

## Options for Molding *Ming* (Fate) in the *Scripture on Great Peace*\*

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### Abstract

This paper describes attitudes to “fate” (*ming* 命) that are documented in the *Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) which reaches back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. The text’s authors link the term closely to the sets of moral and religious teachings that they propagate. For them, the distinction between good and bad fate lies in the length of life and they assure their audience that adherence to the right principles will result in a longer life. This promise is in some conflict with the idea that a man’s fate is decided by heaven and fixed at his time of birth. The authors do not refute this idea but juxtapose alternative ideas that restrain the deterministic impact of a pre-ordained fate. Here the image of heaven rewarding good and punishing bad conduct becomes powerful, and so does the view that individual fate depends on that of the community. Different parts of the long text provide different suggestions for moulding one’s fate. In the “model of heaven” (*tianfa* 天法) group, individual fate is said to depend on the extent of one’s awareness of and support for heaven’s natural order. The authors of the “great peace” (*taiping* 太平) group propose a historical situation where communal life is at the brink of disaster. Individual fate is therefore closely linked to support for social reform and other attempts

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at communal salvation. Authors of the “retaining spirits” (*shoushen* 守神) group have much to say on predetermining physiological conditions. However, they add that by means of close attention to rules of conduct a person can induce heaven or persuade the spirits within and around him to ameliorate his fate. For the authors of the transformation (*dahua* 大化) group a person’s fate is solely decided by converting to an attitude of self-reproach and faithful gratitude to heaven.

**Keywords:** *Scripture on Great Peace*, Han dynasty, fate, model of heaven, retaining spirits

There is no question that fate can be molded. If this were not the case, why should anyone talk about it? The authors of the *Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經, hereafter *TPJ*) take a decidedly pragmatic approach to most of the topics they deal with. *Ming* 命 (fate) is for them a word for the human condition. They approach the topic from various perspectives but always with the aim to improve this condition, make the most of it or adapt to it, and thus influence the consequences that may arise from what has been allotted. The various options for molding fate result from the different ways in which the scripture’s authors understand the term, so the description of the semantic range of *ming* will be central to this paper and attitudes towards improving one’s situation or “changing fate” will be depicted as arising from understandings of the term *ming*.

When wondering about his fate, a Daoist believer may want to know whether he stands a chance of postponing or perhaps even avoiding death. Such knowledge would be practical in case only certain individuals had been allotted this chance.<sup>1</sup> It would be wise of such an individual to concentrate his efforts. The authors of the scripture do not have much to say on this. However, the little they do say stems from the beginnings of a long tradition of concepts and techniques and may therefore be of importance. This paper

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 298. Max Kaltenmark deals with this topic in his “The Ideology of the *T’ai-p’ing ching*,” in *Facets of Taoism*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), 19–52.

will conclude with a short summary account of how much predetermination is involved with regard to the length of one's life.

## I. The Semantic Range of *Ming* (Fate)

For the purposes of this paper the long scripture is tentatively seen as consisting of four groups of material. Differences in the semantic range of *ming* will be used to help document the identity of each of these groups. The problem is not an inconsistent use of the term; for a complex term like *ming* such inconsistency is widespread and the *Lunyu* 論語 could serve as an example.<sup>2</sup> It will be argued that each of the four groups of texts is characterized by a specific understanding of the term.

This is intended as a first step towards dividing the *TPJ* into manageable entities, based on vocabulary and other language use, and also on issues of content. Such groupings may in the long run give us a chance to argue with some confidence for a certain social background and a chronological sequence, relative though it may be, in regard to the origin and transmission of *TPJ* materials. Attempts to define the origin of the *TPJ* as a whole have so far proven futile and its texts continue to lack proper scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> When dissecting the scripture it is reasonable to proceed in distinct steps. The first is to separate those parts containing an argument, parts that need consideration when discussing the text's message, from those which do not need consideration. Here, sections consisting of

<sup>2</sup> See Ning Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (*ming*)," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 24.3 (1997): 323–359.

<sup>3</sup> The transmitted text goes back to an edition of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The editors tell us that their work was based on materials from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., and this is in general seen as being acceptable, at least for part of the transmitted material. As we lack trustworthy related sources, for information about the text's origin we can only rely on the text itself. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the *TPJ* is an unusually long text. This has been pointed out by G. Espeset, "Cosmologie et trifonctionnalité dans l'idéologie du *Livre de la Grande paix* (*Taiping jing* 太平經)" (PhD diss., Paris: Université Paris 7 / Denis Diderot, 2002), 77–80. The CHANT Ancient Chinese Texts database of the University of Hong Kong gives the number of characters for the *TPJ* and *Taiping jing chao* 太平經鈔 as 217,858, based on only 2,130 different individual characters. The figure for the *Guan zi* 管子 is 128,770 (with 3,016 individual characters), and for the *Huainan zi* 淮南子 133,828 (with 4,207 characters).

talismans and of illustrations can be left aside. For the argumentation parts of the scripture there is an established division on stylistic grounds between the bulk of the text and a “secondary stratum,” in the following “*dahua* group.” The main body of the text, or its “primary stratum,” is harder to dissect as there are no striking stylistic or vocabulary based distinctions. The following is an attempt to set up a preliminary, content-based division among three groups within this “primary stratum.” The four groups are here introduced in an order that makes sense for documenting the semantic range of *ming*. They are: (1) *tianfa* 天法 (model of heaven) group: stress on cosmic correlations; (2) *taiping* 太平 (great peace) group: stress on social reforms; (3) *shoushen* 守神 (retaining spirits) group: stress on cooperation with spirits; and (4) *dahua* 大化 (transformation) group: stress on individual transcendence.<sup>4</sup> The attribution of sections is as preliminary as the differentiation of groups.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the *TPJ*, the term “*dahua*” points to the general reform movement that the Celestial Master is said to have initiated: “Now that the great transformation has set in, all twelve thousand countries are in it” 今者為大化出，萬二千國歷運周。See Wang Ming 王明, ed., *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 139.396. This long section is diverse but close to the *taiping* unit. The term also points to the great transformation that this movement is expected to lead to, see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 103.245, where education is said to be the root of a great transformation (大化之本根) that will allow the ruler to reign free from trouble. In the *dahua* unit, the term is also in use for the process or result of an individual transformation, see for instance Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 198.610: “Deep in my heart I have always been intent on the great transformation and desirous of the Dao of life” 心常思樂大化，貪慕生道。Here, transformation is depicted as resulting from a person’s conversion to belief in heaven, see section 179 *passim*. The *TPJ* will here be quoted in Wang’s edition, by section and page. The edition of Yu Liming 俞理明, with its often superior punctuation, has also been consulted: *Taiping jing zhengdu* 《太平經》正讀 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Parts that are left out are the illustrations in sections 162–164 and 168 as well as the talismans in sections 169–172. Sections that have nothing other to say than that they are part of a book and must be read (for instance sections 51, 158, and 188) are also left out. The *tianfa* group consists of sections 67–77, 99–102, 105, 127, 133–134, and 140. The *taiping* group consists of sections 41–48, 50, 52–66, 80–81, 103, 129, 131–132, 155–157, 160, 166, 173, 177, and 206–213. The *shoushen* group consists of sections 106–111 and 151–154, and the *dahua* group of sections 179–190 and 193–203. Another very important set of materials is contained in the *Taiping jing chao*: this consists of excerpts from parts 1 to 9 of the 10 parts that constituted the sixth-century text, including

