《道教研究學報：宗教、歷史與社會》第六期（2014）
Daoism: Religion, History and Society, No. 6 (2014), 33–84

The *Sword Scripture*: Recovering and Interpreting a Lost 4th-Century Daoist Method for Cheating Death*

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Abstract

This article undertakes a new interpretation of the Shangqing text known as the *Sword Scripture,* which has survived in fragments. It argues that the scripture prescribed a classic sort of method of *shijie* or "escape by means of a simulated corpse." It also presents a theory as to why such a method would have been recommended to the earliest recipients of the Shangqing revelations despite the fact that the scripture does not promise that the practice it teaches would lead to Perfected status for practitioners.

Keywords: Daoism, *Sword Scripture*, Shangqing, *shijie*, performance

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* My thanks to Terry Kleeman for inviting me to the Erlangen workshop in which this paper was first presented and for helpful suggestions on its content; to the Internationales Kolleg für Geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung at the Universität Erlangen-Nuremberg and its excellent faculty and staff for hosting the workshop; and to colleagues there and at Vanderbilt University who commented on the paper in its early stages. Special, heartfelt thanks to Steve Bokenkamp for patiently and generously discussing with me many difficult matters concerning Shangqing texts as well as for his many suggestions.

I. Introduction

Between 364 and 370 C.E., high deities known as Perfected Ones (*zhenren* 真人) were said to have appeared in visions to the medium Yang Xi 楊羲 to instruct him on a wide range of topics.[1] Deigning to descend from a hitherto unknown zone of the heavens called Supreme Purity or Shangqing 上清, they dictated to Yang, who wrote down their words, or else they arrived bearing written scrolls, some of which he was allowed to copy.[2] He showed the resulting texts to his patrons, members of the southeastern clan Xu 許. Within a few generations the texts circulated more widely, and then were coveted, imitated, and forged by aristocrats seeking the religious and social cachet that simply owning the scriptures could convey.[3] This scriptural profusion prompted the Daoist master Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 around 499 (and Gu Huan 顧歡 a bit earlier[4]) to

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[1] Works in the Ming Daoist canon are cited by title and folio page as they appear in the 1926 reprint of *Zhengtong daozang* 正統道藏 as photo-reduced in the 60–volume edition by Xinwenfeng (Taipei, 1977) and by the number (preceded by DZ) assigned them in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the* Daozang (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, hereafter *TTC*). Translations are my own except as indicated.

[2] The divine dictation process is described in detail in some of the extant texts. For a translation and discussion of some relevant passages, see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Declarations of the Perfected," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 167, 173–174 (translating *Zhen'gao* 真誥 [DZ 1016, hereafter *ZG*], 1.14aff.). Given the cultural importance of calligraphic style and the sacred power of writing, the question of why the gods did not themselves write down their messages naturally came up and was dealt with explicitly and prominently at a number of points, e.g. at *ZG*, 1.7b–10a. Yang's and the Xus' own calligraphy as well as their literary prowess were highly prized and were among the marks used by Gu Huan and Tao Hongjing to distinguish authentic from forged Shangqing writings, as discussed in Michel Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy," *T'oung Pao* 63.1 (1977): 31–32, 38. An instance of Yang's copying of celestial texts brought down to his studio from the heavens by a goddess may be seen at *ZG*, 2.7a–b. For further brief comments see Robert Ford Campany, "Buddhist Revelation and Daoist Translation in Early Medieval China," *Taoist Resources* 4.1 (1993): 21–25.

[3] On the reasons for this, see Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations," 27–30.

[4] On Gu Huan and his *Zhenji* 真迹 or *Traces of the Perfected*, a partial model for Tao's work that has long since been lost, see Michel Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan: Chronique d'une révélation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France,

undertake a sorting of what he considered the authentic from the apocryphal texts and to compile other documents, including diary-like records of the Perfected Ones' appearances in visions and dreams. The larger of these compilations that survives was titled *Zhen'gao* or *Declarations of the Perfected*.[5] All of this is well known to Daoism specialists but not beyond. Few of these writings have yet been carefully studied, let alone translated, in non-Asian-language publications.[6] But they constitute one of the most fascinating textual dossiers of world religious history.

1981), 12, 64; Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 140–141; Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations," 31–32, 54–55; Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), 1:111–112, 211, and 2:314–315, 320.

[5] Tao also compiled *Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱訣 or *Secret Instructions for Ascending as a Perfected One* (DZ 421), only parts of which survive. This work was designed as a manual for adepts, focusing on methods of practice (see *TTC*, 1:201–205), while *Zhen'gao* had more the character of a collection of other sorts of documents produced during the flurry of the divine-human interactions of the early Shangqing revelations. The best accounts of the origins and early vicissitudes of the Shangqing corpus are still Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*; Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan*; and Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations."

[6] An exception has been the work of Stephen R. Bokenkamp, particularly in *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 275–372, and "Declarations of the Perfected." Bokenkamp is preparing a complete, annotated translation of *Zhen'gao*. Thomas E. Smith, in *Declarations of the Perfected. Part One: Setting Scripts and Images into Motion* (St. Petersburg: Three Pines Press, 2013), offers a translation of (and idiosyncratic commentary to) the first four chapters of *Zhen'gao*. Other Western-language translations of Shangqing texts include Manfred Porkert, *Biographie d'un Taoïste légendaire: Tcheou Tseu-yang* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1979); James Miller, *The Way of Highest Clarity: Nature, Vision and Revelation in Medieval China* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2008); and the following articles by Paul W. Kroll, "In the Halls of the Azure Lad," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105.1 (1985): 75–94; "Seduction Songs of One of the Perfected," in *Religions of China in Practice*, 180–187; "The Divine Songs of the Lady of Purple Tenuity," in *Studies in Early Chinese Literature and Cultural History: In Honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Paul W. Kroll (Provo, Utah: T'ang Studies Society, 2003), 149–211; "Spreading Open the Barrier of Heaven," *Asiatische Studien* 40 (1986): 22–39; "The Light of Heaven in Medieval Taoist Verse," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 27 (1999): 1–12; and "Daoist Verse and the Quest of the Divine," in *Early Chinese Religion. Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:953–985.

Among the thirty-four or so scriptures (that is, *jing* 經, literally "warp [or main] texts," in addition to divine biographies [*zhuan* 傳] and other works and piecemeal bits of instruction[7]) revealed to Yang Xi and his patrons,[8] was one called the *Sword Scripture* (*Jian jing* 劍經) for short. No integral version of it has survived in or outside the Daoist canon, but several texts preserve partial quotations. Here I will first give background necessary to understand what the scripture is about. Next I will introduce its contents. Only then will I come to the heart of this article, which is to provide a new interpretation of the scripture in its religious, cultural, and social context.

The importance of a text such as the *Sword Scripture* for historians of Daoism is perhaps self-evident. But why should other scholars care about it? The study of Daoism lags so far behind that of other major religions that the appearance of a good study of any Daoist phenomenon should be welcomed. Beyond this, though, the scripture—and the category of Chinese esoteric practice to which it belongs—is an extraordinary religious response to death. Anyone interested in comparative thanatology will find rich, unusual, and heretofore largely neglected material here.

Additionally, the scripture provides a useful example of intra-religious contestation. In a crowded field of preexisting religious alternatives, how does a new text justify its teachings and prescribed practices and thus create a niche for itself? Answering this question with regard to the *Sword Scripture* would entail examining its invented filiation and self-provided pedigree, its claims for results superior to those of competing practices (of which its makers were obviously well aware), and other rhetorical features designed to win over its audience. And in this case the language of

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[7] In fact, the situation is more complicated than this; I have simplified things here. Robinet identifies 34 "core" scriptures but there are other scriptures that stand a decent chance of having numbered among the early Shangqing corpus, in addition to at least eleven divine biographies and other works that may preserve early Shangqing material. See Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, vol. 2.

[8] The most authoritative treatment of these is still Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*; for a recent tabular synopsis of her findings see also Robinet, "Shangqing," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), 2:859–860. See also Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan*, 59–81, and Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations," 41–62.

winning over an audience gains unexpected force when we note that most Shangqing texts were explicitly designed as vehicles for divine persuasion: through them, Perfected Ones hoped to woo members of the Xu family, Yang Xi himself, and other qualified parties into undertaking the disciplines necessary to join them in Supreme Purity sooner rather than later. (Sometimes this wooing was quite literal and, we might say, meta-sexual in nature, with a female Perfected One encouraging a male practitioner or prospective practitioner to join her posthaste as her consort.[9]) The *Sword Scripture* and other Shangqing works thus offer complex cases of the rhetoric and poetics of scriptural writing—scriptures, in this instance, presented as the direct speech of gods to mortals.

Thirdly, the text offers material relevant to the question of whether religions and their productions are best seen as tightly coherent, internally consistent "systems"[10] or instead as only loosely cohesive "tool kits" or repertoires of resources based on different, even inconsistent metaphors.[11] Our text offers a single set of directives drawing on multiple wellsprings of cultural prestige and spiritual power, each grounded in a distinct set of metaphoric structures and each trailing its own cloud of precedent associations for readers of its time: metallurgy, with its rich mythological and

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[9] The first four chapters of *Declarations of the Perfected* are almost entirely taken up by a series of divine overtures (ranging from seductive siren-like poems to frustrated scoldings) meant to urge a few select human (male) readers to at once take up the practices necessary for their apotheosis so that they might join their divine (female) suitors in the heavens in their state of Perfection. The Shangqing scriptures, in turn, told these potential adepts what the requisite practices were, and the divine biographies laid out exemplary precedents to follow.

[10] As argued recently in Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81.2 (2013): 357–398. Perhaps proceeding as if religions were systems (as Clifford Geertz and many others have done) is heuristically useful for certain research agendas, but to take the model as an empirically and historically accurate statement of fact is not simply a category mistake; it is also dramatically incongruent with what the actual productions of any religion look like over long periods.

[11] See Robert Ford Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42.4 (2003): 287–319; Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 39–87; and Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," *History of Religions* 52.2 (2012): 99–141.

cosmological background; southern Chinese sword lore and its association with sacral kingship; alchemy; astral travel; bureaucratic deception and the use of surrogates; talismans and the sacred aura of writing; and oral incantations. In addition, as will be seen, it presents a goal that seems to diverge from the Shangqing norm. The text thus begins to resemble less a tight, rationally designed system (or the output of such a system) than a clever but variegated effort at persuasion (of a potentially reluctant audience) and justification (of a self-admittedly inferior, deceptive practice that suspiciously resembled its competitors) invoking as many different sources of cultural prestige as possible.

These angles of interpretation will not be developed much here, although I am pursuing them in a separate monograph. Instead, in this paper I approach the text in two ways. On the one hand, I argue that scholars have not yet fully grasped the scripture's basic purpose. By assembling all of its extant pieces for the first time and then placing those within the context of the Shangqing revelations and their initially restricted audience, I have arrived at a new view of what the scripture was for, which I present here. What it was for turns out to be quite surprising in the context of what else we know (or think we know) about Shangqing teachings. On the other hand, I come to the text with questions regarding the performativity of esoteric religious practice and of textual prescriptions for such practice. Elsewhere I have argued that when interpreting religious ideas, practices, texts, or persons, we often neglect to situate them among their surrounding others, forgetting that they were fashioned under and for the gaze of others. This is, I think, one reason why we failed for so long to grasp what *shijie* 尸解—the type of practice prescribed in the *Sword Scripture*—was about. I will try to restore a sense of how the scripture's recommended practice worked as performance, which will mean lifting our gaze from the adept in isolation, seeing the various others before whom he acted, and understanding that it was their response alone that made the whole thing work. I will also argue in closing that the text itself must also be seen as a situation-specific rhetorical performance—that is, an exercise in persuasion—in order to be properly understood.[12]

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[12] For comments on the notion of performance and its relevance to the study of esoteric religion and hagiographies, see Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 21–30.

II. *Shijie* or Escape via Simulated Corpse

I argue that the main purpose of the *Sword Scripture* was to provide a divinely authorized Shangqing teaching on what had by the late fourth century already become a vexed topic in the Daoist tradition. That topic was known as *shijie*, "escape by means of a simulated corpse," a class of esoteric methods for forestalling the practitioner's own death that had been in circulation for several centuries prior to Yang Xi's visions.[13] This is a view of the scripture's purpose that has been acknowledged in passing by Robinet and Cedzich (though not by Strickmann) but whose full significance has not been realized. I will present the evidence for it at the end of this section, but first a brief, general introduction to the strange business of *shijie* is needed.

(a) How *Shijie* Worked

Shijie methods' main working components were as follows. The afterlife was seen as a vast bureaucracy. Each individual was believed destined to live a certain preordained number of years—his or her *ming* 命 (a term with various significations but here meaning pre-allotted lifespan).[14] At the expiration of this lifespan, agents of the spirit bureaucracy were sent to retrieve one's soul (one of the multiple souls, anyway) from one's body, triggering physical death. The soul was brought before a representative of the bureaucracy for processing (and, once Buddhism took deeper hold

[13] See Angelika Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance, Substitute Bodies, Name Change, and Feigned Death: Aspects of Metamorphosis and Immortality in Early Medieval China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2001): 1–68, which marked a major advance in our understanding; Robert Ford Campany, "Living off the Books: Fifty Ways to Dodge *Ming* in Early Medieval China," in *The Magnitude of* Ming*: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture*, ed. Christopher Lupke (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 129–150; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's* Traditions of Divine Transcendents (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 47–60; and Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 177–178 passim.

