DAOIST TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES

Chinese Religions (Spring 2009)
Lecture 5
Prof. M. Poceski (Univ. of Florida)
The *Shangqing* Revelations

- Revelation of sacred text by gods and spirits who descended from *Shangqing* 上清, the heaven of *Supreme Clarity*, to *Yang Xi* during the 364–370 period
- Creation of a religious *canon* and a *school* of Daoism on basis of the revelations
Shanqing vis-à-vis other traditions

- Retention of most elements of Ge Hong’s tradition
- Adoption of features from the Celestial Masters school
- Incorporation of local cults and shamanic practices
- Adaptation of some Buddhist elements
**Historical Context of the Revelations**

- Political and social takeover of the South by northerners fleeing the non-Chinese dynasties that were formed in the North
- Migration of the Celestial Masters tradition from the North, followed by their crusade against popular beliefs and social customs
- The Shangqing revelations as a response, by segments of the Southern elites, to the conquest from the North
Foundation of Shangqing School in Sacred Texts

- Characteristics of the Shangqing corpus
  - High literary quality of the scriptures
  - Coherence of the whole body of texts

- Description of the sacred texts’ origins in supernatural terms, as manifestations of divine grace and imprints of celestial prototypes that remain in the heavens

- Texts as talismans that bring divine protection
Foundation of Shangqing School in Sacred Texts (cont)

- Practices of recitation and copying of texts
- Establishment of procedures for transmission of the texts; proscription of textual transmission to unworthy individuals
- The role of the master as transmitter of texts rather than spiritual guide
Organization of the Shangqing Movement

- Initial spread of the movement within southern aristocratic circles
- Emergence of Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (452-536) as the intellectual leader of the movement, who gathered, organized, and promoted the scriptures
- Growth of a religious community at Maoshan, whose members dedicated themselves to study of the revealed texts
- Formation of a new religious elite
- Emergence of Shangqing as the most influential Daoist school from the 6th century onward
Key Features of the Shangqing Tradition

- Continuity with earlier Daoist beliefs and practices
- Novel assignment of relative value to received traditions
  - Strong movement towards interiorization, including the use of meditations and visualizations
  - De-emphasis of physiological exercises and drugs
Key Features of the Shangqing Tradition (cont)

- New relationship with the gods, who were invoked rather than summoned, and with whom the adept hoped to unite or enter into a mystical relationship, rather than try to control them.
- Description of spirit-marriage between Yang Xi and a female celestial perfected (see Lopez 166-87).
Key Features of the Shangqing Tradition (cont)

- Redefinition of immortality as something to be attained through the heart
- Transformation of alchemy
  - Move towards interior alchemy
  - Gestation of spiritual body achieved by means of meditation
Origin of the Lingbao Tradition

- The Lingbao 灵宝 (Numinous Treasure) scriptures, composed around 400 CE
  - Claims that the scriptures were originally revealed to Ge Xuan (the great-uncle of Ge Hong)
  - Compilation of the texts by the obscure Ge Chaofu (a member of Ge Hong’s family) during the 397-402 period
The Lingbao Tradition

- Synthesis of all main religious traditions of the time
  - Direct continuation of the Shangqing tradition
  - Assimilation of elements from Celestial Masters Daoism (esp. rituals)
  - Incorporation of Buddhist beliefs and practices
- Organization of the disparate scriptures and systematization of their teachings by the prominent scholar and ritual specialist Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477)
Significance of the Lingbao Tradition

- Lasting impact on the canonization of the essential form of Daoist ritual
- First true and comprehensive permeation of Buddhism into Daoism
  - Incorporation and redefinition of Buddhist beliefs and practices
  - Appropriation of portions of Buddhist scriptures
  - Drawing on popular Buddhism rather than the teachings of Buddhist intellectual elites
Buddhist Influences in Lingbao Texts

- Introduction of the concepts of reincarnation and karma
- Gradual replacement of the ideal of immortality with the Buddhist goal of universal salvation
  - Universal salvation comes to include the dead, esp. the ancestors
  - Human salvation, either of an individual or a group, depends on the salvation of the universe (and vice versa)
- Threefold division of the heavens
  - World of desire
  - World of form
  - World of formlessness
Characteristics of the Lingbao Tradition

- Emphasis on liturgical practice, esp. the communal recitation of texts
  - “Purificatory” rites (zhai)
  - “Offerings” rites (jiao), also known as “rituals of cosmic renewal”
- Neglect of solitary meditation
- Demotion of physical exercises, taking of drugs, and laboratory alchemy to a lower rank
Lingbao Salvific Objectives & Methods

- Objectives and modes of salvation
  - Personal salvation
  - Salvation of the dead (esp. ancestors)
  - Salvation of all beings

- Methods for attaining salvation
  - Practice of moral virtues
  - Chanting of sacred texts
  - Performance of rituals
**Lingbao Ritual**

- Daoist ritual as means for bringing the human world into harmony with the invisible yet all-pervasive forces of cosmic order, through which one actualizes a state of primordial wholeness.
- Prosaic use of ritual for the realization of mundane objectives, such as the prevention of natural calamities and dangers.
- Theatrical quality of ritual, which includes chants, music, dances, banners, etc.
Daoist ceremony in Hong Kong
Daoist ceremony in Hong Kong (cont)
Daoist ceremony in Hong Kong (cont)
Creation of the Daoist Canon

