

The Opposition of Celestial-Master Taoism to Popular Cults during the Six Dynasties

THE EXPLANATORY MODELS

When the Taoist Celestial-Master religion (*T'ien-shih tao* 天師道; literally, “the Way of the Celestial Masters”) began to proliferate in southern China in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, it also began compiling large numbers of scriptural texts to systematize its theological and liturgical teachings.¹ These Taoist scriptures strongly criticized the popular sacrificial cults that promoted worship of demons and divinities 鬼神, as well as of the insatiable spirits of the dead who entered into and spoke through spirit-mediums 巫. In this article I deal in particular with the following scriptures of this type:

Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens (*San-t'ien nei-chieh ching* 三天內解經, referred to below as the *Three Heavens Scripture*)²;

One Hundred Eighty Precepts Spoken by the Lord Lao (*Lao-chün pai-pa-shih chieh* 老君百八十戒, referred to as *The 180 Precepts*)³; and

Lu Hsiu-ching 陸修靜 (406–477), *Master Lu's Abridged Codes for the Taoist*

¹ In general, for the early history and organization of the Celestial Masters, see Ch'en Kuo-fu 陳國符, “Nan-pei ch'ao T'ien-shih tao k'ao ch'ang-pien” 南北朝天師道考長編, *idem*, *Tao-tsang yüan-liu k'ao* 道藏源流考 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1963), pp. 308–69; T'ang Ch'ang-ju 唐長孺, “Wei Chin ch'i chien pei-fang T'ien-shih tao te ch'uan-po” 魏晉期間北方天師道的傳播, *idem*, *Wei Chin Nan-pei ch'ao shih-lun shih-i* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1983), pp. 218–32; Masayoshi Kobayashi, “The Celestial Masters under the Eastern Jin and Liu-Song Dynasties,” *Taoist Resources* 3 (1992), pp. 17–43; Sawa Akitoshi 澤草敏, “Gotōceidō seiken no soshiki kōzō” 五斗米道政權の組織構造, in *Dōkyō bunka kenkyūkai* 道教文化研究會, eds., *Dōkyō bunka e no tenbō* 道教文化への展望 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppan, 1994), pp. 131–52; Terry F. Kleeman, *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1998), pp. 61–85.

² [*Cheng-t'ung tao-tsang* [正統] 道藏 (1445; rpt. Shanghai, 1923–1926), text no. 1196, following numbering in Weng Tu-chien 翁獨健, comp., *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature* 道藏子目索引, Harvard-Yenching Inst. Sinol. Index Ser. 25 (Peking: 1925; hereafter cited as *HY*).

³ Preserved in the work titled *Scriptures of the Most High* (*Tai-shang Lao-chün ching-lü* 太上老君經律 (*HY* no. 785).

*Community (Lu hsien-sheng tao-men k'o-lieh 陸先生道門科略, referred to as Master Lu's Codes.*⁴

Moreover, I include such problematical texts as *The Hsiang-erh Commentary to the Lao-tzu (Lao-tzu hsiang-erh chu 老子想爾注; below, Hsiang-erh)* and *The Scripture of the Precepts and Codes Taught by the Celestial Master from the Texts of the Law of Correct Unity (Cheng-i fa-wen T'ien-shih chiao-chieh-k'o ching 正一法文天師教戒科經; below, Precepts and Codes)*, including the internal section titled "Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Tao 大道家令戒",⁵ where Celestial-Master antagonism towards popular sacrificial cults is also a common theme. Based on materials from the texts just mentioned, we may start merely by stating, as have others, that the new Celestial-Master religion "defined itself in contrast to the popular religious cults."⁶

For instance, in the *Hsiang-erh* we read:

The correct law of heaven does not consist in sacrifices and prayer cults. The *tao* therefore prohibits such practices by severe penalties 道故禁祭饑禱祠, 與之重罰. Sacrifice and prayer are considered heresies 祭饑與邪同.⁷

Furthermore, the *Three Heavens Scripture* claims that in 142 AD "the Lao chün who has newly emerged 新出老君" appeared to Chang Tao-ling 張道陵 and entrusted to him with the new "correct law of the three heavens 三天正法,"⁸ a main prohibition of which stipulated that "one must not make the people improperly worship other spirits and demons; and one must not make offerings of food and drink to demons."⁹

Scholars of medieval Taoism have attempted various explanatory models for this Taoist attitude. An especially influential one is that of Rolf Stein, who understood the Taoist opposition against popular religion as a strategy of syncretism so that the organized Taoist religion could sublimate the more dif-

fused content of popular worship in a better-controlled framework.¹⁰ But Stein's model is founded on a problematic interpretation, which considers that the negative attitude was not unique in itself, but simply an echo of the normative views of governing officials.¹¹ Presupposing a common ground between Taoism and popular religion, Stein thus concluded that the essential difference was simply one of degree.¹² In consequence, a clear line of demarcation between those cults accepted by Taoism and those of a popular or heterodox type were, in Stein's view, difficult to establish.¹³

In more recent studies of Celestial-Master Taoism, Michel Strickmann, Angelika Cedzich, Maeda Shigeki, Kobayashi Masayoshi, and Peter Nicker-son have attempted their own models of explanation concerning the distinction of Taoism from popular religion. They start where Stein left off, but ask the key question, "In what way was the Celestial-Master religion in fact new?"

Strickmann calls the Taoist replacement of the "impure, carnivorous gods of popular religions" a remarkable revolution in Chinese religion.¹⁴ He links the Taoist rejection of bloody rites to its own religious ritual. Because people's requests were channeled to the celestial spirits, the Taoist ritual of "sending up petitions 上章" displayed a certain power over the spirits and demons of popular religions. The Taoist priests, Strickmann says, made every effort to reveal the true nature of those spirits of the dead whom the people worshipped as gods and who demanded food offering and blood sacrifices.¹⁵

Following Strickmann's viewpoint, Angelika Cedzich, studying the Taoist ritual laid out in the works titled *Concealed Instructions for the Ascent to Perfection (Teng-chen yin-chüeh 登真隱訣)*¹⁶ and *Manual of the 1200 Officials*

¹⁰ Rolf Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries," in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1978), p. 59.

¹¹ Stein, "Religious Taoism," p. 69, finds a parallel argument used for the proscription of popular sacrificial cults in *Record of Rites (Li-chi 禮記, sect. "Ch'ü-li" 曲禮)* and *HY* no. 1119. For instance, *Record of Rites* states: "A sacrifice that is not proper to offer, and which is yet offered, is called an excessive sacrifice. Excessive sacrifice brings no blessings" 非其所祭而祭之, 名曰淫祀, 淫祀無福.

