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CONTENTS

- i** Editors' Preface
Benjamin Penny & Remco Breuker
- 1–24** “Crossing Over” to Immortality in the Daoist Ritual
Regulations of Highest Purity
Valentina Georgieva
- 25–46** Flows of Time in the Centres and Peripheries of Tang Experience
Oliver Moore
- 47–62** Within or Without? Ambiguity of Borders and Koryō Koreans’
Travels During the Liao, Jin, Song and Yuan
Remco Breuker
- 63–74** Reflections on the Tower of the Crimson Clouds and the
History of the Private Library in Late-Imperial China
Duncan M. Campbell
- 75–96** Taikun’s Zen Master From China: Yinyuan, the Tokugawa
Bakufu, and the Founding of Manpukuji in 1661
Jiang Wu
- 97–124** Vassal of a Deposed Regime: Archetypes of Reclusion in the
Poetry of Former Shogunal Official Yaguchi Kensai
Matthew Fraleigh
-
- 125–128** Preface to A.R. Davis Reprints
- 129–136** Su Shih, Poems
- 137–150** Su Shih’s “Following the Rhymes of T’ao Yüan-Ming” Poems:
A Literary or a Psychological Phenomenon?
- 151–170** “The Good Lines of the World are a Common Possession”:
A Study of the Effect of Tu Fu Upon Su Shih
- 171–184** On Such a Night: A Consideration of the
Antecedents of the Moon in Su Shih’s Writings

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“CROSSING OVER” TO IMMORTALITY IN THE DAOIST RITUAL REGULATIONS OF HIGHEST PURITY

 Valentina Georgieva

This paper re-examines the esoteric initiation manual called the *Yellow Book Regulations for Crossing-over of Highest Purity* (Shangqing huangshu guodu yi 上清黃書過度儀, DZ 1294, hereafter abbreviated as *Regulations for Crossing-over*).¹ A prime feature of this initiation ritual is the joint participation of a man and a woman in a complex series of exercises culminating in a religiously unitive experience enacted as a ritual congress.² The prescribed sexual and ceremonial actions have been discussed in several articles and books, and although some of the authors quite rightly conclude that the purpose of the rite was spiritual, the symbolic significance of the ritual actions has so far not been examined. Obviously mere descriptions of the ritual actions and haptic motions as prescribed in the manual do not substantiate the argument that the *Regulations for Crossing-over* was more than a sex manual, nor do they explain its purport and significance.³

In this essay I attempt to understand and interpret the Crossing-over (*guodu* 過度), ritual as a historical phenomenon, and thus as a contribution to the history of Daoist ritual. I primarily attempt to make the plot of the ritual intelligible by situating it within the larger context of the Daoist tradition and by discussing its intentions, purposes and values; in particular I reflect on some of the key metaphors found in it. As the title proclaims, this rite was intended to let a couple “cross” from lay status to become a recognised member of the religious community. Making the ritual acts intelligible by situating and viewing them within the context of the ritual plot (which in turn is set within the symbolic framework of the tradition as a whole), shows how its symbolism evinces a unified vision, which finds expression in its metaphoric language.

These concerns are set within a complex symbolic understanding of the “sacredness of nature” whose paradigms are fixed by myth.⁴ More concretely speaking, in the *Daode jing* 道德經 the Dao is declared to be constant and good, pervading all beings, while at the same time it is either hidden, or lost.⁵ In the ritual, this problematic serves as a pivot for the liturgy whereby, on

¹ The *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi* in twenty sections (in 24 folios) is the main source for the rite. The term *yi* 儀 can be understood as rule (*gui* 規), regulation (*ze* 則) or law (*fa* 法). Its exact date of composition, authorship and provenance are unknown but it may have been produced in the early fourth century in Jiangnan within the Celestial Masters tradition, as has been suggested. See Michel Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan: Chronique d'une Révélation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), p.69; and also Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp.150–51. The most recent examination of the dating question, by Gil Raz, also concludes that the issue remains problematic. See “The Way of the Yellow and the Red: Re-examining the Sexual Initiation Rite of Celestial Master Daoism,” in *Nan, Nü: Men, Women & Gender in Early & Imperial China* 10.1 (March 2008), p.89, n.5. The text does not belong to the genre of the arts of the bed-chamber but is rather a ritual manual, as has been suggested by Marc Kalinowski—see his “La Transmission du Dispositif des Neuf Palais sous les Six-dynasties,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R.A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann, Vol.3, (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1985), esp. pp.782–802. For other recent works on the Celestial Masters, see Peter Nickerson, “The Southern Celestial Masters,” pp.256–82; Livia Kohn’s “The North-

ern Celestial Masters,” pp.283–308; and Barbara Hendrichske on “Early Daoist Movements,” pp.134–64. All three articles are in the comprehensive *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

2 The initiation process was apparently conducted in stages so that boys and girls could receive a document registering their entrance into the community at the age of seven. See Kristopher Schipper, “The Taoist Body,” *History of Religions*, Vol.17 (1978), p.376; also see *Santian neijie jing* [Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens] (DZ 876, HY1205, completed by mid-fifth century), 1:6b.

3 See Raz, “The Way of the Yellow and the Red,” pp.86–120.

4 As Paul Ricoeur writes, “what the myth says, ritual performs”. See his “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.50–1. The correlation between myth and ritual has been analysed by the Scandinavian school, for example in the work of Georges Dumézil, and also applied in the study of ritual by Algirdas J. Greimas. See, for example, his *Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Mythology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p.1–10. Moreover, as Ricoeur says, “something like a creation story is necessary if symbolism is to come to language, but the myth that recounts it returns in a way to nature through the symbolism of the ritual where the element becomes once again immediately meaningful”. See Ricoeur, *Figuring*, p.54.

5 See, for example, the *Xiang'er* commentary in Stephen R. Bokenkamp’s *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.40.

6 In the last section of *Regulations for Crossing-over* (20:23b), both the terms sin (*zui*) and fault (*bi* 蔽) are used to describe the state of the initiates.

7 My methodology is inspired by Ricoeur’s, in particular examining the metaphors of this ritual-text to explore how it finds completion in the concept of Crossing-over. See Ricoeur’s “Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.165–82; and also his *Figuring*, pp.93–107.

8 The earliest references to the Union of *Qi* that I could find are the macrobiotic hygiene texts in the Mawangdui manuscripts dated prior to 168 CE, studied by Donald J. Harper in his *Early Chinese Medical Literature: the Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998), pp.134–40.

the one hand, the initiates’ “love of the Dao” (*baodao* 好道) and merit, are emphasised, while on the other, their sins (*zui* 罪) require expiation.⁶ The ritual enacts a healing operation—uncovering the presence of the Dao—by a regeneration of the moral character of the initiates.

Thus, I propose to understand the ritual in terms of its enactment of a spiritual transformation expressing ethical concerns. Thus, sexuality, within the scope of the ritual, is harnessed to the purpose of ethical perfection figuring as a dramatic enactment of the struggle between good and evil on the stage of the human heart-mind. In particular, I show how the metaphors of the ritual can be understood as centred on the core idea of Crossing-over.⁷

This paper consists of four major parts: the first introduces polemic reactions to the ritual; the second and third parts analyse the metaphors at the core of the rite and the techniques practised by the initiates, respectively; in the last part of this article I treat the three overarching features that I have identified in the ritual text (and that are concerns or goals that are considered typical for Daoism): constancy, harmony, and a return to the integral darkness of the source, the Dao.

Reactions to the Ritual as a “Union of Qi” (heqi 合氣)⁸

The Crossing-over ritual was allegedly first performed within the Celestial Masters (*tianshi* 天師) movement around the second century CE.⁹ The sexual aspect of the rite was criticised as transgressing the prevalent social morality, and was often considered a perversion of the meaning of religion; in fact, it had a soteriological function, which arguably led to misinterpretations by Buddhists and some modern commentators who have tended to associate sexual activity with the profane rather than the sacred. Thus a number of modern Western scholars have displayed an uneasiness over the sexual aspects of the ritual, and have consequently downplayed its importance as an initiation rite in the early Daoist community.¹⁰ Some of them have even described it as “obscene”,¹¹ or as “a rite that goes against common social values and is counterintuitive to people’s sense of shame”.¹² Criticism came from both non-Daoist and Daoist circles, but not surprisingly some of the most outspoken disapproval and even ridicule came from Buddhist commentators.¹³ The Buddhist *Further Collected Works on Spreading Enlightenment* (Guang hongming ji 廣弘明集) quotes *Discussions Ridiculing the Dao* (Xiaodao lun 笑道論) of 570:

9 The Celestial Masters who allegedly practised the rite from the second century CE were a Daoist-inspired rebellious messianic and millenarian movement. Sunayama has collected evidence of seven rebellions led by Daoists (ca. 300–450) some of whom it is generally assumed practised the rite of the Union of *Qi*. See Sunayama Minoru, “Ri Kō-kara Kō Kenshi-e: seireki yon-go seiki ni okeru shūkyō-teki hanran to kokka shūkyō” [From Li Hong to Kou Qianzhi-State Religion and Religious Rebellion from the Fourth to the Fifth Centuries], in *Shūkan tōyōgaku* Chinese and Oriental Studies, 26 (1971): 1–21. Also see Richard B. Mather, “K’ou Ch’ien-chih and the Taoist Theocracy at the Northern Wei Court,” in *Facets of Taoism*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, (New Haven: Yale University, 1979), pp.425–51.

10 See Henri Maspero (trans. Frank A. Kiernan), *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.386; also see Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates Among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.149–50.

11 This is the view of Maspero, who follows the Buddhist polemical writings and says that “what remains of the Yellow Writing, *Huang-shu*, ... is so obscene that it is understandable

Laughing at this [practice] I say: “When I was twenty years old, I loved the art of the Dao and entered a phalanstery (*guan* 觀) to study it. At first I was taught the ‘union of *qi*’ (*heqi* 合氣) from the *Huangshu* 黃書.¹⁴ This was the ‘three-five-seven-nine’¹⁵ method of sexual intercourse between man and woman. We faced each other squarely face to face, four eyes, two tongues, and practised the Dao of the Cinnabar Field. Some practitioners said that [by this practice] difficulties would be overcome and life lengthened. Husbands were taught to exchange wives, all this just in order to cherish lust. Their fathers and elder brothers stood before them, but could not be shy or blush! They call this ‘the true art of centralising the *qi*’ (*zhongqi zhenshu* 中氣真術). Today Daoist masters still practice this method for the purpose of seeking the Dao; there are things that cannot be explained in detail.”¹⁶

As Henri Maspero explained, the concept of the “union of *qi*” was related to the method of achieving longevity or immortality (*changsheng* 長生) and it is a constitutive element of the “art of nourishing the vital nature” (*yangxing* 養性).¹⁷ Although according to some Daoist sources the sexual aspect of the rite obliterated the effects of other immortality practices,¹⁸ at the same time the procedure was nevertheless acknowledged as an acceptable albeit inferior method,¹⁹ because the unitive experience culminating in the “union of *qi*” (or Crossing-over), was recognisably spiritual in character.

There can be no doubt that the ritual, assuming that it was performed in the way that the manual describes, stands in stark contrast to the public separation of the sexes in traditional Chinese society and seems to undermine standard marital ethics. One commentator has suggested that its sexual features were side effects of “the newfound freedom in the equality of the sexes” at the end of the Han dynasty and a mark of a utopian vision.²⁰ Another has suggested that it was a remnant of the past that lingered up to the time when Daoism took to “adapting to mainstream courtly moral ideology” in the fifth century.²¹ The main purpose of this paper is not to come to a definite conclusion regarding the precise historical status of the Crossing-over ritual—whether or not it is an invention of the Han dynasty or a remnant of the past. Rather, the conflict of interpretations involved regarding the ethical status of the ritual actually concern an apparent conflict between the phenomena of sedimentation and innovation in the historical formation of religious traditions and their institutions. By examining the complex structure of the symbolic ritual actions, it will become clear that the sexual element—though discordant with the main stream of Daoist religious prac-

Ling, “Dong-han nanbeichao fangzhong jingdian liupai kao” [Investigation of the Trends in the Classics of the Inner Chambers from the Eastern Han to the Southern and Northern Dynasties], *Zhongguo wenhua* [Chinese Culture], 15/16, 1997, esp. pp.149–52; 155–57.

