

FIGURING ON SALVATION: THE DEMONIC SAVIOR WANG LINGGUAN AND THE
POWER OF PRESENCE IN DAOIST RITUAL AND IMAGE AT THE MING COURT

By

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on a 16th century hanging scroll of the Daoist exorcistic deity, Efficacious Officer Wang (Wang Lingguan), to demonstrate how the symbiotic relationship between ritual and image serves as a means for articulating power at the early Ming court. The scroll, referred to here as the MMA scroll, was commissioned by the Honored Imperial Consort Shen in 1542, just months before a failed assassination attempt on the Jiajing Emperor (r. 1521–1567). The MMA scroll marks a critical moment in the history of Daoism at the Ming court. Daoist Thunder Methods, with their liturgies to manifest exorcistic gods, dominated and proved a critical response against threats to Jiajing’s person and state. This is the lifeworld of the MMA scroll, wherein rituals to produce divine power recast the images of exorcistic deities in terms of producing efficacious presence. Thus, the MMA scroll opens an avenue to reconsider the role of Daoism at the early Ming court, and in so doing, raises broader questions of object agency and the potential power of images to produce presence.

This dissertation examines these questions in three parts. Part One focuses on identifying the MMA scroll within a larger conceptual matrix of Wang Lingguan imagery through analysis of historical, visual, liturgical, and literary sources. It argues that this imagery relates to specific Daoist funerary rites known as “Salvation through Sublimation by the Iron Bottle,” and thus, situates the MMA scroll within a broader ritual repertoire of salvific rites associated with Wang Lingguan. Part Two contextualizes the MMA scroll within imperial patronage of Wang Lingguan and the interrelated role Thunder Methods play in articulating power at the Ming court. Part Three focuses on the specific language of ritual manuals and shows how the visuality of the MMA scroll mimics the invocatory language of Daoist ritual and the process of manifesting

divine presence. I argue that the MMA scroll has the potential to produce the presence of the deity and enact the efficacy of ritual performance itself, and in so doing, demonstrate how the vocabulary of Daoist ritual can speak to broader concerns of object agency.

List of Abbreviations

<i>CHC</i>	<i>Cambridge History of China</i>
<i>DMB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
<i>DZ</i>	<i>Daozang</i> 道藏
<i>EtT</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Taoism</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Mingshi</i> 明史
<i>MSL</i>	<i>Ming Shilu</i> 明實錄
<i>SJYLSSDQ</i>	<i>Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan</i> 三教源流搜神大全
<i>SKQS</i>	<i>Siku quanshu</i> 四庫全書
<i>TC</i>	<i>The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang</i>
<i>WLYHB</i>	<i>Wanli yehuo bian</i> 萬曆野獲編

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Introduction: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words, Maybe More

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road
 Best notify my next of kin
 This wheel shall explode!
 -The Band, "This Wheel's on Fire," 1968

This study focuses on an imperially commissioned ritual scroll from 1542 of the Daoist exorcistic deity, Efficacious Officer Wang (Wang Lingguan 王靈官). Using both classical sources and canonical liturgical manuals, it situates the painting within the context of Daoist Thunder Methods (*leifa* 雷法) at the Ming court to help ask what do objects “do.” In reconsidering liturgical vocabulary in its original context of manifesting divine power, this study demonstrates how Daoist ritual offers a vocabulary of presence. Thus, it offers a counterbalance to dominant Western models that privilege metaphorical interpretations of meaning. By framing our study of this scroll in the ritually empowered world of the early Ming court, it looks beyond iconography to reveal the symbiotic relationship between art and ritual. In so doing, it offers an answer to the question of what do objects “do” that speaks beyond the purview of Daoism.

1542 marks a dramatic turning point in the tumultuous reign of the Jiajing Emperor 嘉靖 (r. 1521–1567), since Zhu Houcong 朱厚熜 first ascended the throne in his cousin's place in 1521. Pressure had been building from without the empire and from within his own palace. In the winter of 1542, that pressure reached a boiling point, when the emperor barely survived an assassination attempt at the hands of his concubines, who would go on to implicate his favorite consort, Lady Cao 曹. The emperor's miraculous recovery and subsequent seclusion in West

Park (Xiyuan 西苑) within the palace grounds marked the beginning of his transition away from court, choosing to rule from within his carefully crafted paradise and pursue apotheosis as a Daoist Thunder Deity.¹ Earlier that summer, the Honored Imperial Consort, Lady Shen 黃貴妃 沈氏, had commissioned this painting of Wang Lingguan, which is now part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection under the mistle *Master Thunder (Lei Gong)* (fig. 1).



(fig. 1)
Master Thunder (Lei Gong)
 1542
 Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk
 98.4 x 62.5 cm/210.8 x 68.6 cm
 Metropolitan Museum of Art

Wang Lingguan's status as a powerful demonifuge had garnered the personal patronage of previous Ming emperors since the time of the Yongle Emperor 永樂 (r. 1402–1424), rising to prominence at court as the patron deity of the famed Daoist ritual master, Zhou Side 周思得 (1359–1451). By 1542, this deity's image had become synonymous with the apotropaic power of

¹ Maggie C. K. Wan, "Building an Immortal Land: The Ming Jiajing Emperor's West Park," *Asia Major* vol. 22, no. 2 (2009), p. 85.

Daoist exorcistic ritual generally known as Thunder Methods. The painter who took on the task of fulfilling the Imperial Consort's command remains anonymous, and Lady Shen herself has but a few traces in the historical record. While we have little to tell us why and for what purpose this painting was made, we still have the painting. This painting (hereafter referred to as the MMA scroll) begs many more questions than it answers. Who is Wang Lingguan and what is his role at the Ming court? Who was Lady Shen why did she commission it? Why did she choose Wang Lingguan and what did she expect to gain by doing so? The following study looks to answer those questions, and in that pursuit, we shall learn how the MMA scroll is one important piece of the newly reemerging puzzle that is Daoism at the Ming court.

Based on analysis of a combination of historical, literary, ritual, and visual sources, I argue that the MMA scroll relates to the Daoist funerary ritual known as “Salvation through Sublimation” (*liandu* 煉度). The iconographic elements that identify the main figure in the scroll as Wang Lingguan also include unique features that indicate it was part of a specific liturgy known as “Iron Bottle” *liandu* (*tieguan liandu* 鐵罐煉度), which Vincent Goossaert and Li Fengmao have shown to be among the most prominent funerary rites at the capital during the Late Imperial period.² Dated 1542, the MMA scroll is the earliest known example of this ritual practice, and as such, represents an important moment in the history of Daoism and the Ming court. With death all around, the Honored Imperial Consort Shen commissions a ritual scroll that shows Wang Lingguan in the process of saving the dead.

Thus, this study's first aim is to advance recent scholarly efforts that write Daoism back into the historical record of the Ming court. Lacking the freedom to criticize the emperor

² Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800–1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 341–344; Li Fengmao 李豐楙, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian: Deng Zhimo daojiao xiaoshuo yanjiu* 許遜與薩守堅: 鄧志謨道教小說研究 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1997), pp. 273–284.

directly, official account use Daoism and Daoists close to the court as a foil, casting the emperor's affinity for Daoist practice as a mere dalliance or a more dangerous distraction. However, as we will see, the emperors of the Ming, and Jiajing in particular, knew what they were doing in their interactions with Daoist ritual and Daoist masters. The first half of this study addresses the need to reassess contemporary perspectives on Ming history and argues that failing to recognize the validity of the court's perspective, wherein ritual practice could produce powerful results, necessarily leads to misunderstanding the role ritual objects like the MMA scroll play as objects of power.

The MMA scroll thus stands as a material witness to a world where power is articulated in terms of exorcistic deities and the Daoist rituals to control them. As such, it affords us an opportunity to ask our own questions about object agency and what images *do*. Scholarship on Chinese objects, particularly as borne from the fields of Art History and Religious Studies, has done well to develop the means to assess the meaningfulness of material culture as evidence of its time in more or less concrete terms of modes of production—stylistic influence, economies of objects, creating ritual space, connoisseurship and taste. With few exceptions, we have yet to consider the meaningfulness of traditional Chinese visual and material cultures in terms of the expectation of fulfilling the promise of *doing*. That is to say, rather than be confined to metaphorically reading the meaningfulness of things by virtue of their symbolic meaning and always pointing away from the object itself, we must to consider museum pieces and ritual objects alike as powerful objects in and of themselves and their potential as beings in the world. This turn is inspired by phenomenological concerns for objects and object agency, and we will borrow from the vocabulary of phenomenology to address what the MMA scroll can do. However, that language is found lacking, and we will look to the ritual manuals of the *Daoist Canon* to articulate how the active power of Daoist images and objects can be expressed.

We find in Daoist ritual a vocabulary for manifesting Wang Lingguan's divine presence. By connecting the visual language of ritual invocation from Daoist manuals to the visual language of the MMA scroll. In the second part of this study, I show how Daoist ritual offers a vocabulary to engage with the presence of images and objects using the language of Daoist liturgical texts to "read" the MMA scroll in a way that reveals what an object can do. This requires a combination of different modes of contextualization that include the historical life of objects, but also necessitates we consider the context of power and the how power to affect change (i.e. efficacy) comes to be expressed through the presence of object themselves. Thus, the second aim of this study is to demonstrate how the language of Daoist ritual offers an otherwise lacking vocabulary of presence that speaks to broader phenomenological concerns for object agency. Overall, I bring the historical perspective of Daoism at the Ming court and the divine figure of Wang Lingguan to bear on concerns of what objects *do*, and in so doing, demonstrate how the study of Daoism serves to benefit much broader scholarly concerns.

Methodology and Approach to Sources

I first encountered the painting that now serves as the focus of this study back in 2004, when I was conducting research into the museum holdings of Daoist art for what was then the early beginnings of the Daoist Iconography Project. Led by Poul Andersen at the University of Hawai'i, the DIP (Daojiao tuxiangxue jihua 道教圖像學計畫) was conceived as a collaborative effort between scholars across fields to reposition Daoist images in their ritual context.³ As part of that effort, I travelled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to catalogue the Daoist objects in their collection. Those at the museum were extremely accommodating, and among the

³ <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/daoist-iconography/>

impressive collection they revealed was this vibrantly painting that stood out for its dynamism and for the compelling figures it presented. I immediately recognized it from Stephen Little's seminal work on Daoist art, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, where he identifies the painting as "Marshal Wang."⁴ As the focus of my own research would shift away from iconography and toward ritual discourse of power and objects, that image of the fearsome crimson deity never really left my memory. When it came time to reconsider objects as powerful things in and of themselves through the lens of Daoist ritual, I knew exactly which object I wanted to use to frame my inquiry. I returned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2015, who were just as accommodating as before, to once again look at this painting from a more developed perspective to ask different questions of its potential as a Daoist image and what it can tell us about broader questions of object agency.

Using the MMA scroll to ask multiple questions requires multiple approaches to a variety of sources. The first half of this study makes uses of historical writings found in both official histories and unofficial sources, as well as ritual texts and literary anecdotes to contextualize the MMA scroll within Ming Daoism at court. In particular, the ritual texts dedicated to Wang Lingguan found in the *Daoist Canon* published in 1445 and in the Wanli supplement published in 1607 form a liturgical touchstone to connect the visual elements of the MMA scroll with the broader ritual context of the Ming. As the study shifts toward questions on the power of objects and ritual efficacy, it returns to look at many of the same sources through different interpretive lenses with the intention of gaining a fuller picture of how the MMA scroll fits within the network of historical and ritual significance.

⁴ Stephen Little and Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in association with University of California Press, 2000), p. 266.

As recent scholarship has shown, this network also includes the world of literary narratives, where the figures of Daoist masters and Daoist gods reveal a broader worldview in which popular conceptions of the gods stem from ritual roots.⁵ As such, this study makes use of literary sources otherwise kept confined to the category of “popular fiction,” in order to flesh out the contours of ritual performance no longer accessible in the histories. In particular, I look to the Ming popular narrative, *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 and the detailed account of funerary rites described therein to help locate the potential of a ritual object like the MMA scroll within the popular conception of how an opulent *liandu* ceremony is supposed to look. Thus, I use literary sources not as necessarily as a descriptive text in search of historical accuracy, but as a prescriptive account of ritual in an idealized but palatable form, to investigate how powerful objects like the MMA scroll were conceived of as part of ritual performance.

In addition to re-reading popular narratives, this study brings the MMA scroll into conversation with a more general discourse of Chinese painting and the interaction of “spiritual resonances” (*shenyun* 神韻) between the viewer and the object. This means we look at the MMA scroll not only in comparison to other examples of icons, but in relations to broader categories of Chinese visual arts such as landscape and figure paintings. Thus, I expand the discourse on materiality and form typically reserved for the category of “landscape” (*shanshui* 山水) paintings to include “ritual scrolls” like the MMA scroll to show how the power of visibility creates a network of meaning that transcends external categorizations of objects. Thus, I argue for a new way of “reading” materials that have otherwise been confined to the methodologies and theoretical perspectives that have defined them as “literature,” “art,” “ritual objects,” and

⁵ See Mark Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

“history”—what I call here the “liturgical gaze,” which sees the potential in ritual vocabularies of manifesting presence to articulate object agency. Looking through the “liturgical gaze” challenges us to look back and see new insights into the way form networks of meaning in the history of the Ming court, and encourages us to look ahead and envision how the study of Daoism may inform future concerns for object agency and the power of visuality in the Humanities at large.

Situating within Early Ming History, Daoist Visual Cultures, and Object Agency

In framing the MMA scroll in terms of Daoist ritual and the role Wang Lingguan plays at the early Ming court, this study contributes to the emerging scholarship on Ming Daoism. Recent work by scholars such as Richard Wang, Chao Shin-yi, and Mark Meulenbeld has shed light on a more nuanced vision of Daoism’s role in the politics and personal life of early Ming emperors.⁶ Beyond the official histories that present Daoism as the deviant distraction of emperors fooled by charlatans, these scholars have shown how Daoism, and in particular Daoist ritual, was part of the *Realpolitik* at the early Ming court. My research adds to this ongoing corrective through its analysis of Wang Lingguan as a window into the relationship between Ming emperors and Thunder Methods liturgy.

By arguing for a ritual interpretation of the MMA scroll, this study also contributes to recent considerations for the affective power of images within the study of Daoist visual and material cultures. In 2005, Poul Andersen’s Daoist Iconography Project established a model for studying Daoist images that foregrounds the critical importance of viewing them within ritual

⁶ Richard Wang (Wang Gang 王崗), *The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Chao Shin-yi. *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices: Zhenwu Worship from Song to Ming (960–1644)* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” 2008.

context. Scholars of Daoist material and visual cultures have continued to look toward ritual as a way to understand the aesthetic and functional aspects of Daoist imagery. While Daoist ritual imagery has long been explored within Daoist Studies, Art Historians such as Susan Huang and Maggie Wan have begun to explore the link between the visual repertoire of Daoist ritual and ritual performance that express power.⁷ Likewise, recent scholarship in the field of Buddhist Art History by Philip Bloom and Yuhang Li has demonstrated the active role that bodhisattva images and objects that help one embody the image of bodhisattvas play in reproducing divine presence.⁸ The current study contributes to this burgeoning discourse on the relationship between divine images and ritual expressions of power by analyzing the visuality of the MMA scroll in terms of the invocatory language of Daoist ritual.

At the same time, I push the discussion of Daoist images further toward a consideration of how Daoist ritual language offers a vocabulary of presence to engage with the broader phenomenological concern for object agency. Given the religious contexts for Daoist images, I frame this concern in terms of “presence” and the way that ritual articulates the role of objects in realizing divine presence. We find this concern for presence shared by scholars of religion beyond the Chinese context. For example, the historian of Catholic Studies, Robert Orsi, asks of the Eucharist, “what if the gods were still in religion?” Orsi’s provocative tone questions the relationship between divine presence and the gap produced by symbolic meaning.⁹ Framing the issue of symbolism over presence, Orsi argues that the impulse to metaphorize divine presence is

⁷ Susan (Shih-shan) Huang, *Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Maggie C. K. Wan, “Image and Efficacy: The Frontispieces to the Wanli Emperor’s *Yushu jing*,” *Artibus Asiae* 75.1 (2015): 45–82; Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” pp. 65–99.

⁸ Philip Emmanuel Bloom, “Descent of the Deities: The Water-Land Retreat and the Transformation of the Visual Culture of Song-Dynasty (960–1279) Buddhism,” (PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2013); Yuhang Li, *Becoming Guanyin: Women’s Artistic Devotion in Late Imperial China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁹ Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016).

product of history. As such, it has been used as modern vehicle to categorize, and indeed demonize, the ‘religious’ experiences of those who actively live in the presence of their gods.

On the one hand, Orsi reveals the prejudice of post-Enlightenment (and Eurocentric) models that demean so-called “pre-modern” religious expression into naivety (at best) or deviant superstition. On the other hand, he gets at the insecurity of such interpretative models that simply may not allow themselves to grapple directly with divine presence. Scholars of visual cultures, such as, Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft have noted similar insecurities in the way Western discourse has grown around the power of images, what they term “idol anxiety,” to the extent that the development of the field of Art History itself can be viewed as an apology for idolatry.¹⁰ Likewise, the earlier work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has shown that Eurocentric discourse of post-Enlightenment concerns over the power of presence has simply lost the vocabulary to address the encounter with another.¹¹ This has particularly significant consequences for phenomenological questions about the power of objects and the encounter with object agency.

This “anxiety” has a long history in the Western study of China.¹² Starting with Matteo Ricci in the 16th century, Western efforts to bring segments of Chinese society into the fold led to categorical distinctions between “custom” and “religion” that continues to trouble modern scholars whose interests straddle the line between “Popular Religion” and “-isms” like Daoism, the reverberations of which are still felt in modern categories of religion in China.¹³ Of all the

¹⁰ Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft, eds. *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹² For discussion of the frustration over idolatry in China from Protestant missionary perspectives, see Eric Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹³ David A. Palmer and Vincent Goossaert. *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011). Also see, Robert Ford Company, “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the modern West and in early medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42 (May, 2003): 287–319.

accommodations that Ricci and his fellow Jesuits allowed, such that it led to their eventual failure in the eyes of Rome,¹⁴ the one that Ricci could never abide was the troublesome feature of worshipping images.¹⁵ Idolatry was for Ricci neither “religion” nor “custom,” but superstitious heresy of a lower mind. This critique was nothing new in China, and many imperial officials during Ricci’s time seemed to share his condemnation of worshipping icons.¹⁶ Thus, the potential presence of the divine in such images that we find the *Gengsi bian* anecdote, was, as Orsi points out, looked at from Western and also certain Chinese perspectives with disdain.

As with many of the categories inherited from early encounters in the “Orient,” we have since, in our own enlightened way, learned to deconstruct and problematize the presumptions lying within the vocabulary used to approach our subjects.¹⁷ We may now with confidence approach the study of “religion” or “art” or “literature” with the assurance that by properly contextualizing the subject of our inquiry, in this case a 16th century painted scroll of the Daoist exorcistic deity Wang Lingguan, we may better understand what is behind the claims that images *do* something without fear of taking the claims that such images actually *do* something too

¹⁴ While the distinction Ricci creates initially opened the door for he and his fellow Jesuits to allow ancestor worship to still be part of their budding parish in China, it led to nearly three centuries of protracted debate at the Vatican known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, which the Jesuits would eventually lose with a papal bull by Clement XI in 1715 that officially condemned ancestor rites for Chinese Catholics. It was only until December 8, 1939 that the Pope Pius XII relaxed the restrictions on ancestor rites in the eyes of the Church, by decreeing among other edicts that Confucianism was a philosophy not a religion, and as such, Chinese Catholics were allowed to be present at ceremonies to honor the sage at official temples and schools. (D. E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013); George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), Louis J. Gallagher (trans.), *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610* (New York: Random House, 1953).

¹⁶ For example, see Guo Ruoxu’s 11th century critique of “magic paintings.” (Alexander Coburn Soper, *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-Hua Chiean-Wên Chih): An Eleventh Century History of Chinese Painting Together with the Chinese Text in Facsimile* (Washington D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951), pp. 103–104).

¹⁷ For the problematic issue of Chinese definitions of “religion” as a modern concept inherited from Western perspectives and the political ramifications that comes with it, see David Palmer and Vincent Goossaert, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, also see Goossaert, “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (May, 2006): 307–335.

seriously. Still, the impulse to turn away from acknowledging the potential of divine presence runs deep, and simply placing a powerful object in its ritual context, for example, may not be enough to shake our own anxieties over the potential of what a powerful object can do. Here in the present study, I do not presume to operate outside the bounds of my own inherited bias, particularly when it comes to the heavily burdened language of studying “Chinese religion.” But I shall try to at least remain aware of the potential for unwitting violence to the material in my attempt to recover what is lost in the anxious charge of idolatry. The following study is an attempt to recover some of the indigenous voices of Daoist interactions with manifesting divine presence. It does so not simply as an apologetics for the sake of being heard, but rather, it looks to the vocabulary of Daoist ritual for its important contribution as a means for articulating presence that has since been lost in the West.

At the center of it all is the object itself. This study continually returns to the MMA scroll itself to demonstrate the various ways its visuality reflects Wang Lingguan’s role in Daoist ritual articulations of power. With that in mind, let us briefly introduce our demonic hero.

Wang Lingguan 王靈官

Wang Lingguan is a martial deity associated with the liturgical traditions of Thunder Methods, including funerary programs for saving deceased souls. Wang would rise to great prominence during the early Ming, where the deity would be included as part of official sacrifices added to the regular calendar of state rites.¹⁸ However, today he is perhaps better

¹⁸ As Liu Ts’un-yan points out, the extra layer of state rituals accorded to mostly Daoist deities drew the ire of Neo-Confucian officials at court. In 1488, the Supervising Secretary of the Ministry of Rite (*kedao libu* 科道禮), Zhang Jiugong 張九功, memorialized the Hongzhi Emperor 弘治 (r. 1487–1505) on expunging Daoist influence from state sacrifices, which led to a discussion at court with ranking members of the Ministry of Rites. Among the items discussed was the cessation of sacrifice to Wang Lingguan and his master, Sa Shoujian 薩守堅 (See, Liu Ts’un-yan, “The Penetration of Taoism into the Ming Neo-Confucian Elite,” *T’oung Pao* 57, 1/4 (1971): 44–51).

known throughout China as a guardian of Daoist sacred sites. It is likely that his cult originated in the local ritual traditions of Hunan 湖南, where Daoist families continue to view him as a lineage ancestor, though his historical origins have yet to be fully studied.¹⁹ In fact, there is little scholarly writing on Wang Lingguan specifically, and the few examples that do touch upon his identity and place within Daoism have proven invaluable to the current study.²⁰

This is not to say that he is an obscure figure. On the contrary, the materials used for the current project are widely accessible and most derive from the larger pool of literary, liturgical, and visual resources frequented by scholars in these respective fields. In point of fact, to say that little has been written on Wang Lingguan is misleading, as numerous hagiographies, popular novels, temple accounts, devotional liturgies, ritual manuals, and images attest to his renown. Such was the case at the end of the 16th century when Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642) noted in his *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編:

... When it comes to [the image of] Wang Lingguan, all of today's temples (*shenmiao* 神廟) have him. If [you take the case of] Wudang shan, then every place is like this. It's like *Qielan*, the protector deity of Buddha Shakyamuni.²¹ I

¹⁹ I am grateful to Mark Meulenbeld and David Mozina for sharing the results from their extensive fieldwork among Daoist families in Hunan. For publications on the topics, see Patrice Fava, *Aux Portes du Ciel: La Statue du Hunan* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient), 2013; David Mozina, "Summoning the Exorcist: The Role of Heart Seals (*xinyin* 心印) in Calling Down a Demon-Quelling Deity in Contemporary Daoist Thunder Ritual," in Florian C. Reiter, ed., *Exorcism in Daoism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), pp. 231–256; Mozina, "Daubing Lips with Blood and Drinking Elixirs with the Celestial Lord Yin Jiao: The Role of Thunder Deities in Daoist Ordination in Contemporary Hunan," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 19 (2010): 269–303; Mozina, "Quelling the Divine: Thunder Ritual in South China," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008).

²⁰ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 264–273; Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, pp. 341–343; Mark Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pp. 162–165; Meulenbeld, "Civilized Demons: Ming Thunder Gods from Ritual to Literature," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007), pp. 216–223; Nara Yukihiko 奈良行博, "Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan: Sono Shinkō no Tenkai" 道教護法神王靈官: その信仰の展開 in Naomi Kurita 栗田直躬著, ed. *Chūgoku shisō ni okeru shizen to ningen* 中国思想における自然と人間 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), pp. 471–489; Florian Reiter, "Some Notices on the 'Magic Agent Wang' (Wang ling-kuan) at Mt. Ch'i-ch'ü in Tzu-t'ung District, Szechwan Province," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 148.2 (1998): 323–342.

²¹ The *Qielan shen* 伽藍神 are the divine guardians of Buddhist sites, especially monasteries. In his study of Guan Yu, Barend ter Haar makes note of how Guan Yu, whose roots stretch into Daoist Thunder Methods, became a prominent *qielan* for Buddhist monasteries during the 16th century. (See, Barend ter Haar *Guan Yu: The Religious Afterlife of a Failed Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 34, 42).

don't why [the god] only manifests in the capital [since he is worshipped everywhere]?

至王靈官, 今神廟俱有之. 若武當山, 則處處皆是. 如釋氏之伽藍. 不知何以獨顯於都城乃爾.²²

According to Shen Defu Wang Lingguan's presence was widespread and his image could be found in local temples, along the routes of the famous Daoist pilgrimage site of Wudang shan and in his main temple at the capital. Later, Wang Lingguan would become a dedicated protector of Quanzhen Daoist temples and even come to oversee Quanzhen ordinations.²³ He is known throughout the Chinese religious landscape by various appellations, including Efficacious Officer Wang (Wang Lingguan 王靈官), Marshal Wang (Wang Yuanshuai 王元帥), Wang the Wicked (Wang E 王惡), Wang the Good (Wang Shan 王善), Celestial Lord Wang (Wang Tianjun 王天君), True Lord of Grand Compassion (Long'en zhenjun 隆恩真君), Fire-deity (Huoshen 火神), and also by his Confucian-sounding epithet, "Sincere Heart, Loyal Virtue" (Chixin Zhongliang 赤心忠良). Indeed, the ubiquity of Wang Lingguan may have contributed to the relative paucity of studies, given that his identity extends into many different contexts that make a singular comprehensive account particularly challenging. Still, Wang's pervasive presence makes his image particularly valuable for engaging with broader questions about how Daoism and Daoist images articulate power. To help illustrate the power of images, let us turn to a short anecdote about a wandering Daoist and image of Wang Lingguan.

²² *WLYHB* j. 34, p. 917.

²³ Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, p. 150.

A Story About an Image

The following anecdote about a painting of Wang Lingguan comes from the 16th century collection *Notes from the Last Two Years of the Zhengde Reign* (*Gengsi bian* 庚巳編) that Lu Can 陸燾 (1494–1551) compiled just around the same time as when the Honored Imperial Consort Shen commissioned the MMA scroll. The story is entitled “Daoist Master Zhang” (“Zhang Daoshi” 張道士), and tells of a master of Thunder Methods who deploys Wang Lingguan to exorcize the home of an unfortunate scholar:

Daoist Master Zhang Bixu 張碧虛 from Shatou 沙頭 in Taicang 太倉 (modern Suzhou), who in his youth wandered the rivers and lakes [i.e. as an itinerant] obtaining occult techniques.

There was a family of a scholar living in the village who barely had enough for food and clothes. Once, five men moored their boat at their gate wearing caps and robes as though wealthy traveling sons of nobility. They extended [the offer] for the young scholar to come aboard the boat, where they had arranged a magnificent feast for his enjoyment. To reciprocate, the young scholar had to thus arrange delicacies. From that point on, there was not a day that they did not come, and since when they came they must be entertained and hosted, the expense grew immensely. Eventually [the young scholar’s funds] proved no longer sufficient, to the point that he pawned his personal belongings in order to continue the [feasting].

The small-mouthed earthen pitchers from which they drank their wine piled high to fill the place. His household suffered bitterly from this but he was not able to get away. Their neighbor found this odd, and asked the five men their names and from where they came, and apologized that he didn't know. Then [the neighbor] said, “These must be evil spirits. I’ve heard Zhang Bixu is adept in ‘beheading and interrogating’ exorcism, why not enlist him?” Thereupon he sent someone to ask of Zhang.

When Zhang first ordered the family to welcome the image of Wang Lingguan that he presented, and to provide sacrifices in their room, (it was) taken away by the anomaly. When he went on to hang a (painting of) the True Warrior, the same thing happened. And when he then went there with his command-tablet and his Tianpeng ruler, again it was snatched away and placed on the beam (i.e. rafters). Zhang was angry. He equipped himself with incense, paper and talismanic commands, and then proceeded to the family. After he had executed his rituals for several days, the tablet and ruler that had been snatched away suddenly fell down from the beam. He then, he wrapped them up using the documents (i.e. calligraphy) copied in the scholars own hand.

Zhang happily said, “This is the solution.” Afterward, his group of lads rushed into the house, reporting that, “There were several hundred demons, crimson-coiffed and blue-skinned, the ringleader was fierce and evil and patrolling the grounds.” They further announced, “There was one general in red dress and helmet, who had several hundred men following all wearing red. The general stood in the threshing floor. Pointing with his banner [he signaled to] the red-clad men to seize all the demons one by one they put them in the wine bottles. All the demons [were running] helter-skelter, scrambling against capture. The situation was extremely chaotic.”

Zhang knew this ‘general’ was the god Lingguan. He instructed the lads to watch each demon entering, then he brought forth the bottles, wrote a talisman to seal them, threw them in the water, and soon they sank down and were gone. When all of them were thrown in, the demons were also finished. The general and all his followers had wiped them out in just a short while. Then, [the family] arranged offerings to thank the general, but before they were finished, the scholar’s household suddenly lost their eldest son. They looked everywhere but could not find him. He only returned after several days.

When they asked him about what happened, he said, “I was seized by those Five Men and taken on their boat. The impression is hazy. We traveled for a hundred or so *li*. Suddenly, I was just at the bank of a river, and it was if I awoke from a dream. I was at the foot of Mt. Wu (Wushan 吳山) in Suzhou. Based on asking the way from people who lived there, I was able to return home.”

Mt. Wu is near to Lengjia 楞伽 [pagoda], and we suspect those five demons were really the Wu Tong 五通.

太倉沙頭市道士張碧虛，早歲游江湖，得異術。所居村中一教書學究家，僅足衣食。嘗有五人泊舟其門，衣冠如貴游公子，延學究入舟，盛設享之，學究因亦設饌以謝。自是無日不來，來必款飲，所費浸多，漸不能給，至典賣衣物以繼之。其所飲酒瓶罌，堆積滿場，其家苦之而不能遠也。鄰人怪之，扣以五人居止姓名，謝不知，乃曰：「此必崇也。聞張碧虛精於斬勘，盍招之？」乃使人請張。張先令其家迎所奉王靈官像供其室，為怪攝去，繼掛真武亦如之。乃以令牌，天蓬尺往，復被攝置樑上。張怒，自備香紙符檄至其家，行持數日，忽所攝牌，尺自樑上墜下。仍用學究館生所寫仿書裹之。

張喜曰：「是計竅矣。」已而，其家一群兒奔入，告云：「有數百個鬼，朱發藍膚，頭目瘳惡，在場上逡巡。」又傳報云：「一將軍紅衣兜鍪，從者數百人，皆著紅，將軍立場間，指麾紅衣人將諸鬼一一掙之入諸酒瓶中。諸鬼彷徨搶攘，勢甚洶洶。」張知將軍是靈官神也，使兒伺其每入一鬼，則持瓶來，書一符封之，投於水，便沉下去。瓶投盡，鬼亦盡，將軍及從者一時都滅。乃設祭謝將，未畢，學究家忽失其長子，遍尋不得，數日

乃歸。問之，云：「被五人者掙我入舟，意象迷罔，行百數十里，身忽在岸，恍如夢覺，乃在蘇州吳山下。因從居民問路得歸。」吳山地近楞伽，疑五鬼者，五通也。²⁴

There is more to unpack in this short narrative than this introduction permits, but let us pause for a moment to highlight some particularly relevant points. The story is ostensibly about an itinerant ritual master Zhang, who in his travels, has learned the exorcistic techniques such as “beheading and interrogating” (*zhankan* 斬勘) associated with the Daoist liturgical traditions of Thunder Methods.²⁵ The plot centers on the house of an unfortunate scholar, who has unwittingly invited a host of demons into his home to feast, and now cannot get rid of them. Their hedonism has brought about his family’s ruin, to the point that a neighbor takes notice, and seemingly naturally calls for the famous Daoist exorcist. Daoist Zhang arrives at the behest of the concerned neighbor and immediately sets to work on ridding the house of its demonic guests. What happens next is of particular interest to our study of the MMA scroll.

Zhang sets up an altar in the home with an image of his patron deity, Wang Lingguan, and asks that the family make offerings to it. Here, we may notice that the Daoist’s first instinct upon arriving in a haunted house is to hang an image of this god that he presumably carried with him to perform the exorcism. He then asks the family to prepare offerings to the image, though the narrative does not tell us explicitly to what end. Nonetheless, the image of Wang Lingguan is the focal point of Zhang’s exorcistic ritual. Until it is not, when the demons snatch it away. Undeterred, the Daoist tries the same thing again, only this time, he hangs an image of the

²⁴ Lu Can 陸燾 (1494-1551), *Gengsi bian* 庚巳編 (Notes from the last two years of the Zhengde Reign), “Zhang Daoshi” 張道士, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), p. 65.

²⁵ The exorcistic practice of “interrogating” demons had been incorporated into Thunder Methods liturgy as early as the Song dynasty. See Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), pp. 93–95.

Realized Warrior (Zhenwu 真武), the chief Thunder Deity during the Ming.²⁶ That, too, gets taken by the demons. Unsuccessful the second time, Zhang enters the house equipped with the ritual implements of Thunder Methods exorcism, which the demons also take and toss in the rafters.

Frustrated by this seemingly endless mocking, Daoist Master Zhang leaves the house to perform the ritual undisturbed. There, he deploys talismans, much like we might find in contemporary Daoist performance for summoning the divine warriors to combat the demons. He summons Wang Lingguan himself, whose appearance is confirmed when a lad reports seeing a red-clad general commanding his red-clad troops against the demonic infestation. Visuality plays a key role in fulfilling the promise of the ritual, and indeed, the exorcism succeeds as Wang Lingguan and his subordinates seize the demons. In an ironic twist, they are trapped in the very wine bottles that bore witness to their own debauchery. After disposing of the bottles in the river, the demons are gone. Wang Lingguan and his warriors have wiped them out.

The narrative concludes with a twist, as the eldest son is taken by the demons to Mt. Wu only to return later. As such, the details of specific landmarks and the narrator's identification of the demons as the Wutong 五通 situate the narrative within the context of local religious practice. The Wutong are known to be a widespread popular cult with their own established backstory of originating from mountain spirits (*shanxiao* 山魃) to become Daoist gods under the rubric of Thunder Methods.²⁷ Here, "Daoist Master Zhang" tells the story of a travelling

²⁶ For imagery of the True Warrior (Zhenwu 真武), see Noelle Giuffrida, "Representing the Daoist God Zhenwu, the Perfected Warrior, in Late Imperial China," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2008).

²⁷ For a discussion of their history and relationship to Daoist exorcistic practice, see Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, "The Cult of the Wu-t'ung/Wu-hsien on History and Fiction: The Religious Roots of the *Journey to the South*" in David G. Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Chinese Popular Culture Project Distributed by IEAS Publications, University of California, 1995), pp. 152–192.

Thunder Methods master who could command Wang Lingguan to seize and capture the Wutong, and thus situates the plot within a broader religious framework of Daoist masters incorporating local spirits into their ritual repertoire where they become Thunder Deities (*leishen* 雷神).²⁸

While this is the story of Wang Lingguan in “Daoist Master Zhang,” as we shall see, it is also the story of Wang Lingguan at the Ming court, where Zhou Side brings his ritual prowess to the attention of the Yongle emperor.

Framed within the context of an itinerant Thunder Methods master whose ritual power is attributed to summoning Wang Lingguan, the narrative of “Daoist Master Zhang” also reflects how images, and in particular hanging scrolls, fit within the broader popular conception of Daoist exorcistic practice. Zhang’s initial response to the demonic threat was to set up an image of his patron god, the very presence of which threatened the demons. Once the image proved ineffective, Zhang proceeded to conduct the rituals to summon the god himself, whose presence is confirmed by visual appearance of the red-clad general commanding his troops to seize the demons. While ultimately ineffective in this anecdote about the resilience of the famed Wutong, Master Zhang’s initial response of hanging Wang Lingguan’s image evinces the expectation that the image would *do* something to the demons. Although it clearly did not produce the desired effect, it nonetheless did compel the demons to respond.

Scholars of Chinese literature such as Glen Dudbridge and Robert Ford Campany have demonstrated how strange tales (*zhiguai* 志怪) such as “Daoist Master Zhang” reflect religious practice.²⁹ In the case of “Daoist Master Zhang” the use of images and talismans are part of a

²⁸ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, 2015.

²⁹ Glen Dudbridge, *Books, Tales and Vernacular Culture: Selected Papers on China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 134–150; Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T’ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu’s Kuang-i chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Robert Ford Campany, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015); Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012);

conceptual repertoire that reflects the particulars of Daoist Thunder Methods. It also fits within a broader worldview in which such objects were understood to produce powerful effects across the Chinese religious landscape. Paul Copp’s recent study into the material culture of Buddhist spells (*dhārāṇi*) and amulets situates the use of such objects within ritual frameworks—what he calls the “ritual imagination.”³⁰ Although Copp focuses on Medieval Buddhism, we have the opportunity to extend his general framework to include Daoist images like the one Daoist Master Zhang carried into the haunted house.

While the imperially commissioned MMA scroll is not the same scroll Master Zhang brought with him to combat demons, it is part of the same worldview that understands images of Daoist deities in light of their efficacy. Thus, the short narrative of “Daoist Master Zhang” hints at the two main objectives our study. The first is to demonstrate how the deity Wang Lingguan functioned as a critical part of the broader ritual repertoire of Thunder Methods at court when the MMA scroll was commissioned. The second is to show how the MMA scroll functions as powerful object by showing how this ritual repertoire unfolds. Let us now turn to how this study is organized to address both goals.

Organization of Chapters

Framing the discussion around the painting of the Wang Lingguan, we investigate the potential it offers in two main complementary moves. The first half is comprised of three

Company, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009); Company, *Strange Writings: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996. Also see, William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *Tang Dynasty Tales: A Guided Reader, volume two* (Singapore: World Scientific Press, 2016). In the case of Daoist practice, see Ned Davis’ study of Hong Mai’s 洪邁 (1123–1202) *Tales of the Listener (Yijianzhi 夷堅志)* (Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, 2001).

³⁰ Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

chapters that contextualize the painting within the Ming worldview of powerful images and how it relates to the world of Wang Lingguan and Thunder Methods ritual at the Ming court. The second half is comprised of three chapters that show how the liturgical language of Daoist ritual offers a vocabulary to articulate what objects *do*. The seventh and final chapter returns to the ritual context of the MMA scroll to see what it can do. The overall trajectory of this study becomes increasingly speculative as the narrative moves along. This affords us an opportunity to return to many of the same sources to view them in different light as each chapter adds new layers to reveal the complex network of meaning and significance for the MMA scroll. While this study is about the MMA scroll, it really uses the scroll to ask multiple questions of what images *do* and to find answer those questions across different kinds of contexts.

Chapter One identifies the scroll as an object in its historical and iconographical context. It situates the scroll in a broader visual repertoire of imaging Wang Lingguan through a combination of ritual and hagiographic sources, as well as contemporaneous images. In particular, the unique visual element of Wang's iron bottle that he is seen holding in his left hand identifies the scroll as part of the specific funerary traditions associated with Sa Shoujian, and in particular, the liturgies of "Iron Bottle" *liandu*. Chapter One then discusses the historical context of "Iron Bottle" *liandu* relates key liturgical aspects of the rite to the visuality of the MMA scroll. In so doing, Chapter One lays the foundation for themes that will be further developed in subsequent chapters.

The next two chapters explore the role of Wang Lingguan at the Ming court, and in particular, how his image comes to be associated with efficacious power as articulated by Thunder Methods ritual within the capital. It opens with a brief Intermezzo in which we situate our discussion of Daoism within the broader pejorative narratives that have colored the way

official histories and modern scholars have described the interaction between Daoists and emperors in the past. Redefining this kind of interaction becomes all the more critical at the court of Jiajing, as the emperor's pursuit of immortality during the latter half of his reign continues to have an outsized impact on the way Daoism is viewed in relation to his reign. After situating our study within the growing voices that call for a more critical engagement with Daoism at the early Ming court, we turn our attention to the rise of Wang Lingguan in the capital.

Chapter Two focuses on the rise of Wang Lingguan from local deity to the personal god of the emperor, and from there an established institution within the capital. It begins with the rise of the Thunder Ritual master, Zhou Side, whose ritual prowess he attributes to his “Method of the Efficacious Officer” (*Lingguan fa* 靈官法) dedicated to Wang Lingguan, which in turn helps him become a close confidant of the Yongle emperor. Following Zhou's meteoric rise from relative obscurity, Wang Lingguan becomes a fixture at court, and the emperor himself would patronize the god, taking a miraculous image of the deity with him along his northern campaigns. Upon returning to the capital, Yongle would establish a temple to house the image, which in turn would grow to become one of the most important sites of Daoist power in the Early Ming and beyond. The fame of the temple known as Palace of Manifesting Efficacy (Xianling gong 顯靈宮) and the image of Wang Lingguan would grow in subsequent reigns, gaining renown as a site of efficacious response and solidifying Wang's prominence at the capital.

Chapter Three contextualizes the central role Thunder Methods ritual plays in articulating efficacious response at the court of Jiajing during the time when the scroll was commissioned. Thunder Methods became the language of power during the latter half of Jiajing's reign, as ritual masters such as Tao Zhongwen 陶仲文 (ca. 1481–1560) would become some of the most powerful men in the empire, both holding office and gaining the emperor's personal trust. Ritual

performances were used prominently at court as a means to combat political threats from both without and within the palace walls, and where by 1542, the tensions surrounding Jiajing reached murderous levels. Chapter Three situates the MMA scroll within this world, detailing the events surrounding the assassination attempt and the aftermath in which the emperor would retreat into seclusion in his palatial West Park where the material world of objects plays an active role in creating a literal Daoist paradise on earth. Chapter Three concludes by focusing on the woman responsible for commissioning the scroll, Honored Imperial Consort Shen, and her role as one of the most powerful women in the palace. In so doing, it situates the scroll within the broader trends of court ladies using Buddhist and Daoist images as an outlet to express their own power, while at the same time, considers the decision to commission an image of Wang Lingguan within the specific world in which Lady Shen lived. Thus, the first half of the study concludes with a speculative eye toward the potential motivations behind the painting as it relates directly to the historical contexts in which it was created.

The second half of the study focuses on how the ritual language of invoking Wang Lingguan's divine presence informs what we see in the MMA scroll. It opens with a second Intermezzo reconsidering the Daoist convention of "true form" (*zhenxing*) that privileges the unseen as a means to introduce the following three chapters. Chapters Four, Five and Six all focus on different aspects of how the visuality of the MMA scroll relates to rituals processes for manifesting Wang's divine presence and his "true form." Chapter Four is the first of three chapters that analyze the visuality of the MMA scroll in terms of the invocatory rites detailed in the ritual manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan preserved in the *Daoist Canon*. It opens by problematizing the iconographic approach undertaken in Chapter One by re-situating the ritual language describing Wang Lingguan's appearance in its original invocatory context of

“actualizing” (*cun* 存) the deity becoming “real” (*zhen* 真). By connecting the empowered visuality of invocatory language to the visual language of the MMA scroll, Chapter Four shows how Daoist ritual offers a vocabulary for articulating the power of objects and object agency. It develops this analysis through a comparison of the hierarchal ritual relationships found in both the liturgical texts and the composition of the MMA scroll that, in turn, create the necessary space in which Wang Lingguan’s divine presence may emerge. It then shows how the MMA scroll’s tableau visually recreates the active process of divine emergence, and thus, reveals its potential as a powerful object unto itself.

Chapter Five continues this analysis by returning to the same set of ritual texts to analyze the process of manifesting Wang Lingguan’s presence in terms of ritual transformations of the body (*bianshen* 變身). By focusing on how the ritual manuals articulate the process of transformation both internally and externally via the Daoist’s body, I demonstrate how the visuality of the MMA scroll’s composition mimics similar processes. As such, the MMA scroll functions as a body capable of producing the presence of the god. Reading the scroll as a body in concert with invocatory rites from the ritual texts, I show how the scroll as an object recreates the ritual effect of manifesting Wang Lingguan. Chapter Six then contextualizes the visuality of the MMA scroll within the general visual repertoire of talismans (*fu* 符). Considering the physical medium of a deity’s “true form,” talismans bring together materiality, visuality and invocatory language in order to produce divine presence. Borrowing from Paul Copp’s notion of a broader “ritual imagination,” I connect the visual aspects between the MMA scroll and examples of talismans for summoning Wang Lingguan in order to show how the scroll’s visuality connects to that of talismans within the broader ritual imagination.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, returns to the question of ritual context raised in Chapter One by situating the MMA scroll within the performance of *liandu* liturgy to speculate on its function as a ritual object therein. Facing the lack of available sources for Ming performance of “Iron Bottle” *liandu*, Chapter Seven looks to a similar iteration known as “Water-Fire” *liandu* (*shuihuo liandu* 水火煉度). Grounding our speculation in the liturgical repertoire of Zhou Side’s own iteration of “Water-Fire” *liandu*, Chapter Seven looks to the Ming popular narrative *Jin Ping Mei* to flesh out the contours of ritual performance. Chapter Sixty-six of the *Jin Ping Mei* describes in painstaking detail the lavish “Water-Fire” *liandu* sponsored by Ximen Qing 西門慶 his deceased concubine, Li Ping’er 李瓶兒. By following the performance described in the *Jin Ping Mei*, I show how the MMA scroll could function as a ritual object capable of saving deceased souls, and thus, fulfill the efficacious promise of the ritual itself. As such, I reveal how the MMA scroll may be understood as a powerful object in and of itself. Finally, the study concludes by raising questions about context when considering the possibilities of a powerful object in and of itself.

Chapter One: Lifeworld of the Object

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well...

Introduction:

Before contemplating the potential for what the MMA scroll might do, we must first consider what it is. This opening chapter focuses on historicizing the MMA scroll through multiple lenses in order to lay the foundation for raising more speculative questions later in the study. In so doing, it introduces several key points that are developed further in following chapters. The first half of this chapter looks at the object. It begins by first considering its provenance as a work commissioned in 1542 by members of the imperial family of the Jiajing 嘉靖 emperor (r. 1521–1568) before then turning to its iconography to identify the two principle figures as the Daoist exorcistic Thunder Deity, Wang Lingguan 王靈官 (Efficacious Officer Wang), and his ritual master, Sa Shoujian 薩守堅. According to this provenance, the scroll is the earliest extant painting of Wang Lingguan, and thus stands as a material witness to the prominence of the deity among the emperor's inner circle during the Ming.

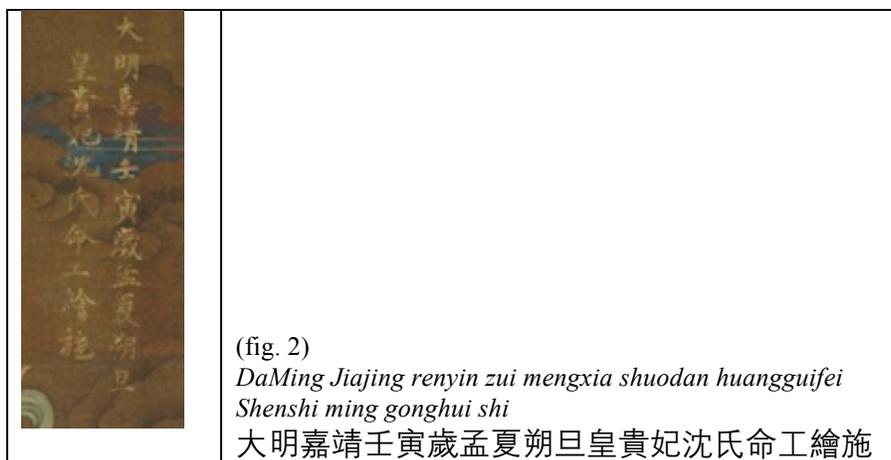
The second half of this chapter focuses on the relationship between Wang and Sa and uses the specific iconographical features unique to the MMA scroll to suggest a possible ritual context related to the scroll's particular imagery—a popular Daoist funerary program known as “Iron Bottle” *liandu* (*tieguan liandu* 鐵罐煉度). Although one of the most popular Daoist rites for “salvation through sublimation” (*liandu* 煉度) at the capital during the Late Imperial period,

the story of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* during the Ming suffers from a paucity of sources. The scroll thus stands among the earliest, if not the earliest records related to this popular Daoist rite. As such, it reflects an important moment in the rising prominence of Daoist ritual at the capital during its time, and serves as a reference point for studying different sectarian traditions who deploy *liandu* the years that follow. Thus, the MMA scroll also stands as a material node where various trajectories of Daoism intersect at the Ming court. The painting itself does not give a full picture of Daoism at the Ming court, but rather, serves as an undeniable piece in the complex puzzle that is just now beginning to emerge in recent scholarship.³¹

1.1 Life of the Object

Let us begin with what we know about the object itself. The painting in question is a hanging scroll, ink and color with gold on silk, measuring 98.4 cm x 62.6 cm and mounted on brocade. It is now housed as part of the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A colophon written in gold ink in the upper right corner of the scroll states that it was commissioned on behalf of the Honored Imperial Consort (*huangguifei* 皇貴妃) née Shen 沈 on the first day of the fourth lunar month at the start of summer in the *renyin* 壬寅 year during the Jiajing reign (May 6, 1542). (fig. 2)

³¹ Recent work on Daoism in the Ming by Richard Wang, Shin-yi Chao, Maggie Wan, and Mark Meulenbeld, among others, has done much to break free from the pejorative narratives that have otherwise dominated the scholarly engagement with Daoism at the Ming court. Chao, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices*, 2011; Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 2015; Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” (2015); Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” (2009).



Later in that same year of 1542, Jiajing would barely escape death when a group of concubines attempt to strangle him in his own bed. Much to his horror, the emperor's favorite consort, née Cao 曹, would be implicated in the aftermath. Retribution for those accused was swift and terrible, and Jiajing would leave the court to live with his closest confidants in seclusion within his palatial paradise known as West Park (Xiyuan 西苑). There, he and his family would pursue the practice of Daoist Thunder Methods. Lady Shen was most likely among those who followed the emperor into seclusion, where he would attempt to become a Thunder Deity.³²

The timing of the MMA scroll's execution raises questions about the role of Daoism and Daoist images in articulating responses to threats during Jiajing's reign. In his seminal catalogue of Daoist art, Stephen Little notes that this scroll is "a rare product of an imperial painting atelier in the Forbidden City during the Jiajing reign."³³ The painter remains anonymous, but given the status of the patron, the work was likely created within the context of the inner palace.³⁴ Yet, as

³² Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," pp. 65–99.

³³ Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 266.

³⁴ For discussion of the role of court painters in the early Ming, see Harrie Vanderstappen, "Painters at the Early Ming Court and the Problem of a Ming Painting Academy," *Monumenta Serica*, 15 (1956): 259–302; v. 16 (1957): 315–347; Kei Suzuki, "Concerning the Organizations of the Ming Painting Academy," *Bijutsushi*, 15.4 (March,

we will see, the workshop that produced the scroll was clearly aware of Daoist ritual, or at least, aware of how divine protagonists of Thunder Methods were viewed within Daoist ritual contexts.

A close examination of the scroll itself reveals numerous hairline cracks running horizontally across the painted surface, showing the effects of having been used over time. Several small bright white spaces show especially around Wang's flaming corona where the pigment has detached entirely revealing the lead-white backside of the sized silk.³⁵ Mounted in the typical *piaofa* 裱法 fashion for vertical hanging scrolls, the relatively pristine and crease-free condition of the silk and fine silk brocade along the borders suggests that the painting has been re-mounted. Three collector seals appear on the painting: a large square in the upper right register, a smaller square in the lower right register, and a small circular seal in the lower left register. All three have faded into illegibility, while also having been truncated as a result of previous attempts to trim the silk and re-mount it. In its current physical condition, the scroll shows evidence that it was used and appreciated as an object worthy of connoisseurship before entering into the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art where it has been exhibited on several occasions.

The scroll became part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection in 1989,³⁶ when it was purchased at auction at the bequest of Dorothy Graham Bennett, a benefactor of the museum whose influence can be found throughout its collection of Asian art.³⁷

1966): 95–106; Sung Hou-mei, “The Formation of the Ming Painting Academy,” *Ming Studies* (January 1990): 30–55.

³⁵ The *Jieziyuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳 (Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting) by Wang Gai 王槩 (fl. 1677–1705) describes the technique of painting the backside of the silk with a corresponding color, often lead-white, to bring out the extra vibrancy of cinnabar (see Yu Feian, *Chinese Painting Colors: Studies of their Preparation and Application in Traditional and Modern Time* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1988), pp. 64–65).

³⁶ Christie's *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy* Thursday, June 1, 1989, Lot 47, p. 20.

³⁷ Dorothy Graham Bennett is subject of the documentary *Through the Moon Door: the Experience of an American Resident in Peking* (1928) and is author many works of both fiction and non-fiction related to her life in China, including: *Lotus of the Dusk: a romance of China* (1927), *The French Wife* (1928) and *Chinese Gardens: gardens of the contemporary scene; and account of their design and symbolism* (1938), *Brush Strokes on the fan of a*

Since then, it has been exhibited on several occasions at the Met and went out on loan in 2000 to the Art Institute of Chicago as part of the first major exhibition of Daoist art displayed in the United States. Curated by Stephen Little, then curator of the Asian Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, the exhibit and the accompanying catalogue *Taoism and the Arts of China* marked the first time in what has become a growing trend among museums to exhibit objects categorized as Daoist art.³⁸

The current condition of the scroll coming down from over the past five centuries or so highlights the implications of materiality when considering the context of the work itself. Unlike statuary or monumental works that are more static and often commissioned to be installed as a fixture within a particular temple in mind. A hanging scroll, in contrast, is necessarily portable and offers to serve a much wider range of potential contexts, whether hung in the private chambers of a palace lady or as part of a temporary Daoist altar.³⁹ As a hanging scroll, the MMA scroll is portable, just like the scroll Daoist Zhang installs in the home of the unfortunate scholar

courtesan: verse fragments in the manner of the Chinese (1927); *The China Venture: a novel* (1929), *Candles in the Sun: a satire in pastels* (1930). As a benefactor to the MMA, her bequest purchases include a number of works now part of the museum's permanent Asian Art collection, including: a Yuan dynasty "Paiza with 'Phag-pas inscription'" (1996. Acc#:1993.256), "White-Robed Avalokatesvara" 14th c. scroll from Japan (1985. Acc#:1985.120.2); and a Song dynasty "Silk Tapestry" (1966, Acc#:66.174b).

³⁸ Prior to his work at the Art Institute, Stephen Little had previously curated an exhibit of Daoist art of smaller scale at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1988. (Stephen Little, *Realm of the immortals, Daoism in the arts of China* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Museum of Art with Indiana University Press, 1988). Since the AIC exhibit in Chicago, the Musée Guimet in Paris has also put on a major exhibit of Daoist art entitled *Taoïste du Voire* in a similar vein, drawing upon their own excellent collection of Daoist paintings, as well as bringing in fine examples from other museums abroad. The exhibit was detailed in the museum's publication of *Taoïsm du Voire* (date). Recent exhibits in the ongoing series *Dafa haihan* in Taipei have focused even more on the local ritual world of objects in Daoist practice in and around Taiwan. (See Recently, exhibitions of ritual tools (*faqi* 法器) and a series of lectures at the Museum of World Religions in Taipei (Shijie zongjiao bowuguan 世界宗教博物館) organized in conjunction with the release of ritual manuals from local traditions headed by Li Fengmao and published under the title *Daofa haihan* 道法海涵 vols. 1–20 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chuban Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 2014).

³⁹ A major part of the ritual repertoire that helps distinguish contemporary Daoist families is their set of altar scrolls, which they bring with them to construct the altar for various rites when called upon to perform at local temples. These collections range in size and scope and quality, that reflect the history of the particular Daoist lineage, such that they provide an excellent entry into the socio-historical circumstances of Daoist families throughout China and Taiwan. Recently, such scrolls have caught the attention of art collectors, and it remains to be seen what impact the potential for a developing art market has on the "value" of such objects.

from the *Gengsi bian* anecdote that opened this study. As a ritual scroll, it could be brought to a temporary ritual altar, where it could be unfurled, hung, and then rolled up again until used for the next ritual performance. As a work of art, it could be likewise unrolled and hung for admiring eyes, and then rolled up again, to be stored or moved to another part of the palace, or even in another wing of the museum, the next time someone wishes to look upon it.

This portability and scale of the scroll allows us to consider multiple contexts for making sense of what it “does.” The different modalities in which we might find the scroll have a direct impact on how we choose the theoretical apparatus with which to approach the object itself. One asks different questions of a work of fine art than one does of a ritual object. Yet, from the perspective of the object itself, this means context is neither fixed in place nor mutually exclusive, but rather a fluid and ongoing engagement. To borrow from the terminology of phenomenology, the scroll is revealed anew in the moment, and in so doing, it can be understood in different ways in different moments. The scroll’s inherent portability thus, allows us to consider different modes of meaning that can open up different worlds of Wang Lingguan.⁴⁰ Before we begin to consider the different contexts of the MMA scroll as it relates to the world of Wang Lingguan, let us first be certain of who it is we are looking at.

1.2 Identifying Wang Lingguan through Ritual Sources of Iconography

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s catalogue identifies the scroll as “Master Thunder (Lei Gong 雷公).” Alternatively, Stephen Little identifies the MMA scroll as “Marshal Wang,”⁴¹

⁴⁰ The notion of different modes and their impact on contextual analysis is explored in the works of from historians of Medieval Italian monumental art Lina Bolzoni and Karl Whittington. See Lina Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from its Origins to Saint Bernardino of Siena* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Karl Whittington, *Body-worlds: Opicinus de Canistris and the Medieval Cartographic Imagination* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2016).

⁴¹ Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 266.

who he describes as a “god of the popular pantheon known for his ability to crush human villains and malevolent river spirits.”⁴² This confusion over the identity of figures appearing in the MMA scroll remains part of the painting’s broader identity today. For example, Wikipedia pages for “Lei Gong” in English and Chinese both offer a thumbnail of the MMA scroll as the representative image of “Master Thunder.”⁴³ While the epithet “Lei Gong” comes to be used for many marshal deities within the litanies of Daoist Thunder Methods liturgical traditions, we will see that the main figure of the MMA scroll is indeed, unequivocally, Wang Lingguan.

In describing the composition of the scroll, Little notes that Wang “stands on a flaming wheel. In one hand he holds a ball on a chain, and in the other a bucket,” and given the serpentine elements of the painting, it would seem that the fierce deity is poised to crush what must be malevolent river spirits. Thus, it fits with Little’s image of Wang as the local god demon-queller rushing into the water to combat demons. Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s summary of the work offers another interpretation of contextualizing the scroll, speculating that it was commissioned for a “ceremony that sought to cure the patron of a disease or other affliction,” though it gives no rationale.⁴⁴ I contend that they are both partially correct. Vincent Goossaert’s study of Daoists at the capital in Late Imperial China offers a clue as to how.⁴⁵

In relating the widespread popularity of Daoist rites for saving the dead known as *liandu*, Goossaert mentions how the kind of *liandu* performed by Daoists housed at the important White Cloud Abbey (Baiyun guan 白雲觀) in the capital, was called *Sazu tieguan liandu shishi* 薩祖鐵罐煉度施食 (Offering of Food and Salvation through Sublimation with the Iron Bottle of

⁴² Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, p. 266; Little refers to Chen Ying, *Zhongguo shenxian huasxiang ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe), p. 220.

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lei_Gong

⁴⁴ <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/41474>

⁴⁵ Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, 2007.

Patriarch Sa [Shoujian]).⁴⁶ The text of that ritual is taken verbatim from what is likely an early Ming scripture dedicated to Wang Lingguan, which in one section, his master Sa Shoujian 薩守堅 is invoked to feed the hungry dead by way of an “iron bottle” (*tieguan* 鐵罐). In the ritual, Sa uses the bottle to distribute surplus food, and is then followed by Wang Lingguan who performs the task of refining souls to be joined with new bodies that completes the funerary ritual.⁴⁷ As Goossaert notes, “One supposes that the Iron Bottle is the magical instrument that allows Sa to distribute untold quantities of blessed food to the hungry ghosts, but, curiously enough, this theme is developed neither in the liturgical manual nor in any text I know.”⁴⁸

Like Goossaert, I have yet to find a manual or text that further develops the theme of the “iron bottle.”⁴⁹ However, I have found it here in the iconography of the MMA scroll. The “bucket” that Little notes is indeed the same “iron bottle” we find mentioned in *liandu* liturgy, and as an otherwise unknown iconographic feature related to Wang Lingguan suggests the painting itself to be related to the ritual feeding of hungry ghosts on the way to breaking out souls from hell. As such, the painting relates to the practice of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* ritual as it was conceived in the imperial household during the middle of the sixteenth century—a

⁴⁶ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 341.

⁴⁷ DZ 1443 *Taishang Yuanyang Shangdi Wushi Tianzun shuo Wang Lingguan zhenjing* 太上元陽上帝無始天尊說王靈官真經 True Scripture of Fire-wheel Wang Lingguan, as Proclaimed by the Celestial Worthy of Limitless Beginning, Most High Great Lord of Primordial Yang). Published in the 1607 Wanli supplement to the 1445 *Zhengtong Daozang*, although non-canonical evidence suggests it circulated much earlier.

⁴⁸ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 343.

⁴⁹ There is, however, a song entitled “Tieguan ge” 鐵罐歌 (Song of Iron Bottle) among the several ditties preserved in the canonical *Chongyang Quanzhen ji* 重陽全真集 that are purported to be composed by the eccentric founder of the Quanzhen order Wang Zhe 王喆 (1113–1170). Each line begins with the calling out the “Iron Bottle” and admiring a different attribute each time to describe the magnificent things it can do. While the final line concludes by invoking imagery of refining to completion new body of gold and jade (*lian Cheng jinyu ti* 煉成金玉體) to be one with the great thoroughfare (*yichong* 一衝), these cosmological results are preceded in the song by noting how the bottle got empty while his belly got full. In other words, “Iron Bottle Song” is truly a song for lifting the spirits, and appears to be a strong reference to *liandu* ritual. See DZ 1153 *Chongyang Quanzhen ji* 重陽全真集 (Complete Perfection According to Chong Yang): 9.9a-10a.

performance of simultaneous violence and benevolence in an attempt to secure the salvation of others. We find a large trove of liturgical sources for *liandu* rituals in the *Daoist Canon* preserved in the ritual compendium known as the *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (Unified Origins of the Dao and Its Methods), and it is there that in the invocatory rites for manifesting the deity's presence that we find the iconographic features to identify the main figure of the MMA scroll as Wang Lingguan.

We may be certain the identity of the main figure dominating the composition of the MMA scroll is that of Wang Lingguan by virtue of the combination of iconographic features we find in earlier ritual manuals. According to ritual sources of the *Daoist Canon*, Wang Lingguan is an exorcistic deity associated with the fiery power of Thunder (*lei* 雷). Wang thus belongs to a specific segment of the Daoist pantheon, namely the Thunder Division (*leibu* 雷部). Examples from liturgies dedicated to summoning forth Wang Lingguan found in the *Daofa huiyuan*, the largest ritual compendium in the *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 (1445), articulate Wang's divine presence via a highly visual vocabulary. The compendium includes three such liturgies.⁵⁰ In each case, these texts offer specific visual details that describe Wang's appearance, thus making them an invaluable resource for iconographic identification.

The first manual, entitled “Secret Rites of the Efficacious Officer of the Sound of Thunder ThreeFive Fire-Wheel Marshal Wang” (“Leiting Sanwu Huoche Lingguan Wang Yuanshuai mifa” 雷霆三五火車靈官王元帥祕法), identifies Wang as “the Binding and

⁵⁰ The three separate liturgies dedicated to Wang Lingguan (*juan* 241–243) found toward the end of the massive ritual compilation amongst various manuals for invoking Thunder Deities. The *Daofa huiyuan* itself represents the largest effort within the *Daoist Canon* 道藏 to compile local liturgical traditions into the state-sponsored canon and was likely completed by Shenxiao masters who were responsible for the final edits of the overall *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 published in 1445. (Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons, pp. 244–250).

Punishing Efficacious Officer, Iron-Faced Thunder Sire, Marshal Wang.”⁵¹ The ritual vocabulary for invoking Wang’s presence describes him with the following details:

Crimson-faced with red beard and whiskers, both eyes have fiery pupils, [he wears] a red gown with green boots and a Wind-Belt. In his left hand is a fire-wheel, in his right a golden baton (*jinbian* 金鞭). His appearance is hot-tempered and wicked (*e* 惡).

赤面紅鬚髮，雙目火睛，紅袍綠靴風帶。左手火車，右手金鞭，狀貌躁惡。⁵²

Here, the text describes Wang Lingguan in terms of his “hot-temper” and “wicked” appearance. The color red dominates the description of his visage, while the elements of his dress and accoutrement reflect the weapons and armor typical of Thunder Deities.⁵³ Meanwhile, Wang’s “golden baton” (*jinbian* 金鞭) and “fire-wheel” (*huoche* 火車) become prominent elements to his particular iconography, such that we see them in the MMA scroll as well as other examples of Wang Lingguan imagery.

The second liturgy, entitled the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” (“Huoluo Lingguan mifa” 豁落靈官秘法), identifies Wang as the “Clear and Bright Fierce Official of the Capital Heaven, Sincere Heart and Loyal Virtue who Controls and Binds Spirits, Fire-Thunder Thunderclap Lingguan Marshal Wang Shan.”⁵⁴ Its invocation conjures a similar image of Wang, with slight variation, including the addition of a yellow kerchief (*huangjin* 黃巾) wrapped around his head and a tiger-skin bag on his back:

Crimson-faced with Crimson hair, a Yellow knotted-kerchief, Golden Armor with Red Cape. His left hand for seizing, his right hand holds an iron baton (*tiebian* 鐵

⁵¹ DZ 1220 *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元: 241.1a. 糾罰靈官鐵面雷公王元帥.

⁵² DZ 1220: 241.1a.

⁵³ This emphasis on the color red, and even his red gown reminds us of the way he is identified in the “Daoist Master Zhang” anecdote from the *Gengsi bian*.

⁵⁴ DZ 1220: 242. 1a. 都天豁落猛吏赤心忠良制鬼縛神火雷霹靂靈官王元帥善.

鞭). Green Boots, he carries on his back a tiger-skin bag, giving him the appearance of might and wickedness (*e* 惡).

赤面赤髮, 黃結巾, 金甲紅罩袍, 左手執索, 右手持鐵鞭, 綠靴, 背負虎皮袋, 狀貌威惡.⁵⁵

In this instance, Wang Lingguan is once again described featuring the color red. Only this time, he also wears a yellow kerchief that we see in the MMA scroll. His right hand now holds an “iron baton” (*tiebian* 鐵鞭) rather than the golden weapon we see in the previous text. In lieu of his “fire-wheel,” Wang holds out his left hand to seize demons, which identifies his role as an exorcistic deity.

The third and final ritual manual, entitled “Secret Methods of the Lingguan of the Fire Thunder of the Southern Pole, Marshal Wang,” (“Nanji huolei lingguan Wang Yuanshuai mifa” 南極火雷靈官王元帥秘法), identifies Wang as the “Fierce Official of Sincere Heart and Loyal Virtue of the Fire-Thunder Southern Pole, Marshal Wang Shan.”⁵⁶ It offers further variations to the now familiar iconographic elements that structure Wang’s appearance:

A face of reddish-purple color; [wearing] a yellow kerchief, red cape, and golden armor. Tiger hair and Tiger pupils, green boots and wind belt. His left hand in Thunder Posture (*leiju* 雷局); his right hand holds a golden baton.

面紅紫色, 黃巾紅抱金甲, 虎鬚虎睛, 綠靴風帶, 左手雷局, 右手執金鞭.⁵⁷

Once again, the ritual manuals offer slight differences in Wang Lingguan’s appearance. While the color red still dominates, here his visage is described in the likeness of a tiger’s. Once again we see the accoutrements of a celestial general—his boots, belt, golden armor, and golden

⁵⁵ DZ 1220: 242.1a.

⁵⁶ DZ 1220: 243.1a. 南極火雷赤心忠良猛吏王元帥善.

⁵⁷ DZ 1220: 243.1a.

baton—but no “fire wheel.” Instead, Wang holds out his left hand in a Thunder Posture hand seal (*shouyin* 手印) that Daoists deploy in ritual performance. When taken together with the two previous texts, the description of Wang’s hand gesture implies that it allows him to seize demons in his left hand, perhaps also indicating that the “fire-wheel” performs a similar exorcistic function.

These three ritual texts offer a general picture of Wang’s iconography. The differences we find therein also highlight the fact there is no one definitive iconography for Daoist Thunder Deities, but rather, a given image is but an amalgamation of different iconographic elements frozen in a specific time and context. This includes multiple divine figures sharing the same iconographic element, such as holding a fire wheel.⁵⁸ While this often makes a positive identification of an unknown image challenging, it is not impossible. A combination of enough known iconographic elements allow us to identify an otherwise complex figure.⁵⁹ Indeed, many of the elements described in these three liturgical manuals reflect visual aspects also found in the hagiographical tradition that informs his broader identity within the Chinese ritual and narrative landscape. In particular, the recurring epithet “Sincere Heart and Loyal Virtue” (*chixin zhongliang* 赤心忠良), becomes a hallmark of Wang’s identity in both narratives and images.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the color “crimson” (*chi* 赤) dominates the visuality of Wang in both the MMA scroll and in the liturgies. His crimson heart, red face and whiskers, and even his red cape, all

⁵⁸ For a discussion of how Wang’s iconography parallels that of the Thunder Deity Marshal Ma (Ma Yuanshuai 馬元帥), including the shared element of a “fire-wheel,” see Nara, “Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan,” pp. 471–489.

⁵⁹ See Michael Naparstek, “Why do Bad Gods Look so Good?: the Iconography of Daoism’s Four Great *Yuanshuai*,” MA thesis, University of Hawai’i, 2005.

⁶⁰ These descriptions also include specific markers that identify Wang within the particular framework of Thunder Methods ritual hierarchies and cosmologies associated with Shenxiao 神霄 (Divine Empyrean) liturgical traditions.

point to the fiery aspects of Thunder. Red is the color of *yang* 陽,⁶¹ the active energy that connotes movement and vigor. Wang's bright red figure casts against the muted backdrop of the MMA scroll further emphasizes the active nature of his persona as a powerful exorcistic god.⁶²

In the case of Wang Lingguan's role as a Thunder Deity, fire becomes the idiom through which he manifests his exorcistic powers. Looking to the MMA scroll specifically, we see how the flames coming off his fire-wheel complement the arcing corona of flames above his head. The overall effect frames the whole figure in a fiery halo—befitting a deity that the ritual texts situate within the Southern Polestar of Fire-Thunder.⁶³ Here, Wang Lingguan strikes a threatening and violent martial figure befitting his role as a Thunder Deity. Wang glares down with bulging eyes at the waters below, his short fangs protruding from his tightly closed mouth, his face tense with clenched jaw all framed by fiery radiance (fig. 3).



(fig. 3)

⁶¹ J.J.M. de Groot noted early on how rooster blood was used in exorcistic practice because it shared properties with ascending *yang* energy as the cock crows the break of day. See J.J.M. DeGroot, *The Religion of the Chinese* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 36–38.

⁶² As an interesting point of comparison, Michel Pastourneau notes the sacramental significance of the color red in its various iterations of hue within Medieval art and its relation to producing spiritual presence both divine and demonic. See Michel Pastourneau, *Red: The History of a Color* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁶³ DZ 1220: 243.1a. The Southern Polestar of Fire-Thunder is the celestial region of the palace of fire where the Daoist will travel in order to call down Wang Lingguan, as detailed in Chapter Four. It is also the place of rebirth in ritual articulations of the Daoist cosmos, as discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Pink swirling scarves twisting in the rush of movement echo the curling flames as they wrap themselves about his armor. The contours of Wang Lingguan’s profile are defined in the careful lines (*gongbi* 工筆) that contrast with the less precise lines used to render the hazy backdrop—giving the appearance of Wang Lingguan standing out separate from his horizon.⁶⁴

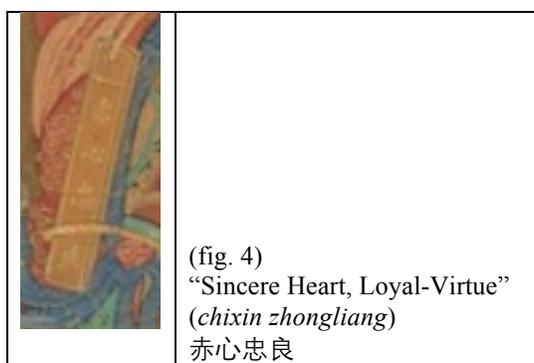
In addition to the overall effect of fiery radiance, many of the specific visual elements found in the ritual texts can be seen in the MMA scroll. Wang wears the “yellow kerchief” (*huangjin* 黃金), green boots (*luxue* 綠靴), and his golden armor (*jinjia* 金甲), while other elements allude to the liturgical descriptions, such as the long fluttering red scarves wrapped around his body that may be stylized wind belts (*fengdai* 風帶). Likewise, the golden baton (*bian* 鞭) that the ritual manuals mention Wang holding in his right hand appears in the MMA scroll as a golden chain with a golden ball at the end—a unique visual interpretation of a rather ubiquitous object found among images of Thunder Deities.