[14] The question naturally arises as to how this lifespan was initially determined. To my knowledge, this is a question for which we do not yet have a complete answer for this period, but for preliminary attempts to tackle it, see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Simple Twists of Fate: The Daoist Body and Its *Ming*," in *The Magnitude of* Ming, 151–168, and Campany, "Living off the Books," 131–133.

in China and already in Shangqing portrayals, for judgment and subsequent punishment). The name of the newly deceased was transferred from a register of the living (each entry with its *ming* expiration date duly noted) to one of the dead. Normally this system worked inexorably, as the ubiquity of death would attest. But there were improbable loopholes. One might avoid, if not death, at least some of the unpleasant fates of the dead (such as forced labor) by assigning a substitute person or object to "take one's place" (*dai* 代).[15] And very occasionally the bureaucracy was imagined to make mistakes, summoning the wrong person or else the right person at the wrong time, a possibility fleshed out in a whole subgenre of narratives in which the protagonist dies only to return soon afterward to relate his experiences while temporarily dead and the reason for his return to life.[16]

Premised on these widely shared assumptions, *shijie* methods enabled those who had been initiated into their mysteries to circumvent the normal bureaucratic mechanism of dying. Most such methods worked by deception. The adept feigned his death, often aided by a decoy object that masqueraded as his own corpse long enough for him to escape. Both the adept's own family and

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[15] See Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 29; Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 40–43; Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 131, 134, 145–148; and Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 17.

[16] On such stories see Donald Harper, "Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion," *Taoist Resources* 5.2 (1994): 13–29; Robert Ford Campany, "Return-from-Death Narratives in Early Medieval China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990): 91–125; Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 45; and Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 258, 260. In the Shangqing scripture *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* 上清後聖道君列紀 (DZ 442), 12a (translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 359) is a passage that describes the death registration process and that goes on to deny that the death registration officials (called, in Celestial Master and Shangqing texts, the Three Offices 三官) ever make this sort of mistake (also specifying that practitioners of pre-Shangqing *shijie* methods must relocate and change names every thirty years to avoid detection); and yet the method offered in the *Sword Scripture* is premised on getting them to register the adept's sword as the adept himself, deceased, when he has not in fact died.

friends and the agents of the afterlife bureaucracy were supposed to be taken in by the ruse. The funeral, burial, and mourning rites proceeded normally, albeit focused on a surrogate object. Meanwhile the spirit agents registered the adept as having already died. With his name expunged from the ledgers of those yet due to die, he was free of the bureaucracy and its system of death-summons, but within certain limits. Texts prescribing such methods typically forbade the adept from returning home or retaining his former name, since the afterlife agents kept track of people by their name and place of residence. He was to head to the mountains or at least stay on the move, living under a new identity, lest the spirits detect that he hadn't actually died. Hagiographies of transcendents or *xianren* 仙人 who were credited with using this method often show them moving, changing their names, and acquiring a series of new families over the many decades or centuries of their ongoing lives.[17] Also, this procedure circumvented only the bureaucratic aspect of death: the natural tendency to age and decay (imagined in ways that were based on other, non-bureaucratic metaphoric structures) still had to be addressed by other means. The death-system loopholes were widely known, as attested in many return-from-death narratives involving ordinary protagonists, but the ritual and mantic procedures by which the adept exploited them constituted esoteric knowledge, transmitted under a solemn oath of secrecy from master to disciple.[18]

In the generic term *shijie*, when this type of method is in question[19] *shi* 尸 designates the decoy object that stood in for the adept as his apparent corpse. It impersonated him, just as the male family member designated *shi* in the solemn family ancestral banquet impersonated—i.e. played the ritual role of—his deceased

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[17] See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 58–59; Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 155, 194–196.

[18] On the culture of esotericism and its workings, see Robert Ford Campany, "Secrecy and Display in the Quest for Transcendence in China, ca. 220 B.C.E.–350 C.E.," *History of Religions* 45.4 (2006): 291–336, and Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 88–129.

[19] There were other methods also sometimes termed *shijie*, evidenced in only a few cases, which I do not deal with here. See Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 12–26; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 59–60; and Campany, "Living off the Books."

grandfather. *Jie* 解 designates the result of this substitution: the practitioner's "release" or "escape" or "liberation," a sort of disentanglement.[20] At least in this type of *shijie*, *shi* in the compound does not designate that which is released but rather that *by means of which* the *adept* is released; and that by means of which he is released is *not* his actual corpse, for he has not in fact died, but an object that only temporarily impersonates him *as* a corpse to allow his escape. Absent a real, physical death—absent an actual corpse—translations such as "liberation of/from the corpse," still used by many scholars, are therefore misleading. In a metaphor the Chinese often used when referring to *shijie*, the old skin of the cicada, now a hollow shell, was left behind, while the living creature flew off to freedom. Western matter/spirit, body/spirit dualisms have encouraged some scholars to read the shell as the physical body, sloughed off for a purer, "spiritual" existence. But in fact the adept was *still an embodied being*, and what was left behind was not he, nor even a lower element of him. It was just an object designed to convince others that he was dead, when in fact he was not.

All this was naturally controversial. Claims of *shijie* were debunked as simply impossible, nonsensical, illogical.[21] The quest for immortality generally, and *shijie* methods especially, were criticized as unfilial, as undermining families and the proper veneration of ancestors.[22] The methods' dependence on deception of

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[20] The term *jie*, as Anna Seidel pointed out, originated in a judiciary context during the Han or perhaps even earlier; its basic meaning in Han tomb documents—and still, arguably, in the compound *shijie*—is "to absolve from guilt," the "freeing" or "release" of a prisoner from "punishment for his misdeeds and from demon demands for payment of fines, debts and taxes." See Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs," in *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* 道教と宗教文化, ed. Akizuki Kan'ei 秋月觀暎 (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), 690. In *shijie*, the adept gains release or absolution from the obligation to die at the appointed time (i.e. from his preallotted lifespan or *ming*) and appear before the underworld authorities, a process portrayed in countless narratives.

[21] As for example by both Wang Chong 王充 in his *Lun heng* 論衡 and Wang Fu 王符 in his *Qianfu lun* 潛夫論 during the Later Han period. See Harper, "Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion," 25–26; Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 16–17; Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Shoki no Dōkyō* 初期の道教 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1991), 553–596.

[22] See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 186–198.

the afterlife authorities was castigated as both impious and absurd: the bureaucracy, said these critics, misses nothing; the only way up or out is *through*—either by moral action (as seen for example in the *Scripture of Great Peace* [*Taiping jing* 太平經])[23] or by a "refinement." The use of surrogates was likewise rejected by those of Buddhist persuasion for whom only the doer of deeds—not substitutes, and not even other family members (as was a frequent occurrence in both Daoist and common-religion contexts)—could answer for them.[24] Even as staunch a proponent of the quest for transcendence as Ge Hong 葛洪, while crediting *shijie* methods and attributing them to many adepts featured in his hagiographical compilation (and whoever wrote Ge's own biography in the *History of the Jin* [*Jin shu* 晉書] deemed Ge to have performed *shijie* himself), ranked it as the lowest category of methods of transcendence, presumably because it relied on deception.[25] Nevertheless, at the time of the Shangqing revelations in the latter half of the fourth century C.E., *shijie* was a well-established type of technique, familiar enough to the general population so that any apparent death of an adept known to have been a practitioner of esoteric arts was liable to be interpreted as an instance of escape via simulated corpse.[26]

(b) The *Sword Scripture* as a *Shijie* Text

Shangqing texts incorporated many earlier practices and adepts of the quest for transcendence while positioning themselves as offering

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[23] See Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 48–51; Campany, "Living off the Books," 138–140; *Taiping jing* scrolls 110–114 (for which see Wang Ming 王明, ed., *Taiping jing hejiao*太平經合校 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960], 524–585); *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*, 11b–12a, translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 359.

[24] See Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 40–43; Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation," 130–133; Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 169; Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 113–118, 170; Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 29.

[25] See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 59, 75–78. On Ge Hong's *Jin shu* biography and its ending, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 13–17.

[26] See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 157, 176, 178, 222, 243.

improved versions of the practices and updated information on the adepts.[27] The *Sword Scripture* was, I argue, the primary Shangqing update of earlier traditions of *shijie* practice. Rather than rejecting *shijie* outright as a category of esoteric performance, as would not have been surprising, the text in effect says: "Here is a superior version. If you intend to deploy a *shijie* practice, use this one." The scripture readily applies the generic *shijie* label to the method it recommends. It claims that its own version of this technique is superior in several ways to previous ones, which it associates with the lower, Taiqing 太清 or Grand Clarity zone of the heavens and the quest for "mere" Transcendent (*xian* 仙) status vis-à-vis the most exalted Shangqing goal of acceding to Perfected (*zhen* 真) status. Its main claim to superiority (other than its theologically superior pedigree) is that, unlike former *shijie* methods, this one allows the practitioner to return home if desired. The scripture concedes the relative inferiority of *shijie* as a class of practices among other classes. Yet it insists on a place for them in the Shangqing repertoire and, in sections B and C,[28] defends them against detractors (mostly on the grounds that they were divinely revealed). Tao Hongjing at one point underscores the sacrality of the *Sword Scripture* and its method with the warning, "This scripture is not something that may be lightly divulged" 經非可輕見![29]

In its essentials, the method outlined in the *Sword Scripture* differs not at all from earlier *shijie* techniques. Here, as elsewhere, the adept feigns illness and stages his own death with the help of a decoy object that mimics his corpse; this triggers the funeral and mourning process and his registration as dead by spirits in the afterlife, enabling him to slip free. Even the use of a talisman-activated sword was not an innovation: some earlier *shijie* methods had employed a sword as the surrogate corpse.[30] What the text

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[27] Robinet led the way in documenting this important feature of the Shangqing texts, but much more remains to be done (*La révélation du Shangqing*, 1:7–104). I hope to prepare a study of the Shangqing reception and hagiographic revision of adepts previously mentioned in *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳, and other texts predating its own.

[28] See below for my division of the text into sections, each denoted by a letter.

[29] *ZG*, 14.18b4.

[30] For an example, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 54.

fundamentally does, then, is to bestow the blessing of the Shangqing Perfected Ones on a preexisting type of esoteric practice.[31]

But this is an aspect of the text that has so far remained largely unacknowledged by scholars, perhaps in part because it is incongruent with what we think we know about Shangqing teachings.[32] For Strickmann, the *Sword Scripture* was not about *shijie* at all; instead its main function was to portray the ingestion of alchemical elixirs as deadly, lest there be any doubt on that score. (More on this below.) Robinet and Cedzich grant that the text has things to say on *shijie* but contort its content to square with what they see as Shangqing's privileging of "refinement" (Robinet) or "transfiguration" (Cedzich) and the goal of Perfected status.[33] (And here, incidentally, is the religion-as-system vs. religion-as-repertoire issue coming back in the door. These eminent scholars perhaps misread the text not only because it had heretofore been rather inaccessible but also because they tried to make it fit their notion of

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[31] Robinet suggests that it is likely that this specific method (but not the text of the scripture) predated the Shangqing revelations (*La révélation du Shangqing*, 2:140). I concur, since, as noted above, we now know (as we did not know when Robinet was writing her magnum opus) of texts outlining closely similar methods (even ones involving swords, elixirs, and talismans) that predate the Shangqing revelations.

[32] Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福 grasps that the *Sword Scripture* presents a *shijie* method, but he confuses its teaching with another notion whereby the adept really dies but preserves his organs and, after refinement, is then reconstituted as a transcendent—the sort of method attributed to Zhao Chengzi 趙成子 (*Liuchao Daojiao Shangqing pai yanjiu* 六朝道教上清派研究 [Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2005], 458–464, 468). Nowhere in extant fragments of the scripture is this latter sort of method prescribed.

[33] For Robinet, the urge to read the text as concerning the "refinement" and transformation of the adept was so strong that she persisted in misreading the title of the scripture, suggesting revisions to its wording that fit her idea of what the scripture must have been intended to say but that are not actually found in any text whatsoever. She even invented a new meaning for a Chinese term to try to make the title fit her ideas. (See note 79 for details.) See Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 2:137–140, and, more recently, her article "Shangqing" in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2:859, 863. Cedzich similarly states, without clear evidence, that the scripture promised that the adept's "actual body was miraculously transfigured" ("Corpse Deliverance," 52) when all it says is that his or her body will be *hidden from witnesses* at the deathbed. Perhaps she had in mind the ambiguous statement at the end of the section I label J; but if the adept has a new, "transfigured" body, we read nothing of it here. "Refinement" is not mentioned; invisibility is.

a system-like Shangqing.) In fact, as can be clearly seen once its extant parts have been collated, the text has nothing to say on the adept's own biospiritual transformation, refinement, transfiguration, or what have you. Instead, it provides a method of *self-concealment* allowing the adept to avoid dying. The only "transfiguration" that occurs is that *an object* is mysteriously transformed into a simulacrum of the adept's corpse so that he may escape.

I now turn to the scripture.