One of the points of difference among the four groups is the presence or absence of elements of what we may term Daoist doctrine, and in consequence the distance from or closeness to what we know of early Daoist communal life. The *dahua* group and *shoushen* group contain more elements that can be seen as resembling early Daoist rituals than do the other two groups. Also, in these two groups *ming* is more often understood as individual fate. The *tianfa* group shares ideas with *chen* 讖 (apocryphal) materials, which is exactly where Han dynasty historical sources place an early text whose title includes *taiping*.<sup>6</sup> The missionary movement that is depicted in the *taiping* group has points in common with the historical Taiping movement that evolved in the latter half of the second century C.E. If we can trust language use and attitudes, the authors as well as the audience of the *taiping* group of texts may well belong there. The *taiping* as well as the *tianfa* group both stress the fact that humankind has a shared fate and therefore have less to say on individual fate.

All four groups share characteristics we would expect in material that circulated among people who could not expect to promote their ideas through the regular channels of Han dynasty intellectual exchange. Throughout, the style of writing is far from elegant and polished; the language contains elements that do not occur in well-written prose of Han and post-Han times, while lines of argumentation are often clumsy, repetitive and confused. References to the high tradition of Chinese literature are almost completely avoided. If, for the educated, heaven reveals itself through the historical events that are documented in the Chinese classics, this type of revelation holds no authority for the authors of the *TPJ*.

The term *ming* occurs in all four groups in a meaning that can

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excerpts from those sections that are no longer part of the transmitted text. Here the topic of “fate” is popular and there are interesting passages on the length of life from lost sections, cf. Benjamin Penny, “A System of Fate Calculation in *Taiping jing*,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 41 (1990): 5, referring to Wang, *Taiping jing bejiao*, 22ff. and 722ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Barbara Kandel, *Taiping jing: The Origin and Transmission of the “Scripture on General Welfare”: The History of an Unofficial Text* (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1979), 4.

be represented in English by the word “fate.” What characterizes the understanding of fate throughout the four groups is that the term is always seen in a positive light.<sup>7</sup> Fate upholds the network that connects human beings to heaven. This was standard knowledge as expressed, for instance, in the Guodian text *Xing zi ming chu*: “*Xing zi ming chu, ming zi Tian jiang*” 性自命出，命自天降 (Nature comes from the decree, and the decree is sent down from Heaven).<sup>8</sup> The ardent belief in heaven that pervades much of the *TPJ* intensifies respect towards “its decree.” *Ming* in whatever definition can therefore only be welcome. The four groups of texts also share a pragmatic approach to the logic of argument and terminological consistency. There is a strong tendency to prove that *Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied*—my fortune is my own doing—even if this involves contradictions of all sorts.

What follows from this is that the authors of the scripture do not see the term *ming* as problematic. Instead, they make use of it when they wish to explain something they see as difficult or important. They might, for instance, mention the difference between the fate of human beings and animals when introducing an argument for moral conduct, and quickly forget about the introduction once the argument is under way.<sup>9</sup> So when interpreting passages in the *TPJ* with a focus on *ming*, there is a certain caveat. These passages are situated within lines of argument that may, as we shall see, twist or shrink the term as it suits the main argument.

## II. The *Tianfa* Group: *Ming* as Cosmic Condition

In this group, the focus is on cosmic correlations and in particular on astronomical phenomena. The term “*tianchen*” 天讖 occurs as a

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Zong-qi Cai, “Multiple Vistas of *Ming* and Changing Visions of Life in the Works of Tao Qian,” in *The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture*, ed. Christopher Lupke (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 191, who has pointed out that the “highly affirmative view of *ming*” characterizes the Daoist understanding of the term.

<sup>8</sup> Marco Caboara, trans., *Xing zi ming chu*, 13.2, Slips 2–3 (unpublished manuscripts, Erlangen, IKGf, 2012). Cf. also Chen Zhongqi 陳仲奇, “Kakuten Sokan Sei ji mei chutsu hen no mei nitsuite” 郭店楚簡性自命出篇の命について, *Shimane Journal of North East Asian Research* 北東アジア研究 1 (2001): 113–135.

<sup>9</sup> See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 153.424–5.

quasi-synonym of *tianfa*. Here, the authors' interest is the wider cosmic scenario that provides the conditions for social and individual fate. The authors argue that, for steering society, men need to be aware of cosmic rules, and therefore they provide an introduction to these rules. This concerns individual fate to the extent that a man's fate is circumscribed by the development of weather conditions and harvest results that decide his health and longevity as well as his chance of raising and maintaining a family.

In section 127, *ming* is introduced with a meaning close to the English word "life." It is "life" in the sense that living beings owe their being alive to the functioning of nature. The authors of the text create the image that heaven and earth shape beings, or "the fate of beings," through their management of *qi*:

[Master:] . . . Well, the nine openings [of the human body] resemble the role played by the nine continents. Now as all of you, Perfected, have put it yourself, whenever someone chokes while ingesting *qi* and there is a block, he will be confused, his vision will be impaired and he will lack clear insight. That is, on the nine continents men of great and small standing oppress each other, and those below do not manage to get what they have to say about urgent matters to those in high positions. *Qi* is that through which the fate of all ten thousand beings of heaven and earth penetrates. Heaven and earth transform the fate of all ten thousand beings by means of *qi*. When [while ingesting] *qi* one chokes and it does not get through; this clearly shows how heaven's teachings when blocked cannot get through and be understood . . .<sup>10</sup>

……然，夫九竅乃象九州之分也。今諸真人自言，俱食氣迺不通，眩暝無光明，是九州大小相迫脇，下不得上通其言急事也。夫氣者，所以通天地萬物之命也；天地者，乃以氣風化萬物之命也；而氣喘不通者，是天道閉，不得通達之明效也……

To depict the result of men's divorce from heaven as lacking breath is rather persuasive. However, the authors' interest is not in this image, and certainly not in establishing a metaphysical background for the term *ming*. As they move on, *ming* gains a slightly wider semantic range and becomes the fate that depends not only on

<sup>10</sup> Wang, *Taijing jing hejiao*, 127.317.

support from heaven and earth but also on proper government. Correlations are said to structure the social environment as well as the cosmos:

Moreover, all the people, the officials, and the male and female servants receive life from heaven, are brought up by earth, and are raised and administered by the sovereign. From these three inputs comes their fate. Without these three inputs they have no chance to come alive, to grow, or to be raised and administered. And yet, [when] men in low position cheat those in high position, they jointly bring it about that men do not know heaven and earth and they let the sovereign be without intelligence and completely blocked, which is a crime that deserves ten thousand deaths.<sup>11</sup>

又凡民臣奴婢，皆得生於天，長於地，得見養理於帝王。以此三事為命，無此三事，則無緣得生長自養理也。而反下皆共欺其上，共無知天與地，使帝王無聰明閉塞，罪皆應萬死……

From an argumentation point of view, this all makes perfect sense. When channels of communication become blocked, be they channels linking heaven and men or the political leadership and its subjects, the results can be deadly for all concerned. In conclusion, the authors refer again to *ming* and give a strong warning: men who prevent the flow of intelligence act against their own cosmic condition.