Most significantly, we may be certain that it is in fact Wang Lingguan shown in the MMA scroll by the appearance of the plaque hanging over his shoulder. A closer look reveals that the plaque is inscribed with the epithet “Sincere Heart, Loyal-Virtue” (*chixin zhongliang* 赤心忠良),⁶⁵ which the hagiographies tell us was bestowed upon Wang Lingguan by the Jade

⁶⁴ The image above does not do justice to how impactful the contrast of Wang’s red figure is in person.

⁶⁵ While Wang Lingguan is the only named deity with whom the epithet is directly associated in the *Daoist Canon*, we find the four-character phrase “*chixin zhongliang*” in canonical texts coming out of exorcistic traditions dating as far as early as the Northern Song, where it appears as one of the phrases found on oracle strips (*lingqian* 靈籤) as part of divinatory techniques associated Tianxin 天心 traditions surrounding the Four Saints (*sisheng* 四聖, i.e. Tianpeng, Tianhou, Heisha, and Zhenwu), a grouping of four exorcistic deities that rose to prominence during the Song. *Sisheng zhenju lingqian* 四聖真君靈籤 DZ 1298: 1a. (*TC*, p. 1246. For a discussion of the rise of the Four Saints, see Edward L. Davis *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, p. 76–77.) The epithet *chixin zhongliang* appears in relation to divine figures as a general appellation among others for benevolent protector spirits mentioned

Emperor himself after Wang commits himself to the service of Sa Shoujian (fig. 4). This is also the epithet by which the famous court Daoist, Zhou Side 周思得 (1359–1451), would call Wang.⁶⁶ As we will see in Chapter Two, Zhou Side’s “Method of the Efficacious Officer” dedicated to Wang would garner patronage from the Yongle Emperor, and subsequently lead to the rising prominence of Wang Lingguan at the capital. Finding the same epithet here in the visual elements of the MMA scroll suggests that Zhou Side’s vision of the deity remained influential nearly a century later when Lady Shen commissioned the scroll.



Here, the plaque functions as a literal Daoist seal of approval, which as we will see, marks him as demon turned demon-queller now in the service of the Dao. To help better contextualize the significance of the visual elements found in the MMA scroll, we may briefly turn our attention to contemporaneous images of Wang Lingguan

1.3 Which Wang is Which?: Contemporaneous Images of Wang

The MMA scroll is the earliest known example that shows the visual element of the plaque inscribed with the telling phrase “Sincere Heart, Loyal Virtue” (*chixin zhongliang*). Thus,

in the Ming dynasty canonical narrative of Zhenwu, see *Taishang shuo Xuantian Dasheng Zhenwu benchuan shenzhou miaojing* 太上說玄天大聖真武本傳神咒妙經 DZ 775: 4.17a. (TC, p. 1195.)

⁶⁶ *Zangwai Daoshu* 藏外道書, p. 463.

it represents a significant moment in the iconographic tradition surrounding Wang Lingguan and forms a critical element of one of two separate iconographic motifs that have come to be associated with the deity. However, it is not the earliest known example of Wang's image. Appearing more than a century before the MMA scroll, an illustrated frontispiece of the Daoist scripture *Yushu jing* 玉樞經 (Scripture of the Jade Pivot) from the of a Xuande-era 宣德 (r. 1425–1435) shows Wang with his a baton in his right hand, his left poised in hand-seal, and a plaque hanging over his right shoulder, though the plaque is left blank (fig. 5).⁶⁷ Here in the 15th century frontispiece, Wang stands among several other figures identified as part of the Thunder Division flanking a seated Leisheng Puhua Tianzun 雷聲普化天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Sound of Thunder of Universal Transformation).⁶⁸



(fig. 5)
Selection of Frontispiece
Yushu jing 玉樞經
Xuande era (1425–1435)



(detail)

In her research comparing different versions of the *Yushu jing* frontispieces, Maggie Wan identifies the scene in the motif of “preaching at the court of Thunder.”⁶⁹ The frontispiece, as

⁶⁷ The plaque is blank, perhaps due to the practical limitations of woodblock printing. A similar plaque hanging from the belt of the figure next to Wang whom Wan identifies as Wen Yuanshuai is also left blank. For the iconography of Wen Yuanshuai 溫元帥, see Paul Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).

⁶⁸ The functional role of images associated with the *Yushu jing* and their potential for producing efficacy as it relates to the MMA scroll is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

⁶⁹ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 49.

Wan argues, shows Puhua Tianzun as he appears in the text of the scripture as the head of the Thunder Division revealing the secret liturgies of a bowed Daoist priest. Wang Lingguan stands in a group of five Thunder Deities to the left of Puhua Tianzun: Deng Tianjun 鄧天君,⁷⁰ Ma Yuanshuai 馬元帥, Wen Yuanshuai 溫元帥, Zhang Tianjun 張天君. The cluster of five is balanced by a grouping of five martial deities to the right of Puhua Tianzun: Guan Yuanshuai 關元帥, Zhao Yuanshuai 趙元帥, Bi Tianjun 畢天君, Gou Tianjun 苟天君, Xin Tianjun 辛天君.⁷¹ Together, the ten form an outer ring (i.e. a border guard) to protect and observe the moment of transmission. As such, they appear in the overall scene much in the same function as we would find individual altar scrolls of Thunder Deities arrayed around the perimeter of an altar to guard the ritual space wherein a Daoist priest would ascend to an audience in Heaven. Thus, this earliest image of Wang Lingguan from the *Yushu jing* frontispiece shares many visual elements with the MMA scroll, while also placing that visual motif within the specific context of the Thunder Division and among deities to be called upon in the exorcistic rituals of Thunder Methods.

The visual motif of “preaching at the court of Thunder” extends beyond the Xuande frontispiece, and Wan notes that groupings of martial Thunder Deities surrounding Puhua Tianzun may have their visual roots in paintings from as early as the Yuan dynasty while later versions of the scene appear in Japanese and Korean sources.⁷² However, the inclusion of Wang among them is unique to the Xuande edition of the *Yushu jing*. Interestingly, Wang does not appear in the text itself. Indeed, we do not see Wang Lingguan in the frontispieces of any

⁷⁰ For the development of Deng Yuanshuai within Daoist exorcistic liturgical traditions, see Meulenbled, “Civilized Demons, 2007.

⁷¹ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 59.

⁷² Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” pp. 45–82.

subsequent editions, a fact Wan suggests could be explained by his peaking popularity during the Xuande era.⁷³ The commissioning of the MMA scroll in 1542 indicates that Wang Lingguan remained a popular subject to paint at court a century later. Yet, by the time of the MMA scroll, we no longer find Wang as part of the Thunder Division, but as the centerpiece of his own tableau surrounded by his retinue of Thunder Deities.⁷⁴

The historical shift from relative anonymity as a Thunder Deity to a central feature of Daoist imagery that we see in the MMA scroll has yet to be investigated in full. However, examples of independent images of Wang Lingguan do appear during the Ming and evince a separate iconographical motif. We find these examples in Wang's role as a protector deity of Daoist sacred sites, and not specifically as part of Thunder Methods pantheon. Two of the earliest extant images are found at Wudang shan 武當山. A gilded bronze image identified as Wang Lingguan and dated to the Ming was installed in the Golden Pavilion (Jin ding 金頂) near the summit,⁷⁵ and another installed in the Abbey of Primordial Harmony (Yuanhe guan 元和觀) east of the peak.⁷⁶

The statue from the Golden Pavilion shows a fierce seated figure wearing a *yuanyou* cap (*yuanyou guan* 遠游冠) under which peer three eyes (one vertical eye in the middle of the forehead) (fig. 6). Its right hand is raised and appears to be grasping an object that is no longer present, while its left hand is held forth in one of the two recognizable hand postures later

⁷³ Wan notes that the ten martial deities that appear with Wang Lingguan in the Xuande frontispiece all appear as part of the fourteen martial deities mentioned in a petition to conduct a Jiutian leizn jiao 九天雷尊醮 (Offering for Thunder Worthy of the Nine Heavens) found in Zhou Side's opus, *Shangqing Lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度金書 (Golden Book of the Sanqing Lingbao Salvation), 35.463.

⁷⁴ Wang would continue to appear in hanging scrolls of popular groupings of Thunder Deities well into the Late Imperial period.

⁷⁵ Zhang Jiyu 张继禹, ed. *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaixiang daxi* 中國道教神仙造像大系 (Beijing: Wuzhou Chuanbo Chubanshe, 2012), p. 120-121.

⁷⁶ Zhang, *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaixiang daxi*, pp. 118-119.

associated with Wang Lingguan known as “Hand-seal of the Lingguan” (*lingguan jue* 靈官訣).⁷⁷

The pavilion was included as part of the Yongle emperor’s large-scale renovations to the mountain from 1412 to 1418. However, it is unclear at this point whether the image was part of that endeavor.⁷⁸



(fig. 6)
Wang Lingguan
Ming
Bronze
Wudang Shan⁷⁹

The image from the Abbey of Primordial Harmony is a bronze gilded statue that shows a seated figure clad in armor and wearing a cloth cap with a flaming pearl in the middle, as we might find as part of the headdress of contemporary Daoist priests (fig. 7). A long beard drapes around his bared teeth, as Wang glares with two eyes out from under bushy eyebrows. His right

⁷⁷ One *lingguan jue* is formed with the middle finger extended and the remaining fingers curling around it in the shape of a fist. Ren Zongquan 任宗权, *Daojiao shouyin yanjiu* 道教手印研究 (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2002), p. 133.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the Yongle renovation of Wudang shan and the role images played therein in promoting the emperor’s divine right, see Chao, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices*, pp. 97–98, 120.

⁷⁹ Zhang, *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaoxiang*, p. 120.

hand is clenched as though holding something no longer present, and his left hand is poised up under his chin forming a different iteration of *lingguan jue*.⁸⁰



(fig. 7)
 Wang Lingguan
 Ming
 Gilded Bronze
 Wudang shan⁸¹

By comparison, the statue installed in the Abbey of Primordial Harmony more closely parallels the image of Wang we see in the MMA scroll. Both are dated to the Ming, but more work is required to determine exactly when during the Ming they were produced or when the statues were first installed in the different temple structures. However, we do know that the idea of images of Wang from Wudang shan gained repute in the cultural memory of literati, and was part of the broader conceptual framework for identifying Wang Lingguan elsewhere such to the extent that Ming writers pondered whether images of Wang found throughout the land derived from the mountain complex and not the capital. We may here recall Shen Defu's comments presented earlier in the Introduction regarding the ubiquity of Wang's image from Wudang shan, now that we have specific examples to help us visualize the author's perspective:

⁸⁰ This *lingguan jue* is formed by the middle finger thrust down into the palm, and the remaining fingers wrapped around in a fist. See, Ren Zongquan, *Daojiao shouyin yanjiu*, p. 134

⁸¹ Zhang, *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaixiang daxi*, p. 119.

...When it comes to [the image of] Wang Lingguan, all of today's temples (*shenmiao* 神廟) have him. If [you take the case of] Wudang shan, then every place is like this. It's like *Qielan*, the protector deity of Buddha Shakyamuni.⁸² I don't why [the god] only manifests in the capital [since he is worshipped everywhere]?⁸³

Whether Wang was known more from Wudang shan or from the capital is ultimately less significant than the fact that there was a notably common conception that multiple images of Wang Lingguan were well known. In other words, the different images of Wang Lingguan themselves and their respective visuality held a critical place in the religious imaginary of that time. This role as a protector deity of Daoist space that appears in Wudang shan would continue to define Wang Lingguan, and indeed, would evince a distinct imagery that we see in the MMA scroll.

The association as a protector deity fits with Wang Lingguan's broader identity during the Late Imperial period. Vincent Goossaert notes how in 19th century Peking, one would find his image guarding Quanzhen monasteries like Baiyun guan, and even be present during ordinations to ensure initiates would not go astray.⁸⁴ A well-known statue of Wang Lingguan, now found in Baiyun guan's Lingguan Hall (*Lingguan dian* 靈官殿) for protecting the temple environs dates from the Ming era, though its particular placement in the hall was a recent addition (fig. 8).

⁸² The *Qielan shen* 伽藍神 are the divine guardians of Buddhist sites, especially monasteries. In his study of Guan Yu, Barend ter Haar makes note of how Guan Yu, whose roots stretch into Daoist Thunder Methods, became a prominent *qielan* for Buddhist monasteries during the 16th century. (See, ter Haar *Guan Yu*, pp. 34, 42).

⁸³ *WLYHB* j. 34, p. 917.

⁸⁴ Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, pp. 102–07. Even as White Cloud Abbey was ostensibly under the institutional control of Zhengyi Daoists 正一 (Orthodox Unity) during the Ming Quanzhen ordinations were still upheld (Goossaert, *EoT*, pp. 207–208).



(fig. 8)
Wang Lingguan
 Ming
 Lacquered Wood
 Baiyun guan⁸⁵

According to Youmi Kim Efurd’s research into the history of Baiyun guan’s images, a temple gazetteer written by the Abbot An Shilin 安世霖 (1901–1946) describes the hall as having housed a lacquered statue of Wang Lingguan measuring approximately 170 centimeters high.⁸⁶ Though the present statue dates from the Ming, it was installed in 1957. The statue is made of carved wood in gold lacquer and now stands on the stone dais which perhaps supported the previous icon.⁸⁷ Poised lunging forward with his left foot out front and bent at the knee, Wang’s feet resting upon a fire wheel that sits upon a stylized base of colorful waves.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁵ Zhang, *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaoxiang daxi*, p. 116.

⁸⁶ Youmi Kim Efurd, “Baiyun guan: The Development and Evolution of a Quanzhen Daoist Temple,” (PhD. *diss.*, University of Kansas, 2012), p. 101. Youmi Kim Efurd notes that the Abbot Shilin held the position from the late 1930’s to 1946, and though the gazetteer is no longer extant, Li Yangzheng’s 李养正 recent revised temple gazetteer, published in 2003, references the Abbot’s description.

⁸⁷ Prior to 1950, the icon was flanked by paintings of four other martial deities associated with Thunder Methods liturgies known as the Four Great Yuanshuai (*sida yuanshai* 四大元帥, Zhao Gongming 趙公明, Ma Yuanshuai 馬元帥, Marshal Wen 溫元帥, and Guandi 關帝), but the images were removed in 1950 and the hall left bare until 1957 when the Daoist Association installed the Ming icon we see now. (See, Kim Efurd, “Baiyun guan,” p. 102; Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠, “Pekin Hakuunkan no genjō ni suite 1 北京白雲觀の現状について 1 [The Present Situation of Baiyun guan in Beijing, Part 1].” *Shina Bukkyō Shigaku* 支那佛教史學 7, no. 1 (1944): 68; Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dōkyō no kenkyū* 道教の研究 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1952), pp. 297–298; Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠, “Pekin Hakuunkan no genjō ni suite 1 北京白雲觀の現状について 1 [The Present Situation of Baiyun guan in Beijing, Part 1].” *Shina Bukkyō Shigaku* 支那佛教史學 7, no. 1 (1944): 68; Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dōkyō no kenkyū* 道教の研究 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1952), pp. 297–298.)

⁸⁸ Zhang, *Zhongguo Daojiao shenxian zaoxiang daxi*, p. 116.

image here of the fire-wheel churning up the water is reminiscent of the scene we find in the MMA scroll, yet the statue in Baiyun guan differs significantly in many of the iconographic features we might recognize in the painting. Whereas the MMA scroll shows Wang wearing a yellow kerchief under which we see the tufts of his scarlet hair and whiskers, the Baiyun guan statue shows Wang's face with a long black beard and wearing a *yuanyou* cap. His left hand is held in a *lingguan* hand seal while his right holds a linked baton, an iteration of what we see in the MMA scroll (and perhaps what was once a part of the Wudang shan statue).⁸⁹ These differences may be choices of convention, and indeed the statue bears some resemblance to that found in the Golden Pavilion on Wudang shan. However, convention does not explain the significance of Wang's third eye shown in the Baiyun guan statue, or its lack of the inscribed plaque that holds such a significant role in the hagiographic traditions surrounding Wang.

Nara Yukihiro posits that the appearance of Wang's third eye reflects the appropriation of identifiable iconographic elements from another more popularized deity, Marshal Ma (Ma Yuanshuai 馬元帥).⁹⁰ Ma's own ritual and hagiographical traditions were linked into a nexus of local southern cults, including the Wutong who appears in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote in the Introduction.⁹¹ Following Li Fengmao's argument that Wang's renown was centered at the capital and a mainly result of imperial patronage,⁹² Nara Yukihiro suggests that deities whose

⁸⁹ There remains some level of disagreement (or freedom) in visually interpreting the *jinbian* 金鞭 among images of Thunder Deities, including those that image Wang Lingguan. Wang is not the only figure known to carry such a weapon (for example, see Zhao Yuanshuai), and as the many different translations one finds for *jinbian* can attest (e.g. "golden whip," "metal whip," "jointed sword," etc.), there is no consensus on what it should look like. Thus, it is likely that the differences we see in the *bian* of the MMA scroll and that of the Baiyun guan icon is the result of employing different conventions to show the same object. However, the golden ball shown at the business end of the MMA *bian* is, to my knowledge, unique.

⁹⁰ Nara, *Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan*, pp. 483–485.

⁹¹ As Ursula-Angelika Cedzich has shown, popular Ming narratives such as *Nanyou ji* 東游集 (Journey to the South) link Ma Yuanhsuai's identity the Buddhist deity Huaguang 華光 as well as the same Wuxian we find in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote at the start of this study. (Cedzich, "The Cult of the Wu-t'ung/Wu-hsien on History and Fiction, pp. 137–218).

⁹² Li Fengmao, *Sa Shoujian yu Xu Xun*, pp. 253–264.

popularity was more widespread and proliferated through local channels and temple networks would come to influence later iterations of Wang's image. The difference in visibility, however, would create confusion. The 18th century literatus and famed critic of the official histories, Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), begins his account of Wang Lingguan by noting the prevalence with which his image pervades the landscape:

There are many statues of Wang Lingguan's image in Daoist temples, just like the statues of Buddhist temples in Buddhist monasteries fashioned to guard their gates. Sun Guomi's 孫國敕 [1584-1651] *Yandou youlan zhi* 燕都遊覽志 [”Records from Sightseeing in Yandou [i.e. Beijing]”] (now lost) states: ”During the Yongle period [1403–1424], there was one Zhou Side 周思得 [1359–1451] who came to prominence in the capital with his “Method of Marshal Wang” (*Wang Yuanshuai fa*) 王元帥法. As for that Marshal, everyone called him “Lingguan” [as his position in the temple] was first among the twenty-six celestial generals. When Wenhuang [i.e. Yongle] would pray/supplicate 禱, there would be an immediate response. He thus he ordered sacrifices to be performed [at the temple] west of the Forbidden Palace.

王靈官：道觀內多塑王靈官像，如佛寺之塑伽藍作鎮山門也。孫國敕《燕都遊覽志》謂：永樂間有周思得者，以王元帥法顯京師。元帥者世稱靈官，天將二十六居第一位。文皇禱輒應，乃命祀於宮城西。⁹³

Written around 1772 while at his home in Jiangsu observing the mourning period for his recently deceased mother, Zhao Yi's *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 shows how, by the late 18th century, Wang Lingguan had already become synonymous with protecting sacred space. Notably, Zhao Yi opens his account of Wang Lingguan by foregrounding the prevalence of his images, comparing them to the guardian deities one finds on Buddhist monasteries. Following the conventions of official histories, Zhou credits Wang Lingguan's prominence in the capital to the court Daoist, Zhou Side 周思得 (1359–1451), whose “Methods of the Efficacious Officer”

⁹³ Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1712-1814), *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 j. 35, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan Chuban, Xinhuai Shudian Zongjing Shou, 1957 (reprt.), p. 770.

the master attributed to Wang Lingguan and made him one the Yongle Emperor's most trusted confidants.⁹⁴

As alluded to Zhao's final line, it was thought that the emperor himself would offer prayers to the image of Wang Lingguan. Upon its efficacious response, the image became officially recognized as an imperial object of devotion and an established institutional feature in the capital. Yet, Zhao Yi reveals that there seem to be two kinds of Wang's in the popular conception: one that is ubiquitous guarding Daoist temples, and another that relates directly with the patronage of Ming emperors.

These associations fit with Wang Lingguan's broader identity during the Late Imperial period. Outside the purview of official patronage, Wang Lingguan continues to remain a relevant presence guarding pilgrimage routes as far away as those leading to the famous temple of Wenchang dijun 文昌帝君 on Qiqu shan 七曲山 in Sichuan,⁹⁵ while local Daoist families in Hunan (the place of origin of his local cult) continue to regard Wang Lingguan as part of their liturgical lineage and similarly use his scroll as a protective force during ritual exploits.⁹⁶ Zhao's own need to explain how "Marshal Wang" comes to be called "Lingguan" reflects this confusion, and is undoubtedly part of an eventual trend of merging of these two different, if not distinct, identities in later times.

The different names and iconographies surrounding the identity of Wang Lingguan may well indicate separate traditions that come to be merged during the latter half of the Late Imperial

⁹⁴ The story of Zhou Side and his role in Wang Lingguan's rise to prominence during the Ming is discussed in Chapter Two.

⁹⁵ Florian Reiter, "Some Notices on the 'Magic Agent Wang' (Wang *ling-kuan*) at Mt. Ch'i-ch'ü in Tzu-t'ung District, Szechwan Province," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* vol 148, No. 2 (1998): 323–342.

⁹⁶ Mozina, "Quelling the Divine," 2008; Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, 2015; Fava, *Aux Portes du Ciel*, 2013.

period that continue to persist into the modern day.⁹⁷ Whether it is a result of the top-down influence of imperial patronage, as Li Fengmao suggests, or perhaps local traditions influencing Daoist institutions at the capital like Baiyun guan remains unclear.⁹⁸ Contemporary examples of Wang Lingguan as a protector deity of Daoist sacred sites, as well as a patron god of local Daoist lineages in Hunan, where he remains a perennial protector of Daoist ritual space, prove that there is still room for ongoing variation of Wang's role.⁹⁹ These variations come to be reflected in the imagery of Wang, and thus, the differences we find in iconography may offer insight into the development of Wang's identity as a local, imperial, and institutional Daoist deity. While that story must wait to be told another day, the potential role that iconography plays in marking the development of Wang Lingguan's cult brings the significance of the MMA scroll into clearer focus.

As the earliest extant painting of Wang Lingguan, the MMA scroll reflects a vision of the deity as he appears at court in 1542. The visual elements of the painting largely coincide with those we find in the earliest image of Wang from the Xuande-era frontispiece, as well as in ritual

⁹⁷ These distinct, but overlapping elements of identity we find between "Wang Yuanshuai" and "Wang Lingguan" would persist into the 20th century, when the French Jesuit Henri Doré would publish his research on Chinese Gods after travelling in Amoy (Fujian). (Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les Superstitions en Chine*, 18 vols. (Shanghai: Imprimerie de T'ou-Sè-Wè, 1915). Doré's account in the entries of Wang Lingguan, Sa Shoujian, and Wang Yuanshuai offer a fascinating look into the dynamic world of divine identities. He notes a variant from the familiar story of Sa burning down the temple in Xiangyin found in a Hunan gazetteer from the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1760–1820), where it is not Wang E but the God of Walls and Moats (Chenghung 城隍) enacting such terrible demands and who later appears in the water to make his appeal (Doré, *Recherches*, vol. IX, p. 76). Likewise, in his observations of local practices surrounding Wang Lingguan, he notes that in addition to seeing Wang's image guarding both Daoist and Buddhist temples, he has "also seen him fulfilling the role of officer of the divinities of the military household (*maison militaire*, i.e. personal guard of the king)." (Doré, *Recherches*, IX, p. 596.) This suggests that even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Wang Lingguan was still associated with protecting the emperor in the popular imaginary. Although it is beyond the purview of the current study, more research needs to be done on how traces of Ming conceptualizations of Wang may be found in modern conceptualizations and what it may reveal about the fluidity of divine identity in Chinese popular culture.

⁹⁸ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 253–264.

⁹⁹ Florian Reiter, "Some Notices on the 'Magic Agent Wang' (Wang *ling-kuan*) at Mt. Ch'i-ch'ü in Tzu-t'ung District, Szechwan Province," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* vol 148, No. 2 (1998): 323–342; Mozina "Quelling the Divine," 2008; Fava, *Aux Portes du Ciel*, pp. 254–256, 534.

manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan in the *Daoist Canon* published in 1445. The golden armor, yellow kerchief, golden baton, fire-wheel, and most significantly, the plaque inscribed with “*chixin zhongliang*” all indicate that the MMA scroll is an early example of one particular iconographic motif that identifies Wang as a martial deity of Daoist Thunder ritual. Indeed, the composition of the MMA scroll would seem to influence later examples of hanging scrolls, such as a Qing dynasty hanging scroll identified as “Crimson-Hearted Lingguan” (Chixin Lingguan 赤心靈官, the title by which Zhou Side identifies Wang Lingguan in his liturgical compendium) housed today in Baiyun guan (fig 9).¹⁰⁰



(fig. 9)
Chixin Lingguan
 Qing
 Ink and color on silk
 Baiyun guan¹⁰¹

The similarities in iconographic elements between the MMA scroll and the later “Crimson-Hearted Lingguan” painting suggests that the MMA served as an earlier marker of what was perhaps a broader visual touchstone for a certain kind of Wang Lingguan imagery.

¹⁰⁰ *Zangwai Daoshu* 藏外道書, p. 463

¹⁰¹ Yau Chi On 遊子安 and Yau Hok Wa 遊學華, *Shuzhai yu daochang: Daojiao wenwu* 書齋與道場: 道教文物 (The Studio and the Altar: Daoist Art in China) (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue Daojiao Wenhua Yanjiu Zhongxin, Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue Wenwuguan, Xianggan Daojiao Lianhehui, 2008), p. 161.



(fig. 10)



(fig. 9)

The presence of the engraved plaque draped over his right shoulder in each painting points to a consistent visual trope among paintings found in the capital that extends into the latter part of the Late Imperial Period (fig. 10, 9). That this particular example from the Qing dynasty is today identified based on the plaque inscribed with the same appellation used by Zhou Side to call upon Wang Lingguan suggests the specific imagery relates to Wang's at court, and not the ubiquitous role of protector deity that cluttered the view of Late Imperial literati.¹⁰² This connection becomes all the more significant when we consider the potential ritual use of the MMA scroll during the Jiajing reign in funerary rites informed by Zhou Side's earlier liturgies as discussed in Chapter Seven. For now, we can see that the MMA scroll serves as a material witness in the story of how Wang Lingguan's iconography relates to his role as a Daoist deity at court. However, missing throughout this story of Wang's imagery is the unique iconographic element of the iron bottle he holds in his left hand we find in the MMA scroll. To make sense of

¹⁰² *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 463.

what it is, and how it reflects Wang’s role at court, we must look to the Daoist figure floating above Wang—his master, Sa Shoujian (fig. 11).



(fig. 11)

1.4 Establishing the Relationship between Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian

The figure riding above Wang upon a pink cloud can be identified as his ritual master, Sa Shoujian, a Song dynasty patriarch of Shenxiao (神霄派 Divine Empyrean School) Thunder Methods Daoism (fig. 12). In addition to his role in the early canonical discourse on Thunder Methods, Sa has his own strong hagiographic presence in the popular traditions.¹⁰³ Described as

¹⁰³ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 254–264.

originally hailing from Xihe 西河, Sichuan, Sa figures as an ideal exemplar of the trope of Thunder Methods master wandering the countryside and defeating local demons. As such, the historicity of Sa's place in Chinese culture is clouded such that it remains an open question whether he ever existed at all.¹⁰⁴ For our purposes, questions of historicity are secondary to the broader cultural and ritual identity Sa fulfills as it relates to his role in defining the status Wang Lingguan. Sa's role as itinerant demon-queller defines his relationship with Wang Lingguan, which is reflected in the ritual manuals of the *Daoist Canon*.¹⁰⁵ There, texts invoke Sa Shoujian in order to control the effectiveness of deploying Wang's power.¹⁰⁶ This liturgical relationship echoes throughout the narratives we find in early hagiographies that describe Sa's authority over the once demonic Wang.

Though the details differ slightly, versions of Wang Lingguan's biography follow the general contours of a demon-turned-demon queller that populate the liturgical and narrative traditions of Chinese martial gods.¹⁰⁷ The earliest known example of Wang's story appears in Zhao Daoyi's 趙道一 (fl. 1297–1307) *Comprehensive Mirror of the Immortals Who Embodied the Dao Through the Ages* (*Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙体道通鑑) included in the *Daoist Canon*,¹⁰⁸ and the narrative elements set forth therein recur throughout popular

¹⁰⁴ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 254–264. While Li Fengmao seems to intimate that Sa's legendary status might be just that, he leaves open the question of whether or not Sa existed as a historical figure. Vincent Goossaert's forthcoming work challenges the historicity of Sa's status.

¹⁰⁵ Sa Shoujian is considered the patriarch of several contemporary liturgical lineages in Hunan, where both he and Wang Lingguan figure prominently in the ritual traditions of Hunanese Daoist families. (See Fava, *Aux Portes du Ciel*, pp. 254–256; Mozina "Quelling the Divine," 2008.

¹⁰⁶ DZ 1220: 241–243; Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 264–273. Ritual manuals used today in Hunan still mention Sa Shoujian along with Wang Lingguan as part of their liturgical lineage.

¹⁰⁷ See Meulenbeld, *Demonic* 2015; Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning*, 1995; Cedzich, "The Cult of the Wu-t'ung/Wu-hsien on History and Fiction, pp. 137–218; Richard von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁸ DZ 296 *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙体道通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror of the Immortals Who Embodied the Dao Through the Ages): 4.1a–2b.

hagiographic collections from the Ming.¹⁰⁹ According to the general narrative, the deity now known as Wang Lingguan was first a demon named Wang E 王惡 (Wang the Wicked) prior to his encounter with Sa Shoujian.¹¹⁰ The initial encounter between the two occurs in a local village, where a wandering Sa has heard rumors of a spirit extorting the local community. This demon has taken up residence in a local temple in Hunan and demands offerings in the form of virgin sacrifice. Thus, Wang's demonic power, and the fear that it wrought, was first situated within the local setting of a village temple and rooted within the specific worldview of local ritual practice. Sa hears of this malevolent spirit named Wang E while traveling from Sichuan, and comes to Hunan in order to aid the villagers.¹¹¹ Sa deploys his ritual power to combat the demon, eventually burning his temple to the ground with his "thunder fire" (*leihuo* 雷火), an indication of his ritual prowess as a master of Thunder Methods. Now displaced and his power over the local community shaken, the spirit takes flight.

The narrative picks up twelve years later, when Sa Shoujian is washing his feet by a river. Up from its murky depths rises the demon Wang, who now identifies himself as Wang Shan (王善 Wang the Good), after having paid allegiance to the Dao and cultivated himself in the time

¹⁰⁹ Wang also appears in lesser-known hagiographic collections such as the *Youxiang liexian quanzhuan* 有像列仙全傳 and the *Guang liexian zhuan* 廣列仙傳 (Wang Yunpeng 王云鵬, *Youxiang liexian quanzhuan* 有像列仙全傳 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1989); *Guang liexian zhuan* 廣列仙傳 (Proliferated Biographies of Transcendents), in *Zangwai Daoshu* 藏外道書 j. 6, 18.541d–542d).

¹¹⁰ The historical figure of Sa Shoujian remains clouded by the idealized details surrounding the events of his life found in the received narrative. Honored as a Shenxiao (神霄派 Divine Empyrean School) patriarch, Sa Shoujian was among those influential Thunder Methods masters at the court of Huizong during the Song, who along with Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1075-1119) and Wang Wenqing 王文卿 (1087-1153) were responsible for establishing Thunder Methods as state-recognized Daoism (*MSL* j. 13.10a (p. 311)). By the time of Jiajing, Sa had already become something of an ideal type for Thunder Methods practitioners both at court and in local temples. As Li Fengmao's careful study of the historical relationship between the literary and ritual identity of his figure shows, Sa Shoujian had apotheosized into a divine Thunder Deity in his own right during the Late Imperial period. (Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 253–264).

¹¹¹ As noted several times already, Wang Lingguan remains a prominent ritual presence in Hunan today. The hagiographic details here strongly suggest the area to be the local origin of the god's cult. (see Fava, *Aux Portes du Ciel*, pp. 254–256; Mozina, "Quelling the Divine," 2008).

since their fateful encounter at the local temple. Proving his worth and steadfast commitment, the Jade Emperor bestows upon Wang the characteristic plaque the reads “sincere heart, loyal virtue” (*chixin zhongliang*), thereby sanctioning his conversion from demon to loyal servant of the Dao.¹¹² Standing on top of the water, Wang pledges himself to Sa Shoujian, and offers his ferocious power in the service of helping others.¹¹³

The conversion story of Wang E is entirely consistent with the broader trope of demon-turned-demonifuge we find with many of those gods that function as the martial and fearsome Thunder Deities.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the hagiographic narratives reflect how the ritual texts of the *Daoist Canon* that recognize Wang Lingguan as a Thunder Deity in the employ of Sa the ritual master.¹¹⁵ In many respects, the story of a local demon turned into a Daoist demon-queller reflect the social-historical trends of local gods and the rituals of local ritual masters (*fashi* 法師)

¹¹² Versions of this narrative play out in different iterations throughout Ming sources. Chapter Twenty-two of *Journey to the North* (*Beiyou ji* 北遊記) describes a similar encounter, only it is the Marshal Ma who defeats Wang the Wicked. The encounter between Ma Yuanshuai and Wang E in *Journey to the North* lends credence to Nara Yukihiro’s conjecture that the iconography of the two deities had been conflated over time (see, Nara, “Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan,” pp. 471–489; for Marshal Ma’s rise as a Thunder Deity, see Cedzich, “The Cult of the Wu-t’ung/Wu-hsien on History and Fiction,” 137–218). Later the narrative’s protagonist, Zhenwu, and not the Jade Emperor, who bestows upon Wang his plaque. While it makes narrative logic to have the protagonist Zhenwu be the one to bestow Wang his plaque and not the Jade Emperor, the role switch may indicate a social-historical development of Wang Lingguan becoming recognized as part of Zhenwu’s rise as patron god of Thunder Methods during the Ming. (For a study of Zhenwu’s rise during the Ming, see Chao, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices*, pp. 67–103; for the development of Zhenwu’s iconography as it relates to his position within state and popular cults, see Giuffrida, “Representing the Daoist God Zhenwu,” 2008).

¹¹³ Li Yuanguo notes that the transformation from what he calls a “popular ‘heterodox god’ (*minzhong ‘xieshen’* 民眾邪神, *xieshen* in quotes by Li)” to an ‘orthodox’ (*zheng* 正) god is the defining feature of Shenxiao Thunder Methods and as such, marks its place in Chinese history. The phenomenon of incorporating local cults into institutional registers of the state was instituted in large measures during the Southern Song, and ushered in the first wave of Thunder Deities to be incorporated into official pantheons (See Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Li Yuanguo 李远国, *Shenxiao leifa: Daojiao Shenxiaopai yange yu sixiang* 神霄雷法: 道教神霄派沿革與思想 (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), p. 62. Mark Meulenbed has shown how this kind of hierarchical dynamic between Daoists and local tradition was implemented through Daoist ritual, and that it forms the basis for popular Ming narratives like the *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義. How this dynamic comes to be reflected in the visual composition of the MMA scroll will be discussed in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁴ Meulenbed, *Demonic Warfare*, 2015.

¹¹⁵ DZ 1220: 241.1a; 241.1a; 243.1a.

becoming incorporated into the Daoist pantheons of Thunder Methods lineages throughout the Song and Ming.¹¹⁶ By the publication of the *Daoist Canon* in 1445, many of these local ritual and narrative traditions had been canonized, particularly in the compilation of the *Daofa huiyuan*.¹¹⁷ Thus, we find in the three manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* described above, Sa's place as a ritual authority where he is identified as the master who oversees the activity of Wang and his demonic subordinates.¹¹⁸

We find that same vertical relationship in the way that the MMA scroll presents the figure of Sa Shoujian floating directly above and looking down over the “sincere heart, and loyal virtue” of a ferocious Wang Lingguan. In nearly perfect correspondence, Sa's appearance in the MMA scroll mirrors that of Wang Lingguan, but reflects the civil (i.e. Daoist) manifestation of Wang's terrible power (fig. 11). In correlative opposition to Wang's demonic violence, Sa cuts an image of calm restraint. Draped in civil robes rather than martial armor, Sa's calm demeanor appears here as the perfect smaller counterpoint to Wang's dominating martial violence. As such, the two figures present the possibility of two complementary opposite aspects of a singular ritual identity—the civil priest and the martial demon-queller.

The ritual texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* that establish the relationship of Sa the Thunder Master and Wang the Thunder Deity appear within the liturgical context of a *liandu* funerary rites. While the prospective functions of the exorcistic rituals described in the *Daofa huiyuan* extend beyond the performance of *liandu*, it is here in the liturgical process of “salvation through

¹¹⁶ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, 1990; Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats*, 1995; von Glahn, *The Sinister Way*, 2004; Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, 2015.

¹¹⁷ For details on the compilation of the *Daofa huiyuan*, see Chapter Four.

¹¹⁸ Sa's title in the ritual manuals, such as make special note of his local status as a Thunder Mater, always identifying him as hailing from West River (Xihe 西河) in modern Sichuan. (see, DZ 1220: 241:1a; 242.1a; 243.1a).

sublimation” that offers us clues into the MMA scroll and its unique presentation of Sa and Wang and the presence of the “iron bottle.”

1.5 Salvation through Sublimation and “Iron Bottle” *Liandu*

Liandu liturgy forms a major part of Daoist ritual identity dating from Song through contemporary times. Its roots can be traced to the fourth century, when, as Peter Nickerson has argued, a new paradigm in Daoist conceptualizations of the dead emerged.¹¹⁹ Around that time, Daoist attitudes toward the dead shifted from viewing their spiritual remnants as malevolent spirits who threaten the living, to lost souls who need the living’s help for finding their way. This innovation for conceptualizing and interacting with the dead that they may be saved, share influence with Buddhist rites for the dead such as *shuilu zhai/hui* 水陸齋/會 (Water-Land Retreat) and contemporary *pudu* 普度 (Universal Salvation) ceremonies.¹²⁰ But as scholars such as Stephen Bokenkamp have shown, Daoist sources have their own distinct view of underworld dynamics.¹²¹

The practice of *liandu* liturgy stems from Daoist articulations as early as the fifth century, when the ritual relationship between the soul and concepts of ‘sublimating’ (*lian* 鍊/煉) and ‘crossing over’ (*du* 度) appear in texts as early as the *Duren jing* 渡人經 tradition.¹²² *Liandu* has

¹¹⁹ Peter Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy in Early Medieval China,” PhD. Diss. UC Berkeley, 1996, pp. 175–182.

¹²⁰ Peter Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy in Early Medieval China,” pp. 175–260.

¹²¹ As Stephen Bokenkamp points out, the role of Daoists in the performance of salvific mortuary rites is contested within Daoist sources as early as the fifth century where adepts are urged to practice ‘correct methods of the Three Heavens’ and are cautioned against practices associated with ‘illicit cults’ that perform rituals for deceased too often. During the late fourth century, concepts articulated in Buddhist salvific rites seem to have informed Daoist practice, although the degree to which Buddhist articulations influenced Daoist rites remains contested, not to mention the fallacies that come with identifying concepts as distinctly ‘Buddhist.’ (See Stephen Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)).

¹²² The *Duren jing* forms the basis for later salvific rites of the *Lingbao dafa*, 靈寶大法 that continues to inform Daoist rites for the dead since its formulation in the Song.

remained a primary component of ritual programs for the dead (*zhai* 齋) ever since, and continues to inform a variety of contemporary funerary practice in places like Baiyun guan in Beijing, and Dongyue dian 東嶽殿 (Temple of the Eastern Peak) in Tainan.¹²³ As such, the *liandu* ritual has functioned as something of a *tabula rasa* on which different liturgical traditions in Daoist history can project their unique capabilities and perform in their unique liturgical idiom.

Ritual programs of “Salvation through Sublimation” first appear in Daoist liturgies developed in the Song dynasty. Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1076-1120), founder of Shenxiao Thunder Methods and favorite of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126), developed liturgies to internalize the *liandu* rites such that sublimation and salvation would take place within the body of the Daoist. As Judith Boltz’s seminal article on the emergence of *liandu* during the Song describes, Lin Lingsu’s adaptation of the fourth century Lingbao 靈寶 corpus meant that the Daoist’s own body could now serve as the means for refining and saving the souls of the dead. The rituals instruct ritual officiant to employ internal techniques for refining their own *qi* and then direct it within the inner cosmos to break down the “gates of hell.” There, the priest would smelt the soul of the deceased that it could be affixed with a new heavenly body, and thus, find salvation.¹²⁴

Lin Lingsu’s innovation was to bring the internal processes of refinement in parallel with the external “secret teachings” (*mijue* 秘訣) techniques of Thunder Methods, with its use of incantations, talismans, and other ritual objects. As Vincent Goossaert notes, the simultaneous

¹²³ John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 216-234; Peter Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” in Poul Andersen and Florian C. Reiter, eds., *Scriptures, Schools and Forms of Practice in Daoism: A Berlin Symposium* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2005), pp. 117–184.

¹²⁴ Judith Boltz, “Opening the Gates of Purgatory: A Twelfth-century Taoist Meditation Technique for the Salvation of Lost Souls,” in Michel Strickmann, ed. *Tantric and Taoist Studies, vol. 2, Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* 21 (Bruxelles, 1983), pp. 487–511; Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 338.

external articulation of the *liandu* ritual meant that those in attendance could see aspects of the internal processes occurring within the Daoist's body.¹²⁵ Thus, *liandu* served as the liturgical arena in which one could interact with dead through both internal and external visibility.

Lin Lingsu's ritual innovation is part of a much broader trend during the Song to extend funerary rites to all beings. This notion of "universal salvation" (*pudu* 普度) designed for saving all souls draws upon a broader conceptual reservoir shared with Buddhist ritual innovations at the time.¹²⁶ As such, *liandu* shares many of the liturgical features for acknowledging and serving the dead with those of Buddhist rituals for lost souls, namely the popular *shuilu zhai* (Land and Water Retreat)—a liturgical framework known since the Song for its use of painted scrolls in ritual performance.¹²⁷

Like the Buddhist *shuilu zhai*, the Daoist *liandu* could also administer to the known souls within the family social construct, as well as those "orphan souls" (*guhun* 孤魂, "hungry ghosts" (*e gui* 餓鬼) of Buddhism) who have no place in society and thus pose a threat to the community.¹²⁸ A whole category of Daoist liturgies for ameliorating the communal angst over unsettled dead developed, what became known in the Ming as the "*huanglu zhai*" 黃籙齋 (Fast of the Yellow Register),¹²⁹ such that Daoists would be regularly called to perform rituals for the communal dead. By the early Ming, popularity of *liandu* during is well-attested, and Goossaert

¹²⁵ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p.338.

¹²⁶ Boltz, "Opening the Gates," p. 492.

¹²⁷ This connection has particular significance for contextualizing the MMA scroll given the prominent role painted scrolls play in *shuilu zhai* rites starting from the Song (Bloom, "Descent of the Deities," 2013).

¹²⁸ Avron Boretz, *Gods, Ghosts, and Gangsters: Ritual Violence, Martial Arts, and Masculinity on the Margins of Chinese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

¹²⁹ The "*huanglu zhai*" was the common parallel to the "*jinlu zhai*" 金籙齋 (Fast of the Golden Register) reserved for the imperial family during the Ming. See Richard Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen-wan Ming wenxue yu wenhua sichao* 浪漫情感與宗教精神：晚明文學與文化思潮 (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu yuxian gongci, 1999), p. 216–217.

points to court-produced guides on Daoist rituals for “correct living” that list *liandu* ritual as the appropriate Daoist funeral rite.¹³⁰ Thus, *liandu* became a way for Daoists to serve both individual families and the broader community on the whole, and would take on both universal and domestic functions in servicing the dead.¹³¹ The popularity of *liandu* during the Early Ming is well-attested, and Goossaert points to court-produced guides on Daoist rituals for “correct living” that list *liandu* ritual as the appropriate Daoist funeral rite.¹³²

The liturgical innovations of articulating “salvation through sublimation” in terms of the martial idiom of Thunder Methods that started in the Song under Lin Lingsu left an indelible mark in vocabulary of Daoist *liandu* ritual. The ritual technologies of Thunder Methods, with their deployment of martial deities to combat the demonic both through internal and external means by way “secret instructions” became a dominant discourse for dealing with the dead. Violence and martiality defined the salvific process, as unnamed deceased souls became demonic threats for Thunder Deities like Wang Lingguan to seize and capture. Meanwhile, the soul of the deceased whose family would sponsor the rite was held captive and in need of rescuing from its underworld prison.¹³³ Yet, at the same time, another idiom of benevolence formed a counterpart to the martial performance. Souls of the collective dead were also pitied (and feared) and found deserving of offerings such that even those displaced and unnamed could be saved through the power of the Daoist’s ritual prowess.¹³⁴ The Daoist would administer to the orphan spirits through the rituals of “Distributing the Food” (*shishi* 施食), in which they would

¹³⁰ Goossaert cites DZ 467 *Da Ming Xuanjiao lichen zhajia yi* 大明玄教立成齋醮儀 from 1374, p. 339.

¹³¹ Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, p. 339. Lai Chih Tim, “Daojiao shishi liandu keyi,” pp. 277–297.

¹³² Goossaert cites DZ 467 *Da Ming Xuanjiao lichen zhajia yi* 大明玄教立成齋醮儀 from 1374, p. 339.

¹³³ For discussions of contemporary rituals for “Attacking the Fortress,” see Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society*, pp. 216–234; Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” pp. 117–184.

¹³⁴ As Mark Meulenbeld has shown, this process of “sublimation” would serve to “civilize” those demonic spirits like Wang Lingguan by normalizing them under the rubric of Thunder Methods pantheons. Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” *passim*.

transform physical offerings into spiritual sustenance to provide for the displaced spirits.¹³⁵ This practice of distributing food to lost souls defines a number of Daoist *liandu* traditions from early Lingbao rites to contemporary practice that include those identified with Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan.¹³⁶ The result is a complex interaction between violent and benevolent idioms. A Thunder Deity like Wang Lingguan would be called to beat back demons and break down the gates of hell, while at the same time, be tasked with compassionately distributing food to those “orphaned souls” who are now seen as deserving pity.

Likewise, the whole enterprise of a *liandu* liturgy can be seen as a complex interaction of performances directed at different audiences: on the one hand, it is for the “universal salvation” of all souls; and on the other, it is very much for the salvation of one individual identity whose family has sponsored the rite. The “Iron Bottle” *liandu* is one such iteration of this interaction as it comes to be defined through the identities of Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan, and one that bears special significance for understanding the MMA scroll. We shall now turn to the specific *liandu* liturgical traditions related to Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan to see how they relate to the painting.

¹³⁵ The practice of first transforming food and then distributing it to hungry souls has been part of the funerary practice of Buddhism (known as *fang yankou* 放焰口) since at least the eighth century (see, Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 334, see note 1; Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et Mandarins: Le Bouddhisme Tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 369–411). It has since been incorporated into the larger funerary liturgy of both Daoist and Buddhist contemporary funerary rites for “Gaining Merit” (*gongde* 功德) (Kristofer Schipper, “Mu-lien Plays in Taoist Liturgical Context” in David Johnson, ed. *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual* Conference Publication, (1990), pp. 126–154).

¹³⁶ See For a discussion of related Daoist liturgies for feeding and sublimating ghosts, see Lai Chi Tim, “Daojiao shishi liandu keyi zhongde chanhui sixiang: yi changdai sizhong Guangdong yu Jiangzhe daojiao keben zuowei zhongxin kaocha” 道教施食煉度科儀中的懺悔思想：以代四種廣東與江浙道教科本作為中心考察 [The Idea of Repentance in Four Contemporary Daoist Liturgical Texts on the Rituals for Feeding and Sublimating Ghosts], *Journal of Chinese Studies* 57 (July 2013): 277-298.

1.6 Beyond the “Pail”: The MMA Scroll and “Iron Bottle” liturgy

Found during Ming times to be the exemplary form of Daoist rites for the dead performed by Quanzhen Daoists 全真 (Complete Perfection) in the capital, the story of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* begins with local Thunder Methods traditions that were brought to Peking during the Ming.¹³⁷ According to Li Fengmao and Vincent Goossaert, “Iron Bottle” liturgies became a part Quanzhen programs later as a result of the immense prestige that Thunder Methods lineages, such as Qingwei 清微 liturgical traditions, enjoyed at court.¹³⁸ According to Vincent Goossaert, the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was a part of a variety of different sectarian ritual programs throughout the course of the Ming and Qing, such that “by late imperial times, the Iron Bottle liturgy was practiced by both Quanzhen and Qingwei clerics in Peking.”¹³⁹ Thus, even as different Daoist schools rose to prominence, and as Thunder Methods traditions gave way to Quanzhen orders, the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* continued to be an important part of Daoist liturgy in and around the court.¹⁴⁰

To understand how “Iron Bottle” *liandu* relates specifically to the unique visual element of the “iron bottle” we find in the MMA scroll, we may look to the 1607 Wanli supplement to the *Daoist Canon* dedicated to Wang Lingguan known as the *Taishang Shangdi Wushi Tianzun shuo Wang Lingguan zhenjing* (hereafter *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*).¹⁴¹ Therein, we find the “Invocation of Initiating the Invitation and Pledge” (“Qi qingshi zhou” 啟請誓咒), whose

¹³⁷ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 341.

¹³⁸ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 273–274; and Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 344.

¹³⁹ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 344.

¹⁴⁰ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, pp. 341–344.

¹⁴¹ DZ 1443, See *Quanzhen qingxuan jilian tieguan shishi* 全真青玄濟煉鐵罐施食 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aNbf2hptu0> (37:10)

opening lines of describe Sa's appearance as he oversees Wang Lingguan administering to the dead:

In his hand he grasps the Fan of Five Brightnesses that Subdues Demons,
 His body draped with the Hundred-fold Garb of Defeating Devils.
 He always takes his iron bottle (*tieguan*) 鐵罐 to administer the surplus (*shijiachi*
 食持),¹⁴²
 That all who contain *ling* each may universally obtain salvation.
 His Incantatory Dates and Written Talismans each evince response,
 Each time he enacts the transformations on behalf of Heaven selflessly.

手執五明降鬼扇, 身披百衲伏魔衣。
 常將鐵罐食加持, 普濟含靈皆得度。
 咒棗書符皆有應, 代天宣化總無私。¹⁴³

From this description, Sa appears as a Daoist priest ready to call forth his retinue of subordinate thunder deities to aid him in the ritual process of attacking the gates of Hell and saving souls we find the Daoist *liandu* liturgies since the Song dynasty. The imagery from this liturgical text of Sa holding “the Fan of Five Brightnesses that Subdues Demons,” wearing “the Hundred-fold Garb of Defeating Devils” and always taking his “iron bottle” to administer food to the hungry souls that they may start on the road to salvation stands in striking parallel to the visual elements we find in the MMA composition (fig. 11). While it is Wang, and not Sa, who holds the “iron bottle” in the MMA scroll, the ritual relationship we find echoed in the hagiographic tradition defines Sa as the master and Wang as his subordinate willing to carry out the dirty work of feeding hungry ghosts. It is here that we find the “iron bottle” that appears in the MMA scroll and nowhere else in the images of Wang Lingguan or Sa Shoujian that suggests this painting is related to the specific “Iron Bottle” *liandu* liturgy.

¹⁴² “*Jiachi*” 加持 is a term used in Buddhist ritual to describe incantation by which one calls upon the power of the Buddha or Bodhisattva nature in all living things in salvific mediation as it relates to Three Bodies scheme.

¹⁴³ DZ 1443: 10a.



(fig. 11)

How Sa Shoujian, and specifically the feature of the “Iron Bottle” became a prominent feature of *liandu* at the capital remains unclear. Goossaert suggests the possibility that the specific “Iron Bottle” liturgy may be an early-Ming innovation of predecessors from the Yuan dynasty, though the lack of concrete evidence makes it difficult to track.¹⁴⁴ Li Fengmao traces the roots of Sa Shoujian’s role as lineage master of *liandu* rites to the Yuyang 玉陽 tradition,¹⁴⁵ which combines the exorcistic trope of summoning martial deities to help with rescuing the dead with the trope of providing relief through the compassionate act of nourishing the orphaned spirits.¹⁴⁶ Liturgical traditions in Hunan, Zhejiang, and Fujian that hold Sa as their lineage

¹⁴⁴ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 342.

¹⁴⁵ See Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 273–278; Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 342 note 22, where he mentions the DZ 1483 *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* 天皇至道太清玉冊 3.27b. (preface 1444) that lists Yuyang among seven known traditions of *liandu*.

¹⁴⁶ For example, see DZ 1220: 208.1a. “Taiji Ge Xianweng shishi fa” 太極葛仙翁施食法 (“Methods of Distributing the Food of Absolute Supreme Uncle Immortal Ge”). The manual describes the ritual process for transforming food into spiritual sustenance as part of *shishi* rites as voiced in the persona of the Ge Xianweng 葛仙翁, eponym of the famous Daoist erudite and alchemist Ge Hong 葛洪 (282–343). However, the text identifies Sa Shoujian as the “lineage master” (*zushi* 祖師) of the traditions that employs these methods (DZ 1220: 208.4a.).

indicate that rites centered on Sa come from southern local traditions, where many of the Thunder Methods masters found at the Ming court started.¹⁴⁷ Li Fengmao argues that this process is a direct result of the popularity enjoyed by Sa and Wang at court through the imperial patronage of prominent Thunder Methods masters, such as Zhou Side.¹⁴⁸ While a distinct Yuyang tradition seems to disappear after the early Ming, the rise of Sa Shoujian as powerful figure and the use of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* continues in other liturgical and institutional traditions.

Unfortunately, as Goossaert laments, the paucity of records indicating how Ming “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was performed at the time make the potential for the MMA scroll difficult to trace.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the MMA scroll, with its unique element of the “iron bottle,” presents a material node at the intersection of multiple liturgical idioms to articulate the process of ritual salvation. Perhaps the earliest such source, the MMA scroll as an object also helps us visualize what the process of salvation could look like at the court of Jiajing. Given the lack of records, we must look forward in order to look back at how the MMA scroll relates to trends in the development of Daoism at the capital during the Late Imperial period. However, our goal here is not to historicize the MMA scroll, as much as to locate it at as a point of reference within the larger contours of Ming Daoism.

As Quanzhen clerics rose to prominence in the capital, they would incorporate the rites of Sa’s “Iron Bottle” into their own *liandu* liturgies. Specifically, they would invoke the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* scripture in their performances of “Offering of Food and Salvation through Sublimation with the Iron Bottle of Patriarch Sa [Shoujian]” at the central temple of White

¹⁴⁷ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 342. Many contemporary Daoist lineages in Hunan still claim Sa Shoujian as their patriarch (See Mozina, “Quelling the Divine,” 2008). Goossaert notes, however, that some evidence of liturgical traditions dedicated to Sa could be found in the north.

¹⁴⁸ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, p. 272. Zhou Side plays a pivotal role in the rise of Wang Lingguan at the Ming court, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

¹⁴⁹ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, pp. 343–344.

Cloud Abbey.¹⁵⁰ Today, Quanzhen Daoists at White Cloud Abbey still perform a version of the *Sazu tieguan liandu shishi*, and still use the text of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* as part of their larger liturgical program of “Distributing the Food by the Iron Bottle and Sublimation through Salvation of Dark Profundity of Complete Perfection” (*Quanzhen qinxuan jilian tieguan shishi* 全真青玄濟煉鐵罐施食). One can even watch on YouTube as the head priest lifts up an iron cup while pronouncing verbatim the lines from the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, “Sa always takes his iron bottle to multiply and distribute [food], That all who contain *ling* each may universally obtain salvation” (fig. 12). While the example of contemporary Quanzhen ritual is anachronistic and comes from a different sectarian context than that of the MMA scroll, we might still stand to gain insight into the way the MMA scroll of 1542 relates to “Iron Bottle” liturgy by looking at how contemporary practice defines it today.



(Fig. 12)
Screenshot of
Quanzhen qinxuan jilian tieguan shishi
video
2013¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 341. Goossaert also notes that by the 19th century, the practice of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was not limited to the capital, as close parallels can be found in Sichuan among the ritual manuals collected in the *Guangcheng yizhi* 廣成儀制, a compilation of liturgical texts associated with the Guangcheng traditions of Sichuan (Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 343). For a textual analysis of the collection, see Chiang Fu-chen, “Models in Taoist Liturgical Texts: Typology, Transmission and Usage, A Case Study of the *Guangcheng yizhi* and the Guangcheng Tradition in Modern Sichuan,” Ph.D. diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2016). Among the texts in the collection, the *Qingxuan jilian tieguan shishi quanji* 青玄濟煉鐵罐施食全集 stands out, as it now carried out by contemporary Quanzhen Daoists at Baiyun guan today.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqpmFYdyG7E>.

In his survey of contemporary Daoist manuals on salvific ritual, Lai Chi-tim notes that the text that Daoists at White Cloud Abbey use today is entitled *Sazu tieguan liandu shishi yankou* 薩祖鐵罐煉度施食焰口 (“Feeding the Mouths, Distributing the Food, and Salvation through Sublimation of the Iron Bottle of Lineage Master Sa”).¹⁵² According to Lai, the ritual program follows a four-day sequence typical of others from the *liandu* genre. A brief outline of the contemporary program will help us situate what we see in the MMA scroll.¹⁵³

Day one begins with sequences for defining the ritual space and establishing the ritual’s purpose: “Establishing the Altar” (*shetan* 設壇), “Transformation of the Spirit” (*bianshen* 變神), “Inviting the Gods” (*qingshen* 請聖); “Proclaiming the Intent” (*xuanyi* 宣意). The second day is centered on summoning the gods to break down the earth prisons where the deceased soul is held (*shezhao poyu* 設召破獄). The third day begins with rites for “Heavenly Doctors Administering Relief” (*tianyi tiaozhi* 天醫調治), “Repentance” (*chanhui* 懺悔), “Removing Enmity and Calling out Resolutions” (*jiyuan shijie* 解冤釋結), “Distributing the Food” (*shishi* 施食), and finally, “Salvation through Sublimation” (*liandu* 煉度). The fourth and final day begins with “conversion” (*guiyi* 皈依), “receiving the precepts” (*shoujie* 受戒), “pronouncement of rebirths” (*shengtian* 生天), and concludes with “Sending off the Gods” (*songshen* 送神).¹⁵⁴ Our focus as it relates to the MMA scroll is on the second and third days, when the ritual program calls for breaking into the underworld and feeding the orphaned souls that will then culminate in the apex of sublimation.

¹⁵² Lai Chi Tim, “Daojiao shishi liandu keyi,” p. 280.

¹⁵³ The language itself draws heavily from a shared vocabulary with Buddhism.

¹⁵⁴ Lai Chi Tim, “Daojiao shishi liandu keyi,” p. 280.

Contemporary examples of “Breaking the Earth Prisons” (*poyu* 破獄, also known in Taiwan as “Attacking the Fortress”) reveal a process of gathering the martial deities previously assembled during the prior rites of “transforming the spirit” in order to form a troop of powerful warriors to combat the demons blocking the way. There, the Daoist summons Thunder Deities like Wang Lingguan and commands them in the martial idiom of a general overseeing a lightning attack into Hell in what amounts to a jail-break.¹⁵⁵ Waving their sword to urge the divine troops forward, the Daoist directs his demonic warriors to break through the gates of the underworld and clear a path toward the citadel where the soul of the deceased family member waits for their rescue. Meanwhile, contemporary examples of “Distributing the Food,” like those we find at today’s White Cloud Abbey, feature a Daoist ritually transforming food offerings through a series of incantations and body postures, before “distributing” the spiritual sustenance again through a series of incantations and hand gestures.¹⁵⁶ While both contemporary and Late Imperial *liandu* liturgies break these into two separate parts of the ceremony, we find both paradigms expressed together in the “Invocation of Initiating the Invitation and Pledge” from the 1607 edition of *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, and indeed, in the same scene presented in the MMA scroll’s tableau.

As noted above, Quanzhen Daoists at White Cloud Abbey this section of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* verbatim the found in the 1607 addendum to the *Daoist Canon*. While we still do not know how this text may have been used in Ming *liandu* ceremony, we may return to it

¹⁵⁵ Liturgical sources in the *Daofa huiyuan* include rites for establishing “earth prisons” and then sending Wang Lingguan to destroy them. See DZ 1220: 241.8a–9a.

¹⁵⁶ The practice of first transforming food and then distributing it to hungry souls has been part of the funerary practice of Buddhism (known as *fang yankou* 放焰口) since at least the eighth century (see, Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 334, see note 1. Strickmann, *Mantras et Mandarins*, pp. 369–411). It has since been incorporated into the larger funerary liturgy of both Daoist and Buddhist contemporary funerary rites for “Gaining Merit” (*gongde* 功德). (see, Schipper, “Mu-lien Plays in Taoist Liturgical Context,” pp. 126–154).

here once again to see how it may inform our reading of the MMA scroll and the two paradigms presented in its composition. In our previous attempts to identify the MMA scroll's unique visual element of the "iron bottle," we turned to the "Invocation of Initiating the Invitation and Pledge" section of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, where we found Sa "distributing the surplus" by means of this special feature. This is clearly suggestive of the rite "Distributing the Food," and as noted above, Quanzhen Daoists at today's White Cloud Abbey recite this section in their performance of the rite. Looking ahead, the text of the "Invocation of Initiating the Invitation and Pledge" then continues by introducing Wang Lingguan and his role in sublimating souls:

Traveling on a cloud all throughout under Heaven [Sa] arrived at Longxing.¹⁵⁷
 The Iron-faced General [i.e. Wang Lingguan] appeared from the deep pool.
 For twelve years he observed his transgressions,
 For eons he cultivated himself, accumulating merit.
 Recklessly pledging an oath in the court of Shangdi,
 In all cases to comply with commands universally throughout the Three Realms.
 Curing illness and returning life as though a flick of the wrist,
 Opening light and attaching [new] bodies to display the might of your power.

I now initiate a request with the hope that you will come be here, I submit that with the hope your Teacher's compassion further supports/protects you (me).

雲遊天下至龍興，鐵面將軍潭底現。
 一十二年觀過錯，百千萬種積功勳。
 妄把誓盟朝上帝，普令三界悉皈依。
 治病回生如返掌，開光附體闡威靈。
 我今啟請望來臨，伏望師恩加擁護。¹⁵⁸

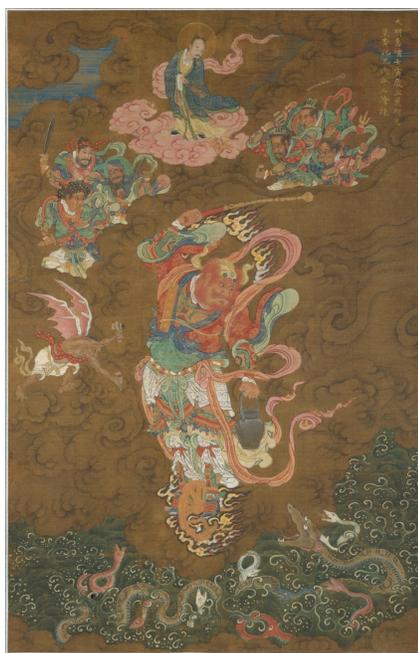
The description of what Wang does in returning the deceased to life by attaching new bodies and opening the pathways for their spiritual power (*ling* 靈) to shine parallels the ritual processes of completing the sublimation process as described in *liandu* programs. It may well be that Wang

¹⁵⁷ This is the place in Hunan where Sa meets Wang according to hagiographical traditions.

¹⁵⁸ DZ 1443: 10a.

here is not only tasked with helping re-form the sublimated bodies we find described in the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, but also distribute the spiritual sustenance for the universal salvation of all.

We see the negotiation of these two paradigms of *liandu* embodied in the figure of Wang Lingguan himself as he appears in the MMA scroll. In one hand, he raises his golden baton in the martial paradigm of a demon-queller striking forth to clear a way through the underworld on his way to “Breaking the Earth Prisons.” In the other, he lowers Sa’s “Iron Bottle” ready to distribute spiritual sustenance to demonic figures below (fig. 1).



(fig. 1)

Each serpent rises to meet him with jaws agape, perhaps threatening to bite him, or perhaps, waiting to be fed, or both at the same time (fig. 13). Here, the MMA scroll presents Wang Lingguan as the embodiment of both paradigms of Thunder Methods *liandu*, literally. On the one hand is Wang’s threatening violence as he holds his golden baton poised ready to strike, and on the other hand, he holds the “iron bottle” to distribute the surplus food to those spirits lost in the darkness of the underworld. at the serpents below. By imaging aspects of both the “Breaking the

Earth Prisons” and “Distributing the Food,” the scroll articulates the main ritual procedures that lead up to the sublimation of the soul and the climax of the ritual, all within the specific idiom of Sa Shoujian’s “Iron Bottle” *liandu*. Even more interestingly, Wang’s embodiment of these two ritual processes brought together is shown here in an active state. More than just a symbolic representation of these two aspects of salvation, the MMA scroll presents Wang Lingguan, and by extension these two ritual paradigms, as a dynamic force in the very process of saving souls. As we will see, this sense of dynamism has critical significance for how we might understand the MMA scroll and what it is capable of doing as an object itself.



(fig. 13)

Indeed, the next step, according to the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, would be for Wang Lingguan to “open the light and attach a new body” for the rescued soul to complete the sublimation process. We shall return to how the MMA scroll relates to the promise of that next step in the ritual performance at the end of this in Chapter Seven at the end of this study. For now, let us suffice to note how the iconography of the MMA scroll not only reflects its association with the specific elements of “Iron Bottle *liandu*,” but that it also presents the correlating oppositional process of benevolence and violence that defines *liandu* performance.

As such, the painting relates to the practice of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* ritual as it was conceived in the imperial household during the middle of the sixteenth century—a performance of simultaneous violence and benevolence in an attempt to secure the salvation of others.

Concluding Remarks: MMA scroll and Nodes of Interaction

Taking an iconographical approach, we have identified the principle figures of the MMA scroll as the exorcistic deity of Thunder Methods, Wang Lingguan, and his ritual master, Sa Shoujian. The MMA scroll contains visual elements found in ritual manuals and hagiographic narratives that identify Wang. Critically, the appearance of Wang’s the plaque that reads “Sincere Heart, Loyal Virtue,” (*chixin zhongliang*) reaffirm Stephen Little’s identification that the main figure of the MMA scroll is Wang, and not Leigong, as it is recorded in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s catalogue. At the same time, the unique iconographic element of the “Iron Bottle” in Wang’s left hand signals something special about this painting. Its unique presence points to potential ritual context and opens many more questions than it answers, forming the basis to speculate on the purpose behind commissioning the scroll.

We have traced the “Iron Bottle” to *liandu* liturgical traditions associated with Sa Shoujian that came to the capital during the Ming and continued to dominate Daoist funerary rites throughout the Late Imperial period. The work of Vincent Goossaert and Li Fengmao has shown that early examples of the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* were likely the ritual purview of Thunder Methods whose prominence at court popularized the rite and influenced later Quanzhen ritual programs, such that the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* remains a fixture today in the capital under different sectarian liturgies. Unfortunately, no known records of how “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was performed survive from the Ming. However, contemporary iterations of the “Iron Bottle” liturgy continue to

be practiced today in White Cloud Abbey by Quanzhen clerics using the *Wang Lingguan*, which allows a glimpse into the conceptual world in which the MMA scroll might fit into ritual context.

The *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, and in particular the ““Invocation of Initiating the Invitation and Pledge” where Sa Shoujian’s iron bottle is explicitly mentioned along with Wang Lingguan’s duties to return souls to a new life, reveals two critical aspects of the general *liandu* program. One is the ritual of “Distributing Food” to the orphaned spirits by way of Sa’s “iron bottle.” Another is the martial idiom of Wang breaking into the underworld to rescue souls that they then may be sublimated into a new body. The visuality of the MMA scroll brings both aspects together in the singular figure of Wang Lingguan, whose right hand holds his golden baton threatening to strike the snakes below, while his left hand lowers the “iron bottle” toward the open mouth of the largest serpent. Thus, the MMA scroll offers glimpse into how both processes were envisioned coming together by the imperial family during the early Ming.

Relating the visuality of the MMA scroll to contemporary articulations of *liandu* raises questions of chronology. It is impossible to say whether the way the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* is used in “Iron Bottle” *liandu* rituals performed today at White Cloud Abbey reflects Ming practices. In fact, it is unlikely that contemporary Quanzhen ritual closely resembles the Daoist rituals at the Ming court performed by Shenxiao, and then later Qingwei Daoists. However, our goal here is not to draw an unbroken line of history from the Ming to today, but rather, contribute to the emerging picture of Later Imperial Daoism at the capital by fleshing out some the contours of how Daoist ritual, and ritual objects, can help articulate the role of Daoism during that time.

While we do not have explicit records of how “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was performed during the Ming, we may still make note of how the MMA scroll functions as a node along the larger conceptual matrix that informs Daoist ritual and practice that extends from the Ming to today.

The striking parallels between the way the MMA scroll presents the image of Sa and Wang, and in particular the “iron bottle” and the image found in the *Wang Lingguan* included in the *Daoist Cannon* a half century later, suggests a broader conceptual framework for understanding the importance of Sa, Wang, and the imagery of the “iron bottle.” The later addition of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* into the *Daozang* undertaken under the reign of the Wanli emperor need not necessarily imply that the material of the text is any later than those dedicated to Wang Lingguan found in the 1445 publication. However, its inclusion does suggest a sustained appreciation for Wang Lingguan and his role in funerary rites. 1607 merely marks the date when the scripture was published as part of the canon and does not necessarily reflect the roots of the text. Nonetheless, the two examples of Sa and Wang with the “iron bottle”—the MMA scroll of 1542 and the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* of 1607—provide nodes along a still murky trajectory of what Vincent Goossaert describes as among the major Daoist funerary rites at the capital during the Late Imperial period.¹⁵⁹

The MMA scroll thus stands as a material witness to the role of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* at court. 1542 is thus far the earliest known source for “Iron Bottle” and the fact that it was commissioned by a high ranking lady of the court indicates that “Iron Bottle” was a feature in the personal, if not also the political lives of Jiajing’s entourage. Meanwhile the MMA scroll is also situated chronologically between two imperially-sponsored publications of the Ming *Daoist Canon* where we find ritual manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan. At the same time, the MMA scroll as an imperially-sponsored artifact in its own right. Insofar as its visual elements relate to ritual texts, the MMA scroll thus reflects the vision of what Wang Lingguan, Sa Shoujian, and the ritual power of the “iron bottle” could be at the time. Thus, the scroll itself offers a different

¹⁵⁹ Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 341.

sort of ritual ‘text’ that draws from the same conceptual reservoir of those manuals that when enacted, serve to bring forth the divine presence of the god himself. To uncover what this ‘text’ tells us requires a different sort of ‘reading’—one that must account for the larger world of ritual efficacy at the Ming court during the time when the MMA scroll was commissioned, and a re-‘reading’ of the liturgical sources whose invocatory vocabulary are not merely repositories for iconographic identifications, but present an effective language for manifesting divine power.

Follow me, dear reader, as we embark on a new way of ‘reading’ a painting. Let us begin by going back to the time around when the MMA scroll was commissioned, and revisit the role Daoism played at the courts of Ming emperors...

Intermezzo One: A Note on Daoism at the Ming Court

In the tradition of Ming history as it has been passed down, Daoism often plays the foil to more dignified Buddhist and Confucian pursuits at court. However, the role Daoism plays in the ideological and practical pursuits of China's social elite during the Ming is far more complex. While the public discourse of officialdom in China necessitated a Confucian-informed vocabulary, this did not preclude literati to engage in the wide range of ritual and ideological (not to mention material) pursuits in their private lives.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the logic underpinning Daoist practices was part of a much broader worldview shared across society, as the historian Willard Peterson notes, even Confucian-minded officials found Daoist practice based on “principles” (*li* 理).¹⁶¹ The issue of Daoism at court, then, was very much one politics. Early studies like Liu Ts'un-yan's survey of Neo-Confucian officials' responses condemning the rising prominence of Daoism within state ritual demonstrate just how integral Daoist rites and Daoist deities had become to the *Realpolitik* of the Ming.¹⁶² Recent scholarship continues to reveal the close extent to which members of the Ming imperial family were acquainted with the ritual procedures of Daoist priests, some even becoming ordained themselves and even performing rites on behalf of the people.¹⁶³ Still, the pejorative tone with which official histories detail the private Daoist pursuits of emperors remains a powerful influence on how contemporary scholars view Daoism. Such is especially the case in Western scholarship, wherein influential projects like the *Cambridge History of China* remain critical of the influence those who identified with Daoism

¹⁶⁰ *CHC* 8, pp. 965–971.

¹⁶¹ Willard Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 133–139.

¹⁶² Liu Ts'un-yan, “The Penetration of Taoism into the Ming Neo-Confucian Elite,” *T'oung Pao* 57, 1/4 (1971): 31–102.

¹⁶³ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 50–59.

had on Ming rulers.¹⁶⁴ While the influence of Daoists at the Ming court need not be excused from critical analysis, the tenor of officially recognized histories and those studies based on them reflects a bias of Neo-Confucian authorities in charge of the official narratives.

