ESOTERIC BUDDHIST ELEMENTS IN DAOIST RITUAL MANUALS OF THE SONG, YUAN, AND MING

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Introduction

During the Song dynasty, a number of new forms of Daoist ritual practice began to gain popularity. Sometimes referred to collectively as “thunder rituals” (leifa 雷法) because they often were addressed to a host of different thunder-related deities (such as Duke Thunder Leigong 雷公, the Five Thunders Wulei 五雷, and various deities belonging to the celestial Thunder Bureau Lei bu 雷部), these ritual methods were performed and transmitted by a wide range of practitioners, many of whom were not ordained Daoist priests (daoshi 道士) but belonged rather to a loosely defined and often itinerant class of “ritual masters” (fashi 法師).¹ There are several relatively distinct textual lineages whose ritual compendia make up the majority of the extant sources for the study of these Song ritual movements; of these, the most widespread are the traditions of the heart of heaven (tianxin 天心), divine empyrean (shenxiao 神霄), numinous treasure (lingbao 靈寶), and pure tenuity (qingwei 清微).²

The orientation of the rituals found in these sources is primarily apotropaic; exorcism, healing, rainmaking, and the subjugation of demonic forces and licentious cults in particular are common concerns found in the ritual texts of these different movements. While in many ways the ritual practices associated with these newly emergent traditions are contiguous with forms of Daoist ritual practiced in earlier periods, one characteristic that has been nearly universally noted by scholars is that they have incorporated a considerable amount of elements from esoteric Buddhism,³ and several important studies have demonstrated

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¹ See Davis 2001, 45–66. For an excellent overview of thunder ritual practices, see Reiter 2007a.
² See Skar 2004 for a thorough discussion of these movements and textual traditions.
³ Most notably Michel Strickmann, who has described such ritual traditions as a form of “tantric Daoism” (un taoïsme tantrique); see Strickmann 1996, 236–241.
clear links between the two types of ritual. Michel Strickmann and Edward L. Davis have explored the connections between Buddhist exorcistic rituals involving the use of spirit-mediums, known as āveśa (aweishe 阿尾捨), and the Daoist exorcistic practice of “summoning [demonic spirits] for interrogation” (kaozhao 考召) (Strickmann 1996, 213–241; Davis 2001; Strickmann 2002, 194–227). Strickmann (2002) has also analyzed the role of talismans and ensigillation in both Buddhist and Daoist practices. Charles D. Orzech (2002) has shown how the Buddhist ritual of “releasing the flaming mouths” (fang yankou 放焰□) was “translated” into the Daoist ritual program of universal salvation (pudu 普渡). In another important study, Mitamura Keiko (2002) has demonstrated that the Buddhist ritual use of mudrā was assimilated to the Daoist practice of ritual gesticulation.4 The present essay will focus on the use of Sanskrit and pseudo-Sanskrit incantations, and the presence of esoteric Buddhist deities in these Daoist ritual practices of the Song and later.5

**Mantra**

The use of pseudo-Sanskrit incantations in thunder rites is probably the most readily observable indication of esoteric influence. The general incorporation of pseudo-Sanskrit terms into Daoist literature is a tradition that long predates the Song and has been studied considerably (Zurcher 1980; Bokenkamp 1983). The mantric spells found in these Song ritual texts bear considerable formal similarities to those Buddhist dhārani given in Tang esoteric texts. In fact, while for the most part these incantations are referred to in Daoist literature as “spells” (zhou 呱), there are even a few instances in which they are explicitly called “mantra” (zhenyan 真言) (for example, CT 1220, 67:27b). The majority of the Daoist pseudo-Sanskrit spells are obviously fabricated, consisting of combinations of unintelligible transliteration characters commonly used in Buddhist mantra, often interspersed with regular

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4 On the topic of Daoist hand signs, see also Reiter 2007b, 189–190.

5 The majority of examples given are taken from the massive compendium Daoist Methods, United in Principle (Daofa huiyuan 道法會元, Concordance du Tao-Tsang [hereafter, CT] 1220), a heterogeneous collection of ritual manuals from the Song period and later, likely compiled in the Ming dynasty. For more on this text, see Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1105–1113. Sources from the Daoist canon will be cited according to the index numbers given in Schipper (1975), *Concordance du Tao-Tsang*.