

## Living Redactions: The Salvationist Roots of Daoist Practice in Central Hunan\*

David J. Mozina

### Abstract

This article examines the nature of “secret instructions” (*mizhi* 秘旨 / 密旨) or “secret transmissions” (*michuan* 秘傳 / 密傳) at the heart of many local Daoist lineages. It shows that *mizhi* texts are not rigid codifications of core liturgical knowledge preciously maintained down the generations of a lineage, but are instead active processes of redaction—“living redactions.” *Mizhi* texts are intertextual; they are like fabrics woven and rewoven from various strands of cosmological theory and liturgical know-how drawn from sometimes surprising sources. This article pulls on the threads of a particular *mizhi* text used by a local Zhengyi Daoist lineage currently practicing thunder rites in north-central Hunan. It discovers

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that their Daoist *mizhi* text is substantially rooted in a seventeenth-century text likely related to Xiantiandao 先天道 (Way of the Anterior Heaven), a salvationist movement devoted to the unity of the Three Teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. That seventeenth-century text was later widely used in spirit-writing altars as it circulated around south and east China. We shall see how certain cosmological theories and inner-chemical methods articulated by this text made their way into the esoteric liturgical teachings of a Daoist lineage in rural Hunan by means of a creative redaction of the lineage's *mizhi* by one of its nineteenth-century masters. And we shall see how the *mizhi* text he created continues to be redacted today.

**Keywords:** Hunan, secret instructions, salvationist movements, Xiantiandao (Way of the Anterior Heaven), spirit-writing, inner alchemy, thunder rites

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## Introduction

Through the late imperial period to the present day, local Daoist lineages across China have maintained their teachings and liturgical practices by various means. One major means is the inheritance, preservation, reproduction, and redaction of their religious texts. Apprentices preparing for ordination into a lineage often copy by hand manuscripts bequeathed by their masters as a way to absorb the know-how necessary for making a living by performing rites on behalf of their local communities. More experienced masters also recopy texts as the older manuscripts wear out with use. But sometimes experienced masters do more than recopy a text; they may in fact consciously take it upon themselves to redact, and so change, it.

Such conscious redactions are done not only on texts less obviously rooted in divine revelation, like those providing the templates for the various documents to be written out, recited, and submitted to celestial bureaux by burning during ritual. Redactions are also done on revealed texts whose authority is believed to stem from some original revelation by a deity and to have been transmitted by one or more lineage patriarchs, such as esoteric instructions for performing rituals. Despite the aura of sacredness, preciousness, and changelessness that these sacred texts might exude, lineage masters, in fact, often creatively redact them in response to their contemporary conditions and liturgical needs, thereby providing new interpretations of core lineage teachings. As a result, even an authoritative text revered as an intact, esoteric document may in fact be comprised of strands of redactions woven together by lineage masters at different historical moments.

This article shows how certain kinds of authoritative texts rooted in revelation—the “secret instructions” (*mizhi* 秘旨 / 密旨) or “secret transmissions” (*michuan* 秘傳 / 密傳) at the heart of local Daoist lineages—are historical constructs created by redactions at particular moments in time, rather than unbroken texts passed down through generations without alteration. In many Daoist lineages across south China, *mizhi* texts—as I will call them—

articulate the most foundational practices every master must learn in order to perform successfully the apotropaic and therapeutic rites for which they are often hired by members of their local communities. These *mizhi* texts are often augmented by instructions in the form of “oral transmissions” (*kouchuan* 口傳) taught by masters to their apprentices toward the end of their training period or shortly after ordination.

We shall see that *mizhi* texts are not rigid codifications of core liturgical knowledge preciously maintained down the generations of a local lineage, but are instead active processes of redaction—“living redactions”—incorporating divergent strands of liturgical theory and method over time. *Mizhi* texts are like textual fabrics woven out of various strands of cosmological theory and liturgical know-how drawn from sometimes surprising sources within and even beyond the lineage. They are woven and rewoven by thoughtful and creative masters in the lineage who have acquired the confidence and stature to do such redactional work. This is often done so seamlessly that the revised text masks its own sources and so maintains the *mizhi* text’s own authoritative narrative as rooted in past revelation. In other words, a *mizhi* text in a local Daoist lineage is in reality not so sacrosanct that it must be preserved unchanged. Rather, it is from time to time redacted by creative minds to suit the lived reality of those who revere it.

This article takes as a case study the production of a *mizhi* text I collected from a practicing Daoist lineage in north-central Hunan province. The *Secret Transmission from Patriarch Lü on the Ancestral Qi of the Anterior Heaven* (*Lüzū xiantian zuqi michuan* 呂祖先天祖炁密傳, hereafter the *Secret Transmission*) lays out the foundational inner-chemical theory and instructions that underpin that lineage’s Daoist thunder rites (*leifa* 雷法). These are rituals for summoning and employing martial gods known as thunder deities (*leishen* 雷神) for apotropaic and therapeutic purposes. As its title indicates, the text is one of the most closely guarded in the lineage’s cache of liturgical manuals, scriptures, and hagiographies. It is transmitted only within the lineage and ought not to be shared with outsiders. By unraveling several of the strands that have been

knitted together to create the *Secret Transmission*, our inquiry will reveal something of how open and porous this highly guarded *mizhi* text has really been. Pulling on those strands will lead us to surprising historical contexts out of which today's *Secret Transmission* emerged. We shall see that this *mizhi* text maintained by an unassuming local Daoist lineage in rural Hunan is substantially rooted in salvationist movements in late imperial China, and possibly in a specific seventeenth-century movement called Xiantian dao 先天道 (Way of the Anterior Heaven), which was devoted to the unity of the Three Teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. We shall see how certain cosmological theories and ritual methods from such sectarian movements made their way into the core liturgical teachings of this Daoist lineage by means of the creative redactions of one of its lineage masters.

This essay will unfold in four parts. First, it will introduce the *Secret Transmission* text and the ordinary local Daoist lineage in Hunan that maintains it. Second, it will examine the seventeenth-century text outside the lineage on which substantial parts of the *Secret Transmission* were based, its author, and how it was propagated by means of spirit-writing during the Qing period. Third, it will contextualize that seventeenth-century text and its author's probable relationship with the salvationist movement Xiantian dao. And fourth, it will show how a resourceful nineteenth-century master in the lineage creatively drew on this seventeenth-century text to redact his lineage's secret instructions to create the *Secret Transmission*, the *mizhi* text taught and guarded by his liturgical descendants today.

## I. *The Secret Transmission* and Its Daoist Lineage in North-Central Hunan

The *Secret Transmission* is taught and maintained by a particular branch of a broad lineage that sprawls across the Daxiong mountains 大熊山 in Anhua county 安化縣 and northern Xinhua county 新化縣. The broad lineage binds together its members by means of a twenty-character lineage poem (*paixu shi* 派序詩) that reads:

道德流來遠	<i>dao de liu lai yuan</i>	The Way and its power flow from profound distance,
通真玄妙深	<i>tong zhen xuan miao shen</i>	Their penetrating truth is mysterious, marvelous, fathomless.
三千功行滿	<i>san qian gong xing man</i>	Accomplish three thousand merits and achievements,
飛身謁玉京	<i>fei shen ye yu jing</i>	Your flying body will pay respects at the Jade Capital.

The Daoist name (*daoming* 道名) bequeathed to a new master upon his ordination includes one character from the poem, which denotes the generation of the lineage to which he belongs. For example, the newest masters of the lineage are now conferred the character *yu* 玉 or *jing* 京, which indicates they are members of the nineteenth or twentieth generation of the lineage. If we take each generation in the poem to occupy twenty to twenty-five years, we can roughly date the lineage back to the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The lineage practices both Daoist rites for the living and Buddhist rites for the dead. Some branches of the lineage also practice local *shigong* 師公 exorcistic rites, which are known as Yuanhuang jiao 元皇教 (the Tradition of the Primordial Emperor).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of this lineage and its genealogy, see David J. Mozina, *Knotting the Banner: Ritual and Relationship in Daoist Practice*, chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lui Wing Sing 呂永昇 and Li Xinwu 李新吾, *Shi Dao heyi: Xiangzhong Meishan Yangyuan Zhangtan de keyi yu chuangcheng* 師道合一：湘中梅山楊源張壇的科儀與傳承, 2 vols., Daojiao yishi congshu 道教儀式叢書 2, eds. Lao Gewen 勞格文 (John Lagerwey) and Lü Pengzhi 呂鵬志 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2015); Mark Meulenbeld, “Dancing with the Gods: Daoist Ritual and Popular Religion in Central Hunan,” in “*Difang Daojiao yishi shidi diaocha bijiao yanjiu*” *guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 「地方道教儀式實地調查比較研究」國際學術研討會論文集, eds. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2013), 113–184; Meulenbeld, “The Dark Emperor’s Law: A Daoist Temple and Its Codification of Rituals in Hunan,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 4, no. 1 (2018): 66–111; and Meulenbeld, “Classifying a Local Cult in Hunan: Daoist Ritual, Ideology, and Efficacy of the ‘General Who Quashed Bandits,’” in *Daoism and Local Cults: Rethinking the Paradigms*, eds. Philip Clart and Vincent Goossaert (forthcoming); and Patrice Fava, *Aux portes du ciel: La statue taoïste du Hunan* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres and École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2013).

The lineage considers its Daoist rites as Zhengyi 正一 (Orthodox Unity), and those rites have historical roots in the great liturgical movements of the Song and Yuan dynasties, including the Tianxin zhengfa 天心正法 (Correct Rites of the Heart of Heaven), Shenxiao 神霄 (Divine Empyrean), and Qingwei 清微 (Pure Tenuity) movements. The lineage traces its Buddhist rites to Pu'an 普庵 (1115–1169), an eccentric Chan monk from Yichun 宜春 in northwestern Jiangxi who reputedly learned different traditions of ritual practice, including Daoist thunder rites.<sup>3</sup>

In the hamlets west of Le'an township 樂安鎮 in southeastern Anhua county, a clan surnamed Jiang 蔣 has dominated the local branch of the lineage since at least the late eighteenth century. Masters of the Jiang clan have trained nine generations of liturgical masters, including Jiang family members, men from a neighboring Li 李 clan, and men of other surnames. The most renowned master of the clan in recent memory, to whom I will refer by his Daoist liturgical name Jiang Shenzhi 蔣身志 (1928–2018), was a member of the seventeenth *shen* 身 generation of the lineage. He enjoyed a long life and great reputation in the locale. Like several of his forebears during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jiang dedicated himself to collecting, preserving, copying, and redacting his lineage's Daoist and Buddhist texts.

Many of the Jiang clan's texts were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), but Jiang Shenzhi took up the task of gathering and restoring the clan's rich textual tradition when the local government gradually began loosening restrictions on religious practice in the late 1980s. By the early 2000s, Jiang had rebuilt an impressive collection that consists of at least 120 texts of various types. Some are scriptures (*jing* 經) in wood-block print (*keben* 刻本) produced by publishers and printing shops in different parts of south China during the late Qing and Republican periods. The great bulk of the collection, however, is comprised of handwritten manuscripts (*chaoben* 抄本) that have been recopied

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<sup>3</sup> For an exploration of the historical roots of the lineage's Daoist rites in Song and Yuan liturgical movements, and the connection of the lineage's Buddhist rites with Pu'an, see Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapters 1 and 2.

by generations of masters like Jiang Shenzhi. These manuscripts include ritual manuals (*kewen* 科文) that script how to perform various rites; collections of hundreds of templates for different kinds of documents (i.e., *shuwen* 疏文, *diewen* 牒文, *biaowen* 表文) that are written out, recited, and then burned to send off to the various celestial and terrestrial bureaux during rites; and hagiographies of great patriarchs and their attendant thunder deities, which are called *zhuan* 傳, or alternatively *chumai* 出脈, *yuanliu* 源流, or *xueben* 血本.

Among the most revered texts in the lineage's living library is the *Secret Transmission mizhi* text. In those rare moments when I could convince Jiang Shenzhi to talk about his experiences during the Cultural Revolution, he recounted how masters in the region were quick to appease government authorities who raided their homes by handing over printed scriptures and even some handwritten manuals for audience rituals with high gods (*chaoke* 朝科), but they carefully hid their *mizhi* texts in the fields, mountainsides, and homes of lay neighbors. Without its *mizhi* text, the heart of a lineage—its foundational theories and ritual methods—would fade from memory. The lineage would lose the fundamentals of its ritual know-how and so would inevitably wither.

We shall see that the *Secret Transmission* is both a theoretical treatise that explains in great detail the roots of a practitioner's liturgical power in the cosmogony, and a practical primer that instructs how the practitioner can tap into that power by means of inner-alchemical (*neidan* 內丹) visualization for the purpose of performing the most important Daoist rites in the lineage's repertoire—thunder rites for summoning fearsome martial deities to protect spaces and bodies from demonic attack, and to heal already afflicted spaces and bodies by means of exorcism.<sup>4</sup> The *Secret*

<sup>4</sup> To get a sense of thunder rites, which arose during the Song period, see Li Yuanguo 李遠國, *Shenxiao leifa: Daojiao Shenxiaopai yange yu sixiang* 神霄雷法：道教神霄派沿革與思想 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2003); Michel Strickmann, "The Longest Taoist Scripture," *History of Religions* 17,

*Transmission* was hand-copied from an older manuscript by a master in the lineage known only by his Daoist name Gong Feiwu 龔飛悟. The name indicates Master Gong was a member of the sixteenth *fei* 飛 generation of the lineage, which was active during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. A colophon states that the text was originally compiled by a certain “old master” (*lao shifu* 老師父) who went by the Daoist name Huang Xingzhong 黃行忠, which identifies him as a member of the lineage’s fourteenth *xing* 行 generation active during the early to mid-nineteenth century. The colophon states that Huang compiled the text in his sixties and based it on a text he had acquired called the *Lüzu zhixuan pian* 呂祖指玄篇 (*Folios Pointing to Mystery by Patriarch Lü*), which was revealed by a figure called only Lüzu 呂祖 (Patriarch Lü). Jiang Shenzhi, who was ordained in 1946, could relate no information about Huang Xingzhong from oral transmissions received from his masters other than to say that Huang was from northern Xinhua county just to the west of Jiang’s locale in Anhua county. Unfortunately, Huang’s own handwritten *Secret Transmission* and the copy of the *Lüzu zhixuan pian* he allegedly acquired have been lost, at least to Jiang Shenzhi’s lineage branch.

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nos. 3–4 (1978): 331–354; Strickmann, “*Sōdai no raigi: Shinshōundō to dōka Nanshū ni tsuite no ryaku setsu*” 宋代の雷儀：神霄運動と道家南宋についての略説, *Tōhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 46 (1975): 15–28; Judith M. Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1987), 23–53; Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone: New Weapons in Battles with the Supernatural,” in *Religion and Society in T’ang and Sung China*, eds. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993), 241–305; Lowell Skar, “Deity Cults, and the Transformations of Daoism in Song and Yuan Times,” in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 413–463; Skar, “Administering Thunder: A Thirteenth-Century Memorial Deliberating the Thunder Rites,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996–1997): 159–202; Matsumoto Kōichi 松本浩一, “Sōdai no raihō” 宋代の雷法, *Shakai bunka shigaku* 社會文化史學 17 (1979): 45–65; and Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapter 2.

