

this way. The Chinese characters in the text are graphic symbols like trigrams and hexagrams. They are to provoke thoughts or arouse imagination, rather than to close the reader's mind.

From the perspective of the historical turn, the problems in Harrington's translation are minor. A thoughtful reader can find a way to navigate *The Yi River Commentary on the Book of Changes* by creating a list of trigrams and hexagrams with Harrington's translation on one column and the images and Chinese characters on the other. A careful researcher can combine Richard John Lynn's translation of the *Yijing* text with Harrington's translation of Cheng Yi's commentary, keeping in mind that Cheng Yi responds to Wang Bi's *Yijing*, not Harrington's *Yijing*. The key point is that with minor adjustments, researchers can now compare three *Yijing* commentaries in translation: Wang Bi's *Zhouyi zhu*, Cheng Yi's *Yichuan yizhuan*, and Zhu Xi's *Zhouyi benyi*. By comparing Wang Bi's and Cheng Yi's commentaries, researchers can study *diachronically* the changes in the Chinese *Yijing* studies from the third century to the eleventh century. By comparing Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries, they can study *synchronically* the changes in the Chinese *Yijing* studies in the Song dynasty. Finally, thirty years after the publication of the *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, Western scholars have the tools and resources to demonstrate that the *Yijing* is indeed a living text—a classic that constantly gains new meaning by provoking its readers to think creatively about human existence.

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The Writ of the Three Sovereigns: From Local Lore to Institutional Daoism. By Dominic Steavu. New Daoist Studies. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. Pp. xiv + 370. \$72.00.

“. . . no Daoist books surpass the *Esoteric Writ of the Three Sovereigns* 三皇內文 and *True Form Charts of the Five Peaks* 五嶽真形圖 in importance.” (Ge Hong 葛洪 [283–343], in *Baopuzi* 抱朴子)

The formation of Daoism into an institutional religion in medieval China remains a critical question not just in Daoist studies, but also in the study of Chinese religions more broadly. Indeed, this question lets us continue to ponder the category of “religion” in China, and perhaps allow for some comparative and methodological

considerations. How do we categorize the various traditions of practice in early and medieval China? How did practitioners consider their own practices and affiliations? Can we distinguish practices from their human practitioners, as free-floating ideas and actions that can be adapted, adopted, and manipulated by adherents of different traditions? At what point does a particular practice become “Daoist” and what does that label mean?

Dominic Steavu’s *The Writ of the Three Sovereigns: From Local Lore to Institutional Daoism* allows us to reconsider these questions by exploring the evolution of the *Writ of Three Sovereigns* (*Sanhuang wen* 三皇文) from a set of powerful talismans (*fu* 符) wielded by masters of esoterica (*fangshi* 方士) at the southern coastal region to a foundational scriptural and ritual corpus in the Daoist Canon. While this book may seem like a microhistory of Daoism, Steavu’s focus on the *Writ* allows us to see the history of Daoism not centred on the Way of the Celestial Master (*Tianshi dao* 天師道), as is often the case in Daoist studies,¹ but from the perspective of a local tradition developing organically and adapted into the emerging Daoist synthesis. As he explores this complex process, Steavu’s careful analysis allows us to observe the fine details of the emergence of Daoism as a self-cognizant and self-creating tradition. During this process, the *Writ* grew from a collection of talismans, with brief affiliated texts for instruction, explanation, and transmission, to a set of three scrolls, then four, eleven, and finally to a corpus of fourteen scrolls, canonized as the Cavern of Divinity (*Dongshen* 洞神), the third division of the Three Caverns (*Sandong* 三洞), the Daoist Canon. Indeed, as Steavu argues in Chapter 4, the very notion of Three Caverns is itself indebted and based on the cosmology of the *Writ*. The story of the *Writ* is, thus, somewhat recursive and centripetal, reminiscent of Isabelle Robinet’s succinct summation of the history of Daoism: “if there is a single thread that runs through Taoism, it lies in its genealogy and in the cumulative and integrative process of its evolution.”²

The book consists of a substantial Introduction, five chapters, Conclusion, and four brief appendices with useful textual information, including variant titles of the *Writ* in early medieval sources (App. 1), synopsis of principal Six Dynasties sources with fragments of the *Writ* (App. 2), a comparative list of talismans associated with the *Writ* from various sources (App. 3), and a comparative inventory of transmission gages associated with the *Writ* (App. 4). The five main chapters are basically chron-

¹ As, for example, in the recent publications by Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016); and Franciscus Verellen, *Imperiled Destinies: The Daoist Quest for Deliverance in Medieval China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019).

² Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 1.

ological, as Steavu traces the history of the *Writ*, from its earliest instantiations (Chapter 1) in the third century, through its various developments, elaborations, and ramifications during the Six Dynasties (Chapter 4), to the canonic formulations of the Tang dynasty (Chapter 5), and beyond, including an especially intriguing Japanese illustrated manuscript, *Sankō Gotei emaki* 三皇五帝絵巻 (*Illustrated scroll of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors*), which may date from the late Muromachi 室町 period (1336–1573), discussed in the Conclusion. Chapters 2 and 3 are more thematic, dealing, respectively, with the theological, or cosmological, notions associated with “talismans” in medieval China, and with the alchemical and meditative practices that were associated and transmitted with the *Writ*.

While the *Dongshen* corpus was by far the smallest of the Three Caverns, and few of the texts included in the corpus have survived intact, it had significant impact on Daoist cosmology and ritual practice. The main sources that remain today are the *Scripture of the Wondrous Essence of the Eight Emperors* (*Dongshen badi miaojing jing* 洞神八帝妙精經, Daozang 640) and “Essential Functions of the Three Sovereigns” (*Sanhuang yaoyong pin* 三皇要用品), *juan* 25 in the Daoist encyclopedia *Wushang biyao* 無上秘要 (Daozang 1138). Based on a careful reading of these two texts and other surviving textual fragments collated from various sources in the Daoist Canon, Steavu tries to reconstitute the corpus of the Sanhuang texts at various stages of development.³ He clearly shows the impact of the ideas and practices advocated in the Sanhuang corpus, especially the use of talismans and the tripartite temporal scheme inherent in the notion of the Three Sovereigns. The cosmopolitical significance of the *Writ* is evinced not just by the attention garnered from Buddhist authors (p. 5), but by the fact that Tang Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–629) proscribed the *Writ* in 648, after it was discovered among the possessions of a Madam Wang 王氏, who claimed “when nobles have this scripture, they become monarchs . . . ladies who possess this text will inevitably become empresses” (p. 2). The imperial proscription of the *Writ* was quite successful and led, on the one hand, to the current fragmentary state of the Sanhuang corpus, while on the other hand, it led to the inclusion of the *Daode jing* 道德經 as a basic ordination texts for Daoist clerics, replacing the *Writ*. In an interesting narrative flourish, Steavu begins and ends the book with the tale of the proscription, its causes and outcome, thus both highlighting the import of the *Writ* and framing its history and development.

Chapter 1, “The *Writ* in Early Medieval Southern China,” traces the origins and early revelations of the *Sanhuang wen* from the second century, through Ge Hong’s

³ Much of this analysis is based on earlier works, especially by Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Dōkyōshi no kenkyū* 道教史の研究 (Okayama: Okayama daigaku kyōzaikai shosekibu, 1964), pp. 277–344; idem, *Dōkyō to sono kyōten* 道教とその経典 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1997), pp. 219–96.

discussion of the text and its powerful talismans in the *Baopuzi*, as well as its adoption in the Shangqing 上清 scriptures of the late fourth century. The origins of the *Sanhuang wen* are complicated as there seem to have been two distinct texts with similar names and contents stemming from two revelations circulating simultaneously in the Jiangnan 江南 region. The earlier revelation text is associated with the mysterious Bo He 帛和 (a.k.a. Bo Zhongli 帛仲理), who received the text through a revelation in a cave on Western Citadel Mountain 西城山. This text was transmitted, along with transmission guidelines by Lord Wang of the Western Citadel (Xicheng Wangjun 西城王君) to Ge Hong by his master Zheng Yin 鄭隱.

Another version of the *Writ* was revealed in 301 to Ge Hong's father-in-law, Bao Jing 鮑靚 (260–330?). He, too, received the textual revelation in a cave (on Mount Song 嵩山), along with a transmission manual from his master Ge Xuan 葛玄 (164–244), Ge Hong's grand-uncle. This text was transmitted to Ge Hong from Bao Jing. As Bao Jing was also the instructor to Xu Mai 許邁 (300–348), one of the main recipients of the Shangqing revelations, Bao's version of the text, and especially the revelation associated with his name, overshadowed the earlier text (p. 31).

