

The Performance and Significance of the Merging the Pneumas (*Heqi*) Rite in Early Daoism

Terry F. Kleeman

Abstract

One of the great mysteries surrounding the early Celestial Master Daoists is a sexual ritual called Merging the Pneumas (*heqi* 合炁). This rite was practiced from the beginning of the movement in the 2nd century and became a distinguishing characteristic of the nascent religion; its performance continued at least into the Song dynasty. Despite a series of articles by top scholars of Daoism, we are still very much in the dark about this ritual, uncertain about its real character, the times it was performed, the individuals who participated, and the ultimate goal of the participants. In this paper, the author examines both surviving Daoist scriptural material related to the rite as well as normative material concerning its improper performance and external critiques of the rite. Because it was an esoteric rite, no authentic liturgical materials survive from a Celestial Master context; the current *Huangshu* and *Shangqing Huangshu guodu yi* derive from a Shangqing context and hence are unreliable witnesses to the Celestial Master rite. Similarly, Buddhist polemics must have portrayed a recognizable but not necessarily entirely accurate image of the ritual. Secondary evidence in the Daoist canon suggests that the rite was performed by normal Daoist citizens, not just libationers, on a regular basis. Celestial Master libationers played a special role as teachers of the rite and initiators into its initial practice. The goal of the ritual is stated to be the avoidance of disaster. One way this is effected in the *Shangqing Huangshu guodu yi* is through the inscription of

the performer's name on the roster of the living. The avoidance of jealousy seems to have been an important proximate goal.

Keywords: Merging the Pneumas, sex ritual, Daoism, libationer

One of the great mysteries surrounding the early Celestial Master Daoists is a sexual ritual called Merging the Pneumas (*heqi* 合炁). This rite was practiced from the beginning of the movement in the second century and became a distinguishing characteristic of the nascent religion; its performance continued at least into the Song dynasty. Despite a series of articles by top scholars of Daoism, we are still very much in the dark about this ritual, uncertain about its real character, the times it was performed, the individuals who participated, and the ultimate goal of the participants. In this paper, I will look primarily at references to the ritual in Daoist, Buddhist, and secular sources—rather than simply the surviving texts that are associated with the rite—in trying to answer some of these questions.

It is perhaps not surprising that, in a country that characterizes itself as “the land of ritual and etiquette,” sexual relations were highly ritualized. The sexual relations of imperial rulers were matters of state, overseen by palace staff; senior women fulfilled a similar role in the home. The concern was twofold: the provision of legitimate progeny was essential to the continuance of the dynasty or lineage, so regulated fertility was a primary concern, but it was also believed that the sexual act had a significant influence on health, and one category of medicine came to focus on these matters.

The traditional literature on sex conduct is quite rich, though full of thorny problems. We know that it has its origins at least in the Warring States period, and we now possess an actual manuscript from that period discussing the “Joining of *Yin* and *Yang*.” There are also texts mentioned in the Han imperial bibliography and subsequently in the bibliography of the *Book of Han* (*Han shu* 漢書) that clearly are of this genre. Such texts were not, as a group, treated well by later bibliophiles, but fortunately many were preserved, at least partially, in a medieval Japanese medical work called the *Ishinbō* (Chinese *Yixin fang* 醫心方 [984]).

The *Classic of the Plain Girl* (*Sunü jing* 素女經) is perhaps the best known of these texts. The French scholar Mussat begins by assuring his reader that, “The *Sunü jing* is not a collection of anecdotes, much less a novel. It is certainly not a book of medicine. It is a treatise on sexuality, and not on sexology, a manual for good sexual health. And above all else, it is not an erotic book, much less pornographic.”¹ Still, much of the early sexological lore looks intricately tied to medicine. It is the same Yellow Thearch 黃帝 who asks questions, and the answers do not look so radically different in form that we would think them of a radically different age or milieu.

One important concern of this literature is issues of timing: when, during the various daily or monthly or longer cycles, is it auspicious or inauspicious to have this activity. The concern was multi-faceted, encompassing the health and fortune of male, and also to a lesser degree female, participants, as well as the well-being of any child produced by their encounters. Taboos concerning the stages of the menstrual cycle should be included in this category. When all were considered together, acceptable times for sexual union may have been rather limited.

