PART 5

Esoteric Contexts and Knowledge Transmission

25 The Body of Laozi and the Course of a Taoist Journey Through the Heavens

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At the border of Hunan and Jiangxi, where Taoist (Daoist) rituals and the Nuo tradition of masked theatre have undergone a large scale revival in recent decades, a Taoist master of the Orthodox Zhengyi 正一 sect, Master Yi Songyao 易松堯, has preserved a number of rare ancient paintings and manuscripts that have been transmitted to him as the liturgical texts of his lineage; these include a map of the body of Laozi and a chart of the course of a Taoist journey through the Heavens. The following brief introduction to these two documents serves mainly as an example of how an intimate knowledge of Taoist ritual can provide a key to the performative nature of the charts and indicates the rich scope for future research.

The fact that many of the rituals involved in Taoist practice have the aim of healing the body at their core provides one reason to include an a chapter on what amounts to an out-of-body shamanic journey in an edited volume on medicine. After all, Taoists were responsible for a very large proportion of healthcare in pre-modern China. Their iconography and topographies of the body also overlap in with medical maps and an analysis of chart and textual itinerary is an invaluable resource for understanding the intersections with more mainstream medical illustration.

Laojun gulou 老君骷髏 (Fig. 1), or *Laojun tu* 老君圖, is a religious topography of the body of Laozi 老子, the foundational deity of Taoism and putative author of its sacred text, *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture of the Way and its Power).¹ It is derived from a Taoist manuscript entitled

Lingbao taiji lianmi 靈寶太極鍊秘 (Alchemical Secrets of the Supreme Ultimate Tradition of the Sacred Jewel) in the collection of Hunan Taoist Master Yi Songyao 易松堯 of the Orthodox Zhengyi 正一 sect. According to an attribution on the cover, it had been in the possession of Master He Huaide 何懷德 whose ordination name (*luming* 錄名) was Yuanzhen 元真. He copied it in the middle of the 19th century from a manuscript by Zhang Fazheng 張法正, who received the text himself in the 36th year of the Kangxi reign period (1697). The entire manuscript, which includes some 70 double sheets, and contains many texts, illustrations and diagrams related to Taoist ritual, is stitched together using the traditional *xianzhuang* 線裝 string binding.

This chapter discusses the *Chart of the Skeleton of Lord Lao* in relation to another chart in Master Yi's collection entitled *Xian zhang feixing sanjie zhi tu* 獻章飛行三界之圖 (Chart of a Flying Journey through the Three Worlds to Present a Petition) (Fig. 2). While the latter chart is not a map of the body, but a representation of Heaven, both charts relate to Taoist ritual, and particularly to the liturgy of Thunder Magic (*leifa* 雷法).² Both are also unique inasmuch as they have no close match in either Taoist or medical archives.³ It is outside the scope of this chapter to provide a full historical contextualisation of every detail of the complex pantheons and places listed on the two

Way and its Power.

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1 Early accounts describe the scribe Laozi, or Lao Dan 老聃, as the 6th-century BCE author of the *Daode jing*, a quietist philosophical text propounding detachment, simplicity and removal from worldly affairs. During the early unification of China, he became worshipped by the imperial house, and he also appeared in a vision as Taishang Laojun 太上老君 (Lord Lao of Grand Supreme) to the founder of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天師) Daoist sect. Records of the early Tang describe Laojun, under the title Celestial Worthy of the Way and its Power (Daode Tianzun 道德天尊), as one of the three Celestial Worthies (Tianzun 天尊), a trinity of anthropomorphic manifestations of the Dao who are coterminous with the Three Purities, celestial realms associated with the teachings of different Taoist sects. Daode Tianzun is associated with the Supreme Purity (Taiqing 太清) heaven. The reason why Laozi was associated with this specific Pure One is, of course, that the title of the book attributed to his authorship contains the same collocation, 'daode' 道德, the

2 Thunder Magic was an exorcistic class of ritual which gained prevalence during the Song dynasty. It had, as its core, methods designed to appropriate the powers of thunder for vitalising the body and punishing enemies using judicial, bureaucratic and meditative rituals. The foremost collection of these rites is in the *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (Taoist Method, United in Principle). This is the largest compendium of the Taoist Canon, in 268 *juan*, and represents the rites (*fa* 法) of 39 different sects from the Song and Yuan dynasties. See van der Loon 1979, pp. 401–5. For the historical background to these rituals and a *résumé* of the whole collection, see Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 1,056–7, 1081–3, 1105–15. Boltz 1987 pp. 47–9 mentions 60 different sects in her discussion of this corpus of Taoist ritual. See also Skar 1996–7, pp. 159–202. Davis 2001 bases his description of Song society on the *Daofa huiyuan*.

3 I have seen only one other witness to this kind of text in a collection belonging to John Lagerwey. However, the well-known chart of the body called *Neijing tu* 內經圖 and specially the *Xiuzhen tu* 修真圖, share common features with *Laojun gulou*. See Despeux 1994, pp. 12–29, 46–65.