III. The Text

A work titled *Xian baojian jing* 仙寶劍經 in two rolls, almost certainly an alternate designation for our scripture, is already listed as missing in the *Sui shu* 隋書 catalog,[34] representing a court-centered view of things around the year 656.[35] No complete version of the text survives. But both within and without the Daoist canon there exist many quotations from it, some quite short, others lengthy. These date all the way back to Tao Hongjing's *Zhen'gao* (ca. 499),[36] into which several excerpts from the scripture were copied (distributed across five of the sections into which I divide the text). The most important of the other sources are *Wushang miyao* 無上祕要 (DZ 1138), compiled late in the sixth century;[37] *Daodian lun* 道典論 (DZ 1130), compiled in the early to mid-Tang;[38] *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, completed in 983 under the supervision of Li Fang 李昉 but mostly anthologizing sources dating to before 641;[39] *Taiping guangji* 太平

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[34] *Sui shu*, *j.* 34, "Zhi" 志 29, "Jingji" 經籍 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 4:1038.

[35] See Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 87.

[36] On the date and circumstances of its compilation, see Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 140–142.

[37] See *TTC*, 1:118–19; John Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao: Somme Taoïste du VIe siècle* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981); Judith M. Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1987), 228–229. Hereafter abbreviated as *WSMY*.

[38] See *TTC*, 1:445–446. Hereafter abbreviated as *DDL*.

[39] I have used the facsimile reprint of the 1935 printing by Shangwu yinshuguan from a Song copy (4 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), cited by scroll and folio page numbers. Hereafter abbreviated as *TPYL*.

廣記, also completed under Li Fang in 978;[40] and *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (DZ 1032), compiled by Zhang Junfang 張君房 (fl. 1008–1025).[41] That a few quotations in *Yunji qiqian* do not appear in earlier sources suggests that some version of the scripture survived in one or more Daoist centers at least until the early Song, despite the *Sui shu* notation of the text's earlier disappearance.

I have assembled all passages that claim to be quotations from the *Sword Scripture*, plus a few others that are not unambiguously attributed to it but whose wording overlaps with passages that are. On the basis of these I have prepared a translation, omitted here due to space limitations. I have made no attempt to establish a "critical edition," however. Given what we know of the writing and transmission of texts in a pre-printing era such as the fourth through sixth centuries,[42] the very notion (often assumed but rarely closely examined) of a pristine, fixed "original" work is, in any case, every bit as mythical as the matters discussed in the scripture.[43] On the other hand, we are fortunate to have as many witnesses to the scripture as we do, and fortunate, too, that they jibe with each other as well as they do. Each textual witness quotes the scripture only piecemeal, and the pieces tend, with a few

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[40] See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 381. Hereafter abbreviated as *TPGJ*.

[41] See *TTC*, 2:943–5; Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 229–231. Hereafter abbreviated as *YJQQ*.

[42] See, for example, Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Christopher M. B. Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), particularly the introduction (1–26); Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 25–30; and, on the basics of the material culture of writing and copying in the period, Tsien Tsuen-hsuin, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), still the standard work.

[43] For one example involving a text close to our topic here, Strickmann wrote as follows concerning *Dengzhen yinjue*: "Though the bulk of [it] may already have been done (the present, incomplete text contains the date 493 . . .), it seems certain that Tao continued to add to it as his experience broadened. This is suggested by the numerous passages of the work, either cited by Tao's biographer or found independently elsewhere, which bear on Tao's activities during the first decade of the Liang dynasty (502–512)" ("On the Alchemy," 141n52). What astonishes is that anyone could ever have imagined otherwise.

exceptions, to be quoted in different order, so there is no good way to determine in what sequence the scripture discussed the topics it addressed. My labeling of the various parts with the letters A through N (skipping the letter I to avoid confusion with the Roman numeral) is therefore to some extent arbitrary.

The topics taken up in these sections are as follows:

A. The scripture's divine pedigree and early-stage transmission history; glosses on the meaning of its title.

B. A defense of *shijie* in general despite its low rank vis-à-vis other methods of self-cultivation practice. The defense mostly consists of reminding readers that such methods were, after all, "received from on high," i.e. divinely revealed.

C. The multiple purposes of the method outlined in the scripture: to enable the adept to conceal himself and escape the Three Offices 三官 (i.e. the lifespan-limit-enforcing bureaucracy of the spirit world);[44] to lessen emotional attachment to family; to gain protection from harm and misfortune; to dissuade non-initiates from thinking death avoidable (for them).

D. The system of lower afterlife ranks and the schedule of advancement through them. This section (attested already in *Zhen'gao*, chapter 16) was perhaps included to portray the unpleasant duties incumbent upon even the virtuous dead and the long tutelages necessary at each rank in order to advance upwards, so as to emphasize the desirability of postponing entrance into this maze for as long as possible or perhaps avoiding it altogether. Perhaps it was also meant to warn practitioners of the scripture's method of what eventually awaited them.

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[44] On the Three Offices see Terry Kleeman, "Sanguan," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2:835–836; Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 12–14; Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 57, 220, 235–236, 359; Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 115, 183. On these ideas in the larger context of afterlife beliefs in the period (both Daoist and other), see Xiao Dengfu, *Han Wei Liuchao Fo Dao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo* 漢魏六朝佛道兩教之天堂地獄說 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989); Sawada Mizuhō 澤田瑞穗, *Jigoku hen: Chūgoku no meikaisetsu* 地獄變：中國の冥界説 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968). I prefer "Three Offices" to "Three Officials" since each of the *guan* 官 in question—of Heaven, Earth, and Water—is not simply an individual but an entire administrative sector staffed by thousands of souls of the dead.

E. Detailed instructions on how to fashion the sword.

F. Detailed instructions on how to inscribe the pommel and blade of the sword.

G–G1. List of previous adepts who feigned death via elixirs and whose tombs are empty.

H. List of previous adepts who feigned death and whose tombs were later found to contain not their corpse but a sword. These two groups of adepts are cited to provide esteemed precedents for the method here prescribed.

J. Detailed account of the final procedure with the elixir and sword; the drama of departure (translated below).

K. The elixir. Superiority of this (Taiji 太極) to previous (Taiqing 太清) *shijie* methods (translated below).

L. More on the difference between this and earlier, lesser methods of *shijie*.

M. How to make and deploy the talismans (*fu* 符) written on the sword. These are what ritually activate it to transform into a simulacrum of the adept's corpse.

N. Tao Hongjing's extended note on his own fashioning of swords (probably attached as commentary to the scripture).

These might be regrouped more simply as follows (omitting Tao's note on sword-fashioning):

I. Filiation of the scripture and gloss on its title (A); general, introductory, justificatory statements on *shijie* (B, C).

II. Competing varieties of *shijie* practice and why this one is superior (K, L).

III. Past adepts who used the method expounded here (G, G1, H).

IV. The details of the method and what the practitioner may expect (E, F, J, M).

V. The afterlife promotion system (D).

The method itself may be summarized as follows. The adept retires to the mountains. Assisted by a skilled smith, he fashions a sword,

precise prescriptions for which are given. Both the adept and the smith maintain ritual purity while the work is in progress. The adept also synthesizes a top-grade alchemical elixir called Winding Constellation Flying Essence 曲晨飛精, the recipe for which unfortunately does not survive. Then, back at home, when he or she is ready to depart, the adept follows the instructions given in the portion of the text I have labeled J:[45]

> Some want[46] to escape as recluses into the noted mountains, nesting on lofty peaks; some wish to observe the world's changes while following the times, roaming without a destination in the wilds; some want to cut off emotional ties with their offspring, bringing an end to the path of beginnings and endings.[47] Exoterically they sever the sorrows attendant on kinship, while esoterically they also shun the rarefied and exalted.[48] Not wanting an office among the Perfected, they seclude themselves and are self-sufficiently unfettered. All such persons should cultivate the Dao of *shijie* by means of a sword.
>
> Having inscribed the sword on both sides with Winding Constellation Flying Essence, you should first retire and feign illness, then lie down holding the sword to yourself.[49] You should also combine the Flying Essence with saliva to form a bolus the size of a large bean. Swallow

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[45] Translation based mostly on *YJQQ*, 84.6b6–8a5, which is more detailed; but passages that occur only in *TPYL*, 665.6a–6b are added in curly brackets: { }. Some of these *TPYL* phrases seem to be commentarial additions.

[46] Reading "或欲" for "若欲" to retain the parallelism with ensuing phrases.

[47] Probably what is meant here is bringing an end to one's enmeshment in birth-and-death or *samsara*—an interesting claim for a *shijie* method, to be sure, and to my knowledge an unprecedented one at the time. The method severs the chain of rebirth not by ensuring no further births but by ensuring no further death. Or possibly the passage is just a rather flowery way of talking about minimizing family ties.

[48] This seems to be an oblique way of saying that the adept slips free of both kinship duties (including future rebirth into his own clan) and the obligation to serve in the celestial administration.

[49] People of means in this period were sometimes buried with swords placed beside them in the coffin. See Albert E. Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 337–338. On the other hand, see Olivia Milburn, "The Weapons of Kings: A New Perspective on Southern Sword Legends in Early China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128 (2008): 429–431, who stresses that burial with swords, at least in the southern realms of Wu 吳 and Yue 越, was at least in theory a royal prerogative—something that might be an important element of the context of *jianjie* 劍解, that is, *shijie* methods that used a sword as the corpse substitute, such as the method given here.

it. Then make another bolus, the size of a small bean, and hold this in your mouth. Wipe some of it on the pommel of the sword while quietly intoning the sword's name. Say this incantation: "Liangfei Zigan 良非子干,[50] I now feed you Winding Constellation Flying Essence, that you may replace my body. Constitute a bodily form [to replace mine] but divulge nothing of this. I will go into hiding. You will, for the time being, enter my tomb. Five hundred years hence, come and look for me. I now beg to take leave of you. Take care that nothing goes amiss! When I ascend to the Grand Bourne I will speak of your merit to the Eight Elementals (*basu* 八素)."[51]

When you have completed the incantation, close your eyes and count ninety breaths. When done, open your eyes. You will suddenly see the celestial steeds that the Grand Monad 太一 (a high celestial deity) has sent to your bedside to welcome you. Mount one of the horses now. {If you are a woman, a carriage will have arrived for you.} Glancing back, you will see that the sword you were embracing has already transformed into your corpse where you were just lying. Now change into the clothes that the Grand Monad has sent to welcome you with. Cover the sword with your old clothes and head cloth. Ride the horse

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[50] This is the sword's name. Many precious swords in this period in China bore names—usually two characters in length, however, not four. The graph/syllable *gan* 干 also figures in many famous sword names, the best-known being Ganjiang 干將, the name both of a renowned swordsmith and of a famous sword he forged. See David R. Knechtges, trans., Wen xuan*, or Selections of Refined Literature. Volume One: Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 407–408; Olivia Milburn, *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the* Yuejue shu (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 273–293.

[51] Grand Bourne or Taiji denoted the exalted zone of the heavens comprising Supreme Purity—higher and purer than the Taiqing or Grand Clarity heavens from which previous generations of esoteric methods and texts were held to have emanated (on which see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 33–36, and Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006], 35–51). *Basu*, which I have rendered "Eight Elementals," has been variously translated. Edward H. Schafer, "The Restoration of the Shrine of Wei Hua-ts'un at Lin-ch'uan in the Eighth Century," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 15 (1977): 132, rendered it as "Eight Immaculates." Compare Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 2:52–57, and Robinet, "*Basu jing*," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1:219–220, where the term is rendered as "the Eight Pure Ladies." Bokenkamp renders it as "Eight Simplicities"; see *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 347. The term as used here refers to eight female deities; in other contexts it may also refer to cloud carriages for deities, the Yin 陰 counterpart of the eight phosphors (*bajing* 八景), "which are Yang carriages of light" (Robinet, "*Basu jing*").

and mount up into the void, going wherever you like. You may change your names and surname if you wish, and [if you do so][52] you may return to your old homeplace—there are no prohibitions or difficulties in doing so. The sword has become your dead corpse, no different from a real one; it will even stink and emit maggots. Once the sword has been placed into the coffin it will revert to sword form and will no longer have the form of your corpse.

{Since ancient times, transcendents have entrusted various objects to stay behind [and impersonate them]. Some have used bamboo staves; some have used headcloths or shoes. Only Bao Jing 鮑靚 used the Taiqing blade method 太清刀法.[53] This[54] divine transformation is rapid and pleasing. It relies on categorical [resonances] to join forms, but its [manner of operation] cannot be worked out by logical inquiry; it is truly a strange matter.}

As for the steeds, they are creatures known as Auspicious Light and Prancing Yellow. {There are ancient images that show these creatures' forms, transmitted by Perfected Ones of former times to show what they look like. Auspicious Light resembles a deer, Prancing Yellow a horse. If you are a man, you ride one of them; if a woman, you hitch both of them to the carriage.} The Perfected Ones of the Grand Bourne will order the envoys of the Grand Monad to present the horses to you by the reins and welcome you with the precious raiment. Their coming will seem to you as if you are in a trance: you will not know how it happened.

At the moment when you depart on the horse, although several physicians may be attending you and although you may be surrounded by family members, once you have changed clothes and dressed the sword [in your old ones], your flowing phosphors transform their

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[52] Whether this passage means that your ability to return home safely depends on your having changed your name as a necessary condition, or whether it should be interpreted more loosely, is unclear to me at this writing.

[53] As seen in another passage in the scripture, Bao Jing, Ge Hong's father-in-law, was reputed to have used a method of *jianjie*; the text is here again addressing that fact (which would have been well known to most readers privy to this text) while ranking Bao's method at a lower level by associating it with Taiqing (vis-à-vis the higher, Supreme Purity method being revealed here). On Bao Jing's rather brief hagiography in *Shenxian zhuan*, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 295–297, 485. There it is said that he used a *shijie* method, but no mention is made of a sword.