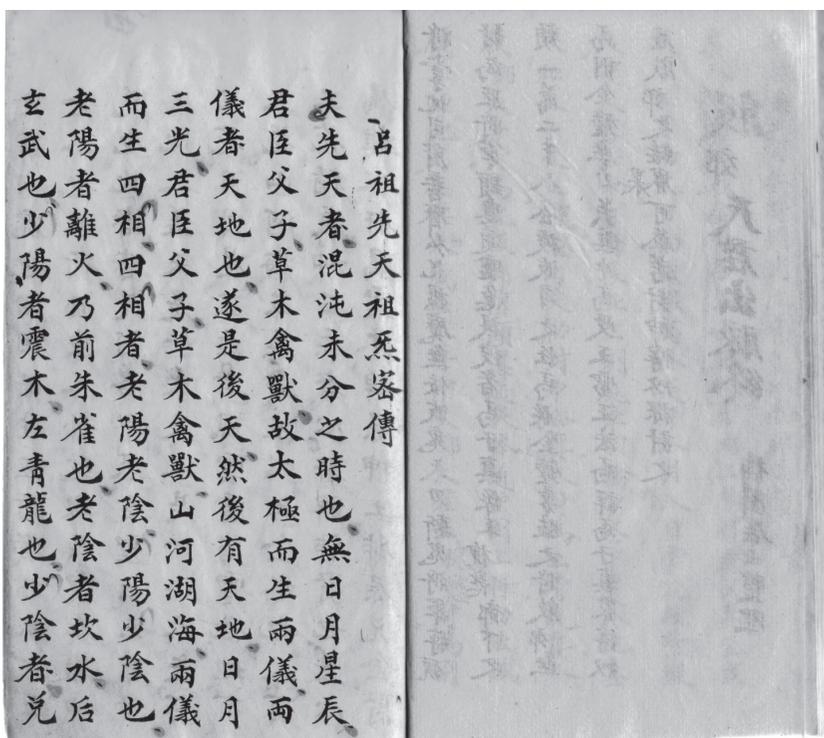


Figure 1 The first page of Huang Xingzhong's *Secret Transmission* (*Lüzü xiantian zuqi michuan*), copied by Gong Feiwu from an older manuscript in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. From author's collection.

The Lüzu of the *Lüzü zhixuan pian* on which Huang based his *Secret Transmission* is, of course, the renowned legendary figure Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓. A poet, calligrapher, healer, alchemist, exorcist, swordsman, and recluse said to have lived during the late Tang dynasty, Lü was a transcendent who, as Paul Katz has shown, has invited diverse interpretations. During the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), Lü became the object of a widely popular cult, which was especially active along the Yangtze River valley from the Jiangnan region down to southern Hunan. During the Song–Yuan period, Lüzu, as he came to be known, was recognized as a great master of inner alchemy by the Southern Lineage of the Golden

Elixir (Jindan nanzong 金丹南宗) and a patriarch of the Quanzhen 全真 tradition. As his cult continued to grow and attract more believers, Lüzu received increased recognition from the state, which granted the deity imperial ranks and titles in 1119, 1310, and 1804.<sup>5</sup> From the mid-Ming through the Qing period, the Lüzu cult was, as we shall see below, propagated all over China by means of spirit-writing, which produced texts of which many were compiled into compendia and published.

Jiang Shenzhi and members of his lineage in central Hunan have no knowledge of this rich history of the Lüzu cult, nor do they know of the significance of Lü Dongbin in the history of Daoism and spirit-writing cults beyond references to him in popular culture as one of the Eight Transcendents (*baxian* 八仙). All they know is that the colophon of the *Secret Transmission* states that their ancestral master Huang Xingzhong had acquired a copy of the *Lüzu zhixuan pian* and then “awakened to the ultimate principle of the Anterior Heaven and gathered into a text [comprehension of] the changes [symbolized] by the eight trigrams and of the generation and conquest of the five phases, [in order] to allow future disciples [in the lineage] to grasp these [concepts as easily as] pointing to the palm of one’s hand” 悟明先天至理，將八卦變化、五行生剋，集之如篋，使後學者指其掌矣。<sup>6</sup> For Jiang Shenzhi and his lineage, the *Secret Transmission* is an enlightened discourse by one of their nineteenth-century forebears on a text originally revealed by Lüzu, a divine patriarch of their lineage. The revealed nature of the *Zhixuan pian* endows the treatise with divine authority such that members of the lineage trust its claims and guard it closely.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 52–93; and Lai Chi Tim 黎志添, “Qingdai Lüzu baochan yu fuji daotan: Guangdong Xiqiao Yunquanxianguan Lüzu wuji baochan de bianzhuān ji yu qita Qingdai Lüzu chanben de bijiao” 清代呂祖寶懺與扶乩道壇：廣東西樵雲泉仙館《呂祖無極寶懺》的編撰及與其他清代呂祖懺本的比較, *Hanxue yanjiu xuekan* 漢學研究學刊 9 (2018): 136–137.

<sup>6</sup> *Secret Transmission*, in *Zuqi michuan Yin Jiao chumai* 祖炁秘傳殷郊出脈, manuscript collated by Jiang Shenzhi, early 1990s, Anhua county, Hunan.

However, when we compare Huang Xingzhong's *Secret Transmission* with Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian*, we find no resemblance. Huang seems not to have drawn any direct quotations or even content from the *Zhixuan pian* itself.<sup>7</sup> This raises several troubling issues: Did Huang indeed obtain a version of the *Zhixuan pian* and compose his *Secret Transmission* on the basis of it, as his text claims? Is the belief by generations of the lineage's masters that their most precious Daoist teaching is founded on a revelation by the deity Lüzu simply a historical misunderstanding?

My research reveals that Huang's *Secret Transmission* in fact draws substantially on excerpts from another text called the *Secret Annotation of the Zhixuan pian by Patriarch Lü* (*Lüzu zhixuan pian mizhu* 呂祖指玄篇秘註, hereafter the *Secret Annotation*). Dated to 1669, this annotation of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* was compiled by a man who went by the pen name Canghai laoren 滄海老人 (Old Man of the Vast Sea), and by what seems to be a Daoist name, Benchengzi 本誠子 (Master of Root Sincerity). As we shall see, the *Secret Annotation* was copied, printed, and circulated widely across China during the Qing period. I have found three versions of the text. The first is a wood-block print currently preserved at the Harvard-Yenching Library in the United States. It was printed in 1887 from blocks stored in an altar called the *Ersheng xianjing* 二聖仙境 (Transcendent Realm of the Two Sages) in western Beijing. The second version is an undated, handwritten manuscript kept in the Waseda University Library in Japan. It was copied by a man named Zhou Miaorong 周妙榮, about whom I can find no information. The third version is preserved in the *Daozang jinghua*

<sup>7</sup> The *Zhixuan pian* attributed to Lüzu is included in two editions of the *Lüzu quanshu* 呂祖全書 (*Collected Writings of Patriarch Lü*): a thirty-two-chapter edition compiled in 1744 by Liu Tishu 劉體恕 and Huang Chengshu 黃誠恕 in Hubei, and a sixty-four-chapter edition compiled in 1775 by Cai Laihe 蔡來鶴 and Shao Zhilin 邵志琳 in Hangzhou. The 1744 edition is included in the *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, eds. Hu Daojing 胡道靜, Chen Yaoting 陳耀庭, Duan Wengui 段文桂, and Lin Wanqing 林萬清 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992), 7:157–172. For an examination of the roots of the various editions of the *Lüzu quanshu* in spirit-writing altars, see Lai Chi Tim 黎志添, “Qingdai sizhong Lüzu quanshu yu Lüzu fuji daotan de guanxi” 清代四種《呂祖全書》與呂祖扶乩道壇的關係, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 42 (2013): 183–230.

道藏精華 (*Essential Blossoms of the Daoist Canon*), a collection of Daoist texts published in 1963 in Taiwan. The Waseda University and *Daozang jinghua* versions are identical, and both include an additional text entitled *Pomi zongzhi pian* 破迷宗旨篇 (*Folios of Tenets for Breaking Through Confusion*), which the Harvard-Yenching version lacks. I rely on the Harvard-Yenching version for this article.

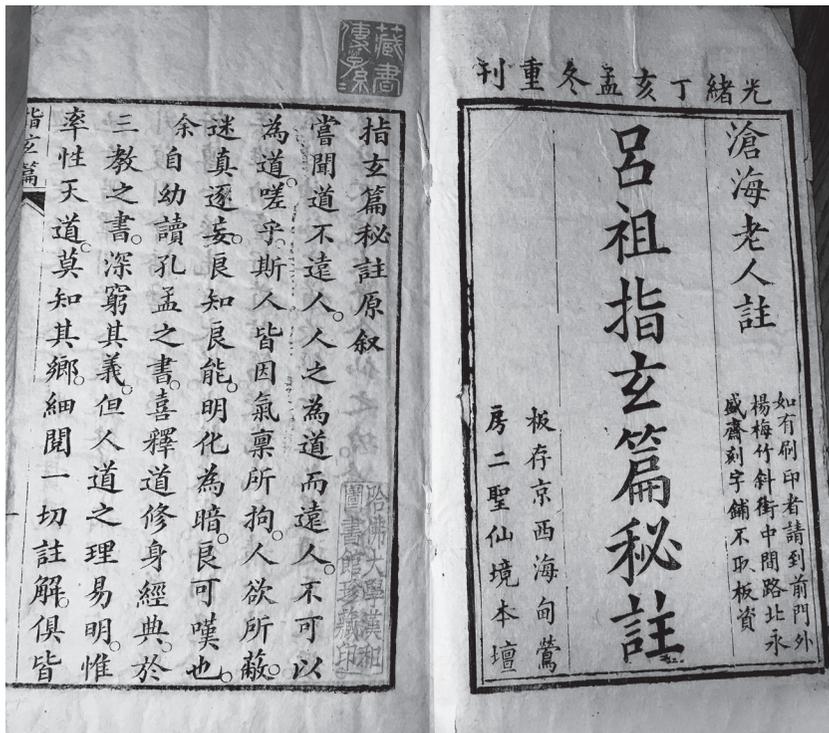


Figure 2 First pages of Canghai laoren’s 1669 *Secret Annotation* (*Lüzu zhixuan pian mizhu*), printed in 1887 and preserved in the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, USA.

A textual comparison of Huang Xingzhong’s nineteenth-century *Secret Transmission* with Canghai laoren’s seventeenth-century *Secret Annotation* reveals that Huang drew liberally from Canghai laoren’s annotations and knitted them together with his own

sentences peppered with a few short passages from the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*), and the *Sanzi jing* 三字經 (*Three-Character Classic*), a text for educating children that was popular during late imperial times. From these textual threads, Huang created a coherent text that explains the inner-alchemical theory and practice that drives his lineage's Daoist thunder rites. But why would Huang Xingzhong take so seriously annotations by Canghai laoren, a figure who, we shall see, leaves almost no trace in the history of Daoism? How could Canghai laoren carry enough authority that Huang trusted his interpretations of Lüzu's revelations when Huang was explaining the very core of his lineage's Daoist practice? The answers lie in salvationist movements in late imperial China and in spirit-writing practices.

## II. Canghai laoren, His *Secret Annotation*, and Its Propagation by Spirit-Writing

No biographical information about Canghai laoren can be found outside the *Secret Annotation* itself. We do not know his given name, age, or anything about his familial relations. As we shall see below, we can only surmise from tangential evidence that he might have been a native of Jiangxi province. I have found no other texts written by him or published in association with him. And we know nothing about the publisher that printed the *Secret Annotation*, Mingshan shuwu 明善書屋 (Library of Illuminated Goodness), other than a scant reference that weakly suggests the publisher was still active in the early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> But its location and

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Clart and Gregory Adam Scott's survey of morality books published in the late Qing and Republican periods includes a religious text for which a certain Dong Chunsheng 洞春生 wrote a preface in a place called the Mingshan shuwu 明善書屋 in 1828. See *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China, 1800–2012* (Boston, Berlin, and Munich: Walter De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), 204. We cannot be certain whether this Mingshan shuwu was indeed the publishing house that printed Canghai laoren's text a hundred and fifty years before. The name Mingshan shuwu here might simply be the name of the

proprietors remain mysteries. Given the lack of records, I suspect the publisher was likely a local business marketing not to wealthy, upper-class, and official readers but to literate members of lower levels of local society. If I am right, Canghai laoren would have likely been a local gentleman or liturgical master in the early Qing period, whose status never rose high enough to garner recognition from elite society.

In his preface to the *Secret Annotation*, Canghai laoren explains his intentions for annotating Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* and his qualifications for doing so. He grew up studying Confucian texts, which mildly suggests he might have been trained as a Confucian scholar to sit for the examinations. But perhaps the political and social turmoil during the Ming–Qing transition, which interrupted the examination system and led to the persecution of Han Confucian scholars and students, might have prevented a man like Canghai laoren from pursuing the examinations during his formative years. But without corroborating evidence we cannot be certain. All we know is that Canghai laoren claimed that although Confucianism taught him the human way (*rendao* 人道), he relished studying Daoism and Buddhism because he longed to learn about the heavenly way (*tiandao* 天道). He complained that most teachings of Daoism and Buddhism in his time were false, and that students were misled because “heterodox types of muddled masters presumptuously annotated alchemical scriptures” 異種盲師妄註丹經. Such masters might establish their lineages in the name of Donghua dijun 東華帝君 (Imperial Lord Donghua), a deity associated with inner alchemy, or in the name of his renowned disciples, like the five patriarchs of the Southern Lineage (*nan wuzu* 南五祖), of which Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (fl. 1194–1229?) was one, and the seven realized ones of the Northern Quanzhen tradition (*bei qizhen* 北七真). But muddled masters wrongly interpreted those patriarchs' teachings “because they all had never obtained authentic heart-to-heart transmission” 皆因未得正宗心傳 from them. These heterodox

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author's private library or a generic term for printing houses that produced religious texts and morality books.

understandings had caused immense confusion among later students and had become “a great peril for the journey to the West (i.e., Buddhist practice) and a confusing maze for the cultivation of the Dao” 為西遊之大患，修道之迷陣。<sup>9</sup>

Unlike those who did not obtain an authentic heart-to-heart transmission from any patriarch, Canghai laoren claimed that he had been personally taught by a certain Qiaowan xianshi 橋灣仙師 (Transcendent Master of Bridge and Bay), who claimed to be a manifestation of the primordial deity Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement). We shall see in the next section that Qiaowan xianshi was a religious leader in Jiangxi known as Huang Dehui 黃德輝. A native of Jiangxi, Huang spent most of his time teaching there, which suggests that Canghai laoren might have also been from Jiangxi.

Canghai laoren claimed that this transcendent master taught him the Xiantian dadao 先天大道 (Great Way of the Anterior Heaven), which included teachings called the “way of the divine transcendent of the Anterior Heaven who refines the One, grasps the mean, and follows one’s nature” 先天精一執中率性神仙之道, and the “technique of the golden transcendent of great awakening without birth or death [by practicing the] seven cycles, nine revolutions, and heaven-traversing fire phasing” 七返九還週天火候不生不滅大覺金仙之功. Proper practice of these inner-alchemical methods would enable one to achieve Buddhahood and Daoist truth (*zhengfo chengzhen* 證佛成真).<sup>10</sup> Believing that he had received these authentically orthodox teachings directly from an emanation of Yuanshi tianzun himself, Canghai laoren vowed to endure hardship and live a virtuous life in order to bring salvation to the world. “I am sincerely moved by the various realized ones in the upper heavens and by the patriarchs of the Three Teachings who have continually instructed me, and have commanded me to live unassumingly in this mundane world [in order] to save all sentient beings by transforming them” 誠感上天諸真，及三教宗師，常常教誨，命余混俗和光，化度眾生。<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 1a1–3b6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1b1–2a3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2b4–5.