¹² Stein, "Religious Taoism," p. 59.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60. Stein's conclusion does not mean that Taoism, "organized into a church, and popular religion, which is unorganized and diffuse," are the same thing. He argues that a clear line of demarcation between the two is difficult to establish.

¹⁴ Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sutra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1990), p. 93. See also, *idem*, "Therapeutische Rituale und das Problem des Bösen im frühen Taoismus," in Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans Hermann Schmidt, eds., *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien* (Würzburg, 1985), pp. 185-200.

¹⁵ Strickmann, "Consecration Sutra," p. 93.

¹⁶ *HY* no. 421.

⁴ *HY* no. 1119.

⁵ Scholarly views on the dating of *Lao-tzu hsiang-erh chu* and *Cheng-i fa-wen T'ien-shih chiao-chieh-k'o ching* range from late E. Han to the 5th c., or later; see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1997), pp. 29-65; Mugitani Kunio 麥谷邦夫, "Rōshi sōji chū ni tsuite" 老子想爾注について, *THGH* 57 (1985), pp. 75-107; and Kobayashi Masayoshi 小林正美, *Rikuchō Dōkyōshi kenkyū* 六朝道教史研究 (Toyko: Sobunsha, 1990), pp. 296-327.

⁶ Angelika Cedzich, "Ghosts and Demons, Law and Order: Grave Quelling Texts and Early Taoist Liturgy," *Taoist Resources* 4 (1993), p. 23.

⁷ Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤, *Lao-tzu Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng* 老子想爾注校證 (Shanghai: Ku-chi, 1991), p. 31.

⁸ Kobayashi, *Rikuchō*, pp. 328-36, discusses the theological meaning in Celestial-Master Taoism's new title for Lord Lao - "Lao-chün who has newly emerged."

⁹ *HY* no. 1196, *ch. A*, p. 6a.

(*Ch'ien-erh-pai kuan-i* 千二百官儀),¹⁷ goes further in explaining how the new Celestial-Master religion asserted its novelty by such opposition to popular sacrifices. She suggests that although the Taoists conceptually might not have been very different from the point of view of officialdom, they did provide a coherent doctrinal, organizational, and liturgical "mortuary cult," which successfully dispersed the widespread fear of the evil caused by the demons of the dead.¹⁸ For Cedzich as for Strickmann, it is largely owing to the Taoist ritual of sending petitions addressed to the appropriate celestial gods and ministries, and subject to bureaucratic rules and legal procedures, that the Celestial-Master priests were able to command vast numbers of "celestial officials, generals, and clerks 天官將吏" to absolve the unshriven souls of the dead and so avoid the affliction that the latter visited on their descendants in the form of illness and misfortune.¹⁹ The Taoist rejection of sacrifices to spirits and demons and their mediums, Cedzich underscores, was possible because of this liturgical reform.

In addition to what Strickmann and Cedzich call the liturgical revolution of the Celestial Masters, Maeda Shigeki's examination of early-Taoist divinities provides another marker for distinguishing Taoism from the other kinds of worship.²⁰ He suggests that Celestial-Master prohibitions of sacrifices in the fourth and fifth centuries did not entirely emanate from the ritual practices of Chang Tao-ling and his followers in the second century AD. He believes that it was also a change in their view of divinities that accounted for the negative attitude towards popular sacrifices. He gives as evidence the list of divinities seen in such fifth-century scriptures as *Ch'ien-erh-pai kuan-i* and *Demon Statutes of Nü-ch'ing* (*Nü-ch'ing kuei-lü* 女青鬼律),²¹ which may be regarded as the Taoist establishment's own hierarchy of gods. The names of these gods were recorded in the registers 籙 that the priests used in order to have the authority to command the gods to heal diseases and to control demons in the petitioning rituals. In this sense, the Celestial-Master religion regarded the worship of spirits and demons not included in its own hierarchy as belonging to "excessive cults 淫祀."²² In addition, Maeda suggests that the theological embellishment known

as "three heavens 三天" as given in the *Three Heavens Scripture* demonstrates the intentional manner in which the Celestial Masters adopted a systematic doctrine to reject and forbid the "other demons and spirits 他鬼神." In the *Three Heaven Scripture* excessive cults were condemned as deviant practices emanating from "the stale pneumas of the six heavens 六天故氣." In contrast, it is said that the newly emerged Lord Lao abrogated the age of decadence governed by the "six heavens," with its deviant practices of excessive cults, and reinstated the correct law of the three heavens.²³

More recently, Peter Nickerson has studied the Celestial-Master liturgical documents of petition in *Master Redpine's Almanac of Petitions* (*Ch'ih Sung-tzu chang-li* 赤松子章曆),²⁴ a scripture containing material from the movement dating back to the third to fifth centuries.²⁵ He points out that in the fifth century the social organization of Taoism was changing from that of a "sect," with priests and registered lay followers, to a "guild" of Taoist priests in the south. The consequence of this change was that the Celestial Masters had to begin to compete with mediums and diviners on the basis of the efficacy of their healing rituals.²⁶ While granting the existence of a conflict between Taoists and their competitors, and that Taoist priests attempted to suppress spirits of divination, Nickerson argues that in the face of the seemingly unequivocal prohibition against popular divination practices, the Celestial Masters nonetheless used certain of those same spirits and mantic principles for diagnosing illness.²⁷

In contrast to Stein's earlier conclusion that "between [the Taoists'] own practice and those of the prohibited popular cults there was not a difference of nature, but only of the degree, not of quality, but only of quantity,"²⁸ Nickerson emphasizes a certain kind of religious transformation, or reform, in Celestial-Master practices.²⁹ Like Strickmann and Cedzich, he argues that the otherworldly bureaucratic rules and procedures employed in the ritual of petitions provided Taoism with methods to subdue the minor spirits of divination and restrict the function of spirit-mediumism and divination to the diagnosis of maladies within their own liturgical framework. In his words, the priests of

²³ HY no. 1196, ch. A, p. 6.

²⁴ HY no. 615.

²⁵ Peter Nickerson, "Shamans, Demons, Diviners and Taoists: Conflict and Assimilation in Medieval Chinese Ritual Practice (c. A.D. 100-1000)," *Taoist Resources* 5 (1994), p. 47; Maruyama Hiroshi 丸山宏, "Shoitsu Dōkyō no jōshō girei ni tsuite - chōshōshō o chūshin toshite" 正統道教の上章儀禮について冢訟状を中心として, *TS* 68 (1986), p. 47.