Throughout section 127, *ming* is seen as a chance that men must take and must safeguard. This understanding is strengthened by a passage in section 134. Here, the teacher explains that when great peace has arrived, all men will be able to live out the years destined for them by heaven. He adds the warning that massive and sudden death must never be seen as *ming* (fate); it is only the token of the intense and no doubt justified anger of heaven and other natural forces:

[Disciple:] I would like to ask: the calamity of inheriting and passing on all this [load of trespasses] is what makes *qi* [of heaven, earth, and the range in between] angry. When there is no load that is inherited and transmitted, how do men die?

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<sup>11</sup> Wang, *Taijing jing hejiao*, 127.321.

[Master:] Well, human life comes to an end. Men of superior, lowly, and median rank will all live out the years destined for them by heaven. Some have found true Dao. On this basis they leave by transcending their generation. That such men are without the trespasses that are inherited and passed on is the art of what it is. Do you understand?

[Disciple:] Yes, we do.

[Master:] All right, you have grasped it. But that men die all of a sudden, one after the other, is not fate at all. It is proof that heaven, earth, the range in between, the four seasons, and the five phases start fights, are enraged, lie in ambush and kill.<sup>12</sup>

「願聞此悉承負之厄，乃忿三氣，其不承負之時，人死云何哉？」「然人生有終，上下中各竟其天年，或有得真道，因能得度世去者，是人乃無承負之過，自然之術也。子知之耶？」「唯唯。」「行，子曉哉！乃一旦而相隨死者，皆非命也。是乃天地中和四時五行戰怒伏殺效也。」

So according to men's cosmic condition, they have a certain life span they are entitled to. Should they be deprived of this they must not blame fate. It can only be their own doing. Their misconduct is such that cosmic order has become deranged.

### III. The *Tai ping* Group: *Ming* as Historical Condition

This group of texts is dominated by teleological visions. Humankind, and with it the world men live in, has reached a state of deterioration that has brought it all close to the end. To turn things around into a state of great peace is the only alternative, and at present cosmic developments provide men with a chance to do so. Individual fate is seen as embedded in the world's fate. It is heaven's command that each man prepare for the arrival of great peace by reversing his attitude and his conduct. This understanding of *ming* is therefore close to that of *ming* as cosmic condition, and relies on it. Cosmology is given as the reason there is no question about the need to fulfill heaven's command. Heaven is placed in the position of a benevolent superior. Naturally, a man who fulfills his

<sup>12</sup> Wang, *Tai ping jing hejiao*, 134.372.

tasks can expect some personal benefit from merciful heaven. So the disciples who are expected to propagate the Celestial Master's teachings and help persuade political leaders to instigate reforms can rightly expect an increase in the years allotted to them. However, even for them individual fate is not isolated from general trends. Their fortune relies on the arrival of great peace, as does that of everyone else. They are not the seed people of a later era who will be selected to survive the approaching cataclysm.

The following passage clarifies the relationship between communal and personal welfare. It occurs within a long discussion about the need to show respect for earth and refrain as much as possible from digging wells and canals and constructing houses and grave mounds:

[Master:] Why do you always ask questions in such detail?

[Disciple:] Through these details I will see things as you do. It is being said that fate depends on heaven and earth. When they remain happy, the order of things achieves great peace. Longevity is then the consequence. This is the reason why, living between heaven and earth, I am always in fear of making them both angry. That is why I work so hard. Should heaven and earth not be in harmony I will not be able to live out the years that have been allotted to me.

[Master:] Excellent, what you have said.<sup>13</sup>

「子問事，恆常何一究詳也？」「所以詳者，比與天師會見，言人命在天地，天地常悅喜，乃理致太平，壽為後，是以吾居天地之間，常駭念天地，故勉勉也。天地不和，不得竟吾年。」「善哉，子之言也。」

Heaven's command includes the characteristic features of the great peace program and, in particular, the concern for people's welfare. This is explained in the following passage:

So the way of ruling a country is to make people the basis. Without people, lord and officials have no means to conduct affairs and establish order. For this reason, when the great, worthy, and wise of old were in government, they saw from morning to night the people as their most pressing concern and worried for their people. It is like

<sup>13</sup> Wang, *Taijing jing hejiao*, 61.122.

the members of a family: father and mother fret about not having children. Without children, how can they be called father and mother? How can someone be called lord if there are no people? So it is heaven's example that makes lord, official, and people constantly share the same fate, share the same good and bad fortune, and fulfill one task. There will be general misfortune if a single activity should go wrong. Since middle antiquity, the rules and guidelines of proper government have often been forgotten. This has created the problem of inheriting [trespasses] and passing them on. So later generations have suffered from a great number of widespread disasters, all because lord, officials, and people have miscalculated things.<sup>14</sup>

故治國之道，適以民為本也。無民，君與臣無可治，無可理也。是故古者大聖賢共治事，但旦夕專以民為大急，憂其民也，若家人父母憂無子：無子以何自名為父母，無民以何自名為君也。故天之法，常使君臣民都同命，同吉凶，同一職，一事失正，即為大凶矣。中古以來，多失治之綱紀，遂相承負，後生者遂得其流災尤劇，實由君臣民失計。

Here the phrase they “have miscalculated things” (*sbiji* 失計, have forgotten the plan), stands for ignoring heaven's command. Another way of putting this is “to ignore heaven's intention.” Terms like “heaven's intention” (*tianyi* 天意) or “heaven's mind” (*tianxin* 天心) are used almost synonymously with “heaven's command.”

The idea that all social strata are united in fulfilling the command pronounced by heaven is basic for the social agenda of the *TPJ*. Human welfare is said to be a joint enterprise that should be central to individual efforts. Individual fate, when mentioned, is treated in a rather casual manner, as if it were a sideline: the disciples who pester the Celestial Master with questions do so under heaven's command and therefore the Master feels obliged to answer; their inquisitive energy and commiseration will improve the account kept on each of them in heaven and they will live longer; or their negligence and lack of understanding will have a terrible impact on their life on earth as well as in the world below.<sup>15</sup> When

<sup>14</sup> Wang, *Tai ping jing hejiao*, 65.151.