Steavu suggests that while the *Writ* was adopted into the Daoist canonic project both due to its importance locally and to its underlying cosmological premises, Bo He was occluded by fifth-century Daoists due to his association with the eponymous Way of the Bo Clan (Bojia dao 帛家道), a popular sect in Jiangnan during the fourth and early fifth centuries known for its use of blood oaths and spirit mediumship (p. 34). These practices were precisely those spurned as “excessive” by the early Celestial Masters as well as the later systematizers, such as Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–477).

By the mid-fifth century, the two versions of the *Writ* seem to have merged, although the two early texts retained distinct titles within the combined corpus, with the Lord Wang–Bo He version known as *Great Characters in Celestial Script* (*Tianwen dazi* 天文大字) or *Esoteric Writ of the Three Sovereigns* (*Sanhuang neiwen tianwen* 三皇內文天文), while the Bao Jing version was at times referred to as the “cave transmission” (p. 40). In the Shangqing scriptures, the Bo He version was known as *Scripture of Lesser Existence* (*Xiaoyou jing* 小有經), while the Bao Jing version was labelled *Scripture of Greater Existence* (*Dayou jing* 大有經) (p. 38).⁴ It seems, however, that the two versions had been quite similar to begin with and had perhaps started to coalesce quite early. At the core of both versions of the *Writ* and of the Sanhuang corpus as a whole were the talismans of the Three Sovereigns. That is, the initial contents of the *Writ* was not legible text, but a set of inherently powerful graphemic forms (*fu* 符).

⁴ Steavu provides a full list of variant titles in Appendix 1.

Steavu begins Chapter 2, “The Religious Life of Objects: The Talismans of the *Writ* and Their Surviving Fragments,” with a discussion of the intriguing notions of talismans and writing in Daoism and continues with a detailed analysis of references to Sanhuang talismans preserved in the Daoist Canon. He first questions the usefulness of translating the polyvalent word, *fu* 符, as talisman, rather than “symbol,” or, better yet, the original Greek “sumbolon” (to join; to connect)—which emphasizes the material dimension of its signified (p. 51). Steavu reminds us of the materiality of the various functions of *fu* in Chinese culture, “as tallies, contracts, bonds, tesserae, registers, mandate gages, response gages, or imperial sacraments.” Steavu accepts the use of “talisman” as expedient, and more importantly analyses how the term and function of *fu* 符 evokes basic notions of Daoist ontology and epistemology. Talismans do not convey linguistic meaning. Rather, the meaning is iconographic, or more precisely emblematic, as they directly depict the true name (*zhenming* 真名) and true form (*zhenxing* 真形) of the deity or entity with which they are associated. Moreover, talismans simultaneously depict and embody “primordial breath” (*yuanyi* 元氣), the basic substance of the cosmos and all things. Thus, “talismanic script was the medium that provided the closest thing to an exact image (*xiang* [象]) of the Dao and its cosmogonic permutations” (p. 63). Even more provocatively, Steavu writes, “In drawing an equivalence between the hyperfactual on the one hand and visuality coupled with materiality on the other, talismans and true-form charts are not unlike scientific image-objects including diagrams, atlases, or technical illustrations” (p. 62). A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to differentiating the talismans and transmission instructions of the Bo He and Bao Jing versions that have been collected in the “Essential Functions of the Three Sovereigns.” Steavu argues that the Bao Jing version of the *Writ* is relatively well preserved in *Wushang biyao*, as it had become the main version of the *Writ* by its composition in the 570s. A comparison of parallels between the two versions shows that the Bo He version had more exacting regulations for transmission. The Bao Jing version included rites for rectifying mistakes or offences related to the *Great Characters in Celestial Script*. Steavu concludes that the Bao Jing version seems to have been a “simpler, more practical version of the *Great Characters in Celestial Script*, aimed perhaps at audiences with different expectations concerning ritual requirements” (p. 72).

Chapter 3, “Beyond Talismans: Alchemy, Charts, and Meditation in Relation to the *Writ*,” discusses several traditions of practice that were affiliated with and transmitted together with the *Writ*. Alchemical practices, known in this tradition as Taiqing 太清 alchemy, overlapped with the *Sanhuang Writ* in functions, applications, and transmission narratives (pp. 89–94).