²⁶ Nickerson, "Shamans, Demons, Diviners," p. 46. Indeed, a similar conclusion was made long ago by Hisayuki Miyakawa, "Local Cults around Mount Lu at the Time of Sun En's Rebellion," in *Facets of Taoism*, pp. 83-102.

²⁷ Nickerson, "Shamans, Demons, Diviners," p. 47.

²⁸ Stein, "Religious Taoism," p. 59. ²⁹ Nickerson, "Shamans, Demons, Diviners," p. 51.

¹⁷ Text preserved in *Teng-chen yin-chüeh* (HY no. 421) 3, pp. 14b-23b.

¹⁸ Cedzich, "Ghosts and Demons," pp. 27, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁰ Maeda Shigeki, "The Evolution of the Way of the Celestial Masters: Its Early View of Divinities," *Acta Asiatica* 68 (1995), pp. 54-67.

²¹ HY no. 789.

²² There are several translations of this term; see Terry Kleeman, "Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China," *AM* 3d ser. 7.1 (1994), p. 194, n. 30.

the Celestial Masters “turned them [the spirits of divination] into minor functionaries on the margin of the vast Taoist invisible bureaucratic pantheon of the other world.”³⁰ In short, Taoism is seen by Nickerson to incorporate into a bureaucratic structure and liturgical framework the spirits and demons of popular religion that originally were created by diviners for their own mantic purposes.³¹ Given the broad assimilation, the chief distinction of Taoism is that in curing illness and enhancing overall fortune one did not use divination or sacrificial rituals, but only the Taoist liturgical method of sending written petitions (subject to numerous bureaucratic rules) to the appropriate divine ministries.

As evidenced in this brief review of recent studies of the Celestial-Master movement in the fourth and fifth centuries, scholars have in general identified the important innovation as the bureaucratic and organizational framework underscored in Taoist liturgy. In this sense the Celestial Masters distinguished themselves from the cults of popular religion.

Furthermore, as a corollary to the above, it should not be thought that the Celestial-Master strictures, or codes 科, against the gods of popular cults had no basis in the movement’s new theology and ethics. If the Taoist opposition to popular religion simply shared the state-official view concerning restriction of sacrificial cults and, therefore, was not motivated by any of its own theological concerns, then the Celestial-Master priests could be described as ritual specialists without any concern for less immediate theological issues. In contrast to earlier scholars’ focus on ritual, this article reexamines the change of theological discourse that appeared in the Celestial-Master scriptures. Directing our attention to the theological and ethical innovations underlined in the codes of behavior will lead us to an integration of different fundamental aspects of the religious life, and of theology and practice, including discourse concerning the nature of the *tao*, the precepts of the *tao*, and the theology of the petition-sending ritual – areas of religion avidly practised by followers of the Celestial-Master religion during the fourth and fifth centuries.

POPULAR CULTS IN THE SOUTH: A CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES

The Celestial-Master scriptures and the Taoist distaste for blood sacrifice both reflect important contemporaneous issues. The *Three Heavens Scripture* describes the religious situation of the general populace as one of decadence: there was “intermingling of humans and demons 人鬼交錯.”³² In response,

the scripture announced a new age of the “three heavens” to be established by the “newly appeared Lord Lao” through Chang Tao-ling, who was called the “Master of the grand dark capital, true unity, pneuma-pacification, and the three heavens 太玄都正一平氣三天之師.” The new age of “three heavens” was to replace that of the “six heavens,” predominantly characterized by the practices of excessive cults.

It should not be assumed that the condemnation of sacrificial cults in these scriptures was simply notional, with no basis in a systematic theology. Strict renunciation of the prohibited popular cults was a prerequisite for conversion to Taoism. Evidences of such conversions tend to contradict Stein’s view that in this time people probably would convert to a Taoist church because it contained familiar elements.³³

For example, an item in *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Chen-kao* 真誥) describes a person named Hua Ch’iao 華僑, who accepted the Celestial-Master teachings. Prior to his conversion, his family had been devout followers of a cult of popular gods for generations 世事俗禱, and he often communicated with demons and spirits 頗通鬼神. However, when he converted to Taoism, his contact with the supernatural then ceased 鬼事得息.³⁴ Another example is that of Fan Po-tz’u 范伯慈, a faithful follower of popular cults 家本事俗. When he heard of the “pure covenant of the great *tao* 大道清約,” which required no sacrifices, he renounced his cult 乃棄俗事.³⁵ In *Master Lu’s Codes* the term “pure covenant 清約” means prohibition against popular cults:

One must not uphold the demons of excessive cults and heterodox teachings. Put an end to all types of magic and enter into a pure covenant with the parishioners such that priests are not to accept money [for carrying out sacrifices] and the spirits neither eat nor drink (that is, do not receive sacrificial offerings).³⁶

Indeed, in contrast to Stein’s notion of the ambiguity between the two religious practices, *Master Lu’s Codes* states clearly that the pure covenant urged the followers of Celestial-Master Taoism to cast out “the thousand spirits and ten thousand demons and all the [popular] gods 千精萬靈一契神祇, 皆所廢棄.” Here, the fact that Celestial-Master Taoism imposed a strict injunction upon its followers upon their joining fits the description of religious acts of conversion, again according to *Master Lu’s Codes*: “Before they converted to the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 50–51.

³² *HY* no. 1196 A, p. 5a.

³³ Stein, “Religious Taoism,” p. 59.

³⁴ *HY* no. 1010, ch. 20, p. 13b.

³⁵ Ibid. 12, p. 12b.

³⁶ *HY* no. 1119, p. 1b.

tao, devotees [of the Way of the Celestial Masters] were followers of popular cults who were possessed by demons to whom they offered sacrifices” 或先是俗身，負鬼祭饌，越入道法。³⁷

If at the historical beginning of the Celestial Masters in Han-chung 漢中 (just north of present-day Szechwan) we can find evidence of Taoist prohibitions against the worship of the spirits of the dead, then we must not suppose that such prohibitions dated to the fourth and fifth centuries suddenly arose on their own. In fact, in 215 Chang Lu 張魯, who had established a semi-autonomous state in Han-chung, surrendered to Ts'ao Ts'ao 操曹, and subsequently several tens of thousands of his followers and their families were resettled around the Yeh, Lo-yang, and Ch'ang-an regions.³⁸ Although Chang Lu's religious kingdom collapsed soon afterwards, recognizable elements of the movement continued to thrive in the Han-chung area and continued their religious practices.³⁹ A passage in *Hua-yang kuo-chih* 華陽國志 states that in 277 a certain Ch'en Jui 陳瑞 revived the “way of demons” 鬼道 and styled himself “Celestial Master” in southwestern Szechwan.⁴⁰ Ch'en Jui's religion clearly prohibited worship of other spirits 不奉他神. Only a ladle of wine and a fish 酒一斗魚一頭 were used in the rituals. The reason given for this religious practice is that Ch'en Jui's movement emphasized the supreme values of “freshness and cleanliness 資鮮潔.”

