version, his rewriting appears extensive, and similarities in language are limited to terms rather than complete phrases. One variation in detail is perplexing. In the earlier two Daoist versions considered above, the messenger is described as being responsible to the Director of Destinies, but in Du's later version he is assigned to Taishan, known as responsible for determining the fate of the deceased throughout China. Since the Director of Destinies is mentioned elsewhere in *Daojiao lingyan ji*, this difference is not immediately explainable as an attempt by Du Guangting to broaden the popular resonance of the account.<sup>79</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Existing material in the cultural milieu of imperial China, given the right properties, could be changed to meet distinct aims. Variations among the accounts considered here demonstrate how individual elements could be grafted on to existing material to fit new demands, be they those of a different genre, different times or a different religion. Were the entire of corpus of material written under the Tang available to us, we might find this practice to be relatively commonplace. Although adherents of a doctrine of belief could not afford to be complacent in a competitive religious environment, they also did not always need to invent entirely new material. The same account could also take on different meanings by virtue of where and how it appeared. The

<sup>77</sup> *Yunji qiqian* 121.

<sup>78</sup> For an example of the differences between two versions of a narrative appearing to derive independently from a background tradition, see Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in Tang China*, pp. 127–31.

<sup>79</sup> *Daojiao lingyan ji* 5, p. 1a.

manipulation of the narrative to serve the goals of individual authors does not diminish the value of any given account, which remains a valid expression of religious culture under the Tang.

Comparison of the four versions and their possible dating reveals indications of the process of refinement and reframing that the narrative went through. Written works were likely part of the transmission, although these would not necessarily be limited to the four presented here. A written work may include contributions from an active oral tradition, in which changes were frequently being made. The incomplete attempts at veracity apparent in the texts considered here are perhaps the results of individual invention. The varying problems with historical details suggest that their authors were conscious of the relationship their compositions had with information available elsewhere and how they might be received by readers, but were not perhaps in possession of all potential sources.

The extended dialogue and dramatic process of submitting the petitions in the account attributed to *Xuanmen lingmiao ji* suggests a relationship with the tradition of anecdotal literature. The version in *Zhenxi*, abbreviated to fit the flow of a biography, is not immediately meaningful in the work as a whole unless the reader is to attach some importance to the person of Dou Dexuan. Its inclusion in *Zhenxi* illuminates the gathering and editing required in providing biographies for individuals who grew in importance after their deaths. The Buddhist version is perhaps a rewriting that easily adopts elements of Buddhist tradition, demonstrating the flexibility of the narrative. The version by Du Guangting is likely a refinement of an earlier record made to better address Du's concerns. By honing its message, this version was part of Du's consolidation of the Daoist tradition and his aim of transmitting it to the future.

The key difference of religious procedure between the Daoist and Buddhist texts – the petition ritual versus the recital of sutras – highlights significant means of salvation in these two religions. It is the efficacy and execution of these processes that give meaning to the accounts. In the longer two Daoist versions, the petition ritual is central to communications with otherworldly offices. For Buddhism, the recital of scripture is a practice accessible to lay believers. Similarly, evidence presented for these processes varies. In the earlier Daoist version, the strict requirements of petitions underscore the value of proper ritual. In the Buddhist version, the testimony of a man returned to life demonstrates his narrow escape. In Du's, the celestial writ in the hands of

the ghost messenger is a symbol of the authority of the otherworldly bureaucracy.

Part of the narrative's value may also lie in its concern for an otherwise unremarkable and uncontroversial official. Here was a man of high rank yet of little note ready to be appropriated and molded in the course of religious innovation and competition. The narrative could be read as evidence for the efficacy of a particular religion and perhaps divine support for the dynasty through the deliverance of one of its officials, depending on the intended audience. Yet the survival of a core narrative in the different versions considered here suggests other reasons for the potential resonance among audiences of the time.

For all their differences, the texts are evidence of a common religious milieu and concerns that permeate society. In all, the bureaucratic workings of the otherworld impact upon the vicissitudes of fate in this, but these workings are mostly hidden and only ever revealed in part. Dou's fate lies in the hands of a ghostly messenger and his knowledge of religious procedure, but Dou is only granted a possible reprieve through the rules of reciprocity invoked through casual kindness while travelling. The messenger feels obliged to offer assistance even though Dou is at first unaware of his identity. Even then, the religious practices embarked upon are not assured of success. This narrative contains themes common throughout religious literature, namely reciprocity and the efficacy of rites and acts of devotion. It also conveys the uncertainties of travel and life in general, e.g. the identity of strangers met on the road is never clear, and death may lie in wait in the next town. The events of the narrative surround the fears and concerns held by people as they pondered how best to address the otherworld regarding their own changes in fortune. The various accounts give readers potential answers to these fears with salvation through different means. Despite the uncertainty, the evidence of miracles promises to anyone who follows these practices the possibility of overcoming the arbitrary nature of fate.