[54] I assume the text has reverted here to talking about its own method, not the one formerly used by Bao Jing.

traces. Although you are right beside the others in the room, eye to eye with them, they will be unaware of anything you might say or do. This is what's known as transforming to hide among the three chronograms,[55] ascending back and forth with the solar essence, a myriad metamorphoses in a single breath, never to return to your old bodily form.[56]

若欲且遯潛名山，棲身高岫；或欲隨時觀化，逍遙林澤；或欲斷兒子之情，令始終道畢，外割親悲，內遏希尚，不願真官隱浪自足者，當修劒尸解之道，以曲晨飛精，書劒左右面，先逆自託疾，然後當抱劒而卧。又以津和飛精作丸如大豆，於是吞之。又津和作一丸如小豆，以口含，緣拭之於劒鐶，密呼劒名字，祝曰：「良非子干，今以曲晨飛精相哺，以汝代身，使形無洩露。我當潛隱，汝暫入墓，五百年後，來尋我路。今請別矣，慎勿相悞，上登太極，言功八素。」祝畢，因閉目咽氣九十息。畢，開目，忽見太一以天馬來迎於寢卧之前，於是上馬{若女子，則以輜軿來迎}，顧見所抱劒已變成我之死尸在彼中也。臨時當易著太一迎服，留故衣巾以覆劒也。乃乘馬躡虛，任意所適。或可改名易姓，還反故鄉，無所忌難矣。劒成死尸，與真不異，又有氣，又乃生蟲。既劒入棺，即復劒形，不復為尸形也。{古來諸仙多有託以餘物，或用竹杖，或巾屨。惟鮑靚用太清刀法，此神變欵怳，假類會形，不可以理趣相求，真奇事矣。}天馬者，吉光騰黃之獸也。{古畫圖有此獸形，皆昔真人所顯相傳示也。吉光似鹿，騰黃類馬，男則單騎，女則駕軿也。}太極真人命太一使者齎馬執控，並迎以寶衣，恍惚而來，不知所以然也。馬去之時，雖眾醫侍疾，子孫滿側，而我易服束劒，流景變迹，徒相衛比肩對目，而不覺我之云為也。所謂化遯三辰，巔徊日精，呼吸萬變，非復故形者也。[57]

At this point the adept is free to go wherever he likes. He may even return home if he wishes: the text mentions this repeatedly, because it was a feature that set this method apart from earlier *shijie* practices that forbade the adept ever to return home lest he be

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[55] *Sanchen* 三辰: sun, moon, and stars.

[56] The last four phrases are in verse, with rhymes on the ends of the second and fourth lines.

[57] *YJQQ*, 84.6b6–8a5, reads with the *TPYL*, 665.6a–6b, interpolations inserted and enclosed in curly brackets.

detected and summoned by the spirit-minions of the Three Offices. And that, as far as the practitioner's work is concerned, is where the scripture leaves things. One detail is especially significant: the adept swallows only a very small dose of the elixir (whose ingredients are not known to us), also rubbing some on the sword. Even if the elixir contained lethal substances, in this quantity they would presumably not have resulted in death. The elixir's key function seems to be not transforming the adept's body but establishing a communion between his body and the sword.

IV. The Aims of the Scripture's Practice: What They *Were Not*

(a) Not Real Death via Elixir Ingestion

It has become scholarly consensus that the characteristic Shangqing way of dealing with the problem of pre-allotted lifespan or *ming* was for the adept to undergo a refinement that generated a new, higher self (sometimes imaged as an embryo gestating in the abdomen) with a new *ming*[58] and that this refinement was evidenced in, among other things, the vivid physical decay of the adept's corpse. This consensus is largely based on the work of Michel Strickmann and of his reading of certain Shangqing passages; Isabelle Robinet, Angelika Cedzich, and other scholars, myself included, have echoed it.[59] As a generalization about

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[58] For some lucidly presented examples, see Bokenkamp, "Simple Twists of Fate," 157–165.

[59] For my own overly brief comments, see Campany, "Living off the Books," 140. See also Isabelle Robinet, "Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse in Taoism," *History of Religions* 19 (1979): 66–68 (she cites Strickmann's influential 1979 article on the previous pages); and Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 32–33: "These exemplary persons committed corpse deliverance and feigned death after ingesting elixirs only to disparage [sic] the ordinary and vulgar folk of an evil world from harboring idle hopes for themselves. As Michel Strickmann has pointed out, the revelations received by Yang Xi emphasize indeed the outward aspects of death in the practice of corpse deliverance." After quoting *ZG*, 4.15a–b, an excerpt from the *Sword Scripture*, she continues: "The utter realism of these descriptions should not, however, lead us to assume that the Shangqing texts discouraged hopes for immortality. Quite to the contrary, corpse deliverance, with all the dreadful appearances accompanying death, was considered in those texts to be a perfect means to accelerate an adept's joining

Shangqing texts other than the *Sword Scripture*, this may be true; we simply need further research into all aspects of Shangqing Daoism. But to the extent that it is based on the *Sword Scripture* and on *Zhen'gao* passages containing extracts from it, it is mistaken. And while Strickmann does cite other texts in support, *Sword Scripture* passages are perhaps his most important sources in making his point. For Strickmann, the scripture's purpose was to emphasize the reality of elixir-induced death and to prescribe a deadly elixir of its own.

"Through preparation and ingestion of an elixir of the Perfected," Strickmann writes, "the favored adept might gain direct access to their otherworldly sphere. Yet there was no belying the

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the ranks of the immortals—far preferable, at any rate, to more surreptitious techniques. Some recipients of these revelations apparently felt so certain and close to their destinations that they committed what we would consider plain suicide." First, the passage she quotes here is not, as I demonstrate below, intended to describe real deaths but feigned ones; and secondly, these descriptions are not being held up to Shangqing readers for admiration or emulation, but rather for relative disparagement: they are the sorts of things readers of the scripture may hope to *avoid* by using its own recommended method. Again, then, we have a scholar who, as did Strickmann, is citing this passage of the *Sword Scripture* to illustrate a purported emphasis in Shangqing practice that the scripture does not, in fact, endorse (and least of all in the cited passage). Compare ibid., 51: "It is surprising that the final achievement was, as we have seen, particularly in the most successful cases, crowned by death and putrefaction. Yet . . . supreme candidates should confidently entrust themselves to death and enter the realm of Grand Yin. Even though their flesh rotted, their blood percolated into the ground, their pulses dispersed and stopped as they passed through the Three Bureaus, their entrails and bones still retained the spark of life; their *hun* and *po* and other corporeal spirits stood by, until their corpses—in thirty, twenty, ten years, or whenever desired—were replenished once more with blood, flesh and the juices of life to revive." This description is based on the rather unusual case of Zhao Chengzi , but his is not a case of *shijie* and bears no resemblance to anything in the *Sword Scripture*. Most recently, Thomas E. Smith (*Declarations of the Perfected*, 300, 306) restates the Strickmann position, based once again on the incomplete quotation of the *Sword Scripture* in *Zhen'gao*, chapter 4 (see below); at 306 he speaks—based on his reading of the brief quotation in *ZG*, 4—of "Xu Hui entering a womb-like cave and finally taking the irreversible step of swallowing an elixir to transform himself into an enduring embryo." However, nothing whatsoever is said in the *Sword Scripture* about transforming oneself into an embryo, and while an elixir is prescribed, it seems to have the dual function of transforming the sword into a replica of one's corpse and of making one invisible to bystanders.

death that he first had to die."[60] He introduces this theme with a quotation from *Zhen'gao*, 14.16a–17a, "a striking series of mortuary vignettes" (131), which is in fact an extract from the *Sword Scripture* and occurs in what I have labeled section G. The passage appears to be a list of how graphically various former adepts died after swallowing elixirs. Strickmann then comments: "Here there is no attempt to play down death and its grisly concomitants. On the contrary, the transfiguration of the destined immortal appears all the more wondrous for being set against the bleak facts of death, decay, and putrescence" (132). But, after mentioning three further past exemplars (King Mu of Zhou 周穆王, Yu 禹, and Shun 舜), the passage continues—as attested both in *Zhen'gao* and in other witnesses (in a section I label G1)—in such a way as to make clear that Strickmann has reversed its meaning:[61]

> All these lords [were of such status that] dragons presented their deeds beyond the numinous banks [surrounding celestial palaces] and phoenixes drummed support around the cloudy ponds [of celestial gardens].[62] Yet even they *also feigned their deaths* using *shijie*. This was precisely because they wanted to cut themselves off using the feelings surrounding death and life and to show the people that there is a boundary between beginning and ending.[63] *How could [their actions] be confused with rotting carcasses in the Grand Darkness whose flesh is taken to feed crickets and ants!* They simply wished to place a roadblock for people of the time, a block on people's hopes.
>
> 此諸君並已龍奏靈阿，鳳鼓雲池矣。而猶尸解託死者，欲斷以生死之情，示民有終始之限耳。豈同腐骸太陰，以肉餉螻蟻者哉！直欲遏違世之夫，塞俗人之願望也。

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[60] "On the Alchemy," 137.

[61] *ZG*, 14.17a10–b4; emphases added.

[62] My translation of this sentence follows the suggestion of Steve Bokenkamp. We both disagree with the Japanese translation of the passage offered in Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 and Mugitani Kunio 麥谷邦夫, eds., *Shinkō kenkyū: Yakuchu hen* 真誥研究：譯注篇 (Kyōto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 2000), 534.

[63] "Show the people that there is a boundary between beginning and ending" 有終始之限耳 is perhaps better understood as "show people that there is a limit to ends and beginnings"—which might be taken as meaning ". . . that death [for ordinary people at least] is final." The phrase "ends-and-beginnings" might also designate rebirth/*samsara*, in which case we would have something like "show people that there is a limit to rebirth."

Taiyin 太陰 or Grand Darkness, ironically, had for centuries been one of the destinations to which Daoist practitioners were said to go after death for "refinement." We find this notion in the *Scripture of Great Peace* and in the early Celestial Master *Xiang'er Commentary* 想爾注 on the *Daode jing* 道德經, for example.[64] It is also discussed in *Declarations of the Perfected*.[65] But in this passage the *Sword Scripture* is very clearly warning its readers *not* to imagine that these exemplars repaired to Grand Darkness—for they had not really died.

In his ensuing discussion Strickmann stresses again that the key Shangqing elixirs were known to be deadly. In doing so he once more invokes the *Sword Scripture* passage mentioned above (section G) with "its gruesome catalogue of alchemical fatalities." In taking the Jade Essence or Winding Constellation elixir, Xu Hui 許翽, who seems to have been particularly interested in this scripture, "consumed an elixir concerning the toxicity of which the communications of the Perfected could have left him in no doubt," Strickmann says (138). But the ensuing scripture passage (the part I label G1) reveals unmistakably that the point being made is precisely the opposite of Strickmann's reading. The elixir-induced deaths, it turns out, were only staged; the gruesomeness was a prop designed to add verisimilitude to the ruse and, as Cedzich well paraphrased the passage, "to [discourage] the ordinary and vulgar folk of an evil world from harboring idle hopes for themselves"[66] (a point to which I return below). Not only did the adepts discussed here in the

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[64] The *Xiang'er Commentary* is one of the earliest extant mentions of the term. See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 46–48, 102, 219–220, 330. See also Anna Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion," 45, and "*Post-Mortem* Immortality, or: The Taoist Resurrection of the Body," in *GILGUL: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions*, ed. S. Shaked et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 230. *Taiyin* also appears in *Taiping jing* (in addition to its occasional use to designate the moon, as at Wang Ming, ed., *Taiping jing hejiao*, 367) as the place where the sinful dead go to receive judgment for their recorded misdeeds; see ibid., 568.

[65] The key *ZG* passage on it appears at 4.16a5–17a8, where the story of Zhao Chengzi is summarized as an example. See Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 182–183.

[66] Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 32. When it comes to the *Sword Scripture*, however, Cedzich follows Strickmann in seeing its depiction of the deaths of *shijie* or *jianjie* adepts as real.

scripture not really die, but the text criticizes anyone uninformed enough to believe otherwise. (Recall the scripture's statement about the sword in section J: "The sword has become your dead corpse, no different from a real one; it will even stink and emit maggots. Once the sword has been placed into the coffin it will revert to sword form and will no longer have the form of your corpse.") Strickmann stopped translating one paragraph too early.

Later in his essay, Strickmann writes, "At the end of Book I of the *Zhen'gao*, Tao placed two extracts from the Shangqing scriptures to illustrate some of the nobler methods of departure from the world of men." The first of these is the account of Zhao Chengzi; while fascinating, it is not an instance of *shijie*, nor does it appear in the *Sword Scripture*, so it need not detain us.[67] The other (at *ZG*, 4.17a) is another extract from the *Sword Scripture*, constituting the section I label K. I present it here with the lines translated and discussed by Strickmann—those lines which *alone* were copied into *Zhen'gao*—underlined:[68]

> As for this Winding Constellation Flying Essence, another name for it is Flower of the Solar Essence of Sevenfold Yang. It is of the same grade as [the elixir] Langgan 琅玕.[69] This elixir can flow about and hide itself, scatter its form, divide its phosphors, and hide itself down to the finest particle. The four seas are not large enough to accommodate its substance, and yet a single grain of rice could contain it. It comes and goes invisibly among the Seven Intervals yet [its light]

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[67] See *ZG*, 4.16a5–b10; Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 182–183; Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 22–23; Smith, *Declarations of the Perfected*, 302–304. But at 299 Smith conflates this *taiyin* refinement with *shijie*, something I do not believe to be warranted by the evidence. The two were quite distinct processes, although it is conceivable that the same adept may have set out to use them both in sequence over his career.