13 See Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) in the *Zhengao* (Declarations of the Perfected 真誥) (DZ 637), 2:1a–b, 5:2a–b, 9:9a, 10:18a–19a. In 415 AD, Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (died 448), one of the most significant Daoist religious leaders and reformers of the order of the Celestial Masters in the north, apparently rejected the rite as unorthodox, see *Zhengao* 2:1a, 4:10b, 5:2a, 6:1a.

14 *Guang bongming ji*, 152a.

15 Van Gulik quotes a passage from the Zhouyi Cantongji ascribed to Wei Boyang where similar symbolic numbers are used: “Nine times returning, seven times resuming, eight times coming back, six times remaining (inside)”. See Robert H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p.82. Also see Fabrizio Pregadio’s *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, “Notes” (Golden Elixir Press, Mountain View, CA, 2011) p.23. We also find the ritual use of these numbers in the practice of swallowing the breath in the *Baopuzi neipian* (Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity).

16 *Ibid*, p.152a–b. Livia Kohn has collected similar passages and compares them on the basis of several sources, see *Laughing*, pp.147–50.

17 Maspero, *Taoism*, p.448. On the Union of *Qi* as the ritual of “merging pneumas” and its early critics as well as adherents, also see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp.44–45.

18 Tao Hongjing says that “practicing the rite once neutralises the effects of one year’s treatment by alchemical medicines, practising it three times completely destroys the beneficial results of the alchemical method, according to an oral transmission through an ancient master”. *Zhengao*, 10:18a–19a, also see 2:1a–b, 5:2a–b, 9:9a. Isabelle Robinet, *La revelation du Shangqing dans l’histoire du taoisme* (Paris: l’École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1984), p.38.

19 “Although it is one of the secret methods of immortality, it is only among the inferior methods, and it is not a superior method.” *Zhengao*, 9:9a.

20 Kohn, *Monastic Life*, p.34.

21 Maspero suggested that this rite was “an adaptation” of the popular spring and autumn festivals of antiquity. It is certainly not difficult to imagine that since the Yellow Turbans had been so wide-

that the Buddhist monk Tao-an regarded it as ‘a pestilential impropriety’. See Maspero, *Taoism*, p.386 (my emphasis), citing *Guang bongming ji*, 140c. When speaking of the ritual and the title *Huangshu* 黃書, Maspero appears only to refer to the *Yellow Book of the Grotto of the Perfected* (Dongzhen Huangshu 洞真黃書), (DZ 1031), without mentioning the *Regulations for Crossing-over*.

12 Livia Kohn cites Rolf Stein’s comment that here “a man assists in the violation of his wife”. The sexual component of the Union of *Qi* is described by Kohn as a “formally choreographed intercourse between selected nonmarried couples in an elaborate ritual”. Livia Kohn, *Monastic Life in Medieval Daoism: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), p.34. Lin Fushi and Li Ling, writing from the perspective of the history of Chinese sexual culture, have compared the ritual-text to later sex manuals and discovered some shared phraseology implying that the *Regulations* should be seen in the tradition of sex manuals. See Lin Fushi, “Luolun zaoqi daojiao yu fangzhongshude guanxi”, [Discussion of the Relationship between Early Daoism and the Art of the Inner Chambers in the Early Dynasties] in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lisbi yuyan yuanjiusuo jikan* [Journal of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica] (2001), pp.248–53. Li

spread among the populace, their movement incorporated some popular folk customs into the Daoist ritual tradition. See Maspero, *Taoism*, p.534.

22 The formula initially appears in the *Regulations* in Act Eight. *Regulations*, 8:5a.

23 *Ibid.*, 1:1a.

24 This term has been translated by Schipper as “peuple-semence”. See “Le Monachisme taoïste” [Daoist Monasticism], in *Incontro di religioni in Asia tra il III e il secolo d.C.* [The Meeting of Religions in Asia between the Third and Tenth Centuries C.E.], ed. L. Lanciotti, L., (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1984), pp.199–216.

25 This term first appears in Act Six of the *Regulations* in what appears to be a title of a group of beneficial spirits who are summoned to hear the petition, and in Act Thirteen. See *Regulations*, 6:3a, 13:8a.

26 *Zhuangzi*, 27:3, p.409: “The myriad beings are equally seeds, [but since] they are distinct in form they give space to each other. In the beginning and end they are like a circle, but no one can grasp their order. This is called the ‘equality of heaven’. The ‘equality of heaven’ is the ‘heavenly unity’.”

27 *Regulations*, 7:4b.

28 These three divinities are first summoned by these names in the petition. *Ibid.*, 6:3a.

29 *Ibid.*, 5:2b.

30 See Julius N. Tsai, “The Transformations of Myths Concerning Yu the Great into Daoist Narrative and Ritual”. Draft prepared for the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, 2003.

31 As Lagerwey suggests, “all the entry rites in the *Kuo-tu yi* could be seen as a ritual representation of Yu’s assembly on Mount Mao”. See John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), pp.154.

tice—should be viewed as the seal of the initiates’ transformation, a core expression of Crossing-over. Thus, sexuality is harnessed to the purpose of ethical perfection. One could even go a step further and say that sexuality in this context is not actually understood as “sexuality”, but as the enactment of the transformational power of the Dao.

Crossing-over

The title of the text and its numerous invocations represent Crossing-over as the goal of initiates who perform the ritual and “cultivate the Dao” (*xingdao* 行道).²² Crossing-over suggests a movement from one state to another, or a certain change in being. What, then, is the state that is to be changed, what is the state that is to be achieved, and how is this process conducted? In the first act, the initiates describe themselves as People of Flesh (*rouren* 肉人),²³ which suggests common mortality, temporality and imperfection, or sin, shared equally by men and women. The counterpoint to this is the long life embodied by the Seed People (*zhongmin* 種民),²⁴ with an intermediate or bridging stage represented by the True Ones (*zhenren* 真人).²⁵

The transfiguration of the People of Flesh who aspire ultimately to become Seed People is a movement towards reunion with the Dao. In Daoist thought “seed” (*zhong*) is understood as an inherent mark shared by all beings; all procreative capacities resemble the eternal generative powers of the Dao.²⁶ In other words, by analogy, seed is the harmonising presence of the Great Dao, contained equally in both male and female. How is this harmonising reunion understood to take place?

The initial action consists in a calming of the mind suggested by “Entering the Quiet Chamber” (Act One). The meditation practised here moves the mind away from the self to concentrate on the talismans. These sacred objects are empowering emblems of the ancient covenant of one’s ancestors with the divinities. This calm focussing of the mind is also a receptive motion of non-action aimed at remembering the past and moving beyond the present. The incantation that constitutes the first of the series of appeals by the initiates to “be among the seed people” is, accordingly, submitted by the master to a list of divinities and spiritual ancestors (Act Six, “Presenting the Petition”). By “ancestors” I refer not only to founders of the spiritual legacy (who appear in the list of divinities), but also to parents, both cosmic and real.

During the ritual, the divine Heaven and Earth are invoked as the cosmic parents, or Compassionate Father (*cifu* 慈父) and Wise Mother (*shengmu* 聖母).²⁷ These two plus the Dao are personified by the main divinities Without Superior (*wushang* 無上), Dark Senior (*xuanlao* 玄老) and Supreme High (*taishang* 太上) who are invoked numerous times during the ritual.²⁸ The trinity is also a manifestation of the Primordial *Qi* and resides respectively over the Three Palaces of Heaven, Earth and Water.²⁹

While Heaven and Earth represent the cosmic parents, Water is connected to the beginning of the world and to the virtuous attainments of the ancestor Yu the Great (*dayu* 大禹) who brought order to the world by taming the primordial deluge. His virtue moved the divinities (embodied by Fuxi 伏羲, another of the sacred ancestors) to bless his work and it was his covenant with the divine forces that allowed him to transform the chaos of the flood.³⁰ As a token of his power he received the eight trigrams and a tablet constructed in accordance with the Earthly Branches. In the ritual, the Earthly Branches, the eight trigrams and Yu’s special step or “star-walking” (*bugang* 步綱) are deployed as important emblems.³¹ Moreover, the initiates—like Yu the

Great—acquire the transmission of the talismans due to their merit and are granted blessings and guidance by their master in their “return to the flow”.³²

“Return to the flow” is suggestive of ideas such as circulation, transmission, purification, and change; and of the life giving element of Water that represents the Dao in its primordial fertility. Water—given its essential role in providing the fertility of the soil, as well as its regenerative and cataclysmic capacity—is used in many myths to depict the original source of creation. It suggests a fusion or interaction of elements evocative of the mud—a mix of water and earth—that was used by Nü Gua 女媧 to engender human life. It is also the flowing yellow waters of the swirling vortex from Mount Kunlun that are reminiscent of the origin myth, and are simultaneously believed to be an elixir of immortality.³³ Mount Kunlun with its nine stories resembles the nine-layered heaven and with its tops veiled in mist is not only connected to heaven above but with its nine grottos (*dong* 洞) it links with the bottomless depths below.³⁴ In contrast to the clearly gendered “parents”, Heaven and Earth, Water has a more complex and ambivalent status, at one level ungendered, at another level close to the female Yin principle of “moisture” and “nourishment”.

Moreover, still water is an allegory for the “mirror of the mind” of the “true one” whose movements are also likened to water, and the responses of an echo. Water is emblematic of highest virtue, or *de*. In the *Daode jing*, water in its nurturing aspect and its abiding in the lowest of places, is represented as being close to the Dao. Thus, the Dao can be said to resemble water as the ultimate source of life, and to move in its direction indicates a return. The transformation brought about by Crossing-over is conceived as a “return” to or “restoration” of the Great Dao. This is spelled out in an incantation invoked in the last act, when the initiates say: “We restore our self (*guishen* 歸身), return our spirit (*guishen* 歸神), and return our destiny (*guiming* 歸命) to the Great Dao”.³⁵ It is the *shen* 身 or “body/self” that is restored to the Dao, the *shen* here referring to the totality of one’s life and not limited to a mere physical or material manifestation.³⁶

Crossing-over presupposes the restoration of oneself to the Dao, or the regeneration of the character of the initiates, a restoration that is mimetically enacted in the ritual. That is to say, the ritual process is a recasting of genesis. The primordial state that is seen to be at the beginning of everything is a state of oneness. Thus, the ritual enacts a return to the One, the Dao, the source of all being, and a unification of male and female principles.³⁷

Starting from one, the numbers with their correlative cosmological³⁸ connotations play a crucial role in the ritual, just as both the *Daode jing* and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 represent genesis in a series of numerological emblems: “The Dao gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three begets the Ten Thousand Beings”.³⁹ It is this initial division of the One into Yin and Yang or Heaven and Earth whose “harmonious union transforms the myriad beings”, and it is their place that is taken by the initiates.⁴⁰

The Three could be said to refer to Heaven, Earth and Water, or the Three Primordial *Qi* that are summoned to unify and be bound, becoming One in the ritual.⁴¹ In the *Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) the way the Three *Qi* relate is a precondition for the establishment of the state of Great Peace (*taiping* 太平), namely that “when the Three *Qi* are in affinity with each other, they permeate each other, and there is no more harm”.⁴² When the Three *Qi* are unified they become the Dao in its generative power, a capacity formed by the interaction of male and female but also transcending

32 *Regulations*, 20:23a–b.

33 *Huainanzi*, 4:7, p.56–7. All the references to the *Huainanzi* are to the Zhuzi jicheng edition.

34 Water is the element that appears to have been conceived as a link between “beginning” and “end”, as confirmed by the *Zhuangzi*, where the Dao is said to be “like an ocean whose depths are unfathomable”. *Zhuangzi*, 22:3, p.324.

35 *Regulations*, 20:23a–b.

36 The character *shen* 身 refers to a wider field of meaning that intersects with terms such as body, self and life. On the Chinese perception of “body” as related to the project of “cultivating oneself” (*xiu shen* 修身), see Roger T. Ames, “On Body as Ritual Practice” and “The Meaning of Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” in eds. Thomas P. Kasulis and R.T. Ames, et al. *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp.149–77.