In this chapter, Steavu also discusses the intriguing “True Form Charts of the Five Peaks” (*Wuyue zhenxing tu* 五嶽真形圖), which Ge Hong considered alongside

the *Writ* as the most efficacious of all the devices used by the masters of his time. The notion of “true form” charts overlaps with the efficacy of talismanic forms discussed in Chapter 2. Steavu suggests that while the *Writ of the Three Sovereigns* represented a temporal dimension of the emanation of the Dao into the world, the “True Form Charts of the Five Peaks” expressed more of a spatial dimension, representing the supernatural shapes or contours of mountains and their numinous inhabitants. Interestingly, despite being linked by Ge Hong, the *Writ* and the “True Form Charts of the Five Peaks” were not transmitted together and were not within the same Daoist canonic corpus.

Another set of charts, however, was integrated into the *Writ*. These were the “Charts of the Nine Sovereigns” (Jiuhuang tu 九皇圖) that portray three triads arrayed on a temporal axis of initial (*chu* 初), middle (*zhong* 中), and latter (*hou* 後), with each triad consisting of the Sovereigns of Heaven, Earth, and Humankind. These Nine Sovereigns, thus, seem to be a multiplication of the Three Sovereigns, or an elaboration of the cosmogonic mythology associated with them. The images of the sovereigns are especially intriguing. They are portrayed as human ministers in the initial triad, as snakes or dragons with nine human heads in the middle triad, and snakes with human head and ox-head for the latter triad (illustrations on p. 103). While this theriomorphic imagery is traceable to discussion of the Three Sovereigns in Han-era weft texts, in the Daoist cosmology presented here they “depict progressive chronological embodiments of the Primordial Breath of the cosmos along a temporal axis” (p. 107).

Importantly, the Sovereigns in the initial and middle groupings are associated with restoration of health and longevity through exorcism of bodily disease demons. The triad of the latter group is particularly affiliated with the Three Terraces (Santai 三台), a constellation below the Big Dipper (Beidou 北斗), which in some contexts are described as the path by which Great Unity (Taiyi 太一) descends from the sky into the microcosm of the human body. The association of the Three Sovereigns, Great Unity, and asterism is also traceable to the Han. Astrological correlations of the Three Sovereigns remained important through the Chinese medieval era, as attested by tenth-century calendrical manuals (pp. 106–7).

The *Writ* emphasizes, however, that the plurality of deities should be understood as unitary. Steavu cites the closing lines of this section: “. . . the preceding Nine Sovereign Lords, these gods are fundamentally one. It responds and then differentiates, stretching in the beginning and spreading out in the middle, where its gradations are also different, until it arrives at its utmost extremes. Thereupon it reverts back to sameness” (p. 108, Daozang 640.9b9). Steavu notes that this “ontological unity” inaugurates and concludes Daoist cosmogony. Adepts strive for this unity through self-cultivation and rulers aim to emulate it in their governing.

The emphasis on the primordial unity of the Nine Sovereigns, and indeed of the Three Sovereigns, informs the third type of practice discussed in this chapter, visualizing Great Unity, the cosmic deity (p. 109). Among the meditative traditions mentioned by Ge Hong, we find two types of “Maintaining Unity” (*shouyi* 守一): (1) “Maintaining the Mysterious Unity” (*Shou xuanyi* 守玄一) and (2) “Maintaining the True Unity” (*Shou zhenyi* 守真一). The former was primarily apotropaic, but also allowed adepts to “divide their form” and thereby see “the three cloudsouls and seven whitesouls within their body” and to “communicat[e] with the gods of Heaven and Earth.” The latter was an even more efficacious practice that drew upon the power of Great Unity. This tradition, which also harks back to Han notions, was central to practices associated with the *Writ*.

The *Scripture of the Wondrous Essence of the Eight Emperors* includes a “Scripture of the Three Sovereigns on [Maintaining] the Triple Unity” (*Sanhuang sanyi jing* 三皇三一經) that provides instructions for contemplating different embodiments of Great Unity within the human body that dwell in the three Cinnabar Fields (*Dantian* 丹田, p. 111). The meditative instructions include an embryological theory centred on Great Unity as a cosmogonic agent, known as Primordial Lord Great Unity, who is “[n]either male nor female . . . [S]ometimes it manifests as Lord Lao, sometimes as the Infant. Its responses are inexhaustible, its transformations boundless” (p. 113). The Great One first emanates as two entities, with itself as mother and Lord Emperor (*dijun* 帝君) as father, who through a series of blendings reverts to unity as the infant within the womb. As Steavu cogently explains, the power of ubiquity that adepts acquired from Maintaining the Mysterious Unity consisted of casting multiple duplicates of Great One while simultaneously projecting one’s “true self” onto infinite points in the cosmos, thus coming to be at every point of space at once. The practice of Maintaining the True Unity operated with similar logic, but in reverse. Here the adept gathered external manifestations of Great Unity, such as exudations from the stars, and condensed them into three locations within the body, eventually collapsing them into one. The adept, thus, became identical to the unity of the cosmos. By contemplating how the Nine Sovereigns or the Three Sovereigns, which presented different spatio-temporal manifestations of Great Unity, revert to their origin, the adept was to harmonize with the singularity of the cosmos: “Primordial breath generates the divine, divine breath descends into humans, and humans become divine” (p. 117).