One of the most obvious examples from the Ming dynasty is that of the Jiajing Emperor, whose retreat into his man-made Daoist paradise in the capital in 1542 (the same year that the MMA scroll was commissioned) preceded what the official records remember as a licentious dalliance into Daoist techniques for immortality and a total dereliction of duty for the Son of Heaven. Accounts of Jiajing's later days when he was consumed by the search for longevity techniques has left an indelible mark of how Daoism and those Daoists who assisted the emperor's efforts, were viewed in the record. His lust for elixirs of immortality and the young virgins whose youthful essences could provide them led to thousands of prepubescent girls uprooted and brought to the capital.¹⁶⁵ Setting cultural relativism aside, the role Daoists played in procuring such elixirs casts the role of Daoists and Daoist techniques in an uncomfortable light for both modern and traditional readers alike.¹⁶⁶ While Late Imperial critics would note the indulgences of the elderly emperor, their concern—at least such that they could write about—was over how Daoist pursuits kept the emperor from performing his duty as the Son of Heaven. As Willard Peterson notes in his study of the Ming intellectual, Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671), Fang was like many “high-minded men who protested their emperor's involvement in esoteric techniques. The protest was based not on denial of the possibility of a given technique,

¹⁶⁴ *CHC* 8, pp. 953–1004. The *Cambridge History of China's* chapter on “Taoism in Ming Culture” concludes with several short essays added in the *Appendix*, which in various ways acknowledge the limitations and biases of imperially-sponsored sources. (see especially Judith A. Berling's essay “Taoism in Ming Culture,” pp. 1003–1004).

¹⁶⁵ Hsieh Bao Hua, *Concubinage and Servitude in Late Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 197–200.

¹⁶⁶ In her study of palace women during the Late Imperial period, Hsieh Bao Hua points to several remonstrative poems, including those by senior court officials, that express sorrow and disgust for the state of young girls in the emperor's palace. (See Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 198).

but on the perception that such self-centered involvement distracted the would-be adept, ...[such as] the Chia-ching emperor, from his larger responsibilities.”¹⁶⁷ The issue of pursuing Daoist practices was one of transaction cost—the emperor could effectively pursue longevity techniques, but it should not be at the expense of shirking his responsibilities as the Son of Heaven.

However, Jiajing’s interaction with Daoism and Daoists was not always a means of escape from his obligations to duty. For much of his reign, Jiajing found in Daoist ritual the means to safeguard the state, as well as his own person. Prior to retreating in 1542, Jiajing was known to have developed a fondness for Daoist ritual, and in particular Thunder Methods, whose practitioners would be called to court to perform powerful exorcistic rituals—rituals that were viewed in the later received narrative as magic tricks by hucksters preying on a gullible and disillusioned ruler. While it appears that some of these “Masters of Methods” (*fangshi* 方士),¹⁶⁸ as they were sometimes called in the official *History of the Ming*,¹⁶⁹ did indeed prove to be frauds with often fatal results,¹⁷⁰ the basis of their claims to producing efficacy in the service of the state were grounded in a logic (*li*) recognized among court elite. As we will see, some

¹⁶⁷ Peterson, *Bitter Gourd*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁸ “*Fangshi*” is an early appellation given to those in the Han court who would serve the state with their ritual prowess and seen by some as precursors to Daoist priests. See the seminal study by Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha,” in Michel Strickmann, ed. *Tantric and Taoist Studies*, vol. 2, *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* 21 (Bruxelles, 1983), pp. 291–371.

¹⁶⁹ For example, the politically powerful master of Thunder Methods and favorite of the Jiajing Emperor, Tao Zhongwen, is pejoratively referred to in the *History of the Ming* as a “Master of Methods” (*fangshi* 方士): “At the time, there was the “Master of Methods” Tao Zhongwen who was pampered by [Emperor] Shenzong [i.e. Jiajing]” 時方士陶仲文有寵於世宗. MS 119.5867.

¹⁷⁰ The records offer the example in 1543 of an unnamed adept recommended to the emperor by Tao Zhongwen who was could transform items into silver and promised Jiajing immortality should the ruler eat exclusively from these silver vessels. The adept was summarily executed for failing to make good on his promise. (*CHC*, vol. 7, pp. 480–481.

Daoists became some of the most powerful men in the imperial bureaucracy through a combination of their ritual prowess and their political acumen.

Still, the influence of the received narrative written by those officials seeking ways to indirectly criticize the misdeeds of Jiajing has maintained its hold on contemporary views of the past. In particular, Jiajing's licentious pursuit of immortality later in life through the use of Daoist alchemy and sexual techniques has come to define the grand narrative of Daoism at court during his time. Recently, the historian John Dardess's account of the Jiajing reign from the perspective of his Grand Councilors reveals new insights into the personal world of court politics. Published in 2016, his *Four Seasons* is among the most recent in a long tradition of reiterating official views that found the influence of Daoism on Jiajing to usher in a period of "lassitude and complacency under increasingly corrupt guidance," leading to the decline of his power and place in history.¹⁷¹ This common refrain among the writings of those critical of the Jiajing's personal interest in Daoism seems to be more directed at the political advantages individual Daoists gained, perhaps at the expense of those felt pushed out by their growing influence. Peterson suggests that the critique of Daoists at court on the part of officials was directed more toward those who would gain favor by leading Jiajing away from his role as Son of Heaven:

The remonstrations might be taken to indicate a measure of skepticism, but much of the protest seems to have been motivated less by disbelief than by opposition to the influence of men favored by the Chia-ching emperor because of their knowledge of esoteric techniques and his consequent neglect of court affairs.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and his Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-century China* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

¹⁷² Peterson, *Bitter Gourd*, pp. 135–136.

Daoism was thus viewed as much a political threat as it was an ideological opposition for those at court who were pushed to fringes of power.

While it certainly seems true that Jiajing's private pursuits of Daoism offered an avenue for retreat from public view and provided the inspiration for bringing many ritual masters to court to confer upon them official titles and rank, the role of Daoism in Jiajing's reign and in the broader history of the Ming is much more complicated. As recent scholarship on Ming history has clearly and conclusively shown, Daoism at the Ming court was not limited to the private pursuits of the imperial family or the public face of a corruptible and gullible emperor who valued magic tricks over classically-trained officials. As we will see, Daoism was an integral feature of the political machinery at court and informed public policy, including foreign relations and military deployment, as well as political responses to domestic crises. During the reign of Jiajing, the shared logic of Daoism, and in particular the ritual vocabulary of Thunder Methods and how it articulates the power of objects, would serve as something of the *lingua franca* at court. Any attempt to understand the history of the Ming court must take seriously the role in which Daoism and Daoist ritual played in forming the *Realpolitik* of the day, a political and ritual world articulated in terms of exorcistic liturgies in which Wang Lingguan played a critical part.

As both Li Fengmao and Nara Yukihiro have argued, Wang Lingguan's rise was a result of the specific patronage from the imperial family itself and is part of the prominence generally enjoyed by Thunder Methods ritual specialists at court during the first half of the Ming.¹⁷³ Perhaps the most notable during the early Ming was a Thunder Methods master from Zhejiang, Zhou Side (1359-1451), whose "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" would be deployed at the

¹⁷³ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 264–73; Nara, "Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan," pp. 481–483.

behest of the Yongle Emperor 永樂 (r. 1401–1424). That story also is one of images, power and place—only it tells first of a miraculous image of Wang Lingguan that became a favorite of the emperor, who then established a place for it in a temple next to the Forbidden Palace. The renown of that place for its efficacious response (*lingying* 靈應) grew, and with it, its prominence within the capital and eventually within the state institutions of Daoism. By the time the MMA scroll was painted, the temple that housed Wang Lingguan's image was at the center of centralized Daoism, and the home of the most powerful Thunder Methods master of the empire, Tao Zhongwen 陶仲文 (ca. 1481–1560), who enjoyed the Jiajing emperor's closest confidence.

When Jiajing left with his family into seclusion to West Park in 1542, Tao went with him, and together they constructed a Daoist paradise on earth—a place where an emperor could become a god. Thus, images of Wang Lingguan were already a powerful presence in and of themselves when Imperial Consort Shen commissioned the painting of Wang Lingguan we now know as the MMA scroll. The following two chapters (Chapter Two and Three) work together to offer a broader picture of the historical context of the MMA scroll by detailing the rise of Wang Lingguan at the Ming court and the role of Daoism, and in particular Thunder Methods ritual, played at the court of the Jiajing emperor around 1542 when the scroll was commissioned.

Chapter Two: Wang Lingguan at the Ming Court

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done...

Introduction

The following section details how Wang Lingguan rose to prominence at the court of the early Ming. In so doing, it takes a closer look at the role Daoism plays in both the political and the personal lives of the imperial family by reexamining the relationship Ming emperors had with Daoist masters and Daoist ritual. While imperial patronage of Daoism during the early Ming has been well-known, it is only recently that scholars have begun to unpack the layers of nuance of this relationship and shed new light on the critical role Daoists played in shaping the politics of the Ming dynasty. Rulers such as Yongle (r. 1402–1424) and Jiajing (r. 1521–1567) would strategically deploy Daoist ritual for political and military advantages, as well as for their personal pursuits. Beyond a passing dalliance, Daoism formed a powerful means to maintain the empire and preserve the emperor's position as its ruler. Wang Lingguan plays an important role in how rulers like Yongle, Xuande 宣德 (r. 1399–1435), and Jiajing would come to view Daoism and, indeed, rely on Daoist ritual to produce the efficacious results commensurate with their own ambitions for power.

At the same time, the rise of Wang Lingguan also reflects the dynamic relationship between local traditions and institutions centered at the capital. Wang Lingguan first became known to Yongle through the ritual prowess of the southern Thunder Methods master, Zhou Side 周思得, whose liturgical efficacy he attributed to Wang Lingguan in what he called “Method of the Efficacious Officer.” Zhou Side's success afforded him great personal favor with the emperor, and with it came imperial support of Wang Lingguan. Indeed, Yongle would take a

miraculous image of the deity along on expeditionary campaigns, and when he returned to his new capital in the north, he would sanction the establishment of a temple to house it. Now with a physical place within the religious landscape of Peking, the image of Wang Lingguan would become an institutional fixture. Subsequent emperors would continue to patronize the site and increase its material grandeur. All the while, the temple and the image of Wang Lingguan would gain renown for its efficacious response starting from the time of Yongle at the beginning of the 15th century all the way until the 18th century and beyond.

Throughout the early Ming, Wang Lingguan and his temple lacked the support of the Ministry of Rites, but rather, enjoyed the personal patronage of the imperial family and their personal wealth. Thus, the relationship between Wang Lingguan and the emperor's family was special, and it stands as a unique case in which a local god brought to the capital by a travelling ritual specialist becomes the private deity of the emperor. The following chapter details this trajectory, starting with a discussion of Wang Lingguan within the established Thunder Methods trope of local demon turned Daoist demon-queller. We then follow the rise of Zhou Side and his "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" at Yongle's court and then highlight the critical role images play in this story starting with the miraculous image of Wang Lingguan that belonged to Yongle. We then turn to the chronological narrative of Wang Lingguan's temple, and follow its meteoric rise from humble hall into one of the three most important Daoist sites in the capital. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the temple during the time of Jiajing, and Wang Lingguan's role in defining the power of that place for the emperor and his family. In so doing, this chapter sketches the contours of how Wang Lingguan came to be seen as a personal divinity of the imperial family and a trusted source of efficacious response for the emperor in his time of need.

2.1 Local Demon turned Imperial God

The broader contours of Wang Lingguan's story and his rise to prominence at the Ming court is a familiar one in which the origins of a violent spirit and the local traditions that attest to its fearsome power was brought under the agency of a centralized institution—in this case, all the way to the imperial family itself. Since at least as early as the Song dynasty, the state had practiced incorporating local gods into official pantheons in an attempt to endear itself with the local powers that be, whose influence around the displaced capital ran much deeper than the those of the imperial administration.¹⁷⁴ Scholars debate the degree to which state efforts had influenced local practice and by what measure we can view official pantheons as 'standardizing' what is ultimately an ongoing dynamic between local and central authority that continues to be played out today.¹⁷⁵ But there is no debate that the attention paid by the state to tutelary deities, and in particular, those who were once viewed as demons and who still retained many of the demonic qualities after being incorporated in official Daoist pantheons, resulted in an expanded pantheon and new strata of martial deities to be called upon as Daoist gods.

Many of the newly incorporated gods, and by proxy many of the local liturgical and hagiographic traditions associated with them, came as a result of the popularity and influence of Thunder Methods at the Song court. This mix of liturgical traditions from local masters (*fashi* 法師) and tantric ritual technologies brought under Daoist liturgies would form a vocabulary for calling forth martial gods to directly combat the demonic influence of those marginalized from

¹⁷⁴ For discussion of the effects imperial efforts had on standardizing the Song pantheon, see Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, 1990.

¹⁷⁵ See Michael Szonyi, "The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 56, no. 1, (Feb., 1997): 113–135; For an overview of the dynamic between local and state authority on issues of acceptable religion as it pertains to the modern era, see Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

civilized society (i.e. recognized by the central authority).¹⁷⁶ As Judith Boltz's seminal work has shown, Thunder Methods ritual could serve as a political tool of officials to also impose their will on local authorities when the symbolic power of the state failed to impress.¹⁷⁷ Many of those figures that make up the host of Thunder Deities were once the same marginalized spirits of the demonic now turned demonifuges in the service of the Dao, and under the direct ritual control of Thunder Methods masters.¹⁷⁸ The methods by which these martial divinities are brought under control and deployed make up much of the later parts of the *Daofa huiyuan* where we find the ritual manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan.

The most influential Thunder Methods lineage during the Song was the Shenxiao 神霄 (Divine Empyrean), whose famous liturgists Lin Lingsu, Wang Wenqing 王文卿 (1093–1153), and Sa Shoujian rose to great prominence at the court of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126). They were credited with developing liturgies that could call upon the power of thunder in the form martial deities to both exorcise demonic influence afflicting the living and also save suffering souls from the tortures of Hell. We may recall that Ming sources attest to the influence Shenxiao masters had at the Southern Song court, and identify the legendary Sa Shoujian as a contemporary of Lin Lingsu and Wang Wenqing, and indeed part of the same lineage that would hold such sway.¹⁷⁹ It is through the cultural memory of Sa Shoujian that we are introduced to Wang Lingguan, who is depicted as Wang's master throughout popular narratives and ritual texts.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the many iterations of this story, Wang is a malevolent demon who is bested

¹⁷⁶ Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, 2001.

¹⁷⁷ Judith M. Boltz, "Not by the Seal of Office Alone: New Weapons in Battles with the Supernatural," in Patricia Buckley Ebrey, et al., eds. *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989, pp. 241–305.

¹⁷⁸ Boretz, *Gods, Ghosts, and Gangsters*, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ *MSL* 孝宗, 13.33133, (p. 311); *Ming Wanli xu wenxian tongkao*, 110, p. 6714; *WLYHB*, 34.1426 (p. 918).

¹⁸⁰ For popular narratives see *Zhouzao ji* 咒棗記, hagiographic narratives in *Sanjiao Yuanliu Soushen Daquan* (Ming published, Yuan antecedents); For narrative found in ritual sources, see DZ 1220: 241–243; DZ 1443.

by Sa, and commits to following him after having reformed his ways through twelve years of practice before finally being deemed worthy by the Jade Emperor.

This sense of regionalism comes across in the hagiographic narratives when Sa Shoujian was travelling from West River (Xihe 西河, in modern Sichuan) to Hunan where he first hears of the troublesome spirit who would be known as Wang Lingguan.¹⁸¹ Upon coming to the temple where Wang the Wicked had entrenched himself, Sa challenges the nefarious spirit and battle ensues. Sa calls forth the power of thunder through his ritual prowess to down fiery-thunder, which burns Wang's temple to the ground. Now displaced and his power over the local community shaken, the wicked spirit of Wang takes flight and leaves the community he terrorized behind.

Thus, the 'malevolent spirit' *xieshen* 邪神 evinces the typical characteristics of the 'orphan spirit' trope (*guhun* 孤魂), the kind of demonic presence that becomes established in a local community, demanding offerings through fear since there is no one to perform offerings through the conventions of filial ritual that define the normative interaction with unseen spirits. It is exactly these kinds of spirits found outside the normative bounds of civil society that are served by the *liandu* rituals developed by Shenxiao patriarchs, in which reformed demons come to administer compassionate aid to the displaced demonic host that exists in the margins. Wang the Wicked becomes just such a reformed demon under the watchful eye of Sa Shoujian.

We see this reformation in how the general narrative concludes. We may recall that twelve years after Sa burns down Wang E's temple Sa Shoujian is washing his feet by a river

¹⁸¹ Here, "Xihe" once again serves as a marker for Sa's localized ritual identity. Liturgical texts dedicated to Wang Lingguan found in the *Daoist Canon* often refer to Sa Shoujian as "Xihe Sa" 西河薩 when invoking his presence at the altar. The role of Sa as the ritual authority over Wang Lingguan in rites performed for calling forth their presence is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

when he once again encounters the fearsome demon, only this time, something has changed. Up from its murky depths rises the demon Wang, who now goes by “Wang the Good” after having paid allegiance to the Dao and cultivated himself. Proving his worth and steadfast commitment, the Jade Emperor bestows upon Wang the plaque the reads “sincere heart, loyal virtue” (*chixin zhongliang* 赤心忠良), thereby sanctioning his conversion from demon to loyal servant of the Dao. There, standing on the water, Wang pledges himself to Sa Shoujian, and offers his ferocious power in the service of helping others, and the spirit without form now appears in the familiar idiom of a Thunder Deity:

He saw in the water there was a reflection of a spirit (*shenyingshen* 神影) facing him, [wearing] a yellow kerchief and golden armor. In his left hand tucked in his sleeve, his right hand grasping a baton. The Realized One [Sa] said, “What spirit are you?” It responded, “Why I am the Xiangyin temple spirit, Wang Shan.”

水有神影方面黃巾金甲左手拽袖右手執鞭。真人曰：“爾何神人也？”答曰：“吾乃湘陰廟神王善。¹⁸²

Here, not only do the visual details of the spirit’s appearance locate the character of Wang within the narrative, but more significantly, they give the spirit a recognizable identity within the broader ritual imaginary of Thunder Methods. Re-formed and ready to serve Sa Shoujian, the demon that once had only surreptitiously occupied a temple now has a form upon which Sa may call to manifest the power of thunder. Significantly, that form takes the appearance of a military commander, dressed in the sort of armor and brandishing the kind of weapons one finds among the martial heroes of that populate the visual and narrative Chinese tradition. In addition to a realized form, he has a re-formed name as well, Wang Shan, to be invoked in the incantations of Thunder Methods ritual. Indeed. both his identity as Wang E and Wang Shan, as well as his

¹⁸² *Sanjiao Yuanliu Soushen Daquan* 三教源流搜神大全, “Sa Shoujian.”

martial form, appear in the canonical ritual manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan found in the *Daofa huiyuan*. As we will see in Chapters Four and Five, there the local markings of Wang's identity are articulated in terms of Shenxiao cosmology, where Wang's true home is in Fire star of the Southern Dipper (*nandou huoxing* 南斗火星).¹⁸³ This dynamic identity articulated across local and Daoist vocabularies becomes a hallmark of the Thunder Methods liturgical traditions.

Indeed, the mechanism of conquering and then recruiting demonic spirits by way of investiture is what Li Yuanguo calls in his study of Shenxiao practice, “the critical power of Shenxiao *leifa*.”¹⁸⁴ In the case of Wang Lingguan, the demonic spirit transforms from the nameless, formless, and homeless terror into what emerges as a martial hero—a transformation and reformation marked by his visual aspects—to serve as the martial counterpart to Sa Shoujian's classical methods of calling down the thunder. As we will see, the language of rituals used for calling down Wang Lingguan that have been preserved and passed down in the *Daozang* speak to a more nuanced relationship between the classical master and the vernacular brute. Likewise, the historical records evince an effort on the part of the court to elevate Wang and Sa's status beyond their local identities. Nonetheless, Wang's martial identity and Sa's violent ritual prowess persists in the popular narratives that make up Ming literary tradition.¹⁸⁵

Thus, Wang Lingguan fits the model of local demon-turned-Daoist demonifuge that forms the literary and social-historical backstory of most thunder deities we find during the Song and then come to be proliferated in the Ming.¹⁸⁶ In addition to the popular accounts from Ming

¹⁸³ DZ 1220: 241.1a; 242.1a; 243.1a.

¹⁸⁴ Li Yuanguo 李远国, *Shenxiao leifa: Daojiao Shenxiaopai yange yu sixiang* 神霄雷法: 道教神霄派沿革與思想 (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), p. 62.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter Seven of the *Xiyou ji* (*Journey to the West*) where Wang Lingguan battles Sun Wukong at the Gate of Heaven. *Beiyong ji* where the same narrative of Wang as a demon terrorizing the locals is retold, only with the variation to the ending with him serving the main protagonist Zhenwu 真武 instead. Sa *Zhouzao ji*;

¹⁸⁶ For studies of individual deities, see Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats*, 1995; Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, “The Cult of the Wu-tung /Wu-hsien in History and Fiction,” pp. 137-218.

literature, anecdotes from the era also show that Wang Lingguan had a reputation among *biji* narratives as a god who could appear to dispense healing and rectify past karmic misdeeds.¹⁸⁷ Or, as in the case with Daoist Zhang from the *Gengsi bian*, would be called upon to fight off troublesome demons independently of Sa Shoujian. Nonetheless, the relationship between Sa and Wang remained a strong identifying feature of the two throughout the Ming and Qing.

Today, numerous lineages in Southern China, and in particular in Hunan where Wang's temple was said to have stood, still claim Sa and Wang as their lineage ancestor to the degree that several West River sects "Xihe pai 西河派" (named after a pseudonym of Sa Shoujian) can be found listed among those recorded at White Cloud Abbey the capital.¹⁸⁸ However, unlike many of his divine comrades whose cults seem to have first gained widespread notoriety amongst local and trans-regional temple networks before becoming incorporated into official pantheons, Wang Lingguan's rise to prominence, as Nara Yukihiro and Li Fengmao each suggest, was fueled primarily by direct imperial patronage.¹⁸⁹ While the emperors of the early Ming generally privileged Thunder Methods at court,¹⁹⁰ Wang Lingguan's specific popularity is mostly linked to the success enjoyed by ritual master Zhou Side, whose liturgical "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" is credited with helping the Yongle emperor succeed in his northern military campaigns.¹⁹¹ In other words, Wang Lingguan's conversion story to Daoism is typical among martial deities who make up the pantheon of Thunder Deities. Only this time, the local spirit becomes a favored god of the emperor. To get a better sense of how this unique situation

¹⁸⁷ Jiang Guan 江權 (1503-1565), *Mingyi lei'an* 名醫類案 (Categorized Cases of Famous Doctors), j. 9 "Sizhi bing" 四肢病, 段 513. *SKQS*

¹⁸⁸ Vincent Goossaert, *Taoists of Peking*, p. 342.

¹⁸⁹ Nara, "Dōkyō Gohōjin Ōreikan," pp. 484-485. Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 265-73.

¹⁹⁰ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*; Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 2012.

¹⁹¹ *MSL* j. 13.311; *Libu zhigao* 禮部志稿, j. 84; Also see Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pp. 162-165.

arose, let us the one responsible for bringing Wang to the capital, Zhou Side, and how he figures into the broader phenomenon of ritual masters at the Ming court.

2.2 Zhou Side, Wang Lingguan, and the Question of Lineage

Recent scholarship on the role of Daoism at the Ming court has demonstrated that the emperors of the first half of the dynasty were well-acquainted with Thunder Methods masters, willing to employ their services for the sake of their person and state, while some were well-versed in liturgies themselves.¹⁹² As Mark Meulenbeld has shown, the founder of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368–1398), employed Daoist ritual masters to help consolidate his new found authority. As Meulenbeld notes, it was “not just the divine thaumaturges that he is reputed to have invited to court (and that his successors canonized) but especially the ferocious powers of divine marshals, generals, and other martial divinities that can be summoned by Daoist ritualists to cooperate with local militias and, eventually, the imperial army.”¹⁹³ In other words, the violent deities of Thunder Methods were called upon by the Ming founder to bolster the power of his military, and thus his own power. Deploying Thunder Methods in this manner, as Meulenbeld goes on to show, is not a matter of metaphor, but rather a committed understanding that the bandits, pirates, and warlords threatening the stability of his new state exist along the same ontological continuum as those demonic forces that continually threaten civilized society. Thus, calling upon the divine power (*ling* 靈) harnessed and controlled by Thunder Methods ritualists was likewise understood as a reasonable and prudent response to political threats. As hinted at in Meulenbeld’s remark, successive emperors would continue to rely on the liturgical

¹⁹² Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 41–59.

¹⁹³ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pp. 132–33.

pro prowess of Thunder Methods masters for matters of state, and in turn, certain successful Thunder Methods masters would rise to great power and even become canonized in the official pantheons, including the legend of Sa Shoujian.

While the apotheosis of Sa Shoujian is well attested to in both hagiography and ritual narratives, Zhou Side would also come to achieve a certain measure of divine status as powerful figure in the cultural memory reflected in the works of later writers, and even come to be included in Qing publications of biographies of the divine.¹⁹⁴ According to the records, Zhou Side hailed from Hangzhou and came to Yongle's court espousing his method for "attaching spirits [i.e. gods] by descending into the body" (*xiangti fushen* 降體附神) of the powerful deity Wang Lingguan, whom he could summon forth at will. He called his method "Method of the Efficacious Official," and promised to apply its efficacy to the will of the emperor. Thus, Zhou Side fits the archetype of local Daoist master coming to the capital to prove his ritual prowess in the service of the court, following in the mode of the Shenxiao masters at Huizong's court before him, and establishing precedent for the institutionally powerful ritual masters such as Shao Yuanjie 邵元節 (1459–1539) and Tao Zhongwen who would succeed him in the court of the Jiajing emperor.

This broader trope was not lost on Ming writers, and indeed several sources, including the *Ming Shilu* 明實錄, identify Zhou Side within the lineage of Sa Shoujian and Lin Lingsu, while placing his "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" within the liturgical tradition of those masters. Sources are ambivalent on the exact origins of Zhou Side's "Methods of the Efficacious Officer", with some suggesting the methods were passed from Lin Lingsu to Sa Shoujian and

¹⁹⁴ *Youxiang liexian quanzhuan* 有像列仙全傳 (Illustrated Arranged Complete Biographies of Transcendents), p. 646.

then to Zhou Side.¹⁹⁵ Others identify Wang Lingguan as the conduit, who having received the secret teaching from his master Sa, then passed them on to Zhou.¹⁹⁶ Regardless, it seems that Ming records all posit the origins of Zhou Side’s “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” within the most well-known Thunder Methods liturgies to have influenced China’s emperors as a matter of course. An entry in the *Ming Shilu* dated to the first year of Hongzhi’s 弘治 reign (1487) on “Chong’en zhenjun”崇恩真君 (the title given to Sa Shoujian during the Xuande reign) and “Long’en zhenjun”隆恩真君 (i.e. Wang Lingguan) notes how:

Daoist lineages (道家 Daojia) have passed down that Chong’en Zhenjun’s surname was Sa, and he was named Jian, hailing from Xihe (Sichuan). During the time of Song Huizong, he studied the rites with Wang Shichen 王侍宸 (i.e. Wang Wenqing) and Lin Lingsu, and was confirmed.

Long’en Zhenjun is the Lingguan, Celestial General Wang of the Jade Pivot’s Fire Precinct. Also, during the Yongle reign, the talismanic methods of Realized Lord Sa (Sa Zhenjun 薩真君) were passed transmitted by means of the Daoist Master, Zhou Side, who could spread the Methods of the Efficacious Official (*Lingguan fa*). Thereupon, he established the Temple of the Celestial General Temple (Tianjiang miao 天將廟) in the Western part of the capital city, and an ancestral hall.

道家相傳以崇恩真君姓薩名堅西蜀人宋徽宗時嘗從王侍宸林靈素輩學法有驗而隆恩真君則玉樞火府天將王靈官也。又嘗從薩真君傳符法永樂中以道士周思得能傳靈官法。乃于禁城之西建天將廟及祖師殿。¹⁹⁷

Here we have the recognizable pattern of situating ritual practice within an authoritative lineage to claim legitimacy that often accompanies any kind of religious innovation,¹⁹⁸ but one that

¹⁹⁵ *MSL*, j. 13; *WLYHB*, j. 4; *MJSWB*, j. 77.

¹⁹⁶ A stela inscription recorded in Zhang Dachang’s 張大昌 (ca. 1893) *Longxing xiangfu jietan sizhi* 龍興祥符戒壇寺志, found at Baoji guan temple 寶極觀 in Zhejiang dated to 1482 is dedicated to Zhou Side. It, in which it recalls the great good his “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” did to protect the emperor and the empire. It makes no mention of the Shenxiao masters, but credits his power to Wang Lingguan. (Zhang Dachang 張大昌, *Longxing xiangfu jietan sizhi* 龍興祥符戒壇寺志, j. 2)

¹⁹⁷ *MSL*, 孝宗, j. 13, 弘治元年四月 / 段 33133.

¹⁹⁸ Most preambles to Daoist liturgies posit their origins through legitimate and authoritative divine channels. The same can be said for *baojuan* like the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*. The *locus classicus* for divine authority revealing itself in Daoism is Zhang Daoling’s encounter with Taishang Laojun on Mt. Heming. Likewise, ritual methods of

particularly resonates with the manner in which ritual manuals, techniques, and objects are passed down within a Daoist Master's family. The particular bond between Sa Shoujian and Lin Lingsu can be found throughout hagiographic sources surrounding the deified Sa.¹⁹⁹ This pattern of transmission recurs all through the historical discussion of Zhou Side and Wang Lingguan, as well, with later sources expanding the gravitas of the lineal authority by adding figures like the thirtieth Celestial Master, Zhang Jixian 張繼先 (1092–1126) to the transmission of “methods” (*fa* 法) received by Zhou Side during the Ming.²⁰⁰ Not everyone was willing to accept the presumption that Zhou Side somehow received direct transmission from figures who lived two centuries prior. The *Ming Shilu* remains skeptical:

Now about this method of Realized Lord Sa, Wang Lingguan functions on the basis of it; as for the method of Wang Lingguan, Zhou Side become prominent by on the basis of it, these methods come from themselves. That their methods both are coming from Lin Lingsu's time is a stretch.

夫薩真君之法因王靈官而行王靈官之法因周思得而顯而其法之所自又皆林靈素輩所附會。²⁰¹

However, historicity here presents a useful mirage.²⁰² Note that transmission is not described here in terms of a direct teacher/student relationship, but through a transfer of techniques—in this case, the use of talismans—that spans a gap of several centuries. This conceptualization of transmission between figures naturally calls into question the historical validity of the actors involved, and as Li Fengmao's careful study of Sa Shoujian shows, his association with the

contemporary Daoist families, including those who view Sa and Wang as patriarchs, pass down their techniques directly to the next generation by secret transmission.

¹⁹⁹ See, *SJYLSSDQ*, *Youxiang liexian quanzhuan*, etc.

²⁰⁰ Shen Defu, *WLYHB*, 補遺卷四 / 釋道 / 薩王二真君之始. The encounter between Zhang Jixian and Sa Shoujian became a fixture in both figures' hagiographies, and is attested to in sources that date perhaps as early as the Yuan. (see Vincent Goossaert, “*Sanshi dai tianshi Xujing zvenjun yulu* 三十代天師虛靖真君語錄,” *TC*, p. 933.

²⁰¹ *MSL*, 311. *Libu zhigao* 禮部志稿, 598.513b.

²⁰² Historical records that come after the *Ming Shilu* would often repeat the pattern of lineage it details nearly verbatim, such that it appears to have formed into common knowledge.

development and influence of Shenxiao ritual methods far eclipses his historical persona. There likely was never any linear relationship of transmission between these parties, but the bonds that are revealed in the author's criticism highlight a ritual alliance that had become seen by the time of the late Ming as a true bond between ritual traditions. Thus, the lineal connections became realized through the ritual efficacy surrounding Wang Lingguan—at least real enough to warrant criticism.

If anything, that early writers felt it necessary to comment on the historical impossibility of linking Zhou Side with the court ritualists of the Song suggests the large degree to which Zhou Side and his “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” had been linked to the potency of Shenxiao methods in the broader ritual imaginary—a common (mis)conception during the early Ming that ritual methods transcend chronological history. What matters here is the reality of the ritual alliance, not the historicity of the narrative. The important aspect of Sa Shoujian's identity in regards to the broader imaginary in which his presence authenticates the methods of Zhou Side and the power of Wang Lingguan is thus not as a historical figure in the conventional sense, but as one identifiable authoritative node along a continuum of powerful methods. Wang Lingguan and Zhou Side, as well, function as nodes along the same continuum, and with them, the narratives and objects that help articulate their presence in the broader imaginary.

The hagiographies tell us that Sa Shoujian apotheosized along with Wang Lingguan, and it is from his place in the heavens that he may convey the power of his method, or more specifically, that his martial agent Wang Lingguan may descend into the world.²⁰³ But, as Florian Reiter points out, Sa was only said to have received methods, and not any of the other traditional accouterment associated with lineal transmission, such as “registers” (*lu* 錄), that could play a

²⁰³ For hagiographical narratives of Wang and Sa embedded in the ritual perspective, see DZ 1220: 241.3a

role in transmitting the power of Daoist transcendents.²⁰⁴ Yet, these methods nonetheless manifest and become transmittable in the form of ritual objects. That is perhaps why Zhou Side is said to have specifically received the “talismanic methods” (*fufa* 符法) from Sa Shoujian, as opposed to any sort of “register” that would more typically be transmitted from master to disciple in written form as acknowledgement of technical progress. It is also perhaps why it is on the basis of having the material means to articulate *fa* that Zhou Side was able to proliferate “Methods of the Efficacious Officer”.²⁰⁵ That is to say, without the materiality of his ritual, there is no “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” worth promoting. In the case of how historical records describe Zhou Side and his “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” at court, the power of his method supersedes any chronological relationship with the past.

What emerges then is a different conceptualization of “lineage” and “transmission”—one that does not depend on chronological time and direct contact between master and disciple to pass on the secret techniques of their ritual “method.” Rather, one that allows for a sense of time wherein a ritual master may connect to the methods of previous (and future) ritual masters through the power (*ling* 靈) of their own ritual techniques—a “ritual” (*fa*) sense of time that functions through ritual power. That kind of a-historical connection would later allow Zhou Side to synthesize prevailing ritual technologies into one massive liturgy, which he compiled into his *Golden Book of Perfect Salvation belonging to the Lingbao of Highest Purity* (*Shangqing Lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書) during the Xuande reign (1426–1435).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Florian C. Reiter, “The Name of the Nameless and Thunder Magic,” in Poul Andersen and Florian C. Reiter, eds., *Scriptures, Schools, and Forms of Practice in Daoism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), p.107.

²⁰⁵ This connection pervades later sources from the Qing, as well. See *MS, j*, 50 j. 72.; Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu congkao*, p. 770.

²⁰⁶ Zhou Side, *Golden Book of Perfect Salvation belonging to the Lingbao of Highest Purity* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書, *Daozang waishu* 道藏外書 17.106.1a–1b.

Surprisingly, Wang Lingguan is not the central deity among the pantheons included in the forty *juan* that make up the massive opus, since it is through his association with the deity that Zhou Side was able to win the favor of Xuande's predecessors and establish both himself and the god as permanent features of Daoism at court.²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, Zhou Side's initial ascendancy has been attributed to his ritual prowess, and in particular his "Methods of the Efficacious Officer", and the figure of Wang Lingguan remained a critical part the narrative that grew around the story of Zhou's rise to prominence—one in which the materiality of his ritual program would play a key role in the Daoist's success. Indeed, later writers would make note of how Yongle would take Zhou Side and a favored miraculous image of Wang Lingguan along during his victorious northern campaigns, which would directly lead to imperial patronage and the establishment of Wang's temple in the capital. This image would come to play a critical role in how later generations understood Wang's place in the religious life of the imperial family and within the capital.

2.3 Yongle and the Miraculous Image of Wang Lingguan

The renown for which we now know of Zhou Side was initially a result of his ritual repertoire based exclusively on "Methods of the Efficacious Officer", drawing upon the power of Wang Lingguan to enact the deity's presence in the service of the emperor. Zhou would accompany the emperor on expeditions where he would be ordered to invoke the fierce deity to crush the enemies of the Ming. Prior to ascending the throne, Zhou Side and Wang Lingguan had already proven to be useful allies in the aspiring emperor Zhu Di's 朱棣 quest to become ruler.

²⁰⁷ Wang Lingguan is mentioned, however, and is identified within the *Shangqing Lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* as "Marshal Wang, Heavenly Inspector of the Court of Fiery Thunder, the Sincere Hearted. Good and Faithful" 35.54a. See Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, p. 165.

While facing certain defeat at the hands of his cousin Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (Jianwen 建文 r. 1398–1402), a miraculous storm emerged from out of nowhere to help turn the tide of battle and pave the way for him becoming the Yongle Emperor. Meulenbeld concludes that it was Zhou Side, then serving as Zhu Di's close advisor, who was credited for conjuring the storm that became known as "Quelling the Calamity" by means of his "Methods of the Efficacious Officer".²⁰⁸ The political successes achieved through "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" meant Zhou Side's status would continue to rise throughout the fifteenth century, and as we have seen, his association with the method grew to be so strong that Zhou's historical persona came to be conflated with that of his method in the historical records.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the Yongle emperor would continue to rely on Zhou Side's deployment of "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" as he looked to expand the reach of his empire northward, and would call upon Wang Lingguan in the form of a miraculous image would become the object of the emperor's personal devotion.

In his *Dijing jingwu lue* 帝京景物略 [Summary of Scenery from the Emperor's Capital], Liu Dong 劉侗 (1593–1636) offers an account detailing the Yongle emperor's personal fondness for a particular rattan image (*tengxiang* 藤像) of Wang Lingguan:

Generations have passed [the story] down of an official rattan image of Lingguan. Wenhuan (i.e. Yongle) obtained it from the Eastern Sea and worshipped it day and night, treating it as though an honored guest. When he went on expedition [the image] necessarily came along. When they reached the Jinhe river, they tried to lift it but it would not move. [They] performed the rites right away and secretly inquired (*miwen* 秘問) of it [the image]. It said, "Shangdi has limits. Stop here."

²⁰⁸ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, p. 163.

²⁰⁹ See Zhou Side's entries in in *MSL*, "Xuanzong," j. 39; *WLYHB buyi*, j.4, 1420; *Ming Wanli xuwenxian tongkao* 明萬曆續文獻通考, j. 243, p. 29265.

世傳靈官藤像，文皇獲之東海，崇禮朝夕，對如賓客，所征必載。及金河川，昇不可動，就禮而秘問之。曰：上帝有界，止此也。²¹⁰

While scholars have shown how the Yongle emperor's deployed Zhou Side's ritual prowess to further political and often violent aims,²¹¹ here, the power to decide on matters of military expansion are placed in the voice and action of an object. The rattan image of Wang Lingguan, which no doubt is favored by the emperor because of its association with the divine inspiration of "Methods of the Efficacious Officer", literally tells the emperor to halt his expedition. The image initially acts on its own accord, without any ritual intercession. It is only after the image miraculously becomes too heavy to move that ritual methods are called upon to "secretly inquire" (*miwen* 秘問, i.e. the use of spirit mediums) to find the reason behind such action.²¹² In so doing, it is the image of Wang itself that serves to define the northern boundary of Yongle's empire.

Not only does the image of Wang Lingguan play the role of sanctioning territorial authority, it also becomes the object of the emperor's ritual attention. In a manner reminiscent of how personators of the dead were ritually treated in Han funerary rites, what Deborah Sommer speculates as the possible precursors to icons in China,²¹³ the Yongle emperor himself treats the image as a guest (*duiru binke* 對如賓客). There is little else to help visualize what this might

²¹⁰ Liu Dong 劉侗 (1593-1636), *Dijing jingwu lue* 帝京景物略 [Summary of Scenery from the Emperor's Capital], (preface dated 1636) *juan* 4 (Taipei: Guangwen Shuju, 1969). This anecdote also appears quoted in Zhao Yi's 陔餘叢考, p. 770; and can be found in *Zhongguo fengtuzhi congkan* 中國風土志叢刊, v. 15 (Yangzhou: Guangling Chubanshe, 2003), 369.

²¹¹ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, p. 163.

²¹² Given early extant examples of rattan statues, it is quite possible that Yongle's favorite image featured articulated arms and legs that could bend at major joints, and thus be positioned during festivals out on tour of its domain. That the narrative notes how the statue could no longer be moved hints at an ambiguity in the language that opens the possibility that the rattan image froze up, stiffening like a corpse perhaps, and thus could no longer move on its own.

²¹³ Deborah Sommer, "Destroying Confucius: Iconoclasm in the Confucian Temple," in Thomas A. Wilson, ed. *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 95–133.

entail, other than we know that the image would be taken back to the capital. It was installed in the temple Zhou Side established just west of the Forbidden City dedicated to Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian known as Tianjiang miao 天將廟 (Hall of the Celestial General). This image, along with another of Sa Shoujian, would later receive regular offerings of new clothes and adornments as part of the official sacrifices accorded the temple.²¹⁴ There, the image of Wang would gain a life of its own within the popular imagination.

In recalling the account of the “rattan image” on expedition, the contemporary scholar Ma Shutian, fleshes out the decision to heed the icon’s admonition against pressing on by noting how after hearing those words, the emperor grew deathly ill and the party was forced to return to the capital.²¹⁵ Thus, as Ma points out, the emperor’s illness would be seen as the manifestation of the icon’s power of bringing about its prophetic claims (*lingyan* 靈驗). Ma is quick to point out that this narrative element of Yongle falling ill does not come out of the official histories but out of later *biji*, and thus dismisses it on account of it being a popular fabrication likely originating from later cults dedicated to Wang Lingguan. While claims of relative veracity between official and unofficial narratives is a thorny issue, that the story itself only appears in texts some two centuries after the recorded events were purported to happen casts doubt on the credibility of the details.

However, veracity is not our concern here. Whether we take the text’s own claim at face value ‘that which occurred on the journey was necessarily recorded,’²¹⁶ or follow Ma Shutian’s logic that the story was the later product of a Wang Lingguan cult, the details reveal a world in which the possibility that the “rattan image” can convince Yongle to end his expedition and

²¹⁴ *MSL* j. 13. 33133.

²¹⁵ Ma Shutian 馬書田, *Zhongguo Daojiao zhushen* 中國道教諸神 (Taipei: Zhongjia Chubanshe, 2005), p. 325.

²¹⁶ *Dijing jingwu lue*, j.4. 1a.; *Gaiyu congkao*, p. 770.

return home is a given. Later narratives surrounding the Yongle emperor's devotion to his favored 'rattan image' of Wang Lingguan reveal a personal connection between the ruler and the god as a means to explain why the Tianjiang miao was built and how the cult of Wang Lingguan achieved institutional status within the capital. While most of Wang Lingguan's rise to prominence (and Sa Shoujian's, as well) has been couched in terms surrounding Zhou Side's rise at court, it is important to note how later records posit the power of an efficacious image as a feasible, and indeed reasonable impetus for establishing Wang Lingguan in the capital. While the expectation of efficacious images is something of a trope in Chinese narratives,²¹⁷ and as such, has often been understood as a way to illustrate otherwise ineffable truths,²¹⁸ here the role of Yongle's favored image is simply to locate power itself. The object gains renown as a powerful thing unto itself.²¹⁹ Even as the narrative itself of Yongle's "rattan image" of Wang Lingguan may be dismissed as those outside the official circles appropriating an emperor's relationship to a deity, the image becomes part of the larger narrative for situating Wang Lingguan within the capital and among those close to the imperial family. Thus, the presence of the "rattan image" as a powerful object within the broader cultural view of the emperor further indicates the critical role that images play in the emperor's relationship with efficacious power of the deity.

In his own redaction of the account, Zhao Yi would claim a more ancient provenance for the image, noting that although, "they say they caught a rattan image in the East Sea, they already had this image since ancient times. It is not the case that it only began since the Yongle

²¹⁷ Robert L. Brown, "Expected Miracles: The Unsurprisingly Miraculous Nature of Buddhist Images and Relics," in Richard H. Davis, ed. *Images, Miracles, and Authority in Asian Religious Traditions* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 23–36.

²¹⁸ This issue forms the crux of scholarly discussions on the tripartite framework for manifesting Buddha bodies. For example, see Daniel Boucher's introduction to his translation of the "Sutra on the Merit of Bathing the Buddha," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 59–68.

²¹⁹ The rattan image itself was commemorated in the poem dedicated to the temple "Xianling gong" by Lü Shichen 呂時臣, preserved in Zhu Yizun's 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) *Mingshi zeng* 明詩綜, j. 54

period.”²²⁰ Zhao Yi also notes an account from the now lost *Yandu youlan zhi* 燕都遊覽志 [Records from Sightseeing in Yandu (Beijing)] by Sun Guomi 孫國敕 (1584-1651) in which the emperor himself would pray to the god to the effect of immediate response, thus prompting Yongle to establish a temple to Wang Lingguan in the capital and order imperial sacrifices to be performed regularly.²²¹ Thus the image, at least in the words of later, showed how Wang Lingguan’s power reached beyond the purview of Zhou Side and “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” as part of the popular imaginary on his own. Such renown accorded to the miraculous image of Wang Lingguan found at the Tianjiang miao undoubtedly contributed to the rising of the temple itself as a place known for efficacious response. Together, the temple and the image would give Wang Lingguan a defined place in the capital and serve to locate Wang’s power for later generations. Successive emperors would continue to sponsor building projects there, expanding its physical grandeur and its footprint in the religious life around the palace, such that by the time of Jiajing, the temple was among the most important sites in Peking. Let us turn now to the role that Tianjiang miao plays in creating a place for Wang Lingguan’s increasing prominence as it grows to become the Palace of Manifest Efficacy (Xianling gong 顯靈宮), and the seat of the most powerful Daoists in the realm.

2.4 Palace of Manifest Efficacy and the Power of Place

According to numerous sources, Tianjiang miao was built just West of the Forbidden City at Zhou Side’s request.²²² Liu Tong 劉侗 (1593-1636) notes in his *Dijing jingwu lue* 帝京景

²²⁰ Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu congkao*, pp. 770-771.

²²¹ Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu congkao*, p. 772.

²²² *MSL*, “*zongjiao*,” j. 13, entry dated May, 1488 (弘治元年四月). The establishment of these temples is also referenced in many other later sources of the Ming and Qing, including: an addendum to the *WLYHB*, j. 4; Chen

物略 [Summary of Sights from the Emperor's Capital, preface 1636] that the emperor himself commanded sacrifices to be offered at the temple in recognition of the power of Wang Lingguan:

During the Yongle period, Daoist Master Zhou Side practiced “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” and understood omens good and bad. Emperor Wenhuang (i.e. Yongle) tried it several times and it would never deviate [i.e. always work]. When it came to performing the rite of *zhaomi* 招弭,²²³ and the offering for clearing demonic disasters (*fuchu* 祓除),²²⁴ spirits of ghosts were revealed to be demons, rain fell at inopportune times, there was suffering from the calamity of war, it kept crime and disease far away. To secure efficacious response, [the emperor] thus ordered sacrifices to the god Wang Lingguan at the palace in the West of the city (i.e. Tianjiang miao).²²⁵

永樂中，道士周思得行靈官法，知禍福先，文皇帝數試之，無爽也。至招弭祓除，神鬼示彪，逆時雨，禳災兵，遠罪疾，維影響，乃命祀王靈官神于宮城西。²²⁶

Here, Liu Tong notes how the palace itself is the direct result of the emperor wanting to maintain a place to access the power of Zhou Side's “Methods of the Efficacious Officer,” while also ensuring its continued efficacy by ordering official sacrifices to Wang Lingguan. Thus, at its very inception, Tianjiang miao was constructed to preserve and maintain ongoing power of Wang Lingguan that the emperor may access it close to the palace. Indeed, Zhou Side would make Tianjiang miao his home, and it is there that he would compile his liturgical opus.²²⁷ While

Zilong 陳子龍 (1608–1647) et al. ed., *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編 [Ming Documents on Statecraft] section on “Scattered Records of Correct Sacrifice” (“Zhengsi dianshu” 正祀典疏), j. 77. Qing sources that mention the establishment of the temple and subsequent granting of titles include: *MS*, j. 26; and even in the commentary of the poem “Xianling gong” 顯靈宮 in Zhu Yizun's 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) *Mingshi zong* 明詩綜 [Summary of Ming Verse], *SKQS*: 54.19a–b.

²²³ *Zhaomi* 招弭 appears to be an ancient ritual performed by *wu* (cited in the *Zhouli* 周禮) in the Spring to clear away disease and illness. 周禮男巫：「招弭以除疾病」，鄭注：「招，招福也。」

²²⁴ In early sources, *fuchu* 祓除 carries the sense of self-purification rituals, often through the use of water associated at the bank of a river.

²²⁵ Calling the temple a ‘palace’ (*gong* 宮) during the Yongle Emperor's reign was a bit of anachronistic labeling on the part of Liu Dong, perhaps suggestive of the renown the temple would later receive after it was awarded the title of ‘*gong*’ during the reign of the Chenghua Emperor (r. 1464–1487).

²²⁶ Liu Dong 劉侗 (1593–1636), *Dijing jingwu lue* 帝京景物略, j. 4.; variation also appears in the *Ming Wanli xuwenxian tongkao* and *Zhongguo fengtuzhi congkan* 中國風土志叢刊, v. 15 (Yangzhou: Guangling Chubanshe, 2003), p. 369.

²²⁷ See Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” pp. 228–235.

the figure of Zhou Side looms large how the records recall the founding of the temple, the temple itself, and in particular the efficacious response of the objects housed therein, play just as an important role in its identity within the broader cultural memory.

In addition to the famous story of the “rattan image” housed there, Zhao Yi also notes how Tianjiang miao housed statues (*su* 塑) of twenty-six celestial generals (*tianjiang* 天將), among which Wang Lingguan’s was placed in the primary position.²²⁸ It may be that this particular statue of Wang Lingguan to which Zhao Yi refers may be the very “rattan image” so admired by Yongle. Indeed, Zhao Yi notes that the Yongle emperor himself would pray (*dao* 禱) at the temple and would always benefit from immediate response, suggesting that it was the personal experience of the emperor (and succeeding emperors, as well) that drove the temple’s patronage. As Susan Naquin points out in her study of the temples in the capital, the operational cost and subsequent expansion of Tianjiang miao was not supported by the Ministry of Rites, but rather by the personal coffers of the imperial family itself.²²⁹ At some point, the temple would lose the financial backing of the imperial family and subsist on private patronage—that is to say, function as a local temple. However, through the first half of the Ming at least, the temple would serve as an important site as the connection between the emperor and the most powerful Daoists at the capital.

Subsequent emperors would continue to support the site, expanding its architecture, bestowing upon it increasingly august names, and granting its main deities, Wang and Sa,

²²⁸ This would bring the total of icons to twenty-six, which is an atypical number arrangement for Celestial Generals.

²²⁹ Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 150. Naquin notes how the phenomenon of “imperial founding followed by private support” was common, and couches this dynamic within the contentious relationships between imperial interests (local and Daoist) with those of officialdom (Confucian).

increasingly prestigious titles.²³⁰ During the Xuande reign (r. 1425–1435), the temple was granted the title Abbey of Great Virtue (Dade guan 大德觀), and Sa and Wang were each invested with the title of “Realized Lord” (*zhenjun* 真君). Sa became known officially as Chong’en zhenjun 崇恩真君 (Realized Lord of Venerable Compassion), and Wang became Long’en zhenjun 隆恩真君 (Realized Lord of Abundant Compassion).²³¹

The temple would also become the site of state-sponsored Daoist rites. The Forty-fifth Celestial Master, Zhang Maocheng 張懋承 presided over a *baoan jiao* 保安醮 (Offering for Preserving Peace) during the ninth and last year of Xuande’s reign.²³² Another *baoan jiao* was conducted at the temple during the following reign of the Jingtai emperor 景泰 (r. 1449–1457) by the Forty-sixth Celestial Master, Zhang Yuanji 張元吉, while the Zhengtong emperor 正統 (r. 1435–1449, 1457–1464) was still a captive of the Mongols.²³³ Following the Zhengtong emperor’s capture at Tumu Fortress,²³⁴ advisors of the newly crowned Emperor Jingtai urged him to summon Zhang Yuanji to court and request that he perform a *baozhenguo jijiao* 保鎮國祚醮 (Offering for Blessings to Preserve and Guard the Country).²³⁵ According to the biographical “Hereditary House of the Celestial Masters of the Han” (*Han tianshi shijia* 漢天師世家) found in the 1607 supplement to the *Daoist Canon* and compiled by the Fiftieth Celestial Master,

²³⁰ For a detailed analysis, see Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” pp. 222–228; *MSL* j. 13, 33133.

²³¹ *MSL*, Liu Dong

²³² *MSL* 5.3b. has the date Xuande 9 (1434, between the 3rd and 5th month).

²³³ *MSL* 6.5b. For a discussion of the various rituals performed at Xianling gong, see Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” pp. 256–258.

²³⁴ For an overview of the military context that led to the Tumu Crisis, see Longfei Feng, “Tumu Crisis and the Weakness of the Military System of Ming Dynasty,” *Asian Social Science*, 5.6 (2009): 12–18; For the cultural impact of the crisis, particularly as it relates to subsequent Ming political ideologies, see Christopher Eirkson, “Early Ming Imperial Ambitions: The Legacy of the Mongol Yuan in Spatial Representations and Historical Judgements,” *Frontiers of History in China* 12.2 (2017): 465–484.

²³⁵ DZ 1463 *Han Tianshi shijia* 漢天師世家 4.5a-b.

Zhang Guoxiang 張國祥 (d. 1611), the emperor requested that the rite be conducted at Dade guan in the fall of 1450. As a result, “there was in the sky an auspicious flowery clouds lofting, their descending strength bore approval of [the rite’s] auspiciousness.”²³⁶ Here at a critical moment of great political as the shaken empire is reeling from the capture of the previous Son of Heaven, Jingtai’s advisors recommend a Daoist *jiao* for safeguarding the state (and likely to help legitimize his claim to the throne) to take place at the temple of Wang Lingguan close to the Forbidden City.

Such a response by the Jingtai emperor indicates just how far Wang Lingguan had become incorporated into state protocol in the span of two decades since Yongle. Once the object of personal patronage by the emperor, by the late 15th century Wang Lingguan had become a figure for state security in the eyes of Jingtai. While the emerging picture of Daoism at the early Ming court continues to show just how integral Daoist rituals were to the political machinations of the state, it is clear that the temple of Wang Lingguan played a critical role as an important place for rituals to affect change on the empire.

By the beginning of Chenghua’s reign (1464–1487), the temple had become renowned for its efficacious response (*lingying* 靈應) that extended beyond the specific purview of imperially-sponsored *jiao*. Its prominence as a temple and its reputation as place of power were reflected in the new title bestowed upon it by the new emperor as well as building projects to enlarge its place within the capital. Liu Dong echoes earlier accounts when he notes that, “its title was expanded by imperial order to say “Palace of Great Virtues and Manifesting Efficacy”

²³⁶ 有天花雲鬻之瑞降勅褒嘉. DZ 1463: 4.5b.

(Dade Xianling gong 大德顯靈宮), and a great a towering pavilion to sacrifice to Shangdi was constructed.”²³⁷

Daoists would continue to perform grand rites at the temple in subsequent reigns, including during the time around when the MMA scroll was commissioned. The *Ming Shilu* records four *jiao* and *zhai* conducted there over the course of two decades of Jiajing’s reign, spanning from 1526 to 1548.²³⁸ It is very likely given the environs, that the figure of Wang Lingguan appeared as part of the *jiao* conducted at his temple, as the temple and by extension the figures therein were understood to be the physical site of efficacious response. A calendar of official sacrifices was established to be performed at Dade guan such that its inhabitants, including its icons, would regularly receive new vestments and jewels on an annual basis.²³⁹ The *Ming Shilu* notes how “They would exchange [the old accoutrement] with new pearls, jade, and beautiful brocade whose expense was beyond measure. For every festival, they would inquire as to the best time of year, and would always dispatch a government official to send an offering.”²⁴⁰ Such annual sacrifices would be recorded as part of the “standard divine sacrifices” (*zheng shensi* 正神祀) in the annals of the Ministry of Rites.²⁴¹ As the material wealth of the temple grew, so too did its reputation for manifesting responses. By Jiajing’s reign, the temple would be

²³⁷ *Dijing jingwu lie*, j.4.

²³⁸ *MSL* records official *jiao* sponsored during Jiajing’s reign in 1526, 1530, 1532, and an official *zhai* in 1548.

²³⁹ *MSL* j. 13. 33133. The annual ritual of exchanging clothes would be supplemented every third year when they would burn the old ones in what was referred to as a “Little Burn” (*xiaofen* 小焚). Every tenth year there would be a “Great Burn” (*dafen* 大焚) that saw all the precious brocade, pearls and jade, exchanged and presumably, burned. The great expense incurred at the temple suggests its prominence, but would also catch the ire of later commentators. (*MSL* j. 13.33133).

²⁴⁰ *MSL* 孝宗 / 卷十三 弘治元年四月 / 段 33133

²⁴¹ *Libu zhigao* j. 84, “Shensi beikao 神祀備考 [雜祀 / 會議釐正神祀] 2792.

known simply as the Palace of Manifest Efficacy (Xianling gong 顯靈宮), and as we will see, would become the seat of the most powerful Daoists in the empire.

2.5 Palace of Manifest Efficacy During the Time of Jiajing

The Palace of Manifest Efficacy continued to grow in prestige as it remained a site for major rituals well into the sixteenth century. The *Ming shi* records that by the beginning of Jiajing's reign, the Palace of Manifest Efficacy, along with Chaotian gong 朝天宮 and Lingji gong 靈濟宮,²⁴² was one of the three most prominent temples in the capital and housed the highest ranking figures of centralized Daoism.²⁴³ The Palace of Manifest Efficacy served as the seat of the famous court Thunder Methods master from Xing'an 興安 (in modern Jiangxi), Shao Yuanjie, who had gained renown for his ability to secure the emperor a male heir through his ritual prowess. In the third year of Jiajing's reign (1526), Shao had been awarded the title of *zhenren* 真人 and placed in charge of Daoist institutions at court.²⁴⁴ His hand-picked successor, Tao Zhongwen, would also come to live at the Palace of Manifest Efficacy, and from there would go on to become one of the most powerful figures at court.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Naquin notes that Chaotian gong was the site of the Daoist Registry (Daolusi 道錄司) during the Ming at a time when "appointments to the Registries in the capital were prestigious, a sign that one had been noticed at court." (Naquin, *Peking*, p. 51.) Lingji gong, like Xianling gong, was established by the Yongle emperor as a temple dedicated to local figures (the Xu brothers), and rose to prominence over the course of the subsequent reigns. (Naquin, *Peking*, p. 147.)

²⁴³ *MS*, 387.7984–7985, pp. 2045–2046. Conducting the only successful rituals for securing an imperial heir was only one among many feats of ritual prowess that drew Shao close to the emperor. For a brief biography of Shao Yuanjie, see *DMB*, pp. 1169–1170.

²⁴⁴ *MS*, 307.7984–7985; *DMB*, pp. 1169–1170. Also see, Meulenbeld, "Civilized Demons," pp. 258–260.

²⁴⁵ *CHC*; *DMB*; *EoT*. Tao was known for his use 'talismanic water' (*fushui* 符水) to look combat immediate threats to the emperor's house and home. Tao Zhongwen would go on to simultaneously hold three of the most important posts in the government and also help usher the Jiajing emperor into seclusion at West Park, where Tao had been tasked with overseeing the construction of Youguo kangmin leidian 祐國康民雷殿. (*MS* 307. 7896, p. 2023)

Tao was a native of Huguang (Huanggang 黃岡), who learned Thunder Methods techniques in the provinces and also served as a minor official before meeting Shao Yuanjie at the capital.²⁴⁶ As the story goes, Shao Yuanjie was having trouble exorcising a demon who had invaded the palace, and left it up to Tao who used his own methods to successfully drive away the offending spirit. The *Ming shi* records that the demonic threat was none other than the *heisheng* 黑眚 (Black Terror),²⁴⁷ an unidentifiable maleficence that had been known to threaten calamity and disaster as recorded as early as in the *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書, 82 CE).²⁴⁸ At the palace, Tao would use his own talismanic methods to subdue the danger. Shao Yuanjie recommended Tao Zhongwen to the court in 1539 when the Jiajing emperor was travelling to visit his father's tomb in Huguang 湖廣 (modern Hubei and Hunan).²⁴⁹ Shao could not attend due to illness, and suggested Tao go in his stead. Tao would foretell of a threat of the emperor's life while on tour to Hugang. When Jiajing nearly died in a fire that broke out in the imperial compound, Tao Zhongwen was credited for his prognostication. When Shao Yuanjie died that same year, Tao assumed his position at court.²⁵⁰

After several other demonstrations of ritual prowess in the service of protecting the emperor and his family, Tao became the only figure in the history of the Ming to concurrently

²⁴⁶ *DMB*, p. 1266.

²⁴⁷ *MS*, 30. 2023.

²⁴⁸ The *Hanshu* 漢書 identifies *heisheng* in the context of the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) as the disastrous phenomena of locusts eating grain. It notes that in the winter of the 15th year of Duke Xuan of Qi (r. 455-405 BCE) that there was a famine as a result of damaged crops suffered and from an infestation termed “*heisheng*.” (*Hanshu* 漢書, 27 中之下.1434). This same “Black Terror” reappears in the *Songshu* 宋書 (493 CE), though by then, it was understood to be a result of missteps in the natural cycle of the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) and came to be associated with the rise of enemy soldiers (See *Song shu* 宋書, 33. 志第 23, p. 973). the use of the term “*heisheng*” and its association with “Black *qi*” (*heiqi* 黑氣) remained through the Ming, where the historical record is filled with numerous *heishang* scares throughout all levels of society.

²⁴⁹ *DMB*, p. 1170.

²⁵⁰ *DMB*, pp. 1266–1267.

hold the three titles of the *sangu* 三孤.²⁵¹ Although both official histories and modern historians have painted Tao Zhongwen as one of those Daoist “charlatans” under whose nefarious influence Jiajing would succumb,²⁵² the records suggest that the man himself was generous with his new found wealth. Just before he died in 1560, Tao relinquished his post claiming sickness and returned the wealth bestowed upon him back to the emperor—jade articles, embroidered dragon robes, golden crowns, golden vessels, and 10,000 teals of silver—that was used to repair the Lugou Bridge 盧溝橋 near the capital.²⁵³ Upon his death, Tao was awarded the posthumous title “Rongkang huisu” 榮康惠肅, a title shared with Shao Yuanjie.²⁵⁴ Both were stripped of the title after the change of succession when the Longqing Emperor 隆慶 ascended the throne (r. 1567–1572).²⁵⁵

While historians tend to focus on the later years of Tao’s influence when he was selecting young virgins to benefit the emperor’s quest for immortality, the ascendancy of his early years at court was a direct result of Thunder Methods ritual and its importance to the emperor.²⁵⁶ As with Shao Yuanjie before him, Tao Zhongwen’s rise to powerful court Daoist and institutional figure mirrored the ascendancy of Zhou Side from local Thunder Methods master to close imperial advisor. Likewise, the figure of Wang Lingguan plays an important role in this shared

²⁵¹ *DMB*, p. 1267. The so-called “Three Solitaries” was used throughout the imperial period to indicate those who occupied three of the highest positions within the central government. The three posts were Junior Preceptor (*shaoshi* 少師), Junior Mentor (*shaofu* 少傅), and Junior Guardian (*shaobao* 少保). According to Hucker, the designation of “Three Solitaries” (lit. “three orphans”) denotes that those occupying the positions were without equal, and carried both institutional and honorific responsibilities attached with their position (Hucker, 4864, p. 398). That Tao Zhongwen was the only figure in Ming history to hold all three posts concurrently suggests that the Jiajing emperor truly viewed him as one without equal, and clearly evinces the great influence he had at court and within the administration of the central government.

²⁵² Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” p. 263.

²⁵³ ter Haar, *EoT*, pp. 971–972; *DMB*, p. 1268.

²⁵⁴ *WLYHB*, j. 13, 527; *MSL*, j. 490, “Jiajing 39, 11/24;” *DMB*, p. 1268.

²⁵⁵ *DMB*, p. 1268; ter Haar, *EoT*, p. 972.

²⁵⁶ *DMB*, p. 1268.

phenomenon. In the case of Zhou Side, the success of his “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” allowed him to establish a place near the palace for Wang Lingguan and the images associated with his power. Zhou, Shao, and Tao would all call home to the Palace of Manifest Efficacy built to house Wang Lingguan close to the palace. While there is no record of Shao Yuanjie or Tao Zhongwen explicitly calling forth Wang Lingguan in their exorcistic rituals, we can assume that by simply living in the deity’s temple that they were well aware of the history Wang Lingguan had with the imperial family and the potential the god offered for furthering their own relationships with the emperor. In particular, it is altogether likely that Thunder Methods masters such as Shao and Tao would deploy Zhou Side’s “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” attributed to Wang Lingguan himself, as it would be closely associated with the physical institution of the temple.²⁵⁷

Even as Tao Zhongwen followed the emperor into his paradisiacal retreat in West Park, the Palace of Manifest Efficacy remained a consideration in the troubled mind of Jiajing. As Zhang Han 張瀚 (1510–1593) recalls in his *Songchuang mengyu* 松窗夢語,²⁵⁸ the emperor remained fearful of retribution from the spirits of those put to death in the aftermath of failed assassination attempt in 1542. In an effort to counteract the vengeance of what Zhang calls the “possible spiritual “demon-concubine” (*yaofei* 妖妃),²⁵⁹ as well as a show of gratitude for surviving the ordeal, the emperor made generous offerings to the Palace of Manifest Efficacy. The highest-ranking officials followed suit, sponsoring a three-day *jiao* at the temple, where they made offering of gold to the Daoists there in order to express their sincere wishes for the ruler’s

²⁵⁷ This connection proves critical for considering the relationship between the MMA scroll and Zhou Side’s role in promoting *liandu* liturgy discussed in Chapter Seven.

²⁵⁸ *Songchuang mengyu* 松窗夢語 5.98-99.

²⁵⁹ While often a generic category of the demonic, “*yaofei*” is likely in reference to the accused concubine Cao, whose death Jiajing lamented the most.

long life.²⁶⁰ Thus, even as the emperor himself began to withdraw into relative reclusion, the Palace of Manifest Efficacy and the power of Wang Lingguan remained a central fixture in the struggle for political survival at court and the well-being of the emperor himself.

Concluding Remarks: Staying Power

The rise of Wang Lingguan from the centerpiece of Zhou Side's "Methods of the Efficacious Officer" to the center of temple life in the capital reflects the influence of Thunder Methods at the courts of the early Ming and the power that Thunder Deities had in the worldview of imperial patrons like Yongle. That theme reemerges a century later during the reign of Jiajing, when ritual masters like Tao Zhongwen ascend to prominence and use Wang Lingguan's temple as their base of power. The prestige and commensurate wealth that accompanied Tao Zhongwen's rise not only caught the attention and ire of many court officials, but also made the Palace of Manifest Efficacy the fitting abode of the most powerful Daoist in the empire.²⁶¹ The splendor of its material presence defined how Ming writers would see this temple. We may here once again recall Shen Defu's remarks on the ubiquity of Wang Lingguan's image found among different temples, but noting here how he holds those in the capital beyond compare:

²⁶⁰ *Songchuang mengyu*, 5.98-99.

²⁶¹ Many temples bearing the name "Xianling gong" would spring up throughout the empire, and it is likely they were viewed in some kind of relationship with the famous center in the capital. Later writers would include mention of temples named "Xianling gong" listed throughout the provinces as part of their discussion of the famous one in the capital. It is unclear the nature of the relationship between those outside the capital and the one established by Zhou Side. Those outside the capital may well have been "branch-temples" either in the sense of state-built or local trans-regional temple networks (See James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ("empress of Heaven") Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in David Johnson, et al., eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 292-324; Kristofer Schipper, "The Cult of Pao-Sheng Ta-ti and its Spreading to Taiwan: A Case Study of *Fen-Hsiang*," in Eduard B. Vermeer, ed. *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 397-416). Regardless of social-historical conditions that led to a profusion of Xianling gong temples, it seems later writers interested in detailing the history of the temple understood there to be a connection enough to warrant their inclusion. Interestingly for our purpose, the points of connection are images of Wang Lingguan.

These two palaces in a corner of the capital [i.e. Temples dedicated to Sa and Wang], with grand and beautiful pavilions and a spacious view, are no lesser than the private apartments in the palace.

此二宮者，俱在京師兌隅。雄麗軒敞，不下宮掖。²⁶²

While Wang Lingguan's image has become ubiquitous among Daoist sites, the Palace of Manifest Efficacy temple remains an exemplar of the opulence Wang Lingguan enjoyed from imperial patronage at the capital. The famous temple remains still relevant during Shen's time, even a half a century after Jiajing's patronage of Daoism and the counter measures against Daoism of his successor, the Longqing Emperor 隆慶 (r. 1567–1572). The popularity of the Palace of Manifest Efficacy would also continue after Jiajing and its reputation within the capital as a site of efficacious response continued to press upon the popular imagination well into Qing.

Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) records a poem entitled “Palace of Manifest Efficacy” 顯靈宮 in his *Ming shizeng* 明詩綜 (Summary of Ming Poetry) that describes the invigorating power of renewal felt in the presence of the temple grounds.²⁶³ While Susan Naquin notes how the temple grounds themselves would become a well-known source of inspiration for Qing literati due the miraculous trees in the courtyard,²⁶⁴ Zhu Yizun's commentary to the poem points to the famous “rattan image” of Wang Lingguan to elucidate the sense of awe expressed in the verses. Indeed, the reputation of the temple and its famous image continued into the eighteenth century such that the *Ming shi* was compelled to contrast its current state with its revered reputation, noting how “in recent times, offerings and requests [made to the images of Sa and Wang] go without a response, and they should thus be taken down.”²⁶⁵ Here, Wang Lingguan's

²⁶² *WLYHB* 34, p. 917.

²⁶³ Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), ed. *Ming shizeng* 明詩綜 (Summary of Ming Poetry), *SKQS* 54.19a–b.

²⁶⁴ Naquin, *Peking*, p. 150.

²⁶⁵ 近今祈禱無應，亦當罷免。 *MS*: 50.1309, p. 366.

image is was among several Daoist gods the *Ming shi* advocates for removal. The *Ming shi*'s indignation regarding the particular activity surrounding the image at the Palace of Manifest Efficacy is quite telling. In calling for its removal, the text indicates that Wang Lingguan remained a critical presence at the capital during that time. By basing the rationale for doing so in the image's ineffectiveness, the text also clearly shows how the image itself remained inexorably linked to the god's presence and the expectation of the deity producing efficacy.

This integral connection between the image of Wang Lingguan and the efficacy his divine power promises serves as basis for understanding the potential of the MMA scroll at the time it was commissioned. A look into how Thunder Methods ritual became the preferred means at Jiajing's court to express this kind of efficacy and the ways that materiality and images like that of Wang Lingguan actively contributed to create an actual Daoist paradise will help situate the MMA scroll within a broader worldview where objects play a critical role in the apotheosis of an emperor-turned-Thunder Deity. It is to that world that we shall now turn our attention.

Follow me, dear reader, to the world of Jiajing's court, where Thunder Ritual mixes with murderous intentions within the emperor's own bedroom...

Chapter Three: Daoism and Ritual Response in the World of Jiajing

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well...

Introduction

Wang Lingguan continued to remain a powerful presence at court during the reign of Jiajing. Under the Emperor Jiajing's patronage, Daoism would become the language of negotiating power at court, and as the emperor would take a personal interest in Thunder Methods, *leifa* liturgical traditions would serve as a common recourse to combat the many threats beset upon his tumultuous reign. Following the pattern of Zhou Side's rise to prominence under the patronage of Yongle, ritual masters such as Shao Yuanjie and Tao Zhongwen would come forth from local traditions to become close confidants of the emperor and ascend to great political power. While the official histories paint the rise of such figures and their influence at court in broadly pejorative terms, recent scholarship has shown a far more nuanced involvement between the imperial family and Daoist liturgical traditions. More than simple charlatans taking advantage of a troubled ruler, Daoist ritual masters and their liturgical training became a model for aspiring Ming princes. Meanwhile, Jiajing himself took a direct and active interest in Daoist ritual from an early age that would continue throughout his life. As such, Jiajing would rely on Daoism, and in particular the articulation of Thunder Methods, as a means to confront the challenges to his political security and to his personal safety.

The critical importance of Daoism was no more apparent than only a few months after Honored Imperial Consort Shen commissioned the MMA scroll in the summer of 1542, when Jiajing's favorite concubines tried to assassinate the ruler in his own bed. In the aftermath, the

emperor would leave the palace to spend the rest of his life in opulent seclusion in his paradise of West Park that Tao Zhongwen helped design. There, the material world created a literal heaven on earth, where the emperor would pursue apotheosis as a Thunder Deity. Later in life, Jiajing would eventually turn his attention to longevity techniques that would include the lecherous pursuit of young virgins for which the official histories would blame the influence of Tao Zhongwen and fellow Daoists. But the first years of Jiajing's seclusion were spent with his closest confidants performing regular rituals at Thunder altars within West Park. It is in this world that Honored Imperial Consort Shen, a powerful and respected woman in her own right, would commission the painting of Wang Lingguan, that personal Thunder Deity of previous emperors. To gain a better perspective on the world of the MMA scroll, the following chapter explores the role of Daoism at Jiajing's court and how Thunder Methods liturgical traditions would inform imperial responses to the heightened threats around 1542 when the MMA scroll was commissioned.

The following chapter begins by looking at how Thunder Methods were seen by the emperor and the establishment inside the court as a means to both political and ritual power. Far from just a gullible mark for nefarious Daoists to take advantage of, we see how Jiajing was a well-informed and active participant in Daoist ritual. It then focuses on the role of Tao Zhongwen and his ritual prowess plays in articulating efficacious responses toward threats both inside and outside the palace, before focusing on the critical year of 1542 and the assassination attempt that would define the latter half of Jiajing's rule. We then follow the emperor into the first few years of seclusion in West Park, where Thunder Methods liturgy framed Jiajing's daily life. Finally, we explore the world of Lady Shen and the role Daoist images like the MMA scroll play in how ranking palace women could articulate their power. In the end, we attempt to

reconstruct the empowered world in which the MMA scroll was created, and in so doing, shed light on how objects that image Thunder Deities were made with the expectation of efficacy.