Figure 25.1 *Laojun gulou* 老君骷髏 (Chart of the Skeleton of Lord Lao)

charts; however my argument here is that, while they focus on different aspects of the Taoist ritual, the two charts are actually interdependent. The journey to present the petition was enacted via the ancient ritual of *chuguan* 出官 (the exteriorisation of the gods that inhabit the adept's body) and required a working knowledge of the celestial domain and the names and locations of a host of different deities within the body.

Generally speaking, a Taoist master inherits his manuscripts from his father and will only transmit them to his eldest son, but he will also let his disciples copy his books during their apprenticeship. At the time of ordination, the initiate must be in possession of all the books he will use for his rituals. The Taoist texts, which are mostly in the form of manuscripts, are not transmitted to outsiders, and to this day, this is considered a very serious matter by

many Taoist masters. Even when copying a manuscript for a Western researcher, the Master will sometimes write:

This secret book must not be transmitted, even to one's own son if he is without virtue; only people with karmic affinities can receive it.

符法不傳無義子 天機當度有緣分。

Despite a steady increase in published Taoist texts, due to the development of Taoist studies, practitioners only use the books transmitted by their masters and generally ignore the immense corpus of Taoist texts available. Among the great amount of liturgical texts included in the Taoist canon, there are many instructions for meditation and visualisation to accompany the performance of rituals, but each Taoist has his own way of delivering the memorials to the gods he addresses. In keeping with tradition, the

Figure 25.2 *Xian zhang feixing sanjie zhi tu* 獻章飛行三界之圖 (Chart of a Flying Journey through the Three Worlds to Present a Petition)

Figure 25.3 Two Ordination documents prepared by Master Qin Guorong 秦國榮 for his disciple. 'All these soldiers and generals will accompany the newly ordained ritual master and will protect him'. Original size: 245 x 28cm and 160 x 28cm

manuscripts in Master Yi's possession were kept secret until he let us photograph them for the purposes of our research.

Editing *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, Kristofer Schipper separated the texts into two categories: those for restricted distribution and those for general transmission. As he points out in the general introduction:

The vast majority of the books in the *Daozang* are those that in principle should be transmitted only within the framework of initiation and ordination... Before the commercial production of the Ming Canon of 1926,⁴ these texts were normally not available in general libraries. Not all works contained in the canon were, however, subject to ritually prescribed transmission. Most writings by philosophers, doctors, historians, and the like, were intended for everybody and thus circulated freely. These texts can therefore also be found outside the canon. The distinction between books in general circulation and those whose distribution was ritually restricted is of great importance for the study of Taoist literature.⁵

I visited Master Yi together with Professor Liu Jinfeng 劉勁峰 while researching the relationship between Nuo theatre (*nuoxi* 儺戲) and Taoism. In 30 years of participant observation of Taoist ritual, this was the first time I had come across documentary and illustrative evidence of the secret knowledge and practice that is at the heart of the Taoist Liturgy. Master Yi is actively involved in the local Taoist community where he is the Gaogong 高功,

the highest officiant in the Taoist ritual known as the *jiao* 醮, or sacrifice.⁶ Despite excellent studies of Taoist body illustration, no published research has previously linked these two charts by considering together the relationship between the internal body structures and a spiritual journey through the celestial realm, as two aspects of the same practice.⁷ The title, *Laojun gulou* 老君骷髏 (*Chart of the Skeleton of Lord Lao*), (Fig. 1) employs the term 'skeleton' in the metaphorical sense evoked by Schipper when he wrote:

One must have 'the bones', the skeleton of an Immortal, to qualify for the dignity of being the representative of heaven and the master of the gods. This genetic quality is not exactly a question of physiology or of physiognomy (although a *tao-shih* must be of sound mind and body); 'the skeleton' is a hidden quality, an inner quality that expresses itself, perhaps unexpectedly but nonetheless significantly, in the special privilege of being the keeper of the sacred writings.⁸

4 I.e. the first reprint of the *Zhengtong Daozang* by the Commercial Press (Hanfenlou 涵芬樓) in Shanghai.

5 Schipper and Verellen, 2004, p. 4.

6 The *jiao* is a community sacrificial ritual, usually performed to affirm the contractual association between a community and its tutelary deity, which can last up to a week. While some elements are open for public interaction (e.g. offerings of sacrificial food, juggling displays and other performances), the central rites take place in a closed temple to which only the primary priests of the rite and certain members of the community have access. *Jiao* rituals can be performed on a regular basis, once every three or more years, or they can be offered to prevent calamities of a specific kind.

7 The only European-language study of these images of the body to date is Despeux 1994.

8 Schipper 1983, p. 58.

To expand upon Schipper's insight, one might add that the cosmic body of Laozi, as it is represented here with its deities and celestial bodies, does not set out to represent a mundane physiology, but the Taoist body as it is cultivated over several years under the formal instruction sanctioned through the ordination ceremonies variously known as *zouzhi* 奏職 (bestowal of office), *shoulu* 受錄 (receiving the register), *shoujie* 受戒 (receiving precepts), *chuanjie* 傳戒 (transmitting precepts) or *shoudao* 受道 (receiving the Tao). During this time, the Taoist initiate (*daoshi* 道士) receives the liturgical instruments of his priesthood and the register of those gods whom he can command to intervene in his rituals.