Such religious characteristics as “clarity and purity” and the prohibition of popular cults and sacrifices to demons of the dead are noticed also in a non-Chang sect of the Celestial Masters called the “Ch'ing-shui tao 清水道” of the Liu-Sung period (420–479 AD). Its origins and religious characteristics are as follows:

[The *Ch'ing-shui tao*] says that the Celestial Master had a slave who was illiterate and thus could not be converted by means of texts. When the Celestial Master was just about to ascend to heaven, he took pity on him for reverence. So he ordered the issue of a well of water for him to use in healing illness and contagious disease... Later, people continued in this

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6a. Cf. *HY* no. 421, ch. 2, p. 21: “This refers to persons who formerly adhered to popular demonic cults, but who were then converted to the truth” 謂人先事妖俗今棄正化。

³⁸ Tang, “Wei Chin ch'i chien pei-fang T'ien-shih tao,” pp. 218–32; Howard L. Goodman, *Ts'ao Pi's Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998), pp. 73–87; Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, p. 77.

³⁹ Howard L. Goodman, “Celestial-Master Taoism and the Founding of the Ts'ao-Wei Dynasty: The Li Fu Document,” *AMJ* ser. 7.1 (1994), p. 26; Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, pp. 79–80.

⁴⁰ *Hua-yang kuo-chih* 8, sect. “Ta-tung chi” (SKCS edn.; vol. 463, p. 210). Early Chinese historiographers referred to Chang Lu's Celestial-Master communities as adherents of the “way of demons.”

cult way and called themselves the *Ch'ing-shui tao*. On their day of vows and supplication, the festival of clarity and light, they have no chambers of the *tao*, no booths for feasts of consecration, no petitions, no talismans, no rites of offering – only a single urn of clear water, which they worship by burning incense. They say that the *tao* is in the water.⁴¹

The *Three Heavens Scripture* says that the sect was criticized as a “false method 非正法,” and not the Way of the Covenanted Authority of the Correct Unity of the Three Heavens 三天正一盟威之道 because it did not follow certain crucial aspects of practice and ritual prescribed by the “correct” Way of the Celestial Masters. Despite such differences, it is possible that they shared common ground in seeking to transcend the existing popular cults. Perhaps this common ground underlined the basic beliefs of the earliest Celestial Masters and persisted in the later period. In an attempt to extend that practice, Celestial-Master Taoism was implementing a movement of religious reform to be carried out among the general populace in the south when it began to proliferate there in the fourth century. Again we come to Strickmann's remark: “From the beginning, Taoist priests had been at pains to reveal the true nature of those spirits of the dead whom the people benightedly worshipped as gods.”⁴² It would not be difficult to imagine that the observance of the excessive cults among the general populace had become a major issue for the newly arrived Taoist sect in the south.

Ko Hung's 葛洪 (283–343) *Inner Chapters of the Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Pao-p'u tzu nei p'ien* 抱樸子內篇) shows the extent of the practice of popular cults with blood sacrifices to spirits and demons during the Eastern Chin (317–419) prior to the Celestial Masters.⁴³ He said that in his time “there were hundreds of cults of demons; animals were killed and [spirits of the dead] ate their fresh blood” 又諸妖道百餘種，皆煞生血食。⁴⁴ Basing himself upon the *fang-shih* 方士 tradition, Ko Hung criticized those sacrificial cults of spirits and demons as perverse and heterodox because, while they demanded the inappropriate actions and great expense of mediums, they could not cure illness.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Ko Hung's criticisms also extended to the popular cult of spirit-mediums and divination:

⁴¹ *HY* no. 1196, ch. A, p. 7; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 219.

⁴² Strickmann, “Consecration Sutra,” p. 93.

⁴³ *HY* no. 1177.

⁴⁴ *Pao-p'u tzu nei p'ien* 9, in Wang Ming 王明, *Pao-p'u tzu nei p'ien chiao-shih* 抱樸子內篇校釋 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1985), p. 173.

⁴⁵ See Chi-tim Lai, “Pao-p'u tzu and the Fang-shih Tradition,” *Chinese Studies in History* (forthcoming).

People neglect the help that medicine can bring, but devote themselves solely to deceptions of prayers and sacrifices. Prayers are made incessantly 祈禱無已; divinations are requested tirelessly 問卜不倦 Spirit-mediums 巫祝 expound madly on maleficent influences, but the dangers and crises of illness are just the things they know nothing about.⁴⁶

Faced by a similar religious environment in the south, the author(s) of the *Three Heavens Scripture* also offered criticism of the widespread observance of popular cults of sacrifices officiated by "physicians" and mediums 醫巫: "Singing and dancing to the music of drums and strings, they slaughtered and cooked the six domestic animals, then made oblations and sacrifice to the deviant forces and the unholy dead" 絃歌鼓舞,烹殺六畜,酌祭邪鬼.⁴⁷

In view of the evidence that the observance of sacrificial cults of the spirits of the dead was a common religious phenomenon in the fourth and fifth centuries in the south, it can be readily imagined that the organized and systematic opposition of the Celestial Masters to excessive cults, indeed, not only reflected the gravity of the crisis and the challenge the Taoist sect faced, but also showed its sectarian view in the codification of its own theology and faith in the form of scriptural texts. As Maeda Shigeki states it, "Of course, the Way of the Celestial Masters also had its divine hierarchy of what were regarded as legitimate gods meriting worship that had been established in *Ch'ien-erh-pai kuan-i*, and the target of its attack was primarily the gods of popular cults."⁴⁸

THE CELESTIAL MASTERS: A NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH

In this section we seek to determine the theological basis upon which the medieval Celestial-Master viewpoint against popular cults was built. Based on rich evidence in the following Taoist religious texts we come to understand how the movement gained a new and different religious basis when it codified its beliefs: the *Hsiang-erh*, the *Three Heavens Scripture*, *Precepts and Codes*, *The 180 Precepts*, and *Master Lu's Codes*.