3.1 Thunder Methods at Jiajing's Court

For the Jiajing Emperor, Daoism, and in particular Thunder Methods, became an indispensable as a way of addressing threats to both the emperor's person and his authority as Son of Heaven.²⁶⁶ Having assumed the throne by way of indirect succession from his uncle, many powerful figures at court, including the Grand Councilor and the Empress Dowager, would argue against posthumously recognizing Jiajing's birth father as an emperor. What became known as the Great Rites Controversy (*Dali yi* 大禮議) would define the first part of Jiajing's reign. Jiajing chose ritual protocol as the battleground in the fight to make his father an ancestor, actively dismantling state rites and reforming them to incorporate his wishes, even going so far as to tearing down and rebuilding ancestral halls to conform to his designs.²⁶⁷

While many of his ritual concerns were reflected in changes to major state ceremonies, Jiajing would make Daoism a central part of more intimate rites, such as the “straw mat” (*jingyan* 經筵) lectures begun at the start of his reign in 1521, and would become increasingly focused on discussing Daoist texts and composing *qingci* (青詞)—the liturgical poetry of Daoist *jiao*.²⁶⁸ Likewise, those “Straw mat officials” (*jingyan guan* 經筵官) responsible for articulating Daoist ideas could rise to the highest ranks of officialdom, and as Chu Hung-Lam has shown in

²⁶⁶ Carney T. Fisher, *The Chosen One: Succession and Adoption in the Court of Ming Shizong* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990).

²⁶⁷ Fisher, *The Chosen One*, pp. 97–106.

²⁶⁸ Chu Hung-Lam, “The Jiajing Emperor's Interaction with His Lecturers,” in David M. Robinson, ed. *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368-1644)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 186–230.

the example of the Grand Secretary Gu Dingchen 顧鼎臣 (1473–1540), even earned protection from otherwise fatal slander at court.²⁶⁹ Such began a pattern early on of those who could identify themselves within Daoism being able to carve a path to success at court and achieve, as Chu notes, “all that a Confucian literatus could hope for as an official.”²⁷⁰

In this vein, Richard Wang’s study of the interactions between Ming princedom and Daoist ritual convincingly shows how Ming princes used ordination into Thunder Methods lineages in order to circumvent the increasingly restrictive *fanjin* 藩禁 policies, as well.²⁷¹ Instituted during Yongle’s reign, the *fanjin* system was established to limit the political power of an unwieldy and ever expanding royal clan. Under such restrictions, Ming princes were not allowed any political or economic power, and were confined to their mansion estates living wholly dependent upon state stipends. As Wang suggests, the boredom and the frustration that went along with being essentially exiled from court led many to pursue an interest in Daoism.²⁷² Unlike the trope of a retired official enjoying Daoist pursuits in semi-reclusive retirement, Wang shows how many among the extended imperial family became actively practicing Daoist priests, often ordained by the most popular Thunder Methods lineages of the day. Wang points to many examples of Ming Princes not only becoming ordained, but performing Daoist ritual to win the favor of the Jiajing emperor.²⁷³ During the first half of the sixteenth century, Princes were building thunder altars and installing images of Daoist gods in their palaces, being called upon

²⁶⁹ Chu Hung-Lam, “The Jiajing Emperor’s Interaction with His Lecturers,” pp. 206–228.

²⁷⁰ Chu Hung-Lam quoting Jiao Hong 焦竑, *Guochao xianzhenglu* 國朝獻徵錄 (1616), 16.41. (See Chu Hung-Lam, “The Jiajing Emperor’s Interaction with His Lecturers,” p. 207, note 94).

²⁷¹ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 3–30.

²⁷² Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, *passim*.

²⁷³ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 52–59.

by the local community to ritually intercede during droughts, and commissioned grand *jiao* to celebrate the occasion of the emperor's birthday.²⁷⁴

Practicing Thunder Methods became a primary means to curry favor with the emperor. For example, Prince Gong of Hui 徽恭王 (Zhu Houjue 朱厚燾, 1506–1550), had befriended both Shao Yuanjie and Tao Zhongwen. Through his association, Zhu Houjue gained the emperor's favor, was given the rank of *zhenren* and bestowed golden seals by the ruler himself. Zhu Houjue's son, Zhu Zailun, won the emperor's admiration and gained institutional status through his alchemical recipes, but after losing favor, was stripped of his Princedom.

Perhaps the most poignant example Wang presents is that of Prince Min of Liao 遼愍王 (Zhu Xianjie 朱憲燾, 1525–ca. 1582), a favorite of Jiajing who referred to himself by his *hao*, “Daoist Priest of Purple Yang” (Ziyang daoshi 紫陽道士), not only had his own master, but also took on his own disciples. Materiality plays a critical role in the way the emperor acknowledged Zhu Xianjie's status as a Daoist. Upon conferring on Zhu Xianjie the title of “Qingwei zhongjiao zhenren” 清微忠教真人 (Realized of Pure Tenuity who is Loyal to Daoism), the emperor bestowed “a set of the *Daozang* 道藏 [...], a gold seal, a Daoist vestment (*fayi* 法衣), and a Daoist crown (*faguan* 法冠).”²⁷⁵ The power of things was not lost on Zhu Xianjie. Wang notes how he was “keen on Daoist scriptures, talismans, spells, and other arts,” who “even in ordinary times he dressed up with Daoist clothes and crown... Whenever he went out, he donned the Daoist vestment and crown bestowed by the emperor and carried a tablet inscribed ‘deities are exempted from greeting [me]’ along with a stick for flogging ghosts.”²⁷⁶ Wang goes on to note

²⁷⁴ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 52.

²⁷⁵ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, p. 45.

²⁷⁶ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 45–46.

how the records show that Zhu Xianjie would be a full participant anytime there was a ritual to be had, even when it was at the home of commoners.

It is important here to note that the symbols of authority bestowed by the emperor are strictly those of a Daoist priest, thus exemplifying the critical place Daoism has in articulating political power at court. The accoutrements of office were not merely symbolic—Tao Zhongwen would come to receive a salary equal to that of the Grand Councilor.²⁷⁷ Likewise, the objects themselves were not only seen as symbolic. As the case of Zhu Xianjie shows, exempting the gods from their civil duty of greeting a prince and carrying a stick to beat back the demons suggests that the power these objects granted to those initiated into the ritual use of them was considered very real and very present.

While Daoism offered otherwise unobtainable access to the court, such access was a two-way street that could lead to ruin as well. Several other Daoists came to Jiajing's court espousing their ritual techniques for procuring the elixir of immortality, only to forfeit their lives when the results failed to impress.²⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the examples from Ming Princedom along with other Daoists at court make clear that Thunder Methods was clearly employed as the vocabulary in a dialogue of reciprocity and favor between the emperor and his fawning subjects. By the time Tao had established himself at Jiajing's capital, Thunder Methods had become the *lingua franca* at court. Likewise, ritual performance of exorcistic liturgies with their retinue of Thunder Deities would come to serve as a preferred means of dealing with trouble both within the palace grounds and out on the frontier—and there was plenty of trouble for a Thunder Deity to deal with in the years surrounding 1542.

²⁷⁷ *DMB*, p. 1267.

²⁷⁸ *CHC* 7, 480–481.

3.2 Ritual Response to Threats from Within and Without

Outside the palace walls, things had not been going well for the empire. In the years leading up to Jiajing's retreat into West Park, large parts of the north had been hit with a disastrous famine while the border along the northern frontier were under constant threat.²⁷⁹ Once again, Tao Zhongwen's ritual prowess was called into duty.

In 1540, Jiajing approved the famous thunder practitioner to establish Thunder Altars (*leitan* 雷壇) throughout the empire, including near Tao's hometown of Huanggang in emperor's home principality of Huguang. A few years later, Tao constructed an altar in the palace to "quell the barbarian invaders" as a pro-active line of defense against the threat of northern invasion.²⁸⁰ When tensions between the Ming and their neighbors to the north had cooled in 1551, the altars were taken down, only to be reinstated when the new threat under Altan Khan 阿爾坦汗 emerged.²⁸¹ While the motivation to construct altars in the image of the emperor's favored deities may be viewed as an effort in playing to the ruler's vanity, the effective power of the altars was nonetheless understood as real. This recourse of using Daoist ritual to combat threats from beyond the border would come to play a major role in safeguarding the emperor from threats within his own court.

Earlier in 1541, the fire that destroyed the imperial Ancestral Hall mysteriously left only the building in which Jiajing's birth-father was enshrined intact. While such suspicious circumstances must be read in terms of the political tension wrought from the Great Rites Controversy, the immediate unseen effect was one of numerous ancestral spirits being displaced without a home. From the perspective of ritual and accommodating the deceased, the potential of

²⁷⁹ *CHC* 7, 470–479

²⁸⁰ *DMB*, p. 1267.

²⁸¹ *DMB*, p. 1267.

imperial ancestors no longer receiving offerings within the proper framework of the Rites could be devastating. Even worse, the thought that imperial ancestors would be left to wander—or become orphaned spirits (*guhun*)—would be unthinkable. Thus, every precaution would have been taken to ensure that the ancestral souls were properly attended to, which means ritual prowess was paramount. In the case of official rites, propriety would be placed at a premium. In the case of Jiajing's preferred ritual program of Thunder Methods, ritual prowess would be measured in power (*ling*), and in the specific power of a ritual master's ability to summon forth exorcistic deities such as Wang Lingguan to wrangle lost souls. While it is beyond the pale of the official historical narrative to even entertain the thought that Daoist exorcism might be employed to accommodate the temporarily displaced souls of imperial ancestors, it remains well within the purview of Daoist funerary liturgy to do just that for less august spirits.

With no record from the Ministry of Rites on what rituals transpired to resituate the imperial ancestors back into the official rites after the fire, we are left to speculate on how the court responded to this unnamed crisis. It is impossible to imagine an official ceremony in which the exorcistic liturgy of Daoist Thunder Methods was employed, yet in the personal and private world of the emperor's family, we find *leifa* a ready remedy trouble with the unseen realm—whether arising from displacement or from the threat of retaliation from having being displaced.

Empress Zhang died later that year. As the minimal funerary rites were underway following the death of Empress Zhang in the months leading up to 1542, the court had to contend with a more immediate and pressing threat. The *Ming shi* records that during this time the capital was gripped in fear of another instance of “Black Terror” (*heisheng*) that Tao Zhongwen had successfully eradicated several years before in a show of ritual prowess that won him a position

at court.²⁸² Sources indicate that the capital was under the threat of a plague at that time, and the newly appointed Minister of Rites, Yan Song, responded to the threat by having pharmacopeia manuals printed up for physicians to consult throughout the capital.²⁸³ Seeking a different method for dealing with the threat, the emperor would once again call upon Tao Zhongwen to showcase his ritual prowess. In this case, the *Ming shi* reveal details that shed light on Tao's methods, recording that he "spat talismanic water from his mouth and used his sword to annihilate the sprites within the palace."²⁸⁴ Here we find the clear hallmarks of Thunder Methods exorcistic practice, the kind Daoist Zhang from the *Gengsi bian* espoused as he summoned Wang Lingguan to the scholars home. Only this time, the ritual master performing the rite is the court's most powerful Daoist—a man who was once a similar local ritual master, but now makes his home in the capital at the temple dedicated to Wang Lingguan.

On the surface, it seems as though Yan Song's response and Tao Zhongwen's response to the "Black Terror" constitute two contrasting approaches that also neatly fit into the pejorative narrative of a measured official on one hand, and a dubious Daoist on the other. Yan demonstrates a more recognizably traditional approach to what modern readers would expect to combat the threat of disease—namely, using the healing properties of ingredients. Yet, the use of exorcistic rituals to fight disease has a long history in China, as epidemiology was conceived of as combatting demonic possession and battling plague demons.²⁸⁵ Daoists since the Song dynasty would conduct rites Thunder Methods—deploying talismans, chanting incantations,

²⁸² *MS* 明史, 307.7896, p. 2023.

²⁸³ Dardess, *Four Seasons*, p. 180.

²⁸⁴ *MS*, 307.7896, p. 2023.

²⁸⁵ Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–88. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats*, 1995.

brandishing a sword—as a primary means of therapeutic rituals for healing the sick and staving off disease like that which gripped the capital in 1542.²⁸⁶

Here, the juxtaposition between Yan Song’s response to the “Black Terror” as the ranking official in the Ministry of Rites at the time, and that of Jiajing’s reflex to call in Tao Zhongwen highlights the critical role Thunder Rites played within the palace to combat the threat of death. Whether or not Tao Zhongwen really did what the *Ming shi* says he did is immaterial. The fact that the *Ming shi* records it as such indicates that responding to something as severe as a plague within the capital and the threat of its incursion into the palace with Thunder Methods was taken as a matter of course. While the records do not go into any further detail regarding the specific rituals Tao Zhongwen performed, we can be sure that the exorcistic rites executed in the palace would call upon the power and presence of such martial demon-quellers as Wang Lingguan to deal with the demonic threat within the palace. As we will see in Chapter Four, such exorcistic rites comprise the bulk of the liturgies dedicated to the Wang Lingguan. Caught within the grips of the “Black Terror” in 1542, Wang Lingguan and the apotropaic ritual materials that bear his image would provide a welcome vision of security and protection for those among Jiajing’s family like the Honored Imperial Consort Shen, who would be facing the unseen threat of death all throughout the confines of the palace. That threat would become very real later that year, as the emperor would be nearly assassinated in his own bed by the hands of the women closest to him. Let us now take a closer look at what happened then, and how the emperor’s reaction as a result helps contextualize the potential of the MMA scroll.

²⁸⁶ Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, 2001.

3.3 1542: Not a Time to Die

The MMA scroll was completed in the Summer of the *renyin* year of Jiajing's reign. According to Shen Defu, the *renyin* year is known to be particularly inauspicious for the court anytime it comes up in the calendric cycle.²⁸⁷ This particular year was already filled with tension. From the perspective of official court ritual, the death Empress Dowager Zhang raised serious concerns. As the former Empress, her passing should be accorded with certain august rites. However, the Empress Dowager was also Jiajing's fiercest rival during the Great Rites Controversy. Questions remained on how best to handle the ensuing official funerary rites, leading the emperor to ritually acknowledge her passing with as little ceremony as deemed acceptable.²⁸⁸ The lack of ceremony did not sit well with those at court who supported the Empress Dowager.

Inside the palace things were not much better. Jiajing had already eschewed management of his official duties and confined himself to his chambers to rest and fast in an effort to conserve his health.²⁸⁹ The official records indicate that Jiajing's temperament had changed and he acted like a tyrant among those close to him. Even his favorite concubines would come to rue any encounter with the mercurial ruler, fearing what his temper might bring. The tension in the palace would eventually lead to murderous intent.²⁹⁰ In the winter of 1542, only a few months after Lady Shen had commissioned the MMA scroll, a group of concubines set out to strangle the emperor to death in the bedchamber.²⁹¹ The details of what happens next have become the stuff

²⁸⁷ *WLYHB* 2 '壬寅歲厄', pp. 65–66.

²⁸⁸ *CHC* 7, p. 464.

²⁸⁹ *WLYHB* 2 '壬寅歲厄', pp. 65.

²⁹⁰ Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 197.

²⁹¹ The exact dates of this event remain in question, as some sources suggest it occurred on November 27, while others indicate it took place on October 21. (*CHC*, p. 464; Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 197). Interestingly, the *Guochao diangu* 國朝典故 Interestingly, the *Guochao diangu* 國朝典故 notes that the assassination attempt

of legend. Some accounts describe several women pinning the emperor down and gagging him while another pulled a cord around his throat. Others tell of them stabbing the emperor in his groin with their hairpins as he gasped for air.²⁹² In each case, the knot that the women tied around his throat failed, allowing time for the Empress to rush in to save him. The emperor was left wounded and unable to speak, but still alive.

Retribution for what Shen Defu calls the “Palace Rebellion of *renyin*” (*renyin gongbian* 壬寅宮變), was swift and brutal. While still unable to talk from the ordeal, it was Empress Fang who ordered the death the sixteen women immediately implicated in the failed assassination attempt, including the emperor’s favorite concubine née Cao. The imperial order came down sentencing them to a most severe death by a thousand cuts. According to Shen Defu’s own conjecture, fear of spiritual retribution from those executed drove the emperor to finally leave the palace and seek reclusion in West Park. Jiajing sought solace in Thunder Methods, and came to increasingly rely on Tao Zhongwen, who had already been placed in charge of overseeing the construction of the emperor’s a divine residence. Whether it was out of fear from spiritual retribution or fear of his physical safety, or some other combination of factors, the Jiajing emperor left his duties to enter reclusion as soon as he recovered. The emperor moved his permanent residence to the Palace of Perpetual Life (*Yongshou gong* 永壽宮) in the newly constructed West Park within the Forbidden City. There, surrounded by only his closest

occurred in the *dingyou* 丁酉 year (1537), (*Guochao diangu* 國朝典故, 36.725). I have yet to find any other sources to corroborate this dating.

²⁹² *MSL* j. 267.6, p. 5285; *Xu Wenxian tongkao* 續文獻通考 201.4389; For the doctor Shen’s 紳 response, see *MS* 114.3531, p.925. Xu Xueju 徐學聚 (fl. 1583), *Guochao dianhui* 國朝典彙 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju 1965), 10.8a; *Huadange congtan* 花當閣叢談 1.544; Zhang Han 張瀚 (1510–1593), *Songchuang mengyu* 松窗夢語 (Beijing: Beijing Ai ru Shengshu Zihua Jishu Yanjiu Zhongxin, 2009), 5.98–99. Also see Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 197; *CHC* 7, p. 464–465

confidants, such as Tao Zhongwen and Lady Shen, Jiajing would spend the next decade pursuing apotheosis as a Thunder Deity.

It is tempting to consider the MMA scroll as counter measure in light of the emperor's fear from spiritual retribution of those executed following the assassination attempt. Alas, the chronology does not allow it. According to the records, the palace women made their attempt in winter and the painting was commissioned for the first month of summer several months prior. Nonetheless, the world of Jiajing's court around 1542 was inhabited by all manner of trouble, and the recourse to objects and ritual articulated in terms of Thunder Methods liturgy proved the preferred response at court. In that response we find out something about how objects were viewed as instrumental in producing efficacious effect. This most evident in the idealized construction of West Park, wherein Jiajing had constructed for himself a literal Daoist heaven on earth.

3.4 Retreat into Paradise

Leading up to 1542, Tao Zhongwen was also hard at work overseeing the construction of one of the Thunder temples that were to comprise Jiajing's paradise on earth created on the palace grounds itself—West Park. Construction of the grounds was already well underway in 1542, when Tao Zhongwen initiated the building of the “Hall of the Thunder God who Protects the State and Enriches the People” (Youguo kangmin leidian 祐國康民雷殿).²⁹³ The temple was one of the many halls and palaces dedicated to Thunder Deities that made up what Maggie Wan argues was a concerted effort in “creating an immortal land in which [the emperor] could enact

²⁹³ *MSL*, 266.50055, p. 5269; Xu Xueju 徐學聚 (*js* 1583), *Guochao dianhui* 國朝典彙, 192, 嘉靖 21; *MS*, 209.5530, p. 1428.

the idealized life of an immortal.²⁹⁴ As her detailed research shows, over the course of time from when Jiajing first entered seclusion in 1542 to his passing in 1567, the physical grounds of West Park would transform in step with the emperor's changing pursuit of Daoist techniques for achieving immortality. In the initial decade of his seclusion, that pursuit was articulated in terms of Thunder Methods, when Jiajing's ultimate goal was to achieve apotheosis as a Thunder Deity himself. The construction, layout, and indeed the objects used to fill West Park were designed and executed to achieve that end.

Wan notes the critical role objects played in realizing this paradise,²⁹⁵ and reports of the opulence with which the construction was undertaken reveal a great many temples with a great many thunder names, all filled with a great many beautifully crafted (and expensive) objects. The expense was deemed outrageous by later writers. While Tao Zhongwen is reported to have been responsible for only one of the many temples constructed in West Park, the nearly contemporaneous *Huang Ming liangchao shuchao* 皇明兩朝疏抄 criticizes him heavily for its decadence in going well over any reasonable budget.²⁹⁶ Such opulence, however, served an important purpose—to create a Daoist paradise or Grotto Heaven (*dongtian* 洞天), suitable for a living Daoist god to inhabit.

When the emperor entered seclusion in 1543 following his recovery from the nearly fatal assassination attempt a few months earlier, he found a literal, not metaphorical, paradise awaiting him. The extravagance of precious gems and metals and soaring towers was no mere symbol of power, but the material presence of immortality itself. This point is underscored by the

²⁹⁴ Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," p. 67.

²⁹⁵ Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," *passim*.

²⁹⁶ See the section on "Commentary on the Slowness of the Thunder Hall work" ("Huan leidian gonzuo shu" 緩雷殿工作疏), Jia Sanjin 賈三近 (1534–1592) *Huang Ming liangchao shuchao* 皇明兩朝疏抄, 8.52a–53a.

installation of a gilded icon of the emperor himself as a Daoist god in the eponymous Xiangyi gong 象一宮 (Palace of Imaging Oneness).²⁹⁷ West Park thus re-creates the heavenly world of splendor described in liturgical sources as it is seen by the Daoist as he ascends to the celestial realm to meet and then call down the Thunde Deities like Wang Lingguan. As Maggie Wan points out, Jiajing's efforts to construct the rest of his paradisiacal retreat at West Park were also identified in terms of thunder ritual. Wan makes careful note of how the names given to the most significant buildings constructed during the first two years of Jiajing's permanent residency in reveal the emperor's proclivity toward the efficacious power of thunder as articulated in Thunder Methods liturgical traditions.²⁹⁸

Maggie Wan's earlier work on the production of porcelain to fill the everyday needs of West Park and its denizens also shows that the material presence of objects was consciously thought of as contributing to the paradisiacal realm it was creating—that is to say, the forms in which everyday objects such as vases and bowls took were designed for ordinary use in an extraordinary environs.²⁹⁹ Created to mimic the features of a Grotto Heaven, the 'everyday' that they evinced was on par with the banal existence of a Daoist god. Here again, the relationship between the objects and architecture of West Park and the Daoist paradise it meant to idealize was not metaphoric, but "aimed at creating an immortal land in which [Jiajing] could enact the idealized life of an immortal."³⁰⁰ The MMA scroll could have easily been commissioned for inclusion as part of the material basis for creating Jiajing's paradise. A decade later, Jiajing's identification with the potency of Thunder Methods and his search for immortality would

²⁹⁷ Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," p. 79. Wan notes that "Xiangyi" was one of the Daoist titles employed by the emperor. (see note 57, p. 79)

²⁹⁸ Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," 78; 84–86.

²⁹⁹ Maggie Wan, "Motifs with an Intention: Reading the Eight Trigrams on Official Porcelain of the Jiajing Period (1522–1566), *Artibus Asia* 63.2 (2003): 191–221

³⁰⁰ Wan, "Building an Immortal Land," p. 67.

coincide in 1556 when he would proclaim himself a god, bestowing upon himself the divine title of a thunder god “Great and Realized in Ultimate Control of the Five Thunders of the Jade Void” (“Yuxu zongzhang wulei dazhenren” 玉虛總掌五雷大真人).³⁰¹ The metaphor model that distinguishes the material object of the gilded image of Thunder God and the divine presence of the god itself thus collapses.

The world Jiajing built to live as a Daoist god foregrounds the relationship between physical place and idealized space, and Wan’s insights, especially when held in conjunction with her work on officially produced porcelain at the time,³⁰² raise the question of how objects fit in to this creative process to bring about divine presence. If the over-expenditures recorded in later sources are to be believed, those like Tao Zhongwen involved in carrying out the vision of paradise in West Park clearly emphasized the importance of materiality in creating that world. Just like the rattan image of Wang Lingguan at the Palace of Manifest Efficacy west of the Forbidden Palace, images of Daoist deities would also play an important role in West Park, where famous images of the Three Pure Ones were said to have been housed in Dagaoxuan dian.³⁰³ Jiajing himself clearly understood the material presence of icons to be critical for creating a divine persona, hence the installation of his own image as a Daoist deity at Xianggyi gong.

While the framework for apotheosis of an emperor into a god has long been part of the conceptualization of Chinese rulership since the Shang,³⁰⁴ here in West Park, the process is conceived of and articulated in the specific terms of Thunder Methods. Looking back, it is

³⁰¹ Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” p.85; MS 307.7898, p. 2024.

³⁰² Wan, “Motifs with an Intention,” 191–221.

³⁰³ Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” p. 78.

³⁰⁴ Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

possible to see how the architecture of West Park, along with its plentitude of material objects and buildings named for their place within Thunder Methods cosmology, all work together to recreate the world for Jiajing and those close to him to live out their ‘idealized life’ together—like a soundstage built to present a scene of the real thing.³⁰⁵ As such, the material apparatus is in place to structure a cosmological space for the emperor to inhabit as a god, something akin to an outward manifestation of the inner-cosmos articulated in the *neidan* rituals the emperor would famously practice there later.

Even as the emperor’s own practice would turn increasingly inward later in his life, the Thunder temples of West Park would continue to host the majority of Daoist rites performed there throughout the remainder of Jiajing’s reign. Along with his closest confidants, including his three Imperial Consorts, the emperor would conduct his own thunder rituals, as he “danced with his sword and chanted Daoist scriptures” to make it rain and snow.³⁰⁶ This personal participation in Daoist ritual within the West Park would continue throughout Jiajing’s seclusion in West Park. As Mark Meulenbeld notes, from 1542 to 1562, imperial rites would be held annually at the “Hall of the Thunder God who Protects the State and Enriches the People,” with the emperor personally participated several times.³⁰⁷ This was not the sort of lascivious pursuit of longevity Jiajing and Tao Zhongwen would be known for later in the emperor’s seclusion. Waving his sword and chanting scriptures to make it rain is not the licentious dalliance with pre-pubescent girls that has defined much of Jiajing’s Daoist legacy in the official records,³⁰⁸ but is the vocation of a trained Daoist priest.

³⁰⁵ For an example of this concept in practice during the Ming, see the case of Lady Wang/Empress Dowager Xiaojing (1565–1611) embodying Guanyin in, Li, *Becoming Guanyin*, pp. 220–293.

³⁰⁶ Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” pp. 90–91.

³⁰⁷ Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” p. 263. Meulenbeld notes that imperial rituals were often held several times a year and on a consistent annual basis, with the exception of 1544–45 and 1550–51.

³⁰⁸ *CHC* 7, 481–482.

Taking into account that Thunder Methods served as the primary mode of articulating the creation of this paradise, just as it played a central role in the *Realpolitick* of the court, then what we find is not the creation of idealized space, but the actualization of cosmic place built upon the material objects that give it form. Thus, the objects and the architecture of West Park—the world itself—is the physical manifestation of making space for Thunder to manifest as a powerful divine presence in the realized form of Jiajing the Thunder Deity. In other words, the world of West Park is the world of Thunder Ritual itself—a place created to manifesting the powerful presence of a Thunder God.

This is the world Honored Imperial Consort Shen found herself when she commissioned the MMA scroll. The main temple of the compound, the Hall of the Great and Lofty Mystery (Dagaoxuan dian 大高玄殿) was completed just around the same time in the fourth month of 1542, and it would become the site of both state rituals as well as the home for eunuchs and palace ladies “when they were learning Daoist scriptures and rituals.”³⁰⁹ We know from the records that Lady Shen had participated in the sponsorship of *jiao* ceremonies herself and had even accompanied the emperor as an active contributor to his own performance of Daoist ritual. It is possible that the impetus for commissioning the MMA scroll coincided with her involvement in Daoist ritual when the Hall of the Great and Lofty Mystery was built, and was part “learning Daoist scriptures and rituals.” Could not this environment have spurred her to commission the MMA scroll in the same month as a hopeful gesture to the emperor and a material contribution to the amassing power of Thunder that dominated the landscape of West Park? Without the proverbial smoking gun, such speculation must remain as such. Yet, we may

³⁰⁹ Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” p. 79.

still gain a better sense of how the scroll may reflect the potency of that world by turning now to the powerful woman responsible for creating this powerful object.

3.5 Honored Imperial Consort Shen

Little is known regarding the personal life of Imperial Honored Consort Shen. We know that by the time she had commissioned the MMA scroll, she was already regarded as one of the three highest ranking women in Jiajing's court, who along with Lady Yan 閔, ranked just behind the Empress and mother to the heir apparent, Lady Fang 方. The earliest mention of her life at court is an imperial edict sent to the Ministry of Rites on the first month of 1534 that acknowledges Lady Fang's rise to Empress. In addition to recognizing Lady Fang as Empress (Huanghou 皇后), the edict decrees Lady Shen is to be enfeoffed with the title "Chamber Consort" (Chenfei 宸妃 along with Lady Yan who is to become the 'Elegant Consort' (Lifei 麗妃).³¹⁰ The three women would most often appear as group mentioned together thereafter, drawing from the Tang tradition of recognizing the three most esteemed woman at court together as the "Three Consorts" (*sanfei* 三妃).³¹¹ That same year, the three ladies would accompany the emperor to the imperial ancestral temple and participate in presenting sacrificial offerings there,³¹² thus beginning what would be continued trend of actively participating in the ritual life of the emperor even as the ritual predilections of the ruler would change throughout his reign.

³¹⁰ *MSL* 158.3537; *Guochao dianhui* 國朝典彙 9.26b

³¹¹ The tradition of acknowledging the three most-honored women at court together was purported to be established during Tang Huizong's reign (712–756). See Hucker, "Lifei," p. 304.

³¹² *Ming Wanli xuwenxian tongkao* 明萬曆續文獻通考 122.7416; *MSL* 158.3546

In 1539, Lady Shen and Lady Yan are both raised to the rank of Honored Consort (Guifei 貴妃),³¹³ and by 1540, Lady Shen is referred to in the historical record by the title of “Imperial Honored Consort (Huang guifei),³¹⁴ the most prestigious rank of consort second only to the Empress Dowager and the Empress herself.³¹⁵ In her study of the world of Late Imperial imperial concubines, Hsieh Bao Hua notes that Jiajing revised the imperial consort system established by the Hongwu emperor at the start of the Ming to more closely resemble that of the Zhou dynasty by expanding the number of ranks to forty-three official titles, thus allowing for a larger harem.³¹⁶ Jiajing’s special concern for expanding the imperial harem is reflected in the numbers gleaned from official records that, according to Hsieh, show sixty-seven different enfeoffed consorts during his reign, nearly double that of the next highest (thirty-seven) of the Ming, held by the founder, Hongwu.³¹⁷ The overwhelming majority of those enfeoffed were brought to the capital as domestic servants, and would find themselves promoted (and demoted) at any given time. Indeed, as the official narrative tell it, the world of an imperial consort during Jiajing’s reign was a tense and violent realm of competition, one in which the increased role of eunuchs at court who were responsible for access to the emperor would lead to resentment and eventually outright rebellion.

As we know, the tipping point came on that fateful day in 1542, when his own concubines tried to murder the emperor. As Hsieh Bao Hua points out, this also would further limit access to the emperor, as he would from that point forward demand women come to him, thereby further

³¹³ *MSL* 191.4020, *Guochao dianhui* 9.28b 9th month JJ15

³¹⁴ *MSL* 233.4783

³¹⁵ *MSL* 233.4783. The rank of Huang Guifei was first established by the Chenghua Emperor (1464–1487) in 1466 to supercede that of *guifei*, which then became the second rank of consorts in subsequent reigns. See Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 256.

³¹⁶ Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 317.

³¹⁷ Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 279.

increasing the influence of those eunuchs responsible for arranging liaisons. This naturally led to speculation and jealousy, and the official records paint a disturbing picture of Jiajing's sexuality under the influence of Thunder Methods masters who encouraged the emperor to seek immortality in intercourse with young virgins. Hsieh notes that between the years 1547 and 1564, 1,080 young virgins were taken from the general population to meet with the emperor at West Park.³¹⁸ Such is the popular notion of Jiajing's depraved exploits undertaken in the name of Daoist pursuits, that literati like Wang Shizhen 王世真 (1526–1590) would compose poems lamenting the human cost of Jiajing's indulgence.³¹⁹

All of this paints a sordid picture of life as an imperial consort during the tumultuous reign of Jiajing, and especially so at the height of its tension in the year 1542. Nonetheless, in her role of Honored Imperial Consort, Lady Shen seemingly remained above the fray. How she managed to navigate such dangerous times remains unclear—she bore no heir. Yet, her high-ranking status and relative longevity in an otherwise dire set of circumstances points to a very powerful and masterfully adept figure. One may well wonder, then, if the MMA scroll might somehow suggest a material example of her ability to play upon the emperor's predilection toward Daoism, and in particular, the power Thunder Methods promised at court.

What little details can be found regarding Lady Shen beyond her official status suggest she was admired for her role as a matron in the life and death tumult of the imperial household. In 1554 the imperial family found themselves in crisis over the impending wedding of Jiajing's third princess, Ning An 寧安. Ning An was the daughter of the ill-fated consort Cao, who had been put to death before the wedding and thus, without Ning An's mother, the wedding posed a

³¹⁸ Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 198.

³¹⁹ Wang Shizhen 王世真, *Yanzhou shanren sibugao* 弇州山人四部稿 *j.* 47, p. 2407. See, Hsieh, *Concubinage and Servitude*, p. 198.

ritual conundrum. According to the *Ming Shilu*, an imperial decree was sent to the Ministry of Rites making Lady Shen the adopted mother of Ning An, who would then act as her surrogate and be accorded every ritual courtesy reserved for one's own birth-mother.³²⁰ The wedding could continue, and Lady Shen treated her new daughter and son-in-law as though they were her own children, including feasting them at the imperial palace and hosting a Daoist *jiao* in their honor. As Shen Defu notes, "There had never been such sagely host with such extraordinary compassion!"³²¹ While Shen Defu naturally had little way of knowing much about the Honored Imperial Consort's actual character, his "recollection" here serves as a marker for how she was perceived in the cultural memory of later generations. Lady Shen was among several powerful women at Jiajing's court, but unlike some close to the emperor, it seems as though history chose to remember her fondly.

Conflicting details surround Lady Shen's death, perhaps in part due to the record identifying her so closely with the *sanfei*. Upon her death, Lady Shen received the posthumous title of "Zhuangshun anrong zhenjing Huangguifei" 莊順安榮貞靜皇貴妃, which she seems to have shared with the Empress and Imperial Honored Consort Yan, as well.³²² The resulting confusion over three women from Jiajing's court all sharing posthumous names makes the details of Lady Shen's death difficult to trace, and results in conflicting accounts among later Ming authors.³²³

According to Shen Defu, Lady Shen's funeral took place in 1566,³²⁴ the same year the funeral of Imperial Consort Yan, and both were presented offerings in the anterior hall of the

³²⁰ *MSL* 406. *Jiaing* 33, *zhengyue*, 14. (52950), p. 7096

³²¹ *WLYHB* 3.1 p. 73.

³²² *WLYHB* 3.1, p. 73. According to Shen Defu, the specific title derives from that granted to the Chenghua Emperor's (Jiajing's grandfather) most beloved Lady Wan 萬.

³²³ *WLYHB* bixu p. 809

³²⁴ *WLYHB* bixu j. 1 809

ancestral temple (meanwhile, Muzong's mother, Lady Fang, was not installed in the ancestor temple).³²⁵ Lady Shen's death was followed by a three-day period of mandatory cessation of official business—an official act indicative of her august status, punctuated by her being enshrined in the anterior hall of ancestral temple.³²⁶ Meanwhile, the *Ming Shilu* notes that all business ceased for five days in honor of an Honored Imperial Consort Lady Shen's death fifteen years later in 1581.³²⁷

Even more puzzling, the *Ming Shilu* also notes that on the seventeenth day of fifth month in the twenty first year of Jiajing's reign (May, 31, 1542):

The Honorable Consort nee Shen died. Business was suspended for three days, and she was granted the posthumous title “Rongshu” 榮淑 (Glorious Virtue). The Honorable Consort was buried with the sacrificial etiquette in the manner befitting the Virtuous Consort “Shuhui” 淑惠, nee Wu 吳.³²⁸

Wang Qi 王圻 (1530–1615), compiler of the *Ming Wanli xuwenxian tongkao*, records the same details surrounding Lady Shen's death and awarding of posthumous title.³²⁹ In the eyes of at least two Ming sources, Lady Shen died just days after she commissioned the MMA scroll. Meanwhile, the *Ming Shilu* also records the death of a Lady Shen some four decades later as well, and it is clear to Shen Defu, at least, that a Lady Shen remained an integral part of court life two decades after the MMA scroll was commissioned. It is impossible to say what is at the source of such confusion surrounding Lady Shen's dates. Perhaps it is a result of how historical record viewed the lives of court women, and we may never know the details surrounding the

³²⁵ *WLYHB* bixu j. 1 809

³²⁶ *MSL* Shenzong, j. 117, Wanli 9yr.10month 10 day, p. 2203.

³²⁷ *MSL* Shenzong, j. 117, Wanli 9yr.10month 10 day, p. 2203.

³²⁸ *MSL* Shizong, j. 261, Jiajing 21yr. 5mo, 17 day, p. 5200.

³²⁹ Wang Qi 王圻 (1530–1615), *Shifa kao* 謚法考 (*Investigation of Posthumous Titles*), “Diho lie feitaizi” 帝后列妃太子, j. 15, in *Ming Wanli xuwenxian tongkao*, j. 148, pp. 9060–9061.

final days of the Honored Imperial Consort Shen. While the lack of a clarity is certainly frustrating, its absence does allow for an opportunity to explore the possibilities associated with the MMA scroll and its surrounding intrigue. To do so, let us now turn our attention to the broader context in which ranking women at court would find in commissioning Daoist images a means to express their own very real power.

3.6 Powerful Women and Daoist Images at the Ming Court

While the historical record leaves us little to form a clear picture of Lady Shen's personal stake in Daoism, we do know that palace women who were her immediate predecessors at court did see themselves as fully ordained and actively participating Daoists, and would envision themselves as such through means of court-sponsored paintings. While textual records indicate that the official visual representations of empresses during the Ming was limited to portraiture, Luk Yu-Ping has shown how court women found an outlet for "pictorial self-representation" in Daoist and Buddhist idioms.³³⁰ Luk focuses on the example of Empress Zhang (1470–1541), mother of the ill-fated Zhengde emperor (into whose vacated throne Jiajing ascended), and her famous *Ordination Scroll* from 1493 that shows her receiving official registers from Daoist divinities. The handscroll, which is currently housed at the San Diego Museum of Art and was featured prominently in Stephen Little's *Taoism and the Arts of China*,³³¹ depicts a procession of celestial figures transmitting an ordination certificate from a cloudy realm to the empress herself.

³³⁰ Luk suggests that while extant visual examples are limited to those preserved in albums, though textual sources suggest portraits of Ming empresses also existed as hanging scrolls, as well. (Luk Yu-ping, "Heavenly Mistress and Bodhisattva: Visualizing the Divine Identities of Two Empresses in Ming China (1368–1644)," in Melia Belli Bose, ed., *Women, Gender and Art in Asia, c. 1500–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 63–90).

³³¹ Figures from the scroll were used as the cover of the catalogue. See, Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 208–213. For an in-depth study of the handscroll, see Luk Yu-ping, *The Empress and the Heavenly Masters: A Study of the Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang (1493)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2015).

The empress is depicted in the handscroll standing to receive the documents with her attendants in tow (fig. 14).



(fig. 14)
 detail of *Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang*
 1493
 Handscroll; ink, colors, and gold on paper
 54.6 x 2,743.2 cm
 San Diego Museum of Art³³²

Like the MMA scroll, the massive *Ordination Scroll* (measuring over twenty-seven meters long and half a meter in height) was executed by an anonymous professional artists (or artists) and, according to Luk, show the Empress Zhang in a very different light than that of her official portrait preserved at the National Palace Museum in Taipei.³³³ The official portrait presents the Empress as an iconic figure “static and timeless her body functions as a frame for the display of imperial accoutrements” in a manner consistent with the other portraits that form the imperial genealogy. In contrast, the *Ordination Scroll* shows the Empress to be “dressed as a Daoist priestess,” in three-quarter pose and dynamic with vibrant colors and flowing robes, thus casting an image comparable to the matriarch of the Celestial Masters, the Mistress of the Orthodox Unity order (Zhengyi nüshi 正一女士) who appears later in the scroll.³³⁴ Taking the opportunity to present herself in Daoist imagery, the Empress Zhang commissions a work that

³³² Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 208–213.

³³³ Luk, “Heavenly Mistress and Bodhisattva,” p. 67.

³³⁴ Luk, “Heavenly Mistress and Bodhisattva,” p. 67.

fulfils her own vision of herself becoming what Luk calls the “Celestial Mistress.”³³⁵ In so doing, Empress Zhang realizes an identity separate from the genealogy of her husband or son, but one still closely connected to the role of Daoism at court during the time. Here, the connection is clearly to Celestial Master traditions of ordination and transmission³³⁶—a vision of the empress becoming a Daoist priest and a visual testament to the relationship between imperial women and Daoism.³³⁷

Thus, the *Ordination Scroll* as an artefact of Ming history serves as a material precedent for high-ranking ladies of court to express their involvement with Daoist ritual through commissioning paintings in Daoist idioms. Luk suggests that becoming the most powerful woman at court following the birth of her son in conjunction with her unique position as the Hongzhi emperor’s only consort afforded Empress Zhang the room for self-expression otherwise inaccessible to other ladies of the Ming. Such may not have necessarily been the case with Lady Shen’s position within Jiajing’s court. However, Empress Zhang’s *Ordination Scroll* does reveal the potential for Daoist paintings to affirm those who associate closely with Daoist ritual at court. Perhaps Lady Shen found in Daoism and in particular, the specific visual expression of Wang Lingguan, a way to appeal to the Jiajing emperor’s interest in Thunder Methods and influence his favor. Indeed, the specific historical circumstances surrounding the year 1542 as they relate to

³³⁵ Luk, “Heavenly Mistress and Bodhisattva,” p. 63.

³³⁶ Luk identifies the male figure just in front of the Empress as the forty-seventh Celestial Master, Zhang Xuanqing (d. 1509), who had been summoned to court on several occasions during the reign of Hongzhi, and whose rituals were thought to be responsible for securing a male heir (p. 68) Also see Luk Yu-Ping’s article, “Picturing Celestial Certificates in Zhengyi Daoism: A Case Study of the *Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang* (1493),” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society*, 3 (2011): 35–47.

³³⁷ The connection to Daoist ritual at court along with the celestial scene presented in the scroll offers a visual and material window into the conceptual world of powerful palace ladies, one in which an empress may assume the mantle of divine figure, much like those images of empresses as the bodhisattva Guanyin found in later periods. See Li, *Becoming Guanyin*, pp. 220–293; Luk, “Heavenly Mistress and Bodhisattva,” pp. 70–80.

Empress Zhang and her chilly relationship with her nephew, the Jiajing emperor, make the precedent of the *Ordination Scroll* even more intriguing.

As we have seen, Empress Zhang was one of Jiajing's main antagonists during the Great Rites Controversy, and would enjoy far less privilege at court during her nephew's reign than she had when her husband was alive. Indeed, official narratives suggest that Jiajing did his best to deny her any courtesy deserved of her role as Empress Dowager, and even perhaps actively antagonized the woman.³³⁸ When in 1541 a fire destroyed the entire imperial ancestral temple complex save the temple of Jiajing's father, Empress Zhang was no doubt nonplussed. The Empress Zhang died later that very year, just a few months before the MMA scroll was commissioned. Given Empress Zhang's self-identification with Daoism and the predominance of Thunder Methods at Jiajing's court, her passing would have been motivation enough to render Daoist ritual means to secure the safe passage of her soul in addition to the state regulated funerary rites.

There is no record of any Daoist funeral for Empress Zhang, and if such a ritual took place, it is impossible to know the degree to which Lady Shen would have been involved. If there is a connection between Empress Dowager Zhang's death and the MMA scroll, we can only speculate whether the motivation for commissioning the scroll was born out of concern for the safe passage of a respected ancestor or out of fear from the restless soul of a bitter rival coming back to seek vengeance, as Shen Defu himself speculates compelled Jiajing to flee to the safety of West Park. While attempting to comment on the personal motivations of those in the past is dangerous guesswork at best, at the very least Shen's account shows how an emperor

³³⁸ In 1521, a fire completely destroyed her residence and forced her to live in a reduced condition, as building efforts were at the time being concentrated on constructing the temple for the emperor's father as newly proclaimed imperial ancestor and thus effectively ended the Great Rites Controversy.

operating out of fear from vengeful spirits would find solace bringing those closest to him to live together among the material presence of Daoist Thunder Deities.

Concluding Remarks: The Object of Power

Lady Shen commissioned the MMA scroll at a time of heightened tension in an already tumultuous reign. We may not know what exactly prompted the Honored Imperial Consort to request such an image, but we do know that the dangerous circumstances surrounding its creation were also a time when the emperor and those close to him would find solace in Daoist Thunder Methods. More than mere dalliances with corrupting charlatans, Jiajing took a direct and active interest in Daoist ritual, and would come to rely on the ritual prowess of Thunder Methods masters like Shao Yuanjie and Tao Zhongwen to combat the many threats beset upon his reign and upon his person. Thunder Methods ritual, and the power that it promised, became the language of court politics and opened the way to gain favor with the ruler, while also serving to preserve his security. Meanwhile, Wang Lingguan remained a powerful figure in the eyes of the court, and as a powerful woman herself, Honored Imperial Consort Shen was close to the emperor and no doubt understood the power that an image of Wang Lingguan would have.

Daoist images were understood to be powerful. Jiajing's own attempts at apotheosis after he left the court and entered into reclusion at West Park suggest that the material opulence of his new home was charged with the power of creating an actual Daoist paradise on earth. During the time surrounding when the MMA scroll was commissioned, the emperor articulated that vision of paradise in terms of Thunder Methods ritual. Sponsoring the construction of Thunder temples and ritual programs in which he and his consorts would actively participate, Jiajing sought a sense of salvation expressed through ritual and materiality directly related to Thunder Methods.

The MMA scroll was thus fashioned in this crucible of an empowered world where the power of Thunder was manifest in the material objects of the imperial family.

The MMA scroll thus reflects a critical moment in the life of the imperial family when the power of Daoist Thunder Deities could be called upon to combat threats both seen and unseen. That the Honored Imperial Consort Shen chose to commission an image of Wang Lingguan speaks to the continued relevance the deity enjoyed within imperial circles. Wang Lingguan's efficacious response remained something to be counted upon. While we may never know the exact nature of the response Lady Shen was looking for, we can know how imaging Wang Lingguan's form was understood to produce the efficacy of response. To do so, we must avail ourselves to the ritual manuals that articulate how to manifest Wang Lingguan's "true form."

Follow me, fearless reader, that we may sojourn together into the ritual world of producing thunder...

Intermezzo Two: The Productive Power of Visuality

In exploring how the MMA scroll can help address questions of what objects *do*, we have moved from identifying the painting through iconography to situating the scroll within the broader worldview of Wang Lingguan at the Ming court. In Chapter One, we used iconography to situate the painting within different images of Wang Lingguan, taking special note of the particular element of the “iron bottle” that gestures toward the painting’s possible relation to *liandu* ritual. In Chapters Two and Three, we situated the MMA scroll within the world of Wang Lingguan at court, and in particular, the role Thunder Magic and Daoist objects play as objects of power in the Ming worldview. We now return to the painting to consider how it can be an object of power by re-envisioning the sources for iconography in terms of their original purpose—to manifest the presence of the god.

By carefully reading the ritual texts in the context of their original invocatory purpose, the visual elements found therein gain a new kind of meaning. The ritual language of visuality is not only a useful tool for iconography, but is fundamentally a language of producing divine power. Considering the visuality of Daoist images like the MMA scroll through that same invocative vocabulary of the ritual texts raises questions and possibilities for understanding what objects can *do*. Over the next three chapters, I employ the concept of visuality as a theoretical tool to show how Daoist liturgy can help articulate what the MMA scroll can do as an object in and of itself. Thus, I take a phenomenological approach to how Daoist images are perceived, but in a way that utilizes the indigenous vocabulary of Daoist ritual to articulate how such images are capable of producing presence.

In turning to how ritual articulations of visuality manifest the presence of Wang Lingguan, we must recognize that Daoist discourse has its own conceptual terminology for

engaging with the power of visuality itself. Central to this discourse is the concept of *zhenxing* 真形, often translated as the “true form.” The notion of the “true form,” or perhaps the “real form,” reflects the active and ongoing relationship between that which is without form (*wuxing* 無形) and that which has form (*youxing* 有形). According to *Lao Zi*, that which is without form is the Dao itself. Hence, the “Great Image that has No Form” found therein can be read as a claim to the higher truth of the formless—the “true” form.³³⁹ That which is with form then, is at best, a secondary order simulacrum of the “true” and “real” nature of the Dao. Such is the dominant discourse on how form relates to the Dao, and in particular, how Daoist images relate to the power of Daoist divinities.³⁴⁰ Images are not “true” or “real” (*zhen* 真) in the sense that the true power of the god lies in its state of formlessness.³⁴¹

However, Daoist ritual, and in particular Thunder Methods rites for manifesting the presence of exorcistic deities, challenges this notion that the “true form” of the god is truly formless. The ritual manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan describe a process of bringing his divine presence into form, and therefore into being, through a litany of invocations, visualizations, body postures, and writing talismans used in concert to articulate the god emerging from formlessness. The aim of these rites is to make Wang Lingguan “real” and “truly” present. Thus, within the context of invocatory liturgy, the “true form” or “real form” is not a secondary state of simulacrum, but more an active process of becoming “real”—a “realizing of form,” a “form becoming true.” The following three chapters use this particular reading of

³³⁹ LZ 41 大象無形. François Jullien basis his phenomenological inquiry of Chinese paintings based on this line, and the higher-order truth he finds understands it to make. See François Jullien, *The Great Image Has no Form, On the Nonobject Through Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

³⁴⁰ See Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, *passim*.

³⁴¹ The concept of *zhen* forms a critical juncture both within Daoist discourse and in Chinese discourse at large. For an overview in a personal vein, see Vera Schwarcz, *Colors of Veracity: A Quest for Truth in China, and Beyond* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014). Also see Poul Andersen’s forthcoming work on the philosophical implications for reconsidering *zhen* as an active principle.

“*zhenxing*” to describe the ways in which the visuality of MMA scroll actively re-produces the ritual process of bringing Wang Lingguan into being by manifesting his form. In so doing, we consciously expand the sense of what “true form” can mean when looking at images of Daoist gods through the lens of Daoist ritual.

In ritual manuals like those dedicated to manifesting Wang Lingguan, the process of “realizing the form” of the god in this mode is not a representation of its power, but seen as the actual presence of the god itself. The connection between form and spiritual presence of the deity is such that Thunder Method liturgies are replete with the threat of annihilating the forms of those agents who dare disobey the ritual authority. While in the case of Thunder Methods traditions such threats are issued within the context of exorcistic rites, the logic underpinning its potency applies beyond the demonic—to dissolve one’s form is to return to the formless, and thus, cease to be. Correlatively, by bringing Wang Lingguan into form, the rituals bring Wang Lingguan into being.

To do so, the Daoist must first create the space into which Wang may emerge. This is accomplished by locating Wang Lingguan within a hierarchy of ritual authority so that he may be controlled. The Daoist does so by invoking different stages of hierarchical structure, all placing themselves at the top by identifying with the civil authority of Sa Shoujian, Wang Lingguan’s master. From this ordered backdrop, the Daoist then begins to “realize” the presence of the martial deity through the ritual performance of “transformation of the body/spirit” (*bianshen* 變身/神). This embodied process requires a visual language in order to help the Daoist “see” the god emerge from the formless into form. Visuality, then, plays a central role in the overall conceptual framework in which divine figures become real.

We find this invocative sense of visuality in the ritual texts for creating talismans to manifest Wang Lingguan's "true form." There, the imagistic qualities of the writing are meant to invoke the very presence of the gods, stroke by each invocative stroke, to then be brought together into singular holistic form of the talisman. Having thus been charged by the presence of Wang Lingguan and his divine retinue, the talisman is made into a powerful object in and of itself, capable of fulfilling the efficacious promise of the gods it images.

Visuality, thus, plays a critical role in the ritual processes for manifesting divine presence.³⁴² Giving form to Wang Lingguan, seeing Wang Lingguan, and being seen by Wang Lingguan are all ritual acts within the larger repertoire of producing his divine power such that it can then be directed toward efficacious ends. As such, visuality here is an active process, one that is capable of producing efficacious results. This productive sense of visuality changes the way we view objects in how they image divine forms, such that we must consider objects like the MMA scroll in their potential to produce divine presence, as well. By closely reading how liturgical manuals articulate the process of manifesting his "true form" in concert with the MMA scroll's visual elements, we may begin to see how an object may make Wang Lingguan's form "real" and "truly" present. Thus, the following three chapters work together to explore how the visuality of the MMA scroll reflects the visual language it shares with the rituals for manifesting Wang Lingguan's presence.

³⁴² The critical role of visuality plays in framing how Daoists "see" has not been lost on scholars looking at Daoist images. Susan Huang's work, for example, has traced many connections between the aesthetics of Daoist ritual and Daoist Visual Cultures that refocus how one views images through the notion of true forms. In a similar vein, Maggie Wan has shown how Daoist visual and material culture proved to be an efficacious means for Ming emperors to respond to threats. Alternatively, both Françoise Jullien and Mathias Obert have each approached the Chinese discourse on *shanshui* painting to show how the ways viewing images of mountains and waters directly relates to Daoist discussions of form and formlessness. In addition, scholars religion and visual/material cultures outside of the Daoist purview such as Paul Copp, David Morgan, Yuhang Li, Diana Eck, and Rachel Nies have taken up broader questions of what it means to "see" and "be seen" in ritual contexts. This is no means an exhaustive list, but I mention these scholars here as their work has directly influenced my own way of utilizing visuality as theoretical tool to look at the MMA scroll.

Chapter 4: Efficacy of the Visual

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road...

Introduction

Returning to the language of Daoist liturgy provides an opportunity to reassess what ritual language does and how its context impacts the way it gets used to describe images of Daoist figures. Rather than only look to the descriptive power of ritual language to help identify iconographic elements in a painting like the MMA scroll, to consider such visual language in its original context, we must also consider its invocative power. More than just depicting a god's appearance, the visual language of ritual serves to invoke the god's presence. In other words, the MMA scroll shares more with the liturgical language than just iconography. It also shares the invocative power behind such visual language.

Visuality, then, must be viewed in terms of its ritual power insofar as it is meant to produce effects in the same way as invocations. According to the ritual manuals, visualizing Wang Lingguan's form plays a critical role in manifesting Wang Lingguan. In the course of ritual performance, when a Daoist envisions Wang as he appears in the invocatory texts, he sees the process of an otherwise formless spirit emerging into form. The act of seeing, then, is an active process of making the god "real" (*zhen*). While the conventional sense of "*zhen*" indicates the unseen potential of the Dao in the Daoist conceptualizations of "true form" (*zhenxing*), here in the rituals manifesting divine power, the process is one of realizing that "true form" such that it becomes "real" in ritual space. Thus, "*zhen*" functions here in an active sense, "to make real"

and in the particular realm of visualizing Daoist deities, to bring the potential of the formless into an actual and present form.

The invocatory roots of that same visual language allows us to “read” the MMA scroll as an invocatory “text” thus capable of manifesting Wang Lingguan’s divine presence on its own. In this sense, the MMA scroll also actively images Wang Lingguan’s form with a visual vocabulary it shares with the ritual texts. By giving Wang Lingguan form in this way, the scroll also makes the god “real” or “true” by manifesting its “true form.” In turn, the MMA scroll holds the potential to manifest the presence of the deity as an object in and of itself. To begin to understand how, let us return to the ritual texts and the visual vocabulary that describes how the Daoist manifests Wang Lingguan’s appearance.

4.1 Contextualizing Visual Vocabulary within the “Liturgical Gaze”

The ritual texts of the *Daoist Canon* describe how a Daoist is able to manifest the presence of Wang Lingguan. Liturgical instructions for writing talismans within in the manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan*, where we find the liturgical sources dedicated to Wang Lingguan, pronounce piece by piece the appearance of the god in exacting iconographic detail. Generally speaking, the vibrant visual language found throughout similar texts of the *Daoist Canon* form the basis for iconographical identification of otherwise unrecognizable Daoist deities in both art and literature. Yet, from the perspective of the rituals themselves and the ritual efficacy that they profess, the way in which Wang Lingguan appears in these texts must also be seen in terms of the potential to fulfil the efficacious promise of the liturgy—through “liturgical gaze.” The “liturgical gaze” here refers to an overall embodied performance of talismans, incantations, hand gestures, utterances, and body postures all contained under the rubric of “secret instructions”

(*mijue* 秘訣)—that in turn charges the visual elements found in the manuals with the power of manifesting divine presence.

Viewing the relationship between the visual element we find in the MMA scroll and the liturgical texts from the perspective of the “liturgical gaze” problematizes Daoist iconography as it has been pursued by recent scholarship, including my own work with the Daoist Iconography Project.³⁴³ Most images of Daoist deities are not labelled as such, and given the challenges of lacking any authoritative standard for how a Daoist deity should look, the primary focus for looking at a Daoist image is first to identify figure in question. For this, liturgical manuals like those in the *Daofa huiyuan* prove invaluable sources for matching specific iconographic features with identifiable deities from Daoist ritual.

The second goal of Daoist Iconography, then, is to place the image as a ritual object within the context of ritual practice. Contextualizing Daoist images in ritual performance resituates them in their functional role as part of the material apparatus of the Daoist altar. Not all images of Daoist deities necessarily belong to a ritual context, but many hanging scrolls just like the MMA scroll are found as part of the travelling altar of Daoist priests. For example, within contemporary *jiao* rites practiced in Taiwan, Daoists hang multiple scrolls of individual Daoist deities to create a physical perimeter round the altar that serves to delineate the ritual space within from the space outside.³⁴⁴ As such, painted scrolls are part of a larger contingent of objects such as incense burners, memorials, swords, offerings, and various other ritual

³⁴³ The Daoist Iconography Project 道教圖像學計畫 (Daojiao tuxiangxue jihua) initiated under the direction of Poul Andersen in 2005 as a joint venture between the University of Hawai'i and the Honolulu Academy of Art, establishes an online database for identifying and studying images of Daoist deities with a particular focus on contextualizing them within ritual contexts. See <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/daoist-iconography/>. Also see, Naparstek, “Why do Bad Gods Look so Good?” 2005.

³⁴⁴ For a discussion of this aspect of ritual layout, see Mark Meulenbeld's article “The Dark Emperor's Law,” found on Academia.edu.

accoutrements that define the Daoist altar. The image below of an altar table (fig. 15), taken during a *jiao* held in Xigang 西港 in southern Taiwan, shows how ritual objects work together, as various implements are assembled before a painted scroll of the “Gate of Heaven” (fig. 16).³⁴⁵



(fig. 15)
Main altar table, showing ritual manual, incense burner, fan, water bowl, thunder block (*leiju* 雷局), offerings, and other accoutrements. Set before the “Gate of Heaven” scroll.”
(photo taken by author, 2010)

The Daoist ritually charges the altar space Through the use of these objects in concert with “secret techniques” deployed during invocatory performance. In the case of ritual scrolls, the Daoist summons the gods one by one to be present in the altar space, although not every scroll in an altar functions the same way. Some may be viewed as the temporary locale of a summoned deity, particularly those found in the outer altar and along the borders of the perimeter where we would likely find Wang Lingguan and his martial comrades. Other scrolls seem to signify space in the heavens. The “Gate of Heaven” is painted on a scroll and hung at the altar before images of the Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing* 三清), the high gods of Daoism. The “Gate of Heaven” is the entrance to the celestial realm, and the Daoist will kneel before the scroll

³⁴⁵ The *jiao* was part of a Wang Ye 王爺 (i.e Plague King) festival. Festivals dedicated to Wang Ye are more common throughout southern Taiwan and along the coast of Southeast China, where they offer a glimpse into the interaction between contemporary Daoist ritual and popular religious practices, including the dramatic climax of a large boat set afire to send off the Plague King. For a discussion of the festival as it centers on the cult of Wen Yuanshuai 溫元帥 (Marshal Wen) in Zhejiang, see Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats*, 1995.

during their journey in order to gain access to the heavenly realm that they may have an audience with the Three Pure Ones (fig. 17).



(fig. 16)
Gate of Heaven
(photo taken by
author, 2010)



(fig. 17)
Master Chen Rongshen
kneeling before the Gate of
Heaven
(photo taken by author, 2010)

Here, scrolls of the Three Pure Ones themselves are hung behind enclosures representing different heavenly palaces. No priest would dare summon the Three Pure Ones. Rather, those scrolls are to help situate the Daoist's orientation toward these manifestations of the Dao in order to present his memorial on behalf of the community (fig. 18). As we can see in this brief example, hanging scrolls of Daoist deities generally function as physical and visual markers within ritual performance.



(fig. 18)
Scroll of Yuanshi Tianzun hung at behind the altar
enclosure "Heavenly Palace of Jade Clarity" (*Yuqing
tiangong* 玉清天宫).
(photo taken by author, 2010)

Contextualizing Daoist images within their ritual function, then, opens the way to consider images from the perspective of divine presence and efficacy. Situated within ritual

performance, a scroll like the MMA scroll can now be read as a function of how it serves the liturgical program. Visual elements that identify a Daoist figures like Wang Lingguan become necessarily charged with the symbolic meaning as they relate to a given ritual performance. The move to establish the ritual framework for change our perspective of the scroll as an object, as well. In the case of the MMA scroll, viewing the object at the Metropolitan Museum of Art raises different questions than viewed as an artifact of Wang Lingguan's patronage at the Ming court. Likewise, viewing the MMA scroll in terms of its role in ritual, in turn, leads to an entirely new set of questions. From the perspective of ritual context, what role the scroll plays in the ritual program becomes critical in investigating these different layers of meaning. Thus, the scroll must be "read" in terms of ritual before the full picture emerges of what the MMA scroll can *do*.

To do so requires the scroll to be interpreted in terms of its purpose within the specific ritual performance. That is to say, ritual becomes the means to interpret the meaning of the scroll. Like using the visual language of ritual manual to interpret iconography, "reading" a ritual to make sense of an image adds layers of meaning that are otherwise missing. However, doing so also privileges the meaningfulness of the ritual program over the meaningfulness of the scroll itself. That is to say, to "read" the MMA scroll only as part of the architecture that structures the ritual is to ignore the potential of the object as an object in and of itself. The "Liturgical Gaze" then is to look beyond the only contextualizing Daoist images within the physical architecture of a Daoist rite, and consider the objects themselves within the invocatory context of objects seen as capable of manifesting divine presence.

4.2 Beyond Iconography

The “Liturgical Gaze” allows us to look beyond traditional iconography and its semiotic underpinnings. Using textual sources to interpret images necessarily assumes a hierarchy of meaning that privileges meaning as it articulated in the texts over meaning articulated in image. From the lexical perspective, the direction of meaning flows down from text to object/practice, in which meaning is mediated through textual interpretation that teaches us to “read.” Reading an image in terms of another text imposes a separation between the immediacy of an object like the MMA scroll and its meaningfulness. In the case of ritual images, reading in this way makes a clear distinction between the presence (or perhaps power) of the object itself and the “truer” (more powerful) meaning of what its imagery symbolizes. This becomes especially problematic when using ritual texts as a source. Rather than take seriously the claim within the rituals that ritual scrolls are capable of producing efficacious results themselves, the impulse to interpret such claims as metaphoric imposes a worldview indicated by Robert Orsi in the Introduction, in which the power of religious objects needs to be explained away.³⁴⁶

According to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, this turn toward metaphorization is a particular outcome of the historical circumstances that gave rise to the Enlightenment.³⁴⁷ Gumbrecht laments Western preoccupations with “interpretation” and the subsequent loss of a vocabulary to engage with what he calls a “nonhermeneutic” model of “presence.” This leaves the proverbial linguistic cupboard bare when it comes to finding the proper vocabulary to articulate power in an object leading to frustration for addressing phenomenological concerns for what objects do.

³⁴⁶ See Orsi, *History and Presence*, 2016.

³⁴⁷ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 2004. Gumbrecht paints the issue of loss of “nonhermeneutic” models as specifically an issue stemming from the Enlightenment. As we have seen in the introduction to this study Robert Orsi also shares this fundamental lament in the modern encounter of the Eucharist in Catholic ritual. I suspect that the roots of the “metaphoric impulse” stretch farther back than the Enlightenment period, and have as much to do with cultural shifts that emphasize allegorical interpretations of the Bible.

Instead, Euro-centric discourse on the meaning of things generally reflects a metaphoric impulse that seeks to locate meaning elsewhere. When it comes to images of divine figures, meaning is often interpreted and read through a system of symbols and thus, pointing beyond the object itself. Thus, the study of religious images is a practice in how to read.

This leads to a question of methodology when considering using the language of ritual texts to understand how to “read” the MMA scroll. The texts that form our source material are designed to produce the power of the divine. Those same visual details that helped identify Wang Lingguan in the MMA scroll are part of a performative language that, within the context of the ritual, makes manifest that which it pronounces. Like the classic example of a “speech-act” in which the pronouncement of ‘husband and wife’ actually makes the relationship so, the visual pronouncements that define Wang Lingguan’s form are to make it real.³⁴⁸ Thus, one cannot simply “read” these texts only by their semantic sense, nor can we “read” an image like the MMA scroll only by locating its visual elements within a system of symbolic meaning. To do so would both force the sources into a Euro-centric discourse of how meaning is conveyed, and cause us to overlook the power of their own vocabulary to articulate meaning in their own terms. If we were to take the liturgical text out of its invocatory contexts for the sake of simply identifying iconographic features, we risk imposing the same hierarchy that privileges abstract interpretive meaning, and thus render impotent the potent vocabulary of invocatory language to produce presence.

³⁴⁸ Here, our discussion of invocatory language as performative language draws on more general considerations of performativity and its relationship to “speech-acts,” as crystallized in the earlier work of Judith Butler (see, Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (Dec., 1988): 519–531). I am grateful for the conversations with Tobias Zürn, Aaron Reich, and Mark Meulenbeld from which these considerations arise. The application of “performativity” as a theoretical discourse to the phenomenological presence of Daoist images is beyond the scope of the present study, but I look forward to exploring it in greater detail in the near future.

Instead, by considering the invocatory purpose of the vocabulary we find in the ritual manuals when using it to “read” the MMA scroll, we gain a different sense of what the scroll itself is capable of. If a painting like the MMA scroll shares the visual language of invocatory text, then by articulating that shared visual vocabulary, the scroll can produce the same effect. Like a talisman, the painting can reproduce the invocative power that language and manifest the presence of the god whose form it images—actively realizing its “true form.” Likewise, if a scroll can manifest the god’s “true form,” then by showing the deity in action, the painting also reproduces the effect of the deity emerging to perform such action. In the case of the MMA scroll, Wang Lingguan leads a dynamic scene in which several divine figures emerge from a cloudy backdrop to charge down toward serpent-filled waters below. In the same way the scroll manifests Wang’s “true form,” the scene mimics the ritual world in which the god performs his duty, and as such, promises a similar efficacious result as those rituals that set the god to task. In this way, the text of the ritual manuals offers a vocabulary for articulating what an object like the MMA scroll can do.

As such, “reading” the visual vocabulary of the MMA scroll in invocatory terms through the “liturgical gaze” shows that it can do more than reflect an iconography grounded in ritual texts and do more than serve as part of a larger liturgical ensemble of hanging scrolls. The invocatory roots of that same visual language allows us to “read” the MMA scroll as an invocatory “text” in and of itself and capable of manifesting Wang Lingguan’s divine presence. This in turn opens up the visual vocabulary of Daoist ritual in a new way—one that is capable of articulating presence in a way Euro-centric discourse no longer can.

To see how this ritual vocabulary articulates presence requires a closer look at the language of the ritual manuals itself. The following section begins our sojourn into the rich

liturgical material preserved in the texts of the *Daofa huiyuan*, beginning with a discussion of the general structure of the texts and their place within the *Daoist Canon*, before focusing on the invocatory language itself and its relationship to the visuality of the MMA scroll.

4.3 Hierarchal Forms in Liturgy and Visuality

Wang Lingguan appears throughout a number of texts of the *Daoist Canon*, most often in those associated with the Shenxiao tradition. However, the three manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* (*juan* 241–243) are the only instances of liturgies dedicated specifically to Wang Lingguan within the *Zhengtong Daozang* of 1445.³⁴⁹ The *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, dedicated to Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian, appears in the later Wanli publication of the *Daoist Canon* (1607) and is mostly devotional.³⁵⁰ Chronologically, the MMA scroll commissioned in 1542 sits between the two, and while neither necessarily reflects the exact time and place of the MMA scroll, all three speak in concert to the broader worldview in which Wang Lingguan inhabits during Jiajing's reign.³⁵¹ Likewise, it is more than likely that the texts themselves circulated throughout local traditions prior to inclusion into the canon.³⁵² Thus, we may look to each of

³⁴⁹ The Ming compilation of incantations (*zhou*) entitled, *Taishang sanding shenzhou* 太上三洞神咒 (Divine Incantations from the Three Caverns Most High) also includes two spells for summoning Wang Lingguan 召王靈官咒, whose text closely parallels that of *juan* 243 of the *Daofa huiyuan*. See DZ 78 *Taishang sanding shenzhou*, 9.19a. Sa Shoujian, on the other hand, does appear elsewhere, including separately within the *Daofa huiyuan* as the source of discourses on the power of Thunder. See, DZ 1220: “Leiting xunlun” 雷霆玄論, 67.11a–18a.

³⁵⁰ DZ 1443 *Taishang Yuanyang shangdi wushi tianzun shuo Wang Lingguan zhenjing* 太上元陽上帝無始天尊說王靈官真經.

³⁵¹ Mark Meulenbeld notes the parallel narrative structures between the first fifty-five *juan* of the *Daofa huiyuan* and Zhou Side's *Shangqing Lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書, thus helping paint a more complex picture of the interaction between Daoists from the Yongle to the Zhengtong reign that necessarily includes Wang Lingguan. See Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” p. 245.

³⁵² Judith Boltz suggests that many of the texts within the *Daofa huiyuan* can be traced to the Song. Pointing to a series of communications on Thunder Methods penned by Bo Yuchan at Chongyou Abbey 冲祐觀 (Fujian) dated 1216 and found in “Wuyi ji” 武夷集 (Collected Works from Wuyi) section of the anthology DZ 263 *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (Ten Books on Cultivating Realized Nature), Boltz notes how these communiques clarify many of the local liturgies found in the *Daofa huiyuan*. (DZ 263: 47.10a–16b. See: Boltz, *Survey*, p. 179; Baldrian-Hussein, *TC*, p. 935–36). On the other hand, if Li Fengmao's suggestion that the popularity of Wang Lingguan was a direct result

these textual sources to help define the focus of the liturgical gaze through which the MMA scroll may have been viewed during the time it was commissioned.³⁵³

Looking to the overall structure of ritual texts, we see a pattern of hierarchical relationships that define the interaction between the Daoist and the figures of Sa and Wang. Each of the three manuals dedicated to Wang Lingguan found within the *Daofa huiyuan* begin by invoking the deities who will be called on to undertake the duties described in the proceeding rituals. All three texts start with the master Sa Shoujian, who is variously identified as the ‘originator of the method’ and the ‘lineage master.’³⁵⁴ Upon introducing Sa Shoujian, each text identifies him locally as Sa who originates from West River (Xihe), before highlighting different aspects of his broader identity, whether as a patriarch in the established Shenxiao tradition or as the itinerant Daoist from Sichuan and savior of the weary and downtrodden. By explicitly identifying Sa as a Shenxiao master, *juan* 241 and 242 claim lineage authenticity for their rites of Wang Lingguan.

of imperial patronage, then the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* may have been produced after the *Zhengtong* Canon was finished. (see Li Fengmo, *Xu Xun yu Sa Soujian*, pp. 264–273). As such, unlike the *Daofa huiyuan* texts, the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* may not necessarily reflect an ongoing codification of local traditions, but perhaps comes out of an institutional context. More work on the textual history of the scripture needs to be done before any conclusions can be drawn

³⁵³ Boltz notes that the latest internal date within the *Daofa huiyuan* is 1356. However, the Qingwei figure Zhao Yizhen, 趙宜真 who features prominently within the first section, died in 1382, indicating that the *Daofa huiyuan* had likely not been completed before the imperially-sponsored undertaking of the *Zhengtong Daozang* had begun in 1406 at the behest Yongle reign. Scholarly consensus points to the Qingwei master, Shao Yizheng 邵以正 (d. 1462) who was responsible for overseeing the completion of the entire *Daozang* as the most likely candidate for also competing the *Daofa huiyuan*. In his analysis of the first-fifty *juan* of the *Daofa huiyuan*, Mark Meulenbeld argues that the ritual compendium was likely the last piece included in the whole canon, and perhaps even delayed the *Daozang*'s publication. See Boltz, *Survey*, p. 179, *EoT*, pp. 316–319.; Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” pp. 244–250. For a more general overview of the *Daofa huiyuan* and its organizational structure as a whole, see Piet van der Loon, “A Taoist Collection of the Fourteenth Century,” in Wolfgang Bauer, ed. *Studio Sinica-Mongolica, Festschrift Herbert Franke* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979), pp. 401–405; Baldrian-Hussein, *TC*, p. 935–36. For an overview of the *Zhengtong Daozang* and its place among imperial-sponsored projects to collect and codify Daoist sources, see, Poul Andersen, “The Study of the *Daozang*,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 3 (Copenhagen 1990): 81–94.

³⁵⁴ ‘zhufa 主法,’ (DZ 1220: 241.1a, 242.1a.) ‘shipai’ 師派 (DZ 1220: 243.1a).