37 This concept of “returning” has to be understood within the vision of Yin and Yang as cosmic forces of creation whose dynamic is cyclical and this is related to the traditional concept of time as a spiral curve, see Ulrich Libbrecht, “Chinese Concepts of Time: *yü-chou* as space-time,” in *Time and Temporality in Intercultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp.75–92.

38 On correlative cosmology, see Joseph Needham’s discussion comparing it to Greek thought; Joseph Needham, with the assistance of Wang Ling, *History of Scientific Thought*. Vol.2 of *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp.232–91.

39 The *Daode jing*’s often quoted phrase says: “The Dao gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three begets the Ten Thousand Beings”. *Daode jing*, 3, p.26 in the Zhuzi jicheng edition.

40 “It is in the harmony [of Heaven and Earth] that the myriad beings are transformed.” Sun Xidan, ed. *Li ji jijie* [Collected Interpretations of the Classic of Ritual], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), xia, p.990. This comes from the *Yue ji* [Book of Music], which is a chapter in the *Li ji*. This text dates from the Former Han (206 BCE–8 CE), but much of it comes from Warring States period (475–221 BCE) material.

41 *Regulations*, 6:4a.

42 Wang Ming ed. *Taiping jing bejiao* [Scripture of Great Peace, with Incorporated Collations] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 48, p.148.

43 I use these terms aware of the danger of possible Christian connotations in the hope that they may be understood in a very different light within the Daoist context.

44 I have been inspired by Ricoeur's "The 'Figure' in Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*" in *Figuring the Sacred*, and have not only borrowed his concept of "figure" here, but have also drawn parallels between his analysis of Judaism and my analysis of Daoist religious practice as represented in the *gudu* ritual. See Ricoeur "Figuring," pp.93–107.

45 *Regulations*, 1:1a.

46 *Ibid*, 1:1a.

47 The text literally says: "Entering the sanctum Yang sets himself up at *yin* 寅 (East-North-East) and Yin sets herself up at *shen* 申 (West-South-West)". *Ibid*, 1:1a.

48 "The flesh is defined as the identity of what touches with the medium where this touching takes place (Aristotle), therefore of the felt with what feels (Husserl) but also of the seen and the seeing or the heard and the hearing—in short, of the affected with the affecting." See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.231.

49 *Regulations*, 1:1a.

50 The concept of pronouncing a "vow" or "pledge" (*yuán* 願), which by some scholars is regarded as being of "the purest Mahayana inspiration", plays a prominent role in the *Regulations*. See Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," *T'oung Pao* LXVI (1980): 84–147, p.133.

it. In other words, Dao can be seen as One or the unifying nexus that connects and encompasses Heaven, Earth and Water; that is, the sacred One, Two and Three.

In the following sections we will see how these triplets can be correlated to genesis, revelation and redemption; or the past, present, and future; or male, female, and child.⁴³

Metaphors at the Core: The Unity of Three Figures

As mentioned above, the three figures⁴⁴ that are envisaged within the ritual plot are People of Flesh, True Ones and Seed People. These three are an emblematic set of images that signify the different aspects of the manifestation of the Dao, but at the same time mark the stations on the path to its restoration. They draw on archetypal models correlated by analogy to Heaven, Earth and Water while the Dao is also the natural unity of the analogous triplet of the Compassionate Father, Wise Mother, and Child of Transformation (*erhui* 兒迴). How, then, does the transformation of these three figures that restores them to the Dao take place, or on what premises?

In the first act, the initiates declare that they are "fortunate" (*xing* 幸) in being "People of Flesh, but suffused with the transformations of the Dao (*de ran daobua* 得染道化)".⁴⁵ The figure of People of Flesh is suggestive of common mortality, temporality, or imperfection and sin but they claim to be beyond this state, situating it in the past. However, by doing this they seem to contradict the text since they have earlier been introduced as Yin and Yang. The initiates continue by saying that they "have been long seeking the Law (*qiufa* 求法)", but nevertheless have "not yet Crossed-over".⁴⁶ Hence, this passage shows the People of Flesh on a quest and receiving the Dao in the world. However, in an apparent paradox to which we shall return shortly, the polar forces of Dao—Yin and Yang—have at the same time been identified as playing the role of the initiates.

This passage further says that when "Yin and Yang" enter the sanctum, they stand in their appropriate positions, in accordance with the spatial points represented by the Earthly Branches, and according to their corresponding gender.⁴⁷ The "flesh" determines the identity of the initiates in their manifestations as male or female, and accordingly determines their correct position, enabling them to receive and be touched by the Dao. At the same time, it is this figure that allows the transformation to take place, by seeing the sacred and being seen by it, by speaking to and being heard by it, by touching and being touched by it.⁴⁸ Hence, in that sense this figure stands for genesis and is transposed onto the figure of the Compassionate Father.

The figure of the Compassionate Father, the first condition for regeneration, is the active Yang of "wisdom", or seeing the truth. The master of the ceremony gives the initiates their sacred names, embodying the figure of the Compassionate Father. They declare: "This is a day of auspicious union" (*jin ri ji he* 今日吉合),⁴⁹ and say: "[You] will become bridges" (*dang wei qiaoliang* 當為橋梁). Meanwhile the initiates pledge⁵⁰ (*yuán* 願) to fulfill their bridging role, and the master responds by "presenting the petition" (*qishi* 啟事) on their behalf. At that point the disciples again prostrate themselves and receive grace (*en* 恩).

The second condition for regeneration is the figure of the Wise Mother, marked by the Yin characteristics of caring, compassion, reliability and trust. The Wise Father and the Compassionate Mother have complementary characteristics. For example, the Father possesses the Yin attribute of compas-

sion. The Mother stands for truth, the Father for seeing the truth. Mother and Father together stand for the revelation of truth as embodied by the True One. Both figures stand in for Heaven and Earth by covering and carrying, and are “faces of the Dao”. Covering is embodied by Heaven with his limitless opening providing light and vision to all beings. Carrying characterises Earth who offers shelter, nourishment and ground to all beings. These attributes are assigned to Heaven and Earth in the incantations recited and acts performed by the initiates in the ritual: “Heaven covers, Earth carries”.⁵¹ These actions define the respective agents, both cosmic and human, who reach towards each other to effect the Crossing-over and to bridge the span.

By allowing themselves to be covered and carried by the Dao, by seeing and trusting, the People of Flesh are restored to order and harmony, knowing things as they truly are and entering the state of the True One. Bridging, petition, and grace are closely related to the reception of Life. It is because the initiates have already acquired good grace by worshipping the Dao and by performing the preparatory exercises to the ritual—fasting, bathing, burning incense, confessing (*xie* 謝), as well as making long efforts to “seek the Law”—that they can take the first step and express their reliance on the master, pledging to accomplish the Crossing-over. Hence, their readiness to take the pledge itself makes them worthy to receive grace. It is ultimately their good grace that will be key to transforming them from People of Flesh into a higher state. In the ritual the Compassionate Father/Heaven and Wise Mother/Earth are individually invoked, but it is their harmonious union that engenders the Child of Transformation. The Child of Transformation is correlated with the Seed People. This is the third figure that marks the final station of the trajectory of the Dao, but the Seed People are brought up in the first act only indirectly in the proclaimed pledge “to take refuge” (*gui* 歸) and “to rely on” (*yi* 依) the master in “pleading for Life” (*qigai shenghuo* 乞丐生活).⁵² This pleading for Life refers to the state of immortality or long life that is embodied by the Seed People. Here we come full circle and the paradox of the initiates referring to themselves as People of Flesh, while also being referred to as Yin and Yang, and at the same time pledging to become Seed People, is resolved by the creative, revelatory and redemptive character of the numinous *qi*. This becomes clear in the final act of the ritual. After the “union of *qi*” has taken place and the divinities of the Five Treasuries (*wuzang* 五藏) have been allowed to return to their respective residences in the body, the initiates hold their toes and revolve on the ground, enacting a child’s rolling movement.⁵³ The rite thus culminates in the engendering of a being—the Child of Transformation—which at the same time unites and is beyond the gender of either participant. This child has no specific gender and is thus like the Dao—the seed of life.

Techniques of the Rite: Meditation and Visualisation

In order to initiate the meditative state and acquire grace by becoming bridges, the initiate must calmly shift attention away from the self to “concentrate on” (*si* 思)⁵⁴ the sacred.⁵⁵ Hence in Act Two, “Visualising Officials and Soldiers”, they focus their attention on the talismans (*lu* 籙, registers of holy names).⁵⁶ As a result of this “act of non-action”, the generals, officials and soldiers—collectively the Divine Guards—of the Meritorious Service Section (*gongcao* 功曹) become fully visible to them. This sequence of actions shows that the act of concentration is considered a precondition of “clearly seeing [the Divine Guards] just as they are” (*fen ming liao ran* 分明了然).⁵⁷ Moving in formation the Guards encircle the initiates, and are addressed

51 *Ibid.*, 15:9b: 天覆地載.

52 *Ibid.*, 1:1a.

53 *Ibid.*, 20:20b.

54 There is the mention of the practise of *si* in eleven of the twenty sections (2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19) of the *Regulations*.

55 As the *Zhuangzi* says: “The one who can forget all things, even forget Heaven, may be called a forgetter of self. The person who can forget one’s self may be said to thus enter Heaven.” *Zhuangzi*, 12:3, p.192.

56 *Regulations*, 2:1b.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

59 According to Schipper, the term “Cinnabar Field” appears for the first time in the *Huangting jing* [Scripture of the Yellow Court] (second to third century CE, see *Huangting waijing yu jing* [Jade Scripture on the Outer Effulgences of the Yellow Court] DZ 167). Traditionally the “Cinnabar Field” was located somewhere below the navel.

60 *Regulations*, 3.2a. The *Taiping jing* records a similar method of meditation that has the practitioner visualise the interior of the body as “resplendent as flawless jade from top to bottom”. See Isabelle Robinet (trans. Julian Pas and Norman Girardot), *Taoist Meditation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), especially p.63. The *yingshi* or “encampment” is also a name of a lunar lodge, see John Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.83.

61 *Huainanzi*, 1:7, p.4.

62 *Zhuangzi*, 7:3, p.138. For the mirror as “lumière de l’âme” or symbol of the mind both in Taoism and Buddhism, see Paul Demiéville “Miroir spirituel” in *Sinologica*, Vol.1, (1948), pp.112–37.

with a prayer: “On behalf of the Servant and Handmaiden transmit the Life Qi of the four directions to extinguish misfortunes and to disperse calamities”.⁵⁸ This prayer shows that while the initiates are still People of Flesh they are already serving as True Ones or catalysts for purification. Hence, their vision of the divinities serves as a mediating third party analogous to that of Water, in the Heaven, Earth, and Water triad.

The next motion is in reverse, directing the attention towards the self, which is already surrounded by the Divine Guards. Thus, in Act Three the initiates focus their attention on the Cinnabar Field (*dantian* 丹田), and the white *qi*, in response, that appears as a mirror of light from between their eyebrows.⁵⁹ As the mirror (*mianjing* 面鏡) of white *qi* gradually grows, a bright light pours down into the body, simultaneously enveloping it to penetrate and make visible all the sections of the corporeal landscape as envisaged by Daoist teaching. “Outside and inside, there is nothing that does not appear clearly.”⁶⁰ Envisaging the internal order of the body, almost no distinction is made between the physiology of the male and the female—instead the body is shown to be internally ordered by the interaction of *qi* energies which include the Yin/Yang division but are also greater than it.

Calmly directing the mind towards the Cinnabar Field is said to bring about the appearance of a light in the shape of a mirror. Thus shifting attention towards the sacred space discloses a previously hidden presence; not only does the light become visible as a mirror, it also makes visible. It “mirrors” the true nature of the *body* emitting the light of *qi* from within, revealing itself as more than just the mere *body* of the People of Flesh. This Crossing-over, uniting the “within” with the “without”, enables a way of seeing or attending to what could not previously be apprehended.