Armed with direct transmissions from Yuanshi tianzun in the guise of Qiaowan xianshi, Canghai laoren took up the task of annotating what he considered a key text, Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian*, with the intention of correcting false interpretations of Daoist and Buddhist teachings and bringing salvation to all beings. The text that Canghai laoren annotated in 1669 consisted of two main prefaces; two sets of abstruse poems reputedly by Lü Dongbin; and annotations to each poem. The first preface, attributed to Lü Dongbin himself, recounts how Lü studied with Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 and Chen Tuan 陳搏, both also considered among the Eight Transcendents. Before he achieved perfection and ascended to heaven, Lü composed the *Zhixuan pian* as his "secret instructions" (*mijue* 秘訣). He hid the text in a cave on Mount Qingcheng 青城山 in Sichuan, hoping that someone who shared a karmic connection with him would discover the text and learn its teaching.<sup>12</sup> The second preface is attributed to Bai Yuchan. Bai does not mention whether he or anyone else discovered the hidden text on Mount Qingcheng, but only recounts that he happened upon the text because he "held old karmic connections" 宿有因緣. Not satisfied with merely reading Lü's text, Bai annotated it "to proclaim and lay bare the transcendent master's hidden secrets and cruxes of truth, and bequeath them to likeminded people in the future" 將仙師隱秘真機重宣大露，而遺之後之同志。<sup>13</sup> Bai supplied a commentary to each of the sixteen seven-character verses (*lüshi* 律詩) that form the first set of Lüzu's poems, which constitutes the heart of the *Zhixuan pian*. He then composed a poem in response (*he* 和) to each of thirty-two seven-character quatrains (*jueju* 絕句) that form the second set.<sup>14</sup>

Canghai laoren, however, criticized much of Bai Yuchan's work. He felt that, even with Bai's annotations, the "principles [of Lüzu's teaching] remain broad and deeply profound, their abstruse

<sup>12</sup> *Zhixuan pian* 指玄篇, in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, 7:162; reprinted in *Lü Dongbin quanji* 呂洞賓全集 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2009), 158.

<sup>13</sup> *Zhixuan pian*, in *Zangwai daoshu*, 7:160–161; and *Lü Dongbin quanji*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> *Zhixuan pian*, in *Zangwai daoshu*, 7:162–172; and *Lü Dongbin quanji*, 159–175.

wonders are difficult to understand” 其理渾涵深蘊，奧妙難明。<sup>15</sup> In other words, Bai Yuchan had not made Lüzu’s difficult teachings any clearer or more accessible. But Canghai laoren believed he was up to the task. “I comprehend the intention of heaven and earth, and the virtues of the previous sages who composed the scriptures. I washed my hands, burned incense, and notified heaven that I would secretly annotate [the *Zhixuan pian*] in order to elucidate the mysterious subtleties and heavenly cruxes within [Lüzu’s] poems” 余體天地之心，前聖著經之德，沐手焚香，告天秘註，闡發詩中天機玄微。<sup>16</sup> Canghai laoren then proceeded to remove Bai Yuchan’s preface and annotations to Lüzu’s first sixteen poems before composing his own much lengthier preface and “secret annotations.” For some reason, Canghai laoren did retain Bai’s poems responding to Lüzu’s latter thirty-two poems. The resulting text, the *Secret Annotation*, was a compilation of the original revelations by Lüzu supposedly from the late Tang, a fraction of Bai Yuchan’s poetry-as-annotation from the Southern Song, and new writings by Canghai laoren from the early Qing.

Canghai laoren believed that his redaction and reinterpretation of Lüzu’s poetic teaching carried great doctrinal significance. He thought his text “may serve as a precious mirror that sweeps away peripheral teachings, specious arts, sundry texts, and heterodox explanations. It is an inscribed exhortation that manifests the heart-to-heart transmission of the Three Teachings, which transcends the mundane and enters the sagely [realm]” 可為掃外道、幻術、雜書、邪說之寶鑑，顯三教心傳超凡入聖之銘箴。<sup>17</sup> By claiming he had received a direct transmission from an emanation of Yuanshi tianzun and had mastered those methods for achieving both Buddhahood and Daoist truth, Canghai laoren seems to have sought to raise his authoritative status to match that of Lüzu himself, and to exceed that of Bai Yuchan, Lüzu’s doctrinal descendent.

Canghai laoren’s claim of authority, authenticity, and orthodoxy did not end with his own 1669 *Secret Annotation*. His text and his

<sup>15</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 4a2–3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4a3–4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5a5–6.

self-proclaimed status were repeatedly celebrated by spirit-writing communities across much of China during the following century. Practitioners in these communities would invite a specific deity to descend to the altar, present Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* to the god, and request that the deity comment on the text or voice a preface to it. These spirit-writing sessions produced multiple prefaces to the *Secret Annotation* text, many of which are extant.

Nine prefaces are included in the 1887 Harvard edition of the *Secret Annotation*. This edition does not include Bai Yuchan's preface, which, as mentioned above, Canghai laoren deleted from the *Zhixuan pian* text he worked on. The Harvard edition includes the original preface by Lüzu that existed prior to Canghai laoren's annotation, the 1669 preface by Canghai laoren, and seven later prefaces. Among those seven prefaces, five clearly explain that they are the products of spirit-writing, and four indicate a location in which they were likely produced.

No.	Year	Spirit-Writing	Author	Title of Preface	Possible Location
1	Before 1669	No	Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓	<i>Lüzu zhixuan pian yuanxu</i> 呂祖指玄篇原敘	Mount Qingcheng in Sichuan
2	1669	No	Canghai laoren 滄海老人	<i>Zhixuan pian mizhu yuanxu</i> 指玄篇秘註原敘	Jiangxi
3	1674	Yes	Guandi 關帝	<i>Guandi zhixuan pian mizhu yuanxu</i> 關帝指玄篇秘註原敘	Either Jiyuan in Henan or Xiangfan in Hubei <sup>18</sup>
4	1740	Yes	Yasheng Mengfuzi 亞聖孟夫子	<i>Fusheng Zouguogong Mengfuzi zhixuan pian yuanxu</i> 復聖鄒國公孟夫子指玄篇原敘	Zoucheng in Shandong

<sup>18</sup> The place name Fandi 樊地 in the text can refer to either location.

No.	Year	Spirit-Writing	Author	Title of Preface	Possible Location
5	1744	Yes	Wenchang dijun 文昌帝君	<i>Wendi zhixuan pian mizhu yuanxu</i> 文帝指玄篇秘註 原敘	Jiangsu
6	1787	Unclear	Yuehua laoren 月華老人	<i>Yuehua laoren zhixuan pian mizhu yuanxu</i> 月華老人指玄篇 秘註原敘	Unknown
7	1793	Yes	Lü Dongbin	<i>Lüzu zhixuan pian houxu</i> 呂祖指玄篇後敘	Penglai in Shandong
8	No date	Yes	Lü Dongbin	<i>Lüzu zhixuan pian fuxu</i> 呂祖指玄篇復序	Unknown
9	No date	Unclear	Huanglong zhenren 黃龍真人	<i>Kunlun shan Huanglong zhenren zhixuan pian mizhu tizan</i> 崑崙山黃龍真人 指玄篇秘註題讚	Unknown

The chart shows that, since Canghai laoren's compilation of the *Secret Annotation* in 1669, the text enjoyed a long and vibrant life among many practitioners across the land. Unlike the works of many local, learned men in late imperial China, which never made it beyond their locales, Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* traveled from one region to another, recognized by multiple groups of religious practitioners as a revered text around which spirit-writing activities were organized.

In 1674, only five years after Canghai laoren completed his annotation and wrote his preface, the *Secret Annotation* had already gained the attention of practitioners in either Henan or Hubei (see no. 3 in the chart). Those practitioners, probably local scholars and/or religious figures who studied the Three Teachings and emphasized the way of heaven as did Canghai laoren, arranged

a spirit-writing event in which they invoked the god Guandi, the deified general Guan Yu 關羽 of the Three Kingdoms. They requested a preface from him and he complied, which produced a piece of writing in which Lord Guan praised the quality and significance of Canghai laoren's annotation, and encouraged people to obtain the text and follow its teaching.<sup>19</sup>

Sixty-six years later, in 1740, the text had traveled northward to Shandong (see no. 4). It was circulated among local scholars and practitioners in the hometown of Mencius. It seems that a spirit-writing session took place in which Mencius, the great patriarch of Confucianism, descended upon his hometown and related a preface to Canghai laoren's text. Mencius claimed that he himself was actually the manifestation of a mythical ruler in high antiquity, Baihuang zhenren 柏皇真人 (Cypress Sovereign the Realized One), and that his teaching was not limited to Confucian discourses about human affairs but carried higher ambitions. Mencius had implicitly conveyed the "ultimate teaching via heart-to-heart transmission" 至道心傳 of the way of heaven in his famous writings, and aimed to "lodge the way of heaven within human affairs" 寓天道於人事中. In this sense, Mencius's teachings actually accorded with Lüzu and Canghai laoren's teachings on the way of heaven, which, according to Mencius's preface, Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* had revealed and Canghai laoren's annotation clearly explained.<sup>20</sup>

Four years later in 1744, the same year that Liu Tishu and Huang Chengshu compiled their thirty-two-chapter *Lüzu quanshu* in Hubei, Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* gained recognition among practitioners in Jiangsu (see no. 5). In a spirit-writing session, the deity Wenchang was invited to review the text and relate a preface in order to authenticate that the text truly contained the "laws and regulations for nature and principle" 性理法則. Lord Wenchang responded with a preface that followed the same line as

<sup>19</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 12a–14b. For discussions of spirit-writing practices invoking Guandi, see Barend J. ter Haar, *Guan Yu: The Religious Afterlife of a Failed Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 211–216, 243–244, and 248–250.

<sup>20</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 22a–24b.

Guandi and Mencius before him. He complained about the false division between the human way and the heavenly way. He pointed out that the human way was delineated by Confucian teachings, especially the “studies of nature and principle” 性理之學 put forth by Neo-Confucian scholars since the Song period, who themselves were, according to Wenchang, manifestations of Daoist realized ones (*zhenren* 真人). In effect, Wenchang implied that Confucian teachings derived from Daoist teachings, and so were at root Daoist. Yet, Confucian teachings, incessantly focused on the human way, could not adequately articulate the way of heaven, which included “the secrets of nature and life” 性命之秘 that could only be attained by the Daoist method of “refining the One and grasping the mean” 精一執中, which was transmitted to Canghai laoren by his transcendent master Qiaowan xianshi. With a palpable sense of irony, Wenchang, the god of literacy and patron of Confucian scholars, criticized Confucian teachings for ignoring the heavenly way—the fundamental teaching about life and nature, including the crucial methods for ascending to the heavens. He effusively praised Canghai laoren’s *Secret Annotation* for capturing that profound teaching and its techniques.<sup>21</sup>

The most interesting and, for us, important preface was composed by Lüzu himself at a spirit-writing session in 1793 (see no. 7). The preface recounts that in the sixth month of that year, Lüzu and various transcendents were wandering about mountain peaks in the wild when they got drunk and fell asleep. Suddenly there arose the roar of tigers and leopards. A transcendent servant woke Lüzu and notified him that “a message of incense is rising, but I’m not sure from which direction” 不知何信香飄來. Lüzu ordered the servant to use his eye of wisdom (*huiyan* 慧眼) to discern whence it came. The servant did so and reported, “It comes from north of the vast wilderness, from the depths of the ocean. [Someone] is making a sincere invitation to you supreme realized ones” 此廣野之北，滄海之隩，敦請上真也. Intrigued, Lüzu invited his

<sup>21</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 8a–11a. For the Wenchang cult, see Terry F. Kleeman, *A God’s Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

fellow transcendents to descend to the place north of the Yangtze River, very likely Penglai in Shandong. A practitioner named Shao Gong 邵弓, who went by the byname Zhanran jushi 湛然居士 (Translucent Lay Practitioner), presented Lüzu with Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* and begged him for a preface. Lüzu responded with a revelation that marveled at Canghai laoren's work:

Had I not written [the *Zhixuan pian*] in the past, who would have revealed its mysteries? Had nobody made [an annotation] later, who could attain my text's principles? The annotation by Benchengzi (i.e., Canghai laoren) and my [text] truly illumine each other. I myself made a vow to save people far and wide, and so wrote a text on Mount Qingcheng and left it there to await someone destined [to discover it]. . . . Now with Benchengzi's annotation, the root meaning of my *Zhixuan pian* is like the sun and moon brightening the sky, and like the rivers and streams coursing across the land. Future disciples will rely on his annotation to pursue the wondrous meaning [of my *Zhixuan pian*]. They will follow this path to inquire after the learned. They will point to the mysterious keys [of my teaching] and refine their mercury and lead (i.e., practice proper inner-chemical technique). It is simple, not complicated. There will [be a time when] all [future disciples] will together pay their respects in the west (i.e., attain Buddhist enlightenment) and arrive at the nine heavens (i.e., achieve Daoist realization). This, then, is my deepest desire!

吾不為之前，其玄誰啟，今不為之後，其理誰達。本誠子之註，真與吾先後相映輝也。吾也，發廣度之願，青城註書，留待有緣……今得本誠子之註，吾指玄本義，若日月麗天，江河行地矣。後之學者，因註而追求妙義，由徑而訪問至人。指其玄竅，煉其汞鉛。簡易無多。有大齊同謁華西，共到九天，則吾之厚望也夫。<sup>22</sup>

Lüzu saw Canghai laoren's annotation as the indispensable key to unlock the "root meaning" of Lüzu's terse poetry. The transcendent's subtle text could only be comprehended by later students with the help of Canghai laoren's interpretation. In a sense, the annotation was made an integral part of Lüzu's original

<sup>22</sup> *Secret Annotation*, 17a6–17b2, 17b3–7. The entire preface can be found on 15a–18a.

revelation. By descending to the spirit-writing altar and endorsing Canghai laoren's text, Lüzu, in effect, granted it the status of a revealed text that practitioners should cherish as being as trustworthy as Lüzu's own writing.

There are three other prefaces—an undated one by Lüzu (see no. 8), and two others by presumably renowned figures, Yuehua laoren 月華老人 (Elder of Lunar Florescence) and Huanglong zhenren 黃龍真人 (Yellow Dragon the Realized One, see nos. 6 and 9). Along with the prefaces examined above, they offer testimony to the remarkable way Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* circulated and expanded via spirit-writing over more than a century. A modest text produced by a seemingly unknown local practitioner thereby became a trans-regional text read and practiced in different parts of China. Spirit-writing sessions in these locales and, doubtless, in many others authenticated Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* as a precious text to be trusted as orthodox, blurring the distinction between the status of Lüzu's poetry and its annotation.

At some point, the *Secret Annotation* made its way to Hunan. It was likely there that a master in a local Daoist lineage in the Daxiong mountains, Huang Xingzhong, came across the text (or at least parts of it) in the early or mid-nineteenth century. We shall see that instead of drawing on Lüzu's original poetry, Huang plucked out multiple passages from Canghai laoren's annotation and wove them into his own composition, the *Secret Transmission*, treasured ever since by the descendants in his lineage. But before discussing Huang's text, we would do well to situate Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* in the broader historical context of spirit-writing cults and of "popular" religious movements during the Qing dynasty.