The Nature of the tao

As is well known, a major religious practice of the Celestial Masters was the recitation of the *Five-thousand Character Text*, namely, the *Tao-te ching* 道德

經. At one point in the *Three Heavens Scripture* we read:

Life is valuable. Those with hearts to hold this truth should memorize the *Five-thousand Character Text*. This scripture leads one to maintain the *tao* and to achieve a lengthy existence beyond both life and death. The ultimate source of the *tao* resides in this scripture.⁴⁹

To be sure, the interpretation of the *Tao-te ching* text and the understanding of the nature of the *tao* itself, both as later rendered in the scriptures of the Celestial Masters, were not the same as that intended in the ancient *Tao-te ching*, or in the Ho-shang-kung 河上公 and Wang Pi 王弼 commentaries. In early Taoism, Lao-tzu is deified as "Lord Lao" (Lao-chün 老君) and, more importantly, as the hypostasis of the *tao*. With reference to the relationship between the two, Stephen Bokenkamp writes, "Lord Lao is the deified Lord Lao, the Dao is Lord Lao. Through the Laozi, the book of the deified Lord Lao, the Dao thus speaks directly to humans."⁵⁰

In the *Three Heavens Scripture*, for example, the primordial *tao* is said first to have begun to act in the world by means of the division of the *tao* into three pneumas 三氣: mystery (the abstruse, or dark) 玄, the primal 元, and inauguration 始, from which heaven, earth, humanity, and water were formed.⁵¹ *Admonitions for the Families of the Great Tao* also states that "the *tao* gave birth to heaven. Heaven gave birth to earth. The earth gave birth to humans. All were born of the three pneumas [of the *tao*]."⁵² The *Hsiang-erh* states, "The pneumas of the *tao* constantly ascend and descend, active in heaven and earth, within and without."⁵³ In brief, the pneumas of the *tao* activate all life and provide the motive force behind existence.⁵⁴

A unique characteristic of the Celestial-Master Taoist scriptures, one that distinguished itself from the popular sacrificial cults to the spirits of the dead, was the coherent emphasis upon the hypostasis of the *tao* and the activities of the *tao* in the world. In essence, the *tao* in its still undifferentiated, fecund fullness is related to the concepts of "non-being" (*wu* 無), "spontaneity" (*tzu-jan* 自然) and "one, or unity" (*i* 一), but the *tao* cannot be given a shape or im-

⁴⁹ HY no. 1196, ch. A, p. 10a; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 224.

⁵⁰ Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 39. *Three Heavens Scripture*, ch. A, p. 2b, says, "Lao-tzu is Lord Lao. Lord Lao transforms and the pneumas took shape as the heavens, earth, humanity and all beings."

⁵¹ HY no. 1196, ch. A, p. 2b. See also *Ta-tao chia ling-chieh* in HY no. 788, p. 12a: "The mystic pneuma forms heaven, the inaugural pneuma forms earth, and the primal pneuma forms the *tao*."

⁵² HY no. 788, p. 12a.

⁵³ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Wang, *Pao-p'u tzu nei-p'ien chiao-shih*, p. 172.

⁴⁷ HY no. 1196, ch. A, p. 4; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 213.

⁴⁸ Maeda, "Way of the Celestial Masters," p. 59.

age.⁵⁵ So defined, the pneumas of the *tao* in heaven and earth are not seen, because they are clear and subtle 清微.⁵⁶

Non-being, spontaneity, and unity, as underlined in this creative *tao* are closely connected to another important Celestial-Master concept, that of “upright and correct (*cheng* 正),” as opposed to “deviant and perverse (*hsieh* 邪).” The “correct law” (*cheng-fa* 正法), or “correct unity” (*cheng-i* 正一), of the Celestial Masters states that “The *tao* prohibits the practice of sacrifice and prayers by severe penalty 道故禁祭餼禱祠” and “Those who possess the *tao* will not stay where there are offerings of foodstuffs or praying at popular shrines” 有道者不處祭餼禱祠之間.⁵⁷

The reason for the prohibition is that the Celestial-Master teachings about anything at all otherworldly stemmed from, and in a way were limited to, the basic belief that the *tao* has no shape or physical image. Thus, the *Hsiang-erh* says, “Hidden away in its subtlety, the *tao* has no shape or physical image. Since it cannot be seen or known, one can only follow its precepts.”⁵⁸ If one wanted to cherish and practice the *tao* with the correct law, then, as *Admonitions for the Families of the Great Tao* states, “One will not point to any shape and call it [the *tao*] 不欲指形而名之.”⁵⁹ Instead of pointing to shapes and calling them the *tao*, Celestial-Master thought considered that those who practice the *tao* should only honor Taoist precepts, regulate their bodies, and nurture their lives to seek blessings.

With reference to its distinct discourse on the *tao* itself and the practice of the *tao*, the “correct law” of the Celestial Masters could be contrasted to “deviant” teachings. In *Master Lu’s Codes*, deviance 邪 was specifically defined in this way: “Making sacrifices to demons and gods and praying for blessings is called deviance.”⁶⁰ Similarly, the *Hsiang-erh* says that “sacrifices and food offerings are a means of commerce with deviant forces.”⁶¹ In the *Three Heavens Scripture* the theological system of contrasting correct and deviant, or good and evil, is further organized in the representations of the old age of “six heavens” and the new age of “three heavens,” which aimed at a redefinition of the distinct religious identity of the “Way of the Celestial Masters” in contrast to the popular cults of sacrifices. The way in which the *Three Heavens* text contrasted the prac-

⁵⁵ *Ta-tao chia ling-chieh* (HY no. 788), p. 12a: “Without shape or image, [the Tao] is undifferentiated and yet spontaneously gives birth to the million species” 大道者無形無像混混沌沌自然生百千萬種; *San-t’ien nei-chieh ching* (HY no. 1196) A, p. 2a: “The *tao* originally rose with nothing prior to it. Dark and attenuated, vaporious and opaque, it had no cause” 道本起於無先溟溟鴻濛無有所因。

⁵⁶ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, pp. 17, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ HY no. 788, p. 16a.

⁶⁰ HY no. 1119, p. 8a.

⁶¹ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, p. 31.

tice of the *tao* to the worship of perverse spirits and demons is illuminating for our thesis:

Now, in the age of lower antiquity 下古, [people] place their faith in the deviant and discard truth, perverting the original *tao*. All sorts of ignorance abound, so that no one knows whence their misfortunes arise. Some even slaughter and cook the six sorts of domestic animal to supplicate empty nothingness. They chant, drum, and dance, making their entreaties with liquors and meats! Seeking life, they gain only death. The deviant ways that they practice ensure it... Through calculating and excessive prayer, they actually bring the destruction of their own bodies. The shortness of their life is truly lamentable.⁶²

To summarize, medieval Taoism’s opposition to popular cults was not the result of a common ground shared with governing officials.⁶³ On the contrary, the Taoist prohibitions were closely linked to the religion’s own theological system: since the *tao* arose from non-being, it has no shape or physical image.