<sup>15</sup> Studying with the right teacher as well as perseverance are mentioned as conditions for achieving an aim. Men arrive at transcendence or longevity

disciples dare to stress their own career interests by enquiring about the price of the Master's teachings, they are mockingly asked what price they would put on saving the world.<sup>16</sup>

It is characteristic of the text's lines of argument that propositions are modified when their practical consequences are seen to entail problems. The fact that the future of humankind depends on general developments and that an individual is well advised to help bring them about does not mean that an evildoer can accuse the government of the day of having caused his early demise. Should he die before his time, the problem remains his, as he personally has ignored heaven's rules of conduct. This is pointed out in a passage that deplores the people's interest in funerals:

Though one vigorously teaches people to be humane, you still worry that they will not be humane, yet the people of lower antiquity, on the contrary, teach them numerological documents; this shows the teaching has already been greatly diminished, and there will be no end to their mutual hatreds and resentments. Though one vigorously teaches them to act auspiciously, one still fears they will act inauspiciously; yet the people of lower antiquity, on the contrary, teach them to exert themselves in studying the preparations for death and mourning. Thus they involve themselves with unlucky affairs before it is necessary in order to prepare for them. Day after day men die before their allotted time, until the clan is almost extinguished, yet they are not aware of their faults. When their time comes, they shout to heaven, wail to earth and call themselves maltreated: "The king's reign is not at peace, so I have to die early." They have brought this upon themselves through their own private affairs.<sup>17</sup>

夫力勸教其仁，尚苦不仁，下古之人反相教數書，已大薄矣，其相憎怨不得絕。力教其為吉，尚苦不吉，下古之人反相勸力學死喪之具，

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through learning to maintain Dao, in addition to being talented and having the right *ming*: "Someone with great talent who has heaven's decree [to do so] will perhaps manage to transcend [the generations]" 高才有天命者或得度 (Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 52.72). This is put in rather clear terms in the following passage: "Although having talent is not as good as being energetic, being energetic is not as good as persevering" 雖然，夫才不如力，力不如為而不息也 (Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 83.210).

<sup>16</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 62.126–7.

<sup>17</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 66.164.

豫與凶事以待之，日死不以其壽，幾滅門矣；而不自知過誤，臨時呼天號地，自言冤，王治不平，使我失年。內行自得之。

The two positions in regard to personal fate seem to clash logically. How can I perish because cosmic order breaks down and because I invest too much time and money in burying my parents? While this juxtaposition may result in some decisive weakness in argument, it is completely justified from a psychological perspective. Both positions make sense. It is the teacher's aim to make men follow his instructions, in all respects, and, for him, promises or threats in regard to the lengthening or shortening of life are essential tools of persuasion.

#### IV. The *Shoushen* Group: Ming as Physiological Condition

The *shoushen* group focuses on obtaining and organizing the services that spirits are expected to render. The term *shoushen* (maintain spirits) occurs in sections 151 and 152. Here, the authors argue that a man's fortune depends on meeting with spirits. By so doing, he becomes prescient in the sense that he understands where gain and loss come from and therefore stands a good chance of becoming reasonably happy. A man may meet with spirits after he has gone through a process of personal cultivation; other sections in this group stress a ritual procedure. It is argued that contact with spirits can be established through the creation of drawings or other concrete images that may be based on visualizations and certainly resonate with complex correlative structures. What is here described could well have had a replica in actual practices of worship.<sup>18</sup> A person's morality seems to play only a secondary role. What counts are the rituals of purification and fasting that precede the envisaging and representation of spirits.

The following conversation emphasizes personal cultivation. It is embedded in a talk about Dao and the benefits that can be derived from following its instructions. The main speaker is here entitled "Spirit Man." He attempts to prove that there is predetermination:

<sup>18</sup> See sections 109 and 110. I have so far found no parallels to what is said here.

[Perfected:] Now, Spirit Man, having heard your words, will we all instantly prolong our lives?

Spirit Man says: Should you not have a profound understanding of my warnings the result could be a great amount of bad luck. So Dao would not come to completion.

Perfected says: Was it because I was born with this fate or was it mere chance that I was able to meet [you] Spirit Man?

Spirit Man says: Well, each of the six ways of human life has its fate. The first is the spirit man, the second the perfected, the third the transcendent, the fourth the man of Dao, the fifth the wise, the sixth the worthy. They all support heaven's rule. The spirit man is in charge of heaven, the perfected of earth, and the transcendent of wind and rain. The man of Dao is in charge of instruction about matters of auspicious and ominous conduct, the wise man is in charge of ruling over the hundred surnames, the worthy assists the wise man in keeping the registers of the ten thousand subjects in order and in extending support in all six directions where there is insufficiency. For this reason each human life has its own fate. If it is someone's fate to be in an honored position, he cannot be lowly, and if he is fated to be lowly he cannot be in an honored position. Do you want to know how I can prove this? Although a fish avails itself of water, it would not fly in water's *qi*; a dragon also avails itself of water, and from the water's *qi* rises into a green cloud and becomes heaven's envoy! The honored and the lowly both have their fates; it is foolish to talk about it at random . . . Could you really have been so foolish as to think that the fate destined by heaven can be obtained by force?

Perfected says: Well, this Dao [you have been talking about], can it really be studied?

Spirit Man says: Well, someone destined by heaven to do so can study it and will certainly be able to undertake the great transcendence. A worthy of medium rank can, when studying it, obtain great longevity. A foolish person of low rank can, with study, obtain a little longer life. If you want some proof, this is the same for all men who study. A worthy of high rank who studies can become a great official. An average worthy who studies can become a medium official. A foolish man who studies can become a petty clerk. Now would a petty clerk ever be employed by people whose dress has no colour?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wang, *Taijing jing hejiao*, 108.288ff.

「今得神人之辭，皆得須臾長生乎？」神人言：「不深戒，成事[即大]<sup>20</sup>凶矣，道不得成也。」真人言：「吾生有祿命邪？僥倖也？遇得與神人相遭逢。」神人言：「然，六人生各自有命，一為神人，二為真人，三為仙人，四為道人，五為聖人，六為賢人，此皆助天治也。神人主天，真人主地，仙人主風雨，道人主教化吉凶，聖人主治百姓，賢人輔助聖人，理萬民錄也，給助六合之不足也。故人生各有命也，命貴不能為賤，命賤不能為貴也。子欲知其審實，若魚雖乘水，而不因水氣而蜚，龍亦乘水，因水氣遇上青雲為天使乎！貴賤實有命，愚者而妄語……子自若愚，為天命可強得也哉？」真人言：「然此道亦可學耶？」神人言：「然，有天命者，可學之必得大度，中賢學之，亦可得大壽，下愚為之，可得小壽。子欲知其效，同若凡人學耳。大賢學可得大官，中賢學者可得中官，愚人學者可得小吏。夫小吏使於白衣之民乎？」

So even a foolish person will, through study, rise above the common people. In other words, the study of Dao, that is, of the Master's teachings, can be expected to improve the student's fate by degrees. The physiological condition exists; its impact, however, is negotiable. Study is a safe way to improve things. Force is not. This long passage is meant to promote the Master's teachings and warn against men who argue for shortcuts.<sup>21</sup>

Another passage represents a similar line of thought in a more complex manner. The Master starts with the argument that men without Dao and virtue share the fate of animals. He then explains what he terms "categories of fate":

[Master]: So someone who has a lot of the five dispositions resembles *yang* and is humane. Someone who has a lot of the six emotions resembles *yin* and is desirous. Someone who has received *yang* that is extensive is male. Someone who has received *yin* that is extensive is

<sup>20</sup> This attempt to fill a lacuna of two characters after "成事" follows a similar passage in section 134: "但逢其承負之極，天怒發，不道人善與惡也，遭逢者，即大凶矣" (ibid., 134.370). Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 237, suggests inserting "復轉," for which there is no parallel.