### III. Lüzu Spirit-Writing Cults, Class, Salvationist Movements, and Xiantiandao

Vincent Goossaert has shown that spirit-writing became a signature practice of the social elite during the Qing period. It promoted their values by creating venues in which groups of elites gathered and communicated with chosen divine saviors like Lüzu, Wenchang,

and Guandi, and then often produced scriptures associated with those deities. These practices promoted the elites' favored savior gods in two ways: "textual canonization" in which collections of writings (*quanshu*) were compiled about savior gods and then circulated; and "state canonization" in which those gods were granted high-ranking titles by the imperial state. Spirit-writing altars, then, arose within local literati networks and consolidated them. Along with the local academy, a spirit-writing altar often served as a kind of club for elites in villages and neighborhoods. For the lower gentry, participating in spirit-writing offered them "a pathway to prestige and honor" in that they could demonstrate shared religious values with those of higher social status and, sometimes, with those occupying official positions. Direct communication with savior deities and the production of authoritative texts espousing a "Three Teachings orthodoxy" were meant to bring salvation and moral reform to a society that elites regarded as in the throes of religious and moral decay, and, during the eighteenth century, of a hardening state orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup>

As our chart above attests, many deities were interlocutors in spirit-writing practices, including Confucian sages like Mencius. However, Lüzu stands out as particularly prominent. In a series of publications, Lai Chi Tim has examined several major spirit-writing groups dedicated to Lüzu, their shrines, and their activities during the Qing period. The wide geographical range of the Lüzu cult and its frequent spirit-writing sessions brought into the world many revealed texts and, as we mentioned, led to the compilation of four

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<sup>23</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "Spirit Writing, Canonization, and the Rise of Divine Saviors: Wenchang, Lüzu, and Guandi, 1700–1858," *Late Imperial China* 36, no. 2 (2015): 82–125. See also Goossaert, "Modern Daoist Eschatology: Spirit-Writing and Elite Soteriology in Late Imperial China," *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 6 (2014): 219–246; and David K. Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 36–88, 280–288. For spirit-writing cults to Wenchang and Guandi, see the aforementioned works by Goossaert and by ter Haar. For spirit-writing cults to the Jade Emperor and Wenchang, see Hsieh Tsung-hui 謝聰輝, *Xin tiandi zhi ming: Yuhuang, Zitong yu feiluan* 新天帝之命：玉皇、梓潼與飛鸞 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2013).

versions of the *Lüzü quanshu*. Lai argues that spirit-writing cults to Lüzu constituted a major historical development in the history of Daoism during the past several hundred years. Like Goossaert, Lai specifies that most participants in Lüzu's spirit-writing altars were elite Confucian scholars and students. During the late Ming and early Qing, there emerged a new Daoist tradition of belief among literati (*wenren daojiao xinyang chuangtong* 文人道教信仰傳統), which distanced itself from older Daoist practices revolving around ordained priests and their institutions. Elite lay practitioners, many of whom achieved high-level positions in the government, gathered in local spirit-writing altars and consciously set their new tradition apart from the established Lüzu cult, which had since the Yuan–Ming period been largely associated with the monastic Quanzhen tradition. Lay practitioners' ability to communicate directly with savior deities through spirit-writing carved out a space for the autonomy and superiority of their religious claims.<sup>24</sup>

These studies by Lai, Goossaert, and others have illuminated the central role that spirit-writing, especially involving Lüzu, played among elites in the religious history of late imperial China.<sup>25</sup> But as we shall see was the case for Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation*, non-elite spirit-writing practices ran parallel with those of the elites. Non-elite practitioners communicated with the same gods, including Lüzu, and produced texts that also stressed the integration of the Three Teachings, universal salvation, and moral reform. These non-elite spirit-writing practices were organized by members of the lower classes that constituted the largest portion of late imperial society—groups like the lower gentry (including Confucian

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<sup>24</sup> Lai Chi Tim, "Qingdai sizhong Lüzu quanshu yu Lüzu fuji daotan de guanxi"; Lai, "The Cult of Spirit-Writing in the Qing: The Daoist Dimension," *Journal of Daoist Studies* 8 (2015): 112–133; Lai, "Ming–Qing daojiao Lüzu jiangji xinyang de fazhan ji xiangguan wenren jitan yanjiu" 明清道教呂祖降乩信仰的發展及相關文人乩壇研究, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 65 (2017): 139–179; and Lai, "Qingdai Lüzu baochan yu fuji daotan," 133–196.

<sup>25</sup> See also articles by Daniel Burton-Rose, Jihyun Kim, Elena Valussi, Maruyama Hiroshi 丸山宏, Hsieh Tsung-hui, and Shiga Ichiko 志賀市子 in the "Special Issue on Scriptures of Lüzu and Spirit-Writing Altars in the Qing," ed. Lai Chi Tim, *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 7 (2015): 1–263.

scholars who failed the examinations), merchants, soldiers, laborers, peasants, and sometimes rebels resisting the Qing state.

Although non-elite practitioners of spirit-writing were often disdained by elite counterparts, the two groups and their practices were remarkably similar. Non-elites also claimed the orthodox heritage of the Three Teachings that drew directly upon classic Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist sources. They advocated for universal salvation and moral reform beyond the frameworks set by traditional religious institutions or the state. And many of their religious leaders came from the lower gentry and were trained Confucian scholars. Despite these deep similarities, the localization and vernacularization of traditionally highbrow religious sources in order to address the religious needs of the lower tiers of society drew the ire of both the elite and the state. Non-elite practices were frequently labelled “heterodox teachings” (*xiejiao* 邪教), and the non-elite altars that organized them suffered repeated crack-downs by agents of the state, who often banned and confiscated their scriptures.<sup>26</sup> This is striking when we consider that the same sorts of practices by elites not only largely escaped government scrutiny, but even received official recognition, and that the same gods worshiped by both non-elites and elites repeatedly received state canonization titles. Even today, non-elite religious practitioners, organizations, and publications surviving from the late imperial period are not typically accepted by state-sanctioned Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian institutions or by literati, who tend to refer to them by the ambiguous term *minjian zongjiao* 民間宗教 (popular religion), which marks them as lesser or other than the Three Teachings.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this religious inferiority of non-elite practices was, then and now, bound up with the socioeconomic and political inferiority of the organizations that practiced them, and

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<sup>26</sup> For an account of the Qing persecutions of White Lotus practitioners, see Barend J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999 [1992]), 247–288.

<sup>27</sup> Ter Haar has recently criticized scholars for using the label “popular,” which wrongly suggests that creative religious interpretations across different traditions, or syncretism, is somehow a lesser intellectual activity. See *Guan Yu*, 248–250.

with the widespread official and elite perception of those practices and organizations as potentially fomenting defiant and destabilizing social, political, and spiritual forces.

It is in the context of non-elite spirit-writing cults to Lüzu that our story about Canghai laoren, his *Secret Annotation*, and its subsequent prefaces is likely situated. The *Secret Annotation* was penned by an obscure author obscure. As it circulated and was being used in many spirit-writing altars across the land, it seems not to have garnered the attention of elites who might have “textually canonized” it by inclusion in any known compilation of Lüzu texts. The *Secret Annotation* seems never to have risen to the realm of elite spirit-writing practice.

In addition to spirit-writing cults to Lüzu and other savior gods, our story of Canghai laoren and his *Secret Annotation* is also bound up with the fervency of salvationist movements in late imperial China, especially with Xiantian dao (Way of the Anterior Heaven).<sup>28</sup> We mentioned that Canghai laoren was likely a local gentleman who studied Confucian teachings when young but became more interested in Daoism and Buddhism as he got older. At some point, Canghai laoren encountered Huang Dehui, the Qiaowan xianshi (Transcendent Master of Bridge and Bay).<sup>29</sup> Born in 1624 in Raozhou 饒州 in northern Jiangxi (present-day Poyang

<sup>28</sup> I use David Palmer’s label “salvationist religion” (*jiudu zongjiao* 救度宗教) as a broad sociological category designating any independent group of practitioners, like Xiantian dao, that organized around cosmological doctrines, charismatic healing, health practices, and moral discourses. See Palmer, “Chinese Redemptive Societies and Salvationist Religion: Historical Phenomenon or Sociological Category?,” *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝 172 (2011): 21–72.

<sup>29</sup> According to Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韓秉方, Huang Dehui was an alternative name for Huang Tingchen 黃廷臣, a religious leader in Jiangxi who was executed by the Qing government. See *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 2:819–824. After initially rejecting their claim, Wang Chien-ch’uan 王見川 eventually confirmed it. For the rejection, see “Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu zhi er: Xiantian dao qianqishi chutan jian lun qi yu Yiguandao de guanxi” 台灣齋教研究之二：先天道前期史初探兼論其與一貫道的關係, *Taibei wenxian* 台北文獻 108 (1994): 128–132. For the later confirmation, see “Qinglian jiao daomai yuanliu xinlun—Jiantan Jiuzu Huang Dehui” 青蓮教道脈源流新論——兼談九祖黃德輝, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 1 (2010): 25–26.

xian 鄱陽縣), Huang Dehui was said to be an enlightened being. At age nine, he allegedly received from a transcendent an oral transmission on the teaching of the golden elixir, and subsequently practiced those self-cultivation techniques and transmitted them to people in his locale. It was said that during the Shunzhi 順治 reign era (1644–1661), Heaven instructed a deity to descend to Mount Lu 廬山 and appoint Huang to become the ninth patriarch of a salvationist tradition of practice that we know as Xiantian dao. Also known pejoratively as Qinglian jiao 青蓮教 (Teaching of the Green Lotus), Xiantian dao evolved from several strands of practice, most notably a tradition called Luo jiao 羅教 (Teaching of Patriarch Luo), a robust religious movement initiated by a soldier named Luo Weiqun 羅蔚群 in the mid-Ming. Eventually, Luo jiao was brutally suppressed by the Ming state, but remnants of the tradition spread out across the country and merged with various local and regional religious practices. One of those fusions in Jiangxi became known as Xiantian dao.<sup>30</sup>

Huang Dehui and subsequent patriarchs of Xiantian dao were committed to constructing a genealogy and origin story of the lineage as a way to claim orthodoxy and legitimacy for their group and its teachings. We saw that Huang claimed to be a manifestation of Yuanshi tianzun—a strong assertion of the divine origin of his

<sup>30</sup> For the story of Huang Dehui, see Lin Wanchuan 林萬傳, *Xiantian dadao xitong yanjiu* 先天大道系統研究 (Tainan: Tianju shuju, 1984), 1:130; Wang Chien-ch'uan, "Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu: Xiantian dao de yuanliu jian lun qi yu Yiguandao de guanxi" 台灣齋教研究：先天道的源流兼論其與一貫道的關係, *Si yu yan* 思與言 32, no. 3 (1994): 8–12; and Ngai Ting Ming 危丁明, *Shumin de yongheng: Xiantian dao jiqi zai Gang Ao ji Dongnanya diqu de fazhan* 庶民的永恆：先天道及其在港澳及東南亞地區的發展 (Taipei: Boyang wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 2015), 97–114. For discussions of the history of Xiantian dao, see Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*, 97–189; Lin, *Xiantian dadao xitong yanjiu*, 1:1–272; Wang, "Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu," 1–31; Wang, "Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu zhi er," 121–167; and Wang, "Qinglian jiao daomai yuanliu xinlun," 20–26, 36.

For studies of Luo jiao, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 109–129; Wang Chien-chuan and Chiang Chu-shan 蔣竹山, *Ming-Qing yilai minjian zongjiao de tansuo* 明清以來民間宗教的探索 (Taipei: Shangding wenhua chubanshe, 1996), chapters 1–2; Ma and Han, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi*, 1:132–260; and Qin Baoqi 秦寶琦, "Qingdai Qinglian jiao yuanliu kao" 清代青蓮教源流考, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 4 (1999): 1–10.

teachings. Huang and his successors constructed several versions of a genealogy of Xiantian dao patriarchs; these display minor differences but generally agree upon the story. They assert that Xiantian dao derived from Chan Buddhism and they recognize Chan's first patriarchs—up to the Sixth Patriarch Huineng 六祖慧能 (638–713)—as the founders of the lineage. They take two masters as its seventh patriarch—one surnamed Bai 白 and one surnamed Ma 馬. Some versions of the genealogy interpret them to be Bai Yuchan of the Southern Lineage of the Golden Elixir and Ma Duanyang 馬端陽, who might have been Ma Yu 馬鈺 (1123–1184), of the Quanzhen tradition. They consider the eighth patriarch to be a certain Luo zu 羅祖 (Patriarch Luo). Some versions take him to be Luo Weiqun, the leader of Luo jiao during the mid-Ming mentioned above, whereas others assert Luo zu was a mysterious figure from the Tang period.<sup>31</sup> In their genealogies, Huang Dehui and his successors wove together these famous figures from Buddhism, Daoism, and other salvationist movements in an attempt to construct an orthodox lineage, and establish its doctrines as a legitimate integration of the Three Teachings.

Claims of orthodoxy and legitimacy were also made by constructing an origin story for Xiantian dao's scriptures. It was said that in 1667 “golden characters appeared in the sky” 金字現天, which revealed to the forty-three-year-old Huang Dehui three scriptures: a ritual text (*liben* 禮本), a repentance handbook (*yuanchan* 愿懺), and a scripture of “thunder mantras” (*lei'an jing* 雷唵經). These texts constituted the foundation for a large number of subsequent texts produced by Huang and his followers.<sup>32</sup>

It is in this context of Huang Dehui's claim to divine authority and his attempts to create a genealogy of Xiantian dao patriarchs, as well as his and others' construction of an origin story of the tradition's foundational scriptures, that Canghai laoren produced his *Secret Annotation of Lüzu's Zhixuan pian* in 1669, a mere two years after Huang's revelation event. We saw that in his text

<sup>31</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:129–130; Wang, “Qinglian jiao daomai yuanliu xinlun,” 21–22; and Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*, 97–114.

<sup>32</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:32, 70.

Canghai laoren claims to have received from Huang direct transmission of the Xiantian dadao—methods for achieving both Buddhahood and Daoist truth. Canghai laoren's text seems to appropriate Lüzu's Daoist classic into the framework of Huang Dehui's Xiantian dao teachings. Canghai laoren edited out Bai Yuchan's commentary on the *Zhixuan pian* and substituted his own commentary on Lüzu's teachings. Against both Quanzhen and Zhengyi Daoist masters of his time, whom he derided as unenlightened, heterodox teachers who falsely interpreted inner-chemical treatises, Canghai laoren claimed that the Xiantian dadao he received was rooted in the great lineages of Buddhism and Daoism revitalized by the ninth patriarch Huang Dehui, who alone possessed the "authentic heart-to-heart transmission" (*zhengzong xinchuan* 正宗心傳) of the Three Teachings.

The date, editorial choices, and tone of Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* all suggest that he was in some way involved in this early phase of the Xiantian dao movement. Unfortunately, little is known about its early period, as we have no other extant texts from those years other than the three revealed to Huang Dehui mentioned above. Despite the dearth of sources, we might hypothesize that Canghai laoren, the self-proclaimed disciple of Huang Dehui who petitioned and received divine permission to promulgate Huang's teaching, saw his 1669 *Secret Annotation* as a companion to the texts revealed to Huang in 1667. Canghai laoren's text might very well have augmented Huang's claims for an orthodoxy of the Three Teachings, his ambition for the Xiantian dao organization, and its appeal to potential followers.