A New Discourse on Religious Ethics: The Honoring of the tao and Maintaining the Precepts

In the face of the wide influence of popular cults in the south, Celestial-Master Taoism identified itself as the only religion that transmitted the “correct teaching” (*cheng-chiao* 正教) of the *tao* by only worshipping the Lord Lao and casting out “all the profane gods” 一切神祇, 皆所廢棄, 臨奉老君.⁶⁴ Besides, since the *tao* had no shape or physical image, Celestial-Master scriptures maintained that practice of the *tao* was not found in prayers and sacrifices, but only depended on one’s keeping the precepts (*tao-chieh* 道戒). Thus the *Hsiang-erh* states, “Since the *tao* cannot be seen or known, one can only follow its precepts.”

Master Lu’s Codes states, “Those who receive the *tao* internally grasp the precepts and regulations and externally take hold of the ways of rituals.”⁶⁵ Also, in the *Hsiang-erh* the importance of correctly keeping precepts is consistently treated as the standard way of practicing the *tao*. For example, “When people practice the *tao* and honor the precepts, the subtle pneumas return to them,” and “Only then should they gradually pursue the precepts of the *tao*, so

⁶² HY no. 1196, ch. A, p. 12; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 206.

⁶³ Kleeman, “Licentious Cults,” p. 202, similarly concludes that, “It would be wrong, however, to assume a commonality of interest between the state and Taoism in rejecting popular cults.”

⁶⁴ HY no. 1119, p. 8a.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7b.

that the *tao* of life does not depart from them.⁶⁶

The firm stance towards honoring and keeping the precepts of the *tao* in the Celestial-Master religion demarcated the domains of Taoism from those of popular sacrificial cults. For example, in *Precepts and Codes* we see precise references to the honoring of precepts as the standard way of distinguishing Taoism from popular cults:

Precepts and codes are to urge people on with [the hope] of long life, the preservation of the body, and the possession of life. The rich and noble cannot use offerings and bribes [to spirits and demons] to gain access to such things, nor can wine, meat, sacrifice, and prayers obtain such things from above. But for people of the *tao* and the wise, when they honor and keep precepts and codes, concentrate the spirit and exert the body, hard work will bring recompense, their good fortune will be the response 教戒者欲令人勸進長生全身保命。此非富貴者貨賂求請所能得通也，亦非酒肉祭禱所降致也。道人賢者奉敬教戒精專勤身，先苦後報，其福應也。⁶⁷

By the middle of the fourth and into the early-fifth century, there already existed sets of precepts and prohibitions that were transmitted and made explicit in the scriptures related to the Celestial Masters in the south.⁶⁸ A work titled *Tao-te tsun ching-chieh* 道德尊經戒 (*Precepts from the Venerable Scripture of Tao-te*) divides these precepts into nine prescriptive (“Nine Practices” 九行) and twenty-seven proscriptive ones 二十七戒。⁶⁹ *The 180 Precepts* contains a list of 180 behavioral injunctions meant especially for Celestial-Master functionaries.⁷⁰ In *Precepts and Codes*, twenty-five Taoist precepts are listed, and specific, emphatic links made to the precepts and rules against popular cults. In *Venerable Scripture of Tao-te* proscription number 6 instructs that one cannot practice false arts and in the mortal world point to shapes and call them the *tao* 戒勿為偽彼指形名道; and proscription no. 22 prohibits prayer and offering sacrifice to spirits and demons 戒勿禱祀鬼神. Again in *The 180 Precepts*, six of the precepts are devoted to the prohibition of sacrifices, divination, and me-

diumism. Precepts for the prohibition of sacrifices are: “Paying ritual homage to other demons and spirits (no. 113);” “making sacrifices to demons and spirits in order to seek good fortune (no. 118);” and “practicing vulgar cults (no. 144).”⁷¹

The necessity of keeping the precepts of the *tao* is closely linked to a system of moral examination sustained by a supernatural juridical system called the law of heaven, which was believed to have accounted ultimately for one’s receiving in recompense 報 good fortune or malefaction 殃. The *Hsiang-erh* states: “Keeping the precepts of the *tao*, we amass good deeds, which accrue merit and assemble our essences to form [internal] spirits. Once the spirits are formed, we enjoyed the longevity of Transcendence.”⁷² On the contrary, if persons do not practice the precepts, and they commit evil, the *tao* departs and they will die.⁷³ The underlying reason is that detailed records of one’s transgressions of the precepts and prohibitions are kept and judged by the celestial officials. The latter’s judgment on such transgressions would determine what kind of, and what intensity of, suffering and disease might occur before death.⁷⁴ For example, *Precepts and Codes* upheld this belief as follows:

There are celestial officers in the bodies of those who receive the *tao*. If [the latter] infuriate these celestial officers several times [because of their transgressions], [the celestial officers] will depart from their bodies. After that, the celestial masters return to the celestial heaven and report the sins. Sins will be counted up and then punishment applied to the offenders. When [sins appear] on the left tally [of the celestial officers], the persons’ numbers of days in their lifespans are decreased. When [sins appear] on the right tally, they will be put to death. When the evil that the persons have committed are still few in number, the punishment of their sins will only be upon their own person, but when their sins are many, the curse will linger on their offspring.⁷⁵

It is possible that the idea of a celestial legal administration where de-

⁶⁶ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, pp. 12, 19.

⁶⁷ *HY* no. 788, p. 9a.

⁶⁸ On the influence of Buddhist vinaya texts on Taoism in the third and fourth centuries, see Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” *IP* 66 (1980), pp. 129–35; Benjamin Penny, “Buddhism and Daoism in the 180 Precepts Spoken by the Lord Lao,” *Taoist Resources* 6 (1996), pp. 8–12.

⁶⁹ *Tao-te tsun ching-chieh* is preserved in *Tai-shang Lao-chün ching-lü* *HY* 785, pp. 1a–2a. See Jao Tsung-I, “Hsiang-erh chiu-chieh yü san-ho i” 想爾九戒與三合義, *idem*, *Lao-tzu Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, pp. 103–11.

⁷⁰ For studies of this text, see Maeda Shigeki 前田繁樹, “Rōkun setsu ippayaku-hachi-ju kai jo’ no seiritsu ni tsuite” 老君說一百八十戒序の成立について, *Tōyō no shisō to shūkyō* 東洋の思想と宗教 2 (1985), pp. 81–94; Penny, “The 180 Precepts,” pp. 1–16.