While this image of the body of Laozi is a replica of the macrocosm, it also recalls the so-called 'registers' (*lu* 錄) which, in the form of cosmic diagrams or lists of deities, constitute a vital part of the alliance between the initiate and the transcendent powers that is established during ordination. In Hunan province, during ordination, ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) receive a long 'register' including hundreds of national and local gods (*difang shen* 地方神) gods of the Thunder Department (*Leibu* 雷部), soldiers and Celestial Marshals, some wielding fierce exorcistic powers, who will, subsequent to the ritual, constitute the specific group that are under the command of the Taoist initiate.⁹ These gods must be familiar to him. Although there are many register charts in the *Daozang*, until the recent discovery in Hunan of ordination registers for *fashi* ritual masters, we have had no evidence of contemporary Taoist registers. That is why Schipper has opined that the ordination register (*lu*) is a 'fictive document'.¹⁰

The registers must be 'inspected' (*yue* 閱) on certain dates during meditation sessions to ensure that all the deities are present and correct. The process involves recitation of specific sūtras and breathing techniques that enhance the purification process. Writing about the register *Dongxuan lingbao ke zhong fa* 洞玄靈寶課中法 (Method for Determining [the Dominant Qi] in each Class [of register] DZ 1246), from the Early Tang (618–907), Schipper opines:

The human body at birth is like the *hundun* 混沌 [*hundun* (lit. chaos) is a central concept in Taoism that describes the moment before creation when nothing is differentiated], but thanks to the revelation of the *Zhengyi mengwei lu* 正一盟威錄 (Register of the Orthodox Covenant with the Powers), the *Qi* differentiates and manifests in form: 'the correct spirits of the Three Pneumas (*Qi*) of the three Cinnabar Fields can change themselves into myriad forms.

To do this, one must know how to visualise on the inside as well as on the outside (內外兩存).¹¹

The Cinnabar Fields are the three alchemical furnaces in which the adept refines the movement and quality of *Qi* 氣, originally undifferentiated, into the elixir of immortality. Although locations vary within limits, they most usually reside in the lower abdomen, the chest and the forehead, and correlate with the successive transmutation of *jing* (精, seminal essence) into *Qi*, and *Qi* into *shen* 神 (spirit[s]), the most common transformative process in inner alchemy. The Zhengyi (Orthodox Covenant) sect, to which Master Yi Songyao belongs, is steeped in the culture of inner alchemy and its traditions of visualisation of the Cinnabar Fields.

The *guan* 冠 (crown) is the headdress *par excellence* worn by the Taoist master at the major ritual ceremonies. Once rolled into a chignon on top of the head, the master's long hair is fastened with a flame-like cap (or a three-headed flower *hua* 華). This marks the place where the gods ascend and leave the body, moving in harmony with the rhythm of the breaths of the master. From the crown, we can identify that *Laojun gulou* is an illustration of the body of a Taoist master as linked to its liturgical functions. Beginning at the top of the body, marked at the summit of the skull, are the Three Purities, or Three Pure Ones: Jade Purity (*Yuqing* 玉清), Highest Purity (*Shangqing* 上清), and Supreme Purity (*Taiqing* 泰清). The Three Purities are the highest deities of Taoism; they represent the Tao, but they are also representations of the gods and the palaces where they live – the ultimate destination of the Taoist master ascending to heaven with his petition (*chengci* 呈詞).

Figures 4 to 6 are modern representations of these palaces from the *Daqiantu shuo* 大千圖說 (Explanations of One Thousand Illustrations), published in 1916.

The two eyes of Lord Lao are identified with the sun and the moon (*taiyang* 太陽 and *taiyin* 太陰), and the Celestial Eye (*tianmu* 天目) in between. The nose is the location of the Grand Unity's Prefecture of Thunder (*Taiyi leifu* 大乙雷府). Flanking this on both sides are the Celestial Emperor,

9 There are many references to these spirits in Reiter 2005.

10 For a reproduction of a Register from the *Daozang*, see, for example, Pregadio (ed.) 2008, pp. 39–42.

11 Schipper 1973. The *Zhengyi mengwei lu* (DZ 1208) is a Song dynasty (960–1279) text on the 24 registers that the initiate can receive during his life. The first is intended for children from seven to eight years, and comprises one general, while the last is reserved for couples and includes 150 generals. These 24 registers are interpreted as an image of 24 dioceses of the Celestial Masters and the deities who inhabit them. Incorporating them into his own body through the alchemical process of refinement (*liandu* 煉度), the initiate can then appeal to the deities and encourage them/coerce them to intervene. Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 971–2. For the *Dongxuan lingbao ke zhong*, and particularly the Zhengyi registers, see Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 472.

Figure 25.4 Heaven of Jade Purity (Yuqing 玉清), residence of the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊)

Figure 25.5 Heaven of the Supreme Purity (Taiqing 太清), residence of the Celestial Worthy of the Sacred Jewel (Lingbao Tianzun 靈寶天尊)

Figure 25.6 Heaven of the Supreme Purity residence of the Celestial Worthy of the Tao and its Potency (Daode Tianzun 道德天尊)

Great Unity (*Taiyi tiandi* 大乙天帝) and the Celestial Net (*tiangang* 天罡), which includes both the star and Ursa Major. The right side of the face is designated as Yin and the left as Yang. The mouth is called the Gate of Man (*renmen* 人門). The titles Fengbo 風伯 (Lord of the Wind) and Yushi 雨師 (Rain Master) stand as metaphors for breath and saliva. On the left and right cheek are two major centres of Taoist administration, the Mysterious Province of Light (*leiting xuansheng* 雷霆玄省) and the Capital of Great Mystery (*taixuan dusheng* 泰玄都省).