By 1672, Huang Dehui had attracted such a large number of followers that he had to establish an administration to govern them. His "eight trigrams and nine palaces" (*bagua jiugong* 八卦九宮) system divided all members into eight sectors, each with a leader, on top of which a central palace provided oversight.<sup>33</sup> Huang had clearly risen within a decade or two to become a powerful religious leader and his Xiantian dao expanded across Jiangxi and beyond. It is very plausible that Canghai laoren's *Secret*

<sup>33</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:32.

*Annotation* contributed to this growth by means of articulating and disseminating the doctrinal claims of Huang Dehui's Xiantiandao. As members of Xiantiandao embarked upon proselytization campaigns called "opening the wilderness" (*kaihuang* 開荒),<sup>34</sup> it is possible that they carried with them the *Secret Annotation*. What we know for sure is that the text somehow made its way to spirit-writing altars. We saw that in 1674, just two years after Huang established the "eight trigram and nine palace" administrative system, Guandi descended to an altar in either Henan or Hubei to proofread the *Secret Annotation* and contribute a validating preface (see again no. 3 in the chart above). In 1740, Mencius descended to an altar in Shandong to do the same (see again no. 4). And four years later in 1744, Wenchang revealed a preface of approval in Jiangsu (see again no. 5).

These spirit-writing activities might very well have been carried out by members of Xiantiandao in order to spread the organization and its teachings. But given the lack of scholarly evidence that salvationist groups took part in spirit-writing before the nineteenth century, it seems more likely that the *Secret Annotation* was picked up by spirit-writing altars unaffiliated with salvationist movements like Xiantiandao.<sup>35</sup> In any case, spirit-writing did, either wittingly or unwittingly, function to propagate Huang Dehui's Xiantian dadao teachings.

Furthermore, it is tempting to imagine that the spirit-writing sessions in which Mencius added prefaces to the *Secret Annotation* in Shandong, and Wenchang in Jiangsu, occurred because Confucian students who participated in local spirit-writing altars wished to introduce the Xiantian dadao teaching to their communities. It is also possible, if less likely, that practitioners of Xiantiandao sought to strengthen connections with local Confucian students and recruit members among them. Around that time, a man named Wu Zixiang 吳紫祥 (or 吳子祥, 1715–1784) had succeeded Huang Dehui as the tenth patriarch of Xiantiandao. Wu claimed to be the manifestation of Lord Wenchang, the patron

<sup>34</sup> On "opening the wilderness," see Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:111–112.

<sup>35</sup> I appreciate this astute comment by one of the reviewers of this article.

of the civil service examinations that focused on Confucian teachings.<sup>36</sup> We may speculate that the spirit-writing sessions inviting Confucian paragons Wenchang and Mencius while the head of Xiantian dao claimed to be a manifestation of Wenchang might have imbued Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* with legitimacy in Confucian circles bound up with the exam system. Such legitimacy might also have helped make Wu Zixiang and Xiantian dao more attractive among budding Confucian scholars in the lower gentry.

However, as Xiantian dao spread across lower levels of the gentry and further among the non-elite, it seems to have encountered hostility from the upper levels of the gentry. Of the four versions of the *Lüzü quanshu*, the 1744 and 1775 versions included Lüzü's *Zhixuan pian* and Bai Yuchan's commentary, but not Canghai laoren's annotation. The later two versions of the *Lüzü quanshu*, one compiled in Suzhou in the late eighteenth century and the other in Beijing in 1803, excised what they considered false (*wei* 偽) texts.<sup>37</sup> Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* and even Lüzü's *Zhixuan pian* were excluded from their collections. Why was Canghai laoren's text not included in any of the four compilations? I think it unlikely the editors and members of the spirit altars—who included Confucian scholars and many high-ranking government officials—were unaware of the existence of the *Secret Annotation*. Practitioners of Qing-period evidential scholarship, they had perfected the skills of exhaustive textual collection and analysis. It is doubtful that they would have overlooked a text so close to those in their compilations, and one that had traveled across China and gained numerous adherents via spirit-writing events. It is much more plausible that the social elite rejected Canghai laoren's non-elite interpretation of the Three Teachings as heterodox.

<sup>36</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1: 130. For more on Wu Zixiang, see Wang, "Qinglianjiao daomai yanliu xinlun," 25–26; Wang, "Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu," 12–15; Wang, "Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu zhi er," 132–136; and Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*, 114–125.

<sup>37</sup> Lai, "Qingdai sizhong Lüzü quanshu yu Lüzü fuji daotan de guanxi," 186, 191–192, 204–206.

We noted earlier that Lai Chi Tim has shown that many Confucian scholars and officials participated in a “new Daoist tradition of belief among literati” in which they claimed direct communication with deities via spirit-writing. They regarded their teachings and its mechanism of transmission as independent from traditional Daoist practices performed by professional priests and within monasteries, and different from the Qing state’s rigid definition of Confucianism. I suggest that while spirit-writing literati fought those institutional and political forces for interpretive control of religious teachings and practice, they must also have waged a battle in the other direction against vibrant non-elite religious movements like Xiantiandao. Led by educated men of lower socioeconomic status like Huang Dehui and Wu Zixiang, and populated by men and women from diverse backgrounds, these non-elite salvationist movements directly challenged elite religious groups the same way the latter challenged large religious institutions and the state. Both parties claimed direct access to the same savior gods, and both touted divinely revealed teachings of universal salvation and moral reform grounded in an integrative vision of the Three Teachings. Elite and non-elite religious movements, whether they engaged in spirit-writing or not, held similar ambitions and adopted similar means to achieve them, all while denouncing each other as heterodox.

Like many religious movements in late imperial times, the expanding Xiantiandao and its claims to orthodoxy and religious autonomy elicited intense suppression by the state. As a fluid organization, Xiantiandao claimed participants with many allegiances, some of whom were also members of so-called “secret societies” like the Tiandihui 天地會 (Heaven and Earth Society), which fomented explicitly anti-Qing sentiment and so were especially worrisome to the government.<sup>38</sup> Both Huang Dehui and his successor Wu Zixiang were arrested and sentenced to death. The eleventh patriarch, He Ruo 何若, was arrested and exiled to Guizhou. The twelfth patriarch, Yuan Zhiqian 袁志謙 (1760–1835),

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<sup>38</sup> Zhou Yumin 周育民, “Qinglianjiao de yuanliu jiqi yu Tiandihui de guanxi” 青蓮教的源流及其與天地會的關係, *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao* 上海師範大學學報 3 (1993): 107–113; and Wang, “Qinglianjiao daomai yuanliu xinlun,” 25–26.

a native of Guizhou, escaped government persecution and fled to Sichuan. Yuan actually had two successors, co-patriarchs Xu Ji'nan 徐吉南 and Yang Shouyi 楊守一. Natives of Sichuan, they spread Xiantian dao to Shaanxi and were both arrested and executed by the state in 1828. After their deaths, the organization did not name a fourteenth patriarch, but rather was led by five men, natives of Sichuan, Hunan, and Hubei, who claimed to be manifestations of deities called the Xiantian wulao 先天五老 (Five Elders of the Anterior Heaven), who corresponded to the five phases of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Three of the five were arrested and executed between 1843 and 1845.<sup>39</sup> In an age of religion-inspired challenges to the state—the Wang Lun 王倫 uprising of 1774, the White Lotus rebellion from 1796 to 1804, the Eight Trigram rebellion of 1813, and the impending Taiping rebellion beginning in 1851—the Qing state doggedly hunted down the leaders of Xiantian dao.

Furthermore, the texts produced by Xiantian dao and other salvationist groups were deemed illegal and banned by the government.<sup>40</sup> Spirit-writing, which had become a means to produce texts for some salvationist groups in the mid-nineteenth century, was nominally illegal during the Qing period. However, the prohibition was rarely enforced. Spirit-writing in Lüzu, Guandi, and Wenchang temples continued, Goossaert has shown, to gain legitimacy from participation by social elites and by official sacrifices.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned above, this largesse from the state was due to the elite nature of those spirit-writing activities and their production of texts. The state did not similarly favor non-elite spirit-writing and textual production. Again, with the notion of

<sup>39</sup> Wang, “Qinglian jiao daomai yuanliu xinlun,” 25–26; Wang, “Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu,” 12–23; Wang, “Taiwan zhajiao yanjiu zhi er,” 132–146; Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*, 114–166; and Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:132–133. See also Chuang Chi-fa 莊吉發, “Qing Gaozong chajin Luo jiao de jingguo” 清高宗查禁羅教的經過, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 63, no. 3 (1981): 35–43; and Chuang Chi-fa, “Qingdai Daoguang nianjian de mimi zongjiao” 清代道光年間的秘密宗教, *Dalu zazhi* 65, no. 2 (1982): 35–50.

<sup>40</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:111; and Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*, 123–125, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Goossaert, “Spirit Writing, Canonization, and the Rise of Divine Saviors,” 109–113.

class in mind, it seems that the law prohibiting spirit-writing and the state's ban on texts from salvationist movements like Xiantiandao were in fact designed to target non-elite, lower-class religious and political movements.

Practitioners of Xiantiandao called attacks by the state “interrogation by officialdom” (*guankao* 官考) and derision by elites “interrogation by social custom” (*fengkao* 風考), and regarded both as heaven's test of their devotion and perseverance.<sup>42</sup> But in the end, Xiantiandao succumbed. By the mid-nineteenth century, it had splintered and fed into several traditions of practice, of which Yiguandao 一貫道 (Way of Pervading Unity) has become well known. But although decimated, Xiantiandao has managed to survive up to today in parts of Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia by, ironically, becoming bound up in the trade routes of commercial elites.<sup>43</sup>

But something of Xiantiandao has also survived deep in the mainland. When Daoist master Huang Xingzhong obtained some version of Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, he, wittingly or not, inherited the Xiantian dadao teaching ensconced in the text, which Canghai laoren claimed to have received from Huang Dehui of the early Xiantiandao movement. In this sense, something of the salvationist religion Xiantiandao persists in the Daoist practice of a lineage of masters in the hills of north-central Hunan. In the next section, we shall see how deeply and creatively Huang used some of those Xiantiandao ideas to make sense of the most important practices within his own Daoist lineage.

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<sup>42</sup> Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 1:129–133; and Wang, “Qinglianjiao daomai yuanliu xinlun,” 23–25.

<sup>43</sup> For recent studies of Xiantiandao in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia, see Ngai, *Shumin de yongheng*; Yau Chi On 游子安 and Ngai Ting Ming, “Xiantiandao de zun Kong chong Dao: Xianggang daodehui Fuqingtang, Shanqingdong de yuanliu he bianqian” 先天道的尊孔崇道：香港道德會福慶堂、善慶洞的源流和變遷, *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝 173 (2011): 59–99; and Shiga Ichiko, “Xiantiandao Lingnan daomai de sixiang he shijian: Yi Guangdong Qingyuan Feixiadong weili” 先天道嶺南道脈的思想和實踐：以廣東清遠飛霞洞為例, *Minsu quyi* 173 (2011): 23–58.

#### IV. From Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* to Huang Xingzhong's *Secret Transmission*

When Huang Xingzhong acquired some version of Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation*, he used it for a reason specific to the liturgical concerns of his local Zhengyi Daoist lineage, which was quite different from the concerns of the *Secret Annotation* itself and the Xiantiandao for which Canghai laoren seems to speak. Huang selectively drew on Canghai laoren's text to give a theoretical account of ritual power, the force that flows through his lineage's exorcistic thunder ritual and makes it efficacious. By means of creatively interpreting selections of Canghai laoren's text in light of his Daoist lineage's teachings on ritual, Huang fashioned his own coherent text, the *Secret Transmission*, which his descendants in the lineage today prize as the primary articulation of their theory of ritual power.

Since we do not have the actual *Secret Annotation* Huang used to compose his own treatise, we do not know what he knew about the text and its origins. Was he aware that a man named Canghai laoren was its compiler and the annotator of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian*? Did Huang Xingzhong have any idea that Canghai laoren claimed affiliation with Huang Dehui and thereby Xiantiandao, which creatively interpreted various ideas from the Three Teachings? Was Huang Xingzhong himself or any of his Daoist predecessors a member of Xiantiandao, which would mean that a non-elite, salvationist movement had become overtly enmeshed in a local Daoist lineage in central Hunan? Did Huang know that the text he obtained was used by spirit-writing cults to Lüzu?

The sources do not offer any convincing answers. All we know is that Huang called his text the *Secret Transmission by Lüzu on the Ancestral Qi of the Anterior Heaven* (*Lüzu xiantian zuqi michuan*), and, according to a colophon, he based it on a text called the *Lüzu zhixuan pian*, which was actually some version of Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation*.<sup>44</sup> This suggests either that Huang did not know he was working from a text annotated by a

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<sup>44</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 17a7–8.

man named Canghai laoren, or that he willfully wrote the annotator out of the story. In any case, it seems that Huang did regard the text from which he worked as rooted in the *Zhixuan pian* by Lüzu, and so authoritative in matters of inner alchemy.

Despite our ignorance of what Huang Xingzhong knew about Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* and its relationship with Xiantiandao, a close reading of his *Secret Transmission* against the *Secret Annotation* can at least give a sense of what Huang tried to do. We can see how he selectively drew on Canghai laoren's annotations of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* to speak to the liturgical concerns of his own Daoist lineage. In a fascinating moment of textual appropriation, Huang borrowed ideas and language from Canghai laoren's annotations, themselves creative interpretations of the Three Teachings, to provide a detailed theoretical explanation of the inner-chemical foundations at the heart of his Daoist lineage's core liturgical practice.

Huang explains how a master's ability to summon thunder deities and employ them for apotropaic or therapeutic purposes flows from his ability to tap and wield the primordial power of creative transformation. That power, called ancestral *qi* (*zuqi* 祖炁), was originally birthed by the Dao in the Anterior Heaven (*xiantian* 先天)—the cosmogonic state of stillness before the beginning of the variegated world of movement. A vestige of that primordial *qi* lies latent within the human body. During ritual, a master must recover his ancestral *qi* and then cultivate it by means of specific inner-chemical visualizations. In his mind's eye, the master allows his recovered ancestral *qi* to transform the whole of his body composed of mundane *qi* into his primordial self, which shares the same ontological stuff, the same ancestral *qi*, as the primordial *qi* birthed by the Dao during the first stages of the cosmogony. As a primordial self, the master can then summon thunder deities and employ them to protect spaces and bodies from demonic attack, or to heal already afflicted spaces and bodies by means of exorcism. Huang Xingzhong produced his *Secret Transmission* as a kind of theoretical primer for his brethren within his Daoist lineage. It would have been used, as it is still used today, as a textual accompaniment to the oral instructions an apprentice receives from

his master during his training. Huang's text implies—and his liturgical descendants today insist—that a master must *understand* how thunder ritual is rooted in inner alchemy, and inner alchemy in cosmogonic forces, in order to perform thunder ritual efficaciously.<sup>45</sup>

Huang begins his treatise with a cosmogonic story derived from the *Yijing*, which was likely handed down to him within his lineage. Within the undifferentiated chaos of the Anterior Heaven, the great ultimate (*taiji* 太極) gave birth to the two polarities (*liangyi* 兩儀) of heaven and earth, which began a progressive differentiation of originally unified *qi* and ushered in the age of the Posterior Heaven (*houtian* 後天). The two polarities brought forth the four symbols (*sixiang* 四相[象])—modes of *qi* corresponding to the four quadrants of the universe and represented by the four heraldic emblems.<sup>46</sup> The four symbols brought forth the five phases (*wuxing* 五行), and the five phases the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). Each of these cosmogonic transformations formed different modes of *qi* that constituted different, homologized aspects of the cosmos in three major registers (heaven, earth, and human). In the heavenly register, the three powers (*sancai* 三才, i.e., the sun, moon, and stars) and the five modes of *qi* (wind, clouds, thunder, rain, and lightning) correspond in the earthly register with its three powers (mountains, rivers, and seas) and its five modes of *qi* (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), which in turn correspond in the human register with its three powers (essence [*jing* 精], *qi* 氣, and spirit [*shen* 神]) and its five modes of *qi* (the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and urogenital organ). These organs within the body serve as the bodily residences of different thunder deities. Huang insists that a master must grasp these foundational ideas about cosmogonic transformations, and, especially, the correspondences between cosmic expressions of *qi* and different parts of the human body, in order to successfully conduct thunder rites.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed exploration of the foundational role inner alchemy (*neidan*) plays in the thunder rites practiced by Huang Xingzhong's liturgical descendants today, see Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapters 3–4.

