

Physicians, Quanzhen Daoists, and Folk Cult of the Sage of Medicine in Nanyang, 1540s–1950s*

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Abstract

This article investigates the close interaction among the physicians' guild, Daoists, patients, and devotees of Zhang Ji (z. Zhongjing, 150–211) at the Shrines of the Sage of Medicine and the Three Sovereigns in the city of Nanyang, Henan, from the late Ming to the early Republican period. Using previously untapped local temple steles, extant textual sources, and other evidences developed from fieldwork, the author shows that Daoist clerics of the Quanzhen Nanwu lineage played a vitally important role not only in the physical upkeep and daily operations of the shrines, but also in the local physicians' annual sacrifices and worship of the medical pantheon that featured the Three Sovereigns and the Prominent Physicians, especially,

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Zhang Ji. In addition, these Quanzhen Daoist clerics also provided service at the physicians' annual social and professional gatherings at the shrines where the guild members discussed their healing craft and practice. The author demonstrates that by using their privileged positions as the shrine keepers, the Quanzhen clerics managed to have cultivated long-term ties with the physicians and local elite. Drawing on these close ties and on the organizational strength of their fictive kinship as a religious lineage, these Quanzhen clerics exercised considerable agency and influence in dealing with their physician clients, in shaping the local cult of the Lord Sage of Medicine centered on Zhang Ji, and in hosting and disseminating folk, rather than orthodox, healing beliefs and practices such as the divinatory slips of prescriptive recipes at the Sage of Medicine Shrine in Nanyang.

Keywords: Quanzhen Nanwu Daoist clerics, shrine keepers, the physicians' guild, Zhang Ji (Zhongjing), Sage of Medicine, divinatory slips of prescription