The ears are interpreted as musical receptors: on the left is written 'Large Golden Bell' (*jinzong* 金鐘), 'Small Fire Bell' (*huoling* 火零) and 'Sky Drum' (*tiangu* 天鼓); and on the right ear, 'Jade Chime' (*yuqing* 玉磬), 'Small Bronze Bell' (*tongling* 銅鈴) and 'Sky Drum'. In Taoist cultivation, these terms refer to 'knocking the teeth', an ancient practice which occurs in a variety of contexts, including *yangsheng* 養生 (nurturing life) practices for health, exorcistic ritual, and entering or departing a ritual space. In hygiene practices it is associated with the production of elixir in the form of saliva from the jade pool under the tongue, which was thought to have rejuvenative qualities. These liturgical instruments are used in ritual and produce a celestial music that invites the gods to descend and participate in the dramatic performance of Daoist ritual. While the drum, cymbals, gong and bell are all percussion instruments,

there are also wind instruments (flutes or *suona* 唢呐) and string instruments (*nanhu* 南胡 and *erhu* 二胡).

The throat is the channel of communication between the two alchemical furnaces, the Upper Cinnabar Field (*shang dantian* 上丹田) and the Middle Cinnabar Fields (*zhong dantian* 中丹田). Under the character 'hou' 喉 (throat) is written Twelve-Storey Building (*shi'er chong lou* 十二重樓), sometimes represented in the form of a pagoda and referring to the layers formed by the cartilage of the throat that one can palpate and see outlined at the front of the neck. On both sides, we find the Administrative Offices of the Three Origins (*sanyuan kaojiao fu* 三元考較府) and the Prefectural Offices for the Three Officers (*sanguan dadifu* 三官大帝府), the Palace of Pure Emptiness (*qingxu fenyang gong* 清虛紛陽宮) and the Court of the Four Saints of the Far North (*beiji sisheng yuan* 北極四聖院). Two other administrations are referred to at the left and right shoulders: the Great Hall of the Celestial Talisman (*tianfu dadian* 天符大殿) and the Censorate of the Commander of Pestilences (*wensi xianfu* 瘟司憲府). The name of the seventh office of the celestial administration, the Crimson Palace of the Fiery Heart (*huoxin jiangong* 火心絳宮), is inscribed on the central axis and is associated with the Vermilion Bird (*zhu que* 朱雀) and Summer Thunder (*xialei* 夏雷). The Vermilion Bird is one of the animals that represent the constellations of the South. References to

Summer Thunder, and other terms that I will come to later, associate this chart with the liturgy of the Five Thunders (*wulei fa* 五雷法), with which the Daoist initiate will light his internal fires. The fires then ascend into the Fire Palace of the Heart, here located in the lower chest. Visualising the fire ball ascending through the heart and entering the *niwan* (mud ball), at the brain in modern-day terms, the adept's ultimate aim is to nurture the infant of immortality.

Common to the three charts at the top is mention of the Three Pures (*sanqing* 三清), their residences on the one hand and on the other the names of the deities imprinted on Laozi's forehead. There are also Tianpeng 天蓬, Tianyou 天猶, Yisheng 翌聖 (aka Heisha 黑殺, the Black Killer) and Zhenwu 真武, martial deities and commanders of their own spirit generals, who became associated as the Four Saints (*sisheng* 四聖) in the Song dynasty and were called upon to assist in exorcistic rites. They are the subject of, for example, the Song text *Taishang jiutian yanxiang di'e sisheng miaojing* 太上九天延祥滌厄四聖妙經 (DZ 26). Mention of the Four Saints links the Laozi body chart specifically to the exorcistic traditions within the liturgy of the Five Thunders that dates to Song times.¹² Further details of our 17th-century charts will testify to a direct association with the Song liturgy, introducing radical changes in Taoist organisation and ritual. Scattered around the chest, stomach and arms, there are multiple references to the Five Thunder Rites: the seasons, the calendrical spirits, the 24 divisions of the year, the five viscera, and the heraldic animals, i.e. the Green Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird and Black Tortoise.

Expressions such as *huibing* 會兵 (assembled troops) and *jibing* 寄兵 (despatched troops), together with the Four Saints, and in particular Heisha, associate the exorcisms in our chart with the exorcistic rituals of the Thunder liturgy or Thunder Magic (*leifa* 雷法) as they are described in the 14th-century text *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (Taoist Method, United in Principle), where the same expressions are also found. These are all troops in the celestial militia in the service of the master during the ritual. They are the souls of the deceased, recruited from the 84,000 *gui* 鬼 (ghosts) that reside under the sole of the left foot and the 3,700 under the right foot. The body thus depicted is both an alchemical crucible and a world in miniature in the image of the cosmos, populated by a host of spirits and deities.