[68] My translation is based on *YJQQ*, 84.8a6–b9. It forms a continuous flow of discourse from J and makes more sense, as an integral unit, than any other version. It is also partially attested in *ZG*, 4.17a1–8 (with the addendum: "右一條是掾抄寫《劍經》後論尸解事"), *WSMY*, 87.4a10–5a9 (citing 洞真藏景錄形神經), *DDL*, 2.10b8–11a5 (citing 太極真人飛仙寶劍上經), *TPYL*, 665.6b–7a, and *TPYL*, 664.1a. Some of the passage is repeated in the hagiography of Wei furen 魏夫人 in *TPGJ*, 58.1 (where its source is listed thus: "出《集仙錄》及《本傳》").

[69] On this famous elixir, see Edward H. Schafer, "The Transcendent Vitamin: Efflorescence of Lang-kan," *Chinese Science* 13 (1978): 27–38, and Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 279, 289–295, 312, 331–339, 348.

could obscure that of the sun, moon, and stars. Truly it is a wonder! None of those who employ drugs other than this numinous bolus (*lingwan* 靈丸) to achieve *shijie* can ever again return to their old homes. This is because if they return there they will be detained by [envoys of] the Three Offices. There are some such who die and come back to life again. Others have their heads broken off and come forth from one side. The corpses of some disappear before they can be laid out. The bodies of others remain but the bones are gone. Sometimes the clothes remain and the body is gone. Sometimes the hair falls out and the body disappears. To depart in broad daylight is said to be the superior sort of *shijie*. If at midnight, this is called lesser *shijie*. Those who depart toward dawn or dusk are called underworld agents.[70] In all such cases the adepts' traces are not completely hidden, causing people to have suspicions about them. Although such adepts manage to go into hiding, which causes people of the world not to despise them, they are unable to return to visit their old homes, and they remain sometimes on the move and other times dwelling somewhere, without any definite pattern. This roaming life, with no constancy, is deeply regretted by them. Their regrets center on this point. All such cases are of course [mere] Grand Clarity methods of *shijie*. How could they be compared to the Grand Bourne (Taiji 太極) modes of metamorphosis and disappearance? [As the saying goes,] "The lofty and the base run on sharply divergent tracks"—and the saying exists for good reason.

此曲晨飛精，一名七陽日精之華，蓋琅玕之併例矣。此丹復能流遁散形，分景藏毫，四海不能容其體，粟米固能纏其外者也。隱廻七度，昏蔽三光，實其妙矣！其用他藥得尸解，非是用靈丸之化者，皆不得返故鄉。返故鄉，則為三官執之也。有死而更生者，有頭斷已死，乃從一旁出者，有死畢未殮而失尸骸者，有人形猶存而無復骨者，有衣在而形去者，有髮脫而失形者。白日去，謂之上尸解；夜半去，謂之下尸解；向曉暮之際而去者，謂之地下主者。此皆迹兆不滅，為人所疑，雖獲隱遁，令世志未厭，又不得返旋故鄉，遊棲靡定，深所恨，恨意在於此。此自是「太清尸解之法」，那得比太極之化遯乎？高卑絕軌，良有由也。

What seems to have happened is that when this bit of the *Sword Scripture* was copied into *Zhen'gao* it was lifted rather severely out

[70] Translation of the underscored lines only partially derived from that in Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 184.

of context. When we restore it to what was probably its original setting (as preserved in *YJQQ*, *j.* 84), we see that it cannot be read in the way Strickmann reads it. It is neither claiming that these apparent deaths were real nor holding these cases up as especially "noble." Nor are the statements following "There are some who die and . . ." intended to describe what happens when practitioners ingest the "numinous bolus" (nor, for that matter, is this "numinous bolus" the name of yet another elixir here newly introduced, as Strickmann imagines; it is simply a laudatory reference to Winding Constellation). Quite to the contrary, the scripture is here describing some of the Taiqing methods to which it claims superiority. It is holding up these sorts of cases for relative disparagement, not praise or emulation.

Strickmann may well have been correct, then, in thinking that among Shangqing adepts "anyone undertaking the preparation of [elixirs] must certainly have known what lay in store for him when the work was completed. . . . The prospective alchemist must have been strongly motivated by faith and sustained by a firm confidence in his posthumous destiny. In effect, he would be committing suicide by consecrated means."[71] Certainly an example such as that of Zhou Ziliang 周子良 fits Strickmann's characterization if taken as representative of Shangqing alchemy overall.[72] But Strickmann was wrong to present the *Sword Scripture* as representing this view. The theater of *shijie*, focusing attention on the simulated corpse while the living adept slips away, still today beguiles observers.

(b) Not Joining the Ranks of the Perfected

There is little mention in extant scripture passages of the ultimate goal of becoming a Perfected Person, despite the fact that the scripture was said to have been transmitted by beings of that rank and that the sword at the method's heart was modeled on those worn by Perfected Ones on high.[73] Rather, the explicit aim of the

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[71] "On the Alchemy," 137.

[72] On this fascinating case see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Answering a Summons," in *Religions of China in Practice*, 188–202.

[73] There is also this assertion in C on the part of the divine speaker of the text: "Now I am secretly putting forth this method of *shijie* so that each of you might

method is clearly to linger in the world as long as possible *without* graduating to the elite level of the Perfected. And the scripture portrays this deferral of promotion as open-ended, with no time limit. In fact, the only clear link between the procedure and eventual promotion to Perfected rank comes at the outset of section D. There we learn that one who has performed *shijie* must first become an underworld agent (*dixia zhu* 地下主); then, after serving in that capacity for 140 years, he is eligible for appointment to an office at the Perfected level and may join the ranks of chariot-driving officials in the Grand Bourne heaven.[74] This of course only serves to underline the comparatively lowly status of *shijie* as a class of esoteric technique while still opening a door up onto the ladder of Perfection.

But in fact this passage is attributed in *YJQQ*, *j.* 86 not to the *Sword Scripture* but to another Shangqing text, the *Scripture of Gold Slips and Jade Graphs* or *Taiwei jinjian yuzi jing* 太微金簡玉字經 (a shortened title for DZ 1316, *Dongzhen shangqing Taiwei dijun bu tiangang fei diji jinjian yuzi shangjing* 洞真上清太微帝君步天綱飛地紀金簡玉字上經). I have treated it as a possible *Sword Scripture* passage because of the occasional tendency of later source texts such as *YJQQ* to misattribute quotations—and because the rest of the passage following these initial lines (in *YJQQ*, 86.9b1–10b5) duplicates material attributed in other sources as early as *Zhen'gao* to the *Sword Scripture*. In the *Scripture of Gold Slips and Jade Graphs* that has come down to us in the Ming canon there is indeed a roughly matching passage. It falls within a long speech by none other than Lord Wang (i.e. Wang Yuan 王遠), who figures centrally in the filiation of the *Sword Scripture* as well.[75] But it

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transmit it to disciples who are fit to become Perfected Ones" 今密出尸解之方，可各以傳示弟子，應為真人者. I return to this line below.

[74] See the opening paragraph of section D.

[75] This is Wang Yuan, styled Fangping 方平. On pre-Shangqing views of him as a more old-fashioned sort of transcendent (and before that as, it seems, a regional god of the conventional, sacrifice-receiving sort), see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 259–270, 456–463. At p. 270, I registered doubt about Robinet's identification of the Wang Yuan of *Shenxian zhuan* with the "Lord Wang of the Western Citadel" of Shangqing texts, but I now think she was right (and other scholars as eminent as Edward H. Schafer have made the same identification—see "The Restoration of the Shrine of Wei," 130). His case does,

imposes even tougher requirements on those who opt for *shijie* than those seen in the *YJQQ* quotation:

> According to the *Perfected Protocols of the Four Bournes*, those who performed *shijie* and who have served as underworld agents after 140 years become eligible to fill offices among *transcendents*. After *another 1,300 years* they become eligible to fill offices *among the Perfected*. [Only] from this point forward may they drive floral-canopied chariots, ride dragon herds, ascend to the Grand Bourne, and travel among the Nine Palaces 九宮 . . . . Only after 140 years can those who have performed *shijie* and served as underworld agents in Grand Darkness begin to advance in rank. *Formerly I myself, thanks to my diligence, reached this point.*
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> 諸尸解地下主者，按《四極真科》，一百四十年乃得補仙官，復一千三百年，乃得補真官，於是始得飛華蓋，乘羣龍，登太極，遊九宮也。謹按法度，奉而行之，無不得仙，精心勤誠，用一十四年耳。於是乃七星之精，下化成神人，並乘流鈴八景，丹玄班雲，俱來詣於子，拜子仙官，授子真符，道成，皆登上清，昇太微宮。勉之勤之，所向必感，亦何為怠情，而為尸解太陰地下主者，方復一百四十年，然後得階乎。吾昔亦由精勤而致此也。[76]

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however, constitute one of the more striking Shangqing appropriations of earlier figures into the ranks of the Perfected—one in which the earlier narratives attached to the figure are almost completely obscured by the newly bestowed identity. For more on Wang Yuan see Benjamin Penny, "Wang Yuan," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2:1019–1020; Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 213n, 351, 355 (the latter two loci re: his important place in *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*); and Dominic Steavu, "The Many Lives of Lord Wang of the Western Citadel," *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 13 (2009): 109–161.

[76] DZ 1316, 20a3–b2 (emphasis added; above is the entire passage, with the lines I have translated above underlined). Incidentally, the last line here may explain why, in material attributed to the *Sword Scripture*, we find some confusion concerning whether Lord Wang had himself practiced the method outlined in it or not— and signs that Tao Hongjing struggled to reconcile different scriptural statements on the matter—and this despite the scripture's own avowal at one point that Lord Wang had "not yet" been able to put the method into action. Here, by contrast, he says explicitly that he himself had once long ago performed *shijie*, served as an underworld agent, then as a transcendent official, and only after more than a millennium finally qualified for Perfected status.

Regarding the *Sword Scripture*'s view of the relation between its prescribed practice and the attainment of Perfected status, we are left with three possibilities. (1) If the *YJQQ*, *j.* 86 section-D passage was not, after all, part of the *Sword Scripture*, then we are driven to the startling conclusion that nowhere in any extant material does the *Sword Scripture* mention how an adept who had performed *shijie* might eventually graduate to Perfected rank. Perhaps the idea was simply to gain more time in the world before eventually undertaking routes to perfection that would lead, more or less rapidly, to the adept's exiting this world for the next. Or perhaps it was something more radical: to offer a final goal other than Perfected status. (2) If that passage *was* copied accurately from some version of the *Sword Scripture*, we learn that the *shijie* adept must first serve as underworld agent for 140 years before qualifying for promotion to a Perfected post. To be sure, this placed him well above the next highest rank mentioned in the passage—those who were exceptionally loyal or filial, who after 140 years as underworld agents were eligible to receive instruction in arts of *transcendence* (not Perfection; see D). But it was still a long and indirect path compared with most other Shangqing methods. (3) If the *Sword Scripture*'s position resembled what the *Scripture of Gold Slips and Jade Graphs* has to say, then the *shijie* adept faced an exponentially longer and more difficult path before ultimately becoming eligible for Perfected rank.

Whichever of these possibilities applies, it seems that the scripture's makers were not overly concerned to tie its method to the paramount Shangqing goal of Perfection, and may even have been trying to present an alternative to Perfection. At the same time, the text's depiction of the rigors of the underworld may have been meant as a warning to adepts opting for *shijie* (rather than for a much more direct route to Perfection) as to what eventually lay in store for them. If so, however, the surviving passages do not sound the warning very explicitly or drive the lesson home directly.

V. The Aims of the Practice: What They *Were*

If the *Sword Scripture* does not confer instruction on the reality of elixir-induced death and does not clearly provide a method for

joining the Perfected, what *does* it offer its readers?