The light first appears, then gradually grows larger and moves to the head to re-enter the body from there. The re-entering is a return to the body for regeneration, or an identification of the Life *Qi* that shows itself in its immanence. Therefore it is not just a question of fixing the attention, but it is an exchange or a dialogue between the self of the People of Flesh and their inner *qi*, representing their inborn nature. This is the point of restoration, or reunification, which makes the reception of the transformative energy of *qi*—which began in the initiates’ own *body*—possible; a process that could only begin by precisely concentrated and directed mind. Ultimately it is calm attention directed towards the Cinnabar Field that makes the inner *qi* appear outside the body. According to the *Huainanzi*, “At birth man is quiescent and this is the nature of Heaven; but then he is *stirred into motion* and this is harmful to his nature ...”.⁶¹ The *Zhuangzi* says: “The Perfected, his mind, attends like a mirror—neither grasping for, nor welcoming anything, responding but not accumulating. Therefore he can win out over things without any harm being done.”⁶² The stillness and focus of the mind allows the initiate to move beyond the limits of the self by mirroring that which is outside; in this case receiving the sacred Immanent *Qi* which, in its generative force, benevolence, and light, reflects the nature of Heaven. By being receptive, trusting and open to the Life *Qi* the initiate allows the Immanent *Qi* to re-enter the body; by “seeing and being seen” the next step in the Crossing-over is accomplished. By mirroring, the True Ones show themselves in their calm and pure inborn nature. By reflecting the light, they can see and be seen. In this way, they can find and provide the reference point for each other, relying on each other and on the immanent nature of the Dao.

Techniques of the Rite: Controlling the Rhythm of Qi

The ritual is conceived as a Crossing-over to a middle point where the polarities unite, a sacred dimension of harmony and peace. This is achieved by concentrating on and enacting the operations of the Five Regulators, whose powers are summoned to carry the initiates beyond ordinary time and space, thus establishing the Ruling *Qi* (Act Four).⁶³ This establishment of the rule of the Five Regulators, or the controllers of the *qi*, is attained by “harmonious concordance”.

The concept of “rule” or “king” (*wang* 王) is related to the Five Regulators, who are conceived as benevolent forces who establish their rule when harmony is accomplished by the concordance of space, time and human actions. In Act Four, the operations of the Five Regulators are set in motion by invoking their characteristics: for example, if the position in space is denoted as East, the time is spring, and the action is directing one’s attention towards the sacred:

It is Spring, concentrate on the green *qi* of the East.

Moisten and give luminescence to my body. The red *qi* is its minister.

It is Summer, concentrate on the red *qi* of the South. The yellow *qi* is its minister.

It is Autumn, concentrate on the white *qi* of the West. The black *qi* is its minister.

It is Winter, concentrate on the black *qi* of the North. The green *qi* is its minister.

It is the intermediate season (*siji* 四季),⁶⁴ concentrate on the yellow *qi* of the Center. The white *qi* is its minister.

Raise the head and inhale the *qi* with the nose, then lower the head and swallow.⁶⁵ It descends to the Cinnabar Field, and ascends to Kunlun.

(Inhale and swallow three times each).⁶⁶

The Regulators affect the initiates through the medium of *qi*. The words spoken to the sacred presence when the initiates ask to receive the benefit of its influence show the trust that they invest in its transformative power. Moreover, the *qi* is drawn inside the body and swallowed, allowing it to exert its influence on the body not only from the outside, but also from the inside through the characteristic attributes of the Regulators. Having entered the body, the *qi* descends to the Cinnabar Field, where it mingles and fuses with the inner *qi*, transforming it. Finally, it ascends to Kunlun, the residence of the spirits (*shen* 神) of the body, to regenerate the celestial *qi* of the practitioner.⁶⁷

This regeneration of the mind under the influence of the *qi* of the Five Regulators is re-enacted with haptic components, directly affecting the Ruling *Qi* in Act Nineteen. While Act Four is primarily a meditation, combined with inhalation and guiding of *qi*, Act Nineteen has the same sequence of meditation but paired with corporeal interaction. It starts with the initiates rubbing each other’s body and face to make them hot, continues with concentration on the *qi* of the Five Regulators, reverts to rubbing the *body*, and ends with motionless meditation.

However, in addition, unlike Act Four that starts with inhalation, Act Nineteen starts with an exhalation of the Life *Qi*: the direction of the motion of the *qi* is thus reversed. Since the unification of the inner and outer realms

63 On the “five elements” and the different theories concerning the origin of the correlative cosmology, see the insightful discussion by Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.356–78. The Four Seasons plus the Intermediate were correlated to the Five Phases, and to the four azimuth directions plus the Centre: Wood to East/Spring; South to Fire/Summer; West to Metal/Autumn; North to Water/Winter; and finally the Earth to Centre/Intermediate. These phases or elements are conceived as cosmic principles which can either produce or destroy each other and when applied to the human body are associated with the Five Viscera or “Five Storehouses” (as they are called in this article): Liver, Heart, Spleen, Lung and Kidney—similar to rulers with appropriate duties. See Nathan Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and the Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), pp.5–37, at p.12; also see Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China’s Medical History, 960–1665*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. pp.19–25.

64 As Marcel Granet has aptly observed, if there had not been an additional fifth season the correlative pattern of relating the seasons to the Five Phases would have been impossible. See *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), p.90–91, n.130.

65 In Daoist rites of transmission or consecration, swallowing of elixir or talismans is the symbolic act of acceptance. See Michel Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of the T’ao Hung-ching” in “Facets,” p.189, n.195.

66 *Regulations*, 3.2a-b.

67 On the pre-Han to fourth century concept of *shen* or “spirit”, see Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth and Reason in the Han period (202 BC–AD 220)* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1982), esp. pp.20–24. Also Schwartz “The World of Thought”, esp. p.396.

68 *Regulations*, 19:19b.

69 *Zhuangzi*, 6:3, p.103.

70 “When one has the ‘Great Law’ then the *Qi* of the Four Seasons and the Five Regulators comes and enters into the person’s belly, it makes the Five Storehouses of the person of ‘pure spirit’ (*jingshen* 精神), and then their color responds to (*xiangying* 相應) the color of the Seasons of Heaven and Earth.” *Taiping jing*, 72, p.292.

has thus been enacted on several levels, the reversal in the direction of the flow shows the capacity of the true ones to emit the regenerated *qi* and establish the Ruling *Qi* on the “outside of the self”. In this act, the numinous substance appears in front of the face as a mirror of light where colour and size change sequentially, gradually growing larger to cover (*fu* 覆) the whole body. This again is a unification or Crossing-over of the boundaries between without and within, this time allowing a fusion with the *qi* of the Five Regulators, rulers of time and space.

The *qi* is guided (*yin* 引) from the feet upwards until it ascends into the brain cavity (*Niwan* 泥丸). After it has made three motions upwards and three downwards, it is restored to the Five Treasuries and brought to the middle of the Cinnabar Field.⁶⁸ Guiding the *qi* from the feet is reminiscent of the passage in the *Zhuangzi* that says: “The True One breathes with his heels”.⁶⁹ The final point of the circular motion is again the Cinnabar Field, where the Child resides, and hence nourishes this subtle entity or emblem of eternal life. The haptic enactments of rubbing in a vertical motion towards the Cinnabar Field and intertwining the hands may be understood as a re-enactment of the generative fusion of *qi* and its cycles.

The transformation that is initiated by this circulation and fusion of polarities is not just the result of directing the attention, inhaling, swallowing, and speaking, but is also an accomplishment of the gradual unfolding of the process of “seeking the Law”. In other words, the initiates demonstrate their capacity to invite the workings of the seasons, as governors of the fluctuations of time and space, by Crossing-over to the middle position (the result of having been granted the Great Law), like Yu the Great who initially “set the four seasons” in motion. The *Scripture on Great Peace* describes a similar state achieved on the attainment of the Great Law where the *qi* of the Four Seasons and the Five Treasuries enter the person’s belly or centre and transform the subject’s Five Treasuries into “subtle spirit” (*jingshen* 精神), their colour “corresponding” (*ying* 應) to the emblematic colours of the Seasons of Heaven and Earth.⁷⁰

Hence by assuming the correct position and practising the appropriate concentration, the initiates have exposed themselves to the workings of the Five Regulators—or the time and space shaping manifestations of the Dao—and have simultaneously internalised their *qi*. By mindfully attending to it and by inhaling, swallowing, and speaking to it, they have been affected by the Dao. Cycling through the body brings the *qi* back to the centre, symbolically equivalent to the Cinnabar Field, and to a point of rest beyond the ordinary mutations of space and time. Thus the process described in Act Four finds its end in the midpoint and can be regarded as a Crossing-over to a point of resonance with the Ruling *Qi*.

Act Nineteen complements Act Four in representing the end of the circle, where the polarities meet and are transformed to begin a new path where reception becomes emission and the Ruling *Qi* is spread into the world. Thus in the central stages of the ritual the focus shifts away from gendered polarities to a larger sense of the body as a product of complex internal regulation of *qi* energies which are ordered by gender categories of right and left, down and up, Yin and Yang, and also by other systems such as the seasons and the Five Regulators. The gendered bodies of the participants are shown as mirroring a larger correlative cosmology.

Techniques of the Rite: Tying Qi

As the Ruling *Qi* has, by this stage, been established, the initiates immerse themselves in the Primordial Life *Qi* to ask for long life in an incantation. The immersion into the essential *stuff* of creation is a common motif in sacramental ritual and it is a theme that speaks of purification, death and rebirth, or here renewal of *qi* and of reinstatement of the bonds of life. As suggested above, the ritual is a re-enactment and remembering of genesis, thus the primary elements of Heaven, Earth and Water are invoked. Water is often represented as the element of fertile connection, or a bridge connecting Heaven and Earth, or Father and Mother, but in one of the versions recounting the creation of humans by the divine maternal prototype Nü Gua, reference is also made to a cord—an emblem suggestive of the idea of a bond, bridge or connection.⁷¹ After fashioning a few people by hand, Nü Gua apparently shook the mud off a rope in the air to create the rest. Thus, this story of creation not only points to the sacred sources of human life, Earth and Water, but also has a divine female presence as the pivot in the chain of transmission of life. Heaven, the third sacred agency—here represented by air—serves as the background for this sacred drama of creation.

The emblem of “fusing” or “unifying” (*he* 合), or “tying” or “bonding” (*jie* 結) is deployed in a variety of guises in the ritual appearing as a constitutive part of the process of bridging, and the immersion in the Life *Qi*. In Act Five the initiates first summon the Three *Qi* of Heaven, Earth and Water to come and be bound together to institute the Dao, and thereby be endowed with Life. This act commences by directing the attention towards the Life *Qi* of the Three Primordial Ones (*sanyuan shengqi* 三元生氣). The tying of *qi* here is apparently initiated by the act of silence and the correct visualisation of the numinous. In a direct response to solely directing attention to the Primordial Ones, pure white *qi* descends, encircles (*zhou* 周), and revolves to cover (*zafu* 匝覆) the *bodies* of the initiates.

Pure white is the color of the *qi* of the right (*zheng* 正) and true (*zhen* 真) Dao.⁷² It is the attribute of the unimpaired spirit that is unmixed and unperturbed, and that can only be embodied by the True One.⁷³ Thus, the descent of the white *qi* in response to the initiates’ quiet call shows that they stand in good grace. Immersing them, it also purifies them by equalising their differences and disclosing their inborn pure nature, in order to claim them as inherent parts of the Dao.

The condition for tying the Life *Qi* is the individual summons of the Three Primordial Ones. However, before speaking to them the immersion has to be completed both on the outside and inside of the body. When the initiates are completely enfolded in *qi*, they raise their faces, inhale it, and then say: “Life *Qi* of One Palace of Heaven, come and give Life to us (*sheng wo shen* 生我身)!” They bow their heads and swallow the *qi* until it fills their belly. The *qi* first descends into the Cinnabar Field and then ascends to Niwan, an inner chamber in the head, or Kunlun.⁷⁴ Next, their concentration is shifted towards Earth and Water, and the same incantation is directed to them.