As a representation of the sites for refinement and circulation of Qi, the body is a dynamic system interacting with the cosmos. The interactive quality of the Taoist body is a manifestation of the resonance between state, cosmos and

body so eloquently described for medicine in the classical period by Nathan Sivin. Qi, or *shenqi* 神氣 'numinous Qi', permeates the universe and body alike. Chinese medicine, Sivin remarks, remained largely holistic: 'the resonance of the body with natural process is an ideal toward which man must strive; ignoring it brings on disease'.¹³ Lord Lao's body contains elements that link canonical medicine, structural anatomy, alchemy and meditation techniques. But above all it is distinguished by its lists of deities and ritual spaces, which uniquely chart the body according to Taoist liturgy – that is to say it is the body of the Taoist master as he works through the prescribed ritual activities and transforms himself and those around him.

If we focus on the performative function of the text, there are two terms written on the two middle fingers, *yuwen* 玉文 (the Jade Wrinkles) at the middle phalanges and *wu* 午 at the tip of the finger, which have a specific function.¹⁴ They simultaneously correspond to constellations, calendrical data and/or internal Qi. By pointing with his thumb to *yuwen* or *wu*, the master links his own body to the external world, remotely exerting control over external phenomena, and mobilising the gods and deities. Listed at the index finger, the Chariot of Fire (*huoche* 火車) is the divine vehicle pulled by dragons in which the gods travel between worlds. Another reference to the liturgy of Thunder is the inscription on the left forearm of the name of the King of Changsha who Destroys Temples (*damiao Changsha wang* 打廟長沙王) and on the right forearm that of General Liu (*Liu jiangjun* 柳將軍), both major exorcists in the Ministry of Thunder.

As in almost all maps of the Taoist body, the Court referred to is the Yellow Court (*Huangting* 黃庭), a term that first emerges in the 2nd century and reminds us of the antiquity of notions of inner landscape, the gods of the body and transmutation. *Huangting jing nei/wai jing* 黃庭經內/外景 (Canon of the Yellow Court: 'Inner Landscape' and 'Outer Landscape'), two meditational manuals used in the Shangqing 上清 (Supreme Purity) tradition of Taoism, contain the earliest writings to link the microcosm of the body with a list of its resident gods. This was later absorbed into *xiuzhen* 修真 (cultivating perfection) practice.¹⁵ Since then, the image of the body-microcosm has evolved differently in different contexts, but the fundamental concept of the human body as a replica of the macrocosm is shared by medical and religious cultures. With this map of the skeleton of Taishang Laojun, Taoists show clearly how they

¹² See, for example, all the references to these Celestial Marshals (*yuanshuai* 元帥) in Davis 2001.

¹³ Sivin 1995.

¹⁴ The Jade Wrinkles are the horizontal wrinkles of the middle phalangeal joints of the hand.

¹⁵ See the introduction to Schipper *et al.* 1975, p. ii.

have abolished the boundaries between the cosmos and the physical body.¹⁶

Progressing downwards, we leave the territory of the myriad gods of the Earth (*dijie wanshen zhi suo* 地界萬神之所) to enter the underworld, which is located in the lower body. Here we find Mount Fengdu 豐都山 and its 36 courts of Justice (*Fengdu sanshiliu* 豐都三十六),¹⁷ Iron Encircled Mountain (*tiewei shan* 鐵圍山), Mount Taishan, one of the Five Sacred Peaks (*wuyue taishan* 五嶽泰山), the Small and Large Iron Courts (*xiao tieyuan* 小鐵院, *da tieyuan* 大鐵院) – all symbols of a formidable penal system – together with the City Thearchs (*chenghuang* 城隍), who represent the underworld above ground, and the gods of the Five Prefectures and Nine Provinces (*wufu jiuzhou zhi shen* 五府九州之神). Here too is Winter Thunder (*donglei* 冬雷), coupled with the True Warrior (Zhenwu 真武), regarded as a powerful deity and exorcist, who reigns over the darkness of the netherworld and is symbolised by the tortoise and snake, and the Dragon Kings (*longwang* 龍王), who are water gods and also reside in the lower body.

The inscriptions around the periphery of Laozi's body provide us with more information. Proceeding from head to toe, at the top and corresponding to Heaven and the Upper Cinnabar Field, are the Palaces of the Five Emperors, the couple Xi Wangmu 西王母 (Mother Queen of the West) and Dong Wanggong (Duke of the East 東王公) as well as the names of several constellations. In the ritual transformation of body and space (*bianshen biantan* 變身變壇), which is enacted during the creation of the sacred internal space, the Taoist master visualises a whole army of celestial soldiers leaving his body through his four limbs. Most of the deities, generals and officers mentioned in the body chart of Lord Lao are the deities that the adept

has received during his ordination. As the ritual evolves, he lets them intervene at strategic moments, and as the ordination draws to a conclusion, they return to his body. In acknowledgement of the work done, both master and deities receive a promotion. As Schipper has often pointed out, rituals denoted as *ke* 科 refer to a kind of 'upgrading'. The practice of internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) shared techniques and goals with Taoist ordination ritual, before autonomous individual practices were absorbed into the more widespread *yangsheng* practice of lay people, *neiguan* 內觀 (inner observation or inner contemplation), and *shouyi* 守一 (preserving unity).