- Compilation of early catalogues of Daoist texts
- Threefold division of the Daoist canon (Daozang 道藏), using the Buddhist canon as a model
- The Three Caverns
  - Cavern of Perfection (Dongzhen)—Supreme Clarity (Shangqing) scriptures
  - Cavern of Mystery (Dongxuan)—Numinous Treasure (Lingbao) scriptures
  - Cavern of Divinity (Dongshen)—Three Sovereigns (San huang) scriptures
The Daoist Canon

- An open canon, with new texts being added to it over an extended period
- Addition of four supplements to the three caverns during the sixth century
- Inclusion of different kinds of texts into the canon
  - Scriptures
  - Scholastic and exegetical treatises
  - Historical texts
  - Ritual manuals
- *Ming Canon of Daoist Scriptures*, compiled in 1445
  - Includes 1,500 separate titles
  - Supplemented in 1607
Daoism as Official Religion 1: Celestial Masters Theocracy under the N Wei

- Kou Qianzhi’s transformation of the Celestial Masters during the N. Wei period (424–448) into an elite, court-oriented tradition
  - Official institution of Daoism as a state religion under the Wei dynasty
  - Briefness of the theocratic interlude and ensuing weakening of the Celestial Masters tradition
- Subsequent reorganizations of Celestial Masters Daoism under the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) Church, which continues to exist today as one of the two main Daoist traditions
Daoism as Official Religion 2: Tang Era

- The Tang era as the “golden age” of Daoism
- Purported ancestral connection between the Tang imperial family (Li) and Laozi
- Official ranking of Daoism as first among the “three teachings,” accompanied with political and economic patronage
- Emperor Xuanzong’s 玄宗 (r. 712-755) support of Daoism
  - Establishment of a system of state-supported Daoist abbeys
  - Setting up of Daoist schools
  - Institution of official Daoist examinations
  - Compilation and distribution of Daoist canon
Interreligious Debates

- Staging of public interreligious debates among representatives of the “three teachings”
- Competition between the Buddhists and the Daoists, with the Buddhist often gaining upper-hand during the debates
- Last formal debates at the Mongol court of Kubilai Khan (r. 1271–1294)
  - Daoist defeat at the last debate of 1281
  - Decree that *Huahu jing* and all other Daoist texts, with the exception of *Laozi*, are to be destroyed
  - Placing of restrictions on the Daoist clergy
The “Conversion of the Barbarians” Trope

- Use of the Huahu jing (Scripture on the Conversion of Barbarians) during the Buddhist-Daoist debates
  - Initial compilation of the apocryphal text around 300 CE
  - Its subsequent expansion and radicalization of its assertions
- The story of Laozi’s conversion of the western barbarians, to whom he appeared as the Buddha
- Heated Buddhist responses to the conversion of the barbarians narrative
Emergence of Daoist Monastic Orders

- Buddhist introduction of monasticism into China
- Gradual development of monastic orientation within Daoism
- Modeling of Daoist monastic institutions, practices, and ideals on those of the Buddhist sangha
- The Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真) school as prime representative of monastic Daoism, from its inception in the 12th century to the present
Founding of Quanzhen Daoism

- Founding of the Quanzhen school by Wang Zhe 王喆 (1113–1170)
- Monastic priorities
  - Practice of celibacy and mendicancy
  - Adoption of austere lifestyle
  - Focus on contemplative practices
- Wang’s syncretism and ecumenicalism
  - Advocacy of the unity of the three teachings
  - Advice to recite Confucian and Buddhist texts such as the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Heart Scripture*
Growth of Quanzhen Daoism

- Qui Chuji’s (1143–1227) meeting with the Mongol ruler Chinggis Khan (d. 1227) and the ascendancy of the Quanzhen school
- Continued presence of the Quanzhen school, esp. in N China, down to the present
Women in Daoism

- Hospitable attitudes towards female participation
- Conception of spiritual cultivation in gender-neutral terms
- Initiation of women into the clergy, including individuals with privileged aristocratic background (e.g. the daughter of Empress Wu)
- Plethora of positive female role-models for aspiring Daoist women
Female Role Models

- Powerful female divinities and immortals
  - Queen Mother of the West
  - Female deities and perfected that inhabit the Supreme Clarity heaven

- Famous female adepts and priestesses
  - Wei Huacun (252–334), Celestial Masters adept and deity that communicated the Supreme Clarity scriptures
  - Sun Buer (1119–1182), one of the seven main masters of the early Complete Perfection school
Daoist Alchemy

- **Internal alchemy** (*neidan* 内丹, lit. “inner cinnabar”)
  - The body and mind of the Daoist adept became the primary foci and tools of spiritual transformation

- **External or laboratory alchemy**
  - Seeks to procure the elixir of immortality by means of chemical procedures, performed in the alchemist’s furnace

- **Mixing of the two types of alchemy**, esp. during the Tang era
The “Three Treasures” of Internal Alchemy

- Gradual purification and sublimation of the three treasures (*sanbao* 三寶) via an inner process of alchemical transmutation
  - Essence (*jing* 精)
  - Vital energy (*qi* 氣)
  - Spirit (*shen* 神)
Perfection of the Alchemical Process

- Gestation of an embryo of immortality, which eventually leaves the body
- Complete spiritual transformation, in which the primeval spirit returns to the point of origin and becomes absorbed into the timeless and all-pervading Dao