The movement of the Life *Qi*, preceding the tying of its three aspects, occurs spontaneously and retraces the memory of genesis. The descending movement of *qi* to the Cinnabar Field reenacts the descending movement of the heavy, turbid *qi* in the myth of the beginning of the world. A well-known passage in the *Liezi* says: “what was mixed and heavy went down and became the Earth, while the harmoniously infused *qi* became humans (*chonghe qi wei ren* 沖和氣為人).”⁷⁵ Likewise the ascending movement of the

71 *Fengsu tongyi* [The Comprehensive Meaning of Popular Customs] cited in *Taiping yulan*, 78:365, “Shouwuji yuanyi”, *Guang bowu zhi* 9. The *Fengsu tongyi* is considered to be a second century CE text. The *Taiping yulan* (sections on Daoism j.659-679) was compiled in 983 CE. (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1963). For a variant reading of this passage see Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.35.

72 *Zhengyi fauen tianshi jiao jie ke jing* [Scripture of Precepts and Codes Taught by the Celestial Master, from the Texts of the Law of Correct Unity] (DZ 789):10b.

73 *Zhuangzi*, 15:3, p.241: “therefore we call white/plain that which is not mixed, and we call pure/sincere that whose spirit has not been tarnished. The one who is able to embody the pure white is called ‘true one’.”

74 *Regulations*, 5:2b. For the instruction that it be inhaled and swallowed three times, see *ibid*, 3:2b.

75 *Liezi*, 1:3. All references to *Liezi* are to the Zhizi jicheng edition.

76 *Regulations*, 3:2a–b.

77 *Taiping jing*, 40:78.

78 *Regulations*, 3:2b.

79 *Regulations*, 6:3b.

80 *Ibid.*, 6:4a.

81 The text specifies that the interlacing of the fingers is done in such a manner that Yang's second finger is placed between the second and third finger of Yin. *Regulations*, 2:1b.

82 *Ibid.*, 2:1b, 8:5a; both *cha* and *be* in 9:5b, 14:8a, 16:11b, 17:17a; both *cha* and *jiao*: 18:18b, 19:20a, 20:13a.

83 Fu Xi and Nü Gua may have first been associated in the *Huainanzi*, 6:7, p.98, see Charles Le Blanc, *Huai Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985), pp.167–70.

84 *Regulations*, 14:8b.

85 The actual tying of the hair of the initiates is not unlikely. During the Song dynasty this was a part of the marriage ritual, see Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp.58, 94.

white shining *qi* reenacts the original ascension of Heavenly *Qi*. In fact these two movements are the complementary motions of a single process of the transformation of *qi*, a Yin movement downwards where it appears as a fluid and a Yang movement upwards where it manifests itself as airy and light.

After each of the Three Primordial *Qi* have been summoned and addressed separately, they are also addressed together: “Life *Qi* of the Three Palaces: Heaven, Earth and Water, come together to give Life to me.”⁷⁶ The Primordial *Qi*, according to the *Taiping jing*, is what “embraces (*bao* 包) Heaven and Earth in the Eight Directions; there is nothing that is born without having received its *qi*.”⁷⁷ The act concludes:

The Life *Qi* of the Three Palaces is vast and overflowing. Pure white, it covers the body, runs through (*guan* 貫) and penetrates (*da* 達) the Five Treasuries, the Six Receptacles, the Twelve Branches and [Ten] Stems.⁷⁸

The Three Primordial *Qi* are brought together uniting and touching the generative centres of the body and all its constitutive parts, completing an immersion of the body in the Life *Qi* that sets into motion the transformation of the People of Flesh.

The People of Flesh, in their act of remembering genesis, are the Yin and Yang who are manifestations of the Life *Qi* of the Three Primordial Ones. However, as the *Regulations for Crossing-over* says, their transformation can only take place through their Five Regulators who are brought together by following the regulations or injunctions (*jie* 節) of Heaven, Earth, Humans, ancestors, four seasons, and eight directions.⁷⁹

Moreover, in Act Six, the master confirms the summons of the Life *Qi* of the Three Primordial Ones and prays for a *binding* of the three in front of the congregation of divinities who have been invited to hear the proclamation:

Respectfully we cultivate Yin and Yang and their Five Regulators. As for the Three *Qi*; first one Generative [*Qi* rises] from the Middle Primordial; one Generative [*Qi* rises] from the Upper Primordial, and one Generative [*Qi* rises] from the Lower Primordial. May the Three Generative *Qi* be bound, and together complete the Dao (*sanqi xiangjie gong cheng weidao* 三氣相結，共成為道).⁸⁰

Several other liturgical actions can be regarded as related to binding or tying: “interlacing” (*chashou* 叉手),⁸¹ “joining” (*beshou* 合手), and “intertwining” (*jiaoshou* 交手),⁸² which calls to mind the iconographic depictions of the brother and sister deities Fu Xi and Nü Gua. Their traditional representation with the lower bodies intertwined could be said to symbolise their union in its divine, bodily and genetic aspects—as is well known they are archaic symbols of marriage, genesis and eternal life.⁸³

Tying the new *qi* of life has its complement in untying the old *qi* of death. The ritual enacts the process of purifying life by releasing Death *Qi* (*siqi* 死氣) and renewing it by tying the Life *Qi*. For example, in their positions of exaltation, Yin and Yang “interlace” their fingers, inhaling and swallowing the Life *Qi* three times while lying and three times while sitting, and at the same time spit out the Death *Qi*.⁸⁴ Moreover, untying and tying are also mimetically deployed in the ritual by using, for example, the hair and the sash. The tying of *Qi* that is announced in Act Six, is enacted by motions of untying and tying in Act Fourteen: “Untying, Tying, and Consuming”. The master unties the disciples’ girdles and spreads their hair, assisted by those who participate in the ritual as announcers, while the wise ones retie the hair and girdles.⁸⁵ Untying may be taken to symbolise the loosening of destructive “knots” received at birth, while the binding secures the coagula-

tion or binding of the newly internalised Life *Qi*.⁸⁶ It follows from this that the “unification of *qi*” is a component of reinstating or remembering, or untying and retying, and thus harmony (*he*) could be defined as re-unifying or regenerating the Life *Qi* by re-connecting with the Dao. The symbolism of tying is clearly central to the concept of creating a bond of interdependence between the two initiates to permit their Crossing-over and forming a bridge.

Techniques of the Rite: Convoking the Divine Administration

In parallel to the summoning of the Three Primordial Ones, other ancestors and deities were invoked; family members were also perhaps invited to attend the celebration and bless the initiates.⁸⁷ The convocation of all “well-wishers” as witnesses to the proclamation was a condition for the sacred to manifest itself to the community.

An important accomplishment of the rite was the interaction of the community to witness the “reunion of *qi*”, but at its heart was the “presenting of the petition” (*qishi* 啟事) and the related “attestation of merit” (*yangong* 言功).⁸⁸ The ground for both was set in the preliminaries and the first act with confessions and pledges of mutual reliance and trust between disciples and masters. The “attestation of merit” refers to the praising of both male and female initiates equally, after they have stated their names, dates and places of birth, declared that they have “loved the Dao” for many years and found joy in immortality, that they have come to the master to seek guidance and that they have made the offer of performance in the ritual.⁸⁹ The *yangong* was also respectfully offered to initiates in the final act.

At the beginning of Act Six before the reading of the list of divinities to be summoned, we find the initiates prostrating themselves towards the East and clapping their teeth twelve times to drum up the protective spirits of their bodies.⁹⁰ At this point “two officials (*erguan* 二官)—one from the High Immortal (*shangxian* 上仙), and one from the High Numinous (*shangling* 上靈) come out (*chu* 出) from the body of the minister (i.e. initiate), and are sent to the “Right One” (*zhengyi* 正一)—the spiritual ancestor of the Heavenly Masters—to heal the afflictions of the Life *Qi* of Yin and Yang.⁹¹ Even if the initiates in their role of Yin and Yang may be considered as paragons of purity and right attitude, in their unresolved state as People of Flesh they are considered as the inheritors of sins from their ancestors. Though the initiates dispatch the visualised officials from their own bodies the master has to speak to the divinities on behalf of the initiates before their request for healing can be accepted thus the master has to intercede on behalf of the initiates for their request to be accepted. “Healing” or “regulating” (*zhi* 治) is thus conceived as the result of the establishment of communication between the master and the Right One. Both good and bad influences could be inherited from the past, and the master serves as the medium who connects the community to its benevolent ancestors and makes the Life *Qi* circulate to benefit and heal the present malaise.⁹²

It was noted above that “confession” or “offering gratitude” (*xie* 謝) was a preparatory practice for the performance of the ritual, but in fact initiates were required to communicate with the master in this way when “coming and leaving the quiet chamber” (*chu ru jie bai jing nai xie* 出入皆拜靖乃謝).⁹³ The *Scripture on Great Peace* defines the practice of *xie* as important for the True One, because “the one who can be modest and not dismissive acts with awareness and uses his knowledge and is able to offer gratitude and not treat it as a side matter”.⁹⁴ The concept of “confession” is to be understood

86 See Robinet, *Meditation*, pp.139–43.

87 The performance of the ritual may have been a social occasion, or a gathering of family and relatives at appropriate times in the calendar. See Maspero, *Taoism*, p.535. Also see Kohn, *Laughing*, p.149–50.

88 The last subsection of Section 20 shows clearly that the “Attestation of Merit” is the important theme of Section 6, repeating almost the same steps as before but summoning a shorter list of divinities.

89 *Regulations*, 20:21b–22b.

90 *Ibid*, 6:2a.

91 *Ibid*, 6:2a–3a.

92 As noted above, the master solicits the benign spiritual guards of the Meritorious Service Section asking them for assistance in a prayer addressed to them first in Act Two. *Ibid*, 2:1b.

93 In the last act of the rite, the initiates confesses: “We, [names], together have committed a thousand sins (*qianzui* 千罪) and ten thousand transgressions (*wanguo* 萬過); may they all be forgiven”. *Ibid*, 20:24b.

94 *Taijing jing*, 40, p.78–79.

95 This translation was coined by Kaltenmark who discusses ethics in the *Taijing jing* and the theory of accumulation of sins across generations. See Kaltenmark, “Facets,” p.24.

96 The *Taijing jing* deals extensively with appropriate social behavior, and it enumerates the following six sins: (1) to selfishly decline to teach the Dao to others and “hoard the Dao and the Most High” for oneself (2) to hoard De and decline to teach it (3) to hoard wealth and be unwilling to help the poor, (4) in spite of knowing the Dao of Heaven, to treat the body which was inherited from the ancestors with disrespect, to be unwilling to study how to care for it and hence die (5) to know the benefit from practising De but be unwilling to study it and do evil by holding oneself in contempt (6) to sit idly and let go of the possibility for life in the hereafter. *Taijing jing*, 67, p.241–42.

97 *Regulations*, 10:6a–b.

98 In Acts Eight, Ten and Eleven, the initiates reiterate part of the incantation from Act Six saying that they “together humbly practise the Dao and its *de*, and ask for the Life *Qi* of Yin and Yang to be harmoniously unified, flowing to immerse (*buliu* 布流) the center of their body.” *Ibid*, 8:5a–b, 10:6a–b, 11:6b–7a.

99 *Ibid*, 20:23b.

100 *Ibid*, 6:4a. Act Six has the most complete text of the incantation, which (with variations) is addressed to the divinities seven times during the rite.

101 In fact in two acts during the ritual the initiates repeat this short incantation directed to the divinities of the Three *Qi*. *Regulations*, 7:5a and 20:21b.

102 *Huainanzi*, 1:7, p.2. The commentary is by Gao You of the Han dynasty.

in relation to the “inheritance of sins” (*chengfu* 承負)⁹⁵ which is represented as the cause of all affliction in the *Scripture on Great Peace*.⁹⁶

The importance of the inheritance of sins suggests the deeds of past generations were remembered and records of them were kept. In fact any merit acquired in the ritual would not be efficacious unless the names of the initiates were noted in the spaces provided for them in the *Regulations*. In addition, recording the initiates’ accomplishments had its complement in writing their names in the jade calendar of long life. It was only their good record that allowed the master to address a formal request on their behalf to the divine administration in Act Six. The lords, generals and officers of the spirit administration are asked to release the initiates from investigation, and strike their names from the registers of death.