Min Zhiting 閩智亭, once the best known representative of modern Taoist organisations at international ecumenical meetings, and author of *Xuanmen risong zaowanke jingzhu* 玄門日誦早晚功課經注 (A Commentary on Morning and Evening Rituals), has described one of the eight secret formulas for purification of the mouth (*jing kou shen zhou* 淨口神咒), a technique which is accompanied by alchemical techniques (*xiulian* 修練). Invoking the gods of the teeth, throat, Qi, heart and thought, the adept recites the formula, and the gods of the mouth (all mentioned in the *Book of the Yellow Court*) return to their respective places in the body. Maintaining the gods in their designated locations, the adept can be united with the Tao (*yu dao he zhen* 與道和真).¹⁸

The sending of petitions and memorials to Heaven has been part of the Taoist liturgy since the foundation of the Celestial Masters Sect 天師道 (*Tianshi dao*) in the 2nd century, especially during the healing rituals of the three major Taoist assemblies of the year that are held in honour of the agents of Heaven, Earth and Water. Several scroll paintings illustrate the ascent to Heaven undertaken by Taoist masters with their documents in different ways. Our second chart from Master Yi's collection is one of these illustrations, and a study of the performance of the ceremony reveals how aspects of the ritual body are connected with the *Chart of the Skeleton of Lord Lao*. The rituals to submit the petitions take different forms, according to particular Taoist schools and local traditions. Taoists from White Cloud Temple 白雲觀 (*Baiyun guan*) in Shanghai use paper cranes as their intermediaries. In Beijing, the Gaogong 高功 (Grand Master of the Ritual) mimes the master's ascent to Heaven by pacing the patterns of the constellations (*bugang* 步罡) on a brocade carpet, which is embroidered with the *Taiji* 太極 symbol surrounded by the Eight Trigrams. He presents the official envelope containing the petition (*fangan* 方函). On his dragon robe, a ritual dress which appropriates the power of the

16 Despeux 1994, p. 52; Pregadio 2008, 'Neidan', pp. 762–6.

17 The numbers of the courts of justice vary in Taoist tradition. Here there are 36. At the Taishan or Dongyue temples there are 70 or 76. In the Jin 晉 dynasty *Zhengao* 真誥, which contains extensive descriptions of Fengdu, there are only six outer and six inner palaces. The *locus classicus* for 36 heavens of Shangqing occurs in a later Shangqing text, the *Waiguo fangpin qingtong neiwén* 外國放品青童內文, DZ 1373. This was later codified in the Tang into a system linking three and nine heaven groupings, which itself produced other variants. One frequently mentioned is found in the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Seven Tablets from the Cloudy Satchel), a Song Daoist encyclopaedia, where there is one Daluo Tian 大羅天, three Purities (*sansqing* 三清), four heavens for the Seed-People (*zhongmin* 種民), four realms of Formlessness (*wuse jie* 無色界), 18 realms of form (*sejie* 色界) and six realms of desire (*yujie* 欲界). There is also an early reference in *Weishu* 魏書 114.3052 to 36 heavens, linking it to a genealogy of the Celestial Masters sect.

18 Min 2000, p. 20.

Figure 25.7 Hunan painting describing the submitting of a petition to Heaven (350 x 33cm). Fava: Private collection

Figure 25.7.1 Detail: The Master prostrates himself before the altar. A crane flying out of the incense burner represents his ascent to the domain of the Immortals.

Figure 25.7.2 Detail: Two Taoist musicians and two Immortals

emperor, are hung talismans to protect him and to open the doors of paradise.

Figure 7 is an example of the sort of scroll that I have frequently seen hung by Hunan Taoists outside the entrance to their altar. This scroll probably dates to the Republican period (1912–49), and, at least as a decorative object imbued with ritual power, has a performative function in the ceremonies, where its presence augments the numinous power of the ritual ground. The question of whether it was originally intended as a pedagogical tool

Figure 25.7.3 Detail: The Celestial Emissary (*gongcao*) and the Three Officers (*sanguan*)

in the illustration of the ritual process through which this kind of petition should be submitted is a subject for more lengthy analysis, but it certainly serves as evidence for the historical reconstruction of the meaning of Master Yi Songdao's second chart.

In the Hunan painting, the master or main officiant (*gongcao* 功曹) respectfully prostrates himself in front of the altar. A crane flies from the mouth of the incense burner, representing the ascent to the domain of the Immortals. The master visualises the journey through the clouds. On

Figure 25.7.4 Detail: The Two Emperors (*erhuang* 二皇)

Figure 25.7.5 Detail: The Three Pure Ones (*sanqing* 三清)

Figure 25.8 Map of the Journey to Heaven of a Taoist master presenting a petition to the Palace of the Three Pures, dating to 1843

Figure 25.8.1 The master kneels in front of the altar. The Vermilion Bird leads the way through the clouds

each side of the altar, two assistants have prepared offerings. After rising through several stages, the master, holding an envelope in which a petition is contained, arrives at the gates of the Palace of the Three Officers 三官 (*sanguan*), where stand two guardians with their banners. Beyond the gates, he will submit the petition to the Emperor of Heaven 天皇 and the Jade Emperor 玉皇, and then on to

the Three Pure Ones 三清, whose names we have also seen inscribed on Lord Lao's forehead.

