

Beyond the Kingly Metaphor: A Sociological Reading of the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign**

Bony Schachter
Fudan University

“. . . Then sacrifice to the air!” “I do not attend to the air”, answered Pionius, “but to him who made the air, the heavens, and all that is in them.” The proconsul said: “Tell me, who did make them?” Pionius answered: “I cannot tell you.” The proconsul said: “Surely it was the god, that is Zeus, who is in heaven; for he is the king of all the gods.”¹

1 Introduction: Mediumistic Origins

In this paper I shall engage with the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*² (YHJ, after *Yuhuang jing* 玉皇經), focusing on the issue of scriptural structure and reception.³

* My thanks to Professor Edward Davis, for his encouraging response to an earlier version of this paper and for the improvements suggested; Professor Lai Chi Tim 黎志添 made important observations in the context of the Young Scholars’ Forum in Chinese Studies (18–20 June 2014), in which I presented a second version of this paper. Finally, the anonymous readers helped me shape my argument, saving me from committing embarrassing errors.

¹ *Martyrium Pionii* 19.9–13, Musurillo (1972, 160ff.), in Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 1.

² Extant recensions include CT 10, CT 11, and CT 1440.

³ An unfortunate example of this kind of scholarship can be found in Chen Jianxian’s 陳建憲 *Yuhuang dadi xinyang* 玉皇大帝信仰 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1995). Chen Jianxian’s Marxism-Leninism is one of the many examples of Chinese indoctrination maintained by those who never read a sentence of Marx, may it be in Chinese or in any other language.

The former deserves a more appropriate assessment, since it has been misrepresented or simply ignored by modern scholarly discussions.⁴ The latter, in its turn, remains practically unexplored. The first question I would like to ask is: what is the YHJ about? Is it about the Jade Sovereign? What do we mean when we state that a certain scripture is about a determined god? Are we saying anything *positively* relevant at all?

⁴ Due to the problem of space, it will not be possible to furnish a complete account of the bibliography related to the Jade Sovereign and his scripture here. I do provide with a more critical assessment in this respect in my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*: A Study and Annotated Translation of Its First Chapter,” *Monumenta Serica* 62 (forthcoming). The fundamental account on the god is still that provided by Henri Maspero in *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises* (1926; Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971). The first philological contributions were those furnished by H. Y. Fêng 馮漢驥 (Feng Hanji), “The Origin of Yü Huang,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 1936), pp. 242–50; Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dōkyō no kenkyū* 道教の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1952), p. 292. Japanese scholars have been focused on the issue of the cult of Yuhuang 玉皇 during Song times. See, for instance, Akizuki Kan’ei 秋月觀暎, *Dōkyōshi* 道教史 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1987), p. 60; Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠, *Dōkyōshi* 道教史 (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1977); Watanabe Yoshio 渡邊欣雄, “Gyokukō jōtei tanshin no matsuri zoku ni kansuru hikaku kenkyū” 玉皇上帝誕辰の祭俗に関する比較研究, *Musashi daigaku Jinbun gakkai zasshi* 14, no. 1 (October 1982), pp. 47–112; Sunayama Minoru 砂山稔, “Gyokukō taitei to Sōdai Dōkyō: Sō Shoku o chūshin ni shite” 玉皇大帝と宋代道教—蘇軾を中心にして, in *Dōkyō no kamigami to kyōten* 道教の神々と經典, ed., Noguchi Tetsurō 野口鐵郎, Sunayama Minoru, Ozaki Masaharu 尾崎正治, and Kikuchi Noritaka 菊地章太 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1999), pp. 55–74. As for Chinese scholarship, we may identify a variety of approaches to the god and his scripture. Wang Jianchuan 王見川, for instance, discussed the issue of the rumours according which the post of the Jade Sovereign had been occupied by Guandi, in his “Taiwan ‘Guandi dang Yuhuang’ chuanshuo de youlai” 臺灣「關帝當玉皇」傳說的由來, *Taipei wenxian* 118 (December 1996), pp. 213–32. Chen Jianxian dedicated a series of papers and a book to the topic. See his *Huaxia zhushen: Yuhuang dadi* 華夏諸神：玉皇大帝 (Taipei: Yunlong chubanshe, 1999). Long Yan 龍延 tried to explain the Buddhist elements one finds in the YHJ in his “Fojiao dui Daojiao dianji de yingxiang qianlun: Yi Gaoshang Yuhuang benxing jijing wei li” 佛教對道教典籍的影響淺論——以《高上玉皇本行集經》為例, *Chaohu xueyuan xuebao*, 2004, no. 1, pp. 23–27. Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韓秉方 demonstrated that the YHJ would be worshipped not only by Daoists but also by sectarian groups, in their *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), p. 880. Zheng Canshan 鄭燦山 argues that the YHJ contributed to elevate the status of the Jade Sovereign in the Chinese pantheon, in his “Cong Yuhuang benxing jijing kaocha Yuhuang dadi de shenge” 從《玉皇本行集經》考查玉皇大帝的神
(Continued on next page)

帝王隱喻之外：由社會史的角度看 《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容和接受史

(摘要)

Bony Schachter

本文初步探討了《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容與接受史。目前，有關《高上玉皇本行集經》的探討，局限於成書年代和問世背景的問題。據今人的考證，《高上玉皇本行集經》屬於南宋、七曲山文昌崇拜的道經，其最早版本應是1218年、以金人侵入四川為歷史背景的版本。本文主張《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容是值得進一步探討的課題。本文詳細分析該道經的內容，指出它是為了滿足不同社會群眾的需要而設計的。《高上玉皇本行集經》內容主要涉及若干承諾和威脅，以及基於這些承諾和威脅所主張的各種儀式化的行為 (ritualized behaviours)。《高上玉皇本行集經》裏所描述的儀式化的行為，建立起宗教經典的使用者 (scriptural user) 與宗教文本之間的關係，而歷代的編者通過各種靈驗故事來強調或否定這種關係的可靠性和神聖性。筆者介紹了非道教讀者對《高上玉皇本行集經》所做出的種種反應。據筆者的考證，道教、佛教、天主教各種文獻指出，明清以來，玉皇的身份曾經變成為各方激烈爭論的對象：佛教徒認為玉皇只不過是帝釋天的化身；道教徒認為玉皇既可以理解為燃燈佛，又可以視為儒教祀典中的昊天、上帝等神靈，但絕不能與帝釋天等同；天主教徒則堅決反對「玉皇為耶穌、玉皇為神 (θεος)」之說。從《高上玉皇本行集經》的接受史也可以看出，在明清時期，該道經曾遭遇到佛教界和在華天主教界的嚴厲批評。本文擬解釋這些衝突的原因所在，並且提出這些衝突與《高上玉皇本行集經》的論點之間有密切的關係。

關鍵詞： 宗教 儀式 道教 玉皇 《玉皇經》

Keywords: religion ritual Daoism Jade Sovereign *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*