Hiding, disappearing, reclusion, escape: these are the dominant themes of the scripture and the primary functions of the method it prescribes. They are announced already in the scripture's formal title. Its core consists of a string of eight characters, *shijing jinguang cangjing luxing* 石精金光藏景錄形, followed by a final term, *fa* 法, which here means "method." I translate this as Method of Essence of Stone and Golden (or Metallic) Light for Sequestering the Phosphors[77] and Registering the Body. The first four characters refer to the sword and its constituent materials. But the second four graphs pinpoint the essential function of the sword and the other aspects of the method: by virtue of having a simulacrum of his body (*xing* 形) "registered" (*lu* 錄) with the ledger-keeping spirits, the adept is able to "sequester" or "hide away" his phosphors (*cang*

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[77] I follow Stephen R. Bokenkamp's usage—based on that of Edward H. Schafer—in rendering *jing* 景 as "phosphors." Discussions of the term's significance in Shangqing texts are surprisingly few and quite brief, but include Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 173–175 (who preferred "effulgences" as a translation), and Bokenkamp, "Declarations of the Perfected," 168–169 (where he renders *jing* as "effulgent spirits"). See also Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 1:129–130. The only extended treatment of which I am aware remains Max Kaltenmark, "'Ching' yu 'pa-ching'"「景」與「八景」, in *Fukui hakushi shōjun kinen: Tōyō bunka ronshū* 福井博士頌壽記念：東洋文化論集 (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1969), 1147–1154. Henri Maspero touched on the topic only very briefly (*Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. F. A. Kierman, Jr. [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981], 553–554). For strongly worded comments on the "proprement taoïste" nature of the anthropology implied by this and other Shangqing notions of indwelling spirits—a set of spirits "complètement différente" from the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 imagined in the wider culture of the time—see Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 1:169–170. The phosphors are what Shangqing male and female adepts exteriorized to "pair" together as a replacement for the sexual practices of both the Taiqing traditions and the Celestial Masters. See Bokenkamp, "Declarations of the Perfected"; Xiao Dengfu, *Liuchao Daojiao Shangqing pai yanjiu*, 642–653; Yan Shanzhao 嚴善炤, *Gudai fangzhongshu de xingcheng yu fazhan: Zhongguo guyou jingshen shi* 古代房中術的形成與發展：中國固有精神史 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2007), 237–270; Zhong Laiyin 鍾來因, *Changsheng busi de tanqiu: Daojing* Zhen'gao *zhi mi* 長生不死的探求：道經《真誥》之謎 (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1992), 67–130; Gil Raz, "The Way of the Yellow and the Red: Re-examining the Sexual Initiation Rite of Celestial Master Daoism," *Nannu* 10 (2008): 86–120; Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2012), 177–209. Here, in terms of the poetics of the scripture's title, these inner orbs of light are obscured by the golden beams of the sword.

jing 藏景), which is an elliptical way of saying he is able to go into reclusion from his family, the larger society, and the celestial bureaucracy. As one of the glosses in part A explains, "'Sequestering the phosphors' refers to hiding oneself. 'Registering the body' refers to substituting [something else] for oneself" 藏景者，隱身也。錄形者，代身也.[78] Robinet, probably to bring the scripture into less apparent disagreement with other Shangqing texts, wanted to understand the word *lu* 錄 as indicating "refinement," but this is not warranted.[79] Instead, what the method entails is what its title implies: self-concealment by means of the otherworld registration of a substitute object as oneself.

This self-concealment is portrayed on several levels at once. In the bureaucratic idiom, it means that representatives of the Three Offices will not come looking for the adept since he is henceforth listed as already deceased. Also in that idiom, use of this method means that the adept is free to remain here on earth below, roaming about at will; dwelling in the mountains—the favorite haunt of recluses shunning bureaucratic service in the this-world imperium—is frequently mentioned as an option. That is, the procedure allows the adept to postpone his divinizing ascent into the heavens, where

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[78] *YJQQ*, 8.23a; this is not a line attributed to the scripture itself but rather appears in an explanation of its title.

[79] Robinet takes the *lu* 錄 in the title (for some reason she romanizes it as *lü*; it is much more commonly read *lu*) to mean "purify" and to be a synonym for *lian* 鍊, "refine" (*La révélation du Shangqing*, 2:137). She repeats this in "Shangqing," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2:859, where she actually proposes changing the scripture's title without any textual evidence for doing so. While there is certainly some imagery of refinement mentioned in the extant segments of the text, it applies not to the scripture's own recommended method but to others, and I see no evidence for understanding the titular *lu* 錄 in the sense Robinet does. Strickmann renders one version of the scripture's full title, *Taiji zhenren shijing jinguang cangjing luxing shenjing* 太極真人石精金光藏景錄形神經, as "Livre merveilleux des Parfaits du Faîte suprême, essence des minéraux et éclat des métaux, sur l'emmagasinement des esprits irradiants et la conservation du corps"—*lu* mistranslated as "conservation." (*Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan*, 61. He repeats the same move in English in "On the Alchemy," 132n20, translating *lu* as "preserving.") Not only does the term 錄 not mean "to preserve"; the scripture, once read in its entirety, can easily be seen *not* to comprise a method for preserving the body at all. Porkert before him correctly translated the *lu* here as "enregistrer" and further glossed it thus: "→ classer → reclasser" (*Biographie d'un Taoïste légendaire*, 95n296).

he would have to serve as an underling to celestial authorities. A passage in section B puts it this way: "Some [who have practiced it] did not yet wish to ascend to the heavens but instead dwell on noted mountains. . . . Some wished to gaze long upon the changes of the world's eras, *fearing the labors required of transcendent officials*" 或未欲昇天，而高棲名山……或欲長觀世化，憚仙官之劬勞也 (*YJQQ*, 85.1a3ff.; emphasis added). We find similar language in section C, which, furthermore, ends on this note: "Many who have used this method of escape have been people who were not eager to be among the wheels of dragon(-drawn chariots, i.e. among high-ranking celestial officials) but who rather wished to dwell happily and peacefully in mountain forests" 夫此之解者，率多是不汲汲於龍輪，樂安栖於林山者 (*WSMY*, 87.3b7–8; cf. *YJQQ*, 84.2b4–3b4). And in J: "Some want to escape as recluses into the noted mountains, nesting on lofty peaks; some wish to observe the world's changes while following the times, roaming without a destination in the wilds. . . . *Not wanting an office among the Perfected*, they seclude themselves and are self-sufficiently unfettered" (emphasis added). Although the steeds that arrive in section J to convey the adept away are sent by the Perfected Ones of the Grand Bourne, the adept is under no obligation to ride them up to that exalted destination; he may go wherever he likes.

It is not surprising to find mention in the scripture of former adepts reputed to have lingered in the world for centuries, exercising the option of remaining "transcendents on earth" (*dixian* 地仙) and thus declining service on high. Whether they did so by *shijie* or by other means, their choice to remain on earth was an important precedent for what our scripture meant to allow. The list is headed by Peng Zu 彭祖, who had been said by Ge Hong to hold the view that "in the heavens above there are many venerable officers and great gods, and that new transcendents hold lowly ranks and are assigned numerous duties. He opined that it was all just more toil and trouble and that it was therefore not worthwhile to seek so urgently to ascend into the heavens. So he remained in the human realm for over eight hundred years."[80] The list of adepts

[80] Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 52; see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 77.

appears twice.[81] In C, these figures are mildly disdained by the speaker in comparison to former practitioners who ascended at once after taking an elixir. However, in G1 they are said to have swallowed superior elixirs but in smaller doses so as to remain on earth as recluses; "it wasn't that they were unable to ascend to the heavens, it was just that they didn't" 非不能登天也，弗為之耳 (a passage to which I return below). There they are also said, thanks to their elixir-ingestion, not to have needed to repeat the *shijie* procedure and are thus distinguished from the run-of-the-mill *shijie* practitioners mildly derided elsewhere in the text. In both passages these adepts are contrasted with Master Yan Men 衍門子, who had ascended at once after swallowing an elixir.[82] And in both passages they are said to have excelled at "transformations," implying the use of somatic disguise.

But the concealment accomplished by the sword method is described not only in bureaucratic but also in cosmic, astral, and sensory terms.[83] To begin with the sensory: at the climactic moment in the procedure, vividly described in section J, the adept's "flowing phosphors will transform their traces" with the result that bystanders in the same room, hovering over what they think is his deathbed and his corpse, will be unaware of his living presence beside them. The method's astral and cosmic dimensions are seen most clearly in section F (attested in *YJQQ*, 84.4b9–6b5 and *TPYL*, 665.3b–4a). There the practitioner is told to inscribe the sword with characters that allude to the sexagenary cycle of time: in one instance either *si* 巳, the sixth earth branch, or *ji* 己, the sixth heaven stem, depending

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[81] With the addition in the second list of Master Azure Essence 青精先生, mentioned elsewhere as having been a teacher of Peng Zu; see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 176.

[82] In C, Yan Men and others like him are said to have "taken a superior elixir and carried out *shijie* deliberately" 諸君衍門子輩，既飽上藥而故為尸解者也. In G1, he appears in a list of former adepts who "feigned construction of a tomb after swallowing Efflorescence of Langgan." So, on the one hand, Yan Men is identified as a *shijie* practitioner (though perhaps of a different kind) and numbers among those who feigned death. But, on the other hand, he is now among the Perfected, and he carried out his *shijie* "deliberately" 故 (an expression perhaps meaning he downed an elixir he knew would be fatal).

[83] A good, general account of the theme of invisibility and its astral aspects may be found in Robinet, "Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse," 51–57.

on the textual variant, written nine times; in the other instance *ding* 丁, written six times. Knowledgeable readers would have recognized the six *ding* graphs as referring to the Six *Ding* Spirits, and behind the whole passage there lies the complex lore of *dunjia* 遁甲 (the graph *dun* 遁, "conceal," recurring multiple times throughout the scripture), *liujia* 六甲, and other ancient methods for self-concealment by summoning spirits related to the time cycle and slipping through spaces in the structure of time.[84] For centuries these methods had also been linked to "treading the Mainstays" (*bugang* 步綱) and other modes of astral travel, and such travel is implied to be a further benefit of the sword method, especially in what appear to be glosses inserted into the scriptural text in section F.

In general, then, while most other Shangqing methods were apparently conducive to promotion (more or less rapid) to the status of a Perfected official in the heavens, this one made allowance for postponing one's ascension and instead remaining here on earth, disengaged from normal social and familial roles. Thus did this option for esoteric biospiritual practice mirror the recluse option prevalent in the wider society of the day, whereby men qualified for office in the imperial bureaucracy declined it for other, more leisurely pursuits.[85] There was a close relationship between *shijie* modes of feigned death and this more ordinary sort

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[84] For further discussion see Marc Kalinowski, "La littérature divinatoire dans le *Daozang*," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1990): 91–95; Kalinowski, "Hémérologie," in *Divination et société dans la Chine médiévale*, ed. M. Kalinowski (Paris: Bibliotèque nationale de France, 2003), 213–300; Gil Raz, "Time Manipulation in Early Daoist Ritual: The East Well Chart and the Eight Archivists," *Asia Major*, 3rd Series, 18 (2005): 27–65; Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 1:22–25, 2:207–212; Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. K.C. Duval (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 142–144; Poul Andersen, "The Practice of *Bugang*," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1990): 15–53; Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 328–329n; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 72–75, 231–232; chapter 5 of the Sui-period *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 by Xiao Ji 蕭吉 (see Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, ed., *Gogyō taigi kochu* 五行大義校註 [Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1998], 56–61).

[85] See Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremetic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990); Alan Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 55–57.

of social reclusion: one effective way to get out of unwanted official duties and tiresome social obligations here on earth was to appear to die.[86] Even Tao Hongjing resorted to changing his identity, assuming a false name to try to escape the demands of his patron, Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝.[87]

VI. The Practitioner and the Audience(s)

Modern scholars failed for decades to understand *shijie* methods. This was due mostly to neglect of the texts languishing in the Daoist canon. But I believe it was also due to neglect of the performativity of religious practice, particularly when that practice is esoteric in nature. *Shijie* was quintessentially an esoteric practice: although narratives about practitioners supposed to have carried it out successfully (or not, in a few fascinating cases[88]) circulated widely,

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[86] As noted in Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 39–44. I offer the following further examples. In one sub-narrative in Ge Xuan 葛玄's *Shenxian zhuan* hagiography, a lay host invited the adept to visit his home; Ge did not want to go, but the host insisted, so Ge set out with him. En route he suddenly feigned severe stomach pain followed by death. "When his head was lifted, it separated from his torso; when his four limbs were lifted, they, too, separated. He began stinking and rotting, and maggots infested him; one could not bear to go near him. The man who had invited him ran to inform Ge's family, where he saw Ge sitting in the main room. He dared not mention anything about it but instead ran back to the place where Ge had died. His corpse had disappeared" (Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 156). Ge Xuan is later portrayed as making a *shijie*-like exit because he was being detained by the emperor and was thus unable to devote himself to making a great elixir (ibid., 157). Zuo Ci 左慈 staged his own death via *bingjie* 兵解 or feigned execution to elude Cao Cao 曹操 (ibid., 281). Examples could easily be multiplied.

[87] *Huayang Tao Yinju neizhuan* 華陽陶隱居內傳 (DZ 300), 2.8b–9b; Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 40. Strickmann describes Tao's journey as an "eschatological pilgrimage" but makes no mention of Tao's attempted identity switch ("On the Alchemy," 151–155). Cedzich suggests he left Mao shan 茅山 not to wait for the apocalypse but to escape the emperor's strident attentions; his escape was thwarted when an imperial envoy caught up with Tao and his small traveling party on a small island off the coast and ordered their return (Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 155; see *Huayang Tao Yinju neizhuan*, 2.11a–b). Michel Strickmann, "A Taoist Confirmation of Liang Wu Ti's Suppression of Taoism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98 (1978): 467–475, also touches on aspects of the relationship between the two men.

[88] See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 157, 177–178, 222.

knowledge of how to do it was closely guarded, enshrined in scriptures transmitted from master to disciple under ritually controlled conditions, including an oath of secrecy and the requirement of supplementary "oral instructions" (*koujue* 口訣) never to be written down.[89] And yet, like "most ascetic behaviors, codes of conduct, instruments of formation, and technologies," this one, too, had "the aspect of performance, of displaying or acting."[90]

An audience of other parties was essential if the method was to work. Essential, too, was these parties' response to what the adept said and did. *Shijie* was an odd sort of theater, a performance frankly intended to deceive, staged for onlookers comprising both living kith and kin and the hovering envoys of the spirit-world. In order to work, the theater, for its part, had to be convincing; both living witnesses and spirits had to accept the adept's death as real. The family or lay patron—whoever was present for the adept's apparent death and responsible for his funeral and the disposition of his remains—had to grieve, mourn, and carry out the burial with complete sincerity, else the deception might come to light. I know of no *shijie* prescriptive text or hagiographic narrative in which family members, friends, or patrons are let in on the secret in advance; rather, they were meant to believe the adept had really died. Spirits of the Three Offices, meanwhile, had to accept the death as genuine and enter the adept's name on the ledgers of the dead, else the method would fail: this registration-as-already-dead was the central aim of the practice.[91] *Shijie* was a confidence game,

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[89] For further details see Campany, "Secrecy and Display," and Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 88–129.