<sup>46</sup> The vermilion sparrow (*zhuque* 朱雀) of the south, the mysterious warrior (*xuanwu* 玄武) of the north, the azure dragon (*qinglong* 青龍) of the east, and the white tiger (*baihu* 白虎) of the west.

Many versions of this cosmological story had long been commonplace by the nineteenth century, but they remained arcane knowledge, including, it seems, for local masters of Daoist rites like Huang Xingzhong. But as an intellectually engaged master, Huang took it upon himself to flesh out the version of the story to which he had access, probably from within his lineage. What is interesting is that he turned to Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation* to help him do so. Huang quoted almost verbatim and without citation several substantial passages from Canghai laoren's text, thus incorporating cosmological and inner-alchemical interpretations particular to the Xiantian dao for which it spoke.

Huang first quotes a passage that recounts the story of how the sage king Fu Xi 伏羲 discovered the cosmological structures of the universe. In high antiquity, Fu Xi encountered a fantastic creature with the body of a horse and the head of dragon, on whose back was etched markings in a specific pattern. Fu Xi figured out that the pattern signified the cosmogony and the structures of the current cosmos, and promptly produced the famous *Hetu* 河圖 (*River Chart*) and *Luoshu* 洛書 (*Luo Writ*), and later fashioned another diagram, the *Fu Xi bagua* 伏羲八卦 (*Fu Xi's Eight Trigrams*). That diagram, also referred to as the *Xiantian bagua* 先天八卦 (*Eight Trigrams of the Anterior Heaven*), maps out the stillness of the Anterior Heaven in terms of the trigrams of the *Yijing*.<sup>47</sup> Although versions of this myth had been widely known since the Han dynasty, it was Canghai laoren's particular narration of the story that Huang quotes and works into his grappling with the arcane numerological schemes of the *Yijing*.

Huang continues on to quote a second passage from Canghai laoren's annotation. Fu Xi lamented the loss of human morality toward the end of the Shang dynasty and so reincarnated as King

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<sup>47</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 10a3–10b6; and *Secret Annotation*, 11b9–12a8, the pagination of the main text starts again from 1 after the prefaces. For the historical evolution of the *Yijing* and associated texts like the *River Chart*, the *Luo Writ*, and diagrams of the trigrams, see Richard J. Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I-Ching, or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008). For shorter introductions, see Isabelle Robinet, "Hetu 河圖 and Luoshu 洛書," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 1:483–485; and Kim Daeyeol, "Bagua 八卦," also in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1:201–203.

Wen 文王 of the Zhou to bring moral correction to the world. King Wen carried forth Fu Xi's agenda, annotated the *Yijing*, and created the *Houtian bagua* 後天八卦 (*Eight Trigrams of the Posterior Heaven*, also called *Wenwang bagua* 文王八卦 [King Wen's *Eight Trigrams*]), which maps out the patterned movements of the flourishing world—the Posterior Heaven—in terms of the trigrams.<sup>48</sup> The idea that King Wen was a reincarnation of Fu Xi does not show up in Daoist and Confucian classics, but does appear in texts associated with Xiantian dao.<sup>49</sup> By quoting this passage from Canghai laoren's text, Huang inherited this Xiantian dao interpretation and incorporated it into his own understanding of Daoist cosmology.

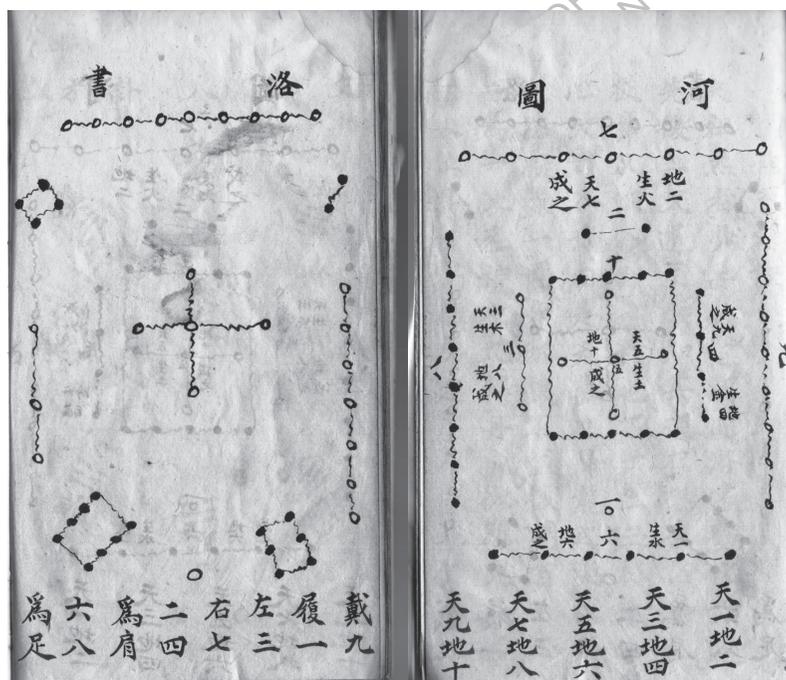


Figure 3 The *Hetu* (right) and *Luoshu* (left), from Huang Xingzhong's *Secret Transmission*

<sup>48</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 11b6–12a2; and *Secret Annotation*, 12b1–5.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, the idea shows up in the *Bazijue yuan* 八字覺源, included in Lin, *Xiantian dadao yanjiu*, 270.

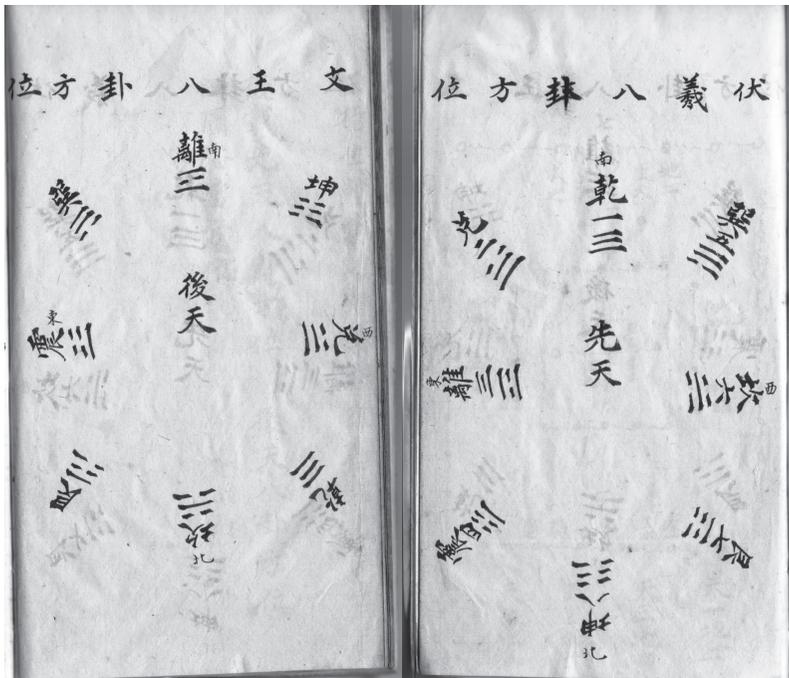


Figure 4 Fu Xi's *Xiantian bagua* (right) and King Wen's *Houtian bagua* (left), from the *Secret Transmission*

Working from these two passages from Canghai laoren's text, Huang elaborates that Fu Xi and his reincarnation, King Wen, discovered the cosmological order in which different modes of *qi* constitute the homologized aspects of the cosmos in the three registers of heaven, earth, and the human body. The upshot is that the cosmos and the body are fundamentally connected and mutually resonant, an idea that Huang deemed the principle (*li* 理) of the cosmos. This principle is the key for understanding the central concept of the text—ancestral *qi*. Huang proclaims that “any talk about ancestral *qi* comes from this principle” 言乎祖氣，皆自此理中來。 He explains that ancestral *qi* is the primordial force that powers the movements of vitality across the three registers of the cosmos. Without ancestral *qi*, “the sun and moon would not shine” 日月不明, “grass and trees would not grow” 草木不生, and one’s “heart and mind would be unmanageable” 心意無主. It is ancestral

*qi* that generates and animates both the natural world and the human body.<sup>50</sup>

For Huang and his lineage, it is ancestral *qi* that also powers the rites that summon thunder deities. The problem for the practitioner performing thunder rites is that ancestral *qi*, originally of the stillness of the Anterior Heaven, has been obscured by the incessant, patterned movements of the flourishing world of the Posterior Heaven, even as it animates them. Ancestral *qi* exists in the bustling world only as a vestige of the full force of creative power in the primordial Anterior Heaven. Huang explains this process of obscuration in terms of the trigrams. Before the patterned movements of *qi* in the Posterior Heaven came about, the Anterior Heaven existed as a state of primal unity in which ancestral *qi*—pure *yang qi* 陽氣 symbolized by the trigram *qian* 乾—existed full of creative potential in pristine motionlessness. As the Anterior Heaven began to differentiate, producing the regular movements of the Posterior Heaven of phenomenal form according to the patterns of the five phases and eight trigrams, primal *qian* 乾 lost its central *yao*-line 爻 and exchanged it with the central *yao*-line of primal *kun* 坤 坤 to form the trigrams *li* 離 離 and *kan* 坎 坎. In the cycle of regeneration that characterizes the Posterior Heaven depicted in the *Xiantian bagua* chart, the trigrams *kan* and *li* reside as opposites in the north and south, where the trigrams *kun* and *qian* originally resided in the stillness of the Anterior Heaven (see Figure 4).<sup>51</sup>

As a microcosm of the cosmos, the human body also bears this obscuration. Huang relies on a third passage from Canghai laoren's annotation to explain. At conception in the womb, a person comes into being as a product of the father's essence as semen (*jing* 精) and the mother's essence as blood. The resulting fetus is composed of ancestral *qi*, the "correct and harmonious *qi*" (*zhonghe zhi qi* 中和之氣) of the Anterior Heaven, described as a still, pristine body of pure *yang qi* symbolized by the trigram *qian*. Emotions associated with human existence in this world—delight, anger, grief, and joy (*xi nu ai le* 喜怒哀樂)—have not yet stirred. Upon

<sup>50</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 12a2–13b5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 14a2–14b4.

birth, the fetus breaks into the world with its first cry, a sign that the correct and harmonious pure *yang* of ancestral *qi* that composes the child is being disrupted. In the imagery of the trigrams, the pristine *qian* ☰ trigram loses its central *yao*-line, takes on the central *yao*-line of the trigram *kun* ☷, and becomes the trigram *li* ☲. The wandering *yao*-line of *qian* becomes lodged within the trigram *kun* ☷ to create the trigram *kan* ☵. The constant, contentious transformations of *qi* in the pattern of the five phases and eight trigrams, which will regulate the human's body for the rest of his or her mortal life, have begun. In this sense, a newborn loses the still, harmonious nature of the Anterior Heaven (*xiantian zhi xing* 先天之性) and takes on the nature of contending *qi* in the Posterior Heaven (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性).<sup>52</sup>

So, how does a practitioner recover ancestral *qi*, which is necessary for proper performance of thunder rites? Huang goes on to quote, with minor differences, a fourth passage from Canghai laoren's annotations, which claims that a practitioner must learn from a true master an inner-alchemical visualization revealed by Lüzu, which was designed to regain ancestral *qi*:

As for the *yang* [*yao*-line] within the *qian* [trigram] that was lost from the Anterior Heaven, seek it by digging into the earth of the *kan* [trigram] in the Northern Sea. Pry open the two *yin* (i.e., upper and lower *yao*-lines of the *kan* trigram) and there gather the central, single *yang yao*-line. The *yin* (i.e., the *yao*-line displaced from the *li* trigram) descends and *yang* (i.e., the *yao*-line gathered from the *kan* trigram) rises, restoring the original body of the *qian* and *kun* [trigrams]. One's torso and four limbs will [then] automatically emanate an extraordinary radiance, which will shine throughout the cosmos. This means that the primordial essence, primordial *qi*, and primordial spirit have congealed, which is called the "three flowers gathering in the cauldron" and the "five [modes of] *qi* facing the primordium."

將先天所失乾中之陽，在北海坎地掘尋，撥開二陰，取那中爻一陽，陰降陽昇，復還乾坤本體，四肢自現毫[豪]光，照徹宇宙。蓋元精、元氣、元神相凝，名曰三花聚鼎、五炁朝元。<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 13b5–7, 14a5–14b2; and *Secret Annotation*, 8a5–8b4.

<sup>53</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 14b2–6; and *Secret Annotation*, 8b6–9a1. Canghai laoren's

Huang relies on Canghai laoren's explanation of a well-established inner-chemical visualization, often called "extracting from *kan* in order to replenish *li*" (*choukan buli* 抽坎補離), in order to explain how practitioners in his own Daoist lineage can recover the lost ancestral *qi* from the original nature of their Posterior-Heaven bodies. The practitioner must visualize that the *kan* trigram ☵, associated with the water of the urogenital organ located in the north of the body between the kidneys, here called the Northern Sea, and the *li* trigram ☲, associated with the fire of the heart located in the south of the body, meld. In his mind's eye, the practitioner must recover the central *yao*-line from the *kan* trigram and use it to replace the central *yin* line in the *li* trigram, thereby transforming *li* back to its original pure *yang* state, the prenatal *qi* of the Anterior Heaven symbolized by the *qian* trigram ☰. Successful practice will produce a pure *yang* body that emanates light powerful enough to penetrate the entire cosmos.

This, then, is an articulation, in terms of the trigrams, of the process by which the essence, *qi*, and spirit constituting the practitioner's body, euphemistically called the "three flowers," congeal and return to their undifferentiated, primordial form as ancestral *qi*. Just as ingredients meld in a hot cauldron, the differentiated modes of *qi* that constitute the human body merge into the single primordial ancestor from the Anterior Heaven. The constantly transforming *qi* of the five phases returns to its stillness in the primordium. Any duality between body and cosmos, Posterior and Anterior Heaven, collapse and the practitioner becomes one with primordial power.<sup>54</sup> In essence, Huang plucked

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text uses the character *hao* 毫 (tiny, minute), and Huang Xingzhong and the copyist of his text, Gong Feiwu, follow suit. However, I suspect this was an error. It seems the correct character should be *hao* 豪 (extraordinary, powerful, bold), which better describes the scale and intensity of the body's radiance as it penetrates the cosmos.