Early Daoist practice did not follow these calendars. With faith in the transcendent reality of the Daoist heavens, Daoists observed no taboos or ritual regimens other than their own.² In pace with their cosmology of Three Pneumas and the Three Offices who judged their conduct, they held three Assemblies each year: upper (1/7), middle (7/7), and lower (10/5). These festivals were held on the designated days regardless of any hemerological or meteorological warnings, just as the dead were buried at a time and location without reference to geomantic or horarological considerations. By some accounts, the Assemblies were key times to perform the sexual rite.

¹ Maurice Mussat, *Sou nu king: la sexualite taoïste de la Chine ancienne* (Paris: P. Seghers, 1978), preface.

² This went in hand with their rejection of divination and traditional medicine, and was documented in both Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜's 5th c. *Abridgement of the Daoist Codes* 陸先生道門科略 and in the articles of the *Hundred Eighty Precepts* 老君說一百八十戒. See the perceptive article of Peter Nickerson, “Shamans, Demons, Diviners and Taoists: Conflict and Assimilation in Medieval Chinese Ritual Practice (c. A.D. 100–1000),” *Taoist Resources* 5.1 (1994): 41–66.

Another key concern was the production and transmission of pneuma (*qi* 氣) and essence (*jing* 精). The sexual act yielded, it was believed, certain natural products that could be used in a variety of ways. *Jing* or essence can famously be retained in *coitus reservatus*, then mystically directed to ascend the body to be retained in the brain. The old man depicting longevity in the “blessings, success, and longevity” 福祿壽 triad seen so often in Chinese culture has a large, bulbous forehead because of this sort of essence retention. Some texts counsel that a succession of partners or exceptionally young partners would increase the essence absorbed from the female. But this also suggests a criticism leveled at the practice, that the male absorbed female essence and combined it with his own male essence to benefit his person. This process was thus essentially parasitic toward the female partners. There were, to be sure, mutually beneficial activities included in these works, but the perspective is usually that of the male.

Such practices seem to have been widespread and understood not just as a physiological process for obtaining progeny, but as a type of self-cultivation. Ge Hong 葛洪, third century occultist and author of the *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* 抱朴子, considered it a lesser art that only rarely resulted in significant increase in longevity, and a dangerous art for those not properly initiated, but still a vital matter for anyone pursuing immortality.³

There are more than ten different schools of the arts of the bedchamber. Some use them to repair and rescue the injured and maimed, some to attack and heal the myriad ailments, some to “pluck the *yin* to supplement the *yang*,” some to add to their years and extend their longevity. The great secret lies in the single art of returning the essence to replenish the brain. This method is only transmitted orally from one perfected to another, and originally was never written down. Though you take famous medicines, if you do not know this secret, you still will not attain long life. Moreover, people cannot just completely cut themselves off from the other sex. If men and women do not have intercourse, then their inaction will give rise to a blockage illness. That is why “Those who seal themselves away in exasperation often fall ill and do not live long.” If you give free reign

³ Wang Ming 王明, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 8.150.

to your emotions and do whatever you will, this will also shorten your life. Only those who have found a harmonious rhythm for their indulgences will be able to pursue them without harm. If you do not attain the arts transmitted in the oral teaching, there is not one person in ten thousand who tries this and does injure or kill himself.

房中之法十餘家，或以補救傷損，或以攻治眾病，或以采陰益陽，或以增年延壽，其大要在於還精補腦之一事耳。此法乃真人口口相傳，本不書也，雖服名藥，而復不知此要，亦不得長生也。人復不可都絕陰陽，陰陽不交，則坐致壅閉之病；故幽閉怨曠，多病而不壽也。任情肆意，又損年命。唯有得其節宣之和，可以不損。若不得口訣之術，萬無一人為之而不以此自傷煞者也。

For Ge Hong, there was real value in the sexual arts that he could not deny, and their practice was necessary for transcendence, but correct performance required direct transmission from a perfected being and so almost no one was doing it correctly, with many doing themselves serious injury. This sort of grudging acknowledgement of an important but uncomfortable topic was common among Chinese literati in dealing with sex, especially ritualized sex (and not different in kind from the response of the Supreme Purity 上清 movement, as we shall see below).

We find a similarly nuanced position concerning the sexual arts among the teachings of the early Celestial Master Daoists, as represented by the *Xiang'er Commentary to the Laozi* 老子想爾注, which they understood to be the creation of the Celestial Master Zhang Daoling 張道陵:⁴

According to the way of *yin* and *yang*, when young you connect your essences in order to create life, so when your age reaches “knowing your fate” (i.e., 50), this should be called “stop it by yourself.” When you are young, though you have sex, you should take it easy and keep it seldom. When it says “wispy” (*mianmian* 綿綿), it means insignificant, that you should do it an insignificant number of times. If you do this when you are young, then you will survive a long time. Now this is becoming a big problem. Why did the Dao create sex?