[90] Richard Valantasis, "Constructions of Power in Asceticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995): 798. See also the discussion in Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 22–30.

[91] As Cedzich has noted, things were not always stated so clearly in texts prescribing this sort of practice ("Corpse Deliverance," 53), but for an early example where the rationale is explained with unmistakable clarity and frankness, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 53–54, where it is promised: "Thereupon you will not die in a thousand autumns or a myriad years, for the ledgers have already been fixed, and your name has forever been expunged" from the list of names of those yet due to die. Another example is to be found in *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*, 12a, translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 360: "If there is no record for death, most people will live a long life, as it is difficult for them to die."

and for any such game to work, the mark—the party not privy to what is really happening—must duly play his part. The success of the adept's *shijie* performance depended on the audience's reception. To focus only on what was happening with the adept himself, as if he could be properly seen in isolation, is to miss the whole point of the practice, yet this is what most scholars have done. In fact, to do so is, in a different way, to be taken in by the *shijie* ruse.

To deceive both one's own family and friends and the spirits of the afterlife bureaucracy was, however, no small thing. It created tensions and stresses, and these left traces in the *Sword Scripture*. As noted above, the chief distinction claimed for its method is that, unlike earlier procedures, it allows the practitioner to return home despite the deception that was the method's core. But this is decidedly odd, for two reasons. For one thing, we are never told—at least not in any passages that have survived—just what it is about this scripture's method that, unlike others of its type, allows the practitioner to return home without risking detection by the Three Offices. We are only told *that* it does; we are not clearly told why. One answer might be given in this line from section K, discussing the Winding Constellation elixir: "None of those who employ drugs other than this numinous bolus to achieve *shijie* can ever again return to their old homes." The combination of a bureaucratic-mode *shijie* procedure with the preparation and ingestion of an elixir was hardly new to the *Sword Scripture*, as its makers must have known,[92] but perhaps it was something unique to this particular elixir that was supposed to protect the adept in ways other methods didn't, as I mentioned earlier.[93]

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[92] For an example see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 54.

[93] Additionally, the scripture seems conflicted on the question of whether or not the practitioner must change his names. G1 says that the earlier practitioners it mentions *did* change their names but no longer needed to repeat the *shijie* process: "改名易字，不復作尸解之耳." J, when claiming that returning home is unproblematic, implies that changing one's name is an option but not a requirement—unless we read the "可" here as stipulative rather than concessory: "You may change your names and surname if you wish, and you may return to your old homeplace—there are no prohibitions or difficulties in doing so" 或可改名易姓，還反故鄉，無所忌難矣. And L lists the required change of one's names and appearance as well as the prohibition on returning home as drawbacks of the more familiar *shijie* methods—implying that users of the scripture's own method were not subject to any of these strictures. This seeming tension between

But the larger reason this emphasis on the prerogative of homecoming seems strange is that the text also repeatedly characterizes the *weakening* or *severing* of family ties as a *benefit* of its practice. Section C promises, among other benefits of the method, that "by deploying it and departing, you may dissolve all emotional ties with descendants" 施之而逝，可以盡子孫之近戀—phrasing that may also be understood as "dissolving all ties *as a descendant*." Section J says of practitioners of this method: "Some want to cut off emotional ties with their offspring (or, alternately, "to cut off all of the ties associated with kinship" both up and down the generational chain), bringing an end to the path of beginnings and endings (i.e. an end to rebirth). Exoterically they sever the sorrows attendant on kinship, while esoterically they also shun the rarefied and exalted (i.e. they postpone celestial service among the Perfected)" 或欲斷兒子之情，令始終道畢，外割親悲，內遏希尚. And section J, as we saw above, is also where we read of how the body-substituting sword permits the adept to suddenly become invisible to his kin and flee his staged deathbed scene. This weakening of family ties was a desideratum not just in the *Sword Scripture* but in other Shangqing scriptures. One example comes in *Annals of the Lord of the Dao, Sage of the Latter [Heavens] of Shangqing* (*Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*), where, in the course of enumerating the many trials faced by the scripture's subject, the divine Lord Li, the text says that "he rid himself of all personal emotional ties to his relatives and repeatedly underwent the great trials set for him by the Celestial Thearchs" 寫私念於五親，累經天帝之大試.[94]

This tension in the scripture is stark and not neatly resolved, especially when we recall a section D passage touting loyalty and filial piety as slow but sure routes toward eventual afterlife tutelage in arts of transcendence. It was a tension not just in this and other

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a supposedly above-board method of altering one's allotted lifespan, on the one hand, and a change of names (necessitated by deception), on the other, nevertheless also shows up in some Celestial Master petition texts from the period; it is not unique to Shangqing or to this scripture. See Campany, "Living off the Books," 136.

[94] *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*, 6a; translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 350.

texts but also in the extra-textual lives of Shangqing practitioners. To see it fully and poignantly fleshed out, one has only to recall the story of Zhou Ziliang as told in what should come to be recognized as one of the most gripping texts of world religious history, *Master Zhou's Records of His Communications with the Unseen* (*Zhoushi mingtong ji* 周氏冥通記, DZ 302). In this text we see from two points of view—Tao Hongjing's third-person perspective and the first-person viewpoint of the young Master Zhou himself—how this disciple of Tao carried on a secret and increasingly odd-seeming spiritual life while in the midst of an intimate family circle on Mao shan, eventually pulled out of that circle completely by the summons of his Perfected tutors and his downing of a deadly elixir, expiring on the floor of his "chamber of quietude" in the presence of his mother and aunt.[95]

Why, we may ask, would readers of the scripture have seen the weakening of family ties seen as beneficial? The tension between the strictures of esoteric practice and the exigencies of family life was hardly new to Shangqing. It had been an often-debated and troubling feature of the quest for transcendence for several centuries, sparking disputes similar to those surrounding Buddhist monastics' renunciation of household life. From the practitioner's point of view, family ties often amounted to obstacles to the pursuit of esoteric disciplines with their strict rules of ritual purity. Some hagiographies poignantly portray the emotional anguish involved in leaving spouse and young children.[96] Xu Hui, youngest son of Xu Mi 許謐 and the member of the Xu clan most receptive to the new revelations of the Perfected, had, after all, sent his young wife back to her family, perhaps so as to devote himself more fully to his religious practice.[97] From the perspective of the female Perfected

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[95] Introduced and partially translated in Bokenkamp, "Answering a Summons."

[96] On these tensions and debates see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 88–90, and Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 186–198.

[97] Or perhaps to avoid the sort of familial legal entanglements with his in-laws discussed in the next paragraph. See Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 148–149, who points out that we do not know exactly when Xu Hui sent his wife, Huang Jingyi 黃敬儀, back to her parents, or why. We do know, as Bokenkamp shows, that the Perfected regarded Hui's father-in-law, Huang Yan 黃演, with especially intense disdain.

Ones searching for suitable mates among mortal males, a practitioner's (or potential practitioner's) freedom from family ties was an attractive trait.

But surely there lurks behind such passages the darker matter of "sepulchral plaints" (*zhongsong* 冢訟). A passage in section B suggests as much when it lists as essential to all *shijie* methods "the withdrawal from relations with one's family dependents" 五屬之隱適也—phrasing that can also be read, depending on how we understand 隱適, as suggesting disentanglement from "hidden culpability" due to one's extended family. "The land of the dead," as Strickmann aptly summed up the matter, "was not a cheerful place. It seethed with regrets and complaints, with rivalries, feuds, and intrigues. . . . Ghosts were especially given to intricate and protracted litigation. Nothing delighted their twisted, dessicated hearts more than a nice, drawn-out lawsuit"[98]—even against their own descendants. Furthermore, "in medieval China, all the members of a given patrilineage were held responsible for the misdeeds of other members of the same lineage."[99] Dead family members often sought living descendants—whose hold on life was weak anyway—and tried to use them as surrogates or substitutes for their own afterlife punishment; if unchecked, such an action caused the death of the unfortunate living target. A suit brought by a ghost created an "infusion" (*zhu* 注) that manifested itself in the form of illness, even death. Portions of *Declarations of the Perfected* are taken up with communications surrounding just such a case in the Xu family during the 360s, that of Tao Kedou 陶科斗, Xu Mi's deceased wife, who, due to a suit filed against one of Xu's deceased uncles, had been imprisoned in her own tomb with nothing to eat or drink. "Faced with charges stemming not from her natal family, but from the family she had married into, Kedou proposed 'to keep watch for a child in her household due to weaken'—that is, one of her own grandsons in the Xu family—whom she could forward in her stead to satisfy the blood lust of the

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[98] Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 13.

[99] Ibid. For further discussion of such plaints, see Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*; Peter Nickerson, "The Great Petition for Sepulchral Plaints," in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 230–274.

underworld plaintiffs," as Bokenkamp explains.[100] A Shangqing practitioner might, then, conduct himself impeccably yet still end up entangled by invisible family-karmic strands in the crimes of distant ancestors or other living family members. Given the difficulty and danger of such situations, the promise of disentanglement from them would surely have appealed to all practitioners in general and quite likely, given their case history, to members of the Xu clan in particular.

But in addition to family, friends, lay sponsors, and the spirits of the Three Offices, there seems to have been one further audience for whom the practitioner of the *Sword Scripture*'s method was understood to perform. When translating the scripture I ran across passages, sounding similar to each other, that at first I had difficulty understanding. Consider:

> C: If [an adept following] the Dao of *shijie* should perform even a small wonder, this causes those with hope to feel obstructed, those who hear of it to think they cannot attain [its goal]. It takes only one [apparent?] death to block their path and make them think there is nothing more to discuss. [101]
>
> 夫尸解之道，如為少妙，既令希有情阻，聞者不及，一以死鎮其路，示無所復論。
>
> G1: All these lords . . . feigned their deaths using *shijie*. This was precisely because they wanted to cut themselves off using the feelings surrounding death and life and to show the people that there is a boundary between beginning and ending. How could [their actions] be confused with their flesh and bones having gone to Grand Darkness to become food for crickets and ants! They simply wished to place a roadblock for people of the time, a block on people's hopes.
>
> 此諸君並……尸解託死者，正欲斷以死生之情，示民有始終之限耳。豈昏腐骸太陰，以肉餉螻蟻者哉！直欲遏違世之夫，塞俗人之願望。[102]

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[100] *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 131. Chapter 4 of this book is now the best treatment of the case of Tao Kedou, which had also received attention from Strickmann, Nickerson, and other scholars.

[101] *WSMY*, 87.2b9ff.; cf. *YJQQ*, 84.2b4ff.

[102] *WSMY*, 87.2a10ff.; portions relevant here are underlined.

> 此諸君並已龍奏靈阿，鳳鼓雲池矣。而猶尸解託死者，欲斷以生死之情，示民有終始之限耳。豈同腐骸太陰，以肉餉螻蟻者哉！直欲遏違世之夫，塞俗人之願望也。[103]

The "small wonder" mentioned in the C passage must, I think, be the false but convincing display of mortality and decomposition achieved by the corpse simulacrum. What these passages suggest is that the staged deaths served an additional purpose beyond that of convincing family, friends, and spirits that the adept had already died so that he would be freed from the necessity of really dying. That additional purpose was a didactic one: to teach the uninitiated that death, at least for them, is inevitable, whatever vain hopes they may have had to the contrary.[104] In effect the message was: "Look! Even this adept, though initiated into the mysteries, has died, and died gruesomely! How much the more will you do so yourself!" The adept's apparent death is here being said to serve a dual purpose, no longer just a ruse but also a teaching moment, "a block on people's hopes."

To my knowledge, this was a novel way of justifying *shijie* methods. Perhaps it was meant to draw attention away from the deception at their heart. These passages ennoble *shijie* by portraying it as administering a painful but necessary corrective to the vanity of most of the contemporary population—those who, having heard that immortality methods exist, aspire to such a destiny themselves but who, unqualified, must remain uninitiated into the secrets. It is, then, a deception that serves a purpose not only for the adept but also for onlookers.

Whom, we might ask, did the text's makers have in mind here? We have only to recall that the pages of earlier hagiographies of transcendence-seekers are crowded with people who have heard of the existence of immortality practices and clamor for access to them yet are not willing or able to undertake the disciplines necessary to qualify for receiving the secret arts. Such individuals

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[103] *ZG*, 14.17a10–b4; cf. *YJQQ*, 84.4a8–b1.

[104] Stephen Eskildsen notes this didactic function of *shijie* methods, although he reads the latter as being "suicidal" in nature; see his *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 93.

might include powerful warlords and officials, even the ruler himself. Han Emperor Wu 漢武帝 was a favorite example of this sort of imperial arrogance and overreaching, but by the mid-fourth century plenty of other powerful figures were on record as having unsuccessfully pressured adepts to reveal their secrets.[105] In the passages above, the *Sword Scripture* assigns a new function to the performance that was *shijie*—new, at least, in the explicitness with which it is here stated: that of scaring off all such importunate bullies and hangers-on.