<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this inner-chemical operation as performed by Huang Xingzhong's liturgical descendants today, see Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapter 3. See also Mozina, "Daubing Lips with Blood and Drinking Elixirs with the Celestial Lord Yin Jiao: The Role of Thunder Deities in Daoist Ordination in Contemporary Hunan," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 19 (2010): 286–287.

plucked out this passage from Canghai laoren's annotation of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* and appropriated it for a concern specific to his Daoist lineage. He relied on Canghai laoren's language of the trigrams of the Anterior and Posterior Heavens to give a theoretical account of his lineage's notion of ancestral *qi*. He worked hard to explain to his liturgical brethren how they should recover that ancestral *qi* by means of a very specific visualization of those trigrams, which, we shall see below, would make their thunder rites efficacious.

The most fascinating and creative moment of appropriation comes when Huang quotes a fifth and final passage from Canghai laoren's annotation to make sense of a cryptic teaching that had been passed down to him within his lineage. A certain old patriarch (*laozu* 老祖) of his lineage had said, "There are thirty-six in heaven above and thirty-six on earth below. One must break open the chamber of the yellow lady if thunder generals are to appear" 天上三十六，地下三十六，若要雷將現，打破黃婆屋。<sup>55</sup> It seems Huang was especially concerned with this yellow lady and what it might mean to "break open" her chamber. He once again turned to Canghai laoren's annotation for guidance:

The heart is the ruler of the whole body; intention is the lord of the three flowers (i.e., essence, *qi*, and spirit). Matter is arranged [according to] the five phases. The nature of the central, principle position [in the five phases] belongs to the earth whose color is yellow. Therefore, [the heart/intention] is called the "yellow lady" and also the "yellow dragon."

夫心為一身之主，意為三花之宗。質列五行，中央正位，其性屬土，其色乃黃，故名曰黃婆，別號黃龍是也。<sup>56</sup>

Huang relies on Canghai laoren to associate the image of the yellow lady in his lineage's teaching with the heart. As the seat of intention, the heart controls the entire inner-chemical visualization

<sup>55</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 15a1–3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14b7–15a1; and *Secret Annotation*, 9b8–10a2. Huang punctuates the passage slightly differently from the 1887 version of Canghai laoren's text I am using, but the meaning is the same.

by which essence, *qi*, and spirit congeal to form ancestral *qi*. For Huang, the image of the yellow lady seems to capture the intention by which the practitioner visualizes “three flowers gathered in the cauldron.”<sup>57</sup> Like a matchmaker, she purposely puts together the ingredients of the inner-chemical ingredients so they can mingle.

Huang seems to have wrestled with what it might mean to “break open the chamber of the yellow lady.” In another place in his *Secret Transmission*, he identifies the chamber of the yellow lady as the lower cinnabar field:

Earth is [located] three and a third inches below the navel. Its color is yellow and it is called the inn (i.e., chamber) of the yellow lady, and also the lower cinnabar field. It is where people are reincarnated [after] receiving semen from a father and blood from a mother, which then forms a person.

土者即臍下三寸三分，其色黃，名曰黃婆店，又名下丹田，即人投胎，受父精母血，而成人也。<sup>58</sup>

In the logic of Huang’s text, if the yellow lady is the heart and its intention, her inn or chamber is the lower cinnabar field in which she directs the mixing of inner-chemical ingredients, just as the womb is the place in which male and female essences—semen and blood—mix at human conception.

Huang sees breaking open this womb-like chamber of the yellow lady as a crucial moment in his lineage’s inner-chemical teaching to recover ancestral *qi*. He lays out the entire visualization as follows:

<sup>57</sup> In her study of interpretations of the late imperial *Xiuzhen tu* 修真圖 (*Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection*), Catherine Despeux gives a similar interpretation. She takes the yellow lady in her sources to be a metaphor for the “intent or creative thinking” that resides in the yellow chamber (*huangfang* 黃房)—the central cinnabar field (*zhong dantian* 中丹田) between the heart and the navel. The yellow lady as cognitive intention instigates the sexual mingling of essence and *qi* in the central cinnabar field, an image that illustrates the transformative union of body and mind to form the “holy embryo” of the practitioner’s divine self. See *Taoism and Self Knowledge: The Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection (Xiuzhen tu)*, trans. Jonathan Pettit (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019 [2012]), 212.

<sup>58</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 11a4–6.

Visualize your hand drawing out [one beam] of golden radiance [that wreathes the body]. Breathe it down from the nostrils. This is primordial essence. [Breathe it] down the twelve jade mansions (i.e. the esophagus) and combine it with the spark of the heart, and then make that mixture enter the cinnabar field. This is primordial *qi*. The saliva of the defeated dragon and the spittle of the subdued tiger congeal into one entity. Like quicksilver in a basin, [when it] scatters there are a hundred thousand [beads], when it unites there is one. This is primordial spirit. Circulate [primordial spirit] nine times to form an elixir, like a fetus coming to term.

存想手搯金光，從鼻孔吸入，即元精也。下十二玉樓，會合心火，同入丹田，是元氣也。降龍之涎，伏虎之沫，凝聚一團，如水銀在盆，散則百千，合而為一，此元神也。九轉丹成，似嬰兒足月。<sup>59</sup>

With classic inner-chemical logic by which essence transforms into *qi*, and *qi* into spirit, Huang instructs the practitioner to visualize that he inhales some of the golden light within which his body is cocooned during the intense procedure. The practitioner should draw that primordial essence down into the heart, where it is refined by the fire of the heart to form primordial *qi*. That substance descends further to the womb-like lower cinnabar field three or so inches below the navel. There the dragon, here an image associated with the trigram *li*, and the tiger, associated with the trigram *kan*, congeal. As described above, the center of *kan* is extracted to replenish the *li* trigram, thus forming the pure *yang qi* symbolized by the trigram *qian*—primordial spirit. Like a fetus gestating in the womb, primordial spirit is then circulated nine times as it matures into the “unified body of the Anterior Heaven” (*xiantian yiti* 先天一體)—the divine self of the practitioner made of pure ancestral *qi*, which makes the practitioner’s entire body emanate an extraordinary radiance.

[Then the fetus of the divine self] does a somersault and breaks open the [chamber] of the yellow lady. It rises straight up [the spine] through the tail gate pass (i.e., the coccygeal pass), the spinal-straight pass (i.e., the spinal pass), and the jade pillow pass (i.e., the occipital

<sup>59</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 20a3–7.

pass) to the muddy pellet (i.e., the upper cinnabar field in the head) to pay its respects to the Emperor on High.

一個觚斗，打破黃婆(屋)，從尾閭、夾脊，玉枕三關，直上泥元[丸]，參謁上帝。<sup>60</sup>

As if being born, the nascent divine self of the practitioner breaks out of the womb-like lower cinnabar field and makes its way up the spine to the cinnabar field in the head. There it stands in audience with the celestial gods, whose heavenly palaces correlate with the upper cinnabar field in the body. Then the practitioner exteriorizes his divine self from the top of his head.

Once again, Huang Xingzhong creatively drew on Canghai laoren's inner-alchemical imagery—this time the yellow lady of intention—to help make sense of the arcane inner-alchemical practice that had come down to him through his Daoist lineage. He strove to understand how a practitioner could, by the power of visualization, literally transform his mundane body into a divine body by giving birth to a divine self that is composed of ancestral *qi* rooted in the Anterior Heaven.

In his primordial, true form, the practitioner could then perform thunder rites. He could express his newly tapped primordial power to summon thunder deities and employ them to protect or heal spaces and bodies. Huang ended his treatise by instructing the practitioner to visualize various thunder deities and their masters as emerging from different viscera. For example, the fearsome Marshal Wang Lingguan 王靈官元帥 with his vermilion face, red hair, silver teeth, three eyes, and iron whip emerges from the heart riding two fire wheels. He is followed by his master, the famed Shenxiao master Sa Shoujian 薩守堅 (fl. 1141–1178?). Boyish-faced Marshal Yin Jiao 殷郊元帥 emerges from the spleen wearing twelve skulls around his neck and brandishing a golden

<sup>60</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 20b3–5. For a general explanation of these passes along the dorsal tract of the body in inner alchemy, see Wm. Clarke Hudson, “Spreading the Dao, Managing Mastership, and Performing Salvation: The Life and Alchemical Teachings of Chen Zhixu” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007), 288–291.

bell and a yellow, leopard-tailed battle flag, followed by his master, the mysterious Shengong zhenren 申公真人 (Shen the Realized One). Marshal Zhang Jue 張瑀元帥 is summoned from the urogenital organ, followed by his master, the Shenxiao patriarch Wang huoshi 汪火師 (Wang the Fire Master, reputedly d. 789). The practitioner visualizes that they too make their way up the spine to the upper cinnabar field in the head and stand in audience before the high celestial gods, masters on the left and marshals on the right. Then the divine practitioner exteriorizes those thunder deities from his head so they appear before him, ready to receive orders to address the purpose of the thunder rite. They may be charged with protecting a pregnant female body and its fetus, or exorcize a place infested with demons and sprites.<sup>61</sup> In this way Huang explained that the thunder ritual his Daoist lineage practiced must, in order to work, be rooted in the alchemical theory and know-how revealed by Canghai laoren's annotation of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian*.

There is one last point to make about the way Huang Xingzhong tried to figure out the cryptic teaching about the yellow lady from his lineage patriarch. Recall that his patriarch stated that “there are thirty-six in heaven above and thirty-six on earth below; one must break open the chamber of the yellow lady if thunder generals are to appear.” It is interesting that Huang completely ignored the first line about the thirty-six. It seems as if he decided not to deal with that phrase because Canghai laoren's text had nothing to say about it.

A little detective work shows that the phrase is rooted in Song and Yuan inner-alchemical practices associated with summoning various martial deities. The *Diqi Wen yuanshuai dafa* 地祇溫元帥大法 (*Great Rite [for Summoning] Earth Deity Marshal Wen*), a manual for dealing with Wen Qiong 溫瓊 which evolved in the Song–Yuan period from an earlier version reputedly written by the thirtieth Celestial Master Zhang Jixian 張繼先 (fl. 1092–1126), states: “There are thirty-six in heaven above and thirty-six on earth below. One must break open the chamber of the yellow lady if one wishes Marshal Wen to be effective” 天上三十六，地下三十六，若要

<sup>61</sup> *Secret Transmission*, 15b7–16b6.

溫帥靈，拆破黃婆屋。<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, the text does not specify to what the “thirty-six” might refer, but it does suggest that the lineage teaching about breaking open the chamber of the yellow lady for efficacious ritual use of a martial deity had somehow come down to Huang from similar rites in the Song–Yuan period.

A little more digging reveals that the first half of the passage—“There are thirty-six in heaven above and thirty-six on the earth below”—shows up in an earlier text from the Northern Song period called the *Taishang dongxuan lingbao jiuku miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶救苦妙經 (*Wondrous Scripture for Salvation from Distress of the Most High Numinous Gem of Cavernous Mystery*). “There are thirty-six [scriptures] in heaven above and thirty-six [scriptures] on the earth below. The Grand Mystery is boundless. How wondrous the *Scripture of the Great Cavern* is!” 天上三十六，地下三十六，太玄無邊際，妙哉大洞經。<sup>63</sup> The number thirty-six here refers to thirty-six scriptures that were revealed by celestial high gods and later stored on earth in a place called the Dragon Palace (Longgong 龍宮). This line was picked up in the late Southern Song in the *Haiqiong Bai zhenren yulu* 海瓊白真人語錄 (*Sayings of Bai the Realized One of Haiqiong*), a record of dialogues reputedly between Bai Yuchan and his disciples. When one disciple inquired about the line from the *Taishang dongxuan lingbao jiuku miaojing*, Bai responded:

This [line] means that there are thirty-six arteries in the human head above and thirty-six veins in the abdomen below. Heaven and earth are [configured] like this. Only the human heart cannot be seen or heard. Therefore, [the text] says: “Grand Mystery is boundless. How wondrous the Great Cavern is!”

<sup>62</sup> DZ 1220:255.1b7–8. Sources from the Daoist canon are cited according to fascicle, page, and line from the *Zhengtong daoang* 正統道藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1977), and numbered according to the index numbers provided in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For more on this rite and the cult of Marshal Wen, see Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> DZ 374:1b8–9.

此言人之頭上有三十六脈，腹下有三十六絡，天地亦如之。惟人之心，視之不見，聽之不聞，故曰：「太玄無邊，妙哉大洞也」。<sup>64</sup>

Bai Yuchan ignored the assertion by the Northern Song text that the number thirty-six referred to revealed scriptures, and instead interpreted the number in inner-chemical terms. The veins and arteries running through the human body correspond to the channels of *qi* running through heaven and earth. They can be counted and charted, and are thus comprehensible. However, the center of the body between the head and abdomen—the heart—cannot be seen or heard and so remains incomprehensible because it corresponds to the Grand Mystery, the Great Cavern—euphemisms that point to the Dao. The heart is profound and boundless, the gateway through which the mystery of the cosmos can be apprehended. We can see that the teaching on inner alchemy and thunder ritual by Huang Xingzhong's patriarch is rooted in the Song and Yuan traditions theorized by the likes of Bai Yuchan and masters of earth deity traditions.<sup>65</sup>

This bit of textual digging allows us to imagine something of Huang's intellectual environment when he was composing his *Secret Transmission* during the nineteenth century. It seems that the intellectual roots of the inner-chemical teachings that had come down to him through his lineage from the Song and Yuan had somehow become murky or had been lost. He seems not to have been privy to those older theoretical explanations of his lineage's inner-chemical practices for the purpose of thunder rites. Perhaps satisfactory explanations had at some point dropped out from his lineage's oral or written tradition, or perhaps the lineage had never had any sort of explication at all. But Huang did have access to some version of Canghai laoren's annotations of Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian*. Determined to make sense of his lineage's abstruse teachings, Huang turn beyond his lineage.<sup>66</sup> Specifically, Huang drew on

<sup>64</sup> DZ 1307:1.9b10–10a3.

<sup>65</sup> For more extensive arguments for the rootedness of Huang Xingzhong's Daoist lineage in specific Song and Yuan traditions of practice, see Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapter 2.

<sup>66</sup> For the notion of religious cultures as “repertoires” or “tool kits” from which

Canghai laoren's language to ground the arcane numerology and trigrams associated with the charts and the *Yijing* in myths about their origins in the fantastic exploits of Fu Xi and King Wen. Huang relied on Canghai laoren to explain in terms of the trigrams how ancestral *qi* became obscured during the birthing process, and how practitioners could recover that primordial power by means of visualizing that the contending movements of the trigrams of the Posterior Heaven revert to the stillness of the trigrams of the Anterior Heaven. And Huang worked hard to make sense of the cryptic term "yellow lady" in his lineage's inner-chemical teaching by very creatively thinking with a short passage in Canghai laoren's text.

Huang's *Secret Transmission* is, then, a sophisticated product of intertextuality. Huang created his text by surgically cutting out discrete passages in Canghai laoren's text that were useful for explaining his lineage's existing Daoist teaching about the centrality of cultivating ancestral *qi* for the purpose of performing thunder rites. Huang then seamlessly sutured those chosen passages into his own narrative about ancestral *qi* and how to recover it via visualization, which was informed by oral and possibly textual teachings within his Daoist lineage and by foundational cosmological ideas derived from the *Yijing*. At times, Huang brought together disparate passages from Canghai laoren's annotation; at other times he cut up passages from the annotation in service of his own narrative. Huang ignored the Buddhist and Confucian content in Canghai laoren's text, which was woven together with Daoist content to annotate Lüzu's *Zhixuan pian* from the perspective of the Three Teachings advocated by salvationist movements. Huang chose only the content that could be made to speak to the inner alchemy and thunder ritual practiced by his

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ideas, practices, narratives, and images may be drawn by practitioners, see Robert Ford Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), especially 39–61. See also Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (2003): 316–319; and Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," *History of Religions* 52, no. 2 (2012): 99–141.

lineage's Daoist tradition. With impressive creativity, Huang in the nineteenth century drew on a very different seventeenth-century text in order to make sense of his local lineage's practice.