<sup>21</sup> The *Taiping jing chao* (Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 222ff.) contains a similar list of eight men who are all in communication with heaven. Here the *chao* is based on material that seems to belong to the *taiping* or *tianfa* group.

female. Someone who has received a large portion of kingly and ministerial *qi* is honored and held worthy and will thus live a long life. Someone who has received a large portion of restive, demoted, and captive *qi* will often be ill and will in consequence die young. He will also be extremely poor. So the life of all men relies on which phase of *qi* they resemble. Their fate depends on their date of birth according to stems and branches. Predictions based on category never fail. So wise men of the past followed everything back to its source. Thereby they knew a man's situation. Do you understand?

[Perfected:] Yes, we do. Excellent.

[Master:] Now the fate of a lord of superior virtue is linked to heaven and earth. So he must strive even harder to emulate heaven and earth and rule by Dao and virtue. So we will bring heaven's teachings into even better order, and lay them out so that we can present them to the lord of superior virtue. Heaven enjoys his good deeds. It would not like to make him have more of such four-legged human conduct.<sup>22</sup>

「故含五性多者象陽而仁，含六情多者象陰而貪，受陽施多者為男，受陰施多者為女，受王相氣多者為尊貴則壽，受休廢囚氣多者數病而早死，又貧極也。故凡人生者，在其所象何行之氣，其命者繫於六甲何曆，以類占之，萬不失一也。故古者聖人深原凡事，知人情者以此也。真人知之耶？」「唯唯。善哉善哉！」……「今上德之君，命繫天地，當更象天地以道德治，故吾更理出天道出以上付之。天樂其為善，不欲復使其有餘是四足之人行也。」

The passage comprises several possible constitutions of a man's physiological condition. One is defined by the amount of *yin* and of *yang*, which determines a person's sex and his or her basic moral characteristics. The other is defined by the quality of a person's *qi*, which determines his state of health, length of life, and social status. Here, the authors' interest is not so much an individual's

<sup>22</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 153.424. The warning that men must take an attitude towards *ming* that is different from that of animals is repeated: "To be killed without knowledge and understanding is the fate of dogs or sheep. How could it be met with for long? Just like animals, they act against their rules. Desirous for food, they hurt themselves. As a herd they follow each other, not aware of the years of their life" 殊無知慮，犬羊之命，何可久遇，與禽同羅，觸犯其綱，貪食害軀。群輩相隨，不惜其年 (ibid., 185.564).

curiosity about his own fate but a wise man's knowledge of these matters, which enables him to understand others and, consequently, employ them well.

The authors here provide details that are at odds with each other and, in particular, with the introductory idea that fate depends on how a man adheres to Dao and to virtue. They mention that a person's physiological condition is said to depend on the stems and branches that are present on the date of his birth. This observation is repeated at length in section 181 of the *dahua* group, where it is almost brought to nil in a final paragraph that stresses the overwhelming importance of doing good.<sup>23</sup> The passage above has a similarly confusing end. If we are to trust the last sentence, fate is something that the educational efforts of a dedicated and well advised ruler can modify.

The last two passages that have been quoted here stick to one structure. They both present standard views on fate that have a strong component of predestination. They both argue that these views are absolutely correct.<sup>24</sup> However, they do not leave the audience with this unsatisfactory result. In both cases a happy end is brought about by the actual presence of the Master and his teachings. The Master suggests that, for men who attend his warnings, fate is malleable. Thus the threatening reality of a given fate is reduced to a tool for advertising and propagating a set of teachings. This can be seen as pointing to the fact that the concept of fate was of interest to the audience but of limited intellectual or religious concern for their teachers.

## V. The *Dahua* Group: *Ming* as the Gift of Life

The sections of the *dahua* group focus on longevity and are of particular relevance for the topic at hand. They are introduced by the particle “*wei*” 惟, as if at some stage someone had tried to signify their togetherness. *Ming* is received from heaven and

<sup>23</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 181.549, and see below at note 29.

<sup>24</sup> The formula “性命出” found on the Guodian strip, see above note 8, does not come under attack. Instead, space for human actions is derived from a complex understanding of *xing* 性.

develops according to a person's conduct. Morality is understood as obedience to heaven.

Only through self-discipline and self-examination can we gain [more] life. The fate that we have received [at birth] has a timespan. How can you be complacent? Aware of this a man's heart aches and tears stain his garments. It does not work for him to be idle.<sup>25</sup> Day after day he worries about the years of his life and is afraid of not achieving longevity.<sup>26</sup>

修身自省，既得生耳。受命有期，安得自在？念之心痛，淚下沾衣，  
無有解已。日惜年命，恐不得壽。

The group provides a rather detailed picture of the functioning of heaven's bureaucracy, as has been carefully analysed by Grégoire Espeset.<sup>27</sup> It is shown how celestial staff manages the career of a person of extraordinary religious devotion who has been selected to rise to heaven in broad daylight. The Lord of Heaven asks his staff to double check: does this agree with the person's *ming*? It does. Once this has been assured, the rest of the bookkeeping is manageable. However, it is important that the records agree or, at least, are made to agree with the believer's intended unusual career. The day he will take off is actually fixed in the records. The management of things is completely in the hands of spirits who are in constant direct contact with the believer. They make sure that an opening in heaven's bureaucracy awaits him. They reassure him and initiate his physical transformation through exercises and a special diet. They even look after his household. All he needs to do, so it seems, is to believe, confess trespasses, and stick to the rules. His achievement is in his attitude.

In these sections *ming* is the concept from which most lines of argumentation take off. Having received this gift from heaven, man has to repay it. This needs to be done while he lives. So, while

<sup>25</sup> It is characteristic of the *dahua* textual unit that *jie* 解 is to be understood as *xie* 懈.

<sup>26</sup> Wang, *Tai ping jing hejiao*, 182.550.

<sup>27</sup> Grégoire Espeset, "Criminalized Abnormality, Moral Etiology, and Redemptive Suffering in the Secondary Strata of the *Tai ping jing*," *Asia Major*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 15.2 (2002): 1–50.

living, a man must try to make the life he has received last as long as possible. He will do this naturally, because he likes living, but he will also try to prolong his life in order to be able to prolong his services, in the first place to heaven. So a man is morally obliged to prolong his life, while he can also expect to live longer if he sticks to moral rules or at least, one might put it, to a code of conduct:

But men have little knowledge. They think themselves worthy. [But] their activities, whether they move or stand still, have no benefit for heaven. Their ominous crimes offend against the prohibitions. Yet they go on until their family is wiped out.<sup>28</sup> They leave the world without progeny and their ancestors remain without offerings. Certainly, the fate that they have received does not remain intact for long, being the men they are! In their actions they show no respect for [what is said in] old texts. Even if they in person do not act against demons and spirits, the three *qi* are not in harmony and there is a thinning of the thickness of fate.<sup>29</sup>

但人少知，自以為賢，動作行止，既無益於天，禍罰觸禁，上至減門，絕世無續，先祖無祠，豈祇命不久全，奈此人何！奉行不承古文，自以不犯鬼神，是乃三氣不和，亦有命厚薄。

The definition of morality takes its clues from the concept of *ming*. Man has received life from somewhere, for a short period. This makes him dependent. The moral rules that are dictated by heaven take their authority from heaven's life-creating power. In consequence, the concept of *ming* is the basis for all ideas of self-cultivation.