⁴ Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian* 老子想爾注校箋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 9; cf. Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 84.

The Dao thinks it is important to carry on the sacrifices, so that the human race does not die out. She wants them to combine their essences and reproduce; therefore she has taught the young to do it seldom but not to cut it off. She did not teach them to expend effort on it. These plans for expending effort are the product of a foolish person's mind. How can you blame the Dao for that? A person of superior virtue, resolved and forceful in will and conduct, who can avoid becoming attached to reproduction, can cut it off while still young, and his/her good spirits will be completed early.

陰陽之道，以若結精為生。年以知命，當名自止。年少之時，雖有，當閑省之。綿綿者微也。從其微少，若少年則長存矣。今此乃為大害。道造之何？道重繼（繼）祠，種類不絕。欲令合精產生，故教之。年少，微省，不絕，不教之勸力也。勸力之計出愚人之心耳，豈可怨道乎？上德之人，志搯（操）堅彊，能不戀結產生，少時便絕。又善神早成。

Thus sex is necessary to carry on the patriline, but ultimately not good for you. Although most must play the part of parent and reproduce, certain particularly advanced individuals could forego this experience and concentrate instead on the cultivation of their bodily spirits. Part of the problem was that sex was a moral quagmire, where it was too simple to fall into sin through either indulgence or self-interest:⁵

The Dao taught humans to connect their essences and create gods. The false arts abroad today falsely claim to be the Dao. Using the texts of the Yellow Thearch, the Mysterious Woman, Gongzi, and Rongcheng, they teach each other to participate with women without ejaculating, in hopes of returning the essence to replenish the brain. Their hearts and spirits are not one, and they will have no one protecting them and thus will lose their keen edge, and will not be able to be treasured for long.

道教人結精成神，今世間偽伎詐稱道，託黃帝、玄女、龔子、容成之文相教，從女不施，思還精補髓（腦），心神不一，失其所守，為搗悅不可長寶。

⁵ Rao Zongyi, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian*, 11; cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 87.

The answer the Daoists proposed to this dilemma was not the wholesale rejection of sex like the Cathars or the Shakers, but rather a Daoist form of sex that defined actions in great detail and tried to explain them in a cosmological framework.

This rite was called Merging the Pneumas, and it was conveyed through a text called the *Yellow Book*, sometimes referred to as the *Yellow Book with a Red Border* 黃書赤界.⁶ We have some evidence of what this rite was like. Two works survive in the Daoist canon called some variant of the name *Yellow Book*.⁷ We do not think that they are original representations of the rite as practiced by the early church. Rather, both volumes show the clear mark of influence from the fourth-century Shangqing revelations, which favored a sort of sublimated practice involving an ethereal merging with supernatural spirits called “pairing the phosphors” (*oujing* 偶景).⁸ Nonetheless, one text in particular, the *Initiation Protocol of the Yellow Book* (*Shangqing huangshu guodu yi*) does preserve directions for a communal rite that both involves actual intercourse and explains its cosmic significance, as we see in the following passage:⁹

Self-guided:

Imagine that your pneumas and spirits have all finished. X then using his hands guides himself. Taking his left hand he touches from the side of the left nipple to the foot, saying, “To the left, the Supreme” three times, then stops. Again, taking the right hand, he touches from the side of the right nipple to the foot, saying, “To the right, the Mystic Elder,” then stops. Next, using the left hand, he touches from the forehead directly down, right to the cinnabar field and [says:] “The Most High,” then the right hand follows it. In this way, he touches

⁶ On these texts, see Wang Ka 王卡, “Huangshu kaoyuan” 黃書考源, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 2 (1997): 65–73; Zhu Yueli 朱越利, “Huangshu kao” 黃書考, *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998), 19:167–188; and most recently, Gil Raz, “The Way of the Yellow and the Red: Re-examining the Sexual Initiation Rite of Celestial Master Daoism,” *Nannu* 10.1 (2008): 86–120.

⁷ The *Dongzhen huangshu* 洞真黃書 refers to itself as having eight chapters (1a). It is often speculated that the *Dongzhen huangshu* and the *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi* 上清黃書過度儀 represent two of those eight chapters.