⁷¹ *HY* no. 785, pp. 8b–10a.

⁷² *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, p. 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 46; see also *HY* no. 788, p. 3b.

⁷⁴ See Anna Seidel, “Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts in Tombs,” in Akizuki Kan’ei 秋月觀暎, ed., *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* 道教と宗教文化 (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), pp. 79–122, on popular religion’s connection with the early-Taoist belief in a supernatural juridical system that accounts for one’s good fortune or suffering in the E. Han era.

⁷⁵ *HY* no. 788, p. 4a. The early-Taoist belief that sins bring punishment to one’s offspring is closely related to the late-Han concept of “inherited evils” [*ch’eng-fu* 承負] in *Tai-ping ching* 太平經 (*HY* no. 1093) 37, pp. 1–7. On *ch’eng-fu* in *Tai-ping ching*, see Barbara Hendrischke, “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the Taiping jing,” *East Asian History* 2 (1991), pp. 1–29.

tailed records of the living and dead were kept and judged was not a Celestial-Master invention, but simply adopted from the ubiquitous practices of pre-Han and Han funerary cults.⁷⁶ What was innovative, however, was the connection of one's illness, misfortune, and death with Taoist precepts. Thus a complete link was established between the practice of a set of ethics and a rationalized system of absolution and punishment, even resurrection, whose provenance was celestial. The *Hsiang-erh* clearly states, "One should keep the precepts in good faith and refrain from committing transgressions or contrary acts, for sins will be tallied up among the celestial officers" 守戒守信不為貳過。罪成結在天曹。⁷⁷ Moreover, in *The 180 Precepts* we read that "if you die holding to the precepts, you will transit through oblivion and your body will be transformed. You will serve as a heavenly official."⁷⁸

The popular sacrificial cults were generally understood as the worship of the spirits of dead, which, in turn, were thought of as demonic forces hostile to the living when their demands for food and other offerings were not satisfied. The precepts of the *tao* in Taoism's ethical and theological system, and their link with a celestial administration, were essentially different. All of this undermines Stein's thesis that there was not an essential difference between Taoism and the popular cults it attacked.

Although Taoism was forced to contend with threatening spirits and demons that were popularly believed to have lurked everywhere – in, among others, stones, trees, rivers, mountains, and wild animals, such things were considered a secondary phenomenon incompatible with worship and ethical correctness (in the Taoist liturgical context). Appeasing hungry spirits of the dead could not bring benefit to the person in distress in any sort of rationalized way. Based upon an ethical system of recompense and punishment that was relatively more rationalized, the scriptures of the Celestial Masters espoused the idea that the Taoist practice of precepts was the only real and correct means to "seek good fortune and drive away what is harmful." This new causal relationship between ethical practice and personal fortune established the theological ground for prohibiting food-offerings and prayers to spirits and gods of local shrines. In this regard the *Hsiang-erh* states, "The correct law of heaven does not consist in sacrifices and prayer cults. The *tao* therefore prohibits such practices by severe penalty. Sacrifices and prayer cults are considered here-

sies."⁷⁹ Likewise, the *Three Heavens Scripture* explains the "correct law of the three heavens" as prohibition against the popular cult of sacrifices: "The people were not to carry out wantonly excessive sacrifice to the demons and spirits that belong to other [shrines]."⁸⁰

The Theological Foundation of the Liturgical Act of Sending Petitions

As discussed above, recent studies that attempt to explain the innovations of medieval Taoism see the distinction in the "Taoist liturgical framework," also called "the Taoist mortuary cult," and treat it as an innovation in the history of Chinese religions. For instance, Kenneth Dean recently shows how the Taoist ritual of petitions successfully provides a bureaucratic procedure and universal pantheon that enables it to incorporate spirits and gods of local cults and divination into a structured liturgical framework.⁸¹ Angelika Cedzich also suggests that the Taoist mortuary cult is established upon a law of otherworldly bureaucratic and legal administration accessible to functionaries of this world, which, in contrast to sacrificial rituals, provides Taoism with the power to disperse the fear of demonic evil connected with death. In her words, "Taoist ritual was in its essence a bureaucratic act. Its purpose was the absolution of the unshriven souls of the dead through orderly legal procedures."⁸²

It may be true that by means of liturgical hierarchy the Celestial-Master ritual of sending up petitions enabled Taoism to cooperate with popular religion by subordinating nonhierarchized local gods and the mantic arts of popular religion within the bureaucratized Taoist rituals. Yet this explanation should not eclipse the distinctive theological ideas that lay beneath Taoist ritual and that also sustained its separate identity and its posture of superiority with respect to popular religion.

As shown above, Taoism rejected sacrifices and prayer to spirits and demons of the dead. By means of written petitions addressed to the appropriate celestial spirit-officials and subject to celestial rule, the Celestial-Master priests requested help from responsible celestial officials against the demons of illness and misfortunes and the spirits of the dead. By rejecting spirit-mediumism, the new religion restricted the average person's communication with the supernatural. Equally important, to preclude such offerings meant a change in popular religious mentality. Therefore, in Taoist ritual even the "pledge-offerings" (*hsin-*

⁷⁶ Wu Jung-tseung 吳榮曾, "Chen-mu-wen chung so chien-tao te Tung-han tao-wu kuan-hsi" 鎮墓文中所見到的東漢道巫關係, *WW* 3 (1981), pp. 56–63; Donald Harper, "Resurrection in Warring States Religion," *Taoist Resources* 5 (1994), pp. 13–28; Chi-tim Lai, "The Taoist Rite of Confession of Sins and Its Relationship with the *Tai ping jing*," paper presented at AAS, Chicago, 1997.

⁷⁷ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ *HY* no. 785, pp. 3b–4a.

⁷⁹ *Hsiang-erh chu chiao-cheng*, pp. 29, 31.

⁸⁰ *HY* no. 1196, ch. A, p. 6a.

⁸¹ Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1995), pp. 173–86.