The above passages and all *dahua* materials rely on the fact that a large semantic range is shared by *sheng* 生 (life) and *ming*. This fact was in the background of the steering of fate through *qi* that was described in the *tianfa* group. The *dahua* group gives a narrower account of the origin of life and, in particular, human life. We are here, one might say, in a more strictly Daoist environment. The following passage introduces triads of spirits and of *ming*, as if they were a condition for the creation and maintenance of a human being:

<sup>28</sup> The character “上” is correctly understood by Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 417, as “尚.”

<sup>29</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 185.564.

The Dao of prolonging life is close to the three spirits. When their three *qi* get together they create a human being. When they don't, they disperse and become soil. Compacted in the manner of tiles and stones and broken down to splinters in unseen places, they cannot compare with a complete entity [as is the human being]. The spirits of the three fates are in the vicinity of the cardiac space. How careful one must be! Injured by covetousness, the bodily form is exposed to the masses in the market of the capital. When would he return home alive? Father and mother think of him with compassion; wife and children are made to suffer.<sup>30</sup>

長生之道，近在三神，三氣合成乃為人。不成，離散為土，在瓦石同底，破碎在不見之處，不得與全完為比。三命之神，近在心間，何惜何愛，反貪形殘，都市示眾，何時生還。父母憐念，妻子被患。

Here the creation of life is highly personalized. The three possible modes of fate, according to the apocryphal *Yuanshen qi* 援神契, consist of a guaranteed longevity, which is rare, accidental blind fate, and merit-based fate.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Wang, *Tai ping jing hejiao*, 185.565ff.

<sup>31</sup> What is meant here is perhaps what Han dynasty cosmologists came up with, pointing to subsections of *ming*. In commenting on a *Li ji* 禮記 passage, ch. 46, see *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 1590, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) has “The Controller of Fate checks on the three fates,” which is clarified by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), who quotes the *Yuanshen qi* as saying: “Fate has three sections. There is fate that is received as guarantee, fate that is suffered as disgrace, and fate that follows as repayment” 命有三科，有受命以保慶，有遭命以譴暴，有隨命以督行。The three fates are explained in some detail by Wang Chong 王充, who gives the first of them as “*zhengming*” 正命 (see *Lun heng* 論衡, ch. 8, “Mingyi pian” 明義篇), and also in the *Baihu tong* 白虎通. If we follow this account, the first mode of *ming*—which here is “*shouming*” 壽命—is rare and reserved for those who stick to the rules; the second refers to accidents that cut a man's life short; and the last points to a life that develops according to one's just deserts. See *Baihu tong*, ch. 31, “Shouming,” Tjan Tjoe Som, trans., *Po hu t'ung* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 2:572ff. However, the line of argumentation followed in the *TPJ* does not take any “theory of three destinies” 三命說 into account. For details on this “theory” see Chen Zhongqi, “‘My *Ming* Resides in Myself rather than in Tian’: Reflections on the Life View of Taoism” 「我命在我不在天」：道教生命觀についての一考察, *Tōhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 99 (2002): 43–64, and Yau Yen-chi 姚彥淇, “Cong ‘shouming’ dao ‘sanming’: Liang Han shiren de xingge zhuanbian yu minglun sixiang de fazhan” 從「受命」到「三命」：兩漢士人的性格轉變與命論思想的發展, *Gaoxiong shida xuebao* 高雄師大學報 28 (2010): 55–78.

## VI. Fated to Avoid Death?

Fear of death and the hope of postponing or even avoiding it are more pronounced in the *dahua* group of texts than elsewhere in the *TPJ*. This group contains detailed accounts of celestial bureaucratic procedures for registering units of life and human trespasses or meritorious acts and the inclusion of a person's name in lists of the living or of the dead. Not all that is said here is clear, but on reading this material one can only come to the conclusion that the authors of the text take an interest in relativizing the rules of predestination. This is particularly obvious in section 181, which comes rather close to assigning men a predetermined fate, as Benjamin Penny has pointed out.<sup>32</sup> Reading the section, he derives a conclusive and powerful table on the link between life expectancy and date of birth. However, even here, I would argue, the authors wriggle, as if attempting to establish an opening for the personal decisionmaking of someone born in the wrong year. The following two passages may help explain the authors' approach:

On the day of birth the Controller of Time situated in the Constellation Room makes a record in the book of accounts that must not be forgotten. If one's fate lies with *zi* and *wu*, one will live a long time, naturally. [Born] in a year of *chou* and *wei*, one does not let go of the sphere of [the phase of] soil and one's life expectancy is feeble. One must not do evil or else one will be stuck with the sphere of soil. As long as life has not yet come to an end, recording takes place in the Constellation Room and, although one may experience a month sign that is kingly and ministerial, *qi* will not grow.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Benjamin Penny, "A System of Fate Calculation in *Taiping jing*."

<sup>33</sup> See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 181.547. It is assumed that "在旁" is a mistake and must be read as "在房." As Luo Chi 羅熾, ed., *Taiping jing zhuyi* 太平經注譯 (Chongqing: Xi'an shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 901, explains, both *zi* (first terrestrial branch) and *wu* (seventh terrestrial branch) have a *yang* association. He also argues that the evaluation of *zi* and *wu* given here does not agree with evaluations that became standard. *Chou* (second branch) and *wei* (eighth branch) both have a *yin* association. Cf. also Barbara Hendrischke, "Divination in the *Taiping jing*," *Monumenta Serica* 57 (2009): 44, on different evaluations of the phases of fire and of earth that play a role in this system. In the passage at hand as well as throughout the *TPJ* the stem and branch based system of fate calculation is introduced as if it were well known.

生命之日，司候在房，記著錄籍，不可有忘。命在子午，其命自長。  
丑未之年，不失土鄉，壽小薄。不宜有惡，使付土鄉。壽未盡，籍記  
在旁，雖見王相月建，氣以不長。

So the wrong time of birth is a handicap, and is said to remain one despite other objective conditions being favourable.<sup>34</sup> However, even someone thus disadvantaged is warned to conduct himself well, as if under all circumstances good conduct may modify what has been predetermined. Another example is the following passage that deals with a very difficult situation:

Now *you* being exactly in the west is the sphere of [the phase of] metal. Someone who likes getting into fights cannot last long. Doing evil, naturally, how should he live a long life? Although he may obtain a month sign that is kingly and ministerial, that is the situation. With sixty or seventy per cent of his actions being evil he will, on the day he dies, have got through only half [the life he was allotted]. This we know.<sup>35</sup>

西正酉復在金鄉，喜行戰鬪，不得久長。行惡，自然何從久生？難得  
王相月建，裁自如耳。其六七惡，日亡其過半，是為可知。

Interpretative interest lies in the expression “who likes to get into fights,” which again seems to provide someone born at the wrong time with an option as if, by staying away from fights, against his inclination, he might live longer. The authors start section 181 sketching a man of superior virtue whose understanding is absolutely comprehensive, which includes knowing the length of a man’s life. This knowledge, we may and must assume, is derived from combining the date of birth with the moral quality of someone’s actions. The section ends with the reminder that men who do well will be rewarded. If this should not take place during their own lifetime, their children and grandchildren will benefit.