The petitioner's journey through the Heavens (*zhang mi yunlu* 章秘雲路) is charted in the second manuscript under consideration, entitled *Xian zhang feixing sanjie zhi tu* 獻章飛行三界之圖 (Chart of a Flying Journey through the Three Worlds to Present a Petition) (Fig. 8), also transmitted to Master Yi Songyao by Master He Huaide. It depicts

Figure 25.8.2 At the entrance of Heaven, the Crystal Gate

the same journey, but in a much more detailed manner. The chart is in nine pages and dates to the 23rd year of the Daoguang period (1843). The date is written on the inside of the back cover. Master He Huaide indicates that he was ordained under the 60th Celestial Master Zhang Peiyuan 張培源 (1829–59) and his ordination lasted three days. He mentions where it took place, the name of his master of initiation, Wang Chunhua 王春華, and the title he received.

To our knowledge, there is no other document that records so much information about the celestial journey and

the major agents as the Chart of the Heavens manuscript transmitted to Master Yi. It belongs to that genre of books and manuscripts that circulated only within closed lineages. Representing the organisation of the celestial administration and therefore the internal process of the master sending a memorial to Heaven, it reveals the invisible and intimate part of the ritual. This illustration is inserted into a folio of 52 pages. The introductory statement explains the journey and all the deities and institutions that the Daoist initiate will encounter on his journey, and the appropriate

Figure 25.8.3 Beginning of the ascent through the 32 heavens. The master arrives before Donghua Gate, the second gate of heaven.

rituals to perform at each stage. In describing the elements in the illustration, I have relied on these explanations. In this chart, the petitioner is represented as transcending his body through his flame-like cap (which, in contrast, in the scroll illustration, takes the form of a flower on his crown). A little further on, we find that his court tablet (often carved from ivory or peachwood and held high so as not to pollute the face of one's superiors with mortal breath) has shifted onto his shoulder for ease of travel. The master will carry it in front of him when granted a

hearing before the Emperor. The bird here is not a crane, but clearly identified and illustrated as the Vermilion Bird, one of four heraldic animals.

Flanking the route chart are the names of a host of emissaries, gods, celestial bureaucrats and different departments and ministries. Continuing the ascent, we traverse three celestial portals: the Crystal Courtyard, the Grotto of the Belles, and Upright Yang – residence of Tang 唐, Ge 葛, and Zhou 周, the generals of the Three Origins. Onwards and upwards we arrive at the Palaces of the Five Agents,

Figure 25.8.4 Across the 28 mansions and the four Brahma heavens

residences of the officers of Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and Wood. The ascent to Heaven continues through the constellations and the 28 lodges, each marked with Qi of a different colour, at the summit of which presides the Pole Star. To the 28 celestial lodges are added the four Brahma Heavens (四梵), familiar from the Lingbao 靈寶 Daoist traditions, and therefore the 32 heavens of the journey through the Empyrean. Proceeding from one position to the next, the master passes 32 named heavens.

Beyond these 32 heavens, the master enters the domain of the Five Officers (*guan* 官) who represent Fire, Earth,

Metal, Water and Wood. Going up, he passes through the seven stars of the Big Dipper and the crowning Pole Star, Purple Tenuity (*ziwei* 紫微). Arriving at the constellation of the Three Masters (*sanshi* 三師), he passes close by the four Directors among the Perfected Lords (*sisi zhenjun* 四司真君): Tianpeng, Tianyou, Yisheng and Yousheng. Ahead in the centre, he reaches the Palace of the Four Saints listed in Lord Lao's Body chart and pays homage to each of the dignitaries. In the margin, a note indicates that he has entered the three Heavens (*santian mennei* 三天門內), where he prostrates himself in front of the lineage masters

Figure 25.8.5 Arrival at the third Gate of Heaven

of the three previous generations, listed in descending seniority (*jing* 經, *ji* 籍, *du* 度), and introduces himself and the purpose of his mission to the officiant.

Thereafter he salutes the Lord of the Origins (*Yuansheng dijun* 元生帝君), the Celestial Worthy of the Dao and its Efficacy (Daode Tianzun 道德天尊), the nine masters (*jiushi* 九師), and the Three Officers (*sanguan* 三官), before entering the Hall of the Three Mysteries (*sanxing dian* 三省殿) and the Court of the Celestial Pivot (*tianshu yuan* 天樞院). From that point, he visits the Emperor of the North Pole who is in charge of the Office of Exorcisms (*beiji quxie*

北極驅邪) and the Emperor of the South Pole, who resides opposite. Now he approaches his ultimate destination and the zenith of the Heavens. After the Gate of the Five Phoenixes (*wufeng lou* 五鳳樓), he can see the residence of the Jade Emperor flanked by the Palace of the Pole Star of the Extreme North and the Marvellous and Majestic Palace of the Extreme East (*miaoyan gong* 妙嚴宮). The manuscript mentions that when the master arrives at the Gate of the Five Phoenixes, he kneels and gazes upon the Jade Emperor with his Celestial Eye (*tianmu* 天目). He also visualises the Celestial Master, who transmits his petition

Figure 25.8.6 Beyond the 28 mansions are the constellations of the Five Agents and the stars of Ursa Major

to a young maiden and follows her to the Palace of Supreme Purity (*Taiqing gong* 泰清宮), which is the residence of the Celestial Worthy of the Tao and its Efficacy (Daode Tianzun), the third of the Three Pure Ones, identified with Laozi himself.

