The Zhengtong Daoist canon Daozang 正統道藏 compiled during the Ming dynasty is a repository of ancient Daoist scriptures. The sheer number of texts in the canon is astonishing, and their rich and complex contents are bewildering. The Daoist canon is organized into various categories such as the “three caverns” 三洞, “four auxiliaries” 四輔, and “twelve sections” 十二部. These form a firm and complete organizational scheme for the various texts. In the last century, modern academic scholarship on Daoism, both in the east and in the west, in dealing with Daoist scriptures and medieval Daoist history, almost always feel it necessary to touch upon the categorization of Daoist scriptures and the process of compilation. But the academic world has still not managed to form a consensus on even one concrete question concerning Daoist textual categorization. While the reason for this is related to difficulties in dating Daoist texts, a more significant reason, I suggest, may be our complete confidence in the methodological approach to examining Daoist textual categorization. Ever since Chen Guofu first attempted to examine the categories of Daoist texts in his Daozang yuanliu kao 道藏源流考 in the 1940s, scholars of Daoism, in east and west, have tended to emphasize a few texts with determined historical provenance that they examine with literary or philological methods. I suggest, however, that the sources and changes of Daoist textual categorization are not purely a question of literary categories, but are primarily related to the development of scriptural theory in religious Daoism. Daoist lineages and scriptural traditions appeared and formed continuously throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang, reflecting the process by which religious Daoism was transformed from earlier diverse forms into a unified religious system. It is precisely due to this that, while building upon the work of our predecessors, we need to re-examine this question by placing it in the historical context of the development of medieval Daoism.

* Translated by Gil Raz.
The revelation of Daoist scriptures: the celestial writs of Lingbao and the creation of the medieval Daoist scriptural system

The celestial writs of Lingbao and the Daoist self-perception of its beginnings

In the third year of the Tianxi era (1019 AD), Emperor Zhenzong (r. 998–1022) of the Northern Song ordered the compilation of the imperially sponsored *Da Song tiangong baozang* (Treasure repository of the great Song celestial palace). The famous Daoist scholar Zhang Junfang 張君房 at once directly managed the compilation and at the same time compiled on its basis the great Daoist encyclopedia, the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Cloudy bookcase with seven labels). Both compilations were presented to Emperor Renzong (r. 1023–63) in the fifth year of Tiansheng (1027). As the *Da Song tiangong baozang* and other Daoist canons of the Tang and Song have been lost, the *Yunji qiqian* has become a source of major importance for understanding the principles of compilation of Tang and Song canons. The first 20 juan of the *Yunji qiqian* are a systematic summation of medieval Daoist scriptures and thought that reflects the complete amalgamation of all aspects of Daoist scriptural traditions. The *Yunji qiqian* was a major influence on all subsequent Daoist canons and on historical developments in Daoism. The third juan of the *Yunji qiqian*, “Section on origins of Daoism; the emergence of Daoism” 道教本始部; 道教所起, thus very clearly reflects how religious Daoism viewed its own beginnings. The section begins with the following lines:

Examining Daoist scriptures and declarations 經誥, we find they arose during the era of the three primordials 三元; sending down their traces from the source, they formed the five virtues 五德. Combining three and five, thus were formed the eight nodes 八會. The graphs of the eight nodes were formed out of marvelous pneumas. The eight junctures sent forth rays that congealed in the void into cloudy seal-graphs. The great perfected held brushes and the jade maidens cleaned the mats; with gold they made writs and from jade they made tablets. They hid these above all heavens; they secreted them in the mystic tower of seven treasures. If one has the Dao, they manifest; if one lacks the Dao, they hide away. These are spontaneously generated celestial writs; they are not related to those produced by Cang Jie 蒼頡. Now, as for the transmission of the Lingbao scriptures, it was the Celestial perfected luminary person 天真皇人 who transmitted them to Xuanyuan, the Yellow Thearch, on Mount E’mei. Then he transmitted them to Thearch Ku at the Mude tower. Yu of Xia caused its descent to Mount Zhong. King Helü stole it at Juqu.