⁸ See *Zhen'gao* 真誥, 2.1a.

⁹ *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi*, 14a–b. Cf. Raz, “The Way of the Yellow and the Red,” 112–113.

three times and says it three times, then rising, rides on the Dipper and travels like a dragon, with no [ties] from the three vertical and five horizontal directions. Getting up, he uses the right hand to rub the lower cinnabar field three times, then proceeds to the Gate of Life. With the right hand, he opens the Golden Door, with the left raises up the Jade Flute, and has it ejaculate on the Gate of Life. Again, he uses the left hand to support Kunlun¹⁰ and the right hand to rub the Gate of Life up-and-down and across three times, saying:

自導：

思氣神都畢，甲因以手自導，以左手將左乳邊至足，言「左无上」三過。止，又以右手將右乳邊至足，言「右玄老」三過。止，次以左手將額上直下，下至丹田，「太上」，右手隨之。如此三將三言之，便乘魁起，不受三五龍行。上復以右手摩下丹田三，便詣生門。以右手開金門，左手挺玉籥，注生門上。又以左手扶崑崙，右手摩命門縱橫三。言：

The waters flow to the East,	水東流，
Clouds return to the West.	雲西歸。
Yin nourishes Yang,	陰養陽，
The pneumas subtle and fine.	氣微微。
The mystic essence and clear saliva,	玄精滋液，
Proceed on up to the Master's Door.	上詣師門。

X then incants again:

甲又呪：

The Divine Man holds the pass,	神男持關，
The Jade maiden opens the door.	玉女開戶。
I dispatch pneumas to enter from the Yin,	配氣從陰，
Bestow your pneumas on me.	以氣施我。

Y then incants:

乙呪：

Yin and Yang bestow transformation,	陰陽施化，
The myriad things are born from it.	萬物滋生。
Heaven covers and Earth supports.	天覆地載，
I request that you bestow your pneumas on me.	願以氣施臣 / 妾身。

¹⁰ Raz suggests that this refers to the navel; see his "The Way of the Yellow and the Red," 112.

We see in this passage a closely guided ritual exercise, with precise movements among symbolically named body parts. We cannot be sure exactly how the actions were performed, but it clearly involved sexual contact, if not actual intercourse. There are continuous visualizations accompanying these actions and placing them in a cosmic framework. The last sentence reveals that either male or female could play the lead role in this rite. In general, the rite strives to be symmetrical.

The following statement, from the chief priest of the rite, explains the reason for conducting the ritual and some of the results the participants hope to achieve. The opening passage clearly names the sponsor, invokes the gods and spirits necessary to accomplish the ritual, and makes a specific request of the deities assembled:¹¹

Respectfully, there is this male or female novice X, from a certain commandery, county, township, and village, who is so many years old, and who loves the Dao and delights in the transcendentals. Now he has come humbly to your servant, begging to be initiated. To carry out the *yin* and *yang*, the Five Agents and Three Pneumas—the first born from the Middle Prime, the second from the Upper Prime, and the third from the Lower Prime—bind together, becoming together the Dao. I would like to ask the Lord of Conversion who Inspects the Inner and Outer and his clerks; the Lord who Returns the Spirit, Restores Color, and Replenishes the Pneumas and his clerks; the Divine Lord of Central Conversion who Guards the Region, his generals and clerks; and the various Lords of Interrogation and Summons, serving the Three Offices of Heaven, Earth, and Water, their generals and clerks, on behalf of your servant and X, to dismiss all interrogation and arrest warrants, erase us from the roster of death, and inscribe our names on the Jade Calendar of Long Life, so that we may be members of the Seed People. I request that for both your servant and X, our essential spirits will be focused and stable, living pneumas will spread through us and mark us, our four limbs and five viscera will each be without problem. What we seek we shall obtain, those we initiate will cross over, and slander will subside. When the matter is complete, we will make a statement of merits, and will not fail to keep our promises.

¹¹ *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi*, 4a.

謹有某郡縣鄉里男女生某甲，年如千歲，好道樂仙。今來詣臣，求乞過度，奉行陰陽，五行三炁。先從中元一生，上元一生，下元一生，三炁相結，共成為道。願請監察內外開化君吏、還神復色補炁君吏、營域中化神君將吏、天地水三官考召諸君將吏，當為臣及甲，解釋三官考逮，撤除死籍，著名長生玉曆，得在種民輩中。願臣及甲，精神專固，生炁布染，四支五藏，各得無他。所求者得，所過者度，口舌伏匿。事竟言功，不負效信。

The significance of the ritual would seem to lie in the manipulation of the three basic pneumas through a series of actions by a pair of cosmologized bodies practicing visualizations to accompany their actions.