The incantation used to reinstate the initiates’ immortal names in the jade calendar is read to the divinities who represent time. In Act Ten they summon Ten Divinities of the days by their sacred names—combining Earthly Branches and Heavenly Stems symbolising Female and Male Energies—and dispatch them to the Three Heavenly Palaces, again requesting that their names be reinstated in the jade calendar and to be among the Seed People.⁹⁷ In Act Eleven they call out to the twelve divinities that embody the twelve directions and pair the Earthly Branches and Heavenly Stems into six “male” and six “female” sacred names resembling the sixty-year cycle. In Act Twelve they ask the Five Spirits of Time (Great Year or Jupiter, Spirit of Current Month, Spirit of Original Destiny, Spirit of Running Year, and Spirit of the Present Day) to “go up high and reach the Three Heavens Office”. To all of these divinities a variation of the same incantation is directed by the master announcing the names and dates of birth of the initiates to them, and by the disciples proclaiming that they “obey the master and request aid in Crossing-over”.⁹⁸ At the end of the ritual when the initiates exit the oratory they once again incant a variation of the apotropaic prayer:

Lord Number One (*yijun* 一君) in front and Lord Number Two (*erjun* 二君) behind: destroy the calamities of the four directions. May all of them be caught and subdued; destroy, remove and make them leave through the gate with your two hands.⁹⁹

The rite is about Crossing-over into a position of the midpoint, which allows for the circulation of the Life *Qi* and purification of evil influences. “Returning” to the original nature and a state of quietness is conceived as a spontaneous cosmic process of response to “good grace”. The precondition for receiving “grace” is said to be sincerity (*xin* 信). This is a significant concept that is related to “fidelity”, “reliability”, and both to “trust” or “trustworthiness”, all of which are relational. Thus, the incantation of the master in Act Six (reiterated at the end of Act Twenty) says:

May mouth and tongue now rest and hide. The service ends and the merit is proclaimed, but do not fail to yield fidelity!¹⁰⁰

In the incantation after the initiates have been warned “not to fail in yielding fidelity”, they address their divine ancestors calling up “those who have given birth to us” (*shengwozhe* 生我者) and those who have “cared for us” (*buaiwozhe* 懷我者). They end by saying: “this service is with the Great Dao, and dedicated to father and mother.”¹⁰¹ In this context it may be significant that as the *Huainanzi* explains: “Maintaining *de* means highest excellence” and its commentary adds: “this means to maintain ‘care’ (*buai* 懷)”.¹⁰² *De* or “virtue” may also be rendered as “efficacy” in the sense that in order to complete the Dao one needs to maintain *de*. However, *de* can

be identified with “care” here, especially in connection to those who have given us life and care, and is acquired by being grateful and by repaying one’s due, not only in remembrance, but also by mirroring their good faith and reliability.

Thus yielding fidelity or reliability means giving and receiving care. This is the very fabric of continuity and connectedness within the spiritual community. Enacting the rite, the initiates serve as “bridges” or mediums who can establish firm connections with their spiritual ancestors and the cosmic administration, to request assistance in pacifying and healing the people of the empire. In petitioning the cosmic administration the initiates link their relationship to each other and to the Dao; or they link the polarised principles of the universe to a pantheon of divinities who authorise the Crossing-over towards the Dao.

Constancy

Crossing-over—the goal of the ritual—is realised by transcending the spatio-temporal order—a process which aims at the gradual solidifying of the Life *Qi* into a “firm” or “constant” (*gu* 固) state. The solidity or constancy of the Life *Qi* is the essential characteristic of all those who have attained the Dao and thus share its constant nature. We have seen above that the initiates expose themselves to the workings of the Five Regulators (the manifestations of the Dao that shape time and space) and internalise their emanation in the form of *Qi*. Affected by the Dao they have acquired its inherent capacity to shift through and beyond time and space. This is rendered in Act Seven as “going beyond the Earthly Net” (*yue digang* 越地網) and “releasing the Heavenly Canopy” (*sbi tianluo* 釋天羅).¹⁰³ The earthly branches and heavenly stems are used as the determinants of time and space, so they come to play an important symbolic role in this process. By acting in harmony with the rules of the natural cycle initiates can move beyond the meshes of space and time.¹⁰⁴ In fact the movement beyond these limits establishes constancy, which enables the initiate to become capable of steadfastly yielding fidelity (*xin*).

The Pole Star plays an important role in determining the initiate’s correct position in space and time, as it has served as the beacon of all travellers since antiquity. *Zhuangzi* refers to the Dipper as one of those who has attained the Dao and its “firm constancy” (*gu cun* 固存).¹⁰⁵ According to the myth of its creation the Dipper, like all stars and planets, came into being from essences remaining after the creation of the sun and the moon—a mix of Yin and Yang.¹⁰⁶ Hence in its genesis and essence the constellation occupies the *middle* position, and represents the joining of the two cosmic polarities embodied in the gender of the initiates.

In fact, whenever the participants change their positions within the ritual space in the guise of Yin and Yang the Earthly Branches serve as their coordinates, and they follow the annual cycle the Dipper. Thus, from Act One, Yang stands at the first terrestrial branch, to mark the position of the Dipper in the east northeast (in the first lunar month at dusk), and Yin at the seventh in the opposite position points to the west southwest (in the seventh month at dusk).¹⁰⁷ The constellation provides not only the sacred “ground” for the rite by determining the positions of Yin and Yang but also appears as a beneficent presence, its divinities being summoned to hear the main “attestation of merit” in Act Six: “Lords, generals and officers of the Three [Primordial Ones], of the Five [Regulators], of the Meritorious Service Section, and of the Dipper (*doushao* 斗杓).”¹⁰⁸

103 This act consists of two sequences (each consisting of three steps), the first dedicated to Earth and the second to Heaven. *Regulations*, 7:4a.

104 The meshes of Heaven were conceived as consisting of Mainstays (*gang* 綱) which run as cosmic meridians binding the stars to each other and to the poles, and the Filaments (*ji* 紀) which connect the finer luminaries perpendicularly. This exercise was believed to result in the forming of immortal embryonic essences in the practitioner’s body which would finally allow for the attainment of ascension to Heaven. See Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: Tang Approaches to the Stars*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p.241–42; note 41.

105 *Zhuangzi*, 6:3, p.111–12: “The Great Dipper has attained [the Dao] and throughout antiquity it has without error” ... 維斗得之，終古不忒。The same passage says: “The Dao has fidelity and inborn nature (*qing* 情), non-action, no-shape; it can be transmitted, but not received; can be attained, but not seen; has its own root, its own source, was there before Heaven and Earth; and from antiquity it had firm constancy”.

106 *Huainanzi*, 3:7, p.35; for a translation of this chapter see Major, *Heaven and Earth*, p.62.

107 *Regulations*, 1.1a. It is believed that the male and female embryos pass through the twelve stations of the zodiac during gestation moving clockwise and counter-clockwise respectively. See Robinet “Meditation,” p.111, n.44.

108 *Regulations*, 6:3b. “Ascending on the constellation” (*cheng kui* 乘魁) is to be achieved by corporeal interactions between the initiates. Also *Ibid*, 16:12a.

109 *Ibid*, 7:4b–5a.

110 Maspero “Taoism,” p.513.

111 *Regulations*, 7:4b–5a. This incantation is repeated in almost identical wording in Act Twenty, 20.21a.

112 *Ibid*, 7:5a; and 20:21a.

113 *Ibid*, 21a–21b.

114 *Ibid*, 21a–21b.

115 *Ibid*, 7.5a.

The movement beyond life’s fluctuations and limits and towards constancy, the characteristic of the Dipper, is enacted in Act Seven by liturgical “steps” in space (*guo* 過) that establish “a crossing beyond the Earthly Net” and “a releasing of the Heavenly Canopy”. The steps retrace the cardinal positions of the movements of the heavenly bodies: east, south and west. The movements of the initiates match and map the positions of the three major divinities: Without Superior on the left, Dark Senior on the right and Supreme High at the rear. At each step their names are invoked as these divinities are believed to represent and protect the three positions.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the positions of the steps, left, right and rear, are the places of exaltation of Yang, Yin and the centre.¹¹⁰ Thus, the initiates simultaneously evoke and embody the trinity who are the natural regulators and harmonisers of the cosmos by virtue of their cardinal positions. In acting as representatives of the Three Primordial Life *Qis*, the initiates are able walk in the steps of the divinities. The three members of the divine trinity are in fact representative of the Yin and Yang principles, as is clear from the use of left and right in their names, while the third stands in the *middle*. Moreover, they can be regarded as different guises of the three figures or the three junctions that the initiates pass through in being regenerated by the Dao.

At the end of Act Seven the initiates address the divinities in an incantation that expresses the salvific purpose of Crossing-over beyond the fluctuations of the universe: “Compassionate Father and Wise Mother, untie the Net and release the Canopy, erase my name from the death register, write my name in the register of Life.¹¹¹ However, it ends with the words which underline the importance of the trinity: “Give us Birth, endow us with Life, this service (*sbi* 事) rests with the Great Dao, and it is for Father and Mother.”¹¹² Here, the Wise Mother represents Earth, the Compassionate Father is of Heaven, while the Great Dao stands for the One—the Child— emblem of the union and origin of Yin and Yang. The incantation proclaims the faith of the initiates in the impartial generosity of these life-engendering entities. Moreover, while the initiates ask for these gifts from the sacred trinity, at the same time they seek to emulate their virtue.

The same incantation is repeated in the final act when the transformation of the initiates comes full circle through their enactment of Yin and Yang and by attending to the divinities of space and time. In the section of the final act entitled “Stepping with Time” (*niesbi* 躡時), the initiates complete three circular revolutions through the azimuthal directions marked by the Earthly Branches.¹¹³ This is the final phase of the “stepping beyond” (*yue* 越) the “Earthly Net” (*digang* 地綱) and the “untying” (*sbi* 釋) of the Canopy of Heaven (*tianluo* 天羅).¹¹⁴

While the repetition of motions and incantations may be understood as an aspect of constancy in the ritual, these reiterations also signify transfiguration. The divinities of time and space are addressed in their transformative power: “The one who gives life to me” and “The one who cares for me”. The divinities who are summoned by their esoteric names also stand for Heaven and Earth, from whom the initiates request: “give me birth and give me life” (*sheng wo buo wo* 生我活我).¹¹⁵ The movement towards the middle point beyond the limits of space and time stands for the wish to attain constancy in yielding fidelity and thus ultimately to establish care, epitomised by Heaven and Earth in their impartial covering and carrying of all beings.

Constancy, virtue, and measured movement are attributes of both the Dipper and the Great Dao. These are enacted by the male and female initiates who, moving with these divine principles, embody their unifying principles and move beyond the polarity of gendered bodies of flesh.

Harmony

Crossing-over is a strictly regulated procedure that relies on several key concepts that serve as catalysts in the ritual process. One of these is “harmony” (*he* 和) or “good measure” that is seen in liturgical motions, as well as being invoked several times during the ritual. Harmony is presented as the characteristic of unification of the Threefold Primordial Life *Qi*, and is also understood as the principle underlying the unity of all beings in their embodiment of the Dao, whose workings unfold as a rhythmic pattern. The True One mirrors the unfolding of the Dao in all activities and takes “harmony as the measure” (*yi he wei liang* 以和為量).¹¹⁶ It is only by embodying the unity of the Dao that the True One can transmit its harmonious influence to the world. The symbols that are key to his correct measure are the numbers from one to ten, that in Daoist religion acquire a sacred status.¹¹⁷

In the Daoist classics, One is considered to be the starting point of all things. The Dao that pervades all beings can only be accessed in its unity, or its transformations through time, the pattern of which is most perfectly found in music.¹¹⁸ This is the harmony of the Dao that *Zhuangzi* says causes trepidation. The Dao is so dazzling that it can only be experienced in total stillness and by the spontaneous abandonment of all thought, or else by open concord with the Heavenly Order.¹¹⁹ Its ultimate fullness can only be apprehended as a unity that finds its expression through harmony.