VII. The *Sword Scripture* as Itself Performance

I believe it can be said that religious productions take on significance in three sorts of contexts or vectors: extrinsic, intrinsic, and situational. By extrinsic I refer to the whole field of "others" among which and by contrast to which the production in question takes its place; or, more precisely, I mean the meanings attributed to the production by virtue of its many sorts of relations with these others. By intrinsic (the sorts of meanings religion scholars most often focus on) I refer to rationales given in or with the production itself as well as how it jibes with other productions of the same tradition or community—how it "expresses," as we often say, or performs, some of their priorities.[106] By situational I refer to the immediate surrounding audience and religious, cultural, and social contexts at or near the time and place of production.

Among the extrinsic meanings and functions of the text and method of the *Sword Scripture*, we can identify these: they resemble, but are claimed superior to, previous *shijie* methods; this superiority rests on the added prerogatives granted to adepts but also on the claim of having issued from Supreme Purity. The adept

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[105] See Campany, *Strange Writing*, 318–321; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 90–92; Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 88–129, 198–215.

[106] On these two modes of significance, see Robert Ford Campany, "The Meanings of Cuisines of Transcendence in Late Classical and Early Medieval China," *T'oung Pao* 91 (2005): 126–182; Campany, *Making Transcendence*, 39–47 (for the methodology) and 47–87 (for its application to religious productions); Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 37–43; and Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation."

using them rises above the common run of humanity, who are subject to the miseries and indignities of the dead. He also matches Buddhist monastics by transcending rebirth and *samsara*, not by no longer being reborn but by not dying. And he extricates himself from all manner of social entanglements, including (perhaps especially) those with previous generations of his own family and with the dead in general.

Intrinsically, of course, the method as well as the text in which it is revealed are constructed on a platform of a great many other Shangqing notions, priorities, and assumptions. But, as we have seen, when it comes to its goal, the method seems to diverge from the usual Shangqing privileging of Perfected status. To explain this divergence we must turn to the text's situational meanings.

Why did this scripture and this method number among the Shangqing revelations? I have shown what the method outlined in the *Sword Scripture* was designed to do, but why would what it was designed to do have seemed like a good thing to the maker(s) and early readers of this text? As we've seen, the scripture holds out a goal different from that of most or all of the other Shangqing scriptures. It appears to have been designed as a sort of divinely sanctioned exit ramp off of the rigorous path toward Perfection, a path that required leaving this world for good. It enabled practitioners to linger on in the world indefinitely. Why did the fashioner(s) of Shangqing scriptures feel compelled to provide such a method at all?

To answer this question, we must see the scriptural text itself, and not just the method it enshrines, as a performance—as a text made for and circulated under the eyes of its initial small audience in the context of the other Shangqing revelations. It was a performance aiming to persuade its readers to take a particular course of action out of a field of other possible courses of action.

To this end, I begin by noting that the text's overall tone is entirely concessory. The text admits that the path it lays out is not the highest path, but it is a viable one. Esteemed adepts from the past can be pointed to as having practiced it. It may not clearly open a door to Perfection—that remains ambiguous from the surviving scriptural quotations—but at least it forestalls falling into the dreaded juridical machinery of the Three Offices. Yet, although

this method demands less of the practitioner than do many others, the text promises significant benefits to those who use it. They will not be food for crickets and ants.[107] The vivid decomposition suffered by past users was a ruse, not real. Practitioners may return home or remain in the mountains, far from the bureaus and the court. They need not take up a post in the Perfected celestial bureaus, either. Their potentially troublesome family ties will be severed. They can simply remain on earth, free from any and all obligations here below or above.

Why these concessions? At this juncture we must recall that much of the Shangqing revelatory corpus, including many of its most memorable passages, consisted of overtures by the Perfected to their human interlocutors to take up the self-cultivational practices required to join them in the heavens—and to do so now rather than later. In this campaign of revelatory persuasion they pulled out all the stops: promises of the delights of hierogamy; descriptions of the wonders of cosmic travel and the amenities of celestial life, paired with stark contrasts with the muck and spiritual danger of earthly life; praise of their auditors' spiritual potential coupled with expressions of deep frustration at their slow progress, even running at times to outright scoldings. Through their appearances to Yang Xi, the Perfected were attempting to win over a small, reluctant audience which apparently consisted at first primarily of only three men: Yang himself, Xu Mi, and Xu Hui.

The *Sword Scripture* should be seen as a plank in this overall program of divine persuasion. It accommodated the scripture's recipients' lack of spiritual ambition and steady resolve. It was designed to assuage their fear, overcome their reluctance, and thus draw in those who were hesitant to leave this world for the next. At least it would get these men out of the rut of their ordinary lives, out of officialdom, out from under the threat of otherworld plaints, and into reclusion, a situation in which they stood a better chance of practicing the arts of Perfection.

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[107] Contrary to what is asserted by Smith (*Declarations of the Perfected*, 300), I do not read these lines in the text as so much "graveyard humor" designed to "diminish the sting of death." The adept embarking on this method would not, in my view, have anticipated imminent death.

All of the early recipients of messages from the Perfected are on record as having initially balked when they were urged to hasten their practice or when they were to be summoned into the heavens. They responded with fear, wanting to know how many more years they had to live or, if they already knew this number, protesting that their allotted lifespan had not yet expired. Xu Mi, not surprisingly, but also even the medium Yang Xi and the pliant young disciples Xu Hui and Zhou Ziliang are on record as having reacted thus.[108]

The living paterfamilias of the Xu clan, Xu Mi, a Jin court official, was the recipient of the Perfecteds' attentions who was most reluctant to answer their call. He was notably slow to abandon his ties to officialdom and take up fulltime practice of the new methods and disciplines being vouchsafed by the Perfected through Yang Xi. Much of the first four chapters of *Declarations* consists of repeated urgings by his would-be Perfected consort, Lady Right Blossom, for Mi to devote himself more single-mindedly to religious practice, coupled with her frequent laments that she is left to wander alone in the empyrean while her chosen partner continues to wallow in the dust of the world.

Even Xu Hui, Xu Mi's youngest son, repeatedly implied to be the most spiritually advanced and receptive member of the Xu clan,[109] appears to have had the sorts of reservations the *Sword*

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[108] Yang Xi's balk is perhaps only implied; he asks, with possible anxiety, how many years he has left to live and what his future fortunes will be at *ZG*, 2.7b10–8a2. His consort, Lady An, smiles and then "only after a long pause"—perhaps indicating her disappointment in his question—responds (2.8a2–10b3) with a predicted date of ascension and a glorious portrayal of their future celestial life together as Perfected officials. She also warns him, however, of the risks of remaining in the turbulent world for the intervening length of time. For a reading of her speech as monitory, with which I concur, see Smith, *Declarations of the Perfected*, 103, 105. As for Zhou Ziliang, he frankly recorded of himself that, upon being told by a visiting Perfected One that he was wanted immediately for a vacant position in the celestial ranks, "My face showed my fear" 子良便有懼色 (*Zhoushi mingtong ji*, 1.11a; translated in Bokenkamp, "Answering a Summons," 198). His Perfected interlocutor, as expected, responded by simply urging him to hurry up his practice and not remain longer in the world, sowing transgressions.

[109] See Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan*, 156–159; Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 138–139, 147–148.

Scripture seems designed to assuage. He is known to have received in 365, via a dream-encounter on the part of Yang Xi, a summons to the post of palace attendant (*shizhong* 侍中) among the Perfected. In the dream he protested that he should by rights have thirteen more years to live (in other words, his *ming* or pre-allotted lifespan had not yet elapsed) and that he had not yet mastered the necessary divine protocols (*yi* 儀)—both clearly stall tactics.[110] The Perfected in 368 once again encouraged him to join them, this time by carrying out the sorts of Grand Darkness refining procedures (*nota bene*) that would result in his celestial promotion, procedures they termed "nocturnal liberation" (*yejie* 夜解); this, they noted, was the practice formerly followed by Zhang Lu 張魯.[111] Tao Hongjing at least twice mentions (in discussing Xu Hui) that he was not clear on just what was entailed in this "nocturnal liberation." In one of these passages he seems to assume that, whatever it was, it was the method Hui had finally used but that it apparently did *not* involve a sword or staff.[112] This suggests that Tao expected that Hui would have been likely to perform some type of *shijie* using a sword or staff. We also know that Hui took particular interest in the *Sword Scripture*: three passages from it copied into *Zhen'gao* were said by Tao to have been written in Hui's own hand.[113] And Cedzich has gone so far as to suggest that Xu Hui's reported death (calculated by Tao to have occurred in 370) was only staged to avoid service to the Jin regime.[114]

In fact, it was in the context of a warning about the perils of continuing to live in this world of dust and sin that Lady An, Yang

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[110] *ZG*, 17.5b10–6a7; Strickmann translates the passage in "On the Alchemy," 129.

[111] *ZG*, 4.14b3–8. On Zhang Lu, grandson of Zhang Ling 張陵, the founder of the Celestial Master Daoist movement, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 34–35. The association with Zhang Lu would normally have signaled to readers the "merely" Taiqing status of the *yejie* method, whatever it was.

[112] *ZG*, 4.14b6–8; 20.10a10–b2. For one account of Xu Hui's apparent demise before the mouth of a cavern on the north side of Mao shan, leaving a strangely lifelike "corpse"—an account Tao cites with apparent approval—see *ZG*, 20.10a10–b2; translated in Strickmann, "On the Alchemy," 129–130.

[113] *ZG*, 14.18b4–6. Strickmann mentions this in "On the Alchemy," 132, 138.

[114] Cedzich, "Corpse Deliverance," 33n123. Tao points out that the note about Xu Hui's avoidance of service was added by Hui's grandson, Xu Rongdi 榮第, and discredits it (*ZG*, 4.13b2–3), but Cedzich allows that it may have contained some truth.

Xi's Perfected consort, suggested to him that, if things became unbearable in the twenty-two year interim between their present conversation and his eventual ascension into the heavens, he could withdraw early by "seeking a way of escape by means of a sword" 尋解劒之道.[115] In the passage in question (in chapter two of *Declarations of the Perfected*) she mentions that doing so would allow him to "embrace Perfected form in a secluded wood" 抱真形於幽林, and she characterizes this feat as a "technique of announcing your end" 告終之術 and a "finishing oneself off" 自盡—the latter phrase meaning, in my understanding, not suicide but (in accordance with "the technique of announcing your end," implying the pretense that one is mortally ill—something unnecessary if one is really about to die) the performance of an *apparent* death.[116] I believe that this passage clinches my argument concerning how the method was supposed to work and what it was for. The actual end of Yang Xi's life on earth—here described as a daytime ascension into the heavens—is predicted to occur twenty-two years hence; but if, in the meantime, the world proves too much for him, he can escape it by means of the sword method, which entails not death but withdrawal under the cover of a staged-death performance into social reclusion.

The *Sword Scripture* must have held particular appeal to those who heard the siren call of the Perfected but hesitated to quaff an elixir. It sanctioned their delay in answering the call to the last full measure while at the same time, merely by having received the scripture in transmission, assuring them of divine favor. (This is the most technical sense in which the text functioned performatively, by bringing about a state of affairs in the act of describing it.) It affirmed that they were fit for Perfection while also absolving them of the responsibility to seek it immediately, as in this line in section C: "Now I (the divine speaker of the text) am secretly putting forth this method of *shijie* so that each of you might transmit it to disciples *who are fit to become Perfected Ones*" 今密出尸解之方，可

[115] *ZG*, 2.10a6–7. Here "escape by means of a sword" is termed not "*jianjie*" 劒解 but "*jiejian*" 解劒—perhaps due simply to a copyist's inversion of the two graphs.

[116] Here I roundly disagree with Smith, who understands the process as one of deliberate suicide (*Declarations of the Perfected*, 105).

各以傳示弟子，應為真人者 (*WSMY*, 87.2b9ff.; cf. *YJQQ*, 84.2b4ff.; emphasis added). And it pointed to past exemplars in what must have been reassuring terms:[117]

> When it comes to the likes of Master Azure Essence, Peng Keng, Feng Gang, the Four Hoaryheads of Mount Shang, and the Eight Sires of Huainan, they all took superior elixirs but only in a small dose so that they might leave their habitations in silence, hiding out in the mountains and forests, delighting in wandering and metamorphosing but shying away from ascending into the void. It wasn't that they were unable to ascend to the heavens, it was just that they didn't. Thus these lords all circulated among the marchmounts, changing their names but no longer needing to perform *shijie*. (From section G1.)
>
> 至於青精先生、彭鏗、鳳綱，及商山四皓、淮南八公，並已服上藥，不至一劑自欲出處默語，肥遁山林，以遊化為樂，以昇虛為感。非不能登天也，弗為之耳。以此諸君自展轉五嶽，改名易字，不復作尸解之耳。

It wasn't that they were unable to ascend to the heavens. It was just that they didn't—yet.

[117] *WSMY*, 87.2b3–8, citing 洞真藏景錄形神經; compare *ZG*, 14.17b5–10.

《道教研究學報：宗教、歷史與社會》第六期（2014）
Daoism: Religion, History and Society, No. 6 (2014), 33–84

道教的詐死之術：《劍經》佚文的重新整理與詮釋

康若柏

摘要

本論文將重新詮釋散見於各種文獻中的上清道書：《劍經》的佚文，並主張該作品指定了一種稱為「尸解」的古老修行方法。雖然該經並未向信徒許諾此種修習方法可以使人達致「真人」的境界，但其中也提供了向上清啟示的早期接受者們推薦這種方法的原因。

關鍵詞：道教、《劍經》、上清、尸解、表演