With specific regard to the performance of the rituals themselves, the texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* clearly identify Sa as the figure of authority under whose watch the ritual may proceed to its efficacious conclusion. Likewise, the texts of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* also invoke Sa Shoujian as the authority figure, who oversees Wang's violent efforts in saving the souls of the dead.³⁵⁵ In so doing, the texts establish a hierarchical distinction between the “civil” (*wen* 文) persona of the Daoist Sa Shoujian over the “martial” (*wu* 武) persona of the Thunder Deity, Wang Lingguan—a hierarchical distinction we have seen recurring in the narrative traditions discussed previously. As Kristofer Schipper's seminal study on the unique role of Daoist priests shows, the exclusive purview to conduct rituals in the civil idiom defines Daoist performances from those of any other ritual specialist.³⁵⁶ We can see the binary structure articulated in terms of “civil” and “martial” also in the composition of the MMA scroll where Sa literally appears dressed as Daoist floating above Wang as he surveys the violent waters below. Their juxtaposition in the composition reflects a *ritual relationship* in which the civil Daoist controls and commands the martial deity. The hierarchical relationship that posits the Daoist master above the gods comes to be articulated in terms of *wen* and *wu*. Thus, considering the dynamics between *wen* and *wu* further offers a way to view the tableau itself in ritual terms

The *wen/wu* relationship defines much of Thunder Methods ritual, in which the authority to control the violent spirits of Thunder Methods is located in the civil authority of the Daoist ritual persona of what Kristofer Schipper has called the “dignitary of the Dao”—the Daoshi 道士.³⁵⁷ In the case of contemporary Daoist ritual, the Daoshi can fulfill both *wen* and *wu* roles in a

³⁵⁵ DZ 1443: 10a. See Chapter 1.

³⁵⁶ Kristofer Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism,” *JAS* 45 (Nov. 1985): 21–57.

³⁵⁷ Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 55.

given performance, as they can oscillate between the civil and martial personae through both internal and external transformations.³⁵⁸ One can observe the change of external ritual demeanor of a Daoshi depending upon whether they face the “inner altar” (*neitan* 內壇) where images of the Daoist high gods are hung, or facing the “outer altar” (*waitan* 外壇) on the opposite side, where the pantheon of lower ranking and local deities reside.³⁵⁹ When facing the inner altar where images of Daoist high gods hang, the Daoshi performs in the idiom of an official audience presenting memorials. Turning to face the outer altar where the pantheon of local deities gather, the Daoshi performs in the idiom of a martial figure general, barking orders and waving their sword to command their troops with exaggerated movements that produce a wild and violent affect.³⁶⁰ This relationship between *wen* and *wu* underlies the role of the Daoist in relation to the wild and local spirits that come to be incorporated into the pantheons of Thunder Methods traditions.³⁶¹ This relationship also defines the power dynamics between Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan that we have seen previously in the narrative traditions, and now here in how the ritual texts of the *Daoist Canon* are structured.

Critically, the dynamics between *wen* and *wu* come to be expressed in the performance of the ritual itself. By first invoking the presence of Sa Shoujian as we see in the *Daofa huiyuan* texts, the Daoist identifies their own authority to conduct the ritual in terms of Sa. Likewise, when Wang Lingguan is made present in the altar space, the ritual texts instruct the Daoist to

³⁵⁸ Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp. 45–71.

³⁵⁹ Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp. 89; Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society*, pp. 31–35; Own fieldwork in Taiwan, 2010. While these sources are limited by their reliance on Daoist ritual as practiced in contemporary Taiwan, they offer examples of the general principles of how ritual roles play out according to altar space in the performance of a Daoist priest.

³⁶⁰ Fieldwork in Taiwan, 2010.

³⁶¹ Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, 1990; Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” 2007; Boretz, *Gods, Ghosts, and Gangsters*, 2011.

control the martial deity by “illuminating” (*zhao* 照) him with the “precious character” of Sa in order that he may follow one’s command:

Once he has come to stand there, with your hand write the precious character (寶字) of Lineage Master Actualized Sa as a single luminance. This general will cup his hands in reverence to hear your command and avail himself to your will.

就以立乎書祖師薩真人寶字一照, 其將方拱手聽令任意驅遣。³⁶²

This particular summoning incantation from the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” concludes a process of externalizing the internal fiery *qi* (火氣) cultivated by the Daoshi, instructing them to quickly invoke the graphic authority of Sa Shoujian, Wang’s master, by writing his precious character over the deity in order to keep the powerful demon-queller under control.³⁶³ The use of the written character itself is a clear marker of civility and the application of the single written “precious character” alludes to the authority reserved for the stamp of an official’s seal. In other words, the Daoist identifies as the civil Sa Shoujian in order to control the martial violence of Wang Lingguan to fulfill the promise of the ritual. We see that same structure in the composition of the MMA scroll in that the civil form of Sa Shoujian above mirrors the martial form of Wang Lingguan below (fig. 11).



(fig. 11)

³⁶² DZ 1220: 242.4a–4b.

³⁶³ Literally “illuminate” (*zhao* 照) as found in the ritual process of enlivening icon by “dotting open the light” (*diankaizhao* 點開照) commonly found in *kaiguang* 開光 consecration ceremonies.

While the overall hierarchical structure within the ritual sources privileges the “civil” over the “martial,” there is a clear hierarchy of command within the category of “*wu*” where Wang Lingguan figures as the martial authority. It is, after all, Wang’s violent figure that dominates both the painting and the ritual texts. Wang Lingguan’s role as the martial commander actually tasked with leading the divine troops into combat proves the crux of the ritual programs. As such, this role, and the expectation of efficacy that it serves, illuminates the way in which the figure of Wang Lingguan can be viewed in the MMA scroll tableau.

In introducing Wang Lingguan, the ritual texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* tie his form to his martial authority by first introducing Wang Lingguan under a functional category before offering a litany of visual vocabulary for articulating his form. Before setting Wang to any particular task, the texts first establish a vertical hierarchy of ritual authority to situate, and as we will see, control Wang Lingguan’s ritual potency. Each text does this through a combination of naming individual figures using hierarchal titles, as well as introducing them in a sequence by the highest authority is called first before then moving down the ranks.

The first of the three texts (*juan* 241), entitled “Secret Methods of the Lingguan of the ThreeFive Fire-Wheel of the Sound of Thunder, Marshal Wang,”³⁶⁴ identifies Wang in military terms as the Chief Commander (*zhushuai* 主帥) a functionary title that appears throughout works of the *Daoist Canon*, most often in reference to martial deities. The text then calls forth Wang with the name “The Binding and Punishing Huoluo Lingguan of the ThreeFive Fire-Wheel from the Heaven of the Sound of Thunder Capital, the Iron-Faced Thunder Sire, Marshal Wang, taboo

³⁶⁴ DZ 1220: 241.1a. *Leiting sanwu huoche Lingguan Wang Yuanshuai mifa* 雷霆三五火車靈官王元帥秘法

named ‘*guishan*’ 鬼善.’³⁶⁵ This seemingly exaggerated appellation brings together the variety of multiple identities surrounding the figure of Wang Lingguan.³⁶⁶ The title with which the text identifies Wang at the outset locates the deity within a Shenxiao vocabulary, by referencing here the ‘Thunderclap, Overseer of the Heavens’ (*leiting dutian*)—the cosmic locale of Leisheng Puhua Tianzun 雷聲普化天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Sound of Thunder of Universal Transformation) and divine patriarch of Shenxiao’s Thunder Rites.³⁶⁷

Likewise, the title of the third *juan* of the *Daofa huiyuan* dedicated to Wang Lingguan (*juan* 243), entitled “Secret Methods of the Lingguan of the Fiery-Thunder from the Southern Pole, Marshal Wang,”³⁶⁸ also references aspects of Shenxiao cosmology. Shenxiao pantheons identify the “Southern Pole” (*nanji* 南極) as is the cosmic locale of the first of the from the Nine Heavens of the Nine Sovereigns (*jiuchen* 九宸). Identifying Wang as an agent from this cosmic place and associated with fiery thunder and rebirth, the text locates itself and its protagonist within a strata of the pantheon where martial deities are deployed to manifest the power of ‘thunder’ according to their own ritual idiom while still subordinated under the authority Shenxiao high-gods.

³⁶⁵ The “Talisman of the *Zhushuai*” (主帥符) occurs later in the text of *juan* 241, in order to command the deity to descend with utmost speed. The talismans is to be performed under the explicit authority of the “Iron Master” Sa Shoujian. See DZ 1220: 241.4b–6a. This is followed by a talisman of the *zhushuai* to be written with in blood dripping from a nipped finger (主帥咬指滴血符)—a embodied expression of great *yang* (DZ 1220: 241.6ab.). The talismans are followed by the “Incantation of Heart of the *Zhushuai*” (主帥心咒) follows with a twenty-eight character mantric chant. See DZ 1220: 241.6b–7a.

³⁶⁶ DZ 1220: 241.1a. 雷霆都天豁落三五火車糾罰靈官鐵面雷公王元帥諱 𩇛.

³⁶⁷ The central deity for Shenxiao exorcistic liturgy, Leisheng Puhua Tianzun carries its own complex identity, often having been associated with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, while also being the divine authority responsible for revealing one of the most important texts of the Shenxiao tradition, the *Yushu jing*. Full title is DZ 16 *Jiutian yingyuan leisheng Puhua tianzun yushu baojing* 九天應元雷聲普化天尊玉樞寶經 (Precious Scripture the Jade Pivot of the Celestial Worthy of Universal Transformation Whose Sound of Thunder Responds to the Primordials of the Nine Heavens), attributed to the famous Southern Song *neidan* and Thunder Methods master, Bo Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–ca. 1229).

³⁶⁸ DZ 1220: 243.1a. 南極火雷靈官王元帥祕法.

Other texts identify Wang Lingguan in more localized practical terms. Both *juan* 242, and *juan* 243 identify Wang in military terms with the functionary title of “Squad Leader” (*jiangban* 將班).³⁶⁹ The practice of “leading the squad” appears as part of several exorcistic liturgies within the *Daoist Canon*, the majority of which are attributed to Qingwei and Shenxiao Thunder Methods liturgical traditions.³⁷⁰ By placing Wang Lingguan in the role of the “Squad Leader,” the present texts posit him as the commander who will lead his troops to carrying out the forthcoming ritual functions.³⁷¹

The Wang Lingguan of the MMA scroll appears in just such a battle, as the overall composition evinces movement toward a violent confrontation. It is Wang who leads the charge down toward the roiling waters below with his subordinates in tow, just as he is commanded to do within the ritual texts when the Daoist calls upon his presence to confront trouble. Thus, the relative position of the figures within the MMA scroll composition not only establishes the vertical hierarchy we find in the ritual texts, but it also presents the primary function of those kinds of divine agents within the hierarchy. Like the invocatory rites that summon his “true form” to battle demons, the MMA scroll invokes Wang Lingguan’s form in action leading his troops against the troubled waters below. In so doing, the MMA scroll replicates the way in which Wang Lingguan and his divine comrades-in-arms go about the process of exorcising “deviant possessions.”

³⁶⁹ DZ 1220: 242.1a; 243:1a.

³⁷⁰ See DZ 1220: 6, 29, 32, 38, 61, 64, 82, 83, 93, 97, 110, 121, 125, 127, 130, 154, 155, 156, 195, 198, 225, 226, 229, 230, 231, 235, 237, 242, 243, 247, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261; DZ 223 *Qingwei yuanjiang dafa* 清微元降大法: 13, 15; DZ 1166 *Fahai yizhu* 法海遺珠: 1, 17, 18, 19, 26, 38, 31, 33, 34 35, 36; DZ 585 *Guandou zhongxiao wulei wuhou bifa* 貫斗忠孝五雷武侯秘法: 57;

³⁷¹ Within contemporary practice in Taiwan, the position of *jiangban* is one that heads the group of deities in charge of protecting the cardinal directions of a local temple (*shen jiangban* 神將班). These larger-than-life figures found swinging their arms in exaggerated gestures as they walk along temple processions. These figures are manned by *fashi* and not necessarily within the ritual purview of a Daoshi. In the contemporary sense at least, *jiangban* clearly has associations with local practices for invoking divine protection of local temple and ritual altar space.

While the specific identities of those subordinate deities remains unsettled, the liturgical sources do offer examples of the kinds of deities Wang Lingguan leads into battle. Returning to the texts, we find a host of demonic forces ready to be invoked and then led under Wang's command. Wang Lingguan sits atop of loosely defined hierarchy within the martial idiom. Wang's subordinates are identified by as Deputy Generals (*fujian* 副將).³⁷² Standing at attention to Wang's left, is the "Might (*wei* 威) of General-in-Chief (*da jiangjun* 大將軍) Marshal Chen 陳元帥 of the "Thunderclap that Rattles the Heavens."³⁷³ Standing at attention to Wang's right is the "Preeminence (*xian* 先) of General-in-Chief Marshal Qiu 丘元帥 of the "Golden Baton that Interrogates Demons."³⁷⁴ This configuration of the three deities—Wang, Chen, and Qiu—recurs throughout different ritual invocations throughout the *Daoist Canon*, though the specific hierarchy that determines who is in charge varies.

The association between these three deities—Wang, Chen, and Qiu—also appears among the ritual manuals found elsewhere in the *Daoist Canon*, suggesting their identities were tied together in ritual contexts beyond the *Daofa huiyuan*. A similar configuration appears in the *Taiyi huofu zougao qirang yi* 太乙火府奏告祈禳儀 (Ritual Announcement for an Exorcism, from the Fire Court of Taiyi), where Wang is identified as the Deputy Marshal, General-in-Chief

³⁷² According to Hucker, "*fujian*" was a common title to indicate second-in-command of military forces that during the Ming could also be a reference to a Regional Commander (*zongbing guan* 總兵官). See Hucker, p. 217.

³⁷³ Individual talismans for both Chen Yuanshuai and Qiu Yuanshuai appear later in the text of *juan* 241. See DZ 1220: 241.7a-b.

³⁷⁴ DZ 1220: 241.1b 左直轟赫震靈大將軍轟天霹靂陳元帥威, 右直轟烈飛黑大將軍金鞭考鬼丘元帥先; DZ 1220: 243.1b 左直大將軍陳威, 右直大將軍丘先. According to Hucker, "*da jiangjun*"大將軍 is a superior commanding rank just below that of 'marshal' (*yuanshuai* 元帥). The apparent contradiction found in the text of *juan* 241 of identifying both Marshal Chen and Marshal Qiu as 'marshal' (*yuanshuai*) while in the same line identifying them with the subordinate title of General-in-Chief (*da jiangjun*, see Hucker, p. 464) suggests the that their title of '*yuanshuai*,' along with that of Wang Lingguan (referred to in the text's title as Wang Yuanshuai), refers to their function as martial (*wu* 武) combatants of demons within a broader strata of the pantheon as expressed in a military idiom, rather than a specific place within the divine hierarchy vis-à-vis each other.

of Efficacious Transformation, Marshal Wang (*Lingbian da jiangjun Wang Yuanshuai* 靈變大將軍王元帥).³⁷⁵ The association with the group of three and the “Fire Court of Taiyi” also appears in ritual manuals compiled in the *Fahai yizhu* 法海遺珠 (Pearls Retrieved from the Sea of Rites). Like the *Daofa huiyuan*, the *Fahai yizhu* is a liturgical compendium that brings together local Thunder Methods traditions and is preserved in the *Daoist Canon*. We find the three deities as part of a much larger assembly of martial gods at the Fire Court (*huofu* 火府) who flank the right of Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun 太乙救苦天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Grand Unity who Alleviates Suffering). Like we have seen in the frontispiece of the *Yushu jing* that features an image of Wang among a host of martial deities flanking Puhua Tianzun, the texts of *Fahai yizhu* identify Wang as just one of the many gods who form a collective identity around the figure of Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun. Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun, along with Puhua Tianzun, is one of the two main deities of the Shenxiao pantheon, which in turn is one of the Thunder Methods liturgical traditions from the Song that view Sa Shoujian as a patriarch. That the same assembly of figures that we see the *Daofa huiyuan* recurs in other ritual manuals centered on the “Fire Court” of the Shenxiao pantheon suggests the possibility of a broader ritual association between Sa, Wang, Chen, and Qiu within the Ming worldview.³⁷⁶

While Wang Lingguan is not always identified as the primary martial authority, it is clear that these divine identities were connected to each other over various configurations of the

³⁷⁵ DZ 217 *Taiyi huofu zougao qirang yi* 太乙火府奏告祈禳儀 (Ritual Announcement for an Exorcism, from the Fire Court of Taiyi): 3b. The text is a condensed version of the ritual program found in 188 to 194 in the *DFHY*. (See Lagerwey’s summary in *TC*, pp. 1088–1089).

³⁷⁶ The historical significance of this association with the “Fire Court” is beyond the purview of the current study and shall be explored further in coming work. Suffice it to note here that the association with Wang Lingguan and the “Fire Court” extends beyond the Ming and into contemporary times as Wang is associated with the “Fire God” (*huoshen* 火神) of local temples.

group. This sense of collective association between Sa, Wang, Chen, and Qiu as they appear in different Thunder Methods liturgies also recurs in the composition of the MMA scroll, as well. Indeed, Chen and Qiu may be present in the MMA scroll tableau among the two groups of three armor-clad deities emerging from above Wang's right (fig. 19) and left (fig. 20), but a positive identification remains elusive at present.³⁷⁷



(fig. 19)



(fig. 20)

In addition to Sa, Wang, Chen and Qiu, the ritual texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* speak of a general assembly of demonic forces marshaled under the command of Wang's lieutenants. Qiu and Chen are described in command of a host of fearsome combatants:³⁷⁸

3,000 men of the Silver-toothed Phoenix-Beak Official, direct the throng of a million PiXiu 貔貅 emissary soldiers of the Tiger Chief; the Warden of *hun* souls, Marshal Bi 畢元帥; the Eight Great Generals of Capturing (*zhuo* 捉), Binding (*fu* 縛), the Cangue (*jia* 枷), Flogging (*kao* 拷), Beheading (*zhan* 斬), Burning (*shao* 燒), Freezing (*bing* 冰), Crushing (*ya* 壓); and a host of 300,000 elite troops of the “Flying Heaven” (*feitian* 飛天, [skt. *apsarāh*]) and Yakṣa (*yecha* 夜叉).

³⁷⁷ In the case of this specific configuration of Taiyi's Fire Prefecture, Qiu Yuanshuai is the commanding officer (*zhujiang* 主將), while Wang and Chen are deputies (*fujian* 副將). DZ 1166 *Fahai yizhu* 法海遺珠 (Pearls Gleaned from the Sea of Rites): 4.12b. Also see DZ 1166: 5.4a, 15.19a. A similar configuration appears in the *Taiyi huofu zougao qirang yi* 太乙火府奏告祈禳儀 (Ritual Announcement for an Exorcism, from the Fire Court of Taiyi), where Wang is identified as the Deputy Marshal, General-in-Chief of Efficacious Transformation, Marshal Wang (*Lingbian da jiangjun Wang Yuanshuai* 靈變大將軍王元帥). DZ 217: 3b. The text is a condensed version of the ritual program found in 188 to 194 in the *DFHY*. (See Lagerwey's summary in *TC*, pp. 1088–1089).

³⁷⁸ *Juan* 241 also contains individual talismans (*fu*) for manifesting both Chen Qiu Yuanshuai (DZ 1220: 241.7ab.

銀牙鳳嘴官將三千人; 虎首貔貅吏兵百萬眾; 監魂畢元帥; 捉縛枷拷斬燒冰壓
八大神將; 飛天夜叉精兵三十萬眾。³⁷⁹

This list helps draw in some of the contours of an otherwise often indistinguishable subset of the demon-quelling strata—the group of runners, ruffians, and brutes charged with carrying out the dirty work of wrangling and subduing demonic spirits.³⁸⁰ The deployment of local spiritual agents, is a common feature of local exorcistic practice and of methods recorded in the *Daofa huiyuan* more generally.³⁸¹ These agents may not always be individually identifiable in images. Instead, they form an identity as a group, one that emphasizes the general martial quality of those lower ranking spirits tasked with carrying out the commands of their superiors. As we have seen with the invocation above that calls for “a swarm of 300,000 elite troops of the Apsarāḥ and Yakṣa,” the sense of overwhelming numbers plays just as critical a role as do deities identified by name, such as Marshal Bi 畢元帥 (Bi Yuanshuai), who is identified in the same line as the “Warden of *hun* souls.”

Elsewhere in the ritual texts, the unnamed subordinates serving Wang are described as a motley crew, wielding all manner of “copper knives and iron hatchets, generals and officials one after another” to attack their foe.³⁸² The interplay between hordes of demonic-looking figures and individual Marshals defines much of the exorcistic liturgy found in Thunder Methods manuals. Thus, the appearance of unidentified martial figures still marks ritual performance as recognizable in the broader context of Thunder Methods liturgy. Likewise, the presence of unidentified figures in the composition of the MMA scroll still identifies the painting with the broader ritual worldview of Thunder Methods traditions. At the same time, the presence of

³⁷⁹ DZ 1220: 241.1b.

³⁸⁰ Avron Boretz, *Gods, Ghosts and Gangsters*, pp. 23–25.

³⁸¹ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pp. 165–166.

³⁸² 銅刀鐵斧, 將吏紛紛. DZ 1220: 241.4a.

identifiable figures like Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian in the painting's tableau identify the scroll with liturgical traditions present Wang as the martial authority who leads the demonic-troops into battle, while the civil authority of Sa Shoujian oversees from above.

In each case, both the ritual sources and the MMA scroll establish the vertical hierarchy of authority, starting with the "civil" Sa Shoujian at the top, and then the "martial" commander Wang below leading the smaller subordinates into battle. The ritual texts make the hierarchical structure explicit through the sequence of invocations and then the ranking titles by which those invoked are identified. The MMA scroll articulates the same organizational structure in the way that its figures are vertically orientated, as well as their relative size and position. But establishing the structure is only the necessary beginning to bringing that ritual authority to bear upon the liturgical task at hand. Wang Lingguan and his retinue are called forth from their place in the heavens to descend upon the altar and purify the realm of demonic essences. Reading the MMA scroll in concert with visual language of the ritual texts from the perspective of their invocatory purpose, we can see how the painting mimics this process of Wang's "true form" emerging into the hierarchical space created in the visuality of the MMA's tableau.

4.4 Ritual Vocabulary for Seeing the "True Form"

From a schematic perspective, each text in the *Daofa huiyuan* introduces Wang under a functional category, one that is hierarchically below that of Sa Shoujian, but also one that identifies Wang as the central agent of the liturgy. In so doing, the manuals present Wang Lingguan in a martial idiom who, as the primary figure, wields authority over a separate category of subordinate officers. The composition of the MMA scroll mimics that same vertical structure, with the civil figure of Sa floating above the violent figure of Wang, while also reinforcing the

hierarchy of *wen* over *wu*. Likewise, the dominating figure of Wang commands the foreground of the composition, where he stands as the vanguard among groups of smaller martial troops emerging behind him on their way to confront the serpents below. In this way, the MMA scroll presents the same hierarchical relationships of ritual authority made explicit in the ritual texts themselves, using the same binaries of above/below and civil/martial.

Yet, like the ritual texts, establishing these structures is only the beginning. The framework of hierarchical authority invoked in ritual context, in which the Daoist identifies with the civil authority of Sa Shoujian in order to control Wang Lingguan, creates the space into which Wang's martial power can safely be manifested. Otherwise, Wang's martial power cannot be directed toward the goal of producing ritual efficacy. That is one reason why the Daoist is instructed to illuminate Sa's precious character (*baozi*) the moment Wang is understood to be manifest in the altar space. We can "read" the MMA scroll in a similar way, in which it presents the process of manifesting Wang Lingguan within this established space.³⁸³ By recreating that same framework of ritual authority in its composition, the MMA scroll's tableau also creates the same space into which Wang Lingguan's true form may manifest for the similar purpose of producing efficacious results.³⁸⁴ The painting then becomes the model for how to articulate the ways in which Wang Lingguan's true form emerges into presence.

³⁸³ For a discussion of the relationship between Daoist imagery and the construction of ritual space, see Aaron Reich, "Seeing the Sacred: Daoist Ritual, Painted Icons, and the Canonization of a Local God in Ming China," PhD. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2018.

³⁸⁴ I am greatly indebted work on Buddhist sutra imagery and ritual images by Eugene Wang and Philip Bloom to think with the MMA scroll in terms of an active tableau. Eugene Wang's programmatic reading of visual culture surrounding Lotus Sutra narratives reframes the role of images in actively guiding practitioner to salvation. Philip Bloom, in his work on Song dynasty ritual scrolls for the "Water-Land retreat" (*shuilu zhai*) funerary rites, shows how the images themselves play an active role in rituals for saving deceased souls. See Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Bloom, "Descent of the Deities, 2013.

To see how the dynamism of the MMA scroll manifests the presence of Wang Lingguan, let us first return to the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* that instruct the Daoist how to do it. The “Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang” is the longest of the three *juan* dedicated to Wang Lingguan.³⁸⁵ As such, it presents the fullest picture of summoning Wang for what clearly is a *liandu* ritual. According to the text, after invoking the ritual hierarchy, the Daoist then proceeds on a journey up to the celestial abode of Wang Lingguan in order to then bring him down to manifest into the altar space. Like many Daoist ritual performances, the journey to Wang Lingguan takes place both internally and externally. The Daoist envisions their ascent to the Gate of Heaven internally in their own body, where they pass through to find the palatial abode of the gods. There they meet with Wang Lingguan, who they then compel to descend into the altar space by “merging” (*he* 合) the god’s *qi* with their own. At the same time as this occurs internally, the Daoist also articulates the journey externally, performing acts from their “secret instructions” as they move about the altar space. Once Wang is called down, the Daoist then externalizes their *qi* to manifest Wang Lingguan’s presence in the altar space. As such, the Daoist transforms Wang Lingguan from formless into a formed being—a realized (*zhen*), or perhaps true, form.

In manifesting Wang Lingguan’s true form, the Daoist negotiates the emergence of the god’s presence from undefined *qi* into the specific form of Wang Lingguan as defined by liturgical texts and the ritual acts of invocation. Visuality plays a central role in this process, as the ritual texts describe both the internal and external performance using vivid visual language in order to help the Daoist “see” what they are doing. As noted previously, this kind of vision is

³⁸⁵ DZ 1220: 241, “Leiting Sanwu huoche lingguan Wang Yuanshuai mifa” 雷霆三五火車靈官王元帥祕法 (Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang).

capable of producing effect in the same way that invocations are capable of producing efficacy as speech-acts. When the Daoist sees Wang Lingguan, they give the god form, and thereby make him real. Thus, visualization is a key component of performing the journey to see Wang Lingguan. However, it is not a passive visuality that manifest the god, but rather, visualizing is one part of an entire embodied vision that is explicitly for the purpose of producing the real presence of the deity. That is to say, one must first actively give Wang Lingguan form in order to see him, and in so doing, one brings him into Being.

The critical term in facilitating this process as it is described in the ritual manuals is “*cun*” 存, which is often glossed as “visualize.” While the visual dominates the liturgical language for manifesting Wang Lingguan, the performance is not limited to only one sense. Interlinear notes that direct the Daoist evince an holistic embodied process that engages with all the senses working in concert to realize the divine presence of Wang Lingguan.³⁸⁶ Visuality thus serves as a critical component of a broader ritual repertoire for bringing about presence by giving form to the formless. That is why I have eschewed the more conventional gloss of “*cun*” as “visualize” for the term “actualize,” as an attempt to bring out the critical importance of manifesting presence expected of such techniques. “Actualizing” thus becomes the critical imperative to locate Wang Lingguan’s presence, both when travelling to the heavens above and when calling him down to the altar space.

³⁸⁶ The implications of this embodied process will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter. Here, we may point to Michel Serres’ ‘philosophy of mingled bodies’ to illustrate the implications within a phenomenological discourse of how the senses might producing in an ontological sense, rather than only perceive, as discussed in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. (Michel Serres, with Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (trans.), *The Five Senses* (London: Continuum, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, Maurice and Donald A. Landes (trans.), *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012)). For a discussion of how visuality unfolds as an embodied process in regards to Christian images, see David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Let us now turn toward the specifics of the liturgical vocabulary for actualizing Wang Lingguan's presence at the altar. The "Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang" instructs the Daoist to stop and "see" (*jian* 見) Wang Shan [i.e. Wang Lingguan] manifest his form (*xianxing* 現形) in the Third Star" where Wang is known to reside.

³⁸⁷ They then silently incant to themselves a command to Wang that begins with situating their authority within the cosmogonic power drawn directly from the *Zhouyi*:

Qian 乾: Beginning Growth, Succeeding Fulfillment.³⁸⁸ Make my endeavor mighty and efficacious. I quickly summon the Descending General, manifest your true form with blazing speed. If you disobey my command even slightly, I will fly up a written petition to the Highest Purity. Quickly, in accordance with Lineage Master Realized Lord Xihe Sa's orders, manifest your true form with blazing quickness. With Speedy Haste!

乾元亨利貞為吾逞威靈急召豁落將火速現真形稍有違吾令飛文奏上清急準祖師西河薩君真人命火急現真形疾。³⁸⁹

Here again, Wang is called to "manifest his form" (*xian zhenxing* 現真形) under the threat of higher authorities, this time that of the realm of Highest Purity as well as Sa Shoujian. The constant warnings reflect the violent and unruly nature of Wang that requires constant oversight under the threat of ritual command from the Daoist masters.

³⁸⁷ *jian Wang Shan xianxing yu disan xingxiong* 見王善現形於第三星中. DZ 1220: 241. 3b. The relationship between *jian* 見 and *xian* 現 in this kind of liturgy suggests two different aspects of visuality with regards to manifesting divine powers. In the case of *jian*, it generally seems to be a case of actively employing perception, that is, the Subject directing its gaze. In the case of *xian* 現, it more often seems to denote the act of being seen, or making one's self seen, thereby an action of the Object of the Subject's gaze. In this sense, the ritual seems to distinguish between two kinds of visuality, one attributed to the Subject, the other to the Object, but interesting, both kinds of visuality are active and both require agency on the part of the Subject and the Object. The implications of this kind distinction for understanding how Daoist ritual language can inform the phenomenological questions of visuality and the affect of the Gaze promises to be significant and a worthwhile endeavor I plan to undertake in a following study.

³⁸⁸ Edward Shaughnessey "The composition of the Zhouyi," Ph.D. diss. Stanford University, 1983; Shaughnessey, "I Ching 易經 (Chou I 周易)," in Michael Loewe, ed. *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, Institute for East Asian Studies, University of California, pp. 216–228).

³⁸⁹ DZ 1220: 241.3b

Elsewhere, the interlinear notes instruct the Daoist how to actualize Wang's form, beginning with their ascent to the Heavenly Gates behind which resides the fearsome god:

The master actualizes (*cun* 存) the Heavenly Gate open above the Northwest. The master closes their eyes, and gazes towards Heaven (*qian* 乾). Actualize reddish glow radiating shooting straight out as the Heavenly Gate opens. Above there is the Precious Hall of Golden Watchtower of Primordial Yang. Halt there.

師存西北上天門開, 師瞑目, 望乾. 存霞光直射天門開, 上有金闕元陽寶殿. 止.³⁹⁰

The Daoist begins by actualizing the gate in Northwest corner of the sky where one finds the entrance to Heaven. There it opens to reveal a “reddish glow radiating” (*xianguang* 霞光, i.e. the glowing light of dawn) out from beyond its threshold, indexing the potency of *yang* energies that come to be associated with violent and active figures like Wang. Indeed, both the image of clouds and red radiance harkens to the bright crimson image of Wang set against swirling clouds we find in the MMA scroll. There within the glowing light, the Daoist finds Wang's abode, literally placed in the palace of *yang* energies. the Daoist then stops once the point of origin is located within in the cosmic space.

The next step for the Daoist is to create the vertical hierarchy that we have seen already in both the overall structure of the liturgies and in the overall alignment of figures within the MMA scroll's composition:

Inside is the Highest Realized [in the realm] Shangdi. The lineage Master and Marshal of Generals [i.e. Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan] is below. Imagine (*xiang* 想) one's self as an auspicious star body freely coming and going as you arrange the array of the Marshal of Generals on the altar.

有上帝高真在內, 宗師帥將在下. 想自己元辰往來無礙, 壇中帥將森列.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ DZ 1220: 241.2b.

³⁹¹ DZ 1220: 241.2b.

Here Sa and Wang are both placed below the authority of Shangdi, while the Daoist master positions themselves within the realm initially above the ritual hierarchy between Sa and Wang, as they freely move about to arrange the deities' places on the altar. At this stage of the ritual, the Daoist identifies with the celestial powers tasked with arranging the hierarchical structures between divine agents so that they can be set in their relative positions in order to create space within the altar for them to emerge. As such, the Daoist operates among the formless, and has yet to produce the true forms of the gods. That is why here the Daoist does not identify with Sa Shoujian, who the text locates below Shangdi, as neither Sa nor the other deities have taken form yet. As we will see, once Wang Lingguan and his retinue are brought into form at the altar, the Daoist will then identify with the civil authority of Sa to control him.

Once the hierarchy is established before the altar, the next step is then to summon the deities to emerge down to the realm below. This is performed through the civil idiom of sending up emissaries through the rite of “Burning the Incense and Announcing the Summons” (“Fenxiang Xuanzhao” 焚香宣召).³⁹² In this rite, the Daoist dispatches a divine emissary (*gongcao* 功曹), to deliver a summons for Wang Lingguan to descend to the altar with haste. The emissary travels to Wang's palace, here identified as the Thunder Court (*leifu* 雷府).³⁹³ With the

³⁹² This ritual procedure is also part of *shishi* 施食 (feeding and sustenance) rites of contemporary *liandu* ceremonies performed among Guangdong Daoist lineages practicing in Hong Kong. See Li Zhitian 黎誌添, *Guangdong difang Daojiao yanjiu: Daoguan Daoshi ji keyi* 廣東地方道教研究: 道觀、道士及科儀 (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe, 2007), pp. 237–238.

³⁹³ DZ 1220: 241.2b. Note that the *Daofa huiyuan* text locates Wang within the Thunder Court (*leifu*), while the manuals from the *Fahai yizhu* identify Wang as part of Taiyi's Fire Court (*huofu*). The identification with the Thunder Court suggests Wang's place among the deities under Puhua Tianzun, the other main figure of Shenxiao pantheons. While the discrepancy between the two sources is most likely a result of two different local traditions, the relative similarity of placing Wang within a Court of Shenxiao deities points to a more generalized sense of how these Thunder Deities functioned. They are all part of the larger group of martial gods, even if their specific role in that group is less consistent across ritual texts.

expectation that the summons was delivered, the Daoist then proceeds to manifest the presence of the deity through a visually charged invocation:

Heavenly Tones, Heavenly Tones, resonate with 10,000 efficacies. With a single tone of the Thunder Clap, Wang Shan manifest your form.

天聲天聲, 震動萬靈. 霹靂一聲, 王善現形.

Divine Might of HuoLuo (i.e. Wang), in Golden Armor and Yellow Kerchief. In his hand a golden baton, a red cape covers his body. Green boots and Wind Belt, his two eyes with fiery pupils. Around his waist a coiled dragon-rope, he receives the orders of the Three Clarities.

神威豁落, 金甲黃巾. 手執金鞭, 紅袍罩身. 綠靴風帶, 雙目火睛. 腰纏龍索, 受命三清.³⁹⁴

Here we have the familiar image of Wang Lingguan as we have seen throughout both liturgical and visual sources. This time, however, these kinds of visual elements are in set in their original context of actualizing the deity's form. The movement from formless to form carries with it the promise of efficacy, but also the responsibility to control the god to fulfill that promise. When Wang comes into form through the visual elements that define it, he also comes into being as a divine agent capable of affecting the world around him. He is thus given a purpose as he comes forth in order to direct that power. Meanwhile, that purpose comes with a threat to keep his power under control:

Moving throughout the Three Realms, search to capture nefarious essences. Should you dare refuse or go against [my command], you shall be turned to dust. Quickly, in accordance with the Law of Lineage Master Realized Man of West River, Sa's wind-fire command.³⁹⁵

出入三界, 搜捉邪精. 敢有拒逆, 化作微塵. 急準祖師西河薩真人風火律令.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ DZ 1220: 241.3a.

³⁹⁵ "Wind-fire" (*fenghuo* 風火) here may also allude to the hagiographical narratives discussed in Chapters One and Two that describe Sa burning down Wang's temple by summoning thunder, thus serving as a subtle reminder of Wang's vow to come and assist those who need it as well as a passive threat to know his role.

³⁹⁶ DZ 1220: 241.3b.

Here, Wang Lingguan is brought from formlessness into form in order to purify the cosmos. In order to control him, the Daoist threatens to pulverize the god into dust (*huazuo weichen* 化作微塵). In other words, change the form of god back into the formless. Later in the liturgy, the same threat is invoked when calling the gods to attention. Here, the threat of changing the divine agents back to formlessness is made explicit:

If there are any who dare refuse or go against [my command], then my wind-fire shall wipe out (*mie* 滅) your true form (*zhenxing*). Quickly, quickly [come in] accordance!”

敢有拒逆者，風火滅真形，急急準。³⁹⁷

Thus, the transition from formlessness into form functions at the center of manifesting divine presence. The two threatening invocations above also suggest that the dynamic goes both directions. A ritual authority can bring a god into this world, and take a god out of this world by manipulating their forms. Here, the text identifies the ritual authority as Sa Shoujian, as the Lineage Master whose law must be followed. Interestingly, the texts also allude to the specific, and indeed personal, hierarchical relationship between Sa and Wang Lingguan.

Both threats reference “wind-fire” (*fenghuo*) as the mechanism by which insubordinate gods will have their forms stamped out. While the invocation of “wind-fire” appears as a common recourse in Thunder Methods liturgy, it is mentioned here along with Sa Shoujian’s authority.³⁹⁸ In so doing, the specific mention of “wind-fire” evokes the image of Sa’s “wind-fire” with which he burns down Wang’s temple in the hagiographic traditions. In the narratives we have seen in previous chapters, Wang’s demonic spirit (then Wang the Wicked) becomes displaced as a result. This moment sparks the conflict between Sa and Wang, which ends in

³⁹⁷ DZ 1220: 241.2ab.

³⁹⁸ “*Lingbao wuliang Duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經.; *Taishang sanding shenzhou* 太上三洞神咒.

Wang defeated and leaving from view. In the aftermath, Wang returns in a new form, Wang the Good, to pledge his service as Sa's disciple. Here in the ritual text above, the threat of turning Wang to dust is enriched by the backstory of Sa's "wind-fire" powers, and thus serves as a potent reminder of just who is in charge. While still within the hierarchical relationship that privileges the civil over the martial, the ritual further identifies that sense of civil authority with a specific form by invoking the presence of Sa Shoujian. It is no wonder then, that the Daoist identifies with Sa when manifesting Wang Lingguan's presence. While perhaps not as high ranking as Shangdi, Sa's authority is all the more potent because it is personal.

Thus, the hierarchical framework into which the Daoist can safely manifest Wang Lingguan is structured both according to broader tropes of civil and martial, as well as organized in a vertical relationship between the individual figures of Sa Shoujian lording over Wang. The Daoist may now summon Wang forth knowing that the powerful presence of the god can be controlled and therefore directed toward fulfilling the efficacy of the ritual. The first ritual imperative for summoning Wang appears already in the initial invocations, where he is charged with the task of purifying the Three Realms (i.e. the cosmos). The deities are then called forth by name to arrive with haste:

I solemnly summon from the Thunderclap, Overseer of the Heavens, the Ferocious Official of the Celestial Descent of Three-Five Fire Chariot Binding and Punishing Lingguan, the Iron-faced Thunder-Sire, Wang Yuanshuai. His two deputy generals Chen and Qiu Yuanshuai, with blazing speed arrive at this altar, there is work to be done. With Speedy Haste!

謹召雷霆都天豁落猛吏三五火車糾罰靈官鐵面雷公王元帥, 副將陳丘二元帥, 火速臨壇, 有事差委!疾!³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ DZ 1220: 241.3b.

Under the command of the Daoist, the martial deities arrive. The Daoist, who before had arranged the hierarchical structure, now oversees the emergence of divine troops, beginning with Wang Lingguan. Later in the liturgy, Wang is summoned once again to appear. This time, the emergence of Wang's "true form" is made explicit:

[I] quickly summon the Huoluo General, manifest your true form with blazing speed. If you disobey my command even slightly, I will fly up a written petition to the Highest Purity. Quickly, in accordance with Lineage Master Realized Lord of West River Sa's orders, manifest your true form with blazing quickness. With Speedy Haste!

急召豁落將, 火速現真形. 稍有違吾令, 飛文奏上清. 急準祖師西河薩君真人命, 火急現真形. 疾!

As the ritual continues, more figures are called down, as the contours of the ritual hierarchy discussed above begins to become filled in. Some deities are identified as individuals; some are identified as groups. In all cases, their appearance and the fact that they can be seen makes them powerful:

Their radiance shines on the Four Seas and can slay bedeviling essences. Divine might quickly captures the hiding forms of the myriad demons. The Five Powers of Realized Lao[jun] (*wuling zhenLao* 五靈真老) command the celestial troops.⁴⁰⁰ Copper knives and iron hatchets, generals and officers one after another.

光映四海, 能斬妖精. 神威急促, 萬鬼伏形. 五靈真老, 統攝天兵. 銅刀鐵斧, 將吏紛紛.⁴⁰¹

Here the text distinguishes between those devilish forms hiding and those divine and mighty forms seeking to chop them to bits. Unnamed figures from both the civil emissaries and the

⁴⁰⁰ The "Five Powers of Realized Lao" are invoked in several exorcistic manuals in the *Daoist Canon*. They are generally associated with the north (*beifang* 北方) See DZ 653: *Taishang Laojun shuo wudou jinzhang shousheng jing* 太上老君說五斗金章收生經, 5a. In contemporary practice among Daoist families in Hunan, the "Five Lao Cap" (*wulao guan* 五老冠), or "Five Buddha Cap" (*wufo guan* 五佛冠) refers to the hat worn by priests while performing exorcisms. We also find contemporary Quanzhen Daoists at Baiyun guan leading the "Iron Bottle" *liandu* wearing a similar hat.

⁴⁰¹ DZ 1220: 241.4a.

martial generals are seen here coming one after another, all under the martial idiom as they “wield copper knives and iron hatchets.” The invocation presents an image of a motley crew all rushing forth under the command of exorcistic lieutenants. Leading the way is the martial authority himself, Wang Lingguan, as he emerges from the Daoist’s body:

Man merges with the spirit. The spirit merges with man. The spirit empowers the general. The general empowers the spirit. Lingguan Wang Shan quickly emerge from my body (*chu wushen* 出吾身). With speedy Haste!

人合神, 神合人. 神靈將, 將靈神. 靈官王善速出吾身.疾!⁴⁰²

We will return to these lines to discuss the implications of how the body of the Daoist merges with the god and functions as the source for externalizing the presence of Wang Lingguan in Chapter Five. For now, suffice it to note that these lines help explain the how the Daoist identifies with the spiritual authority of Sa Shoujian, and the Dao in general. The key is how the reciprocal relationships between “man” and “spirit” and those between “spirit” and the “general” connect. Here the relationship between “man” (i.e. the Daoist) and the “spirit” is one of bringing together on equal footing, such that one can identify as the other (e.g. the Daoist can identify as Sa Shoujian). The relationship between the “spirit” and the “general” (i.e. Wang Lingguan) is one of efficacious power (*ling*), such that the “spirit” can actively impact the world (i.e. summoning forth Wang Lingguan to fulfill the efficacy of the ritual). In each case, there is no clear distinction between subject and object, as “man merges with spirit” and “spirit merges with man,” just as “the spirit empowers the general” and the “general empowers the spirit.” Like the relationship between the civil and the martial, both sides of the relationship are necessary here. The ritual only is effective if Wang is present, and in turn, Wang is only effective if his form is called forth to manifest within the structures of authority established by the ritual. This

⁴⁰² DZ 1220: 241.4a.

dynamic is exactly that which empowers (*ling*) the efficacy of the Wang Lingguan, and it is in this context that he may emerge from the Daoist's body to become fully present in the altar.

It is then, at this moment, that Wang Lingguan's form begins to truly emerge in the ritual space. The text identifies him with broader associations of Thunder Deities, like those we have seen in the MMA scroll. The text also clearly indicates both sides of Wang's violent efficacy:

Oh, Iron-faced Thunder-Sire (Leigong 雷公) and Fire-Wheel Great General (Huoche dajiang 火車大將). You swallow the daemons and devour the demons. You protect and safeguard the living. The order comes down from the Iron-master [i.e. Sa Shoujian]. Follow the command of the Realized [Sa]. Quickly, in accordance with imperial order of the Iron-Master of Shangdi of the Anterior Heaven, and as the Lineage Master Realized Lord of West River Sa Method Decrees, I solemnly request Wang Shan to descend to this altar-hall with haste.

鐵面雷公, 火車將軍. 吞魔食鬼, 保佑生靈. 鐵師命下, 真人令行. 汝濟急難, 速現真形. 以炁合炁, 以神合神. 神炁交會, 自然成真. 急準先天鐵師上帝救命, 祖師西河薩君真人法旨, 謹請王善速降壇庭.⁴⁰³

Referencing Wang Lingguan with the appellation “Leigong” suggests that this text, like the MMA scroll, identifies Wang with a more general sense of Thunder Deities and their function. That function is to combat the demonic. The power that defines Wang Lingguan in this context can devour malevolent spirits. When directed toward the living, that same power then serves to protect those in need from demonic threats. Thus, the power itself, and therefore Wang Lingguan himself, lacks any fundamental purpose other than violence. It becomes a matter of being able to control and direct it that it becomes useful, or potentially harmful. That is why it is critical to first establish the structures of ritual authority into which Wang Lingguan may manifest. Otherwise, there is no means to control him. Thus, this part of the text reiterates the ritual hierarchy

⁴⁰³ DZ 1220: 241.4b.

established at the beginning by first referencing the Anterior Heaven where Shangdi resides before once again invoking the familiar authority of Sa Shoujian from West River.

As this part of the liturgy concludes, Wang Lingguan finally emerges in full. The interlinear text makes this explicit by directing the Daoist to “actualize [Wang] arriving” (*cunzhi* 存至). Now manifested, the Daoist pays the deity respect with an offering of incense:

The Thunder-Marshal has arrived to the altar, provide him with an incense lamp.
Few can halt the power of Thunder, receive now this humble request.

雷帥到壇, 香燈供養. 少駐雷威, 領今祈禱.⁴⁰⁴

Offering lit incense not only shows the proper etiquette, but also indicates that Wang Lingguan is a Daoist deity and distinct from those former demons who still enjoy bloody offerings.⁴⁰⁵ At the same time, the ritual text is quick to remind the Daoist of the potential power in front of them. As often as the text threatens Wang to follow commands, and as often as it reminds Wang of the ritual authority he must obey, this part of the liturgy concludes with a warning to the Daoist—the ritual authority—of the overwhelming power of Thunder that they must now control. Standing face to face with this awesome sight, the manual quite sensibly instructs the Daoist to offer a “humble request” that Wang Lingguan may carry out their wishes with great efficacy.

Taken as a whole, the invocations that open the “Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang” situates the visual elements designed to manifest Wang Lingguan’s true form within hierarchical structures of ritual authority. Through a combination of vertical relationships as well as the trope of “civil” and “martial” authority, the Daoist constructs a safe space for Wang to emerge. By identifying with different elements of the

⁴⁰⁴ DZ 1220: 241.4b.

⁴⁰⁵ See Terry Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China,” *Asia Major*, 3.7 (1994): 185–211; Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats*, 1995.

hierarchical structure, the Daoist actively sees Wang Lingguan emerge, and thereby makes his form real. The rite concludes with the rushing emergence of martial figures toward a violent purpose. Wang Lingguan leads the charge to clear the realm of demonic essences, rushing forth quickly as the vanguard with his lieutenants in tow. Once the god is present, the Daoist can then rely on the established ritual authority to direct Wang Lingguan toward fulfilling the efficacious promise of the ritual. After all, as an earlier invocation clearly states, there is “work to be done.”

The image of Wang Lingguan rushing forth with his troops in tow strikes a dynamic tone for the overall ritual. Indeed, this sense of an oncoming rush of divine forces is encapsulated in the text’s final warning to the Daoist, that “few can halt the power of Thunder.” Visuality plays a critical role in realizing this affective force of the ritual. The Daoist “actualizes” (*cun*) Wang Lingguan, Sa Shoujian, Qiu and Chen Yuanshuai, and the different kinds of martial figures all coming into being in large part through the active process of seeing—that is manifesting their visual form to make them real. Just as the ritual texts offer visual elements to actualize Wang’s form, we may also look to the MMA scroll as an object capable of manifesting divine form through a shared visual vocabulary. More than recreate the deity’s appearance through iconography, we will show how the MMA scroll is also capable recreating the active process of bringing Wang Lingguan’s presence forth, for there is still “work to be done.”

4.5 Emerging Forth to Capture in the MMA Tableau

Looking in terms of how the visual language of the MMA scroll produces the same effect as that of the invocatory language in the ritual manuals, we may consider how the scroll’s visuality reproduces the process of manifesting presence. Returning to the MMA scroll’s composition, we see the same dynamism of figures emerging forth from the misty backdrop.

Each figure appears to be in various stages of emerging into view. Some, like Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian, are fully in view (fig. 21). Others, like the two groups of martial deities have their features partially obscured by the misty clouds (fig. 19, 20). Still others, like the serpents below, are half-hidden in the dark waters (fig. 22). Looking from the perspective of how visibility is an active process of bringing the true form of a god into being, the various degrees of visibility presented in the MMA scroll composition may reflect a moment when the deities themselves are in the process of emerging forth, their forms coming into view.



(fig. 21)



(fig. 19)



(fig. 20)



(fig. 22)

As such, Wang Lingguan leads the group out in front and center. Likewise, Sa Shoujian is already fully present and looking down at the oncoming rush of Thunder Deities. The two groups of martial figures are still emerging, as though called after Wang to follow his lead. As

we have seen in the invocatory texts, Wang is presented here in the MMA scroll tableau as the “Chief Commander” (*zhushuai*), the largest and most visually vibrant figure of the scene. Sa Shoujian appears here as the civil authority with whom the Daoist initially identifies, hovering above just enough to make his authoritative presence known, but not engaged in the impending violence. Figures like Chen Yuanshuai and Qiu Yuanshuai and those violent troops under their command make up the flanking groups in the process of emerging forth, brandishing all sorts of various weapons (though it is difficult to say whether any of the are copper knives or iron hatchets). In addition, the figure previously identified with Leigong iconography also appears fully emerged in the middle register of the painting. He is shown bare-chested and barefoot like a spirit medium might be, and his violent intentions are made clear by the hammer and chisel he wields in his hands (fig. 23).⁴⁰⁶



(fig. 23)

Perhaps this Leigong figure is the first of the subordinates to arrive on the scene. Perhaps he is linked to epithet Leigong that the text (and indeed the Metropolitan Museum of Art) identifies with Wang Lingguan. It is unclear exactly how, or even if, that figure reflects the

⁴⁰⁶ See Chapter One for a more detailed description of how this figure’s visual elements suggest Leigong as well as a discussion of how its appearance suggests the role of a spirit medium. For an analysis of the development of Leigong iconography and its relationship to Daoist Thunder Deities, see Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” pp. 44–100.

specific ritual text of we have been looking at. However, that figure is still part of the entire group of martial figures emerging from the backdrop of cloudy mists rushing down to the snake-filled waters below.

Movement defines the scene within the MMA tableau in much the same way it defines the ritual process of manifesting Wang Lingguan's presence. The main figure of Wang Lingguan anchors the otherwise wild and frenetic energy presented in the composition. The placement of the emerging figures follows the contours of the Wang Lingguan's arched pose, making Wang the dominant figure in size, but also the central pivot for the action occurring within the tableau. The whole scene swirls in a counter clockwise line as the emerging divinities fill the sky above from the right to left and down, a movement mirrored in the lower register where the dark waters build and the serpents rise in ascending height from left to right.

The figures brought forth from the swirling background align in a symmetrical balance along the vertical axis, with the two main figures of Sa Shoujian and the larger Wang Lingguan serving as the central meridian. Visually, Wang's relative size and position at the center gives the impression of authority—the same kind of authority over demon troops we find in the manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* (fig. 1). Likewise, the vertical orientation of the composition parallels the hierarchy of divine agents defined in the ritual texts for summoning them.



(fig. 1)

The various degrees to which the different figures can be seen calls attention to the issue of visibility itself, as the mists obscure the sky from view evokes the sense of the unseen and formlessness before Wang Lingguan emerges into view. From the perspective of the ritual manuals, the Daoist manifests Wang Lingguan by making him visible, thus giving him form and actualizing his presence at the altar. The countermeasure to actualizing form is expressed in the various admonitions that threaten divine forms being annihilated, and thus no longer manifest. The interplay that occurs between form emerging from formlessness found in the ritual texts appears here in the MMA scroll as the divine figures emerge from the obscurity of the cloudy backdrop.

Emergence—moving from obscurity toward the visible—defines the scene within the scene presented in the MMA scroll tableau. Here, placement of the emerging figures follows the contours of the Wang Lingguan's arched pose (and to a lesser extent Sa's). Thus, just as the

commanding divinity within the liturgical texts, Wang appear in the MMA scroll as the dominant figure in terms of size, but also the central pivot for the action occurring within the tableau. Meanwhile, each figure appears to be looking in different directions, as though “moving throughout the Three Realms, searching to capture nefarious essences,” rather than rushing to a single target.



(fig. 19)



(fig. 20)

Clouds swirling in the upper and middle registers suggest celestial realm contrast with the roiling waves and writhing serpents at the bottom register suggesting the watery depths below. Each of the figures who appear in various stages of emerging from the swirling mists looks downward, while their scarves and weapons all flutter toward the upper right corner, suggesting movement rushing toward the serpents reaching up from the bottom register (fig. 19, 20). The dynamic energy and movement from top to bottom of the tableau gives a strong impression of descent, further emphasized by the trail of Sa Shoujian’s pink cloud that ends (or, more appropriately, begins) at a vanishing point in amongst the muddled dark blue of the clouded up sky. Still, the striking contrast in colors of the dark green water highlighted by white accents against the subtle hues of the swirling clouds above visually distinguishes the two as separate realms colliding together as the divinities descend upon the waters.

The contrast between the light hues of the cloudy space above and darkly defined waters below suggests two kinds of space. Above is the celestial world of clouds and sky from which divine agents emerge to be present in the scene. Below is the watery realm of the snakes, where serpentine bodies with gaping jaws lunge out of the waters toward the oncoming rush. Here in the snake-filled waters of the lower register, visibility once again plays an important role. Like the divine figures above, the serpents are also partially hidden from view. In contrast to the deities, however, the snakes are not obscured by clouds, but rather, hidden by the dark water. This difference suggests that the martial figures are emerging from a celestial realm above, while the snakes are hiding in the watery realm below. The significance of this distinction is how the visuality of the scroll resonates with ways in which the invocatory texts describe the ritual imperative of the divine agents. As a previous invocation claims of the gods, “Their radiance shines on the Four Seas and can chop bedeviling essences. Divine might quickly captures the hiding forms of the myriad demons.” Here, the difference in visibility as divinities and the serpents as they appear in the MMA scroll is a ritual distinction. The divine might of Wang Lingguan is called down to emerge out of the celestial clouds above, while the snakes appear to be among the “myriad demons” actively hiding their forms in watery sea at the bottom register of the MMA scroll tableau.

Few can halt the power of Thunder, and the water itself seems to respond as if it is being thrust upon by the descending entourage. As Wang Lingguan and his martial lieutenants sweep down, the force of their charge fills the lower left register as the waves are swallowed up by clouds. One might expect the serpents to follow suit, fully hiding themselves by diving into the roiling waters to avoid the onslaught. On the contrary, most of the snakes rise up to meet the vanguard, their ascent juxtaposed to the overall movement of the composition (fig. 22).



(fig. 22)

In the liturgical context of ridding the realm of demonic essences, this juxtaposition between figures seems to imply conflict. Indeed, the arced pose of Wang ready to swing his golden baton suggests the coming violent confrontation. As we will see in the following section, the presence of the “iron bottle” that Wang clutches may in fact suggest an altogether different sense of the juxtaposition between the rising serpents and the descending Lingguan, one in which the snakes risen mouths will be fed. As the MMA tableau relates to the liturgical vocabulary found in the “Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang,” however, the sense of that the painting shares with the ritual manual evinces the violence of exorcistic purification.

Just as the rituals appeal to the civil authority of Sa Shoujian to properly conduct the violent process of seizing and capturing demons, so too does the MMA scroll by positioning Sa above the frenetic scene. There, his almost demure figure floats upon a pink cloud overseeing the frenzied charge. The ritual authority of the lineage master, according to whose methods the powerful scene plays out, appears in serene contrast to the violence anticipated below. Just as Sa’s authority is invoked to set the scene in motion, here in MMA scroll tableau Sa’s presence gives the overall painting the sense of efficacious power and authority to charge down and rid the

realm of its viperous elements. There is indeed “work to be done,” and in its imaging of Wang Lingguan emerging into view, the MMA scroll can do it.

4.6 Contextualizing Emergence

In order to help contextualize the imagery of emergence and how it relates to producing efficacious presence, let us briefly look beyond ritual context to the broader worldview of images that *do* things in the Chinese tradition. Chinese narratives are filled with accounts of miraculous images of the gods acting on their own accord, to the degree that, as we have seen in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote, one could hang a painting of Wang Lingguan with the expectation that it would rid demons. Likewise, the narrative tradition has many examples of miraculous painters as well, most notably the Tang artists Wu Daozi 吳道子 and the tale of his famous departure into his own painting. The connection between paintings and efficacious results has a long history in China, even if it does not always meet with approval by Chinese writers. Nonetheless, there is a special corner of the broader discourse on paintings reserved for images of Buddhist and Daoist figures.

The Song critic, Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (fl. 1070) distinguishes between those masterworks of Buddhist and Daoist figures from what he views as surreptitious stories of magical images paintings” (*shuhua* 術畫) like the kind we find in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote.⁴⁰⁷ The former are objects to be treated like honored guests, hung in an appropriately clean and quiet room and handled with the utmost respect.⁴⁰⁸ The latter are to be dismissed outright and never to be spoken of again lest even admonitions give credence to their specious tales and further delude the

⁴⁰⁷ Guo Ruoxu (fl. 1070) 郭若虛. *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe 1963), pp. 1.15b–16b, 6.18b–19b. See Soper, *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting*, pp. 103–194.

⁴⁰⁸ *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 1.15b–16b.

people.⁴⁰⁹ Still, paintings were seen as powerful objects in their own right, as Guo's compulsion to deride those who would still believe in tales of "magical paintings" can attest.

The notion that images of human and demonic figures can actively resonate with the viewer plays an important role in the overall discourse of Chinese painting. As the Tang dynasty critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 815–ca. 877) famously put it in his "Discourse on [Zong Bing's 宗炳 (375–443)] Six Laws of Painting" ("Lunhua liufa" 論畫六法):

As for demons and gods and human figures, they have a liveliness that can be expressed and need *shenyun* 神韻 (spirit resonance) to be complete. If *qiyun* 氣韻 (*qi* resonance) does not extend throughout, it is useless to bring out formal resemblance, and if brush strength is not vigorous, it is useless to be good at coloring; one can say it is not excellent. As Han [Fei]zi said, "Dogs and horses are hard [to paint] and demons and gods are easy, since dogs and horses are what is commonly seen, and demons and gods are extraordinary forms." These words are to the point.⁴¹⁰

The issue is one of resemblance. "Demons and gods and human figures" have a sense of vitality themselves, and in imaging them, the challenge is to bring that vitality out through technique.⁴¹¹

As the quote attributed to Han Feizi notes, imaging demons and gods is relatively easy since

⁴⁰⁹ *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 6.18b–19b. Guo's condemnation of spurious claims regarding "magical paintings" (*shuhua* 術畫) concludes the entire work. The fact that Guo Ruoxu is compelled to discuss that which he himself says one should not bother discuss speaks to just how much miraculous images were a relevant part of the worldview at the time. This issue still hangs over how modern perspectives categorize different kinds of Chinese paintings. The issue of how an object like the MMA scroll has come to be categorized is tied to the long established discourse on Chinese painting that distinguishes between amateur and professional works. How these categories determine our evaluation of objects like the MMA scroll and other so-called "ritual scrolls" and how they limit what kinds of vocabularies we can use to talk about them is the topic of a future project.

⁴¹⁰ Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 815–ca. 877) 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters from Past Dynasties), j. 1. See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 16, quoting William Acker, *Some Tang and pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), p. 151.

⁴¹¹ Technique is only one part of the equation. For many Chinese authors, including Guo Ruoxu, the ability to produce a painting with "spirit resonance" (*shenyun* 神韻) lies in the inherent qualities of the painter. (*Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 1.11b–12a.; also see Soper, *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting*, p. 15). The discourse on *shenyun* 神韻 (spirit resonance) and *qiyun* 氣韻 (*qi* resonance) becomes much further developed in the discussion of *shanshui* 山水 (land-water painting), starting with Zong Bing's 宗炳 (375–443) *Hua shanshui xu* 画山水序 (Exposition on Painting Mountains and Waters). The relationship between how *shanshui* paintings and scrolls like the MMA scroll each produce the effect of bringing the viewer into the presence of the Other will be a topic explored in later work.

there is no frame of reference in the natural world. In painting the form of Wang Lingguan, then how, as Zhang Yanyuan insists must be done, does one understand the liveliness of and spiritual resonance of the extraordinary form?

Once again, the interplay between form and formlessness can help articulate a sense of “liveliness” and presence through the dynamic of emergence. Creating this dynamic of divine presence emerging into form is not limited to the ritual context, and indeed, can be found among the works of China’s most august painters. In his study of the great Song master, Ma Yuan 馬遠 (ca. 1160–1225), Richard Edwards looks to the ‘hitherto admired but until recently little studied’ image of the *Dragon Rider* (*Cenglong tu* 乘龍圖), now housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei (fig. 24).⁴¹² Celebrated for the liveliness and spiritual resonance of his *shanshui* paintings, Ma Yuan’s corpus includes attributed paintings of divine figures and extraordinary forms, as well. While the “spiritual resonance” of Ma’s *shanshui* works has received much attention, little has been paid to the potential of his paintings of other subjects to affect the same resonance. If painted by the same cultivated hand, then those images of divine figures should in theory produce the same resonance.

In looking at Ma Yuan’s *Dragon Rider*, Richard Edwards tentatively identifies the divine figures as Lao Zi 老子 and Yin Xi 尹喜. He situates the overall composition of defined figures emerging from undefined backdrop within the larger religious aesthetic of dragons emerging from the mist, as well as Chan subjects to inspire awakening.⁴¹³ In so doing, Edwards describes

⁴¹² Richard Edwards, *The Heart of Ma Yuan: The Search for a Southern Song Aesthetic* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2011).

⁴¹³ Edwards notes the potential influence of Ma Yuan’s aesthetic on Chen Rong’s 陳容(1200–1266) famous *Nine Dragons*.

the overall dynamic of contrast between the clearly defined main figures and the indistinct background as a process of emergence (emphasis added):

Ma Yuan, a master in the use of close space, creates here an ambient which, as so often in the Southern Song, is seldom empty and continues thereby to be the author of commanding physical definition. Atmospheric **breath gathers and emerges** in a forward **thrust of powerful presence**, a moment of concentration within a small area of the painting. Wash and line move from muted suggestion to jet black certainty. This tonality is linked to appearance in both shape and careful placement. The **breath that pervades the whole fuses to become its own conscious** complementary statement of **form** in subtle shapes of cloud, mists, and light....⁴¹⁴

The language Edwards uses to describe the effect of Ma Yuan's *Dragon Rider* describes the movement from formlessness into form, touching upon a vocabulary that we find in the ritual manuals for manifesting the presence of Wang Lingguan. As Edwards summarizes, "What gives the painting unique force, however, is the degree to which Ma Yuan is concerned with this positively defined vision, the sky-born presence coming directly toward us."⁴¹⁵



(fig. 24)
Dragon Rider
Ma Yuan (ca. 1160–1225)
Song dynasty



(detail of fig. 24)

⁴¹⁴ Edwards, *The Heart of Ma Yuan*, p. 160.

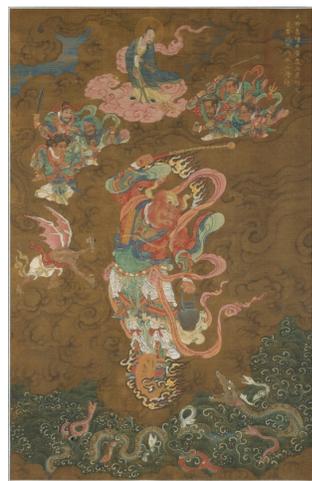
⁴¹⁵ Edwards, *The Heart of Ma Yuan*, p. 160.

For Edwards, the movement of form coming into view from formlessness creates the “liveliness” that Zhang Yanyuan speaks of. In order to create this affect, “both shape and careful placement” come together in powerful ways as the defined figures emerge from undefined mists. Thus, the painting itself creates the space in which the divine may thrust into being with “powerful presence.” With an eye toward how Ma Yuan’s work influences Chan discourse, Edwards considers here presence in terms consciousness. However, we can also see how the divine Dragon Rider actually comes into being by emerging from formlessness itself. Thus, as the “wash and line move from muted suggestion to jet black certainty” the movement of *Dragon Rider* brings the divine form into being.

The overall composition of the *Dragon Rider* resonates strongly with the MMA scroll, both in the way it images the emergence of the main figures, and the dynamism by which the composition gives those figures energy (fig. 24, fig. 1). Looking the MMA scroll, we see how definitive forms take shape from the undifferentiated horizons of misty clouds, until they emerge as fully present beings.



(fig. 24)



(fig. 1)

In the case of the *Dragon Rider*, the muted lines of clouds extend throughout the entire tableau. The divine forms emerge from formlessness into form as the only definitive being in the whole composition. They are surrounded by formlessness. In contrast, the MMA shows Wang Lingguan emerging from a vision of formlessness created by the cloudy mists obscuring the clear sky. Wang emerges in a tableau of a world already formed, and as such, formlessness is introduced from somewhere beyond that world. Formlessness is thrust into the scene in the shape of celestial clouds pouring in. Like the ritual texts that first establish the world of the divine within the altar space before actualizing their forms, the MMA scroll shows the world of formlessness being brought into an already formed world.

In addition to creating a world of formlessness by way of imaging the muted backdrop, the MMA scroll also shows Wang Lingguan and his retinue in the process emerging into the world of defined figures. Like the *Dragon Rider*, Wang Lingguan emerges from the swirling atmosphere “in a forward thrust of powerful *presence*.” But unlike the divine figures of Ma Yuan’s work appearing in a sea of emptiness, the divine figures in the MMA scroll emerge into an established hierarchy of ritual authority. Herein lies an important difference between the two. Whereas the *Dragon Rider* may evoke the “thrust of powerful presence,” the MMA scroll invokes powerful presence such that it may then be directed to fulfill the efficacious promise of ritual.

The ways in which the MMA scroll and the *Dragon Rider* each produce presence speaks to larger questions of what paintings do. In particular, recent scholarship has brought phenomenological concerns to how visibility in Chinese paintings can articulate the relationship between form and being (and the correlative of formlessness and non-being).⁴¹⁶ The interplay

⁴¹⁶ Pulling from the vast traditional Chinese discourse on *shanshui* painting, scholars such as Francois Jullien, Mathias Obert, and Kuan-min Huang have looked to the interplay of natural forms against a muted backdrop to

between “muted suggestion” and “certainty,” as Richard Edwards describes it, helps inform a broader discussion of the negotiation between Being and Non-being. Scholars like François Jullien, for example, discuss the movement from form toward formlessness terms of moving toward non-being, which he relates to discourses of returning to the Dao.⁴¹⁷ This movement upward is mediated by the painting itself, what Mathias Obert calls an *Aufgang* or “a way of ascent,” which relates to how the physical properties of a painting as an object can lead the viewer to an encounter with Nothingness. Thus, a painting may mediate the process of moving from the manifest form into the more conventional sense of “true form”—that is, the absence of form itself. In contrast, both the *Dragon Rider* and the MMA scroll create the reverse of this process, and thereby articulate the ritual sense of “realizing” the deity’s “true from.”

Rather than movement up toward formlessness, the two paintings show movement downward as figures emerging from formlessness into form. In a similar way, Richard Edwards highlights the interplay between form and formlessness but from a Chan perspective that emphasizes awareness and emptiness as it pertains to consciousness. While the discourse on Chinese paintings has much to offer the discussion regarding form and being, to fully engage with such discourse is beyond the purview of the current study. Rather, it is worth noting here that scholars who seek to articulate the relationship between form and being—questions that

consider how it relates to philosophical questions of Being. These considerations have also been discussed in terms of Daoist perspectives on Being and Form by Jullien as well as Mark Meulenbeld’s forthcoming article. As such, the discourse of *shanshui* and how it relates to phenomenological concerns promises great implications for thinking about what an object like the MMA scroll can do as an object in and of itself. To address these questions in full is beyond the scope of the present study, but they are discussed in a related study currently in progress. (Mathias Obert, *Welt als Bild: die theoretische Grundlegung der chinesischen Berg-Wasser-Malerei zwischen dem 5. und dem 12. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg: Alber, 2007); Kuan-min Huang, “Toward a Phenomenological Reading of Landscape: Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and Zong Bing,” in Chung-chi Yu and Kwok-ying Lau, eds., *Phenomenology and Human Experience* (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Baut, 2012), pp. 45–63; Jullien, *The Great Image has no Form*, pp. 1–14.

⁴¹⁷ Jullien focuses on *shanshui* painting and calls this movement a process of “deontology,” which he relates to a discourse on returning to the Dao.

inform phenomenological discourse—look to Chinese paintings to help provide a way to engage with those questions. Here, we are reminded of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s lament that the Western discourse has lost the vocabulary to address such issues of what he calls the “production of presence.”

What we have, then, in the fascination with Chinese paintings, is an attempt to recover some of that language. Most of the scholarly attention thus far has been paid to how paintings create the movement toward non-being. However, the example of the *Dragon Rider* presents that movement, only in reverse. Here in the limitless muted backdrop, “atmospheric breath gathers and emerges in a forward thrust of powerful *presence*.” Thus, the painting shows how to produce presence (or Being) through the emergence of visible form. The discourse that underlies how paintings like Ma Yuan’s prove significant for addressing phenomenological questions of producing presence has yet to be applied to ritual scrolls like the MMA scroll. However, the visual process of imaging divine figures emerging into formed beings is the same. While this may have more to do with the categorization of the MMA scroll as a ritual object, rather than a masterwork from one of China’s most celebrated painters, the affect is the same. Fortunately, we may look back to the ritual language to help articulate that process of manifesting divine forms, and in so doing, avail ourselves to a rich vocabulary of bringing a god into being.

Concluding Remarks: Looking back toward Ritual

In this opening chapter to our consideration for Daoist articulations of presence, we have returned to the visual vocabulary articulated in ritual manuals of the *Daoist Canon* to reconsider how it may inform what a painting like the MMA scroll can do. Pushing back against the impulse to “read” the scroll metaphorically, we have re-situated the visual language of liturgical

texts back within their original invocatory contexts. The visuality of the MMA scroll appears in a new light, one that is empowered like an invocatory text to manifest the divine presence of Wang Lingguan itself.

We have shown how the MMA scroll visually establishes a similar hierarchy of ritual authority to that we find in the ritual manuals for invoking Wang Lingguan using a shared visual vocabulary. There we find similar hierarchical relationships couched in terms of “civil” and “martial” that guide the Daoist in negotiating the process of manifesting Wang Lingguan in the ritual space. Through a review of the MMA scroll tableau, we see these same relationships presented in the painting’s composition such that it creates the visual space into which Wang Lingguan manifests. These structures serve both the rituals and the MMA scroll to control Wang Lingguan’s martial power, and direct it toward efficacious ends.

In addition to structuring the space into which Wang Lingguan may emerge, both the liturgical manuals and the MMA scroll share the active motif of divine emergence. Moving from formlessness into form, the divine figures appear into view, and thus, become real (*zhen*). The dynamism of emergence presented in the MMA scroll also identifies it as part of a broader motif in Chinese painting of bringing distinct forms into being that occurs outside of any specific liturgical context. Thus, the MMA scroll also offers a brief look beyond ritual context to see how the motif of descent helps inform phenomenological concerns over Chinese paintings. Still, the MMA scroll resonates closely with the specific ritual process of manifesting Wang Lingguan’s true form. By returning back to the ritual language, we find a ready vocabulary for articulating how a painting negotiates this emerging presence. In so doing, the MMA scroll also opens the way to an empowered vocabulary of Daoist ritual that can speak to presence in a way that has been lost within much of the Post-Enlightenment discourse on objects.

Follow me, intrepid reader to the next chapter, where we shall again revisit the liturgical language of manifesting Wang Lingguan and look to see how the embodied language of transformation can show how the MMA scroll functions as a body of presence itself...

Chapter 5: Ritual Transformations, Bodies of Presence

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road...

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we looked to the dynamic structures of ritual authority in the liturgical language of the *Daofa huiyuan* and their relationship to the visuality of the MMA scroll's composition. By taking a systematic approach to how the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* organize ritual authority, we showed how the composition of the MMA scroll recreates similar hierarchies through a shared visual vocabulary of imaging Wang Lingguan, Sa Shoujian, and their retinue of celestial warriors. In addition, both the ritual manuals and the MMA scroll show Wang Lingguan emerging from formlessness into form. In so doing, both create the space into which the “true form” (*zhenxing*) of Wang Lingguan can safely manifest and be directed to fulfil the efficacy that his presence promises. We will now return to the language of the ritual manuals to look closely at how the process of emergence comes to be.

The ritual language of producing Wang Lingguan's “true form” comes to be articulated via the bodily practices of a Daoist priest. The Daoist's body serves as the medium by which the presence of the god is expressed through a complex negotiation of internal and external performances. Ritual sources commonly describe this process as the “transformation of the body” (*bianshen* 變身) or “transformation of the spirit” (*bianshen* 變神), in which the Daoist produces the presence of deity by first merging (*he*) their own bodily essences with that of the

divine to then externalize the god's presence in the altar.⁴¹⁸ Thus, the language of manifesting Wang Lingguan is an embodied language that requires a fluid sense of “body” to produce his divine presence. As we will see, the visuality of the MMA scroll mimics the ways in which the ritual texts detail the internal process of manifesting Wang Lingguan in the Daoist's own body. In so doing, the MMA scroll functions as a body itself to bring Wang Lingguan's true form into being—becoming real (*zhen*).