<sup>34</sup> The impact of the stage *qi* happens to be in, here “kingly” and “ministerial,” is evaluated differently in section 153 of the *shoushen* group of texts, see above at note 22.

<sup>35</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 181.548. *You* is the tenth terrestrial branch. Yu reads “行惡自然，何從久生” and renders “自然” as “lacking self restraint”; see *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 406. There does not seem to be any parallel for this use of the term.

The stakes are higher when there is the option to avoid death, which is of interest mainly to the authors of the *dahua* group of texts. They point to certain cases of “ascension” and “deification,” in Espeset’s words, but insist that such cases are very rare:<sup>36</sup>

Each man living between heaven and earth obtains one life and cannot live a second time. Only men who have obtained Dao live a second time. They die and are born again. They are liberated by means of the corpse. That is all. To be thus favored by heaven and earth does not happen to one man among ten thousand times ten thousand. Therefore ordinary men, once they have died, do not come to life again.<sup>37</sup>

人居天地之間，人人得壹生，不得重生也。重生者，獨得道人，死而復生，尸解者耳。是者天地所私，萬萬未有一人也。故凡人壹死，不復得生也。

Rising to heaven in broad daylight is said to be at least as rare as release by means of the corpse. Elsewhere in the *dahua* group the two events are mentioned as if they were in sequence and, after release, a man would remain active in the realms between heaven and earth for a number of years, gaining merit:

Occasionally there is release by means of the corpse and dissolution of the bodily form. When bones and body have become separated, the corpse is left complete while vital energy and spirit form the person. Once others see the corpse, they all say the man has died. Later on, some may know. They see that he exists. This is the man released by means of the corpse. After a long time the number of years is right and he then rises up as a person who ascends to heaven in broad daylight. If there is the right number of years and the achievement of great merit, he may live again, shining brightly. He will assist celestial spirits in their circles and, on return, rest amidst clouds. Administrative regions all have transcendents who have arrived there through release by means of the corpse to take charge of human ghosts.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Grégoire Espeset, “Criminalized Abnormality, Moral Etiology and Redemptive Suffering,” 30–33.

<sup>37</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 110.298.

<sup>38</sup> To take charge of the dead, that is (ibid., 182.553). In “骨體以分,” Yu correctly understands “以” as “已” (*Taiping jing zhengdu*, 410).

或有尸解分形，骨體以分，尸在一身，精神為人。尸，使人見之，皆言已死，後有知者，見其在也，此尸解人也。久久有歲數，次上為白日昇天者。使有歲數，功多成，更生光照，助天神周徧，復還止雲中，所部界皆有尸解仙人，主知人鬼者。

Here, the only condition mentioned for ascension is “to have obtained Dao.”<sup>39</sup> This is repeated and there is no reference to any other conditions. It is mentioned once, in a *dahua* section, that men from Daoist families are privileged. However, their advancement takes place after death. Once they have turned into demons, they are assigned positions of rank.<sup>40</sup>

We may conclude that the authors assume that whether men end their life by ascending to heaven or entering earth is not predestined but reflects heaven’s judgement of their human actions. They suggest different means by which this judgement reaches men. One is the celestial distribution to men who deserve them of garments that characterize the occupants of heaven.<sup>41</sup> A section of

<sup>39</sup> See also Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 208.665: “In the times of the Three Majesties and Five Emperors men often obtained Dao and were either released by means of the corpse or went away with their body intact (this is “rising to heaven in broad daylight”). In the times of the three kings men lived long lives. In the times of the five hegemon men died in the wilderness. Nowadays in lower antiquity we have preserved the way of these hegemon. We all die in the wilderness, as did they . . .” 故三皇五帝多得道上天，或有尸解，或有形去。三王以壽，五霸無得正道者，皆戰鬪死於野。今下古守此霸道，亦皆死於野…… In the *TPJ*, the expression to “obtain Dao” is rare, as if it were reserved for a situation where men prepare for transcendence. For another example of this use, see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 107.282 in a passage characteristic of the *shoushen* group: “Therefore at a time when men do not have Dao they are just men. When they obtain Dao they change into spirit transcendents” 故人無道之時，但人耳，得道則變易成神仙。The expression is also used for someone who is in complete mastery, as for instance: “The essential message is the following: In early antiquity, men able to bring peace to their reign through their grasp of Dao were merely engaged in nourishing their own person and preserving their root” 語真人一大要言，上古得道，能平其治者，但工自養，守其本也 (ibid., 48.61). This understanding of the term can be seen as characteristic of the *taiping* group of texts.

<sup>40</sup> See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 182.553–4: “In a house that has Dao the deceased are appointed to honored positions among demons, under the name of terrestrial numinous beings, with a sash in purple, green, blue, and yellow” 有道之家，其去者得封為鬼之尊者，名為地靈祇，亦得帶紫艾青黃。

<sup>41</sup> See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 63.138, in the *taiping* group.

the *dahua* group of texts proposes that heaven uses the following method to implement its will:

This man cannot teach himself to be good and heaven knows that his being evil can go on for a long time. Therefore it lets him eat food that has physical form. Therefore the man will be stored beneath the earth and in charge of being a terrestrial spirit who will not be permitted to return to life.<sup>42</sup>

此人不得自師為善者，天知為惡可久前，故使食有形之食。故藏土下，主為地神，使不得復生。

So here heaven is seen to actively send an evildoer to death by serving him earthly food. For a good man the situation is the opposite:

How should a man who eats and defecates be able to work for a long time with great spirits from heaven? If someone among those who digest corresponds to the measures set up in celestial writings, heaven sends spirits to teach him. When the number of years, months, and days is full, a commission is sent out to the spirit warden of heaven's great granary to cut off things with physical form and provide the man with *qi*-type food from heaven's great granary to consume and digest.<sup>43</sup>

食糞之人，亦安從得與天大神久共事乎？糞中之有應天書度者，天遣神教之。歲月日滿，勅天大倉守神，斷有形之物，稟天大倉氣食消化。

## VII. Conclusions

Robert Campany has argued that the *TPJ*'s *dahua* group proposes a way to longevity and even immortality that is based on merit only. Deception and tricks are shown to be of no avail. As I have tried to argue elsewhere, the problem here lies in the concept of merit.<sup>44</sup> The world depicted in the *dahua* group is that of a

<sup>42</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 182.553.

<sup>43</sup> Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 182.553. Following Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 409, “歲月日滿” is replaced by “歲月日滿。”

<sup>44</sup> See Barbara Hendrischke, “Religious Ethics in the *Taiping jing*: The Seeking of Life,” in *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 4 (2012): 53–94.