⁸² Cedzich, "Ghosts and Demons," p. 31.

kuei (信託) of paper, ink, and writing brushes promised to the assisting celestial officials for their help were not meant as offerings to demons and spirits. They served merely as a *quid pro quo* payment of needed items, and also marked the achievement of merit 功 for having gained an effective result.⁸³

More importantly, at the level of theological innovation was a belief that the hundreds of celestial deities who descended during the ritual of petitioning were not deified human beings. As Isabelle Robinet says, "Unlike the popular saints, the [Taoist] gods, apart from Laozi himself, have no biographies except for purely ethereal, celestial, and impersonal ones."⁸⁴ The names of celestial deities listed on the registers were not human names. Instead, those celestial deities were explained as pure crystallizations of the three pneuma of the divine *tao*.⁸⁵ In *Master Redpine's Almanac of Petitions* we read:

The celestial officials who were asked to cure illness corresponded to the twenty-four deities that were located in the palaces of the human body. The hundreds of celestial officials, generals, clerks and soldiers were the crystallization of the three pneuma of Taoism in response to the situation 官將及吏兵人數，悉道家三氣，應事所感作也。Therefore, they were not humans born in heaven and earth 非天地生人也, but, formed because of the clarity and sincerity of the audience of the rituals, invited by the things of registers, and created by the pneuma of the *tao*, they as a result become celestial clerks and soldiers 所以氣作而成吏兵也 (emphasis added).⁸⁶

By insisting on the impersonal character of the hundreds of celestial deities addressed by the Celestial-Master priests, the *Three Heavens Scripture*, compiled in the face of flourishing popular cults in the fifth century, emphasized this in an even more forceful and systematic way:

The *tao* originally arose with nothing prior to it. Dark and attenuated, vaporous and opaque, it had no cause. It was born in the Void through self-actualization. Transforming, it gave birth to the Elder of the Way and Its Power 道德丈人 Based on this, there are the Illimitable Great

⁸³ According to Nickerson's study of *Lu hsien-sheng tao-men k'o-lieh* in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of China In Practice* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 347-51, ostensibly the pledge-offerings were provided to pay the assisting celestial officials; since they normally included vegetarian foodstuffs and items of use to the Celestial-Master priests, such as paper and writing brushes. They were ultimately to be distributed to the priests, recluses, and the poor, with supernatural consequences for priests who took more than their thirty percent.

⁸⁴ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of A Religion*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), p. 18.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ *HY* no. 615, ch. 2, p. 22a.

Way of Grand Clarity – the Mystic and Primal and the Highest Three Heavens 太清玄元無上三天無極大道, the Most High Lord Lao 太上老君, the Most High Elders 太上丈人, the Thearchs of the Heavens 天帝君, the Nine Ancient Lords of the Transcendent Metropolises 九老仙都君, the Elders of the Nine Pneumas 九氣丈人, a billion pneumas of the *tao* 百千萬重道氣, twelve hundred official lords 千二百官君, and the throne of Grand Clarity. When people of the present day send up written petitions to the Grand Clarity, it is these Perfected of the heavens whom they address 今世人上章書太清正謂此諸天真也 (emphasis added).⁸⁷

By understanding the celestial perfecteds and officials as only the transformed pneumas of the unfathomable *tao*, Celestial-Master scriptures prohibited sacrifice to "other" demons and spirits. It was due to this distinctive Taoist belief that the helpers of the celestial deities were called up by the Celestial-Master priests in their rituals. Thus, one passage in a scripture states, "Within the three pneumas, the *tao* controls all above and below."⁸⁸ In the ritual of petitioning, it was the *tao* that had become a celestial deity receiving liturgical honors. As Isabelle Robinet put it, the multiplicity of these celestial deities "represent progressive differentiation from the Formlessness and the One that is the origin of all things."⁸⁹

It is important to note that this liturgical theology of the *tao* partially accounts for the *raison d'être* of the religion of the *tao*, that is, "Taoism," which insists on the impersonal character of the divine *tao*. The highest divine authority was the *tao*. On this point, Anna Seidel was right in saying, "The innovation of Taoism was a belief in the highest authority of the *tao* which is higher than the immanent gods of nature and the ancestors to whom sacrifices used to be offered."⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

As already pointed out by previous scholars, certain cult practices of popular religion and such customs as the worship of the soil and stove gods and the observance of calendrical taboos were adopted within Taoism.⁹¹ The *Three*

⁸⁷ *HY* no. 1196, ch. A, p. 2a; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 207, with modifications.

⁸⁸ *HY* (no. 788), p. 12a.

⁸⁹ Robinet, *Taoism*, p. 19.

⁹⁰ Anna Seidel, "Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China," *Taoist Resources* 7 (1997), p. 52.

⁹¹ Stein, "Religious Taoism," p. 68. For discussion of the historical origin of the worship of the soil and stove gods on *la* days, see Hsia Jih-hsin 夏日新, "Rōtachi teki saishi" 臘日的祭祀, *Tōyōgaku shūkan* 東洋學集刊 73 (1995), pp. 1-22.

Heavens Scripture states that, “the faithful among the people are to sacrifice only on the five propitious *la* 臘 days of the year to the primogenitors and ancestors, male and female, of their own family and in the second and the eighth months to the god of the soil and the god of the stove.”⁹² As Peter Nickerson has also shown, “divination is allowed, and even may be practiced by [the Taoist] priests, provided it serves only for diagnosis and thereby remains subordinated to the bureaucratized, curative ritual of petitioning.”⁹³

As argued here, it would be hasty to conclude that Taoist opposition to popular religion was not new, and when Celestial-Master Taoism was redirected to a wider spectrum of local needs and began to take root among the populace, it effected a compromise with popular religious practices. I distinguish Taoism, however, from popular religious cults in the areas of both belief and practice.⁹⁴ Moreover, the Taoist condemnation of sacrificial cults was not the same as that of Confucian literati and officials; they did not share common ground.⁹⁵ The Celestial-Master prohibitions against popular cults of sacrifice and offerings genuinely arose from its own distinctive theological ground concerning the *tao* and the practice of the *tao*. Since the Celestial Masters held that the *tao* cannot be named and had neither shape nor image, they condemned the “false practices” 偽伎 of making statues of the *tao*. Against offerings and sacrifices to those spirits of the dead and the cult of spirit-mediumism that provided immediate contact with spirits and demons, the medieval Celestial-Master religion conformed itself only to the practice of the *tao*. It bound the practice of the *tao* to the personal means of keeping the precepts and codes and to the liturgical means of written petitions to celestial spirits in order to seek good fortune and avoid the evil connected with the netherworld of demons and spirits.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HY Weng Tu-chien 翁獨健, *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature* 道藏子目引得

⁹² HY (no. 1196) A, p. 6a; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 216.

⁹³ Nickerson, “Shamans, Demons, Diviners,” pp. 65–66.

⁹⁴ On this point, see also Robinet, *Taoism*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Stein, “Religious Taoism,” p. 61, holds that “this whole attitude of the Taoists [toward the excessive cults] is strictly the same as that of Confucian literati and officials.”