Chapter 4, “From Local Lore to Universal Dao: The Cavern of Divinity and the Early Daoist Canon,” discusses the integration of the various ritual and scriptural lineages into a canonic structure, the Three Caverns, which was presented to the throne in 471 by Lu Xiujing in his *Catalogue of Scriptures and Writings of the Three Caverns* (*Sandong jingshu mulu* 三洞經書目錄). This *Catalogue*, which formed the basis of institutional Daoism since the fifth century, consisted of the Cavern of

Perfection (*Dongzhen* 洞真), the scriptures of the Shangqing corpus; the Cavern of Mystery (*Dongxuan* 洞玄), the scriptures of the Lingbao 靈寶 corpus; and the Cavern of Divinity, based on the *Writ*. In Lu Xiuqing's *Catalogue*, the *Dongshen* section included only the four scrolls of the *Writ*, but within a century this corpus expanded to ten, eleven, and finally fourteen scrolls. Intriguingly, some stages of this process are clarified by a close reading of a transmission manual composed by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) in the early sixth century, preserved only as fragmentary Dunhuang manuscripts.⁵ Steavu shows that Tao Hongjing had received a version in ten scrolls. Steavu argues that Tao probably added an eleventh scroll to the Sanhuang corpus prior to his death in 536. This eleven-scroll corpus was said to consist of the three scrolls of the *Writ* and eight scrolls of the Scripture of the Eight Emperors, adopting a mythology harking back to early China. Thus, collapsing ancient imperial mythology with the cosmological imagination of the *Writ*, it highlighted the corpus's suitability for statecraft at a time that Daoism was coalescing into a state religion (pp. 147–48).

While the Three Caverns scheme presented in Lu Xiuqing's *Catalogue* was his own, the notion of a tripartite textual corpus appears earlier in both the Lingbao and Shangqing scriptures, albeit with differing perceptions of the contents, arrangement, and hierarchy of the texts within the Three Caverns. It was the Lingbao scheme that was adopted by Lu Xiuqing. Significantly, Steavu shows that these notions are traceable to the cosmogonic and cosmological notions introduced in the texts associated with the *Writ*, particularly the "Scripture of the Three Sovereigns on [Maintaining] the Triple Unity" and the "Charts of the Nine Sovereigns" preserved in the *Scripture of the Wondrous Essence of the Eight Emperors*. These texts present the correlation of Three Primes (*Sanyuan* 三元) with Triple Unity, by way of its emanations: the Mysterious (*Xuan* 玄), Primordial (*Yuan* 元), and Inaugural (*Shi* 始) breaths, and with the Three Powers (*Sancai* 三才): Heaven, Earth, and Humankind. Steavu argues that, "[i]f the sources preserved in the *Wondrous Essence of the Eight Emperors* predate the early Lingbao scriptures, . . . some of the more pivotal elements of the Lingbao model of the Three Caverns would find their origins in the *Writ* and its associated material" (p. 134). Nevertheless, as Steavu notes, due to the complex and convoluted textual histories of the various Daoist scriptures, the precise relationship between the *Writ* and the schema of the Three Caverns remains problematic.

Steavu also tackles a question that continues to bother scholars of Daoism: Why were the texts of the Celestial Master community not included in the Three Caverns? Steavu argues that a major motivation for the emergence of institutional integrated

⁵ Reconstructed and labelled as *Tao gong chuanshou yi* 陶公傳授儀 by Ōfuchi Ninji, *Tonkō dōkyō*: *Mokuroku hen* 敦煌道經：目錄編 (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1978), pp. 331–32; and published in *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 4.521–25.