Kafkaesque bureaucratic nightmare. The candidate for transcendence succeeds because he undergoes a process of complete self-alienation. This guarantees the support of high-ranking bureaucrats who are impressed with his malleability and venture to find a position for him in the celestial bureaucracy. They also make sure that the paperwork is done properly. The candidate's handling of these bureaucrats, whom he sees as his future colleagues, is clever. He hangs around with the heads of departments in order to learn what we could term the "correct language." He begs for instruction, is filled with unending remorse, and describes himself as a child in need of guidance.<sup>45</sup>

Differences between the *dahua* and other groups are easy to prove and have already been observed and described. The identity of the other three groups that have here been set up is harder to prove. Much more documentation is needed. However, it is plausible that each has a recognizable intellectual and social home. In the *tianfa* group the world is patiently explained as resulting from the powerful impact of cosmic correlations. Here, the term *ming* has a place, but individual fate is an entity that is largely ignored. The background is in the study of prognostics and other scholarly pursuits. In parts of the *taiping* group, cosmic order is depicted as if it were the scene of a dramatic performance where different actors are about to finish off each other as well as the stage they all play on. Individual fate is said to be part of this ubiquitous drama so that each person stands a chance only as part of a larger group. It is easy to imagine that leaders of a millenarian movement would take an interest in this material. In the *shoushen* group, the authors pay attention to physiological aspects that were or became the expertise of Daoist thinkers. However, this attention is limited and the knowledge that is conveyed is not transformed into practical advice; rather, the practical advice given is to sideline physiological conditions. This holds true also for the rituals that are

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<sup>45</sup> That he manages to shame even the Lord of Heaven, head of this bureaucracy, adds another twist to his character. Petty clerks had been told to delete the candidate's inherited sins—he needs to have a clean slate before he can ascend—but have not done so. The Lord of Heaven is furious as the candidate sighs audibly: one promise not kept; how about the others? (Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.534.)

mentioned in this group of texts. They are only meant to provide direct access to spirits for therapeutic purposes. The term *ming* is used sparingly but individual fate is central.

In concluding a paper on *ming*, Company observes that, for the texts he works on, *ming* is not an abstract concept but an “aspect of culturally constituted lived reality.”<sup>46</sup> It is important to keep in mind that for authors and audience of the *TPJ* this reality is comprised of a few essential factors and is completely different from, for example, the understanding of fate that is the basis for Meng zi’s complaints and Wang Chong’s mockery.<sup>47</sup> Meng zi accuses heaven of preventing a king from granting him an audience. This situation is far removed from the lived reality of individuals in the *TPJ* who are concerned with avoiding illness, criminal prosecution and natural disasters so that they can finish their allotted life span and have children who prosper.

For the *TPJ*, understanding the whole range of *ming* proves Stephen Bokenkamp right when he argues that “fatalism of any sort could logically play no part in a religion that promoted its self-cultivation practices with promises of longevity and death avoidance.”<sup>48</sup> However, a statement like the following disagrees with the theist principles of great-peace teachings: “My fate lies with me, not with heaven” 我命在我不在天。<sup>49</sup> In all groups of the *TPJ* the authors would twist this sentence into something like “human fate lies with heaven, and therefore human beings must pay attention to it.” For the authors of the *TPJ*, respect for fate agrees well with the devotion that human beings are said to owe

<sup>46</sup> See Robert Company, “Living off the Books: Fifty Ways to Dodge *Ming* in Early Medieval China,” in *The Magnitude of Ming*, 143.

<sup>47</sup> *Lun heng*, ch. 30, “Ci Meng” 刺孟 (Censures on Mengzi), cf. Alfred Forke, trans., *Lun-Hêng* (New York: Paragon, 1962), 1:423, has the expression “*yiming*” 易命 (changing fate). Here Wang Chong mocks Meng zi who, we are told, remained at the court of Qi in hope of meeting the king, while in Lu he gave up quickly, arguing that heaven had decided against his success. As Wang Chong put it: “Why should heaven in the course of three days change Meng zi’s fate in order to let him meet the king” 天豈為三日之間，易命使之遇乎？

<sup>48</sup> See Stephen Bokenkamp, “Simple Twists of Fate: The Daoist Body and Its *Ming*,” in *The Magnitude of Ming*, 156.

<sup>49</sup> See *Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命錄 (DZ 838), “Jiaojie pian” 教誡篇, quoting a *Scripture of Transcendence* 仙經 (1.9b), as quoted by Stephen Bokenkamp, “Simple Twists of Fate,” 157.

heaven. This strong theist approach may explain the fact that the *TPJ* does not seem to contain any advice on the psychosomatic techniques that can be deployed for altering *ming*.<sup>50</sup> It also explains that fate remains a weak and dependent term that is seen to matter not too much, squeezed as it is between an active heaven and an active human being or group of men.

So again, what are the options for molding fate? The *tianfa* option is to keep the cosmos in order. By thus involving their audience in a project that is of major concern for the educated elite, the authors document the socially integrative approach that they propagate. The *taiping* option is new. The authors of this group of texts agree with the need for cosmic order, but by means of a dynamic interpretation of this order they arrive at demands for a dynamic social restructuring. In 20<sup>th</sup>-century language, it is as if people were expected to mold their fate by revolutionizing society. The *shoushen* option is complex. Here the authors show their audience the full power of predestination and then send them, one might say, in the direction of organized religion. For the authors of the *dahua* unit conversion and personal faith are the condition for molding *ming*. These options are diverse but all seem to fit, more or less, within the boundaries of what became Daoism.

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<sup>50</sup> Chen Zhongqi, as in above note 8, argues that the concept of *chengfu* 承負 as developed in the *TPJ* helped a Daoist re-orientation of the relationship between *xing* 性 and *ming*.

## 《太平經》中的改命途徑

芭芭拉·亨德施克

### 摘要

本論文介紹了最早成書於公元二世紀的《太平經》中所記載的對「命」的多種理解，這些理解與其作者們所宣揚的多套道德和宗教教化相關。對他們而言，好命與壞命的區分表現在生命的長短，他們使信眾確信只要堅守正道，就會帶來長生。這種許諾似乎又與人生來即各自有命的觀念有些矛盾。作者們並沒有否認這個觀念，而是提出其他並行的看法，以限制命定論的影響。在這裏，天賞善罰惡的形象起到了巨大的作用，同時，個人命運也與集體命運息息相關。長篇經文中的不同部分提供了彼此相異的改命途徑。在「天法」文本中，個人命運取決於他對天地自然規律的認識與適應程度。「太平」文本的作者則展現了一個集體生活隨時面臨災難的歷史處境，個人命運因此與其對社會改革和其他社會拯救活動的支持緊密聯繫。「守神」文本強調了先天的生理條件；然而，其作者又認為若個人能夠多加留意自己的行為，他可以使得天或體內外的神靈改善其命。「大化」文本中的改命則可僅通過修身自省，以及對天滿懷感恩之心而達到。

關鍵詞：《太平經》、漢代、命、天法、守神