Schipper, in the fifth chapter of *The Taoist Body*, described this trip as follows:

Curled up in the fetal position, the Great Master then makes a spiritual journey within his own body. First he visualizes a newborn child in the area of his abdomen,

there at the site of the Cinnabar Field (*tan-t'ien*) [*dantian*] below his navel. Then he concentrates on his heart, where he rediscovers the newborn child, who is now called the True Person. He is dressed in red and two guards in military uniform stand beside him. They are 'generals'. He visualizes all three, standing on a terrace bathed in the light of dawn. Then, with an escort of other generals, they ascend a twelve-storey tower (which corresponds to the trachea) and present themselves before the Pass of the Tiger and the Leopard (throat). They enter the mouth, then the nose and continue their path all the way to the Gates of

Figure 25.8.7 The seven stars of Ursa Major have the Pole star at their top (*ziwei*). Beyond are the Palace of the Three Masters, the Four Offices of the Stellar Lords and the Palace of the Four Saints

the Sun and Moon (the eyes), which open into the point between the brows. Finally, they arrive at the top of the head and from there enter the cavity inside the crown. There stands the Golden Gate. On his knees, facing the flaming pearl – a white light emanating from the original energy – the True Person presents the memorial on which he has placed several *fu* or passes. Once the memorial has been accepted by the officers of the Heavenly Chancellery, the True Person turns back. But the journey to the heavenly regions has transformed him. Now he appears as a venerable old man, the Great Lord of Long Life, the stellar

deity of Immortality, who slowly descends to reintegrate himself with the point of origin, The Cinnabar Field.¹⁹

There are many descriptions of the submission of Taoist petitions and the process through which the Taoist master externalises the officers of his body. In *Chisongzi zhangli* 赤松子章曆章曆 (Master Red Pine's Almanac), the officiant, prostrate in front of the altar, visualises a red Qi emanating

¹⁹ Schipper 1993, pp. 98–9.

Figure 25.8.8. Traversing the last palaces among which are those of the Three Officers of Water, Earth and Heaven

from his heart, passing along the course of the *huangdao* 黃道 (solar ecliptic) and arriving at the Gate of Heaven, where he is hosted by Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the founder of the Celestial Masters sect. Once there, an Immortal approaches to receive his petition. The Taoist master is then brought before the Palace of the Three Pure Ones who read the document. He withdraws respectfully, and then returns to the altar while they examine the petition, and

finally he performs the rites of thanks.²⁰ *Chisongzi zhangli* is a collection of *zhang* 章 (petitions) dating to late Tang times, which probably contains documents used by Taoist masters in late Han.

Another very complete account of the submission of a petition is that of the great Taoist master and prominent liturgist Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–77). Lu wrote a manual for the ordination rites in which hundreds, if not thousands, of

²⁰ Verellen 2004, pp. 291–343.

Figure 25.8.9. Arrival at the court of the Jade Emperor and the Palaces of the Three Purities

gods are dispatched to Heaven during the *chuguan* ritual, and then re-integrated (*fuguan* 復官) at the end of the ritual in readiness for their next mission.²¹ During such ordination ceremonies, which sanction a lengthy training in Taoist ritual, the initiate becomes the *alter ego* of the gods who enter into his service and to whom he will give orders, like a general to his troops. But lest the military metaphor be over-read, we must remember that the Taoist initiate is also an alchemist. During the long retreat that precedes ordination, the applicant prepares a bowl of sacred water into which he mixes the ashes of *fu* 符 (talismans) that record the secret (*hui* 諱) names of his divinities. He will drink this water, mixed with cinnabar, on the day of his inauguration so that the gods can pass into his body.

As was succinctly observed by Kenneth Dean:

The medieval liturgical manuals reveal that the talismanic-orders were not only burned and sent to the Gods or to the souls. Some were burned and then the ashes were consumed by the priest. Descending into his body, they could affect the summoning of the gods within his body, whom the priest would then send forth to merge with their counterparts in the macrocosm.²²

Master Yi Songdao's *Chart of the Skeleton of Lord Lao* and *Chart of a Flying Journey through the Three Worlds to Present a Petition* have focused us on connections between the inner and outer geography of the Taoist ritual. Together the charts preserve knowledge of an ancient tradition belonging to the shamanic sub-strata in Taoism, as Piet van der Loon has described²³. Simultaneously alchemists, exorcists, official dignitaries of the Tao and masters of the gods, Taoists are also the inheritors of ancient shamanism, of which this journey into the celestial realm is the best illustration.

²¹ A very detailed summary of this work by Lu Xiuqing, entitled 'Taishang dongxuan lingbao shou du yi' 太上洞玄灵宝授度仪 (DZ 522), is in Benn 1991, pp. 121–36. For an account based primarily on the ritual of Master Chen Yung-sheng Tainan, see also Lagerwey 1987, pp. 126ff.

²² Dean 1993, pp. 48–9.

²³ Van der Loon 1979.

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