This chapter begins by looking at how the shared visuality between the ritual texts and the MMA scroll both articulate parallels between the Daoist body and the divine body of Wang Lingguan that resonate with the structures of *bianshen*. In so doing, we will discuss the role of mimesis and how the MMA scroll recreates the process of Wang Lingguan's becoming as a body, and how images of Daoist deities like the MMA scroll functioned to do the same in the broader context of the Ming court. Finally, we will return to the ritual texts in concert with the MMA scroll to see how the visuality of painting recreates the process of “transformation of the body” and thereby reveals itself to be capable of producing the presence of Wang Lingguan.

5.1 Ritual Idiom of the Daoist Body

The ritual texts that detail the process of manifesting Wang Lingguan's true form do so through a complex of multiple idioms. These are not mutually exclusive, but rather work together in layers to articulate how to produce and control the power of extraordinary forms. In addition to binaries like “civil” and “martial” (*wen/wu*) that structure divine agents along hierarchies of ritual authority, the manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* deploy other complimentary dynamics that define the relationship between the actors within the ritual performance.

⁴¹⁸ Ritual texts also refer to this process as the “transformation of the spirit” (*bianshen* 變神), such as it appears in the *Daofa huiyuan* texts discussed below.

Manifesting Wang Lingguan through the process of “transformation of the body” is a matter of the Daoist identifying their own bodily constituents with that of the god. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this comes to be articulated in terms of actualizing the deity taking form through the manipulations their own *qi* both internally within their own body and externally in the physical space of the altar. Thus, the dynamic between “inner” (*nei* 內) and “outer” (*wai* 外) provide another active relationship that defines the ritual performance. At the same time, visuality continues to play a central role in this embodied process of manifesting the deity’s true form, such that one “sees” (*jian* 見) the movement between inside and out crystalize as Wang Lingguan takes shape. In the embodied process of *bianshen*, the visual language is an empowered language designed to produce the presence of the god. The productive power of visuality is thus empowered through the context of a Daoist body.

In the broader sense of “transformation of the body,” “body” functions as a means to situate the transformative property of the Dao. As Zhuang Zi’s famous dream of flitting about as a butterfly so profoundly demonstrates,⁴¹⁹ “body” is not a static category, but rather functions a way of temporarily grounding fluid transformations.⁴²⁰ Transformation is described in the ritual manuals as a process of merging together: at first internally within the priest’s body, and then after externalized to manifest the presence of the god at the altar.⁴²¹ This starts from within the Daoist’s body and then becomes externalized into the altar space through a series of visualizations, body postures, incantations, and writing of talismans. The degree to which

⁴¹⁹ Zhuang Zi “Qiwu lun” 齊物論, 14.

⁴²⁰ See Nathan Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.” in *HJAS* 55:1 (June, 1995): 5-37; and Deborah Sommer, “Boundaries of the *Ti* Body,” *Asia Major* 21.1 (2008): 293–324.

⁴²¹ For a discussion of Daoist ritual transformation and sublimation through the metaphor of bodily sacrifice, see Mark Meulenbeld, “From ‘Withered Wood’ to ‘Dead Ashes’: Burning Bodies, Metamorphosis, and the Ritual Production of Power,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 19 (2010): 217–267. For an overview of *bianshen* and its role in contemporary Daoist ritual, see Poul Andersen, “Transformation of the Body in Taoist Ritual,” in Jane Marie Law, ed. *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 186–207.

visuality dominates the invocations themselves, often opening with a summary of how Wang Lingguan appears before he *really* appears, shows the critical importance of the visual as the main means for conveying presence.

In the context of ritual performance for manifesting Wang Lingguan, both the internal space of the Daoist's body and the external space of the altar function together as the place in which the deity becomes real. It therefore follows that the process of "transformation of the body" operates interdependently with those same organizing principles that structure the ritual authority discussed in the previous chapter. The two work in symbiotic relationship, such that the ritual space must first be established before "transformation of the body" can take place within Daoist ritual. In turn, the ritual space becomes further empowered through the Daoist's "transformation." Thus, the dynamics between "civil" and "martial," and between "inner" and "outer" work in concert in Daoist ritual and add layers of meaning to the performance.⁴²² Likewise, the MMA scroll presents multiple layers of resonance to the degree that it these structures and dynamics therein. To that end, we will have occasion to revisit some of the same textual sources discussed earlier to show how these layers interact and take another look at some of the same visual elements in the MMA scroll we have seen before, only looking this time through the lens of bodily transformation.

⁴²² For a discussion of the multiple layers of meaning produced in Daoist ritual performance, see Poul Andersen, "Concepts of Meaning in Chinese Ritual," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 12 (2001): 155-183. Andersen convincingly argues against Fritz Staal claim that meaning is exclusive to the structuring elements of ritual by showing how innovations within the active performance generate modes of meaning that prove equally critical from ritual to ritual. (See Fritz Staal, *Rituals and Mantras: Rules without Meaning* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

5.2 Transformative Beings: “Transforming the Spirit to Summon the General”

Returning once again to the liturgical texts, our focus shifts to the specific rites that details the process of transforming the body. Let us first consider the general contours of how the rituals for “transformation of the body” fit within the rites dedicated to summoning forth a martial deity like Wang Lingguan in the *Daofa huiyuan*. In so doing, we will establish a framework to compare how the MMA scroll mimics the body of the Daoist to produces similar effect, and thus, function as its own body capable of producing divine presence—a “body of presence.”

We shall begin by returning to the liturgy of the “Secret Methods of the Sound of Thunder Three and Five Fire-Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang” that it may help us better see the potentiality of the MMA scroll as an object capable of producing Wang Lingguan itself.⁴²³ As described previously in Chapter Four, this text first establishes ritual hierarchy to create the space for Wang Lingguan, and then describes his emergence. That visual process coincides with *bianshen* rituals that articulate how the deity emerges from the body of the Daoist. Once the hierarchical structure described previously is established, the liturgy then proceeds to detail the process for manifesting their presence, beginning with the rite of “Bianshen zhaojiang” 變神召將 (Transforming the Spirit to Summon the General).

The text of “Transforming the Spirit to Summon the General” opens by locating Wang’s power in the fiery corners of the Southern Dipper and then proceeds to detail several invocations to bring Wang from out of the Heavens and down to Earth. After situating the scene within the

⁴²³ DZ 1220: 241.1a.

fiery radiance of Heaven (*tianzhong huoguang* 天中火光),⁴²⁴ the invocation begins by situating the ritual methods in cosmic time by making overtures to a cosmogony that posits Thunder

Deities near the start of creation:

Thunder Deities, Thunder Deities, *yang* and *yin* are clearly separated. My teaching was the first to arise and thus is based on Taiji, the source of all transformations and sustenance. When the One opened/began into Heaven and Earth, soon thereafter were the Thunder Gods. The moves at each turn of the Five Phases, the outcome is still ongoing [in a process of] coming together with the Dao. Thunder Gods are not far, hear my summons and arrive at once. I travel the path as the teachings of my [lineage] ancestor commands.

雷神雷神,陰陽判分. 我教先興,遂憑太極,化育之源. 一開天地,便有雷神. 樞機各運於五行,究竟還同於道合. 雷神不遠,聞召即臨. 吾行道祖教敕令.⁴²⁵

It then proceeds with a request to the unnamed Divine Immortals (*shenxian* 神仙) to rise on their clouds in ordered procession in order to "brush clear the fog of the Three Realms and sweep clear the Ten Directions."⁴²⁶ This now familiar charge to clear away the fog and demonic defilement of the world becomes the main ritual imperative given to Wang Lingguan and his entourage. Meanwhile, unnamed Thunder Deities are then called on to "quickly open the Heavenly Gate" so that the Daoist may pass through to the Hall of Primordial Yang (Yuanyang dian 元陽殿) where Wang Lingguan resides.⁴²⁷ We may recall that this is the moment in the Daoist's journey that they are about to envision meeting Wang in the heavens.

⁴²⁴ Here again, Wang Lingguan is closely identified with the element of fire (*huo* 火), an association that pervades in both his appearance amidst fiery radiance in the MMA scroll and later as he comes to be known as Fire-God (*huoshen*).

⁴²⁵ DZ 1220: 241.1a.

⁴²⁶ DZ 1220: 241.3a 先天諸神仙,整肅上清雲. 捲開三界霧,掃蕩十方清.

⁴²⁷ This is the only mention of the "Hall of Primordial Yang" (Yuanyang dian 元陽殿) in the *Daoist Canon*, and thus perhaps suggests a uniquely local liturgy dedicated to Wang Lingguan. However, the general use of palatial landmarks within cosmological geography is a common feature throughout Daoist liturgy, and fits within the general topos of ritual journeys performed within the body and around the altar space.

The process of ascent to the celestial realm occurs concurrently throughout the altar space and within the Daoist's body. The cosmic landscape and its hierarchical structures discussed in the previous chapter are all envisioned as part of an inner landscape within the priest. In order to externally manifest Wang Lingguan in the altar space, the Daoist then must first encounter Wang within their own body. This necessarily requires the Daoist to first create the celestial environs internally. In so doing, their own body becomes the body of the cosmos. Within that embodied cosmos, Wang Lingguan is brought into being first through actualizing his form within his celestial abode, and then through externalizing his form as he emerges into the altar space. Here, the interlinear notes designed to aid the Daoist in their performance offer a vital insight into how visuality plays a critical role in fulfilling the promise of manifesting the deity. By carefully reading the text, we may recast the visuality of the MMA scroll in similar terms that it too may recreate the presence of the god.

5.3 Seeing a God on His Own Terms

Looking closely at the language of the “Transformation of the Spirit to Summon the General” rite, we gain a clearer sense of the relationship between the Daoist and the martial figure of Wang Lingguan they manifest. When the time comes to bring Wang forth, the Daoist absorbs the spirit of Wang from his astral seat. Buttressed by the authority of Daoist high gods, the Daoist internalizes the ferocious deity and is able to control it by virtue of the established ritual authority. The text of the “Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang” describes this process in the interlinear directions to the Daoist and is articulated terms of projecting the Daoist's own *qi* in the form of incantations. The first is for absorbing Wang's essence by chanting a *dharani* thrice in one breath:

Silently recite the “Stalwart Beheader *dharani*,” and incant: The Seizing Lingguan Wang Shan, arrive with haste! “An Hong” [mantric sound] by divine imperial command, Chop and Seize! <say three times in one breath>

魁斬摩呢: 攝靈官王善速至唵吽神敕煞攝. <一炁三徧>⁴²⁸

Then, still within the interlinear direction, the internal process continues:

With the master’s Heavenly Eye (i.e. third-eye), Void-Write (i.e. in the air) the Ancestor of the Dao’s command and exhale one’s heart-*qi*. [Then] using the Thunder Gesture, rush into the Third Star. The Marshal sees, and the blue-green radiance of Thunder-fire comes forth. [I] inhale it and it enters the root mansion [where it] mixes and merges together.

師以天目光虛書道祖令, 呵心炁, 以雷局衝入第三星中. 帥見, 同雷火青光中來, 吸入本府混合.⁴²⁹

The text describes the preparations for manifesting Wang Lingguan via the oscillations between externalization and internalization through the body. As is the case of the overall ritual protocol, the first step is establishing ritual authority. This is described here as an external process, wherein the Daoist “exhales their heart-*qi*” (*he xinqi* 呵心氣) to issue the command of the ancestor of the Dao (*daozu* 道祖). Now operating with that authority, the Daoist then inhales the “Thunder-fire” (*leihuo* 雷火) of the god into themselves. Now inside their own body, the Daoist merges (*hunhe* 混合) the fiery essence of Wang Lingguan with their own bodily essence to initiate the transformation that will allow the priest to eventually externalize the bodily form of the god.

Visuality plays a pivotal role, as the act of seeing (*jian*) defines the critical moment when the Daoist encounters the deity before they merge together. The text states that “the Marshal sees, and the blue-green radiance of Thunder-fire comes forth.” If we take “*jian*” here to refer to the

⁴²⁸ DZ 1220: 241.3b.

⁴²⁹ DZ 1220: 241. 4a.

active process of perceiving on the part of the Subject, then it means that the Daoist priest is the Object of Marshal Wang's gaze. Here, the separation between two "bodies" into Subject and Object occurs through a process of visibility—seeing—which is a necessary first step before ultimately merging the two together. Thus, the ritual of body transformation is one of first "seeing" difference between Subject and Object and then ultimately collapsing the distinction, only to be re-defined as distinct later in the ritual when the Daoist externalizes the "body of presence" that is Wang Lingguan. While this needs to be explored further, the transposition of the typical Subject-Object relationship of Daoist visualizing gods promises to have critical implications for how we understand who is actually looking at whom when a person looks at a painting of a Daoist deity.⁴³⁰

Returning to the text, after the interlinear instructions, the Daoist then announces the relationship between human, god and Wang Lingguan himself that we discussed in the previous chapter:

Man merges with the spirit. The spirit merges with man. The spirit empowers the general. The general empowers the spirit. Lingguan Wang Shan quickly emerge from my body (*chu wushen* 出吾身). Haste!

人合神, 神合人. 神靈將, 將靈神. 靈官王善速出吾身.疾!⁴³¹

In Chapter Four, we discussed the logic of these lines in terms of how they reflect the symbiotic relationship between the active power of the General (i.e. Wang Lingguan) and hierarchical structures of ritual authority that direct Wang's active power to fulfill the efficacy of the ritual program. In returning to these lines through the lens of *bianshen*, we note how that the Daoist's body serves as the medium by which the symbiotic relationship between the Daoist (*ren* 人), the

⁴³⁰ Philip Bloom's ongoing research into the active role of image in Buddhist grottoes touches upon this relational aspect of visibility, and promises to be a great benefit to the broader study on the life of religious images in China.

⁴³¹ DZ 1220: 241.4b.

divine spirit (*shen* 神), and the active power (*ling* 靈) come together to empower deities like Wang to become an active force within the ritual space. To empower the ritual, then, is for the Daoist to undergo an internal process wherein the primary constituents are first merged together within. Then, as the text states, Wang Lingguan emerges out from the Daoist's body (靈官王善速出吾身) with all the force and power of Thunder. Thus, the Daoist's body serves as the medium by which the ritual structures first take form, and then become empowered by the active presence of the god. The body, then, becomes the ritual. As the medium through which Wang Lingguan actively emerges and becomes present, the Daoist's body becomes a body of presence.

With the body becoming the primary medium for manifesting Wang Lingguan, the interlinear notes then shift focus to internal workings of the Daoist's inner cosmos. It instructs the Daoist on how to “see the form” (*jianxing* 見形) of Wang Lingguan emerging, much in the same way as the MMA scroll tableau presents his emergence, but here visibility is explicitly an embodied process. It describes the methods for externalizing Wang Lingguan by navigating the merging of essences through a series of viscera:

With the Thunder Block in Both hands, move [Wang] up to the pass between the spine and out from the Palace of the Muddy Pellet.⁴³² See [Wang's] form above the gallbladder (*xun* 巽).⁴³³

Mantric syllables Lingguan Wang Shan arrive with haste!

Spread out the northern and southern dippers across the crown of the Marshal's head.

雙手雷局，運至夾脊雙關上泥丸宮出，巽上見形。

唵吽吽 靈官王善速至。橫布南北二斗于帥頂。⁴³⁴

⁴³² “*Niwan gong*” 尼玩宮 is the ultimate “palace” within the *neidan* practitioner's body, most often situated at the top of the head and functioning as control for the other palaces, as well as the home of the immortal embryo through which the practitioner will be reborn.

⁴³³ By the Yuan dynasty, “*xun*” was one of the *bagua* 八卦 generally associated in *neidan* with the gallbladder, and appears to be a common point of access for externalizing essence in exorcistic texts found in the *Daozang*. See DZ 1098 *Neidan huanyuan jue* 內丹還元訣 (Instructions for the Return to the Original State [through] *neidan*).

⁴³⁴ DZ 1220: 241.4a.

After bringing Wang Lingguan through the internal embodied cosmic landscape and then through the celestial landscape of the dippers, the Daoist concentrates their energies on that connect the crown (*ding* 頂) of god and that of the priest's. It is from this point of their body at the top of the head that the priest invokes Wang Lingguan to emerge and manifest his “true form” in the incantation we have seen before:

Iron-faced Thunder-Sire, Fire-Wheel Great General [Wang]. You Swallow the daemons and devour the demons. You protect and safeguard the living. The order comes down from the Iron-master [i.e. Sa Shoujian]. Follow the command of the Realized [Sa] Thou offers relief to disaster, quickly manifest your true form true form (*zhenxing*).

鐵面雷公, 火車將軍. 吞魔食鬼, 保佑生靈. 鐵師命下, 真人令行. 汝濟急難, 速現真形.⁴³⁵

Here we find Wang in his familiar role of exorcizing demons and protecting the living once again called forth under the direct explicit authority of Sa Shoujian. The process is described in terms of “manifesting the true form” of the deity, a process that began with the previous invocations that explicitly called for Wang to emerge out from the Daoist's body. To articulate how to manifest the true form from the internal process of merging, the text once again recalls the symbiotic relationships that underpin the procedural logic. This time, the merging of constituents is articulated in terms of *qi* and *shen*, with the explicit result of producing something real (i.e. the real form):

With [your] *qi* merge with [my] *qi*, with [your] *shen* merge with [my] *shen*. When *shen* and *qi* encounter each other, from this comes completing the real (*chengzhen* 成真).

以炁合炁, 以神合神. 神炁交會, 自然成真.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ DZ 1220: 241.4a.

⁴³⁶ DZ 1220: 241.4a. Meulenbeld notes how *Zhuang Zi* deploys this exact kind of language in describing how an artisan first makes an ontological connection to the wood he selects prior to carving it into a bellstand. The implication being that the difference between things (*wu* 物) is a second-level distinction (to use Merleau-Ponty's

The internal process of “transforming the body” is articulated here in terms of “merging” (*he*) immaterial essences *shen* and *qi* to then bring about something *real* (*chengzhen* 成真). In this case, Wang Lingguan’s presence. The text itself describes the active process of producing divine presence through the bodily practice of externalizing and then merging the immaterial essences of both the priest and the deity—their *qi* and the *shen*. Thus, when the two are mixed together, one becomes the other and once externalized produces the realized form of the god—a “transformation of the spirit to summon the general.” In so doing, the distinction between the Subject (i.e. the Daoist) and the Object (i.e. Wang Lingguan) dissolve in the realizing of the god’s form.⁴³⁷ This notion of “becoming real” (*chengzhen* 成真) carries with it a sense of completion, that through the merging of immaterial essences the deity finally comes into being and can be treated as a divine agent capable of fulfilling requests. As such, the ritual process of transforming the body is an ontological exercise, articulated here in terms of both Being and Form—bringing Wang Lingguan into being within the altar by making his form real.

The invocation then concludes by announcing Wang Lingguan’s descent to the altar to be present under the ritual authority of Sa Shoujian. Present in the altar space, Wang Lingguan’s form is made real and brought into being through the internal process of the Daoist’s body. The deity is then externalized in a process of emergence, to be then directed toward fulfilling the efficacious promise of the ritual. In this way, the body of the Daoist itself becomes the medium for the ritual to occur and for its efficacy to take shape. The relationship between Being and

terminology) removed from their original sense of oneness and that the “transformation of things” (*huawu* 化物) is spiritual process of reconnecting oneself to the shared oneness of all things. Mark Meulenbeld, ““Daoist Modes of Perception: ‘Registering’ the Living Manifestations of Sire Thunder, and Why Zhuang Zi is Relevant,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society*, No. 8 (2016): 47.

⁴³⁷ See Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” pp. 42–43.

Form as it comes to be articulated in the ritual texts bears significance for understanding what an image like the MMA scroll can *do*, as it, too brings the form of Wang Lingguan into being in its own way. Emerging forms become an embodied process of bringing the divine form into being—a becoming real.

Revisiting these figures of Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan in the MMA tableau from the perspective of *how* the Daoist manifests the true form of Wang Lingguan through their own body, we see a new kind of relationship emerge—one that visually recreates the parallels between the Daoist body and Wang Lingguan’s form as articulated in the manuals. In the case of the MMA scroll, the visual vocabulary of “transformation of the body” can be seen in the juxtaposition between the central figure Wang and the figure of Sa Shoujian floating above, whose ritual authority the Daoist invokes to control the demonic god.



(fig. 11)

Sa Shoujian’s “civil” appearance dressed in the robes of a Daoist offers a corresponding contrast to the “martial” silhouette cast by Wang’s fiery pose not only offers a counterbalance to the scene, but it also mimics the role of the Daoshi in performing the rites for bringing forth Wang’s divine power. Each figure mimics the other in a display of visual corresponding

contrasts. The arcing outline of Wang's frenetic body mirrored by the understated grace of Sa's posture, the fiery halo of flames encircling Wang's head resonate with the golden corona surrounding Sa's, the threat raised by Wang's swinging golden whip in his right hand contrasting with the subdued fan Sa holds in his right hand pointing down—each visual element (while in accord with liturgical descriptions) reflects one another to produce the effect of reduplication, of mimesis itself (fig. 11, fig. 25, fig. 13).



(fig. 25)



(fig. 13)

While such visuality evinces a series corresponding contrast that neatly fits into more general schema of *wen* and *wu* that, the relationship between the two figures becomes apparent in their faces. They are, in fact, two faces of the same persona.⁴³⁸ Wang's face naturally shows his hallmark ferocity with its crimson color and protruding fangs, but looking past the obvious, we can see that the two figures share a common visage. The contours of their faces each share a similar outline, each highlighted by tufts of hair puffing out at the sides on top of their heads, and whiskers framing their jawline. More strikingly, each figure shares the same vision. Following their gaze pointed downward toward the lower right register we can see both Sa and Wang gaze

⁴³⁸ I would like to thank Vincent Goossaert for suggesting the explicit nature of this shared identity and I look forward to his forthcoming work on the subject.

as one, their combined vision leading to the turbulent sea where the writhing vipers rise up out of the water with gaping jaws. Looking through the world of ritual actualization, one can almost see the two figures, looking as one and visualizing the serpents below as though the visuality of the painting actively actualizes the scene, thus recreating the ritual procedures of the liturgies in the tableau itself. As such, the visuality of the painting as an object itself mimics the promise of ritual transformation of the Daoist's body to manifest the presence of Wang Lingguan.

Not only does the MMA scroll establish the parallel bodies of Sa and Wang, Daoist and Deity, but it also reveals the act of creating a new body in the transformative process of externalizing Wang Lingguan. We have already seen how the MMA scroll mimics the critical sense of emergence found within Daoist rituals for manifesting Wang's "true form." To get a better sense of how this process unfolds across Wang Lingguan liturgy, let us now look through the lens of *bianshen* at a different ritual text as it relates to the visuality of the MMA scroll.

5.4 Externalizing Bodies in the "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan"

Much like the invocations we found in the discussion of the "Secret Methods of the Sound of Thunder Three and Five Fire-Wheel Lingguan, Wang Yuanshuai" above, the text of the "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan" ("Huoluo Lingguan mifa") guides the Daoist to manifest the presence of Wang Lingguan through the "transformation of the body."⁴³⁹ It, too, establishes a ritual hierarchy of authority prior to detailing the process of externalizing the internal essences of the Daoist to bring the true form of Wang Lingguan into being. As such, the text of the "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan" is replete with visual vocabulary as it articulates how the Daoist is to envision this manifestation to occur. The text contains parts of a *liandu* liturgy in which

⁴³⁹ DZ 1220: 242.

Wang Lingguan, Sa Shoujian and their retinue are called upon to break into Hell and lead the deceased soul out toward salvation.⁴⁴⁰ The details described in this liturgy bear special significance on the potential ritual context for the MMA scroll, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven. The “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” is a much shorter text and does not cover the breadth of liturgical functions we find in the previous manual. Far from a detriment, the relative focus of the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” provides an even richer vocabulary for how the Daoist manifests Wang Lingguan, and thus, offers even deeper insight into how the MMA scroll tableau reflects this process. Let us now look at the section entitled “Making Use of Summoned Forces” (“Zuoyong zhaoyi” 作用召役),⁴⁴¹ which comes at the end of the liturgy and instructs the Daoist on how to manifest the efficacy of Wang Lingguan after the ritual for salvation has concluded.

“Making Use of the Summoned Force” begins the process in familiar terms of the internal-external dynamic that underpins the “transformation of the body”:

First fly and transform to face in front of the First Seat of Primordial Dipper.
 Inhale the fire-*qi* of the Southern region into your heart and with the tip of the tongue write one “blaze” character.
 Exhale on the Southern region.
 Transform [the *qi*] into one ring of fiery radiance.
 Its power scorches like the kind that emits from the sun.

⁴⁴⁰ DZ 1220: 242. The term “huoluo” 豁落 occurs throughout the *Daoist Canon* and while remains problematic for scholars to translate, generally seems to indicate a relationship to stars and astral bodies. “HuoLuo” as an epithet for Wang Lingguan may reference the “Seven Primes *huoluo*” (*huoluo qiyuan* 豁落七元) found in Tang collection of talismans related to the stars of the dipper. (See DZ 392 *Shangqing Huoluo qiyuan fu* 上清豁落七元符 Talismans of the Seven Primes Descending from Highest Clarity), 3b–6b). Catherine Despeux associates “huoluo” with liturgical traditions of Shangqing. In particular, she points to those liturgies designed for dismantling the Six Heavens (i.e. heterodox) cults in order to usher in the Shangqing cosmology of the three heavens. Thus, “huoluo” seems to suggest some exorcistic function of purifying the realm. However, Wang Lingguan is not mentioned by name as part of this process. Nonetheless, there appears to be a specific relationship between Wang Lingguan’s identity and the notion of “*huoluo*” outside the *Daoist Canon*. Huoluo Yuanshuai” 豁落元帥 also appears in the cartouche above the figure who might be identified as Wang Lingguan in the *Daozi mobao* 刀子墨寶 (Ink-Treasure of [Wu] Daozi). (See Isabelle Robinet, *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan tradition of great purity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 32, 206; Catherine Despeux, in Livia Kohn, ed. *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 509; Schipper, *TC*, p. 1198).

⁴⁴¹ DZ 1220: 242.4a–b.

先飛化元斗一座於面前，吸南方火炁入心，以舌尖書一炁字，呵於南方，化成一團火光，其勢炎炎如日出之狀。⁴⁴²

It begins by locating the process by situating Wang Lingguan within the southern region of the cosmogonic Dipper, the direction of fire, from which the Daoist draws in fiery-*qi* to form the substantive base of what will become Wang's external form. The fiery *qi* taken from that space is given a specific form of a graphic character “blaze” (“*liao*” 炁) through the bodily techniques of the priest.⁴⁴³ The Daoist first brings the *qi* to the tip of their tongue, where they transform the formless essence into form, in this case a written character, which is then externalized and transformed again into a ring of fiery radiance. The externalized *qi* has the effect of fire and is also given movement and direction—spatiality—as well as the visuality of radiance and the effective power of the burning sun. The fiery radiance that materializes evokes the blazing corona we see in the MMA scroll surrounding the crown of Wang Lingguan's head (fig. 26). Likewise, the fire-wheel on which he rides that makes up part of Wang's identifiable repertoire is encircled by a fiery ring (fig. 27).



(fig. 26)



(fig. 27)

⁴⁴²DZ 1220: 242.4a.

⁴⁴³ The visual aspects of the constituents that make up the character “*liao*” 炁 corresponds to “fire dipper” (*huodou* 火斗), which is the talismanic term for the “southern dipper” (*nandou* 南斗), the cosmic abode of Wang Lingguan.

But this is getting ahead of ourselves. According to the text of the “Making Use of Summoned Forces,” nothing has formed except a burning ring of fire. Down, down, down, the Daoist delves before finally finding something, a single point of light from which the process of bringing Wang into being may begin:

Within this fire is one point of efficacious radiance indistinct but moving. This is what’s called DeepDeep (*yaoyao* 窈窈), DarkDark (*mingming* 冥冥). There within is “essence” (*jing* 精); ObscureObscure (*huanghuang* 恍恍), IndistinctIndistinct (*huhu* 惚惚), there within is “thingness”(wu 物).

火中有一點靈光隱隱而動。
所謂窈窈冥冥，其中有精，恍恍惚惚，其中有物。⁴⁴⁴

In this remarkable moment, the text articulates the process of transforming from the immaterial to the material by invoking the Dao itself. While clumsy in translation, the aural impact of the reduplication of “*yaoyao*” 窈窈, “*mingming*” 冥冥, “*huanghuang*” 恍恍, and “*huhu*” 惚惚 goes beyond emphasizing the lilt of ritual language.⁴⁴⁵ It evokes the conventions of vocabulary for describing the source of all being itself, namely the Dao. The onomatopoeic syllables here echo the convention of referencing the primordial chaos (i.e. *hundun* 混沌) that precedes the division of the world into distinguishable elements in Daoist cosmogonies.⁴⁴⁶ The phrase derives from chapter Twenty-One of the *Daode jing*, where it describes the formation of the perceptible world arising from the undifferentiated obscurity of the Dao itself. The ways in which the *Daode jing* describes such a process is particularly instructive in the context of

⁴⁴⁴ DZ 1220: 242.4a.

⁴⁴⁵ Each line also rhymes.

⁴⁴⁶ We find a similar image of a circle as the place of cosmogonic origin elsewhere in the rituals of the *Daofa huiyuan* compendium. The “Diagram of One Point of Efficacious Radiance” instructs the priest to incant a similar phrase while actualizing a point of efficacious radiance within a circle. The rite is part of a broader ritual program to engender the inner immortal embryo generally known as “keeping the one” (*shouyi* 守一), DZ 1220: 29.9a. The phrase 杳杳冥冥其中有精 appears with 恍恍惚惚其中有物 over thirty times in the *Daozang*, especially prominent among texts detailing techniques for inner alchemy.

bringing divine power into knowable form, as it articulates the formation of being in terms of “thingness” (*wu* 物) and “essence” (*jing* 精), that are real and knowable:

...As a thing (*wu* 物), the Dao is obscure (*huang* 恍), indistinct (*hu* 惚).
 Indistinct and obscured, yet within there is an image (*xiang* 象).
 Obscured and indistinct, yet within there is a thing (*wu* 物).
 Deep (*yao* 窈) and dark (*ming* 冥), yet within there is an essence (*jing* 精).
 This essence is quite real (*zhen* 真), and within it there is something that can be tested...
 ...道之為物, 唯恍唯惚. 忽兮恍兮, 其中有象; 恍兮忽兮, 其中有物. 窈兮冥兮, 其中有精; 其精甚真, 其中有信...⁴⁴⁷

The relevance of this passage from the *Daode jing* to the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” is not one of historical continuity,⁴⁴⁸ but rather one of an underlying conceptual framework for expressing how to bring that which is formless into being itself.⁴⁴⁹ The movement distinguishable forms coming into view from indistinct backdrop alludes to the “deep,” “dark,” and “obscured”—the vocabulary of the Dao.⁴⁵⁰ But just as the MMA scroll reveals the process of Wang Lingguan and his retinue emerging forth from the swirling muted mists, so too does the ritual language of “Making Use of the Summoned Forces” articulate the process of the deity

⁴⁴⁷ LZ 21. For further discussion of how these terms relate to perception in the invocatory context of manifesting Thunder Deities, see Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” pp. 73–78.

⁴⁴⁸ It is well beyond the scope of the current study to revisit the critical assessment of the *Lao Zi*’s textual history and the profound impact of the commentarial traditions that have largely defined what the text represents to different people. For a brief summary, see Isabelle Robinet’s “Polysémisme du Texte Canonique et Syncrétisme des Interprétations: Étude Taxinomiques des Commentaires de *Daode jing* au Sein de la Tradition Chinoise,” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident*, no. 5 (1984): 27–47.

⁴⁴⁹ According to the *Xiang'er* commentary, this passage, and in particular that which can be tested (what Bokenkamp translates from the *Xiang'er* perspective as “tokens of faith” (*xin* 信)) relates directly to bodily practices of merging and holding fast to internal essences that preserve life. As Bokenkamp’s translation makes clear, the *Xiang'er* commentary relates such practices to the Celestial Masters community’s need for practicing good deeds to cultivate one’s body accordingly. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 113–114.

⁴⁵⁰ For a discussion of how Daoist ritual informs modes of perception, and in particular the transposition of subject and object, see Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” pp. 35–91.

becoming a Thing (*wu* 物) by using the exact visual vocabulary of bringing form into being from the muddled obscurity of the deep dark horizon:

Thus, the dusky eye shuts in *qi* within my thoughts.
 The fiery *qi* within my heart also steams and rises together with the fiery swirl
 before my face...
 There the horizon is faint but moving.

乃瞑目閉炁內想，吾心中之火炁亦騰騰而起與面前之火團。在天際隱隱而動。⁴⁵¹

We see a similar process unfold before us when we returning our gaze to the MMA scroll tableau. There, faint swirls of muted clouds obscure a horizon—their color and movement echo a misty backdrop evocative of *shanshui* paintings. Starting at the top register, the clear sky appears defined by a dark blue backdrop accentuated with lighter parallel horizontal lines that give the impression of stratus clouds moving across the heavens (fig. 28). The thin light lines contrast with the swirling clouds that fill the rest of the tableau with only a precious few places where the sky still peaks through, giving the sense of smoke billowing down and obscuring the sky from view. The clouds extend all the way to the edge of the painting, suggesting that they originate somewhere above and beyond view. Coming down into the sky from up and beyond lends a celestial sense to the clouds themselves, as though they pour forth from the obscure realm beyond the sky.



Upper Register (fig. 28)



Lower Register (fig. 29)

⁴⁵¹ DZ 1220: 242.4a.

The swirling clouds extend from the top to the bottom of the painting, where they form the perimeter of this separate space that also includes snake-filled waves below (fig. 29).⁴⁵² Swirling mists like steam rise from the roiling waves. Thus, like the ritual invocations, here in the MMA scroll tableau, clouds define the bounds of a world within a world—the world of the dark blue sky into which this clouds pour forth, and an active world within the cloudy realm itself. This world within itself resonates with the internal world the Daoist creates within from which Wang Lingguan emerges as they externalize his form.

Bounding the worldspace of the painting, the swirling mists create a distinct place in which potentiality of divine power descend into fully formed being to be present in that world. It is exactly this process of descent that the MMA scroll reveals, and does so in a manner that echoes the process we find in ritual articulations from the *Daofa huiyuan*. Thus, in parallel to the ritual texts, the mists of the MMA scroll *form* the obscure and shifting horizon that locate the place in which “fiery *qi*” may rise and swirl. As in the MMA tableau, the swirling indistinct horizon is likewise actualized according to the ritual manual to create the space into which a ray of concentrated *qi* may emerge:

Then, with my eye’s radiance, I shoot out one ray, its fire like a golden swirl.
I allow the glow of my eyes to rise to the crown of my head.
Then, exhale out the fiery *qi* in my heart, that it may come together with the other
atop (my head). Within there is one seat of golden radiance in the Northern
Dipper that shines thusly...

然後以目光一射，其火若金團，隨我眼光在吾頂上。乃呵出我心中火炁，與彼相合在上。中有北斗一座金光朗然。⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Here, one can see a reference to Ma Yuan’s style in the accentuated curvature of the cresting waves reminiscent of his *Studies of Water Shuitu juan* 水圖卷 (in particular, see “Yunshu langjuan” 雲舒浪卷 and “Huanghu niliu” 黃河逆流). This is hardly surprising given that the MMA scroll reflects the style associated with late Zhe school (*Zhepai* 浙派) and the characteristic homage paid to the Southern Song Ma-Xia style 馬夏 that typified early Ming painting.

⁴⁵³ DZ 1220: 242.4a–b.

Internalized forms are made manifest here through the process of externalizing radiance and *qi* that they may join together outside the body of the priest, and through that merging, produce the same pregnant point origin for divine presence to emerge, only this time, in the form of Wang Lingguan emerging into the outside world itself. In keeping with the cosmological associations with Wang Lingguan, the process is expressed through the idiom of fire, taking the shape of a fiery “golden swirl” (*jintuan* 金團). Therein, one finds the “Northern Dipper” (*beidou* 北斗)—the pivot of the entire universe and the symbolic locus of origin in broader Daoist cosmology. It is no surprise then that the power of the Dipper be invoked as a point of origin in a ritual for bringing Wang Lingguan into being. That point is described in the familiar visual terms—a golden radiance (*jinguang* 金光) that shines forth,⁴⁵⁴ much like the corona of fiery radiance glowing around the crown of Wang Lingguan’s head as he appears in the MMA tableau (fig. 30).



(fig. 26)

As with the host of deities that emerge from the misty backdrop of the MMA tableau, the ritual process of “Making Use of the Summoned Forces” as described in the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” liturgy concludes with the dramatic scene of Wang Lingguan bursting forth

⁴⁵⁴ “*Jinguang*” 金光 relates to the sense of primordial creation from the undefined chaos of *hundun* 混沌 found among the various “Incantations of Golden Light” (*jinguang zhou* 金光咒). See Meulenbeld, “From ‘Withered Wood’ to ‘Dead Ashes,’” pp. 229–230.

from the fiery depths. The apex of the rite occurs when the priest actualizes the Northern Dipper within the ritual space in the form of a fiery swirl composed of externalized *qi*. That swirl becomes a fire-pellet (*huokuai* 火塊) that will serve as the point of origin for Wang Lingguan to emerge into the world. Through their performative repertoire in the martial idiom, the Daoist cuts open the fiery mass to engender the demonic god's presence (fig. 13):

... Thereupon, with your right hand sword gesture, split open the fire pellet (i.e. the fiery swirl).

See (*jian*) Wang Yuanshuai bursting forth from within the expanse of fiery radiance.

Standing there in front of the altar, draped in colors manifesting his state of great power and fury.

遂以右手劍訣，劈開火塊，見王元帥從萬丈火光中迸出，立于壇前，服色分明其狀大威怒。⁴⁵⁵



(fig. 13)

While the ritual birth of Wang Lingguan coming out from a split pellet harkens back to cosmogonic motifs found elsewhere in the Chinese tradition and beyond,⁴⁵⁶ it is through the visual that the deity is born. Here, visibility is paramount to the ontological process of bringing

⁴⁵⁵ DZ 1220: 242.4b.

⁴⁵⁶ For example, Sun Wukong's birth from a stone at beginning of the *Xiyou ji*.

the god into being. After cutting open the “fire pellet” via the embodied technique of hand-seals (*shouyin*), in this case within the martial idiom of a sword), the priest “sees” (*jian*) Wang Lingguan coming forth from the expansive depths. The act of “seeing” here empowers the priest as the Subject, who in their ability to perceive the deity, gives the deity “form” (*xing*), and thus, brings it into being. The presence of Wang Lingguan is then confirmed via his vibrant colors being distinctly visible (*fenming* 分明), as he literally “stands” (*li* 立) there as the Object of the Daoist’s gaze. This notion of the deity “standing” there in front of the altar directly relates directly to practice of installing (*li*) icons into the altar space,⁴⁵⁷ such that ritual object that image divine figures become objects of devotion and the site of efficacious response. Thus, the connection between the presence of Wang Lingguan through articulation of ritual language and that of the MMA scroll is made explicit in the invocatory language itself. By making Wang Lingguan “stand” present at the altar, both the ritual and the ritual scroll manifest the god’s presence—not stand in for the deity, but rather, stand *as* the deity.

Like an invocatory text, the visuality of the MMA scroll holds the promise of producing the true form of its divine figures. In the previous chapter, we considered this invocatory promise in structural terms. Here, we may now begin to consider this invocatory promise in terms of an embodied language of *bianshen*, one in which the MMA scroll mimics the internal process of the Daoist priest’s own body. As such, the MMA scroll itself functions as a body to bring Wang Lingguan’s true form into being—making it become real. Just as the Daoist’s body is the medium for the visuality that is first internalized and then externalized to produce the “true form” of Wang Lingguan, the MMA scroll in its very articulation of the same kind of visual

⁴⁵⁷ As Deborah Sommers has shown, this notion of *li* 立 has been associated with manifesting divine power in icons since the Han dynasty when the youngest descendants would personate the deceased (*lishi* 立尸) to receive offerings and give commands during funeral rites. See, Sommer, “Destroying Confucius,” pp. 95–133.

vocabulary, may serve as a kind of “body” to produce the deity’s presence. The potential to do so lies within how a painting mimics the ritual process undertaken by the Daoist to produce similar ends. This sense of mimesis, one that not only replicates the forms of performance but also produces similar results is a creative (or re-creative) process that can be found elsewhere in the discourse of Chinese visual culture. A brief look into that discourse will help inform our understanding of how the MMA scroll recreates the presence of Wang Lingguan and brings the god into being.

5.5 Mimesis and Bodies of Presence

Mimesis plays a critical role in the theorizations of both Chinese visual cultures and ritual performance. While it is beyond the purview of the current study to unpack all the implications of mimesis, it is instructive to consider some of the ways in which the body functions as a medium to connect the visual to ritual performance in terms of mimesis. Working from Matthias Obert’s insights into Chinese ink-brush painting, we will first look at how the performance of painting and writing in Chinese visual cultures may be viewed as an embodied process of re-creation, before then looking toward how embodied process of mimesis functions to empower objects in Daoist ritual.

Obert’s work looks at Chinese ink-brush writing from the perspective of how aesthetics connects to phenomenological concerns of recreating presence.⁴⁵⁸ According to Obert, the process of writing (and painting, as well) within traditional Chinese discourse is ultimately a process mediated by the body to re-create, and thus encounter anew, the visual traces of past masters. As he notes:

⁴⁵⁸ Mathias Obert, “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness,” *Dao*, 12 (2013): 523–543. Obert explicitly mentions Theodor Adorno, Michael Tausig and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others.

There clearly is a moment of mimesis involved in any writing procedure “coming about by itself.” However, as is put into evidence by lots of ancient textual material, this sort of mimesis represents an intentionality directed toward *qualities of body movement* [emphasis in the original], rather than concerning scriptural symbols or visual patterns as such. Since the mimetic ability, in this case, essentially is performed by the body on its own, it should be understood as body mimesis.⁴⁵⁹

Thus, the visual quality of mimeses in copying the form of past masters is not intended as an intellectual exercise, but a bodily encounter which is both mediated and made meaningful by different “bodies” connecting each other. This sense of what Obert calls “body mimesis” (*leibliche Mimesis*) describes the connection between the creative process of producing the visual and the ability of that visual creation to re-create presence. The bodily presence of the artist is left on the object through traces of the immaterial essences—their *qi* and *shen*—and thus, the painting or scroll becomes a body unto itself.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, for Obert, *mimesis* does not imply merely imitation or representations, but an active embodied performance of re-creation. Hence, the aesthetics of Chinese ink-brush painting (as well as other genres of paintings) fit into the broader phenomenological encounter of “bodies” and perceiving presence like those raised by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and many before him.

Indeed, Obert explicitly draws upon Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological considerations of perception to inform the process of “body mimesis.” The visual endeavor starts with the painter transforming the corporeal world into one that is purely visual. We find this notion expressed in Merleau-Ponty’s oft quoted line, “by lending his body to the world that the painter

⁴⁵⁹ Obert, “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness, p. 542.

⁴⁶⁰ This embodied relationship between *qi* and *shen* as it pertains to encounters with the visual also appears in Obert’s earlier study of Song dynasty *shanshui*. See Obert, *Welt als Bild, passim*. For consideration of the cosmological significance of encountering traces in Early China, see Tobias B. Zürn, “Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the Huainanzi’s Self-Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2016.

changes the world into a painting.”⁴⁶¹ This process of transference, or what Merleau-Ponty describes as “transubstantiation,” occurs on the level of perception.⁴⁶² The painting re-creates (i.e. makes real) the painter’s vision of the “real world” for the viewer to experience as though it is real. As such, the painting as an object not only mediates the interaction between the painter’s vision and the viewer’s vision, but actively participates in the re-creation of the “world.” As Obert is quick to point out, this grounds Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of perception in the experience of the body.⁴⁶³ This is not an interpretive process, but one of ontological encounters in which perception is an active process and not merely a passive encounter with an object.⁴⁶⁴ It also describes exactly the process undertaken by a Daoist priest in their rituals of transforming the body to produce the divine presence of Wang Lingguan, only in reverse. As we have seen, the ritual manuals are replete with visual vocabulary to perceive the world of the divine, and through the merging (*he*) of immaterial essences (*qi* and *shen*) within the body and eventually the externalization of those essences that the priest may actualize (*cun*) the “true form” of the god here in our world. Thus, through ritual processes articulated in the visual vocabulary, the Daoist reverses the process and changes a painting into the world.

Transforming the world through body mimesis is a matter of course within the realm of Daoist ritual. Peter Nickerson addresses the role of mimesis directly in his study of contemporary Daoist funerary rites in southern Taiwan. During the funerary rites, paper figures in the form of human bodies (*hunshen* 魂身, *ren'ou* 人偶, *wanghun* 亡魂) are used to conduct the deceased

⁴⁶¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 162.

⁴⁶² Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” *passim*. See, Meleunbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” *passim*.

⁴⁶³ Here “Body” is not limited to corporeality, but serves the ontological sense of a “being in and toward the world” (*être au monde*) and its capability to actively interact with other such “bodies.”

⁴⁶⁴ In what he sees as contrary to Merleau-Ponty’s view on the phenomenology of perception, Michel Serres argues for an active process of sensory engagement in producing bodies. See Michel Serres, *The Five Senses* (London: Continuum, 2008).

souls through the realm of the dead. Nickerson shows how through the process of performing mimesis itself that the Daoist priest transforms the paper icons often considered to stand-in for the deceased, into the deceased themselves—a “body double.”⁴⁶⁵ Nickerson argues that the world of the altar becomes real through embodied ritual articulations of different agents undertaking the process of breaking down the fortresses of Hell. The actualizing power of the “body double” extends to the figurative objects that participate in the ritual, as well.⁴⁶⁶

Those paper figurines which occupy the place of the deceased upon the altar to be subject to the priest’s commands are not, as Nickerson is quick to point out, mere representations of lost souls. Rather, “the objects that are used to ‘represent’ invisible beings simply *are* [emphasis in original] those invisible beings. The copy, through the magic of mimesis, becomes the thing itself.”⁴⁶⁷ To borrow from Merleau-Ponty’s vocabulary referenced earlier, this kind of “transubstantiation” occurs on an ontological level within the ritual arena to literally re-create the world of the deceased as a means to save souls, and therefore re-fashion in an ontological sense, a new body.⁴⁶⁸ Nickerson’s focus is part of a larger ritual program of “salvation by means of sublimation” (*liandu*), which bears special significance for the potential context of the MMA scroll and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Here, it is important to note

⁴⁶⁵ Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” pp. 117–183.

⁴⁶⁶ The sense of an active “body double” occurs in the contemporary ritual practices surrounding spirit-mediums, as well. Lin Wei-Ping’s research into contemporary Taiwanese spirit medium cults draws a functional connection between the body of the medium (*shentong* 神童) dedicated to a divinity, and that of its carved icon (*ouren* 歐人), which images its form. See, Lin Wei-Ping, *Materializing Magic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 27–52.

⁴⁶⁷ Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” p. 151.

⁴⁶⁸ We find this ritual transformation of object into active agent articulated in terms of body elsewhere as well, especially in the *kaiguang* 開光 (“opening the radiance”) rites for consecrating icons that they may become enlivened by opening their corporeal passages to let *qi* flow and animate their bodies. In addition to also opening up the five viscera that make up a human body, talismans and apotropaic materials are inserted into the body cavity, thus bringing to life the inert object in a manner reminiscent of traditions in south Asia concerned with enlivened “seeing” (*darśan*) as well as European narratives regarding the Golem (See, Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine in Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

how Nickerson shows that the materiality of ritual salvation undergoes transformations articulated through a process of mimesis negotiated through the Daoist's body. This kind of mimetic process is not limited to statuary such as paper icons, but can be seen in interaction between the priest and the ritual scrolls used in contemporary *jiao* programs that show the priest before the Gate of Heaven, as a prelude to the climactic audience with the high gods of Daoism.

In the image below of the “Gate of Heaven” seen previously (fig. 16), we see the renowned Daoist, Chen Rongsheng 陳榮盛 (1927–2014), in the process of his ritual ascent to an audience with the Daoist High Gods (fig. 17). Crouched before the inner altar, Chen's own body undergoes an internal journey as he sits in perfect mimesis with that of the figure of the Daoist priest we see in painting itself, as both prepare themselves before the heavenly gate that demarcates the entrance to the highest realm of Daoist divinities.



(fig. 16)



(fig. 17)

Here at a pivotal point in the ritual, the distinction between Daoist priest at the altar and Daoist priest in the painted scroll collapses in the transformative process of one's spirit entering into an audience with the divine.⁴⁶⁹ In a moment reminiscent of the Jiajing Emperor's own claim to apotheosis after having installed an image of himself as a Thunder Deity in West Park, the

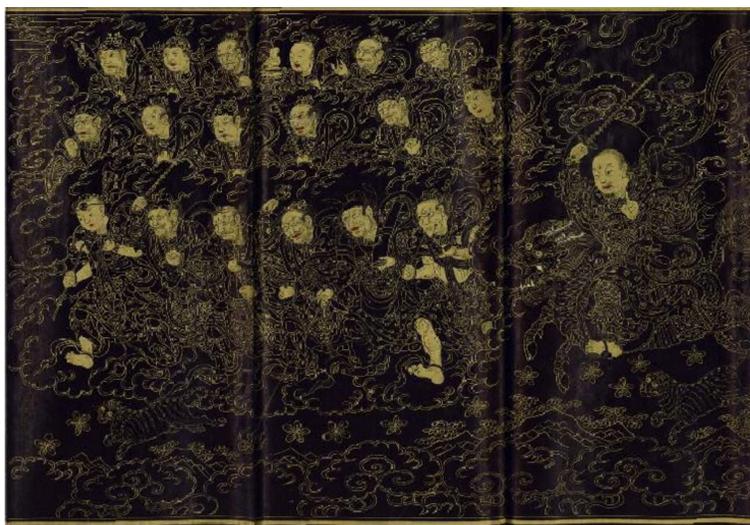
⁴⁶⁹ For a further discussion of how this ritual mode of perception collapses the distinction between “Subject” and “Object,” see Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” p. 73.

differentiation between image and body collapses in the reflection of the other. As both Obert and Nickerson point out, though from different contexts, the creative process of mimesis lives on in the material and visual objects that Daoists and painters produce. Thus, in the context of Daoist ritual, we may view the material objects themselves as active participant in that same creative process. As we see in the example of Chen Rongsheng's altar scroll of the Gate of Heaven, mimesis goes both directions. The visuality presented in the tableau of altar scroll like the Gate of Heaven, and indeed that of the MMA scroll do not merely reflect a vision of the divine. They also reverberate with the mimetic power to bring that which they image into being. As such, paintings may function as bodies themselves to manifest the presence of the divine figures they show, and in so doing, mimic the process of actualizing divine power as it comes to be articulated in the invocatory context of Daoist texts. To help contextualize the way in which the MMA scroll would do so during the time it was created, we may look to other examples of images re-creating the process of *bianshen* commissioned for the Ming court.

5.6 Contextualizing Visuality of *bianshen*: *Yushu jing* during the Ming

Both the body of the Daoist and the body of the scroll are part of a much broader continuum of performative mimesis for bringing the “true form” of the divine body into being. In this way, the MMA scroll fits into a broader Ming worldview in which the Ming imperial family would commission images of Thunder Deities as response to immediate threats to their person. To help contextualize the MMA scroll as a body of divine presence, we may look to the recent work on the efficacious relationship between text and images associated with the well-known Thunder Methods scripture the *Yushu jing* (Scripture of the Jade Pivot).

We have looked at frontispieces from editions of this same scripture in Chapter One, where we find the Xuande-era example that bears the earliest image of Wang Lingguan. Here, we may focus on a frontispiece commissioned by the Wanli emperor to be included in the 1615 edition of the *Yushu jing* shows the dynamic elements that resonate with the composition of the MMA scroll (fig. 30). The overall scene of the frontispiece, depicts several martial and civil figures emerging from a cloudy backdrop as they descend upon a roiling waves below. The composition, which Maggie Wan identifies the “martial scene,”⁴⁷⁰ evinces a shared motif with the MMA scroll and perhaps even hints a broader convention for imaging Thunder Deities among imperially commissioned works during the Ming.⁴⁷¹



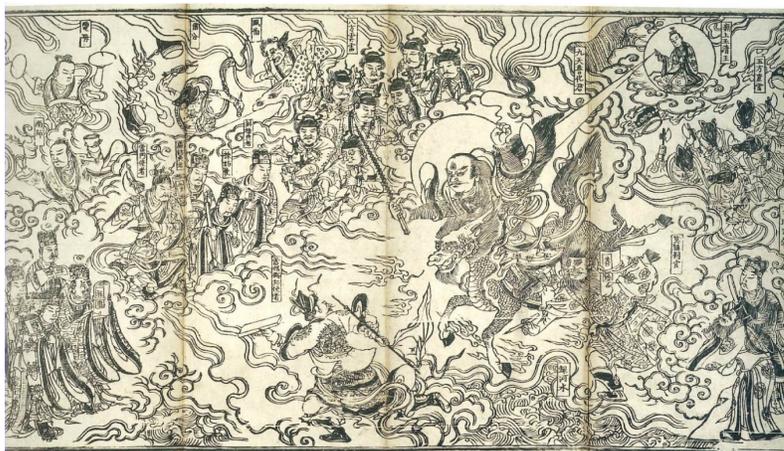
(fig. 30)
1615 *Yushu jing*, Collection of the National Library of China, Beijing.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 58.

⁴⁷¹ Poul Andersen’s study of a hanging scroll commissioned by the Wanli emperor in 1596 that is now part of the National Museum of Denmark’s permanent collection in Copenhagen shows the iconography of the scene relates directly to the visuality of the “martial scene” frontispiece (see, Daoist Iconography Project, <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/daoist-iconography/cop.html>). Likewise, the “Copenhagen scroll” shares strikingly similar visual details with two other known large hanging scrolls depicting Puhua Tianzun and the Thunder Division now housed in White Cloud Abbey in Beijing, which includes the text of the *Yushu jing* written as the outline of Puhua Tianzun’s robes. (Yau Chi On and Yau Hok Wa, *The Studio and the Altar: Daoist Art in China*, pp. 142–43).

⁴⁷² Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 46.

As Maggie Wan has shown, the 1615 edition reflects an already established visual motif of the “martial scene,” in which the main figure identified in the scripture as Puhua tianzun appears charging down from among the clouds to lead a troops of martial deities—the Yuanshuai of the Thunder Division (*leibu*). The most recognized examples of this come from an edition held in the British Library and featured in the exhibit of *Taoism and the Arts of China* (fig. 31). The main figure of the British Library edition is identified as Puhua tianzun dressed in armor riding a *qilin* and leading the Thunder Division into battle against unseen foes.⁴⁷³



(fig. 31)
Frontispiece of Yushu jing
 16th c.
 The British Library, London⁴⁷⁴

Taking a closer look at the visual elements of the frontispiece, we see the “civil” figure of a Daoist priest in the upper right register floating above the martial figure of Puhua tianzun. Like the MMA scroll, the contrast between the two in their attire and relative position within the composition suggests that the Daoist is in position of authority over the Thunder Deity.

⁴⁷³ Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 237–239; Wan, “Image and Efficacy, 2015; Poul Andersen, “The *Yushu jing* and the Qingwei Tradition,” Conference Paper, International Conference on Song Daoism organized by the Centre for Studies of Daoist Culture (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), September 22–23, 2011; (also see Daoist Iconography Project (<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/daoist-iconography/cop.html>)). The text of the *Yushu jing* itself contains dates to Yuan dynasty, but Wan argues that the edition is in fact from 1615. A similar example of the same scene with the ray of light can be found in a frontispiece dated to 1570 and now housed at the Tenri Central Library at Tenri University in Nara, Japan. (see Wan, “Images and Efficacy,” pp. 69–70)

⁴⁷⁴ Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 237–239

Likewise, the hand gesture of Puhua tianzun suggests mimicking the Daoist's raised their finger suggests a strong parallelism between the two. The *Yushu jing* frontispiece, however, makes the nature of that parallelism explicit in the way that a ray of light connects the figure of a Daoist priest to the body of Puhua tianzun (fig. 32).



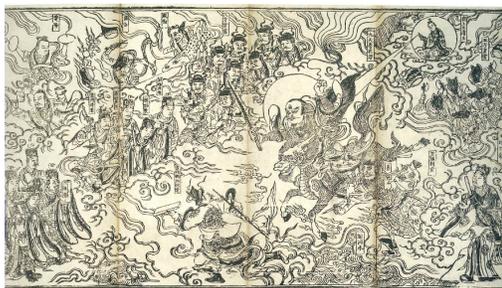
(fig. 32) Detail of *Yushu jing*

In his work on the liturgical roots of Puhua tianzun's imagery, Andersen suggests that the visual link made between the civil figure of the priest and that of the martial Puhua tianzun shows the process of "transforming the body." In so doing, the scene depicts the fundamental Thunder Methods idiom of externalizing the martial presence of a deity after the ritual process of internal transformation has been completed.⁴⁷⁵ The beam itself emanates from the index finger of the Daoist figure's raised right hand, a gesture echoed by the raised finger of Puhua tianzun's own left hand from which emerge lines evocative of radiance (*guang* 光).⁴⁷⁶ It is, in other words, an illustration of the process by which a Daoist priest manifests the presence of a Thunder Deity through externalizing their internal light. The beam of light clearly remains connected to both

⁴⁷⁵ Poul Andersen, "The *Yushu jing* and Qingwei tradition," 2011; also see Daoist Iconography Project (<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/daoist-iconography/cop.html>).

⁴⁷⁶ Wan identifies these lines as "reigning in the Atmospheres of the Nine Heavens."⁴⁷⁶ This same posture appears in the left hand of Puhua tianzun in the hanging scrolls, where thick polychromatic lines evoke the brilliant colors found described in rituals for absorbing and expelling transformative *qi*. (Wan. "Images and Efficacy," p. 55)

bodies—that of the Daoist and that of Puhua Tianzun—indicating the embodied relationship between the two (fig. 31, fig. 1). Thus, the frontispiece visually articulates the ritual process of *bianshen* we find in Thunder Methods ritual manuals, including those we have looked at in detail dedicated to Wang Lingguan. The degree to which the visuality of the *Yushu jing* frontispiece resonates with that of the MMA scroll suggests this connection can be made across media, and indeed, across different times.



(fig. 31)



(fig. 1)

The question then becomes, if the visuality of different scrolls can mimic the process of *bianshen*, what purpose can they serve? Fortunately, Maggie Wan's research into different Ming editions of *Yushu jing* frontispieces offers some insight into how imperially commissioned images of Daoist Thunder Deities like the MMA scroll were thought to serve the emperor's household.

Wan has shown that different examples of the visual tableau that appear in different editions of the text would in turn serve different roles, each independently of the scripture itself. During the early 17th century, the Wanli emperor commissioned several illustrated frontispieces to append to several editions of the text of the *Yushu jing*. According to Wan, two visual motifs of different editions were meant to produce efficacious results similar to different aspects of the

scripture itself.⁴⁷⁷ The “martial scene” reflects the violent efficacy of the Thunder Division over which Puhua tianzun commands with his martial authority. The second, what she calls “preaching at the court of Thunder,” draws from various visual repertoires associated with Buddhist sutras imagery and reflects the civil motif of an audience with the emperor (fig. 33).⁴⁷⁸



(fig. 33)
1619 frontispiece of *Yushu jing*,
Institute for Research in Humanities,
Kyoto University.⁴⁷⁹

Wan convincingly argues that the frontispieces attached to different editions of the *Yushu jing* themselves are not linked to the narrative of the scripture itself, but rather reflect contemporaneous visions of what such images can do in producing similar efficacious results as the scripture itself intends. She notes that, “the adoption of one type of frontispiece over the other was thus not the aesthetic quality but the efficacy of the visual representation in achieving the goal of the scripture reproduction.”⁴⁸⁰ Thus, Wan attributes the stark contrast between the two scenes as they appear in different editions to the changing needs of the imperial family and their different responses to various threats against their person.

In the case of the “martial scene,” Wan argues that “a new visual representation was therefore created to offer the commissioner an effective visual tool to gain access to the deity’s

⁴⁷⁷ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” *passim*.

⁴⁷⁸ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” 49. Also see, Katherine R. Tsiang, “Buddhist Printed Images and Texts of the Eight-Tenth Centuries: Typologies of Replication and Representation,” in Matthew Kapstein and Sam Schaik, eds. *Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rite and Teachings for this Life and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 201–252.

⁴⁷⁹ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 57

⁴⁸⁰ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 78.

power.”⁴⁸¹ That “commissioner” was the emperor himself, and thus highlights how the Ming imperial worldview viewed images of Daoist deities in terms of efficacy. In explaining how the Wanli emperor came to the choices he did in commissioning these two different motifs, Wan suggests that the martial scene found in a 1615 edition offered the emperor a different kind of power than the more conventional courtly scene found in the 1619 edition. “Preaching at the court of Thunder” was commissioned at a time that demanded more conventional need to reinforce order. In contrast, the 1615 “martial scene” was commissioned at a time when the Wanli Emperor’s own family was under threat.

A failed assassination attempt on the heir apparent that same year shook the security of the palace and the imperial family.⁴⁸² In response, the Wanli emperor commissioned the “martial scene” edition in order to avail himself of the apotropaic power that marshaling the Thunder Division brings. The motivation to do so is pertinent to our discussion of the MMA scroll, as the year 1542 when it was commissioned coincides with a particularly dangerous time for Jiajing’s own person, including the failed assassination attempt at the hands of his own concubines. That the Wanli emperor found commissioning images of Thunder Deities a reasonable response to such personal threats seventy-three years later suggests that the efficacious promise of Daoist images, and in particular those of Daoist martial deities, remained a consistent and powerful tool for the imperial household to combat threats. The “martial scene,” then, offers a poignant point of comparison to the visuality and potential for efficacy to the MMA scroll’s tableau.

In the case of the *Yushu jing* frontispieces, visuality itself serves as an effective response to combat looming threats in the imperial palace. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the image of Wang Lingguan also provided efficacious response to the imperial household from the time of

⁴⁸¹ Wan, “Image and Efficacy,” p. 78.

⁴⁸² Wan, “Images and Efficacy,” pp. 76–77.

Yongle. For Wan, the frontispieces commissioned by the Wanli emperor remain linked to the scripture itself, and thus, their power is still tied to the efficacy granted the scripture itself. Yet, as the mutability even within the same trope of frontispieces imagery suggests, visuality operates independently of textual descriptions. It serves to reason, then, that painted images of the same scene, or other similarly dynamic scenes, would also be found a worthy response by those seeking the power of Thunder Deities to combat their current troubles. Images like the MMA scroll, then could likewise provide the imperial family an “effective tool to gain access to the deity’s power.”

This “power,” as Andersen suggests, is integrally linked to the ritual processes of manifesting the divine, expressed in the liturgical techniques of “transformation of the body.” As such, the MMA scroll is part of a broader worldview at court that envision images of martial Daoist deities to be capable of producing efficacious responses in the way that Daoists were able to produce results by manifesting the presence of those same deities by ritually transforming their body. Thus, the visual parallels between the civil Daoist and the martial god that we see in the MMA scroll and in the *Yushu jing* frontispieces function just as the body of the Daoist during ritual performance. The painting then acts as a body itself to provide access to such divine power by mimicking, and thus re-creating, the ritual relationship between the Daoist body and the body divine.

Concluding Remarks: Body Doubles

We have seen some of the ways that the texts of *Daofa huiyuan* instruct the Daoist how to manifest the presence of Wang Lingguan’s true form through the ritual process of *bianshen*. In these rites, the Daoist’s body serves as the medium for producing the presence of the god

through a negotiation of internal processes that lead to the externalization of Wang's form. Wang Lingguan thus emerges from the body of the Daoist to become real as articulated through a highly visual vocabulary. Likewise, the MMA scroll mimics the processes described in the ritual manuals via the visual vocabulary it shares with the texts. The way that the MMA scroll tableau presents the parallel figures of the civil Sa Shoujian and the martial Wang Lingguan in complimentary opposition establishes the dynamics for *bianshen* to proceed. Wang's fiery visage standing out against the muted backdrop of the tableau mimics how the ritual texts describe the internal processes undertaken by the Daoist to envision the deity within their own body.

Wang Lingguan's dynamic emergence from the clouds in the MMA scroll resonates with those same texts describing how the Daoist then externalizes the presence of the god himself. Like the body of the Daoist, the MMA scroll re-creates the process of Wang Lingguan moving from internalized formlessness to a distinct and present form. As such, we have seen how the MMA scroll also performs the functions of the Daoist body as its own kind of body, capable of making the form of Wang Lingguan "real" or "true." In so doing, the MMA scroll functions as a body of presence, one that by virtue of its own material presence may produce the efficacy promised in rituals for manifesting the "true form" of Wang Lingguan.

To see how the MMA scroll functions as just such an object, follow me, intrepid reader, that we may sojourn together into the world of talismans where the material world becomes inscribed in powerful ways...

Chapter Six: Talismans and the Shared Visuality of the “True Form”

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road...

Introduction

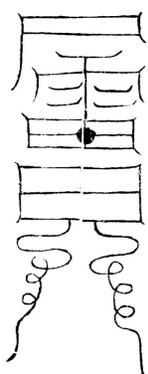
In the previous two chapters, we have laid out how the visuality of MMA scroll mimics the ritual processes for manifesting the “true form” of Wang Lingguan. Using a visual vocabulary that it shares with the invocatory texts of ritual manuals from the *Daoist Canon*, the MMA scroll recreates the structures of ritual authority to establish the space within its tableau to bring the deity into form. In addition, the MMA scroll also recreates the bodily relationship between the Daoist and Wang Lingguan to mimic the ritual process of manifesting his form through “transformation of the body/spirit” (*bianshen*). In these ways, the MMA does the work of ritual through the visuality of its tableau.

In the current chapter, we will look at how these various layers of recreating ritual efficacy relate specifically to the MMA scroll’s own presence as a powerful material object. Borrowing from Paul Copp’s notion of a broader “ritual imagination,” we will once again return to the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* to focus on how the texts detail creating their own objects of power for manifesting Wang Lingguan—talismans (*fu* 符).⁴⁸³ Copp’s recent study of Medieval Buddhist practices regarding the use of spells (*dhārāṇi*) demonstrates that powerful objects functioned within a broader conceptual network informed by ritual. All kinds of objects—texts, images, statues, amulets, body adornments—are not only capable of *doing*, but

⁴⁸³ Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, *passim*.

are in fact *expected* to do something.⁴⁸⁴ As we have seen in previous chapters, this was certainly the case at the Ming court during the time when the MMA scroll was commissioned.

While the MMA scroll is not a talisman, we will see how it functions like a talisman within the broader ritual imagination. Generally speaking, talismans are the most recognized medium by which the “true form” (*zhenxing*) of the deity appears in Daoist ritual. Individual features of a god’s form are invoked as the Daoist draws the talisman, often in the shape of stylized Chinese characters on strips of paper, until the entire body of the god is present (see fig. 34, fig. 35). The result is the presence of the god itself inscribed in a visual and material form that can then be applied in the physical world.



(fig. 34)
“Talisman for
Summoning to Merge,”
DZ 1220: 242.2a.



(fig. 35)
“Talisman of the Chief
Commander,”
DZ 1220: 241.6a

The apotropaic function of such talismans suggests that the objects themselves perform an ongoing function. Likewise, the power that these objects were seen to produce remain active long after the ritual for creating them had ceased. As such, talismans occupy a special place in the ritual negotiations between manifesting divine presence, visibility, and the materiality of objects. By comparing the MMA scroll with different kinds of talismans designed for

⁴⁸⁴ See Robert Brown, “Expected Miracles,” pp. 23–36 for the notion of “miraculous expectation” as it relates to Buddhist icons.

manifesting Wang Lingguan's "true form," we gain clearer insight into how a painting as an object may produce efficacious results.

Before looking at specific examples, we will first consider how talismans are seen as objects of power, first in general and then in the specific world of Daoist writing and the role writing plays in expressing power and authority. Then, we shall look at two examples of talismans from separate manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* and compare the visuality of their form with that of the MMA scroll to show how each resonate together within the broader ritual imagination. The first examples come from the manual "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan," where we will consider the "Talisman for Summoning to Merge" (fig. 55) and the "Talisman for Merging the Scene" that are both designed to assemble Wang Lingguan's retinue of deities. The second example is the "Talisman of the Chief Commander" (fig. 56) from the manual of the "Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang," which is designed to send Wang Lingguan into action. In so doing, this chapter aims to broadly connect the visuality of the MMA scroll with the visuality of talismans to better understand how the painting could be viewed as a powerful object in and of itself. It is important to note here at the outset that the point of these comparisons is not to suggest that the MMA scroll is a talisman. Rather, our methodology of bringing talismans in concert with the MMA scroll aims to show how the painting may function *like* a talisman within the broader ritual imagination through a more general shared sense of visuality for manifesting Wang Lingguan.

6.1 Talismans and Producing the "True Form"

In the worldview of Daoist ritual, the imagistic qualities of writing carry great power that extend well beyond semantic meaning of the words themselves. The visual and material presence

of this ritually-charged script contains the ability to produce efficacy by its mere presence and can thus communicate a sense of authority that defies discursive interpretations. While scholars have done much to acknowledge the symbolic power of these kinds of writings as a feature of Daoist visual and material cultures, we have seen that language of Daoist ritual is foremost invocatory in nature.⁴⁸⁵ Drawing upon a confluence of their “secret instructions” (*mijue*) repertoire —writing, body postures, invocations, hand gestures, visualizations—the Daoist actualizes the form of the deity in the process of producing the talisman itself. Thus, the talisman is both part of, and the product of, embodied ritual performance. In the case of talismans, the visuality of their written form offers a vocabulary for the language of presence in its most explicit form.⁴⁸⁶ At the same time, talismans are also objects in and of themselves. As such, they are part of a much broader worldview of objects functioning as active agents in the production of ritual efficacy.⁴⁸⁷

In surveying various kinds of graphic designs found within the ritual manuals preserved in the *Daoist Canon*, Franciscus Verellen distinguishes talismans from pictorial images noting that, “Thanks to the authority of the written word in China, the graphs of written characters are

⁴⁸⁵ For example, see Franciscus Verellen, “The Dynamic Design: Ritual and Contemplative Graphics in Daoist Scriptures,” in Benjamin Penny, ed. *Daoism in History: Essays in Honour of Liu Tsu'un-yan* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 159–186; Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 246–279; Hsieh Shu-wei, “Writing from Heaven: Celestial Writing in Six-Dynasties Daoism,” Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2005; Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, pp. 123–193; Monika Drexler, *Daoistische Schriftmagie: Interpretationen zu den Schriftamuletten Fu im Daozang* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag), 1994.

⁴⁸⁶ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, *passim*.

⁴⁸⁷ For a discussion of how talismans and writing fit into that worldview, see James Robson, “Signs of Power: Talismanic Writing in Chinese Buddhism,” *History of Religions*, 48.2 (Nov. 2008): 130–169; John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Consideration for the relationship between material and visual culture and religion in China has largely come from scholars of Buddhism. While the work of Copp, Robson, and Kieschnick (among many others) focuses mainly on the confluence of Buddhist objects and text, their work reveals a much more dynamic religious worldview that includes Daoist modes of articulating the relationship between objects and power (see, Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008)).

regarded as the ultimate efficacious designs of Daoism.”⁴⁸⁸ These kinds of special writing, Verellen points out, function as “dynamic symbols with transformative powers used in healing, exorcism and ritual,” which operate differently from pictorial images whose primary function is to make the “unseen world visible,” a kind of “pictorial metaphor.” The power of the pictorial thus lies in its ability to serve as a metaphor pointing away from the image itself to the true power beyond, while the power of the talisman is found within the object itself by virtue of the special power writing holds in the Chinese worldview. While the previous two chapters have argued against the insistence to metaphorize the “pictorial” as a distinct category within the broader ritual worldview, it is necessary to note some important differences between the production of talismanic forms and that of the MMA scroll.

A talisman is produced by a Daoist using a specific set of ritual technologies as defined by ritual context. The MMA scroll, on the other hand, was produced by a court sanctioned artist who used a different set of technologies, such as their repertoire of painting techniques, to become a visual form of Wang Lingguan as defined by a host of different factors, some of which clearly go back to ritual context. In regards to form itself, talismans display both figurative and textual qualities in how they articulate the “true form,” as specialized characters are combined with figurative features of the deity. While the MMA scroll does contain textual qualities in the form of colophons and collector seals, its primary mode of expression is figurative. Nonetheless, both talismans and the MMA scroll still function as part of the broader matrix of visual and material expressions of divine forms and the potential efficacy surrounding them. Likewise, the visual vocabulary of the MMA scroll and the visual vocabulary of the talisman share similar efficacious potential. An exploration of the relationship between the two illuminates the

⁴⁸⁸ Verellen “The Dynamic Design,” pp. 159–186.

pathways that connect the visuality and materiality of objects with divine presence. In so doing, we will see how the MMA scroll can do just what the talismans say they do—make Wang Lingguan a *real* presence. Before delving into the world of “true forms,” a few words about talismans themselves and their place among the discussion of Daoist visual cultures.