Daoism was a desire to articulate a state creed that would correspond to the needs and aspirations of a unifying ruler. He goes on to argue that “local intelligentsia that made up Lu Xiuqing’s immediate circle of patrons were more interested in rehabilitations of autochthonous traditions that had been neglected and that northerners had vilified since their arrival. This predilection for southern lore was notably reflected in the *Unsurpassed Secret Essentials* [*Wushang biyao*], a sweeping sixth-century anthology that brought together disparate forms of Daoism and presented them in a manner that converged with state interests. While the *Writ*, Shangqing materials, and especially the Lingbao revelations constituted the core of the collection, the Way of the Celestial Masters, whose tenets were undeniably known to the compilers, was thoroughly ignored” (pp. 141–42).

While Steavu’s description of the current contents of *Unsurpassed Secret Essentials* is correct, he neglects to mention that this collection was compiled in northern China at the orders of Yuwen Yong 宇文邕, Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 561–578) of the Northern Zhou. This collection was compiled by scholars at the Abbey of the Pervasive Dao (Tongdao guan 通道觀), established in 574 by the emperor at the foot of Mt. Zhongnan 終南山, south of the capital, Chang’an. The collection of Daoist texts in the Abbey is said to have numbered 8,030 scrolls.⁶ These texts must have included the texts of the Celestial Master, yet it remains unclear why these northern scholars based on the mountain associated with the revelation of the *Daode jing* preferred the texts of the southern traditions over the texts of the Celestial Master tradition that had had a long local history.

Although the *Writ* was included as the lowest of the Three Caverns of the Daoist Canon, it retained its mytho-cosmological import as signifying the potential for rulership. As Steavu stresses, “recipients of the *Writ* could not only become immortals but also supreme overlords of all of the denizens of the world” (p. 152). This implied potential may explain the continued mystique and power of the *Writ* that led to its proscription, even as it was relegated to a preliminary role in the initiatory scheme of integrated Daoism after the sixth century.

Chapter 5, “The *Writ* and Its Corpus: The Rise and Fall of the Cavern of Divinity in Institutional Daoism,” continues the historical narrative of the development of the Sanhuang corpus, focusing on the canonic formulation and liturgical functions of these texts in the early Tang dynasty. At this point the Sanhuang corpus reached its fullest maturation with fourteen scrolls as presented in the now lost *Catalogue*

⁶ *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, “Biography of Wang Yan” 王延傳, Daozang 1032, *juan* 85; Wang Chengwen, “The Revelation and Classification of Daoist Scriptures,” trans. Gil Raz, in John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, eds., *Early Chinese Religion: Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), p. 867.

of *Registers, Charts, and Scriptures of Great Existence* (*Dayou lutujing mu* 大有錄圖經目), partially quoted in *Protocols of the Three Sovereigns* (*Taishang dongshen Sanhuang yi* 太上洞神三皇儀, Daozang 803) of the early Tang:

Scrolls 1–3: Sovereign of Heaven’s [Earth, and Humanity] Esoteric Writ of the Registers and Charts of Great Existence 大有錄圖天〔地、人〕皇內文

Scrolls 4–6: Scripture of the Wondrous Essence of the Eight Emperors, parts 1–3 八帝妙精經，上、中、下

Scrolls 7–9: Scripture of the Mysterious Transformations of the Eight Emperors, parts 1–3 八帝玄變經，上、中、下

Scrolls 10–11: Scripture of the Divine Changes of the Eight Emperors, parts 1–2 八帝神化經，上、下

Scroll 12: Protocols of the Purification Rite of the Three Sovereigns 三皇齋儀

Scroll 13: Audience Ceremony of the Three Sovereigns 三皇朝禮

Scroll 14: Transmission Protocols of the Three Sovereigns 三皇傳授儀

Steavu analyses the various lists of injunctions, transmission codes, and liturgical materials associated with the Sanhuang corpus, showing their distinct sources and filiations. It was during the seventh century, just when the Sanhuang corpus was completely integrated into the Daoist Canon, that Taizong’s proscription of the text occurred, reiterating the cosmo-political significance of the *Writ*.

Steavu’s *The Writ of the Three Sovereigns* is, thus, a masterful study of an important, yet neglected, aspect of the Daoist history. He is able to show us the complex process by which a local tradition was integrated into the emergent Daoist synthesis while informing and transforming this emerging religion in profound ways. The significance of the notion of powerful script embodied in talismans and charts, on the one hand, and the notion multiplicity within unity embodied in the tripartite and nonary emanations of the Three Sovereigns and Nine Sovereigns, central to the *Writ*, became crucial to medieval Daoist practice and cosmology. While these notions are traceable to Han, and indeed pre-Han, sources and were part of the common religion, the *Writ* expresses them in a particular form that directly inspired later Daoists.

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