The term “harmony” occurs in the ritual text for the first time in Act Eight (“The Four Lords”). When preparing for the incantation, the initiates intertwine their hands and face *Yin* (east northeast). The initiates put their wish for a union of the *Qi* of Yin and Yang into words, speaking in unison:

Together we respectfully cultivate the Dao and its *de*, we beg for a union of Yin and Yang in harmony; may the Life *Qi* flow all over us. May it render our subtle spirit consolidated (*gu* 固) in our bodies; may each of us attain no other transformations.¹²⁰

This incantation is addressed to divinities named after days of the sexagenary cycle who are called “father” and “mother”. The same prayer to the divinities of time for the consolidation of *Qi* is offered in four acts (eight, ten, eleven and twelve). In this way, the coordinates of space and time through which the Dao rotates and measures all phenomena, and that are the principles of the unity of creation, are venerated as the emblem of the Dao.

It is during the equinoxes in the second and the eighth months that the *Qi* of Yin and Yang stand in equal relations, so it was probably no accident that the ritual was performed at this time,¹²¹ specifically at the new and full moon allegedly for six hours during a day and a night.¹²² Spring and autumn, therefore, at the beginning and end of the life cycle, are the emblematic seasons for the ritual. This supports Maspero’s theory that this rite was a version of the popular spring and autumn festivals of antiquity.¹²³

It is important to take note of the fact that the notion of *du* (in *guodu*) crucial to the ritual, has a numerological dimension due to its meaning as “to go through a measurable series of things”. Considering the ubiquity of numbers in the *Regulations* it is hardly surprising to find that the ritual process of Crossing-over accords to the numbers that are the key to harmony and is executed and performed in a strictly measured way. One of the indicators of this procedure is that the number of repetitions of bodily actions, vocal enunciations, and mental exercises performed is often specified, creating a kind of a rhythm in the performance.

116 See *Zhuangzi*, 20:3, p.293: “When one takes harmony as one’s measure, then one can drift and rumble with the Ancestor of the myriad things. Then one becomes a being of the beings, but is not a mere being to the beings. How could then any evil be tied to him?” And *Ibid*, 22:3, p.325 “Virtue is being harmonious and responding”.

117 For the cosmic actions of the numbers see *Tai ping jing*: “The Heavenly Numbers start from One and end with Ten”. *Tai ping jing*, 40:76.

118 The association between music and good governance or morals is found in ancient mythological sources. See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1982), pp.55–151.

119 *Zhuangzi* 14:3, p.222–25 where the description of the Yellow Emperor’s performance of the piece “Lake of Union” (*xianchi* 咸池) ends with the words: “When listening to it, you do not hear its sound; if approaching near to it, you cannot see its form; it flows and fills completely Heaven and Earth; enfolds and penetrates all the six directions. You want to hear it, but cannot reach to it, therefore you are bedazzled”.

120 *Regulations*, 8:5b. Instead of the more common *jingshen* 精神 (in the two other similar incantations in Acts Six and Ten), this act has the combination *shi shen* 釋神 “liberating spirit”.

121 *Huainanzi*, 3:7, p.40. “In the eight month and the second month, the *Qi* of Yin and Yang is equal, day and night are divided equally, therefore *xing* and *de* are together at the gate”.

122 *Bianzhen lun*, 545c; and *Xiaodao lun*, in *Guang Hongming ji*, 152a.

123 Maspero, “Taoism,” p.534.

124 *Huainanzi*, 3:7, p.47.

125 “The correct measure is within the breast”, see *Liezi*, 5:3, p.63 and *Huainanzi*, 9:7, p.141. Charles Le Blanc gives a parallel translation of this passage from both sources, see Le Blanc, *Huai Nan Tzu*, p.91.

126 *Zhuangzi*, 24:3, p.374.

127 *Regulations*, 17:17b–17:18a.

128 *Ibid*, 9:5b.

129 *Yunji qiqian*, “Hundun,” 2:1a, Zhizi jicheng edition.

130 *Lunbeng*, “Tantian,” 7/105, Zhizi jicheng edition.

131 Or “sacred Dao and *bundun* are one”. See *Guiguzi*, DZ 671, HY 1025, Xia, “Benjing Yinfu,” 13a.

132 The *Zhuangzi* says: “De is harmony; and Dao is order. When there is nothing that De does not encompass, that is benevolence; when there is nothing that Dao does not order, that is propriety. When propriety is clear and the beings are close to each other, that is loyalty. When inside there is purity and fullness, there is heading back to inborn nature, that is music. When there is a sincerity in practice and bearing, as well as adherence to cultivation/form, that is ritual.” *Zhuangzi*, 16:3, p.242–43.

133 *Regulations*, 8.5a–b.

134 The text says: “Music is the harmony of Heaven and Earth. Ritual is the order of Heaven and Earth. When [they are] in harmony then the myriad beings are transformed. When [they are] in proper sequence then the myriad beings are [correctly] distinguished.” *Li ji*, 3:990.

Ideas concerning the sacredness of numbers can be found as early as the *Huainanzi* where in “olden times the *measure* (*du*) for reckoning of light and heavy arose out of the Dao of Heaven.”¹²⁴ Not only do we learn from the classical Daoist writings that the *Dao* is the source and essence of numbers, but also that the heart-mind (*xinzhong* 心中) is where true measure (*zhengdu* 正度) resides.¹²⁵ According to the *Zhuangzi*, “the human who takes harmony as his measure” is free from trouble and “the one who embraces *de*, is fused with Harmony, and in agreement with the world, is called the True One”.¹²⁶ The unification of male and female is thus embedded in a larger cosmological framework organised by *Qi* as a seasonal and numerological structure.

Integral Darkness

The transformation of the “people of flesh” comes about through the workings of the numinous *Qi* that follows the cyclical rhythm of gestation, engendering life. Thus, the initiates cultivate and honor the Dao of Heaven and Earth not only in thought and word, but also by the sacrament of bodily congress.

During congress, the sun and moon are said to come out of “obscurity” (*yaoyao* 窈窈) and then re-enter “darkness” (*mingming* 冥冥).¹²⁷ This is the primordial darkness that precedes Heaven and Earth and is the essence (*jing* 精) of the Dao. It corresponds to *bundun* 混沌, suggestive of darkness or obscurity and the rapid flow of water, and it is where the ritual-text says Yin and Yang are unified to form One; it is “integral darkness”. The meditation starts with Yin and Yang sitting and facing each other (Act Nine). They intertwine their fingers and place their hands on the top of their knees with Yin “carrying” and Yang “covering”. The hands are concealed and they direct their attention to the emblematic colors of the Three *Qi*: pure azure for Wushang, or the *Qi* of Heaven; pure yellow for Xuanlao, or Earth; and pure white for Taishang, or Water. The text declares: “the Three *Qi* together form a single *bundun*” (*gongwei yi bundun* 共為一混沌). It is like a chicken egg in five colours.¹²⁸

The *bundun* is compared “a cosmic egg” or a zygote that is at the same time the mysterious womb or valley that encompasses the multiplicity of all creation. The term *bundun* implies full potentiality, before the division of Heaven and Earth,¹²⁹ or the undivided state of Primordial *Qi*,¹³⁰ and is understood as the sacred Dao itself.¹³¹ This completion of *bundun* takes place in Act Nine in all likelihood to correspond to the nine gestation phases of the embryo as well as the number of stages in the transmutation of cinnabar.

In addition, the initiates repeatedly claim to be cultivating the “Dao and its *de*”. As we have seen above, *de* could here be understood as related to “care”.¹³² Thus, the initiates invoke care in an apotropaic prayer asking for all disasters and calamities in the eight directions to be extinguished.¹³³ Indeed, the sacramental bodily congress prescribed in the ritual-text unifies the Life *Qi*, which set Yin and Yang in motion, and ultimately generates harmony that purifies the world of all malevolent influences.

The Classic on Music says that the interactions between Heaven and Earth cause the hundred transformations and that “music is the harmony between Heaven and Earth”.¹³⁴ The act of congress is performed according to the numbers that define the harmonious and harmonising rhythm of the workings of the Dao. The initiates assume their correct positions embodying the Spirit Male and the Jade Female, corresponding to the Sun and Moon,

and direct their attention to the numinous *Qi* that flows on its primordial course affecting the regulative centres in their body. “Bridging” the polarities of the cosmos they meet at the Gates of Destiny and Life to receive the life regenerating *Qi*. The gate is a familiar emblem in many rites of initiation representing the threshold of beginning and end.

At the Gate of Destiny (*mingmen* 命門), the Spirit Male holds the Jade Female on both sides. The *Qi* of Yang circulates to the left, the *Qi* of Yin revolves to the right. Ascending, it reaches Great Clarity (*taiqing* 太清), descending it reaches Endless Depth (*wuxia* 無下), always travelling between the Nine Palaces, the Five Treasuries, and the Six Receptacles. Guide the flock of record-making spirits by summoning their names from the legal records so that they cannot but perish.

“May longevity reside in my body! Endow me with perfect immortality!”

Raising the heads, inhale the Life *Qi* three times with the nose; swallow it three, *five*, *seven*, and then *nine* times.

Yang says: “Dao of Heaven!”

*Yi*¹³⁵ says: “Dao of Earth!”

Then, enter the Gate of Life (*shengmen* 生門). Inside, command half a head.¹³⁶

The flow of the Life *Qi* is determined by the sacred numbers that generate transformation and life. Thus the initiates fall into the rhythm of the Dao to allow its *Qi* to suffuse them. In other words, they embody the transformation instituted by the Dao by resonating with its process of “measuring” and thus partake in its limitlessness.¹³⁷ Yang asks Yin to bestow her *Qi* on him so that the pairing of *Qi* might take place, but it is the female initiate who confirms that “heaven covers and earth carries” and asks for the Life *Qi* to be granted to both disciples.¹³⁸ She appears as the direct link to the *Qi* of the Dao.

While in Act Nine the appearance of the *bundun* takes place as the result of meditation and shows itself as a vision that fills the minds of the initiates, the haptic exercises lead to “actual” unity of the bodies of Yin and Yang. Thus in Act Seventeen when bodily congress has taken place, the ritual-text announces:

The Bodies of the Minister and Handmaiden are fused together (*bundun* 混沌) and have become One. Its name is: Taokang 桃康.¹³⁹

Taokang is the divinity who governs the Gate of Destiny, resides in the Palace of the Cinnabar Field, and governs the essence or *jing* 精.¹⁴⁰ In the Scripture of the Yellow Court, *Qi* and *jing* are conceived as transmuting into each other, or rather being related in complementary qualities, namely airy and liquid.¹⁴¹ Hence the initiates announce the fusing of their primordial essences, re-setting and putting into motion the process of gestation. This is an enactment of the natural process of gestation, conceived as a genesis that transforms *qi* into *essence*, and then into the subtlest form of being, spirit.¹⁴²

Thus, in the final act, the initiates proclaim their intention to return to the flow and have themselves thus restored (*gui*) to the Dao, through merit acquired by the veneration of the Regulators of Yin and Yang and the harmonious union of *Qi*. Hence, in the final act they chant:

We obey our master so-and-so to assist us in Crossing-over. Together we respectfully practice the Dao and its *de*; we beg for a harmonious union of Yin and Yang; we ask for Long Life without end. We pledge to use this merit and *de* so as to return to the flow. We restore our self, return our spirit,

135 This *yi* 乙 may be a mistake for *yin*.

136 *Regulations*, 17:15a–b.

137 This resonates with *Zhuangzi* 22:3, p.324: “in depth abyssmal like the ocean, so high that its end is also its beginning; it carries and measures all beings without error”.

138 *Regulations*, 17:14b.

139 *Ibid*, 17:15a.

140 Maspero, “Taoism,” p.537, n.104.

141 In the *Taijing jing* this can be found at 11:50a; 12:3b, 12:10b and is corroborated in other sources including both *Huangting jing* and *Yunji qiqian* according Isabelle Robinet, see *Meditation*, n. 101.

142 *Regulations*, 6:3b–4a.

143 *Sanzun* or the *sanbao* 三寶 are the Dao, the Texts and the Master; see Robinet, “La revelation,” p.201.