Huang Xingzhong's intertextual work was so seamless that it completely obscured any trace of Canghai laoren. Again, we do not know whether Huang knew anything about him and his association with Xiantian dao. It is possible that Huang willfully wrote Canghai laoren out of his *Secret Transmission* to conceal the fact he was taking from a text associated with a salvationist tradition outside his Daoist lineage. It is possible that Huang was working from a version of the *Secret Annotation* that indicated Canghai laoren was the author, but Huang had no idea who he was and so ignored him. It is possible that Huang had acquired an anonymous printed or handwritten copy. And we must keep open the intriguing possibility that Huang was somehow associated with Xiantian dao, which would mean that a trans-regional, non-elite, salvationist association had become entwined with Huang's local Daoist lineage in north-central Hunan by the mid-nineteenth century.

But these must remain historical speculations. All we know for sure is that, one way or another, specific theories and inner-alchemical practices associated with the Three Teachings of Xiantian dao covertly made their way into this Daoist lineage through the textual work of one of its masters. The linchpin was Lüzu. Recall that Huang was said to have based his work on a text called the *Lüzu zhixuan pian*, which was really some version of Canghai Laoren's *Secret Annotation*. It seems that Huang trusted the passages he chose from that text because he thought they were either directly from or associated with Lüzu. It was Lüzu's authority as a revealer of true inner-alchemical teachings that gave Huang license to appropriate his teachings for his Daoist lineage's own tradition of inner alchemy and thunder ritual. Huang in fact created a new text, the *Secret Transmission from Patriarch Lü about the Ancestral Qi of the Anterior Heaven*, but allowed the title and content to give the strong impression that the whole of the text was rooted in Lüzu's esoteric teachings in the *Zhixuan pian*. In effect, Huang redacted the theoretical core of his lineage's own

liturgical tradition by relying on an authoritative text outside the lineage. Huang's text has since become the most precious "secret transmission" for his liturgical descendants within the lineage.

## V. Living Redactions

Barend ter Haar makes the point that "combining resources from different religious and philosophical origins is the very stuff of religious innovation."<sup>67</sup> Huang Xingzhong's composition of the *Secret Transmission* is, then, an exemplary case. We saw that Huang creatively drew on specific passages of Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation*—a text likely associated with the salvationist movement Xiantian dao and then widely used in spirit-writing activities—to gain theoretical purchase on an abstruse practice at the heart of his local Daoist lineage's thunder ritual. Huang's *Secret Transmission* was a kind of redaction. It was a willful reworking of disparate source materials into a new written form. Those disparate oral and textual materials were recast so seamlessly that the new text masked its indebtedness to Canghai laoren's *Secret Annotation*. The new *Secret Transmission* simply became the most cherished teaching of Huang's Daoist lineage, and was recognized as rooted in the authoritative inner-chemical teachings of Lüzu. It became the most valued articulation of the theory and method for recovering ancestral *qi* and using it to wield thunder deities, which has ever since been taught to Huang's liturgical progeny within the lineage.

But the story does not end there. The *Secret Transmission* has since assumed a life of its own and has continually responded to changing political and social conditions. We mentioned that the *Secret Transmission* survived the intermittent official suppressions of religious practice begun in the early 1950s and managed to evade government confiscation during the Cultural Revolution. As Jiang Shenzhi, the leading master in the lineage during the late twentieth century, worked to rebuild his lineage's textual heritage

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<sup>67</sup> Ter Haar, *Guan Yu*, 250.

in the decade or so after suppression subsided in the late 1980s, he realized that the tradition of oral instruction had so deteriorated that masters and new apprentices were ill-equipped to make sense of a crucial but challenging text like the *Secret Transmission*.

Compounding this situation, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy drew young people from the countryside to higher paying jobs as migrant laborers in the factories of coastal cities. For example, Jiang Shenzhi's own grandson and best disciple left the village many times during the decade after his ordination in 1991 to take up various jobs in Zhuhai, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen.<sup>68</sup> Jiang saw that his grandson and other young practitioners simply were not home enough to deepen their grasp of the rites the traditional way—slowly through repetition guided by oral transmissions (*kouchuan* 口傳) from their masters. Furthermore, apprentices and young masters were not gaining a solid understanding of the theory and ritual method articulated in the *Secret Transmission*, which, Jiang insisted, was essential for the efficacy of their thunder rites.

To confront this dilemma, Jiang Shenzhi took it upon himself not only to copy almost all of the lineage's texts, but also to redact many of them, especially the ritual manuals scripting the various rituals in the lineage's liturgical repertoire. He wrote out crucial ritual instructions traditionally kept as oral instructions and wove them into his copies of ritual manuals. He went so far as to provide his own discourse (*lun* 論) on Huang Xingzhong's *Secret Transmission* in order to make the nineteenth-century text more accessible to late twentieth-century practitioners. Members of the lineage are quick to note that not just any master would dare produce his own text based on the lineage's core theoretical treatise. Jiang, who passed on in January 2018, was regarded as perhaps the most accomplished master in the region. Trained by his father, who himself was a famed master in the county, and ordained in 1946 while still a teenager, Jiang spent his life memorizing all the rituals in his lineage's repertoire—a rare feat, as most practitioners simply rely on the ritual manuals while performing. He performed

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the impact of migrant labor on this lineage in the 1990s, see Mozina, *Knotting the Banner*, chapter 1.

with a kind of concentration that exuded palpable *lingqi* 靈氣—ancestral *qi* in the terms of the *Secret Transmission*—which made observers feel they were in the presence of a powerful master.

In his text, entitled *Xiantian zuqi zailun* 先天祖氣再論 (*A Further Discourse on the Ancestral Qi of the Anterior Heaven*), Jiang “sorts out” (*zhengli* 整理) key concepts in Huang’s *Secret Transmission*. In effect, he summarizes foundational concepts like Anterior Heaven and ancestral *qi* by quoting sentences from the *Secret Transmission* and commenting on them. Interestingly, Jiang does not mention anything about the numerology from the charts and the *Yijing*, which Huang Xingzhong worked so hard to figure out. Jiang is less interested in the order of the cosmos as expressed in numbers and trigrams, and more interested in the text’s discussion of the theory of practice. Jiang explains how the human body is a microcosm of heaven, and so the upper cinnabar field in the head can reasonably be the palace of the celestial high gods, and the viscera in the abdomen can be the seats of thunder deities. Jiang is especially interested in fleshing out the passages in the *Secret Transmission* that state how thunder rites flow from inner-chemical cultivation of essence, *qi*, and spirit directed by the intention of the heart, and in explicating those passages that explain how human beings can transform their mundane bodies into the divine bodies of high gods.

Jiang spills the most ink making sense of the phrase “ancestral *qi* in seven characters” (*qizi zuqi* 七字祖炁), which the *Secret Transmission* simply mentions without elaboration. Jiang asserts that the phrase refers to a seven-character *dhāraṇī* composed of transliterations of supposedly Sanskrit sounds. The *dhāraṇī* is to be intoned *sotto voce* during minor thunder rites for calling upon thunder deities for apotropaic or therapeutic purposes. Jiang explains that each strange character points to a moment in the inner-chemical visualization by which the practitioner recovers his lost ancestral *qi* in order to summon thunder deities. Jiang paraphrases whole swaths of Huang Xingzhong’s explanation of the visualization in the *Secret Transmission*, including Huang’s articulation of the “extracting from *kan* in order to replenish *li*” sequence, which, we saw, he took almost word for word from Canghai laoren’s *Secret Annotation*.

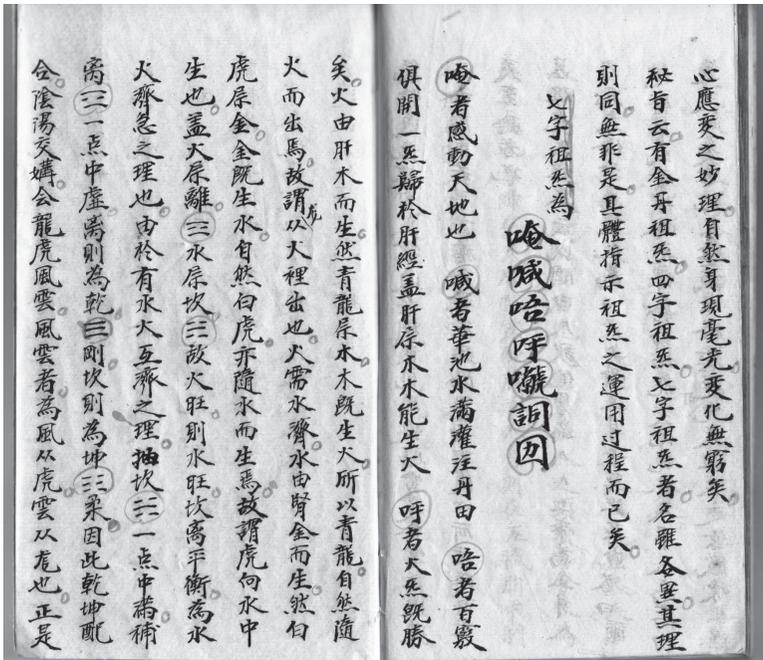


Figure 5 The “ancestral *qi* in seven characters” *dhāraṇī*, in Jiang Shenzhi’s *Xiantian zuqi zailun*.

In effect, Jiang creatively drew upon Huang’s *Secret Transmission* to make sense of a cryptic *dhāraṇī* in the lineage’s ritual practice, much like Huang creatively drew upon Canghai laoren’s *Secret Annotation* to make sense of cryptic language in the practice like “breaking open the yellow lady’s chamber.” Jiang’s discourse, then, is also a kind of redaction. It is an intentional reworking of source material into a new form in order to gain theoretical purchase on an arcane aspect of the lineage’s practice. Through Huang’s *Secret Transmission*, theoretical ideas and language from Canghai laoren’s *Secret Annotation* written in the context of late imperial salvationist movements remain anonymous threads in Jiang Shenzhi’s reweaving of his Daoist lineage’s essential ritual teachings. For Jiang, those threads are ultimately authoritative because they seem to have originally come from Lüzu via Huang’s text.

## Conclusion

From our exploration of Huang Xingzhong's nineteenth-century *Secret Transmission* and its covert reliance on Canghai laoren's seventeenth-century *Secret Annotation*, and of Jiang Shenzhi's late twentieth-century discourse and its overt reliance on Huang's *Secret Transmission*, we see that a local Daoist lineage's most guarded *mizhi* texts are alive. A *mizhi* text, then, is a "living redaction." It is a literary form in a more or less intense state of creative production rather than a literary product forever frozen by faithful recopying down the generations. A *mizhi* text is an intertextual site in which available threads from authoritative texts—written and oral, within and beyond the lineage—are from time to time rewoven into new authoritative forms by thoughtful and creative local practitioners. When the fabric of this text is pulled apart, we discover surprising threads. In the case of the nineteenth-century *Secret Transmission*, we notice that strands of cosmogonic myth and inner-chemical theory and practice likely from the salvationist group Xiantiandao were used to explain the core visualizations that drove the thunder ritual at the heart of a local Daoist lineage in Hunan. A hundred and fifty years later, a master in the same lineage took some of those very same strands in the *Secret Transmission* that were secretly indebted to Xiantiandao and used them to explain the meaning of a cryptic *dhāraṇī* employed in the lineage's thunder rites. Each of these *mizhi* texts is a redaction by a creative mind seeking to make sense of aspects of his liturgical heritage. One redactor looked beyond his Daoist lineage, and the other looked within it.

These textual analyses beg us to reflect for a moment on the workings of syncretism in late imperial Chinese religion. In producing their living redactions, these Daoist masters do not seem to have impacted the salvationist Xiantiandao movement and its commitment to the Three Teachings, but rather the other way around. This conjures up Philip Clart's reading of Kenneth Dean's hypothesis that Daoist masters have often provided scriptures for

“popular” cults.<sup>69</sup> Although the Xiantiandao salvationist movement is not the kind of popular cult to local deities Dean studied in Fujian, Clart raises the issue of the flow of power. For Dean, Daoist masters and their liturgical knowledge and know-how supply content and structure to non-Daoist cults—a “Daoist liturgical structure” in his words.

Huang Xingzhong’s *Secret Transmission* indicates a reverse of that relation. The trans-regional salvationist movement Xiantiandao, with its embrace of the Three Teachings, supplied key theoretical knowledge and language for an obscure local Zhengyi Daoist lineage in the remote mountains of central Hunan. The Daoists and their liturgical framework received rather than provided, and now Xiantiandao theory, method, and language continue to live unassumingly in the very heart of that Daoist lineage. Likewise, David Palmer notes that Qing spirit-writing groups, Republican-era redemptive societies, and *qigong* movements in the 1980s and 1990s have been major propagators of Daoist self-cultivation practices, including inner-alchemical techniques attributed to Daoist transcendents such as Lü Dongbin.<sup>70</sup> But in a reversal of that dynamic, our Daoist lineage in Hunan actually propagates inner-alchemical teachings attributed to Lüzu that were associated with a Qing salvationist group. Our attention to the intertextuality of *mizhi* texts in a local Daoist lineage plunges us into an obscure network of textual relations, which in turn thrusts us into a network of social relations, some of which we might not expect. Such is the complexity of appropriative strategies of local religion on the ground.

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<sup>69</sup> See Philip Clart, “Anchoring Guanyin: Appropriative Strategies in a New Phoenix Hall Scripture,” *Minsu quyi* 173 (2011): 120–121; and Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 32.

<sup>70</sup> Palmer, “Chinese Redemptive Societies and Salvationist Religion,” 54.

## 活著的文本，持續的編訂： 湖南湘中道教的救度宗教之根源

莫達夫

### 摘要

本文旨在研究地方道教宗派所流傳的「秘旨」(密旨)或「秘傳」(密傳)文本的性質。本研究指出一份關於秘旨的文本不是對其宗派世代沿襲之核心儀式知識的一成不變的嚴苛定律，而是不斷編輯、持續修訂的過程。秘旨文本具有很強的互文性，就像紡織品一樣，一份秘旨文本常由各種宇宙學理論和儀式知識在不同時段內層層編織而成。而有時這些理論和知識卻擁有意想不到的來源。本文以湖南湘中地區一個施行雷法的地方正一道教宗派的秘旨抄本為例，梳理其多條文本脈絡。本研究發現該秘旨文本很大程度上來源於一份十七世紀的文本，而此文本與當時的一個致力於宣揚儒、釋、道三教的救度宗教——先天道——有千絲萬縷的聯繫。這個十七世紀的宗教文本在後世通過扶乩降筆的靈文書寫活動傳播到中國各地。本研究顯示，該文本的某些宇宙學理論和內丹教義在十九世紀流傳到湘中，被當地的道教宗派所吸收，由該宗派的法師以創造性的編訂方式將其融入到其宗派的秘旨中。直到今天，那位法師所創造的秘旨文本仍在繼續被編訂與重塑。

關鍵詞：湖南省、秘旨/密旨、救度宗教、先天道、扶乩、內丹、雷法