6.2 Powerful Script: Daoist Talismans as Objects of Power

Talismans fit into a broader Daoist worldview where writing is power. Daoist writing plays an important role in constructing that broader worldview.⁴⁸⁹ In the case of Daoist writing as it pertains to enacting ritual, and in particular the graphic repertoire of a Daoist priest whose writs (*wen* 文), seals (*yin* 印), and talismans (*fu*) form an integral part of communicating with the gods, the act of writing and its resultant form serves as both the material and symbolic means to control divine power.⁴⁹⁰ Far from being the work of marginalized sorcery, the roots for using such objects to confer power stem from early court practice, stretching as far back as the Han dynasty when court *fangshi* 方士 (masters of methods) would deploy talismans and charts (*tu* 圖) to legitimize imperial claims to the Mandate of Heaven.⁴⁹¹ Anna Seidel’s seminal study on the early roots of Daoist ritual has shown that these features of *fangshi* practice would influence the liturgical use of talismans in early Daoist communities.⁴⁹² Meanwhile, the work of the *fangshi*

⁴⁸⁹ In addition to funerary rites, Daoist liturgical traditions inform how the power of writing plays into broader culture. Recent research in the field of Daoist epigraphy and excavated texts by Gil Raz has begun to reveal the potential socio-historical context in which such “commemorative” writings could operate for living communities above ground as much as spirit communities below ground (Gil Raz, “Local Daoism: The Community of the Northern Wei (5th-6th Century) Dao-Buddhist Stelae,” conference paper, *AAS*, March 17, 2016). Indeed, the very concept of what a text is capable of has been challenged by the recent work of Tobias Zürn, who argues that the famous *Huainanzi* of Liu An is first a foremost a powerful object that is capable itself of ordering the cosmos according to the Dao (see, Zürn, “Writing as Weaving,” 2016).

⁴⁹⁰ For a comprehensive study of the history of talismans as Celestial Writing and their relationship to Buddhist practices surrounding Sanskrit writing, see Hsieh, “Writing from Heaven: Celestial Writing in Six-Dynasties Daoism,” 2005.

⁴⁹¹ Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments,” pp. 291–371.

⁴⁹² Seidel, “Imperial Treasure,” p. 347.

was very much an integral part of the state machine, and likewise, the use of talismans and charts in fulfilling their vocation was supported by the central government.⁴⁹³ In other words, talismans as powerful objects were a matter of state institution since at least the Han and would remain as such throughout the imperial period.

The use of Daoist seals and talismans as objects of political power would emerge in the provinces as part of official recourse to combat local interests. As Judith Boltz has shown, talismans and seals were used by governmental officials during the Song dynasty to enact their authority at times even when the symbols of imperial officialdom they carried failed to convince the local administrators.⁴⁹⁴ Boltz demonstrates that when the symbols of imperial office lacked the desired effect, officials sent to the provinces would avail themselves to the Daoist repertoire to combat trouble and impress the local community. We have seen that by the Ming, both the imperial court and the Ming princes would deploy Daoist ritual objects as symbols of power to gain both spiritual and political advantages.⁴⁹⁵ But as we discussed in Chapter Three, the world of Jiajing's court viewed objects as more than symbols of power—they were responsible for producing power themselves and served as appropriate responses for threats to the empire and to the imperial family.⁴⁹⁶ As the “true form” of the deity, talismans serve as a particularly potent kind of object to produce divine response.

Producing this divine power was the result of writing, and thus Daoist talismans present a special kind of object because they deploy a special kind of writing. As Hsieh Shu-wei's work on

⁴⁹³ As Seidel argues, “Taoist badges of priestly investiture and communication with the unseen realm, the talismans, charts, registers, writs, and tallies are not magic wands invented from scratch or derived from some preexisting folk religion or medium cult; they are, rather, elaborations upon the Han theme of imperial treasure objects, the presence of which guaranteed the imperial mandate.” (Seidel, “Imperial Treasures,” p. 292).

⁴⁹⁴ Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone,” pp. 241–305.

⁴⁹⁵ Wang, *Ming Prince and Daoism*, pp. 41–59.

⁴⁹⁶ Wan, “Building an Immortal Land,” pp. 65–99. See Chapter Three for further discussion of the role of objects and talismans in the Jiajing emperor's apotheosis into a Thunder Deity.

Daoist views on talismans from the Six Dynasties period has shown, talismans were seen as manifesting “celestial script” in the mundane world. This “script” was understood as the crystalline *qi* and substantive essence of the most august gods of the Shangqing pantheon.⁴⁹⁷ Thus, the writing itself is the material presence of the formless divine. The form that such writing takes presents an imagistic quality created by the combination of character graphs on the page, and sometimes the addition of figurative drawings, as well. The interplay between the semantic meaning of written “text” and the imagistic quality make the medium of the talisman particularly adept at conveying the “true form” of the god. In her discussion of the visual quality of powerful writing, Susan Huang describes objects like talismans as “hybrid imagetexts” (borrowing from W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of the term),⁴⁹⁸ such that she places the imagistic quality of the object on equal footing with semantic or discursive meaning relayed by different forms of writing.⁴⁹⁹ As such, the imagistic quality of talismanic writing, like those of other “imagetexts,” function as part of a larger conceptual matrix of power that connects both ritual and the visual arts to broader articulations of authority.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Hsieh, “Writing from Heaven: Celestial Writing in Six-Dynasties Daoism,” *passim*.

⁴⁹⁸ Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, p. 136. For W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of “imagetext,” see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 83.

⁴⁹⁹ Other kinds of “writing” within the imagistic repertoire include stamps and seals (*yin*) to convey divine power and authority dating at least as far back as the Eastern Han and comes to be deployed in the exorcistic healing techniques during the Six-Dynasties related to Buddhist practices. (See Shih-shan Susan Huang, “Daoist Seals: Part I: Activation and Fashioning,” *Journal of Daoist Studies*, 10 (2017): 70–101.

⁵⁰⁰ This matrix of power is not limited to Daoist contexts. The talismanic power of written text appears in some of the earliest examples excavated from Qin-era tombs, where the specialized arrangement of entombed texts has led several scholars of Early China’s funerary culture to suggest that their presence served more of an apotropaic function rather than conveying semantic meaning. (See, Donald Harper, “Warring States, Qin, and Han Manuscripts” 1997; Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s Dudian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006). To that point, scholarship by Robin Yates and Anthony Barbieri-Low on excavated Qin texts suggests that power writing within the early Chinese imperium was never necessarily couched in terms of literacy, but rather in the physical presence of written text as a means to produce an efficacious effect. Arguing that the job of recording and reading official documents was the specific task of hereditary “scribes” (*shi* 史), and thus, the ruling elite need not necessarily be concerned with literacy. (see, Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China*, p. 109). Elsewhere, Yates argues that the slips unearthed from Qin graves of scribes, such as those found in the grave of one Mr. Xi 喜, were not necessarily official documents, but rather objects produced for the specific purpose to be entombed as a part of the funerary paraphernalia accorded a scribe. (Private discussion with Professor Yates, April 11, 2018, and Public Talk, “Despot or Failed Sage? The First

The relationship between the visuality of talismans and the visuality of other forms of images and so-called “imagetexts” suggests intriguing possibilities for making connections within the broader ritual imagination that have only begun to be explored from the perspective of Daoist visual cultures. Returning to both Huang and Verellen’s work, we see how pictorial images and graphical images of talismans can occupy the same conceptual world of visually articulating efficacy. Verellen notes the complex layers of connections between talismans and other imagistic forms within the texts of the *Daoist Canon*, as they interact on “multiple cognitive planes” in the reading and performance of such texts.⁵⁰¹ While Verellen focuses his investigation on how images function within canonical texts, we may venture to look beyond into a broader world in which talismans, charts, ritual scrolls, ritual implements all reverberate together on “multiple cognitive planes” and form a more comprehensive matrix of powerful objects. While the MMA scroll is not an “imagetext” in the way Huang views talismans, it does share the invocative language of ritual texts through its own articulation of a shared visual vocabulary. Let us now look at how such visuality resonates within the specific language of producing talismans for Wang Lingguan detailed in the *Daoist Canon*.

6.3 Visuality of “Summoning to Merge” and “Merging the Scene”

As the “true form” of the deity, talismans produced during the rituals to summon Wang Lingguan serve as the material and visual presence of the god and thus, a physical reference

Emperor of China, the Qin Empire and Historical Reality,” UW-Madison, April 10, 2018”). This use of writing for funerary practice reflects what Timothy Davis has called a “commemorative culture” that would continue throughout the imperial period and still continues today (see, Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: A History of Early Muzhiming* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Also see Wu Hung, *Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) for early funerary practice. For a discussion of how writing and written objects play a role in contemporary funerary practice in Taiwan, see Ellen Johnston Laing and Helen Hui-ling Liu, *Up in Flames: The Ephemeral Art of Pasted-paper Sculpture in Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰¹ Verellen, “The Dynamic Design,” p. 181–182.

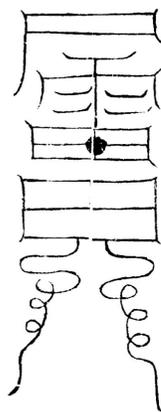
point for all that the power of Wang is expected to fulfill. Through the very strokes of the brush, Wang's true form is created. For example, within the "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan" liturgy, we find Wang Lingguan (identified here as Wang Shan 王善) literally "drawn" into the talisman. Under the rites for "Summoning to Merge" (Zhaohe 召合) (fig. 55), the Daoist is instructed to write the talisman while incanting: "Wang Shan enter into the daubing [i.e. the ink]" (*Wang Shan rutu zhong* 王善入塗中).⁵⁰² Wang Lingguan is literally part of the physical substance of the talisman itself.

Like we have seen in the discourse on painter's traces in the previous chapter, here the brush strokes that create the talismans are first charged with the refined *qi* externalized from the priest's body resulting from "transformation of the body" rites as detailed in the previous section. Thus, according to the ritual text, the performance of a talisman not only creates the space as a symbolic marker for the god's power, but it also creates the material form itself by which the deity enters the manifest world. We can begin to see parallels between how the visuality of the MMA scroll may function like a talisman in the way that it, too, establishes the space for Wang Lingguan to emerge and mimics the process of externalizing the deity's presence. While the MMA scroll is not the same thing as a talisman, it is however like a talisman in the sense that it presents a visual form of Wang Lingguan merging into being within the broader ritual imagination.

The "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan" details several talismans for summoning Wang's "true form." As is typical with Thunder Methods talismanic writing found throughout

⁵⁰² DZ 1220: 242.2a.

the *Daozang*,⁵⁰³ each pass of the brush coincides with declarations and commands, which in this eulogizes the power of thunder through in idiom of martial directives that command Wang seize and capture demonic essences. While such talismans often “draw” the visual elements of the deity culled from the preliminary invocation,⁵⁰⁴ in the case of this relatively clear simple talisman presented here, the lines themselves more resembles the recognizable graphs of “*shi*” 尸 (corpse), “*lei*” 雷 (thunder), and “*gui*” 鬼 (demon), and not any anthropomorphized form (fig. 34):



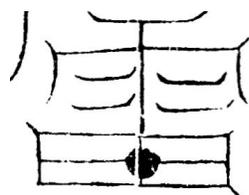
(fig. 34)

As such, it recalls the initial process of this rite that opens with first writing the character “hong” 轟 in the incense burner before actualizing (*cun*) the character within one’s body. The character is then transformed into a fire pearl from which the priest sees Wang emerge. The “fire pearl” itself that creates and locates the point of Wang’s entry may in fact be reflected in the dot we

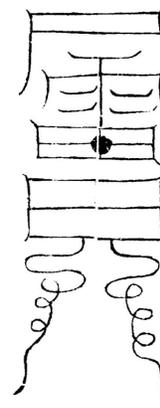
⁵⁰³ Monika Drexler, *Daoisitische Schriftmagie*; Feng Xiaoxiao 馮曉曉, Matsumoto Kōichi 松本浩一, and Sugimoto Shigeo 杉本重雄, “Building a Database of Dao-Fa Hui-Yuan and its Application to Statistical Analysis of Fu,” *Tōhō Shūkyō* No. 120 (November, 2012): 63–80.

⁵⁰⁴ For examples, see Drexler, *Daoisitische Schriftmagie*, p. 161.

find in the middle of the “lei” character that centers the visual balance of the talisman itself (fig. 36).



(fig. 36)
Detail of Talisman of
“Summoning to Merge”



(fig. 34)

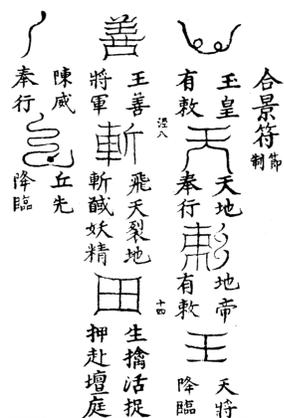
We see a similar positioning of Wang Lingguan in the overall composition of the MMA scroll where his figure provides a centering pivot around which the other visual elements in the tableau emerge, although there we find him in an anthropomorphized form. In the talisman, this may well be the point through which Wang “enters into the daubing” (*Wang Shan ru tu zhong* 王善入塗). At any rate, the interlinear directives tell us that Wang is now there in the physical and visual form of the written talisman poised to emerge.

Once made present, the liturgy proceeds by summoning the rest of Wang Lingguan’s retinue and bringing them under control through the “Talisman for Merging the Scene” (“Hejing fu” 合景符).⁵⁰⁵ The invocation articulates deities emerging from undifferentiated backdrop to surround and revolve around the focal point of Wang, just like we see in the MMA tableau. The talisman itself is part of a more general rite under the heading “Incantations for Summoning to

⁵⁰⁵ DZ 1220: 242. 2a-2b.

Service [for] One’s Heart Wishes” (“Zhaoyi ru yixin zhou” 召役如意心咒) (fig. 37, fig. 38) and thus is applicable to any number of ritual needs that require the efficacious power of Wang and his retinue. The incantation that precedes the talisman is short, beginning with onomatopoeic chanting and concluding with the command to behead “demons and seize malevolent spirits.” The text then proceeds to explicate the constituent elements of the talisman’s form by way of incanting, thus enacting the divine power behind it:

When the Jade Emperor has edicts; Heaven and Earth Carry them out. When the Earthly Thearch has edicts; Celestial Generals descend. Great General Wang Shan; Flying through the Heavens; Splitting through the Earth; Beheading and taking ears of the demonic essences. Capturing alive the living; Taking them into custody to present at the altar hall. Chen the Mighty (left deputy) carries it out; Qiu the First (right deputy) descends.⁵⁰⁶



(fig 37)
“Talisman for Merging the Scene” (“Hejing fu” 合景符)
Invocations⁵⁰⁷



(fig. 38)
“Talisman for Merging the Scene” (“Hejing fu” 合景符)
Talisman⁵⁰⁸

Invocatory commands accompany each graphic component of the talisman that enact the duties of Wang and his martial retinue. While the talisman itself is designated for “Incantations for Summoning to Service [for] One’s Heart Wishes,” the actual commands found within the

⁵⁰⁶ DZ 1220: 242.2b–3a.

⁵⁰⁷ DZ 1220: 242.2b–3a.

⁵⁰⁸ DZ 1220: 242.2b–3a.

invocatory narrative fit within the manual's overall idiom of rescuing souls from hell as part of the *liandu* service. Here, Wang is charged with “Flying through the Heavens, splitting through the Earth,” as though cutting through to the earth prison of Fengdu 豐都 where the souls of the deceased are held.⁵⁰⁹ The invocation makes it clear that this is not a civil visit, but a militaristic incursion, as upon his descent Wang is tasked with “beheading and taking ears (*guo* 馘) of the demonic essences” as he makes his way down.⁵¹⁰ The invocation also makes a functional distinction between the demonic spirits and the souls of living, those who must be brought back “alive” to the altar that they may undergo the final process of sublimation and be saved.⁵¹¹ But Wang does not do this alone, and the incantation explicitly calls forth his lieutenants to manifest their presence in the proceeding talisman such that one can “Bring the Scene Together” in order to gather the necessary forces and dispatch them to the underworld. The talisman itself becomes the medium through which these martial figures come together to then be set to a common purpose.

This is the same motif we have seen recur in the MMA tableau, as well as in the “martial scene” of the *Yushu jing* frontispieces, where the looming figure of the divine commander appears fully emerged and leading the charge as his martial lieutenants rush forth gathering

⁵⁰⁹ Establishing the earth prisons from which to rescue the deceased souls comprises an important part of the rites dedicated to Wang Lingguan found in the previous *juan* 241. See the talismans and incantations for establishing “The Nine Prisons of Fengdu.” DZ 1220: 241.8a–9a.

⁵¹⁰ DZ 1220: 242.2b. 飛天裂地斬馘妖精。 “*Guo*” 馘 is the practice of taking the left ear of slain combatants to show how many one has killed in battle. The term itself appears as early as the *Zuozhuan*, and the unmistakable militaristic idiom would have still resonated during the Ming. (See David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵¹¹ DZ 1220: 242.2b. 生擒活捉押赴壇庭。 The commands resonate with the performative features of contemporary funerary rites northern Taiwan such as the “Attack on Hell” as described in early field research of John Lagerwey and Peter Nickerson (see Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, pp. 216–234; Peter Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” pp. 117–183). The overall structure of the *liandu* rite will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven.

behind him.⁵¹² What makes the dynamism of the MMA scroll particularly interesting here as it relates to the visuality of talismans, is that the action is one of emergence—forms coming forth from the undifferentiated horizon to direct their violent power downward.

In its deployment of visual language shared with the ritual manuals examined here, the MMA scroll reveals the process of actualizing the presence of Wang Lingguan and his entourage from the undifferentiated horizon in parallel with the vocabulary of “summoning to merge.” Doing so does not make the MMA scroll a talisman per se, but it does articulate the presence of Wang Lingguan using a shared vocabulary of actualizing the god in a way that performs the same process as a talisman when set within the broader ritual imaginary. To draw a functional connection between a talisman and a painting assumes an implicit relationship between the objects themselves. While the interconnectedness of the material and immaterial world is something of a truism in Daoist discourse, the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* explicitly connect the affective power of talismans to other objects. Significantly, this is detailed in the manual of “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” within the context of *liandu* funerary rites, wherein Wang Lingguan and his retinue are tasked with entering the underworld and rescuing deceased souls. This process is carried out by way of transforming the talismanic “true form” of Wang into the physical banner that will house the deceased soul as its temporary place while it undergoes the salvific process of sublimation. We will see how the rites for inscribing Wang’s presence in the material context of *liandu* relates to the MMA scroll in the following chapter. But before we do, let us turn our attention to how the performance of a talisman brings forth divine

⁵¹² According to Hsieh Shu-wei, this sense of violent dynamism helps define similar scroll as related closer to the exorcistic traditions of contemporary local masters (*fashi*) than the more courtly processions shown in those hanging scrolls associated with Buddhist funerary repertoires. Hsieh Shu-wei, “Local Daoist Visual Arts and Rituals: From Three Daoist Exhibitions to a Daoist Visual Art Project 地方道教視覺藝術與儀式：從三個道教藝術展覽到一個道教視覺藝術計畫,” Conference Paper, 11th Annual International Conference on Daoist Studies, Nanterre University, Paris, 2017).

presence through the very strokes of the brush, and how that process comes to be reflected in the tableau of the MMA scroll.

6.4 Shared Visuality and the “Talisman of the Chief Commander”

To that end, let us now take a close look at the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” (“Zhushuai fu” 主帥符) found within the texts of “Secret Methods of the Thunderclap Three-Five Fire Wheel Lingguan, Marshal Wang” (fig. 35).⁵¹³ The talisman appears immediately after the conclusion of the rite for making Wang Lingguan manifest in altar.⁵¹⁴ After noting how few can withstand the power of Thunder, Wang Lingguan is presented at the altar to await the command of the Daoist who has summoned him. A series of several talismans and their respective invocations follows those rites to thus send Wang and his retinue on their way.



(fig. 35)

Predictably, the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” opens with the Daoist identifying with the authority of Sa Shoujian before commanding Wang Lingguan to descend. The linear form of the talisman begins as a dot in the upper left register, echoing the dotting of the “fire

⁵¹³ DZ 1220: 241.4b–6a.

⁵¹⁴ DZ 1220: 241.4b.

pearl” from the “Summoning the Merge” talisman mentioned above. From there, the Daoist makes a horizontal stroke from left to right, stopping to form another point. After which, the Daoist writes a swirling stroke that descends from the upper right down toward the lower left (fig. 39):



(fig. 39)
Start of
“Talisman of
the Chief
Commander”
 (“Zhushuai
fu” 主帥
符)⁵¹⁵

I humbly receive the imperial orders from the Great as Ancestor of the Dao Thearch of the Anterior Heaven who commands Highest Thearch Iron Master. The method of Realized Lord Sa directs the Chief to chop “*mo-ni*” (嘛呢) to seize and quickly descend with haste.

吾奉先天道祖大帝敕鐵師上帝命薩君真人法旨魁斬嘛呢攝急速降。⁵¹⁶

Both the invocatory language and the linear movement of the talisman originating from the left, moving across to the right and then down toward the left again is reminiscent of the overall sense of movement and emergence within the MMA scroll tableau (fig. 40).



(fig.40)

⁵¹⁵ DZ 1220: 241.4b.

⁵¹⁶ DZ 1220: 241.4b. Here “*mo-ni*” 嘛呢 may be an abbreviate version of the mantric Om mani padme hum (唵嘛呢叭咪吽), which also appears in earlier invocations in this same text.

The sense of emergence and then descent that frames the MMA scroll also frames the entire talisman, as the initial stroke creates the border under which the rest of the action occurs.

The instructions for writing the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” continues with several strokes in succession accompanied by invocatory text. Each stroke is charged with the ritual potency of bringing the host of Thunder Deities under Wang Lingguan’s command into the talisman. Accordingly, the correlating strokes are bold lines slashing from all angles, as though the celestial troops are flying about to fulfil their master’s commands. The overall effect is a dynamic scene coming together and emerging into its “true form.”

The text announces the names of seven lunar mansions in each direction to establish the celestial space from which Wang’s form descends, starting with the East, then North, West, and finally the South. Meanwhile the linear strokes of the talisman form a series of three layered lines in a horizontal pattern, and then ends on a vertical line for the South, the region of Wang’s fiery presence. The three horizontal lines are drawn parallel one atop another to establish the Eastern, Northern, and Western corners of the cosmos. These three lines are then intersected by the descending vertical stroke of the South, mimicking Wang Lingguan himself descending from the southern celestial realm to emerge at the altar (fig. 41).

—	Jiao, Kang, Di, Fang, Xin, Wei, Ji [East] 角亢氐房心尾箕
—	Dou, Niu, Nü, Xu, Wei, Shi, Bi [North] 斗牛女虛危室壁
—	Kui, Lou, Wei, Mao, Bi, Zi, Shen [West] 奎婁胃昴畢觜參
]	Jing, Gui, Liu, Xing, Zhang, Yi, Zhen [South] 井鬼柳星張翼軫

(fig. 41)

The next series repeats a similar pattern of establishing divine presence within the directions. Only this time, the invocations locate emerging presence on earth, where the “savage thunder quickly arises” (*manlei suji* 蠻雷速起) amidst the five directions. As in the previous series, horizontal strokes accompany invocations for East, North and West, while this time the Southern stroke is not vertical, but diagonal from top right to bottom left. In this iteration, the vertical stroke is reserved for the Center position (fig. 42).

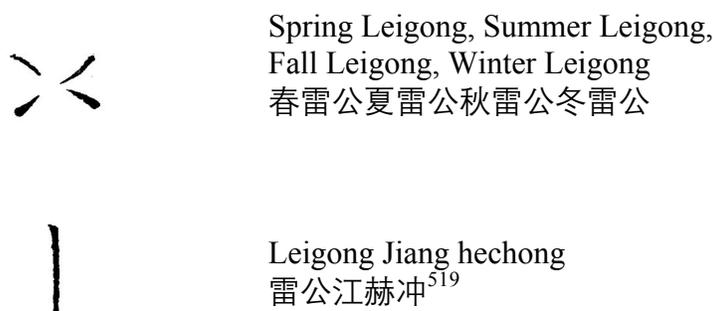
—	Eastern Savage Thunder Quickly Rise 東方蠻雷速起
—	Southern Savage Thunder Quickly Rise 南方蠻雷速起
↙	Western Savage Thunder Quickly Rise 西方蠻雷速起
↘	Northern Savage Thunder Quickly Rise 北方蠻雷速起
	Central Savage Thunder Quickly Rise 中央蠻雷速起 ⁵¹⁷

(fig. 42)

Four celestial lines come together to form a set of three parallel lines much like the trigram *qian* ☰ with an off-center vertical line in the upper region of the talisman, as though Wang Lingguan is descending from his celestial abode. Meanwhile, the terrestrial lines come together to form the top of the next part of the talisman as though a canopy under that covers what comes next.

⁵¹⁷ DZ 1220: 241.5a

The next series of invocations in creating the talisman invokes atmospheric deities who are often associated with the Thunder Division (*leibu*).⁵¹⁸ Five separate Leigong are invoked. One for each of the four seasons are called forth while the Daoist makes four separate diagonal strokes. The fifth, a “Leigong Jiang Hechong” (Leigong Jiang Hechong 雷公江赫冲), serves as the central vertical stroke between them all (fig. 43):



(fig. 43)

Jiang Hechong Leigong is a female Thunder God who often accompanies the Lightning Mother (Dianmu 電母) as part of the Thunder Division, who appear in the next series of lines.⁵²⁰ The lines come together under the canopy of terrestrial lines toward the center of the talisman to form the graph of “yu” 雨 (rain), which is also the top half of the graph for “thunder” (*lei* 雷). Accordingly, other recognizable figures from the Thunder Division come next in the invocations. Mother Lightning (Dianmu 電母), the Earl of Wind (Fengbo 風伯), the Rain Master (Yushi 雨師), and Deng Bowen 鄧伯溫 round out the Thunder Division’s presence.⁵²¹ Each invocation

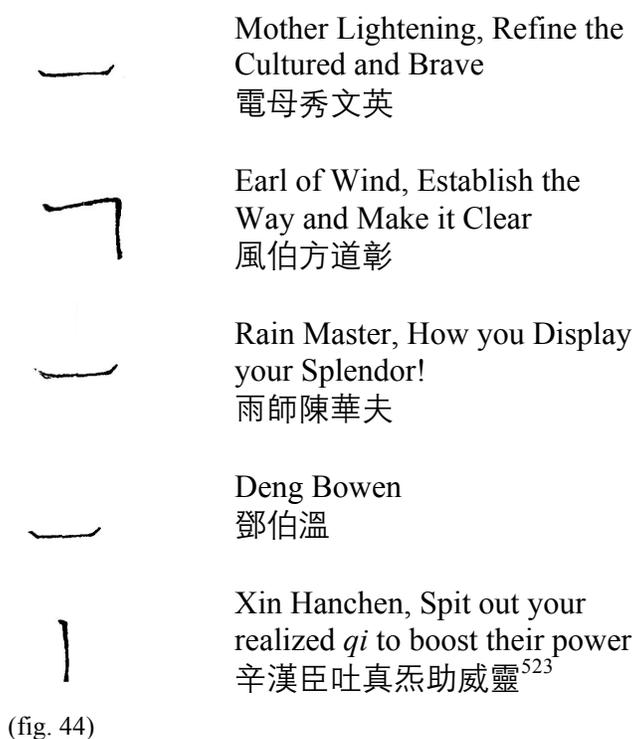
⁵¹⁸ See Mark Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” 2007; Maggie Wan, “Images and Efficacy.”

⁵¹⁹ DZ 1220: 241.5a.

⁵²⁰ See, DZ 1220: 61.2b; 62.16a; 128.12a.

⁵²¹ This group of four, including Leigong, form a common visual trope in images of the Thunder gods, especially those connected with Leizu. Examples of the *Yushu jing* frontispieces, as well as hanging scrolls of Leizu discussed in the previous section include these figures among the host of Yuanshuai.

accompanies a stroke that start to surround other strokes—forming the beginning of a boundary. Here the text invokes Xin Hanchen 辛漢臣 (ca. 14th c.), a Song dynasty divinized Thunder Master, to empower the Thunder Division. Like Sa Shoujian, Xin Hanchen has grown into a legendary figure connected to summoning the martial troops of Thunder Methods pantheons. Here, he is tasked with rallying the troops by “spitting out his realized *qi* to boost their power” (*tu zhenqi zhuwei ling* 吐真氣助威靈).⁵²² This call to arms coincides with a strong vertical stroke (fig. 44).



⁵²² DZ 1220: 241.5b. Xin Hanchen is said to be responsible for compiling the DZ 193 *Yuhuang youzui xifu baochan* 玉皇宥罪錫福寶懺 (Precious Litany of Repentance That Moves the Jade Emperor to Grant Absolution from Guilt and the Allotment of Good Fortune).

⁵²³ DZ 1220: 241.5a.

These strokes merge to form the graph of “*tian*” 田 (earth). By bringing the strokes associated with Leigong and those associated with the Thunder Deities together as they descend from the upper realm, the Daoist forms the graph for “thunder” (*lei*) in the top half of the talisman.

Looking back to the MMA scroll, we see a similar sense of thunder gods, swooping down as though ready to crash into the waters below. The downward movement of the figures at the top registers starting from the periphery of the tableau in toward the center while the serpentine figures below rise up toward the middle gives the composition a sense of bounded space much like the strokes of the talisman made during the invocations of similar deities (fig. 45). Now bounded, the rest of the invocatory language performed in concert with writing the talisman describes what the power (*ling*) of those divine troops is designed to do—namely, exorcise demons.



(fig. 45)

According to the talisman, the Daoist rallies the troops to destroy the demonic by utilizing the language of opening and closing, which resonates with both internal bodily processes, as well as with cosmological schema of the afterlife with Celestial abode above and

the Earth prisons of the dead below.⁵²⁴ Accordingly, the correlating strokes are bold lines slashing from all angles, as though the celestial troops are flying about to perform these deeds (fig. 46):

	Open the Heavenly Gate 開天門
	Shut the Earthly Doors 閉地戶
	Preserve the Human Gate 留人門
	Block their Demonic Roads 塞鬼路
	Pierce their Demonic Hearts 穿鬼心
	Crush their Demonic Guts 破鬼肚 ⁵²⁵

(fig. 46)

Appropriately the, lines come together to form the top half of the graph for “demon” (*gui* 鬼).

The “legs” of the graph for *gui* 鬼 come in the form of the lieutenants Chen Yuanshuai and Qiu Yuanshuai, whose summons coincide with writing jagged diagonal lines descending from top to bottom. Their presence is followed by that of the General himself (i.e. Wang Lingguan), whose arrival indicates that the talismans is nearly complete.

⁵²⁴ The text references the Heavenly Gate (*tianmen*), the Earthly Doors (*dihu* 地戶), the Gate of Man (*renmen* 人門), and the Demon Road (*guilu* 鬼路), each of which play a role in conceptions of the afterlife and, in particular, how to respond to troubled souls of the deceased. Generally speaking, this scheme is laid out horizontally within the ritual space. Here, the physical qualities of the talisman re-orientate the scheme vertically. We shall discuss the use of talismans and similar objects in dealing with the dead in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

⁵²⁵ DZ 1220: 241.5b.

Finally, the Daoist calls Wang Lingguan to the scene. Wang's arrival signals a shift in the rhythm of the invocation. The text moves from the staccato of individual strokes to a longer incantation like that which opens the talisman. The invocatory language is performed in concert with a heavier circular stroke that creates a filled circle from which one point emerges toward the upper left. The circular form coincides with the text's focus on Wang Lingguan's fire-wheel that becomes the medium by which Wang's presence emanates from the talisman itself. The text places the fire-wheel front and center of the invocation, and we see the same positioning of Wang riding his fire-wheel in the MMA scroll tableau. The central place of the wheel's circular form in the lower register, emphasized by halo of flames fluttering off its surface, mirrors the position and form of the talismanic fire-wheel drawn along with Wang's arrival (fig. 47):



Qiu the Mighty,
Descend with Speedy
Haste
陳威疾速降



Chen the First, Grasp
the Command and
Carry it Out
丘先秉令行



(fig. 47)

To call the General's
name, use the [hand
seal] *tankui erdou*.⁵²⁶
Recite the Incantation
of the Divine Mighty
Huoluo.
將名用貪魁二斗念神
威豁落呪⁵²⁷

⁵²⁶ Literally the “Voracious Stalwart Second Dipper,” *tankui erdou* 貪魁二斗 appears in the *Daoist Canon* three times, only as part of exorcistic liturgy contained within the *Dafoa huiyuan* (see also DZ 1220:195.10b; 195.13b). The gesture likely alludes to the second star of “Kuixing” 魁星 (i.e. the Big Dipper), possibly referencing the popularized god of literature, Kuixing. Taken literally, the phrase may also reference the astral home of Wang Lingguan noted in the text to be found at the second star of the southern dipper.

⁵²⁷ DZ 1220: 241.5b.

These three strokes combine together to form the lower half of the graph “*gui*,” with the two lieutenants forming the “legs” and the fire-wheel forming the rest. The text then shifts focus to readying the talisman such that it can be deployed effectively and with proper ritual authority. The text instructs the Daoist to call Wang forth by incantation and hand-gestures and then describes the process of bringing the deity into the talisman:

And utter [i.e. mantric syllable] “*zha jin xi*.” While daubing, actualize rays of [Shang] Di crossing each other and shooting within the talismans. Marshal Wang is there inside, and leaves by incinerating the fire-wheel. Use the “Heart-seal” [hand gesture] of Lineage Master [i.e. Sa Shoujian] to send [Wang] under control (*yafa* 押發). Start to use the brush pointed toward *xun* [i.e. Southeast] (to write...)

及吒唵嚩,塗存帝光交射符中,王帥在內,焜火車而去.用祖師心印押發,出筆向巽.⁵²⁸

The Daoist begins the process of drawing in Wang Lingguan by first actualizing the power of the celestial realm in the form of intersecting rays of light. These rays parallel the strokes of the talismanic form that create the space for Wang Lingguan to be present. According to the text, Wang then is literally found within the talisman, and can be summoned out by “incinerating the fire-wheel” (*kun huoche erqu* 焜火車而去). Just as we have seen in the rites discussed in previous chapters, the Daoist appeals to the ritual authority of Lineage Master Sa Shoujian to control Wang Lingguan’s emerging power, but this time, that power is clearly located in the form of the talisman. The Daoist then uses the Heart-seal (*xinyin* 心印) hand gesture of Sa Shoujian to carefully convey Wang’s power to the “brush,” which will then be used to finish drawing the talisman in order to bring the form to fulfillment.⁵²⁹

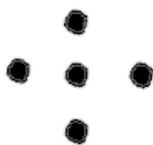
⁵²⁸ DZ 1220: 241.5b.

⁵²⁹ For contemporary use of “heart-seals” in local Daoist ritual traditions related to Sa Shoujian, see Mozina, “Summoning the Exorcist,” pp. 231–256.

The talisman draws to a close by looking at its form as a whole. Using their charged brush, the Daoist points towards the Southeast and draws a circle of light that surrounds and covers all the demons and gods below. The Daoist then placing dots in the five directions while calling upon emissaries of the Five Thunders to ensure that the commands of Sa Shoujian will be carried out (fig. 48):



This circle radiates for 10,000
zhang 丈 and covers over the
demons and gods
圓光萬丈罩下鬼神



Emissaries of the Five Thunders,
your Fire quickly follows the
Lineage Master's Heart-seal
五雷使者火急隨行祖師心印⁵³⁰

(fig. 48)

This juxtaposition between the circular canopy of light and squared points of the five directions alludes to traditional cosmic topographies of heaven being circle above and earth being a square below. Together, they encompass the whole world, which the text explicitly states necessarily include all the gods and demons. In this sense, the talisman creates a world within itself, much like the MMA scroll creates a world within its tableau.

⁵³⁰ DZ 1220: 241.5b.

This world takes its final form as the Daoist concludes writing the talisman by drawing a seal. Like writing characters in gold to identify the MMA scroll, or stamping it with a collector's seal, the Daoist uses his brush and hand-seals to finish the talisman. Tracing this from onto the talisman, he swears oaths to ensure the efficacy and proper deployment of the power he has just brought into this world (fig. 49):



(fig. 49)

Upon Heaven I make
this oath. Upon Earth I
make this pledge.
以天為誓,以地為盟

Wherever my heart-
seal goes, fire will
quickly follow.
心印到處火急奉行。⁵³¹

Thus, the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” is now completed (fig. 35). Its efficacy derives from the ritual process of creating it, line by line, as Wang Lingguan and various Thunder Deities are invoked with each stroke. Each individual stroke reflects individual deities and commands them to action such that they infuse the overall form of the talisman with active divine power and potential efficacy. As each stroke is drawn in relation to another, they come together to form a compositional figure. In so doing, writing the talisman not only makes individual deities present in the performance of each stroke, but also brings those divine spirits together in a holistic way by arranging the various strokes to create a recognizable character. In other words, the talisman is a whole scene of divine agents organized into a cohesive form like a tableau.

⁵³¹ DZ 1220: 241.6a.



(fig. 35)

Looking back once again to the MMA scroll, this same sense of bringing the scene of emerging Thunder Deities together resonates with the intention of the talisman, only of course, it is performed in pictorial mode within the MMA tableau (fig 35, fig. 1).



(fig. 35)



(fig. 1)

Thus, we might see how the visuality of the MMA scroll could recreate the scene from “Talisman of the Chief Commander” (fig. 50) as the two resonate within the broader ritual imaginary of power articulated by both visuality and materiality.



(fig. 35)



(fig. 50)

The rite for creating the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” concludes with a series of brief instructions for the Daoist to use with hand-seals. This short list of four examples the text gives offers a glimpse into the expectations of what sort of efficacy Daoists associated with the “Talisman of the Chief Commander,” and perhaps points to expectations for images like the MMA scroll:

For Controlling the Evil, press *gen* 艮 (i.e. base of the index finger)
 治邪出艮
 For Moving Thunder, press *zhen* 震 (i.e. middle of the index finger)
 動雷出震
 For Offering a Memorial, press *xun* 巽 (i.e. top of the index finger)
 捧奏出巽
 For Burning down a Temple, press *li* 離 (i.e. top of the middle finger)
 燒廟出離.⁵³²

⁵³² DZ 1220: 241.6a.

The first three examples of hand gestures paint a general picture of efficacy. Exorcizing demons and calling forth the power of Thunder are expected features among Thunder Methods liturgies and highlight the martial nature of typical responses. The third example, “Offering a Memorial,” fits more in line with the special civil authority in the purview of the Daoist, whose role in large-scale rituals would include submitting memorials to celestial deities. As such, this feature may well gesture toward the civilizing presence of Sa Shoujian, who is otherwise seldom mentioned in the formation of the talisman itself.

The final example, however makes reference to Sa Shoujian, and in particular, the authority he wields over Wang Lingguan. “Burning down a Temple” (*shaomiao* 燒廟) here seems to allude to the hagiographic traditions that tell of Sa razing the temple of Wang E before making him submit to the authority of the Dao.⁵³³ The specificity of the example seems out of place from the previous more general responses, and suggests the possibility that the Daoist here once again is meant to identify with that floating figure of Sa and his authority to look over Wang Lingguan and the scene of Thunder Deities even in the practice of deploying talismans. In other words, once the talisman is created, it was seen as powerful, and potentially dangerous, object in and of itself.

We have seen the need to keep vigilant watch over Wang Lingguan’s powerful potential before. Previous examples instructed the Daoist to draw the precious character of Sa Shoujian the moment Wang arrives so that the deity will be receptive to their request. In the case of creating the “Talisman of the Chief Commander,” the already manifest Wang Lingguan is directed out of the altar space and into a more contained form—the script of the talisman itself. Wang enters the talisman and his spiritual power has been transferred from the body of the

⁵³³ Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone,” *passim*.

Daoist to the “body” of the talisman, where it can be stored to be made manifest later. As such, the talisman here functions something like a spirit-battery. The power of Wang Lingguan was produced by the previous ritual performance of “transformation of the body,” and now the Daoist transfers that power through the visual and invocatory language of creating the talisman. The talisman then, stands as a powerful object in and of itself now charged with the presence of the god. As an object, it carries the potential to be “discharged” whenever that presence is needed.

In correlative contrast, the MMA scroll shows Wang Lingguan in all its kinetic glory, revealing the process of Wang’s power emerging from the clouds. Rather than his form entering into the talisman, the MMA scroll tableau shows Wang bursting forth with his fire-wheel blazing brightly. This sense of kinetic energy fits with how we have previously described the ways in which the MMA scroll images the process of manifesting Wang’s form. To keep with the metaphor of a battery, the MMA scroll is battery in the process of discharging—showing energy in the process of breaking forth. Thus, both the talisman and the MMA scroll function as powerful objects capable of producing the active form of Wang Lingguan. Only, the MMA scroll shows the power of a talisman in reverse—moving from its potential to showing the process of Wang’s “true form” coming into being.

The closing instructions to the Daoist on how to activate the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” after it has been created gives us a glimpse into how Daoists viewed the purpose and the potential for deploying such objects. They do not, however, reveal much about how those outside of the specialized purview of those initiated into Daoist Thunder Methods traditions. Thinking back to the world of the MMA scroll and the time of the Jiajing emperor, we know that initiations into Thunder Methods lineages was occurred with relative frequency around the court. The emperor himself likely had direct knowledge of Thunder Methods ritual. Thus, it is possible

that when the MMA scroll was commissioned, those at court could see it through the trained eyes of a Daoist, and perhaps find something familiar in the way its composition reminded them of powerful talismans the Daoists would no doubt wield during official rituals.

Regardless, the connections between the visuality of the talisman and the visuality of the MMA scroll within a larger conceptual network that considers objects capable of producing results would no doubt prove a powerful reminder for anyone familiar with the painting around the time it was commissioned.⁵³⁴ In the speculative comparison between the “Talisman of the Chief Commander” and the MMA scroll, we begin to see how the visual aspects of each may still well resonate with one another within the broader ritual imagination. Even if one does not necessarily look with a specially trained eye, one may still recognize the power of such visuality. The invocatory language of creating a talisman nonetheless offers a way to engage with how visuality articulates the power of objects like the MMA scroll.

Concluding Remarks: Sharing the Script

In this chapter we have continued our discussion of how the language of Daoist ritual can articulate the power of objects by looking at the role visuality and materiality play in constructing conceptualizations of Wang Lingguan’s “true form” through the process of creating talismans. While the previous two chapters address the visuality of the MMA scroll tableau as it mimics rituals for bringing Wang Lingguan form into being, here we consider how the MMA

⁵³⁴ Oliver Moore discussed the role of painted scroll as tools for affecting power at the Ming court using the example of the well-known painting, *Guan Yu Captures a Rebel General (Pang De)* by Shang Xi 商喜 (d. ca. 1450), now housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing (Oliver Moore, “Violence Un-scrolled: Cultic and Ritual Emphasis in Painting Guan Yu,” *Arts Asiatiques* 58 (2003): 86–97). In a different vein, recent scholarship by Foong Ping demonstrates the way in which Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067–1085) deployed the paintings of the famous *shanshui* painter Guo Xi 郭熙 (ca. 1020–ca. 1090), to affect a dominant role of ruler at an unsettled court during the Song. See Foong Ping, *The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

scroll relates to talismans in the broader ritual imaginary. Though not a talisman, the MMA scroll shares a similar visual language that suggests its potential for producing Wang Lingguan's "true form."

According to Daoist ritual vocabulary, visibility is an active force. Far from just a passive repository of iconography, the invocatory language that calls forth the form of Wang Lingguan and his retinue of martial deities into a talisman is explicitly charged with the power of making that form truly manifest. In this sense, the "true form" of Wang Lingguan is not only the unseen and un-formed, but the active process of his form becoming real through the visual language of ritual. The ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* articulate this active and creative sense of visibility through the invocations, talismans, and embodied ritual transformations that provide the Daoist the means to empower the ritual performance. We have shown how the MMA scroll shares this empowered sense of visibility through our investigate of ritual texts over the last three chapters.

Looking through the critical perspective of the "liturgical gaze," we can see how the MMA scroll tableau makes the power of Daoist ritual visually present by the hierarchical structure of its composition, the dynamism of its emerging figures, and now, by the parallels it shares with talismanic forms. This sense of empowered visibility is shared across a conceptual network, parts of a broader "ritual imaginary" that includes ritual texts, talismans, and paintings, which understands objects to be powerful things in their own right. As such, the degree to which we can make connection between what we see in the MMA scroll and what we are told to see in the ritual manuals affords us the opportunity to make use of the rich liturgical vocabulary to help articulate what objects do.

The implications of how Daoist ritual vocabulary may inform the study of objects extend well beyond the context of Daoist practice. Recalling Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's lament that Western vocabulary has lost the linguistic repertoire to address the power of presence that objects demand, we may find in Daoist ritual articulations a way to help address that loss.⁵³⁵ To that end, let us consider the MMA scroll in the liturgical context of *liandu* and see how its presence as a powerful object fulfills the efficacious promise of ritual performance.

Follow me, dear reader, as we turn back into the world of the Ming dynasty and the ritual possibilities that the MMA scroll presents...

⁵³⁵ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 2004.

Chapter Seven: To Hell with Salvation—The MMA Scroll in Performative Context

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road
 Best notify my next of kin
 This wheel shall explode!
 -The Band, "This Wheel's on Fire," 1968

"Controlled fantasy is relatively benign, and indeed it prepares us for future discoveries. Speculation is harmful only when it parades as certainty."⁵³⁶
 - William H. C. Propp

Introduction: An Invitation to Speculation:

As we begin the final chapter of this study, we return to the ritual context of the MMA scroll. While there is no explicit record of how the scroll was used, we may still entertain the potential for ritual that it may lead to productive consideration of Daoism during the Ming and the world of powerful objects. As such, we shall once again turn to the broader ritual imagination to situate the MMA scroll as an object into the performative realms of Daoist funerary rites. Although there are no extant Ming sources on "Iron Bottle" *liandu* available, we know that other iterations of *liandu* figured significantly in the ritual world of Wang Lingguan during the time.

The previous discussion in the last three chapters established the productive relationship between the visuality of the MMA scroll and that of the invocatory language of Daoist ritual manuals. This shared invocatory visuality fits within the broader ritual imaginary during the Ming discussed in Chapters Two and Three, and in particular within Jiajing's court, where Thunder Methods ritual and Daoist objects come together to articulate the court's preferred

⁵³⁶ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 54. I thank Jordan Rosenblum for the reference, who in turn credits Kevin Mattison for pointing it out.

response against threats to both the state and the emperor's person. Given what we know of the time when the painting was commissioned and the highly regarded Honored Imperial Consort Shen who commissioned it, we may consider that the MMA scroll reflects the personal interest and perhaps even direct involvement with Daoist Thunder Methods on the part of the imperial family as the tension within the palace rose to its boiling point.

While we do not have explicit evidence that the MMA scroll was used in ritual, the visual element of the “Iron Bottle” that indicates its connection to *liandu* liturgical programs at the capital, and thus suggest that the scroll was initially commissioned to express some aspect of the salvific power of Daoist ritual. In so doing, the scroll not only stands as a material witness to the prominence of “Iron Bottle” liturgy at court in the early Ming, but also highlights the critical role visuality plays in articulating the promise of “salvation through sublimation” and the benefits it may bestow upon individuals suffering in the underworld. While we lack explicit evidence for how *liandu* was performed in the capital during that time, we know that both “Iron-bottle” and “Water-Fire” iterations were part of the larger ritual repertoire known to denizens of Peking during the time when the MMA scroll was commissioned.

Let us then imagine the possible context of the MMA scroll and thereby, seriously consider the potential for what it can do as an object. Performing Daoist ritual relies on objects to frame ritual space and, as we have seen, also articulate the process of engendering ritual efficacy, as well. The dynamic use of ritual implements (*faqi* 法器) for both external and internal rites prove integral to defining how a Daoist negotiates the ritual performance. More than simply static things, objects like hanging scroll such as the MMA scroll play an active role in the negotiation between Daoist and object—what Susan Huang describes as “materiality as a

process.”⁵³⁷ Her insights, built upon the interplay between iconic and aniconic features of the Daoist’s “secret instructions” (*mijue*) repertoire, shed light on the otherwise passive features of ritual space and the critical role commonly found objects like paintings play in facilitating ritual efficacy.

Our goal in the following section then is not to necessarily pin down the MMA scroll to a specific moment in history as much as it is to use the MMA scroll to open a discussion on the potential role of objects as active agents in ritual performance—as a “process.” Thus, while we may locate the MMA scroll within the history of Daoism at court during the Ming, our aim here is to see the MMA scroll within the broader ritual imaginary of the time. In turn, the MMA scroll allows us to ask questions about materiality, visibility, and ritual power that go beyond any specific ritual context. In the end, the MMA scroll may not necessarily offer concrete answers, but that doesn’t diminish the value of the questions that it asks.

And so, dear reader, come with me as we start rolling down that road into the world of idealized ritual context as told through the voice of popular narrative. For as much as it might feel at times like wandering in the desert, William Propp’s comments in the epigraph above on reinterpretations of the old narratives in *Exodus* remind us that not all who wander are lost.

7.1 Framing the Question of Ritual Context

To help frame those questions, we will return to funerary ritual in the Ming. While, as Vincent Goossaert laments, we currently do not have explicit evidence of how “Iron Bottle” *liandu* was practiced or what it looked like. We do, however, have an idealized version of a

⁵³⁷ Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, p. 280. Huang’s discussion builds off of David Morgan’s work in religion and material culture. (see, David Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2010)).

similar “Water-Fire” *liandu* (*shuihuo liandu*) ritual described in great detail in the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅. Written sometime toward the early part of the 17th century, the plot of the *Jin Ping Mei* has traditionally been read as a critique of lavish excess and lascivious indulgence as it tells of the fall of Ximen Qing 西門慶 and the decline of his family’s wealth in the Northern Song.⁵³⁸ The great care taken in detailing the events that led to his demise offer an invaluable resource for reconstructing the worldview of early 17th century social elites, that when taken in concert with what we know of the material culture of the time, can help situate paintings like the MMA scroll in the context of ritual performance. As scholars of Chinese literature and Chinese religions have shown, the literary imagination and the ritual imagination draw from the same shared conceptual reservoir.⁵³⁹ This reservoir includes the liturgical world of Wang Lingguan as preserved in the texts of the *Daofa huiyuan*, and in the *Golden Book* of Zhou Side, as well.

Zhou Side, whose “Methods of the Efficacious Officer” history holds responsible for Wang Lingguan’s rise to prominence at the Ming court, promoted “Water-Fire” *liandu* as his primary ritual idiom for sublimation of the dead. His massive liturgical opus, the *Golden Book of*

⁵³⁸ The textual history of the *Jin Ping Mei* remains an open question and debates continue over dating editions of the received text, including mentions of a manuscript edition by 1596. According to Patrick Hanan’s classic analysis of the novel and its sources, the earliest extant edition (A) dates from 1617 and is the closest the time of the author. See Patrick Hanan, “The Text of the Chin P’ing Mei,” *Asia Major* 9.1 (1962): 1–57; “Sources of the Chin P’ing Mei,” *Asia Major* 10.1 (1963): 23–67. For an overview of the work and its textual history, see David Roy, “Chin P’ing Mei” in William Nienhauser, Jr. ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 287–291.

⁵³⁹ Liu Ts’un-yan’s 柳存仁 (1917–2009) work on the relationship between Chinese religions and Ming literary narratives laid the foundation for scholars of both literature and religion to consider how the two influence each other. Such categorical distinctions have been since shown to be problematic. (See, Liu Ts’un-yan’s 柳存仁, *Chinese Popular Fiction in Two London Libraries* (Hong Kong: Lungmen Shudian, 1967); *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese Novels* (Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag, O. Harrassowitz, 1962)). For examples of recent scholarship, see Meir Shahr, “Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods’ Cults,” in Meir Shahr and Robert P. Weller, eds. *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), pp. 184–211; Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, 1999; Qiancheng Li, *Fictions of Enlightenment: Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, and Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004); Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, 2015.

Perfect Salvation belonging to the Lingbao of Highest Purity (Shangqing Lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu) contains multiple rituals that detail the use of water and fire for saving souls.⁵⁴⁰

Interestingly, the cosmic place where the Fire sublimation takes place is none other than the Fire Palace in the Southern Dipper—the celestial home of Wang Lingguan as described in the ritual manuals from the *Daofa huiyuan*.⁵⁴¹ There, Zhou Side lists numerous deities to be called forth in the ritual performance. Significantly for the MMA scroll, Zhou includes two recognizable figures: Sa Shoujian, who is invoked as a ritual authority representing masters of previous generations,⁵⁴² and the Great General in Charge of Fire (Zhuhuo Dajiangjun 主火大將軍), whose appearance is strikingly similar to that of Wang Lingguan.⁵⁴³ While the name Wang Lingguan does not feature prominently within Zhou Side’s “Water-Fire” *liandu* rituals, the deity he does also appear as Marshal Wang under his epithet “Chixin zhongliang” 赤心忠良 among a litany of deities summoned to the rite.⁵⁴⁴ This of course is the same identifying phrase we find inscribed on the plaque over Wang’s shoulder in the MMA scroll, and as such indicates that the scroll’s image of Wang Lingguan is consistent with Zhou Side’s vision of the deity.

It is quite likely that those at the court of Jiajing remained cognizant of Zhou Side’s ritual vision nearly a century after his death. Zhou Side endeavored to synthesize Daoist ritual into a unified liturgy, the result of which is his *Golden Book*. Zhou produced his compendium during the Xuande reign (r. 1426–1435) while living at the capital in the Palace of Manifest Efficacy, where we can imagine him operating under the shadow of Wang Lingguan’s image. While Zhou Side’s ritual texts were never included in the imperially-sponsored publications of the *Daoist*

⁵⁴⁰ *Zangwai Daoshu* 藏外道書 (vols. 16–17) (Chengdu: Ba Shu Shushe, 1992–1994).

⁵⁴¹ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 33.

⁵⁴² *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 47.

⁵⁴³ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 34.

⁵⁴⁴ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 463.

Canon, his liturgies were well-known among the ranking Daoists in the empire. As Mark Meulenbeld has shown, much of the material contained within the compendium were new writings, or at least Zhou's own revisions of older copy, and individual chapters were disseminated by his disciples from his institutional base at the Palace of Manifest Efficacy.⁵⁴⁵ Thus, the textual material we find therein reflects the lifework of the most powerful Daoist at the capital, whose career subsequent ritual masters like Tao Zhongwen would attempt to emulate at the court of Jiajing.

Even without their inclusion in the *Daozang*, Zhou's writings clearly remained relevant to later generations and contemporaries alike. The publication of his *Golden Book* contains an introduction written by the Forty-fifth Celestial Master dated 1433, who concludes his dedication by noting that the emperor commissioned printing block in order to preserve the text for later generations.⁵⁴⁶ It is thus likely that the liturgical texts of Zhou Side remained part of the ritual vocabulary well into Jiajing's reign. In addition, the striking parallels between the careers of Zhou Side and Tao Zhongwen, and their mutual relationship with the Palace of Manifest Efficacy, strongly suggests that Tao would be very much aware of Zhou Side's vision of "Water-Fire *liandu*." Given Tao's own influence among the imperial family, it is likely that the Honored Imperial Consort Shen was also aware of "Water-Fire" *liandu* in her considerations of the inspiration behind commissioning the MMA scroll. Thus, with its promotion of "Water-Fire" *liandu* and its strong connection to Wang Lingguan at court, the liturgical repertoire of Zhou Side grounds the speculative considerations of this chapter in the ritual world of Jiajing and Honored Imperial Consort Shen.

⁵⁴⁵ Meulenbeld, "Civilized Demons," pp. 228–229.

⁵⁴⁶ *Zangwai Daoshu* 16, p. 1.

In working through the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei*, we shall have reason to return to the ritual texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* and Zhou Side's *Golden Book* to see how they articulate the transformation of Wang Lingguan to empower ritual objects for saving souls in the kinds of *liandu* rites described in the popularized account.⁵⁴⁷ As we will see, the attention the narrative gives to extravagant details helps fill in the physical and material world in which the rituals we find in texts such as the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* and those from the *Daofa huiyuan* actively inhabit—forming a potential bridge between liturgy and an object like the MMA scroll. Taking the ritual texts in concert with the idealized narrative of in the *Jin Ping Mei* will help shed light on the relationship between visibility, materiality and ritual performance and in turn highlight the active role objects like the MMA scroll play in the ritual process. Thus, we may look to the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* not necessarily for its historical accuracy, but for its conceptual potency that informs the ritual imagination of the Ming and the potential power of the MMA scroll therein. In so doing, we may consider how the MMA scroll functions as a powerful object—capable of both creating the ritual space as a ritual tool, and recreating the efficacy of the ritual itself through the power of its visibility.

7.2 *Liandu* through Ming Eyes: The *Jin Ping Mei*

By the sixteenth century, *liandu* would take on both universal and domestic functions in servicing the dead.⁵⁴⁸ Rites could be performed for a single family for a three or one day ritual at varying degrees of expense. The popularity of *liandu* during the early Ming is well-attested, and

⁵⁴⁷ Indeed, many of the rituals detailed in Zhou Side's *Golden Book* (and *liandu* liturgy in general), such as "Breaking the gates of Hell" and "Crossing the Golden Bridge," are described in strikingly similar detail in the *Jin Ping Mei* narrative. *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17. For "Breaking the Gates of Hell," see pp. 26–27; for "Crossing the Golden Bridge," see, p. 36–37.

⁵⁴⁸ Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking*, p. 339. Lai Chih Tim 梨志添, "Daojiao shishi liandu keyi," 277–297.

Goossaert points to court-produced guides on Daoist rituals for “correct living” that list *liandu* ritual as the appropriate Daoist funeral rite.⁵⁴⁹ Chapter Sixty-six of the *Jin Ping Mei*, entitled “Realized Huang [Performs] a Liandu Sacrifice for the Deceased,”⁵⁵⁰ centers on just such a funeral. It details the performance of Daoist Master Huang 黃道士 as he leads a three-day “Water-Fire” *liandu* at the behest of the wealthy protagonist Ximen Qing who sponsors the ritual for his recently deceased concubine, Li Ping’er 李瓶兒. Though not the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* specifically, the “Water-Fire” *liandu* connects to the same Yuyang tradition in which Sa Shoujian plays a role as lineage ancestor.⁵⁵¹ Thus, *Jin Ping Mei* offers a glimpse into an idealized conception of what a related *liandu* sponsored by wealthy patrons should look like during the Ming.

Chapter Sixty-six is the fifth chapter that follows the machinations of the three-day *liandu* program. It culminates in the ritual of ferrying Li Ping’er’s soul out of the underworld by way of guiding it to a soul-banner (*shenfan/hunfan* 神旛/魂旛) such that it may then undergo sublimation through the *yin* element of water and *yang* element of fire before joining the spiritual reservoir at the ancestral temple. Richard Wang’s close analysis of Chapter Sixty-six reveals that the literary world of the *Jin Ping Mei*—from its description of the altar to its account of the rites performed therein and even down to the lines of texts chanted for saving deceased souls—draws heavily from Daoist *liandu* rites reflected in liturgical texts of the *Daoist Canon*.⁵⁵² Indeed, much

⁵⁴⁹ Goossaert cites DZ 467 *Da Ming Xuanjiao lichen zhajia yi* 大明玄教立成齋醮儀 from 1374, p. 339.

⁵⁵⁰ The full title of the chapter is “Guanjia Zhai Sends a Letter and Offers Funerary Compensation, Realized Huang [Performs] a Liandu Sacrifice for the Deceased” 翟管家寄書致賻, 黃真人煉度薦亡. Other editions contain the alternative title without explicit reference to ‘*liandu*,’ “Realized Huang Sends up a Petition Recommending the Deceased 黃真人發牒薦亡. Aside from the title, the details of the narrative remain consistent between the two editions.

⁵⁵¹ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, p. 274.

⁵⁵² Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, pp. 218–222.

of vocabulary used in Chapter Sixty-six to detail ritual articulations during the ceremony appears to have been culled nearly verbatim from *liandu* liturgies preserved in the Canon, and Wang clearly demonstrates how the way that the scene plays out reflects a well-informed awareness of Daoist *liandu* in general.⁵⁵³ Even though the publication of *Jin Ping Mei* is likely to be several decades after the execution of the MMA scroll, the ritual imaginary it describes certainly draws from earlier times.⁵⁵⁴ As such, Chapter Sixty-six offers a broader expectation of what Daoist *liandu* ceremony should look like around the start of the 17th century. David Tod Roy's annotated translation allows us a lively window into that world, and we will base our analysis on his translation only to comment on particular terms when relevant to the current discussion.⁵⁵⁵

7.3 Backdrop to Chapter Sixty-six and the Death of Li Ping'er

Li Ping'er's relationship with Ximen Qing and the circumstances surrounding her death provide an important backdrop to understanding the motivations and conceptualizations of the funerary rites described in Chapter Sixty-six. A few chapters earlier, Chapter Sixty-two opens

⁵⁵³ Both Richard Wang and David Roy point out textual parallels between the *Jin Ping Mei* and liturgies of the *Daozang* as the *Jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 九天生神章經, which the plot mentions by name as the text chanted by Daoists during the recitation of scriptures to gain merit part of the funeral program. (Roy, p. 728 note 12; also, see Roy, vol. 2, chapter 39, note 71; Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, pp. 217–242). Wang offers a close textual comparison of the scripture as it is chanted in the *Jin Ping Mei* with the text found in the *Daozang* that reveals only slight variation between the two (for a further discussion of the scripture, see below). In addition to the *Jiutian shengshen zhangjing*, Wang notes how elements within the *Jin Ping Mei*'s narrative resonate with several canonical liturgical sources that could be part of the *huanglu zhai*, some of which come out the Lingbao corpus, with dates ranging from the Tang to the Ming (pp. 219–220). The texts all deal with saving the souls and securing blessings employing both internal and external idioms: DZ 491 *Jinlu dazhai qimeng yi* 金籙大齋啟盟儀; DZ 91 *Taishang dongxuan Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶無量度人上品妙經; *Taishang Lingbao tianzun shuo jiuku jing* 太上靈寶說救苦經; DZ 181 *Taishang jiuzhen miaojie jinlu duming bazui jing* 太上九真妙戒金籙度命拔罪經; DZ 24 *Yuanshi tianzun shuo shengtian dedao zhenjing* 元始天尊說生天得道真經; DZ 19 *Taishang shengxuan xiaozai huming miaojing* 太上升玄消災護命妙經.

⁵⁵⁴ While the setting of the *Jin Ping Mei* narrative is the Northern Song dynasty, several anachronistic elements in the details of the plot reveal Ming sensibilities.

⁵⁵⁵ David Tod Roy, Xiaoxiaosheng 笑笑生, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or Chin P'ing Mei [金瓶梅]*, vol. 4 "The Climax" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

with Li Ping'er fearful of demonic attacks as she lies wasting away suffering from fatal hemorrhaging after her husband had compelled her to participate in the trial of his newly acquired aphrodisiac while she was menstruating. Ximen Qing, frustrated by her laments and skeptical of her claims of seeing demons, nonetheless calls in a Daoist priest to perform an exorcism. In a move reminiscent of when the neighbor calls for Daoist Zhang in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote, Ximen Qing summons a Daoist Master Pan (Pan Daoshi 潘道士), better known as “Demon-catcher Pan,”⁵⁵⁶ who is trained in the Thunder Methods of the Tianxin 天心 (Celestial Heart) school.⁵⁵⁷

When Daoist Master Pan arrives at Li Ping'er's sickbed, he summons an unnamed Thunder Deity to undertake the exorcistic rite of interrogating demons:⁵⁵⁸

[Pan] then spurted a mouthful of consecrated water out of his mouth, whereupon a strong gust of wind arose, and a yellow-turbaned warrior appeared before him. Behold: His forehead is enveloped in a yellow silk turban; His body clad in a purple robe of embroidered silk. A Lion Barbarian girdle tightly binds his wolflike waist; Leopard-skin trousers securely enclose his tigerlike body... Within the halls of the Jade Emperor, he is known as a talismanic functionary; Before the carriage of the Northern Dipper, He holds the title of celestial warrior. He is always on duty before the altar to protect the law; He constantly visits the mundane world to vanquish demons. *On his breast is suspended the bronze plaque of the Board of Thunder*; In his hand he holds a brilliantly decorated gilded battle-axe.⁵⁵⁹

一黃巾力士現于面前，但見：黃羅抹額，紫綉羅袍。獅蠻帶緊束狼腰，豹皮被牢栓虎體...玉皇殿上，稱為符使之名；北極車前，立有天丁之號。常在壇前護法，每來世上降魔。胸懸雷部赤銅牌，手執宣花金蘸斧。⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁶ Interestingly, Pan 潘 is also the surname of the famous Ming court Thunder Master, Tao Zhongwen discussed in Chapter Three (see *DMB*, p. 1266).

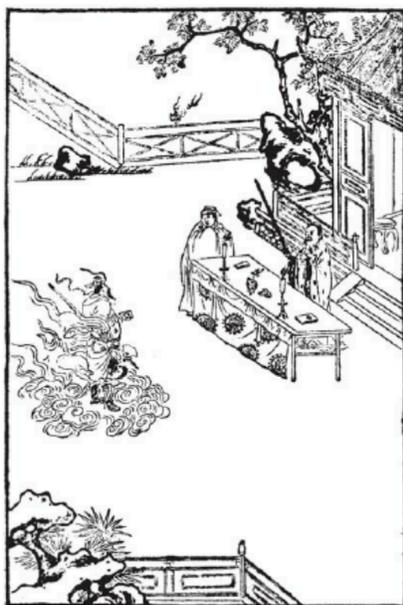
⁵⁵⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 116–117.

⁵⁵⁸ The exorcistic method of “interrogating” demons (*kaozhao fa* 考召法) is well attested to in Thunder Methods sources as early as the Song. (See Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, pp. 151, 158–159).

⁵⁵⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, pp. 123–124. 一黃巾力士現于面前，但見：黃羅抹額，紫綉羅袍。獅蠻帶緊束狼腰，豹皮被牢栓虎體...玉皇殿上，稱為符使之名；北極車前，立有天丁之號。常在壇前護法，每來世上降魔。胸懸雷部赤銅牌，手執宣花金蘸斧。

⁵⁶⁰ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei cihua* 繡像金瓶梅詞話 (Illustrated *Jin Ping Mei*), (Taipei: Xueshan tushu youxian gongsi, 1993), 62: 452–453.

Like the manuals for invoking Wang Lingguan found in the *Daofa huiyuan*, here the text of the *Jin Ping Mei* concerns itself with the how the deity appears, foregrounding visuality in a litany of iconographic elements, including the curious bronze plaque upon his breast (fig. 51). The appearance of this element, along with his yellow turban, resonates strongly with the plaque worn by Wang Lingguan inscribed with “*chixin zhongliang*.” While there is not enough to go on here to make any direct connection certain, the similarities are quite suggestive. Nonetheless, it is important to note how the description of the deity here in the narrative reveals a critical aspect of how the visual language associated with manifesting divine presence in both literary and ritual contexts of exorcism.



(fig. 51)
“Daoist Master P’an Conjures up a
Yellow-turbaned Warrior”⁵⁶¹

Within the context of the narrative world itself, the characters understand the appearance of the deity to be actualized as a result of the ritual methods performed by Daoist Pan.⁵⁶² The

⁵⁶¹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 125.

⁵⁶² While the category of “Literature” itself guides the readership of the *Jin Ping Mei* to see the appearance of the Thunder Deity as anything more a character to help further the plot, when those same details are articulated within the category of “Ritual,” then the deity becomes part of the lived experience just as though we were part of the

deity's appearance not only reflects how Thunder Deities were part of the conceptual repertoire of Ming social elite, but also emphasizes just how critical the vocabulary of the visual is for making deities *real* to those who expect to encounter them. Once summoned, the deity reports that her sickness is a result of a sepulchral plaint,⁵⁶³ and while Daoist Master Pan's exhausts his efforts to exorcise the demons terrorizing Li Ping'er, there is really nothing to be done. She will soon die. In spite of her protestations against anything too expensive, the lavish funeral following Li Ping'er's death sets the stage for the next five chapters.

We will now turn our focus to the final section of that funeral—where the famed Daoist from the capital, Realized Huang (Huang Zhenren 黃真人), oversees the rituals for feeding the hungry ghosts and refining the soul by water and fire. In so doing we will show how the rite as described through the idealized narrative connects to ritual world of Wang Lingguan and the MMA scroll. In particular, the use of ritual objects such as soul-banners and papier-mâché bridges found in the narrative relate directly to the talismanic forms of Wang Lingguan and, thus, the potential of the MMA scroll to function as a powerful object through its visuality and material presence.

7.4 Material Comfort: Hanging the Banner to Start Saving her Soul

We have noted how materiality plays a critical role in producing ritual efficacy. In keeping with the tenor of the overall narrative, the *Jin Ping Mei* pays considerable attention to the material world of Ximen Qing and his lavish lifestyle as a hedonistic social elite. While

world revealed in the narrative. For further discussion of how the category of “literature” relates to “ritual” and the impact such categorizations has had on how we interpret religiosity in the Ming, see Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pp. 1–59, *passim*.

⁵⁶³ For a historical and textual analysis of the ritual technology of sepulchral plaints see Peter Nickerson, “The Great Petition for Sepulchral Plaints,” in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 230–274.

Ximen Qing is enjoying drinks with his pals, the Daoists from the nearby Temple of the Jade Emperor construct the altar where the three-day ceremony will be held in the home:

At the upper end of the altar space were placed images of the Three Pure Ones and the Four August Ones. In the middle was placed an image of the Grand Monad Heavenly Worthy Who Saves from Distress, with images of the Gods of the Eastern Peak and Fengdu to either side of it. At the lower end of the altar space were placed images of the Ten Kings who rule over the Nine Realms of Darkness that constitute the underworld; the two marshals with their Divine Tiger guard the altar; the Four Great Celestial Lords Huan, Liu, Wu, and Lu;⁵⁶⁴ the Divine Empress of the Moon; the Seven Perfected Jade Maidens who govern the fates of deceased women; and the seventeen divine marshals of the Tribunal for Suspended Lives whose job it is to [seize] (*she* 攝) the souls of the dead.⁵⁶⁵

在大廳上鋪設壇場，上安三清四御，中安太乙救苦天尊，兩邊東嶽酆都。下列十王九幽，冥曹幽壤，監壇神虎二大元帥，桓，劉，吳，魯四大天君，太陰神后，七真玉女，倒真懸司，提魂攝魄，一十七員神將。⁵⁶⁶

While the specific altar arrangement here raises interesting questions the potential amalgamation of different local traditions, our concern at present is more general. Ritual scrolls of Daoist divinities arranged hierarchically to create the altar. We find a similar scene in. The construction of the altar with ritual scrolls that we see in the *Jin Ping Mei* parallels the *liandu* liturgies of Zhou Side's *Golden Book*, and suggests that images were indeed an integral part of the performance. The ritual space as it is described in the *Jin Ping Mei* is thus defined by hanging scrolls perhaps not unlike the MMA scroll. Thus, both materiality and visuality create the place for *liandu* to occur. The *Jin Ping Mei* goes on to make specific note of how objects define the ritual space:

Both within and without the altar space,
Everything is arranged in perfect order;
The incense, flowers, lamps, and candles,
Are arrayed in glittering resplendence.

⁵⁶⁴ While the exact identity of these figures is not certain, Roy suggests that they are Huan Kai, Liu Hou, Wu Tao, Lu Feng (Roy, p. 728, notes, 6–9).

⁵⁶⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 206. Roy makes special note of this last sentence, which according to his analysis, remains grammatically unintelligible in all versions of the text. Thus, in translating it, Roy defers to Mei Chieh, *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua chiao-tu chi* (Collation Notes on the Text of the Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua) (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 306.

⁵⁶⁶ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 508.

Censers are supplied with the famous “hundred-blend” incense;
 Hanging lamps are suspended loftily around the sacred area.
 The scripture lecterns are in place,
 Curtained off by drapes of gold lamé;
 Ritual drums are situated on high stands,
 Surrounded by cranes in variegated clouds.⁵⁶⁷

內外壇場，鋪設的齊齊整整，香花燈燭，擺列的燦燦輝輝。爐中都焚百合名香，
 周圍高懸弔挂，經筵羅列，幕走銷金，法鼓高張架，彩雲鶴旋繞。⁵⁶⁸

The scene is one of grandeur and opulence doubtlessly designed to show off the wealth of its sponsor. Ximen Qing is indeed overjoyed upon seeing the altar in his home and rewards those responsible for setting it up so lavishly. We find here echoes of the ostentatious temple-building of Tao Zhongwen in Jiajing’s West Park paradise, and the self-satisfaction of the emperor when he moves to reclusion in his new environs to become a Thunder Deity. Indeed, the *Jin Ping Mei*’s fascination with material wealth offers us a glimpse into how materiality plays a role in the idealized world of *liandu* ritual patronized by Ming social elite. Curtains and drapes of gold lamé, hanging lanterns, burners stocked with expensive incense, all “arranged in perfect order” to create the ideal space to perform *liandu*. This is the stage for Li Ping’er’s forthcoming sublimation and its environs construct a material, and indeed visual, form of paradise for her soul’s eventual salvation. As such, the conceptualization of what ritual looks like to the audience both within and without the narrative comes to be defined by this particular vision of what is more generally a “Yellow Register” domestic ceremony. One could imagine, then, how the extreme splendor presented here would be more august in a performance if its imperial analogue, the “Golden Register Retreat” (*Jinlu zhai* 金籙齋). Indeed, the such a ritual would require the finest work of court painters, like those responsible for the MMA scroll.

⁵⁶⁷ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 207.

⁵⁶⁸ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 508.