144 *Regulations*, 20:23a–b.

and return our destiny to the Great Dao. We, head and body, cast ourselves onto the Earth (*toudi* 投地). Of our own accord we return. The Three Lords (*sanzun* 三尊)¹⁴³ support this merit and *de* and return us to the flow.¹⁴⁴

The order of events in the incantation indicates a chain of causality from the “harmonious unification of the Three *Qi*” to the “acquiring of merit” and the “returning” or “restoring”. By venerating these aspects of the sacred, harmony is established. It is the basis of quiescence, necessary for mirroring the *body* by the light of Primordial *Qi*, thus restoring it to the Dao. The initiates are restored to the Dao as “seed people”; in this vision the entire human being is integrated and redeemed to the sacred. The fusion of Yin and Yang, or male and female, or Heaven and Earth, is a Crossing-over to a state of being that is analogous to the primordial darkness in which all distinctions of male and female have an embryonic or seed-like vitality and invisibility.

Conclusion

No ritual can be understood without reference to the ethical and cosmological vision it entails. In this case, the ethical vision is based on the presence of evil with its malevolent influences, and the resulting quest for purification, transformation, regeneration and redemption. By situating the terminological register and metaphors of the ritual within the ritual plot as well as the tradition as a whole, their significance and the related liturgical performance becomes intelligible.

As we have seen, the process of regeneration may be read as a response to the question of how one can recover the concealed presence of Dao—a problem that is framed by the fragmentation of the cosmos into the polarities of Heaven and Earth, Yang and Yin, and male and female. This regeneration evolves through three different figures: those who first appear as people of flesh (“father”) emerge transformed as true ones (mother”) to proclaim their aspiration to become seed people (“child”). The unfolding of the ritual is itself a process of ethical purification with the central theme of remembering or cherishing the ancestors. Out of which, in turn, follows the importance of sincerity, compassion and wisdom, resolving conflict dispelling confusion, and restoring the Dao.

Hence, the theme of regeneration is ethical, and trust or sincerity is the precondition for overcoming sins and evil. This is achieved by trusting in the goodness of an inborn human nature, or the nature of the Great Dao, that is restored by apprehending its harmony and order. Harmony relates to the initiates’ according with the unifying pattern of the Dao, and order to understanding and true vision. Harmony and order possess the complementary attributes of the divine Father and Mother, namely compassion and wisdom, and form the heart of the Crossing-over.

However, it is only through love for the Dao, conceived as the natural force that connects all parts to the whole, that the initiates can be reunified with it. The emblem of this union is the Child of Transformation, their only means to repay what is owed to their ancestors. In other words, those who die live on, in the form of the Child, in the heart-mind of their posterity. The initiates summon the memory of the ancestors whose covenant with the sacred was the very precondition for life, and at the same time remember their inborn nature as that of the luminescent Life *Qi*. In this sense, the transformation takes the form of remembering with the connotations of love or care; these together are reminiscent of filial piety. Thus the initiates achieve the right to receive the Dao from their love for the Dao.

Thus, the ritual of bridging enacts the sublation of past and future into the present of the revelation of the Dao, the three temporal terms being parallel with the people of flesh, the seed people and the true ones, who are emblematic of the eternal flow of *Qi*, or regeneration itself. The constancy of the eternal flow in all temporal manifestations is the panacea against the vicissitudes of time and it is, in turn, by the embodiment of temporal limits that the illusion of time can be dispelled. Thus, embodying the Dao means regeneration by the Dao. As noted above, the criticism that the ritual violated “peoples’ sense of shame” originally came from the Buddhist side, with the intention to suggest that Daoists were indulging in abominable and immoral practices; moreover, both within the Daoist tradition and in modern times, the ritual has also been perceived as antinomian and destructive of good social mores—in its overt, albeit religious use of sexuality. However, since those who attain full mastery of the Dao come to an understanding that transcends all limitations and apparent contradictions, thus encompassing even the “most lowly appearances” (as the *Zhuangzi* makes abundantly clear), it is no surprise that one stream of the Daoist tradition should have developed a public rite of purification that puts the traditionally private at centre stage.

Thus, what at first sight may have appeared to some commentators as a shameful act was one symbol of Crossing-over within the complex ritual. The Crossing-over was thus to be understood as a transformation of an individual of unclear destiny, marred by sin and mortality, into a member of a community bound for immortality. The individual, shaped and guided by a master as a representative of the tradition, was groomed to fulfill an institutional role.

One can readily imagine that the performance of such an intricate and precisely prescribed ritual must have required long-term preparation, complete concentration and a self-effacing attitude. To transform the sexual act from that of a common mortal into a significant and elevating exercise by performing it in strict accordance with correct ritual procedure turned an activity typically believed to be causing the depletion of *Qi*, into a remedial practice for the purpose of achieving immortality.

The sexual component must not be taken out of its ritual context; I suggest that it is only possible by looking at all of the ritual components together and setting them within the tradition as a whole, to come to a clearer historical understanding of the purpose and significance of this complex event. Making the sexual contact between the couple public ensured that it was carried out according to specified rules taught by the spiritual masters of the community. Spontaneous and private intimacy was transformed into a controlled and public event, a subordination in thought and deed to the ideals of the community; thus, a personal intimate act became a public ceremony.

This strenuous ritual sanctified the intimate bonding of the couple and their connection to the community. At the same time, the initiation of new members of the community symbolised the perpetuation of the group and its regeneration through new members. The public union of Yin and Yang highlighted the mirroring and response of the community and the cosmos. The private sexual encounter was transformed from a spontaneous act of individuals into a strictly ordered public liturgical performance, its plot structure mimicking and embodying the narrative of the tradition and transcending the personal. This established the bodily congress as an intrinsic component of the sacred, purging it of its individual characteristics while setting out to purify and elevate it as a bridge of shared commonality, an act of belonging to the community within the restored presence of the Dao.

A Summary of the Ritual-text

Introduction

The introduction specifies preconditions for the ritual with bathing, fasting and burning incense required of the initiates. Obeisance and confessions to the master are prescribed.

(1) Entering the Quiet Chamber (rujing 入靖)

The initiates assume their proper positions within the ritual space, proclaiming their aims and the intention of the ritual in a prescribed dialogue with their master.

(2) Visualising Officials and Soldiers (cun li bing 存吏兵)

The initiates assume prescribed ritual gestures and visualise their spiritual helpers who report to them one by one.

(3) Concentrating on White Qi (si baiqi 思白氣)

This act provides guidelines for the visualisation of the White *Qi*.

(4) Concentrating on the Ruling Qi (si wangqi 思王氣)

This act provides guidelines for the visualisation of the *Qi* of the Five Seasons, and their inhalation and ingestion.

(5) Swallowing [Qi] of the Three Palaces (yan sangong 咽三宮)

This act is concerned with the inhalation and ingestion of the *Qi* of the Three Palaces (Heaven, Earth and Water) accompanied by a prayer for the bestowal of the gift of Life to them.

(6) Presenting the Petition (qi shi 啟事)

After visualising and summoning a great assembly of divinities by the reading of their titles from a long list, assuming prescribed ritual gestures, the initiates recite the prayer for Long Life and attainment of the state of Seed People. (All other invocations in the ritual are variations of this basic prayer).

(7) The Earthly Net (diwang 地網) and Heavenly Canopy (tianluo 天羅)

The initiates recite a variation of the invocation to the divinities who rule the Earthly Net and Heavenly Canopy with prescribed ritual gestures.

(8) The Four Lords (sizun 四尊)

The initiates recite a variation of the invocation to the Four Lords with prescribed postures and ritual gestures.

(9) Visualising and Concentrating (cunsi 存思)

The initiates perform a meditation, and visualise *hundun* 混沌 according to guidelines with prescribed postures and ritual gestures.

(10) The Ten Divinities (shishen 十神)

The initiates concentrate on each of the Ten Divinities by recalling their names. This act finishes with a variation of the invocation addressed to them, offered first by the master and then by the initiates.

(11) Pairing Jia (pei jia 配甲)

The initiates call out the twelve names of the Lord and a variation of the invocation is addressed to them.

(12) The Five Spirits (wushen 五神)

The initiates summon the Five Spirits by concentration on their names, which have been taught to them by the master, the disciples address them by reciting a variation of the invocation.

(13) The Eight Living [Qi] (ba sheng 八生)

The traditional annual dance of the Dragon and Tiger is performed in eight positions. The action is introduced by the master with a variation of the invocation and the act closes with a joint recitation of a variation of the invocation.

(14) Untying, Tying & Consuming (jie jie shi 解結食)

The master unties the girdles of the initiates' clothes, and ties up and spreads their hair; he is aided by “announcers” (*gaozhe* 告者) and “wise ones” (*xianzhe* 賢者).

(15) The Nine Palaces (jiugong 九宮)

The initiates concentrate on the Five Treasuries of the body; using their fingers and toes, the transformative number nine is represented in various gestures performed by the man and woman together; and the transformative energies of the Five Regulators (water, wood, metal, earth, and fire) are summoned with invocations. In addition the names of the trigrams of the *Yijing* and the magical number five are invoked.

(16) Crossing-Over (du 度)

1. In an intricate set of exercises the initiates first massage each other's heart region with their feet while standing and lying down respectively and later massage the region from the chest to the belly with their hands while holding each other's head. From time to time they recite a short invocation asking for the help of the divinities in Crossing-over.
2. This section provides guidelines on how to visualise the *Qi* of the Three Palaces and shift it around the body while reclining.
3. This section provides guidelines outlining a meditation that envisions the shifting of the *Qi* through the Treasuries of the body.
4. While chanting the names of the three main divinities, the man massages the woman from head to feet and touches the area below the Cinnabar Field and the “Gate of Life”. Invocations are chanted calling each other “divine man” and “jade woman” and praying in turn for the transformative *Qi* to be bestowed upon them.

(17) His and Hers Incantation Method (jia yi zhufa 甲乙咒法)

This act starts with proclamations by the initiates wishing to serve as Heaven and Earth respectively, followed by an apotropaic incantation by the master. They recite the names of the Three *Qi*, concentrate on them, and chant a variation of the invocation calling out to the divinities Taokang and Zidan. They visualise the circulation of the *Qi* through the body, then repeat a short version of the invocation asking for Long Life, inhaling and swallowing *Qi* according to the pattern of three, five, seven and nine. After each of the initiates call out for the Dao of Heaven and Earth to be enacted the man penetrates of the Gate of Life halfway. This is followed by more invocations and visualisation of divinities, at which point a full penetration takes place. The man then withdraws from the Gate of Life. Next, the divinities of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches are honored, and more *Qi* is inhaled

and swallowed. The initiates then massage their partner's heart area with the feet while changing positions to stand and lie down respectively. This is part of a series of actions where the initiates step around each other and massage the heart area with the feet, assuming positions to match the movements of the Dipper. This act closes with a series of invocations completing the Twenty-Four *Qi*.

(18) *Returning Divinities* (huan shen 還神)

This act provides guidelines outlining a meditation for returning divinities to their respective places of residence within the bodies of the practitioners.

(19) *The Ruling Qi* (wangqi 王氣)

This act starts with the initiates rubbing each other's face and body with both hands. It unfolds as an eidetic device for the visualisation of the Five Regulators with their respective colours, seasons, and other markers. It includes a visualisation of the circulation of *Qi* through the body's important centres.

(20) *The Child of Transformation* (huaner 迴兒)

1. The Child of Transformation starts with the male initiate taking hold of his right foot from behind his left leg and revolving on the ground. Together the initiates then revolve on the ground with their feet opposite each other bending and stretching their legs. During the exercise they quietly recite the names of the Three *Qi*.
2. Cutting Death consists of complex actions that are performed separately and together that mirror each other's actions while their gaze is directed to particular parts of the body. After various haptic exercises and revolutions on the ground, they chant a variation of the invocation.
3. Stepping on the Hours is performed by the initiates pacing around each other and invoking the divinities of the Dipper to make three revolutions. It closes with a variation of the invocation.
4. Thanking Life is performed to accept Life. With intertwined hands the initiates and the master repeat their pledges of intention, as well as the apotropaic formula of purification of the world. They revolve to complete the circuit of the twelve hours.
5. Speaking of Merit is a short summary repeating the petition of Act Six, with a variation of the invocation. In the written form of the ritual-text, space is provided for the signatures of the participants indicating that this may be used as a written formulary of the ritual. The ritual ends with an apotropaic formula.

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