The following day, Realized Huang arrives on the scene carried in great opulence and riding an ivory sedan chair. Ximen Qing offers his respects as the Daoist prepares to submit documents to the gods on account of securing the release of Li Ping'er's soul:

[When it was time to ascend the altar, Master Huang] changed into a ninefold-yang thunder cap, a crimson Taoist robe embroidered with golden clouds and white cranes, the pattern of which extended to its flying sleeves, soft white satin socks, and vermilion cloud-scaling ceremonial slippers. An outward-facing Pavilion of Heaven and Earth was set up, covered by two gilded flabella, where Golden Lads presented incense, and Jade Maidens scattered flowers, while holding aloft pennants and standards. As for the divine marshals who guard the altar, the talismanic functionaries of the Three Worlds, the four duty officers in charge of the year, the month, the day, and the hour, the God of Walls and Moats, the divinity of the soil, the local tutelary god, and his attendants, there were none whose presence was not invoked. On the high priest's incense table were arrayed five talismanic writs for summoning the celestial sovereigns, a black pennant for evoking thunder deities,⁵⁶⁹ the jade ruler of the celestial general Tianpeng, a sword incised with a diagram of the seven stars of the Dipper, and a ritual ewer of purified water.⁵⁷⁰

登文書之時,西門慶備金段一疋僉字,登壇之時,換了九陽雷巾,大紅金雲白鶴法氅,與袖飛鬣,腳下白綾軟襪,朱紅登雲朝舄,朝外建天地亭,張兩把金傘蓋。金童揚煙,玉女散花,執幢捧節,監壇神將,三界符使,四直功曹,城隍社令,土地祇迎,無不畢陳。高功香案上列五式天皇號令,召雷皂纛,天蓬玉尺七星寶劍,淨水法盃。⁵⁷¹

The details of Realized Huang's ritual vestments, his accoutrements of the Tianpeng ruler (*tianpeng chi* 天篷尺), seven-star sword (*qixing jian* 七星劍), and ewer (*shuiyu* 水盃) purifying water (*jingshui* 淨水), along with the presence of the Marshals (Yuanshuai) guarding the altar and the black banner that commands the Thunder Deities—all are hallmarks of Thunder Methods ritual regalia.⁵⁷² Here, Realized Huang is preparing to carve his way through the underworld in

⁵⁶⁹ For a detailed discussion of the black pennant and how it relates to summoning divine combatants against military threats, see Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, p. 179–180.

⁵⁷⁰ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, pp. 208–209.

⁵⁷¹ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 509.

⁵⁷² We also see some of these objects, like the Tianpeng ruler, used by Daoist Master Zhang in the *Gengsi bian* anecdote.

order to break Li Ping'er's soul out of bondage much like we see in the rite of "Attacking the Fortress" performed in local temples today.⁵⁷³

We may recall here how the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* detail the process of the Daoist transforming into Wang Lingguan the military commander, ordering his divine lieutenants to search and destroy demonic essences on their way to the underworld. Such is the task of Wang to cut a swath through the underworld in order to secure and purify a path for the deceased soul to escape. We have argued how the MMA scroll mimics the ritual vision of this process, and while it may not be Wang Lingguan that Realized Huang sees in his performance on the altar, it is the figure of those like Wang that the audience would have in mind. Critically, the audience of the *Jin Ping Mei* seems to need no introduction to what is actually being performed on the altar. The material details themselves cue the reader to expect what's coming. To wit, the narrative quite matter-of-factly tells us that Realized Huang simply performed the rituals to break her soul out of hell and to summon her forth:

After the morning invocation the Three Treasures were invited to authenticate the covenant, the various talismans and texts were promulgated, and the ceremonies of "breaking out of Hell" and "summoning the soul" were performed. Music was struck up again, and a ritual for attracting and summoning the soul of the deceased was performed in front of Li Ping'er's spirit tablet.⁵⁷⁴

早辰開啟, 請三寶證盟, 頒告符簡, 破嶽召亡, 又動音樂往李瓶兒靈前攝召引魂。⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society*, pp. 216-234; Nickerson, "Attacking the Fortress," pp. 117-184.

⁵⁷⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 209.

⁵⁷⁵ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 509-510

After which, Realized Huang changes into his formal vestments in order to perform the steps of “pacing the outline” (*bugang* 步罡) and ascend to the gate of Heaven and present a memorial requesting that Taiyi “dispatch divine marshals to fly down” on behalf of the ritual.⁵⁷⁶

The lack of explanation or description of these steps in the *Jin Ping Mei* narrative suggests that they were popular enough rites among the general readership at the time to take such details for granted. While this may not be the case for contemporary readers (especially in English translation), we know from our previous discussion of ritual manuals from the *Daofa huiyuan* what this process entails when it comes to ascending to the heavens in order to request that Wang Lingguan descend. One can almost see the tableau of the MMA scroll that figures Wang Lingguan’s arrival under Sa playing out in the ritual drama of the *Jin Ping Mei*. This is not to suggest that Wang Lingguan is present in the temporary altar erected for Li Ping’er, but rather, that the ritual technologies for summoning divine marshals to be present appears to be shared across contexts—to the degree that Ming readers of a popular narrative would recognize them with little introduction. In other words, the ritual world of Wang Lingguan and that of the *Jin Ping Mei* is the same, and the deities that inhabit both are part of the same broader ritual imaginary. Thus, even if it is not Wang Lingguan emergence into Li Ping’er’s altar, his presence and the way it manifests would not be out of place. The connections they share within the broader ritual imaginary are important to keep in mind as the Daoists prepare for the climactic moment of sublimating Li Ping’er’s soul.

We pick up the narrative at the beginning of the third night of the “Water-Fire” *liandu* when many of the guests have gone home leaving only a troupe of Daoists and the intimate

⁵⁷⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 209. For detailed analysis of the ritual practice of *bugang*, see Poul Andersen, “The Practice of Bugang,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* (1989) 5: 15-53.

relations of Ximen Qing to attend the apex of the liturgy. The Daoists start by erecting a temporary altar space outside in the courtyard in a manner that follows the scheme described in Zhou Side's *Golden Book*,⁵⁷⁷ as well as reflected in contemporary programs for "Iron Bottle" *liandu*.⁵⁷⁸

At dusk they came to witness the Water-Fire *liandu*. In the temporary structure outside the large reception hall, an elevated throne had been set up, a variegated bridge of papier-mâché had been constructed, a basin containing water and a basin containing fire were put in place, and food for the souls of the dead was provided.⁵⁷⁹

晚夕觀看水火煉度，就在大廳棚內搭高座，扎綵橋，安設水池火沼，放擺斛食。⁵⁸⁰

The *Jin Ping Mei* describes establishing the ritual space for conveying the deceased souls of Li Ping'er in terms of materiality. While we already recognize the "food for the souls of the dead" from the "Distributing the Food" (*shishi*) rites discussed in Chapter One, the basins of Water and Fire help define this particular iteration of Water-Fire *liandu*. In addition, the presence of a papier-mâché bridge that will later be used to convey Li Ping'er's soul out of the underworld serves as prominent feature of not only Water-Fire *liandu*, but of Daoist funerary rites in general.⁵⁸¹ Ritual objects and their materiality are placed front and center for the purpose of performance as the altar is built. The critical importance of the bridge and the coinciding use of spirit mediums to help ferry Li Ping'er's soul across occurs at the end of the narrative and will be discussed in further detail in a moment. For now, it is worth noting that the narrative shows how

⁵⁷⁷ Zangwai Daoshu 17, p. 59.

⁵⁷⁸ Li, *Xu Xun yu Sa Shoujian*, pp. 281–283.

⁵⁷⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 215. 夕觀看水火煉度，就在大廳棚內搭高座、扎綵橋、安設水池火沼，放擺斛食。

⁵⁸⁰ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 512.

⁵⁸¹ Richard Wang argues that the papier-mâché bridge and elevated throne reflect elements of local rites of "ritual masters" (*fashi* 法師), similar to those found in contemporary Daoist ritual. See, Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, pp. 239–240.

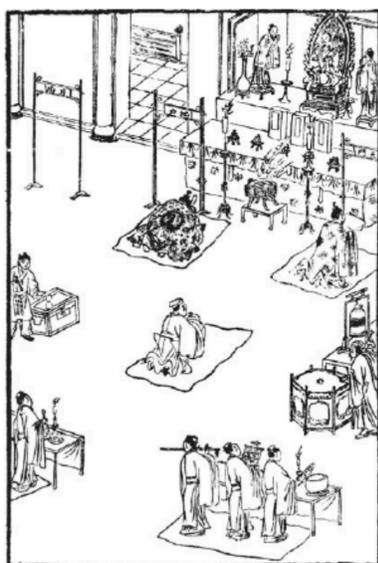
objects once again play a critical role in engendering the ritual, here not just in the passive articulation of establishing the altar, but, as we will see, in the articulating the process of salvation itself. It comes as no surprise, then, that material preparations are made for the soul of Li Ping'er itself:

Offerings were neatly arrayed before the table that held Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, under its own marquee. Her soul banner was placed beside it, together with a red banner and a yellow banner, and above it was suspended an inscription that read:

Overcome demons and guarantee the opportunity,
To undergo sublimation in the Southern Palace.⁵⁸²

李瓶兒靈位, 另有几筵幃幕, 供獻齊整. 傍邊一首魂旛, 一首紅旛, 一首黃旛上書:

制魔保舉受煉南宮.⁵⁸³



(fig. 52)
“Perfect Man Huang Petitions for the
Salvation of the Dead”⁵⁸⁴

The Daoists place the “spirit tablet” (*lingwei* 靈位) of Li Ping'er, which serves as the material target for her immaterial soul. Next to that, they erect her “soul banner” (*hunfan*), the

⁵⁸² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 215.

⁵⁸³ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 512.

⁵⁸⁴ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 210.

temporary means of conveyance that must be protected from the influence of demonic threats (fig. 52). Prior to the third evening when the *liandu* ritual was to occur, Realized Huang had directed Li Ping'er's soul to the object through a series of incantations and bodily practices while the attending Daoist priests chanted sections of the *Jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 九天生神章經.⁵⁸⁵ While the *Jin Ping Mei* does not go into as much detail on the preparation of the “soul banner,” Richard Wang's analysis of the text has convincingly demonstrated that the overall narrative draws from a well-informed knowledge of its construction based in Daoist ritual texts. Beside the “soul banner,” the Daoists have also erected red and yellow banners that correlate with performance of the water and fire sublimations. Each will play a role in the transfer from banner to tablet, as well as offerings for the soul once it has been transformed into the more stable and physically permanent “spirit tablet.” These objects are all placed physically before the offerings for hungry ghosts, the sublimating basins of water and fire and the bridge await to facilitate her final conveyance into ancestor-hood.

The spatial distinction marked here by the physical separation of altar tables reflects an ontological distinction imposed by the ritual itself. On one side are the accoutrements of ancestor worship: the spirit tablet and offerings—what Roy translates as “spirit tablet” is literally described here as the “place for the *ling*.” (*lingwei* 靈位). Across from the *lingwei* is a collection of ritual implements that are, by definition, temporary in that they exist for the purpose of the ritual and also made of disposable material (e.g. papier-mâché). Perhaps because of their identity as temporary, these objects are specifically empowered to save the soul from the dangers of a

⁵⁸⁵ DZ 318 *Dongxuan Lingbao ziran jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 洞玄靈寶自然九天生神章經 (Stanzas of the Life Spirits of the Nine Heavens) (ca. 400) is a core text of the Lingbao corpus. Part of it describes how beings are brought to life through the merging and coalescing of the Nine Pneumas 九氣 into the Nine Heavens 九天 within the void. See Schipper, *TC*, p. 220. See Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, notes 40–49, pp. 738–39.

displaced and liminal existence—that is, the life of an “orphaned soul” (*guhun*). Thus, the temporary status of what is literally called here in the narrative as a “banner for the *hun*” (*hunfan*), becomes the material means of conveyance into something far more stable and permanent—a *place* (*wei*) for *ling*.

As Roy notes, the two lines that appear as an inscription above the yellow and red banners come directly out of Lingbao readings of the *Duren jing* 度人經.⁵⁸⁶ They are the first among many such phrases that appear in this scene culled verbatim from texts utilized in well-known funerary traditions, and thus, situate the ritual vocabulary of the Water-Fire *liandu* within well-established vocabulary of Daoist ritual measures for attending to the dead that date as far back as the fifth century.⁵⁸⁷ While a reception history of the *Duren jing* is beyond the scope of the current study, it is important to note here that its popularity derives in part from how different ritual traditions have incorporated it into their own liturgical idioms such that it continues to inform contemporary Daoist practice today (fig. 53, 54).⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 215, note 35. See, p. 738

⁵⁸⁷ See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 373–404.

⁵⁸⁸ Several instances of *shenfan* being used in salvific rituals occur in the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* and found in the *Daozang*, see DZ 1 *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經 (Wonderful Superior Book of Immeasurable Salvation from [the Canon of] the Numinous Treasure): 4.8a, 7.8a, 15.10a, 22.8a, 35.1a, 40.11a, 43.10a, 53.8b. For specific talismans for creating soul-banners, see DZ 220: *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* 無上玄元三天玉堂大法 (Great Method of the Jade Hall of the Three Heavens, of the Supreme Mysterious Origin), 16.8b. For contemporary examples see Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society*, pp. 216–234; Laing and Liu, *Up in Flames*, 2014.



(fig. 53, fig. 54)
Soul-banners deployed for
funerary practice
Hall of the Eastern Peak
Dongyue dian 東嶽殿
Tainan, Taipei (2009)
Photo by author

In turn, the process of establishing the soul-banner of Li Ping'er may well have resembled that which is described in the rituals we find in the liturgies dedicated to Wang Lingguan from the *Daofa huiyuan* for first creating a soul-banner by way of inscribing Wang Lingguan's talisman, and "Hanging the Banner" (*zhui fan* 墜旛) that the soul may cross over from the underworld.⁵⁸⁹

7.5 Materiality's Role: Creating a Soul-banner with Wang Lingguan

Soul-banners play a critical role in rituals for saving the deceased and leading their souls out of the prisons of Hell so that they may be purified and eventually sublimated to salvation. In the performance of the Daoist "salvation through sublimation" rituals, soul-banners are erected as objects on the altar itself, and thus form the physical link between the immaterial spiritual essence of the deceased party and the salvific space of the ritual. The ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* describe the process of transforming a soul-banner into a powerful object through the use of talismans.

⁵⁸⁹ DZ 1220: 242.3b.

As we have seen from examples in the previous chapter, talismans serve as the visual and material presence of Wang Lingguan's "true form" (*zhenxing*). As Wang is explicitly commanded to "enter the daubing," divine presence is thus articulated to be present in the very substance of that gives the talisman its form. From the perspective of empowering the object, form and substance become one. It is through this mechanism that the Daoist creates a soul-banner by inscribing the talisman of Wang Lingguan onto the physical medium of a banner made from paper or silk, and thereby transforms it into a powerful object capable of producing the efficacy of the god itself.

Turning back to the text of the "Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan," we find two corresponding rites for creating a soul-banner for the purpose of a *liandu* program similar to what we find at the altar of in the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei*. The first step is creating the "Talisman of Seizing the Dead" ("Shewang fu" 攝亡符) that bears Wang's name to inscribe on the banner. The next step is the ritual of "Hanging the Banner" ("Zhuifan" 墜旛) upon the altar such that it can be used by the Daoist to ferry the deceased soul out of the underworld.⁵⁹⁰ The process described in the texts for creating and deploying a soul-banner using talismans of Wang Lingguan articulates how talismanic forms empower material objects to fulfil the efficacious promise of the ritual. Thus, a close reading of these two rites proves particularly instructive for considering how talismanic forms transform objects into powerful agents within ritual

⁵⁹⁰ Often associated with Buddhist imagery, the use of soul-banners for funerary rites is not limited to Daoist ritual, but rather reflects a much broader ritual imagination of rites for the dead. Buddhist imagery of the soul-banner dates at least as far back as the late Tang, where hanging scrolls from Dunhuang show the visual motif Guanyin leading the dead (*yinlu pusa* 引路菩薩). In her study of the transformation of Guanyin into a Chinese deity, Yü Chün-fang highlights this particular function of the goddess as having derived specifically from indigenous elements later incorporated into conceptualizations of the Chinese Buddhist underworld. (Yü Chün-fang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 225–228). Susan Huang suggests that visual reference to soul-banners becomes a feature of Daoist visual culture from the Song dynasty onward. (See, Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, pp 254–280).

performance. In so doing, we may begin to reconsider how an objects like the MMA scroll may be viewed as powerful object in and of itself.

“Wang Shan Talisman for Seizing the Deceased (攝亡符)”

The first rite we look at describes how the banner itself comes to be charged with Wang Lingguan’s power. The Daoist does this by inscribing the “Talisman for Seizing the Dead” that bears Wang’s name (here “Wang Shan”) directly onto the banner (fig. 55).⁵⁹¹



(fig. 55)
“Talisman for Seizing the Dead”⁵⁹²

The interlinear text instructs the Daoist to write directly on the banner using *qi* taken in from South (i.e. the cosmic place of Wang Lingguan) and formed using the *wu* 午 hand gesture (*wuwen nanqi, shuyu fanshang* 午文南炁, 書於旛上).⁵⁹³ A series of five pronouncements follow as the Daoist builds the talismanic form piece by piece, each containing a combination of non-discursive utterances with phrases that relate the power of Thunder to the task of seizing (*she*)

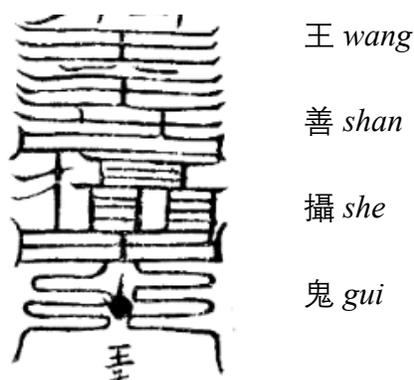
⁵⁹¹ DZ 1220: 242.3a.

⁵⁹² DZ 1220: 242.3a.

⁵⁹³ DZ 1220: 242.3a. Elsewhere in the *Daofa huiyuan* the “Explanation of Thunder” attributed to Sa Shoujian further explains that the channel for *qi* drawn from the South to be used with *wuwen* 午文 derives from the connection between the heart and the mouth. DZ 1220: 67.15a.

spiritual essences.⁵⁹⁴ As the Daoist invokes the power of Thunder, they simultaneously write the talisman on the banner. In so doing, the banner becomes the medium in which Wang Lingguan’s presence resides, thus empowering it as an object capable of “seizing” the deceased souls to then bring them out of the underworld.

The form of the talisman itself literally shows the process of Wang Lingguan seizing *gui*, which given the context, refers here to deceased souls rather than nefarious demons. Three graphs of “*shan*” 山 (“mountain”) from the top of the talisman, below which we find the graph for “*dong*” 東 (“east”). The combination indicates that this is the Eastern Peak, which sits atop the entrance to the underworld can be found. Below the peak we find Wang Shang himself seizing deceased souls (fig. 56):



(fig. 56)

Bearing in mind that talisman functions as the “true form” of the deity and not a symbolic representation, the performance of writing “Wang Shan Seizing Ghosts” 王善攝鬼 creates the potential for what Wang can do, while also describing the process of him doing it. By using externalized *qi* to inscribe the spirit-banner with this command, the Daoist transforms the

⁵⁹⁴ DZ 1220: 242.3b.

material of the banner itself into a powerful object capable of saving souls. Now charged like a spirit-battery, the banner is ready to be hung with the proper ritual authority to ensure its efficacy. To this end, the ritual then shifts to guiding the specific lost soul of the deceased, like that of L Ping'er, out of the underworld and into the temporary banner that it may be ferried toward salvation. This process involves combining the altruistic rite of feeding the orphaned spirits and the martial idiom of breaking into hell. We now return to the *Jin Ping Mei* narrative to see how this process unfolds for Li Ping'er's soul.

7.6 Stealing her Soul in Plain Sight

As the *Jin Ping Mei* narrative continues, we find Realized Huang standing before the temporary altar that was constructed in Ximen Qing's courtyard, where he is performing the ritual process of inviting a divine host down to the space in order to initiate the process of saving Li Ping'er's soul. The rite begins with a long invocation drawn from the *Duren jing* that announces the divine agents and describes the task of bringing Li Ping'er's soul out of hell. The initial invocation concludes with the ritual for "Distributing the Food" (*shishi*) to the orphan spirits.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, this particular moment allows us a glimpse into what similar rites to "Iron Bottle" *liandu* may have looked like in the Ming at the moment when Sa Shoujian and Wang Lingguan would be invoked to administer to the dead. We may thus use the narrative to not only gain a sense of context for the MMA scroll, but also consider the productive power of the scroll painting by comparing the performance of the rite with the visuality of the painting.

⁵⁹⁵ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 216.

Realized Huang begins the rite by invoking the authority of the Celestial Worthy Who Alleviates Suffering, Taiyi, (Taiyi jiuku tianzun) who, along with Puhua Tianzun, forms the head of the Shenxiao Thunder Methods pantheon:

Diligently dispersing genuine incense, we sincerely invoke the attendance at this sacred rite of the Great Compassionate and Merciful Occupant of the Palace of the Eastern Apogee Who Listens to the Voices of the Distressed and Is Moved to Respond to Their Needs, the Celestial Worthy Who Alleviates Suffering, Taiyi, i.e., the Sovereign Deity Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East and Presides over the Nine Yang his avatars, the Great Perfect Men Who Save from Distress of the Ten Directions, the celestial and terrestrial transcendents, the officers of the Three Worlds, the deities of the Five Peaks, the Ten Kings of the Underworld, and the worthies of the Water Bureau and Mount Lo-feng.⁵⁹⁶

謹運真香，志誠上請：東極宮中大慈仁者，尋聲赴感太乙救苦天尊，青玄九陽上帝，十方救苦諸大真人，天仙，地仙，三界官屬，五岳十洲，水府羅酆聖眾。⁵⁹⁷

Taiyi comes to be associated with controlling the body as well as funerary rites and other rituals that requires engaging with the underworld and so it comes as no surprise that his presence is called forth to oversee the success of the ritual.⁵⁹⁸ Judith Boltz's work has shown how the process of rescuing and refining souls correlates with places within the inner cosmos of the priest's body.⁵⁹⁹ Following her work, Susan Huang makes the point that several texts identified with the Shenxiao and Lingbao *Duren jing* traditions that inform the rites detailed in the *Jin Ping Mei* describe the opening of the gates and proceeding into the Water Bureau in terms of a purifying radiance that light the way for Taiyi to come and feed the hungry souls:

Trillions of light rays coming from the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning now turn into myriad celestial troops who descend to open the gates of the Fengdu prison (i.e., the kidneys). The overwhelming light flashes into the depths of the darkness, turning the prison into a land of purification and refinement, a scenario not unlike that visualized by the master when performing the rites of breaking open hell. All souls are led to the vast sea below the prison to bathe. This watery

⁵⁹⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 215–216.

⁵⁹⁷ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 512–513.

⁵⁹⁸ Boltz, *Taoist Meditation*, *passim*.

⁵⁹⁹ Boltz, "Opening the Gates of Purgatory." DZ 1221 *Shangqing Lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (Great Rites of Numinous Treasure Most High).

part of the transformation is called the refinement through water (*shuilian* 水鍊)...The master visualizes the Heavenly Worthy of the Great One Who Saves From Suffering and the Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions Who Save from Suffering chanting and descending from heaven while sprinkling sweet dew to nurture the souls.⁶⁰⁰

The process described here foregrounds the martial influence of Thunder Methods rites associated with Shenxiao liturgical traditions beginning with Lin Lingsu. The radiant light emanating from Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning (*Yuanshi tianzun*) transforms into a host of martial divinities all descending into the abyss. Their blazing light “overwhelms” the darkness, purifying the landscape and illuminating the path to the waters below where the rescued souls may begin the first stage of sublimation through the “refinement through water.” Following the violent descent into Hell, the initial step of sublimation coincides with the benevolent act of Taiyi descending from the heavens down to the waters to feed needy souls with the sustenance of sweet dew like that which we find coming forth from the “Iron Bottle” of Sa Shoujian in the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*. Indeed, the entire scene playing out within the inner world of the Daoist’s body strongly parallels that which we see in the tableau of the MMA scroll.

The specific divine identities invoked in Realized Huang’s incantation draw from the broader salvific repertoire of figures associated with handling souls in the underworld, including those that match the *liandu* traditions associated with Sa Shoujian.⁶⁰¹ In particular, Sa Shoujian is identified within the texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* as the “Realized Sa Shoujian Who Saves from Distress“ (*jiuku zhenren* Sa Shoujian 救苦真人薩守堅), using the same epithet we see in the *Jin*

⁶⁰⁰ Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, p. 273. DZ 407 *Lingbao dalian neizhi xingchi jiyao* 靈寶大鍊內旨行持機要 (Summary for the Practice of the Esoteric Instructions of the Great Lingbao Sublimation Rite): 6.556b; DZ 219 *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶無量度人上經大法 (Great Rites of the Book of Universal Salvation): 9.4a-5b.

⁶⁰¹ For example, see DZ 1220: 207 “Taiji Ge Xianweng shishi fa” 太極葛仙翁施食法 (“Methods of Distributing the Food of Absolute Supreme Uncle Immortal Ge”), 1a-1b. Zhou Side also identifies Sa Shoujian with this tradition (*Zangwai Daoshu* 17, p. 47).

Ping Mei reserved for Taiyi.⁶⁰² Here, Taiyi governs over his “avatars” as they undertake the tasks of saving souls, just as we have seen Sa Shoujian watching over his martial charges in the texts of the *Daofa huiyuan* and in the hierarchical composition of the MMA scroll. Indeed, the imagery of Sa floating on a cloud over the fray recurs in the invocation as Realized Huang calls forth Taiyi’s authority to oversee his own charges as they make their way into the underworld:

... We respectfully hope that your lion throne will float through the void, and your dragon pennant sparkle in the sunlight, that you may dispense the malachite elixir that dispels distress, and the sweet dew and ambrosia that generously alleviate the hunger of bereaved souls. Today, we dedicate a provisional offering upon the table holding the spirit tablet of the deceased and transmit the talismans that will abolish the guilt of those incarcerated in the Nine Realms of Darkness, so that their interrogations may be ended and their punishments cease.⁶⁰³

伏望獅座浮空, 龍旂耀日. 空青枝酒頻除熱惱; 甘露食味, 廣濟孤噓. 今則暫供
儿告頒符命, 九幽滅罪, 罷對停毆.⁶⁰⁴

In the case of the ritual for Li Ping’er, Taiyi is called upon to distribute the “sweet dew and ambrosia” to “generously alleviate the hunger of bereaved souls” (*ganlu shiwei, guangji guxu* 甘露食味, 廣濟孤噓). This describes the process of “Distributing the Food” at the heart of “Iron Bottle *liandu*.” Here we can find echoes of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* wherein Sa Shoujian dispenses the surplus food with his “iron bottle” to facilitate the salvation to all:

In his hand [Sa] grasps the Fan of Five Brightnesses that Subdues Demons,
His body draped with the Hundred-fold Dress of Defeating Devils.
He always takes his iron bottle to administer the surplus,
That all who contain *ling* each may universally obtain salvation.

手執五明降鬼扇, 身披百衲伏魔衣. 常將鐵罐食加持, 普濟含靈皆得度.⁶⁰⁵

Indeed, Master Huang’s invocation concludes with his own performance of the “Distributing the

⁶⁰² DZ 1220: 241.1a; 243.1a.

⁶⁰³ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, pp. 215–216.

⁶⁰⁴ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 513.

⁶⁰⁵ DZ 1443: 10a.

Food” at the altar:

The high priest then recited the *Wuchu jing* 五廚經, or *Scripture of the Five Feasts*, and the sacred spell that transmutes the food offerings, thereby distributing the ritual foodstuff to the hungry spirits.⁶⁰⁶

高功念五廚經, 變食神咒, 散法食。⁶⁰⁷

Thus, we see a shared conceptual vocabulary for how Sa Shoujian’s “Iron Bottle” may have been thought to help distribute spiritual sustenance to the community of lost souls operating across the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei*, the text of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, and the visual tableau of the MMA scroll. However, just like the MMA scroll shows, “Distributing the Food” is only one side of the process. The individual soul of the deceased family member still must be saved. Accordingly, the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* continues by incanting the process by which the deities will save come to seize Li Ping’er’s soul and lead toward salvation.

According to Roy’s annotations, Realized Huang performs this rite by incanting lines from the *Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens* (*Jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 九天生神章經). The text itself dates from at least as far back as the Song, and details the process of guiding an individual soul like Li Ping’er’s to the soul-banner that it may be brought out of the underworld.⁶⁰⁸ The language of the text describes the transformation of the soul in terms of undergoing transformations of its form:

The reason why human beings suffer from death and decay is that they are unable to cherish their forms, preserve their spirits, value their pneumas (*qi*), and solidify their roots, thus forsaking their true natures. In order to be reborn, their forms

⁶⁰⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 216. The *Wuchu jing* 五廚經 is associated with the eighth century text *Laozi shuo wuchu jing zhu*, 老子說五廚經註 (Commentary on the Five Feasts Scripture Pronounced by Lao Zi) by the prominent court Daoist 尹愔 (d. 741), which details internalizing feasts of the five directions by mapping them onto the five viscera. See, Verellen, *TC*, pp. 351–352; also see Roy, p. 730, note 39.

⁶⁰⁷ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 513.

⁶⁰⁸ *Jiutian shengshen zhangjing* 九天生神章經 (Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens) can be found in the DZ 1032: *Yunji qiqian* 雲集七千, 16:90b. See Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 730, note 40.

must be bathed in the Great Yin, and their substance refined by the Great Yang, so that the Nine Pneumas may cause them to coalesce, and the Three Origins re-create them in the womb, thereby giving renewed shape to their forms. Were they not able to rely upon the immutable laws of the Most High (Shangdi), and the esoteric commands of Lao-tzu, the founder of the school of the Mysterious Origin, how could they hope to find a way of salvation for their incarcerated souls, or expect the restoration of their original bodies, enabling them to mount the auspicious clouds and attend upon the Primordial, while overcoming demons and being guaranteed redemption? To this end, we shall reverently present the true talisman of the Numinous Treasure for the refinement of the bodies of the dead.⁶⁰⁹

人之有死壞者，皆所以不能受其形，保其神，貴其炁，固其根，離其本真耳。若得還生，須得濯形於太陰，煉質於太陽，復受九炁凝合，三元結成胞，乃可成形。匪伏太上之金科，玄元之秘旨，豈可開度幽魂，全形復體，駕景朝元，制魔保舉。靈寶煉形真符，謹當宣奏。⁶¹⁰

Such is the process of sublimation that the deceased souls may be “reborn” with new bodies and a “renewed shape to their forms.” While the main agent of redemption here in the recitation of the *Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens* is figure of Lao Zi, we find this same notion in the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* that describes Wang Lingguan’s salvific role immediately following mention of Sa Shoujian’s benevolent “Iron Bottle”:

The Iron-faced General [i.e. Wang Lingguan] appeared from the deep pool.
For twelve years he observed his transgressions,
For eons he cultivated himself, accumulating merit.
Recklessly pledging an oath in the court of Shangdi,
In all cases to comply with commands universally throughout the Three Realms.
Curing illness and returning life as though a flick of the wrist,
Opening light and attaching [new] bodies to display the might of your power.

一十二年觀過錯，百千萬種積功勳。
妄把誓盟朝上帝，普令三界悉皈依。
治病回生如返掌，開光附體闡威靈。⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 216.

⁶¹⁰ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 513.

⁶¹¹ DZ 1443: 10a.

The invocations of the *Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens* by Realized Huang and the text of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* address the same function, namely, powerful divine agents saving individual souls by giving them new forms. Particularly relevant to our discussion of the MMA scroll as a powerful object, Realized Huang conducts this process through the use of talismans, in this case, the “true talisman of the Numinous Treasure for the refinement of the bodies of the dead. While we do not get to see the visual form of the talisman in the *Jin Ping Mei*, we do hear Realized Huang as he incants in concert with creating it:

The Lord of Grand Tenuity summons with his yellow pennant,
The deity of Florescent Nonbeing directs the soul banners.
Attracting and summoning the dead from their eternal night,
They provide a way of salvation for their resurrected souls.⁶¹²

太微迴黃旗，無英命靈旛，
攝召長夜府，開度受生魂。⁶¹³

Here, we find two deities responsible for conveying the soul to the soul-banner that it may be led out of the underworld. According to Isabelle Robinet, Taiwei 太衛 and Wuying 無英 look after the body and are capable of bring it back to life.⁶¹⁴ In the case of the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, we see Wang Lingguan charged with the same power to return bodies back to life, as though just a “flick of his wrist.” In the case of Realized Huang’s invocation, this is done by way of first directing the deceased soul to the soul-banner and then sublimating the soul by immersing the banner into the basin of water and then the basin of fire set up on the altar—i.e. the definitive features of the “Water-Fire” *liandu*:

⁶¹² Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 216.

⁶¹³ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 513.

⁶¹⁴ Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, pp. 100–101, 128–129, 146–148. See Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 730, note 48.

The Taoist celebrants first took Li P'ing-erh's soul banner, immersed it in the basin of water, and burnt a talisman addressed to Jielin 結璘, or the Ladies of the Moon, after which they exchanged it for the red banner. They then put this in the basin of fire and burnt a talisman addressed to Yuyi 鬱儀, the Emperors of the Sun, after which they replaced it with the yellow banner.⁶¹⁵ The high priest then declaimed the words:

The Heavenly number one begets water,
The Earthly number two begets fire;
When water and fire are refined together,
They give birth to the true form.⁶¹⁶

道眾先將魂旛安於水池內，焚結靈符，換紅旛。次於火沼內，焚鬱儀府，換黃旛。高功念：

一生水，地二生火；水火交煉，乃成真形。⁶¹⁷

While the process draws from cosmogonic language of Five-phase theory and alludes to relationships between elements to inform how a new “true form” comes to be, the performance of the ritual to sublimate Li Ping'er's soul relies here on a series of transference between temporary material objects. First, the soul is transferred from the soul banner to be submerged in water, to a different red banner, which is to be doused in flames, and then finally into the yellow banner, after which her immaterial spirit will be transferred to her final resting place in the permanent physical object of the spirit tablet. Unfortunately, the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* offers little further detail on what occurs at this climatic moment of the “Water-Fire” *liandu*, but that is not surprising. From the perspective of the audience, both in attendance and reading along, this meets the expectation of what the performance of “Water-Fire” *liandu* looks like. This is

⁶¹⁵ The “Jielin” and “Yuyi” can be found in the Six Dynasties period text, DZ 1376 *Shangqing taishang dijun jiuzhen zhongjing* 上清太上帝君九真中經 (Central Scripture of the Nine True Ones) and relate to Shangqing internal practices of ascending to heaven in the chariots of these gods. See Robinet, *TC*, p. 145.

⁶¹⁶ Roy, pp. 216–217. Master Huang invokes the cosmogony in Chapter forty-two of *Lao Zi* to explain the logic of how water and fire come together to produce the “true form” of what will be Li Ping'er's new sublimated body (The Dao gives birth to the One, the One gives birth to the Two, the Two gives birth to the Three, the Three gives birth to the myriad things. 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物). This recalls a similar relationship of how *shen* 神 sublimates *qi* 氣 to create the “true form” of Wang Linguan described in the manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan*.

⁶¹⁷ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 513-514.

most evident in the narrative pace, which quickly moves from seemingly painstaking detail before rushing to the speedy conclusion of the rite.

7.7 Crossing that Bridge When We Get There

According to the narrative, the climax to the performance is rather, well, anti-climactic:

Once the sublimation ceremony was completed, the soul of the deceased, attired in its formal cap and cape, was invited to cross the golden bridge (*bu jinqiao* 步金橋), pay court before the jade steps, and confess her allegiance to the Three [*sic*] Treasures.⁶¹⁸

煉度畢，請神主冠帔，步金橋，朝參玉陛，皈依二寶。⁶¹⁹

In concert with Song dynasty liturgical precedents, the Water-Fire *liandu* concludes by Realized Huang leading the newly formed soul of Li Ping'er across the “Golden Bridge” (*jinqiao* 金橋).

The rite of “crossing the “golden bridge” guides Li Ping'er's soul across (*du* 度) that it can find its place (*wei*) in the socially acceptable form of a “spirit tablet” (*lingwei*), and thus concludes the main funerary ceremony.⁶²⁰

The ritual of crossing the “Golden Bridge” can be seen practiced today in temples dedicated to the underworld, such as the Hall of the Eastern Peak in Tainan, where the bridge itself is often constructed out of papier-mâché or sometimes found in the form of a silk scarf hanging as part of the funerary banner carried as part of the funeral procession.⁶²¹ Details of the use of soul-banner in conjunction with rites of the “golden bridge” can be found in the *Daozang*

⁶¹⁸ Roy, p. 167. Likely a textual variant, Roy translates the final two characters in the line as “Three Treasures,” which he suggests is referencing the Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing*) (Roy, p. 739, n. 52 referring to Roy, vol. 2. Chap 39, n. 12, p. 565.

⁶¹⁹ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 514.

⁶²⁰ Roy, p. 215.

⁶²¹ Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, pp.216–37; Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” pp. 117–184. My own fieldwork from 2010.

within the 13th century compilation of funerary rites known as the *Golden Book of Salvation According to the Lingbao Tradition* (*Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* 靈寶領教濟度金書),⁶²² while anecdotal evidence from that time also attests to the practice of constructing actual temporary wooden bridges sturdy enough to support the weight of Daoists ritually walking across a man-made pond.⁶²³ The use of the “golden bridge” suggests the incorporation of material features of *fashi* rites into Daoist funeral liturgy. As Richard Wang notes, the ritual of crossing the bridge as it appears in the *Jin Ping Mei* has its roots in the local practices of *fashi* who deploy spirit mediums to convey the deceased soul across.⁶²⁴ Its prominence in the *Jin Ping Mei*’s depiction of Li Ping’er’s funeral reflects the dynamic interaction of local and Daoist rites performed to the expectations of an upper-class funeral during the mid-Ming.

“Crossing the bridge” thus not only reveals the degree to which local practice was incorporated into Daoist ritual of the time, but it also highlights the importance of the materiality associated with the *fashi* rites for conducting *liandu*. In other words, the MMA scroll, with its material presence of a former demon-queller, would fit seamlessly into those rituals associated with calling upon Wang Lingguan’s presence for conveying the deceased across the “golden bridge.” We find a similar process for conveying the dead across the golden bridge detailed in the rites of “Hanging the Banner” (“Zhuifan” 墜旛) from the “Secret Methods of Huoluo Lingguan” of the *Daofa huiyuan*, in which Wang Lingguan guides the soul across toward salvation. As

⁶²² DZ 466. See Lagerwey, *TC*, pp. 1033–36.

⁶²³ Susan Huang points to criticism from the synthesizer of the DZ 1221 *Shangqing Lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, Jin Yunzhong 金允中 (fl. 1225) levied against his fellow at the time, that the prevalence of the bridge in funerals was such that “the fish swimming in the water were symbolic heavenly messengers, not unlike dragons.” Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, p. 277.

⁶²⁴ Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, pp. 239–40.

such, the ritual manuals once again offer a window into how both visibility and materiality play a central role in the process of sublimating souls.

The ritual of “Hanging the Banner” immediately follows the creation of the soul-banner by way of inscribing Wang Lingguan’s talismanic “true form” onto the object itself, thus transforming it into a physical manifestation of the deity’s presence. Once transformed, the banner then becomes an active participant in the ritual process of saving the deceased soul. While the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* offers only the briefest summary of the rite being complete, the ritual manuals offer details in articulating the performance that help us see how visibility and the materiality as it relates to the MMA scroll may factor into the vision of how Daoist ritual saves souls.

Having thus been inscribed with the talisman of Wang Lingguan, the spirit-banner itself is transformed into the form of the deity. To fulfil its ritual role, the Daoist hangs the banner in such a way as to then transform it into the bridge for the souls of the deceased to cross over into the altar space to then be saved:

Actualize the deceased person, the shape and form of the man or woman’s face and eyes. Actualize the banner becoming a “golden bridge,” crossing over to crown of the “lad’s” (*tongzi* 童子, i.e. spirit medium) body.⁶²⁵

存亡人男女面目形狀，存旛為金橋，過於童子身頂。⁶²⁶

The manual directs the Daoist to concentrate first on the face of the deceased as a way of identifying the correct soul. In so doing, the soul is transformed from the generic dead to an individual—one with recognizable features that connect them back to the world of the living and

⁶²⁵ For an analysis of the parallel function of spirit mediums and icons in contemporary rituals for summoning souls, see Lin, *Materializing Magic Power*, 2015.

⁶²⁶ DZ 1220: 242.3b.

the memory of the family.⁶²⁷ To do so, the ritual calls for the soul-banner to be transformed into a “golden bridge” for the deceased soul to cross-over to begin the process of sublimation.⁶²⁸ As we have seen in other examples of transformation within ritual performance, the transformation into the “golden bridge” occurs through the invocatory methods of the Daoist, and plays out simultaneously both internally within the Daoist’s body and externally in the ritual space.⁶²⁹ In this case, the process does not occur unless the banner had been previously transformed into a powerful object by the “Talisman for Seizing the Deceased,” and thereby transformed into the presence of Wang Lingguan himself in a transformative process that closely parallels the rituals of “transformation of the body.” Thus, the material presence of the banner itself functions just like the Daoist’s own body in facilitating the ritual’s efficacy, much like the ways in which MMA scroll parallels the rituals of body transformation discussed in Chapter Five.

The focus of the rite then shifts to process of leading the deceased soul to the banner and then out of Hell:

First, using the “mountain character” hand seal, actualize the entirety of Mount Tai keeping down below.⁶³⁰ See the God of Mount Tai leading the deceased soul with both hands to the hanging banner.

⁶²⁷ For a discussion of the central importance of “face” in visualizing the dead and the underworld, see Wu Hung, “On Tomb Figurines: The Beginning of a Visual Tradition,” in Wu Hung and Katherine Tsang, eds., *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 13–48.

⁶²⁸ For a general overview of how the “golden bridge” fits within Daoist rituals for saving the dead, see Haruji Asanos’s entries on “Gongde” 功德 (Ritual of Merit) and “Kaitong minglu” 開通冥路 (Opening a Road in the Darkness) in *EoD*, pp. 449–451, 598.

⁶²⁹ The “golden bridge” appears in several rituals describing the internal cosmology within the body related to the practice of inner alchemy since the Song. For examples, see DZ 141 *Ziyang zhenren wuzhenpian zhushu* 紫陽真人悟真篇註疏 (Commentary on Ziyang Zhnren’s Awakening to Truth), 5.20b.; DZ 78 *Taishang sandong shenzhou* 太上三洞神咒 5.22b. “Incantation of Sitting Sublimation” (Zuolian zhou 坐鍊咒) is included among several other incantations for summoning Thunder Deities. The “golden bridge” also appears as an element for calling down deities to altar, see DZ 220 *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* 無上玄元三天玉堂大法, 36.6b.

⁶³⁰ Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山), also known as the Eastern Peak (*dongyue* 東嶽), is located in modern Shandong Province. As early as the Six Dynasties, it has been associated with the location of the underworld and funerary practices concerned with the welfare of deceased souls within the broader ritual imagination. According to Stephen Bokenkamp, the conceptualization of Taishan as the site of the entrance to the underworld dates from the and thus pre-dates the influence of Buddhist visions of Hell, but by the Song dynasty, Taishan was part of a broader and more diverse conceptual reservoir from which the ritual imagination surrounding visions of the underworld could draw (See, Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 2007; Christine Mollier, “La méthode de l’empereur du nord du mont

先用山字印存一泰山壓下, 見泰山神引亡魂掬墜旛上。⁶³¹

While the principal agent in the invocation leading taking the souls and leading them to the soul banner is the god of Taishan, the scene itself parallels almost exactly with the literal/graphic narrative seen in the “Seizing the Dead Talisman of Wang Shan” discussed above. There in the talismanic form, the Eastern mountains of the east (i.e. Taishan) are literally pressing down upon “Wang Shan,” which in turn heads the “seizing of ghosts,” drawn here for the explicit purpose of leading deceased souls to salvation. As a speech-act, the invocation not only described what is happening, but reifies the scene by virtue of its pronouncement. Likewise, the production of the talismanic true form of Wang Shan and its subsequent inscription onto the banner reifies the transformation of form from a banner into Wang Lingguan in the form of a banner that then carries away the departed.

The performative nature of the talisman and the invocation are then realized through the embodied repertoire of the Daoist. Interlinear text describes how to form the “mountain character” hand seal:

Five fingers reach out to the middle finger, the second and fourth fingers press against the pinky and index fingers. For “gen” 艮 (i.e. trigram for “mountain”) writing, extend the middle finger.

五指勾中指二指四指壓小指大指掐艮文伸中指。⁶³²

Fengdu: Une tradition exorciste de Taoisme medieval,” *T’oung Pao* 83 (1997): 329–385; Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals, pp. 185–211. Contemporary temples dedicated to the Eastern Peak (Dongyue miao 東嶽廟) often serve as the sites of funerary rites, especially those centered on rescuing the dead from the earth prisons of Hell. (See, Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, pp. 216–237; Nickerson, “Attacking the Fortress,” pp. 139–179).

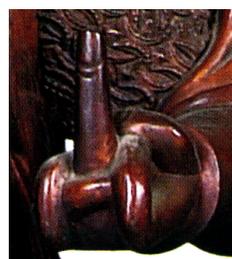
⁶³¹ DZ 1220: 242.4a-b.

⁶³² DZ 1220: 242.3b. While “genwen” 艮文 elsewhere in the *Daozang* relates to *bagua* 八卦 divination techniques counted on the hand (for example, see DZ 93 *Taishang dongxuan Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin jingfa* 太上洞玄靈寶無量度人上品經法 (Commentary on the Book of Salvation): 5.13b.), here it appears as the final stroke in an otherwise closed fist.

In so doing, the text describes what may well be an iteration of what has since come to be known as the “*lingguan jue*,” one of the hand gestures associated specifically with Wang Lingguan, and can be seen in images of the deity where his left hand is clenched in a fist extending his middle finger (fig. 8 detail).



(fig. 8)



(detail of fig. 8)

If the “mountain character seal” is indeed representative of how Wang Lingguan’s own hand seals were conceived, then the ritual master using it here to transport the souls of the deceased to the replacement body of the medium suggests that the ritual is performed in the idiom of the god himself. That is to say, the Daoist takes on the mantle of Wang Lingguan to become the deity through the transformative process of *bianshen* in order to ferry deceased souls out of the underworld. The process of transporting disembodied souls is thus described here through a combination of body of the priest and the body of the god articulated through talismanic writing. Thus, the physical presence of the talisman, the banner, and the body of the priest all work together in concert with the visuality invoked in the ritual as a network of mingled bodies in order to produce the presence of the Wang Lingguan in its realized form. Throughout the rite for “Hanging the Banner” the Daoist must negotiate transformations across different kinds of bodies.

In addition to the Daoist's own body and the engendered body of the transformed soul-banner, the Daoist also conducts the ritual through the "replacement body" (*shending* 身頂) of a spirit medium (*tong zi*).⁶³³ The invocation directs the Daoist to actualize the "golden bridge" of the soul-banner to connect to the crown of the medium's head.⁶³⁴ All three "bodies"—Daoist, soul-banner, and spirit-medium—work together as a continuum to bring the disembodied soul out of the underworld where it will then be sublimated into a new body.

Here, the mechanism of "body mimesis" discussed in Chapter Five within the context of visuality in the MMA scroll is made explicit through the orchestrated interaction of different bodies. The Daoist's body serves as both the theater and a principal actor for the process to unfold. Meanwhile, the banner serves as a momentary replacement body in and of itself as it serves to convey the immaterial soul to the replacement body of a spirit medium. In a similar way, then, the MMA scroll tableau reifies this process by mimicking the visual invocatory vocabulary. In so doing, it carries the potential as an object to transform from a hanging scroll, to an object of power capable of producing efficacy, much like a banner or a talisman used in similar circumstances. This is made possible by the transformative process of first inscribing the

⁶³³ The practice of a living member personating the deceased dates back to the *Liji*. In her study of aniconism related to Confucius, Deborah Sommer notes how the physical appearance of the living resembled the deceased in the manifest world, while in the hidden, "the continuity of blood and vital energy allowed one to communicate with the spirits of one's ancestors in the eidetic visions of pre-sacrificial vigils." As Sommer goes on to point out, descendants would literally "image" 象 the deceased, leading many scholars to consider this practice to be the forerunner of icons (see Sommer, "Destroying Confucius," p. 101). In the contemporary practice among Taiwan's urban and rural setting, Wei-Ping Lin argues that the bodies of human spirit mediums and the iconic bodies of fashioned statues function within the same continuum of simulacrum, and that practically speaking, the two kinds of bodies can be interchangeable. See Lin, *Materializing Magic Power*, 2015.

⁶³⁴ Other rituals in the *Daofa huiyuan* evince the use of spirit mediums to manifest Wang Lingguan's presence, as well. The canonical liturgy of the "Secret Methods of the Lingguan of Fire Thunder from the Southern Pole, Marshal Wang," for example, concludes with ritual for detailing how to create a "golden well to corral" 金井欄 all the dangerous spirits (note the parallel we find in the anecdote of Daoist Master Zhang's using bottles covered sealed with talismans to capture the Wutong). Therein, it tells how to coerce Wang to "enter a body" (*ruti* 入體) of a medium (*tongzi* 童子) and what to do once he is there. The use of a spirit medium to communicate with Wang Lingguan is reminiscent of *fashi* techniques to control local gods, and thus its inclusion at the end of the canonical text evinces the efforts to bring these local practices under an authoritative aegis of Daoist liturgy. See DZ 1220: 243.3a.

“Talisman for Seizing the Dead” onto its surface, and thus incorporating Wang Lingguan’s presence into the very fabric of its existence. Thus, we can see in the rites for “Hanging the Banner” that the transformative potential of talismanic writing is not limited to the use of talismans themselves. While the Daoist initially empowers the soul-banner by inscribing Wang Lingguan’s “Talisman for Seizing Ghosts,” the banner then becomes a powerful object in and of itself and indeed capable of serving as a temporary replacement body for deceased souls.

Finally, the short rite of “Hanging the Banner” concludes by the Daoist reaffirming their ritual authority through invocations of high-gods. In this instance, it is not the familiar master Sa Shoujian, but the grand figure Taiyi. Here, the text instructs the Daoist to make a short proclamation to invoke his divine authority:

In a Great Voice say: I receive the imperial order of the Great Emperor Thunder Ancestor of the Nine Heavens as the law of the Celestial Worthy Taiyi who Alleviates Suffering commands!

喝云：奉九天雷祖大帝敕，太乙救苦天尊律令。⁶³⁵

Like the rituals we have seen in the *Jin Ping Mei*, the text of “Hanging the Banner” invokes the ultimate of Taiyi, to whom the Daoist presents the banner now charged with the presence of deceased souls. While we do not know which deity may have been responsible for helping Li Ping’er’s soul across the “golden bridge,” we can still get a sense from the ritual manuals how a deity like Wang Lingguan could do it.

7.8 Finishing Off the Narrative and Returning to Materiality

Back at the altar in Ximen Qing’s courtyard with Realized Huang, the ritual has reached its apex and Li Ping’er’s soul has been saved. However, before the “Water-Fire” *liandu* program

⁶³⁵ DZ 1220: 242.4a–b.

is truly complete, the collective dead must still be addressed. Master Huang turns the ritual's attention back to the general crowd of orphaned spirits, to whom he announces the Nine Precepts and sings an incantation addressed to the ten classes of homeless souls, to the tune "Hanging Chains of Gold" (挂金索).⁶³⁶ The song is twelve verses long and offers a tour of Hell, with each verse dedicated to a different category of suffering denizens. Every verse concludes with the resolute coda "So that the homeless souls that crowd the underworld, can come to savor the taste of this sweet dew." Set to music, the verses are geared toward different categories and the different ways in which the souls can be saved according their particular plight are all reminiscent of the stanzas we find in other *baojuan* texts, and evinced in the harangue (*shi* 誓) of Wang Lingguan found in the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* sung in dedication to seeking universal salvation (*pudu*).⁶³⁷ The details may be different in the chants of *Wang Lingguan zhenjing*, but once again we find a shared ritual repertoire in the "Water-Fire" *liandu* of a broader ritual imaginary that connects the world of Wang Lingguan and "Iron-bottle" *liandu* to the popularized vision of what a *liandu* should look like.

The opulence of the altar, the lavish finery of the Daoists' ritual vestments,⁶³⁸ the soul-banners, "golden bridge," ritual tools, the hanging scrolls all evince a ritual imaginary structured by materiality. It bears repeating here that the value of Chapter Sixty-six of the *Jin Ping Mei* as a source is not for its insight into historical accuracy, but rather for its potential to both reflect and

⁶³⁶ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, pp. 168–169. Note that the *Wang Lingguan zhenjing* is also set to tunes. "Hanging Chains of Gold" is an exemplary *zaju* 雜劇 piece by the Yuan dynasty writer, Ma Yu 馬鈺 (1123–1183), and in addition to the *Jin Ping Mei* is listed in the late 14th century *biji* collection *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329–1410) (j. 27), as well as among the thirty kinds of *zaju* in the *Yuankan zaju sanshi zhong* 元刊雜劇三十種 (the collection having begun in the Ming under Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502–1568)).

⁶³⁷ DZ 1443: 3b–6a. The notion of setting the eulogy to a popular tune also recalls the instance of the "iron bottle" noted in Wang Zhe's 王嘉 "Tieguan ge" 鐵鑊歌 (Song of Iron Bottle) from (See Chapter One, note 17).

⁶³⁸ In addition to describing the lavishness of the altar-space, the narrative takes special note of the attire and appearance of the main figures. To wit, the narrative includes a eight-line poem describing the unusually grand appearance of Master Huang. (see, Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, pp. 210–211).

project specific aspects of *liandu* that comprise the ritual imagination of the time. This is what the world of *Jin Ping Mei* espouses *liandu* to be. This is what the intended readership recognizes when it sees *liandu*. While it may not reflect the specific rites of an “Iron-bottle” *liandu* with Wang Lingguan and Sa Shoujian taking center stage, it establishes what the set could look like. To the degree that the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* reflects a broader awareness of Daoist *liandu* during the early seventeenth century, it evinces very clearly that objects such as the soul-banner and golden bridge, along with ritual scrolls and ritual texts (most often in the form of invocations and talismans) play a concerted and active role in ensuring ritual efficacy. This remains true in today’s performances of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* at White Cloud Abbey, as much as it was part of the romanticized vision of *liandu* during the Ming. Thus, how the *Jin Ping Mei* describes the “Water-Fire” *liandu* opens a window into the Ming ritual imaginary, particularly as it pertains to *liandu* ritual at roughly around the time the MMA scroll was commissioned.

The critical role of materiality is further underscored in how the ritual ultimately concludes:

Once the sublimation ritual was completed, Perfect Man Huang came down from his elevated throne, and the Taoist priests struck up their music as they escorted him outside the front gate where paper money was burnt and a coffer of papier-mâché goods for the dead was incinerated. Once they came back inside, the ceremony was officially over, and the Taoist celebrants changed their clothes while the vergers proceeded to take down the scrolls depicting the Taoist deities.⁶³⁹

煉度已畢, 黃真人下高座. 道眾音樂, 送至門外. 化財焚燒箱庫回來, 齋功圓滿. 道眾都換了冠服, 鋪排收捲道像.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁹ Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, p. 220.

⁶⁴⁰ *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, 66: 516.

Once again, we see how ritual images like the MMA scroll play a critical role in the material culture of *liandu* rites. The ceremony concluded, the altar is dissembled, which in this case, means the “scrolls depicting the Taoist deities,” (鋪排收捲道像) are taken down and put away. In other words, the scrolls delineate the altar, and thus create the space in which the potency of the ritual may be performed to efficacious ends. Given the strong potential for parallel ritual contexts, the conclusion of an “Iron Bottle” *liandu* may well have concluded in the same fashion, with the Daoists taking down ritual scrolls that make up the temporary altar. One can imagine a similar scene playing out in the private corners of Jiajing’s palace, where imperially commissioned hanging scrolls define the ritual space.

The parallelism between domestic practice and court-sponsored ritual carries potent meaning within the larger context of the *Jin Ping Mei*, as Ximen Qing’s household frequently inappropriately makes use of material objects that should be exclusive to the imperial family. Could the MMA scroll be one of these “scrolls depicting the Taoist deities” in an analogous performance of the “Iron Bottle” *liandu*? While the colophon on the scroll suggests that it would be for the imperial household, the close similarity between domestic funerary rituals of the commoners and that of members of the emperor’s family does not preclude the possibility.⁶⁴¹ On the contrary, the central role objects and in particular, hanging scrolls play in the idealized vision of *liandu* would require the imperial household to commission paintings for just such an occasion that they might then be used as altar scrolls. However, the visuality of the MMA scroll suggests something even more. Unlike the paintings of individual deities that feature static forward-facing figures that we might expect, the dynamism of the MMA scroll’s composition suggests a more active role in the performance.

⁶⁴¹ Wang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen*, p. 218–222.

7.9 To Hell with It: The Potential Salvific Power of the MMA Scroll

The composition of the scroll is not that of the front-facing singular deity we are accustomed to finding hung in the construction of the altar space. Rather, the MMA scroll shows a violent burst of Wang Lingguan and his entourage out from the undifferentiated horizon and rushing threateningly toward the vipers below. Thus, the energetic dynamism of the overall composition distinguishes the MMA scroll from the static altar images like those mentioned in the *Jin Ping Mei* used in conjunction with rituals to invite the gods. How then to understand the active dynamism of Wang Lingguan as he appears in the MMA scroll?

Based on our previous discussion on how the visuality of the MMA scroll mimics the ritual processes of manifesting Wang Lingguan we may now reconsider the dynamism of the MMA scroll in relation to the *liandu* performance as located within the broader orchestration of ritual objects and ritual performance. Of course, the ceremony conducted within the narrative world of the *Jin Ping Mei* is not the “Iron Bottle” *liandu*, but a narrative account of the “Water-Fire” *liandu*. While this obvious difference precludes any historical claim, the manner by which the ritual of *liandu* is articulated here in Chapter Sixty-six offers a chance to make connections within the broader conceptualization of scrolls like the MMA scroll function in ritual context. If it is truly part of the ritual context of a *liandu*, what is the MMA scroll doing?

Here may look back to the liturgical connections that Zhou Side’s *Golden Book* offers. In his section on “Illuminating *liandu*” (“Ming *liandu*” 明煉度), Zhou Side describes the overall ritual process of sublimating souls in the same terms we find describing the “transformation of the body” in the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan*. Narrated in the voice of the Dark Master (Xuanshi 玄師), “Illuminating *liandu*” begins at, well, the beginning of all things:

First, Heaven then life arrived in the void without a body. The void transformed into spirit, which changed into *qi*, and then assembled together in form (*xing* 形). This is origin of the beginning.

先天而生至無虛. 虛化神, 化氣, 聚於形矣. 原其始也.⁶⁴²

The same constituents that the Daoist manipulates in the rituals for manifesting Wang Lingguan described in Chapter Five appear here in the context of saving souls within Water-Fire liturgy. Here it describes *qi* and *shen* as the constituent element of life itself, which gather together to give life form. As we detailed in Chapter Four, this same logic underpins the process of giving “life” to Wang Lingguan by giving him form—a process that the MMA scroll mimics through its visuality of emergence. Thus “form” serves as means by which the spirit and thus life transform into being and out of the original void. The explanation goes on to describe that the unity of all constituents must be kept, otherwise transformation cannot occur:

Without unity, there is no transformation into *qi*. If it is so, then it is the end. Without unity, there is no transformation into form. Therefore, the 10,000 transformations have their root in form and *qi*. Form and *qi* have their root in divine spirit (*shenming* 神明). Divine spirit has its root in void and nothingness.

無一不變於氣. 要其終也. 無一不變形. 是故萬化本形氣也. 形氣本於神明也. 神明本虛無也.⁶⁴³

The logic reinforces the interconnectedness of *qi*, spirit, and form by reversing the order of their appearance from the beginning. Without one, the other does not exist, and therefore returns to the ultimate root of nothingness. This is described within the context of explaining the funerary rites of *liandu*, and thus relates directly to how Zhou Side articulates the ritual process of transforming a deceased soul through sublimation. The text goes on to detail the various kinds of rituals deployed for enacting these transformations for the sake of the deceased, including many of

⁶⁴² *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 59.

⁶⁴³ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 59.

which we have seen detailed in the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* above. The passage from “Illuminating *liandu*” quoted above makes the relationship between transformation and the comingling of *qi* and form explicit. The 10,000 transformations that describe all things, all have their basis in the manipulation of *qi* and form. This directly parallels how the Daoist manipulates their *qi* to manifest the form of Wang Lingguan in the ritual manuals of the *Daofa huiyuan* and mimicked by the MMA scroll. If the MMA scroll can produce the divine form of Wang Lingguan through the invocatory visual language it shares with Daoist incantations and talismans, then it may also do so in the similar context of manipulating form for the sake of transforming deceased souls.

Sublimating souls is an active process that requires the Daoist to summon powerful deities to perform the task of sublimating souls. Elsewhere in the *Golden Book*, we find fiery martial deities performing this very task. The Great General in Charge of Fire (Zhuhuo Dajiangjun 主火大將軍) is just such a deity. According to the rites for “Summoning the Great General in Charge of Fire” (“Zhao Zhuhuo Dajiangjun” 召主火大將軍), the Great General comes from the Fire Division (*huobu* 火部) of the Southern Dipper (*nandou* 南斗), the same cosmic home of Wang Lingguan we find described in the *Daofa huiyuan*.⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, according to the *Golden Book*, the Daoist summons the Great General in Charge of Fire with *qi* drawn in from the south and using the same *wu* 午 hand gesture that we find used for drawing Wang into the “Talisman for Seizing the Dead.”⁶⁴⁵ Here, the text of the “Summoning the Great General in Charge of Fire” describes the ritual master burning a talisman to summon the fire-deity:

⁶⁴⁴ DZ 1220: 243.1a.

⁶⁴⁵ *Zangwai Daoshu* 17, p. 59; DZ 1220: 242.3a.

In his left eye, three circles move the heart-fire (*xinhuo* 心火). Purple *qi* radiates from his left eye and descends into the fire-basin. After smelting (*yelian* 冶煉) the dead soul, fire sublimates it (*huolian* 火煉).

左邊目三匝運心火。自左目紫氣光降火池。冶煉亡魂已後火煉。⁶⁴⁶

The text describes the fiery deity manifesting from the talisman to descend into the “fire basin” (*huochi* 火池) in order to burn away the deceased soul and pave their way toward salvation. This aspect of sublimation through fire occurs at the physical site of the fire basin, which we have seen Daoist Master Huang use to sublimate Li Ping’er’s soul. Here, the Great General in Charge of Fire is called to perform the task by directing his purple *qi* into the basin to transform the deceased. The text continues by directing the Daoist to summon the Great General’s subordinates, should his sole efforts prove insufficient. These unnamed generals are described as “violent and mighty,” and wear red clothes and jade-colored caps. They follow the Great General’s command, which is carried out under the ultimate authority of Fire Emperor (Huodi 火帝).⁶⁴⁷

The description of the Great General in Charge of Fire certainly recalls the fiery image of Wang Lingguan we see in the MMA scroll and in the ritual texts of the *Daofa huiyuan*. Indeed, the image of the Great General recalls the description of Wang Lingguan from the “Secret ‘Methods of the Efficacious Officer’ of the Sound of Thunder ThreeFive Fire-Wheel Marshal Wang”:

Crimson-faced with red beard and whiskers, both eyes have fiery pupils, [he wears] a red gown with green boots and a Wind-Belt. In his left hand is a fire-wheel, in his right a golden baton. His appearance is hot-tempered and wicked.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 34.

⁶⁴⁷ *Zangwai Daoshu*, 17, p. 34. “Quickly, quickly, as the Fire Emperor orders!” (*jiji ru Huodi chi* 急急如火帝勅).

⁶⁴⁸ DZ 1220: 241.1a.

Even Wang's eyes are described as having "fiery pupils," much like the swirling "heart-fire" in the Great General's left eye that proves to be the source of his transformative power. In addition, Great General's ability to command red-clad subordinates reminds us of the *Gengsi bian* anecdote wherein it describes Wang Linguan as the red-clad commander standing in the scholar's house and directing his red-clad troops to seize the troublesome demons. Even more so, the image of a fire-borne Wang Linguan commanding his celestial generals, some of whom are dressed in red, as they descend into the depths below is exactly the scene shown in MMA scroll (fig. 1).



(fig. 1)

While the Great General in Charge of Fire is not explicitly identified as Wang Linguan, we find many parallels in the between his role and the visuality of the MMA scroll. In addition to the obvious connection to fire, both present an image martial commanders leading violent troops

down into murky depths under the authority of a more powerful figure. In the case of the Great General in Charge of Fire, that sense of violent descent is specific to the Fire aspect of “Water-Fire” *liandu* as envisioned by Zhou Side. Though this may not be precisely the case for the MMA scroll, the connection between Zhou Side’s vision of what it means for a fiery deity to actively engage the process of sublimating souls during *liandu* ritual, nonetheless would influence how Wang Lingguan would have been seen in a similar context.

Looking back to the MMA scroll, we see in emergence of Wang Lingguan’s figure the process of *liandu* ritual unfolding before us. Holding the “iron bottle” while swinging his golden baton, Wang Lingguan’s image embodies the dual rites of “Distributing the Food” and “Attack on Hell” critical for saving the souls of both individual and collective dead. We also see Wang’s fiery appearance reminiscent of the fire-deities called forth in the “Water-fire” *liandu* of Zhou Side. In the context of ritual performance itself, the visuality of the MMA scroll mimics the internal rites embodied process of the Daoist, while at the same time, as an object itself, mimics the external process performed on the altar. If we could re-imagine the MMA scroll as part of the material culture of *liandu* like those kinds of objects we have seen in the idealized performance of “Water-Fire” *liandu* from the *Jin Ping Mei*, we see a much more dynamic and varied vision of its potential as a ritual object.

As Realized Huang deploys the various soul-banners to sublimate Li Ping’er’s soul, first in water and then in fire, we may imagine a similar scene being played out on the altar of an “Iron bottle” *liandu*. In accordance with the ritual program, the use of the soul-banner coincides with both breaking the soul of the deceased out of hell along with feeding the orphaned souls. Like a soul-banner, the MMA scroll functions as a ritual object, one that is also charged with the presence of Wang Lingguan by virtue of its visuality. The MMA scroll’s tableau reveals this

process unfolding, and as a material object whose own physical properties parallel that of a soul-banner, may well function the same. That is to say, the material qualities of the MMA scroll lend it to potentially being used like a soul-banner, while its visual qualities enact the very ritual process of breaking the soul out of hell and leading it forth toward salvation. In other words, the MMA scroll as an object itself projects both the physical means and the ritual process to save a soul.

Concluding Remarks: A Bridge Too Far?

We have seen how objects play an active and critical role in the process and the expectation of enacting ritual efficacy serving as both as the material means to articulate the goal of such rituals. As such objects prove integral parts of performing the ritual, without which the performance simply would not work. Thus, while the material culture of Daoist ritual depends on objects for establishing ritual context, the objects themselves have a far more active role as part of the broader ritual reservoir. This suggests a change in priorities, such that objects are not so dependent on ritual context to *do*, but that ritual is dependent of objects to ‘do.’ In other words, while ritual empower objects, objects play an equally critical role in empowering ritual. Foregrounding the active agency of the objects themselves does not contradict the pivotal role occupied by the Daoist priest. The layers of meaning that overlap to form Daoist ritual are far more dynamic. Rather, looking at objects from the perspective of active participants opens new avenues to understand the power of objects.⁶⁴⁹ Not only may a painting play an active role in creating the efficacious space for ritual performance, but by imaging the ritual tableau may also,

⁶⁴⁹ See Bloom, “Descent of the Deities,” 2013.

by its very composition, actively serve to fulfil the efficacious promise of the ritual performance itself.

Conclusion: Objects of Power and Questions of Context

If your memory serves you well, you'll remember that you're the one
 Who called on them to call on me to get you your favors done
 And after every plan had failed and there was nothing more to tell
 And you know that we shall meet again if your memory serves you well
 This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road
 Best notify my next of kin
 This wheel shall explode!

-The Band, "This Wheel's on Fire," 1968

"To remember is not to bring back before the gaze of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past, it is to plunge into the horizon of the past and gradually to unfold tightly packed perspectives until the experiences that it summarizes are lived as if anew in their own temporal place."

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945⁶⁵⁰

Our study concludes where it began—with the object itself. Painted in 1542 for the Honored Imperial Consort Shen, the MMA scroll served as a means to express power during the most dangerous time of Jiajing's tumultuous reign. That power takes the form of the Daoist demonifuge, Wang Lingguan, a central figure in the religious life of the imperial family and the capital at large. As we have shown, Wang's rise to prominence at the capital reveals a more nuanced picture of Daoism at the Ming court, where emperors would rely on Daoist Thunder Methods rituals to achieve their political and personal ambitions. Not only would early Ming emperors deploy masters of Thunder Methods like Zhou Side and Tao Zhongwen, they would participate in rituals themselves. We have seen how Wang Lingguan features prominently in the ways that these rituals articulate power. Likewise, objects, including miraculous images of Wang Lingguan, play a critical role in articulating this power. The MMA scroll is part of that story of how objects produce efficacy in the broader ritual imagination—a story that is now only beginning to unfold.

⁶⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 23.

We may use objects like the MMA scroll to broadly consider “ritual context” itself. By locating the power of ritual language at the object itself, we may shift the focus symbolic meaning to the articulation of presence in the immediate moment. Thus, the idea of ritual context, and in particular reference to objects, can be understood from a phenomenological perspective that grants agency to the Object. Through our study of how the visuality of the scroll shares the invocatory power of Thunder Methods for producing Wang Lingguan’s “true form,” we have shown how the language of Daoist liturgy offers a vocabulary to articulate the power of objects. As part of the “Iron Bottle” *liandu* ritual context, the MMA scroll images the salvific process of Wang Lingguan saving souls. Such is the power of objects as articulated by Daoist liturgy.

We have demonstrated how liturgical manuals may inform the composition of the work and how the ritual performance by Daoist priests relate to the dynamism that appears in the painting. Likewise, the use of objects along with the whole range of “secret instructions” technologies point to a broader and more active nexus of meaning when it comes to the role objects play in ritual performance. From here, we can begin to ask new questions: What does the power of presence as it appears in the scroll tell us about efficacious power (*ling*) in general? What other sensorial modes beyond visuality can articulate the MMA scroll as a body of presence? What is “ritual context” when defining the power of “ritual objects” when object agency is concerned? These are but a few lines of promising inquiry that our reconsideration of what the MMA scroll does opens for future fruitful investigation. Given this more dynamic relationship between objects and their active/critical role in the articulating a ritual and ensuring its efficacy, the dynamism of the MMA scroll raises many more important questions on the overall “meaning” of objects that go beyond Daoist ritual.

In his work challenging the interpretive reflex in Western discourse as the sole arbiter of meaning, Hans Gumbrecht claims that it has lost the vocabulary to engage with the very thing in front of it—what he terms “presence.”⁶⁵¹ While writings on the material history and functional context for an object has always been a central part of what makes things meaningful in the study of objects in China, scholars have just begun to scratch the surface on the range of Chinese discourses dedicated to understanding the power of things.⁶⁵² The ontological turn in Western scholarship has generated a great interest in alternatives to dominant Eurocentric discourse on things, and recent engagements with Chinese sources from epistemological,⁶⁵³ ontological,⁶⁵⁴ and indeed, ritual perspectives have shown them to be a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about the power of objects.⁶⁵⁵ It is my hope that our current investigation of the MMA scroll helps illuminate the potential for Daoist sources, and in particular, the broad spectrum of visual vocabulary for articulating power in objects. The invocatory language of Daoist liturgical sources contributes a vocabulary for discussing the “presence” of things otherwise lost in Western discourse.

Today, the MMA scroll sits in storage at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where one can still visit it upon request. Kept secured in a climate controlled vault, it no longer saves souls in the same way it did during the Ming. While the memory of “Iron Bottle” *liandu* is now lost on

⁶⁵¹ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 2004.

⁶⁵² For a recent survey, see the edited volume by Shane McCausland and Yin Hwang, *On Telling Images of China: Essays in Narrative Painting and Visual Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014); Also see Yuhang Li’s article, “Sensory Devotions: Hair Embroidery and Gendered Corporeal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” in Sally M. Promey, ed. *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 355–374.

⁶⁵³ Barry Allen, *Vanishing into Things: Knowledge in Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁶⁵⁴ François Jullian, *The Great Object Has No Form*, 2009; Obert, *Welt als Bild*, 2007.

⁶⁵⁵ Lin, *Materializing Magic Power*, 2015; Meulenbeld, “Daoist Modes of Perception,” 2016.

most viewers, that does not mean that the MMA scroll lacks power. To think of it in terms of its presence as an object, we may recall Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view on perception:

To perceive is not to experience a multitude of impressions that bring along with them some memories capable of completing them, it is to see an immanent sense bursting forth from a constellation of givens without which no call to memory is possible. To remember is not to bring back before the gaze of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past, it is to plunge into the horizon of the past and gradually to unfold tightly packed perspectives until the experiences that it summarizes are lived as if anew in their own temporal place. To perceive is not to remember.⁶⁵⁶

The demonic figure in red “bursting forth in a constellation of givens” we see today when looking at the MMA scroll today affords us an opportunity to engage with object anew. Therein lies the source of its continued power. Its presence as an object calls to the past, where we have delved into multiple “tightly packed perspectives” in our attempt to unfold layers of meaning built upon the scroll. Still, we continue to find the scroll in new contexts, as new layers fold upon one another, supported by the presence of the object itself. Though we now find the MMA scroll far from the memory of its ritual context, the language of Daoist ritual offers us a way to speak to new interactions with the power of this fascinating object.

⁶⁵⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 23.

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DZ 24 *Yuanshi tianzun shuo shengtian dedao zhenjing* 元始天尊說生天得道真經 (Pronouncement of the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning on Living in Heaven and Obtaining the Dao)

DZ 78 *Taishang sanding shenzhou* 太上三洞神咒 (Divine Incantations from the Three Caverns Most High)

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DZ 93 *Taishang dongxuan Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin jingfa* 太上洞玄靈寶無量度人上品經法 (Commentary on the *Book of Salvation*)

DZ 141 *Ziyang zhenren wuzhenpian zhushu* 紫陽真人悟真篇註疏 (Commentary on Ziyang Zhenren's Awakening to Truth)

DZ 181 *Taishang jiuzhen miaojie jinlu duming bazui jing* 太上九真妙戒金籙度命拔罪經 (Book of the Golden Register for the Redemption of Sins and for Salvation, [Including] the Marvellous Commandments of the Nine Zhenren)

DZ 219 *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶無量度人上經大法 (Great Rites of the Book of Universal Salvation)

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