The desired result is expressed in the words of the participants. They seek to become Seed People (*zhongmin* 種民 or *zhongzi* 種子), people who would survive the coming cataclysms and live to see the dawning of a new age of universal peace and equanimity called Great Peace (*taiping* 太平). The third-century *Demon Statutes of Lady Blue* 女青鬼律 confirms this key role of the ritual:¹²

You must not let yourself go, grasp your heart!
 If you do not practice the 3 and 5 it is just evil lust.
 You speak of Heaven and the Great Dao with no constraint.
 The rulers of the Three Offices are picking the Seed People.
 They will pick those who have merged pneumas, eighteen thousand.
 How many have been picked from the beginning until now?
 The Great Quota has not been reached. Exert yourself, sir!
 Changing your heart and bowels, become a Perfected of the Dao.
 An oral secret from your master shows you are worthy,
 Those who wear my contracts will all be first,
 Will get to see the Divine Transcendent Lord of Great Peace,
 Who, leader of the Five Thearchs, will transmit secret words.

勿得任意唯捉心，不行三五唯邪淫。言天大道而不禁，三官主者擇種民。取合炁者萬八千，從來至今有幾人。大限未足子勤身，改心易腸道真人。師受口訣以見賢，佩吾券契一為先。得見太平神仙君，五帝主者傳祕言。

¹² *Nüqing guilü*, 5.1a–b.

Thus, according to the third century understanding, there was a finite limit on the number of people who might survive and the selection was ongoing at the time, so every aspect of behavior was being rigorously examined by supernatural officials. We see some of the exasperation of church leaders with the conduct of their parishioners in the following oracular communication from around 220, when the movement was just regaining its feet following its defeat and absorption by the Cao Wei empire:¹³

You people are all so difficult to teach. I cannot talk to you. You turn right into wrong, and consider bent to be straight. At this confluence of a thousand years, what should I do about you? I have accompanied the Supreme Lord Lao as he traveled to the end of the earth in all eight directions, traveling amongst the citizens in order to select the Seed People, but in the end we could find none at all. Among the commoners and all of you, there was no one who deserved to be a Seed. You only lust after glory, wealth, money and possessions, grain, silk brocade, and filmy cottons.

汝曹輩乃至爾難教，叵與共語。反是為非，以曲為直。千載之會，當奈汝曹何？吾從太上老君，周行八極，按行民間，選索種民，了不可得。百姓汝曹，無有應人種者也。但貪榮富錢財，穀帛錦綺絲綿。

It is interesting to note that sexual conduct does not seem to be a major problem in this exposition. A general condemnation of lascivious conduct occurs near the end of the document, but nothing that would link it specifically to the Merging the Pneumas rite.

Evidence that the ritual of Merging the Pneumas was controversial is found in all the “reformers” who are said to have wanted to change or, more often, eliminate it. The first such challenge came from the proponents of the Shangqing revelation in the 360s. It would seem that the rite was controversial, since so many thought to change it somehow, even before there was clear evidence of Buddhist condemnation. But such reformers typically stopped short of condemning or prohibiting the union of pneumas. Usually there is an admission of the importance of progeny and the inevitability of sexual contact, but it also is in some sense extremely

¹³ *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經, 20b.

perilous and should be left to experts. Most reformers claim some vague correction to practice that will make everything all right again, but specifics are few.

Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 was one of the “reformers” who is said to have opposed and outlawed the practice of merging pneumas. In the early fifth century he announced a new revelation proclaiming himself the Celestial Master, and this movement won the official support of the Northern Wei government for many years. In the extended passage below, we see that his position on the Merging the Pneumas rite is actually more nuanced:¹⁴

In the teachings of the bedchamber, as transmitted through the scriptures and contracts of the Yellow and Red, there are one hundred twenty methods, yet with the teachings of [one who] walks the gate and hall there is not a single point of intersection. Ever since the Successor Celestial Master Daoling rose up as a transcendent, there has only been the scripture abroad in the world. Who was there who understood it? How many people have there been who attained eternal life and flew off as transcendents? The most secret elements within the body, the oral instructions for guiding the pneumas, are all in the mouth of the teacher, whereas the teachings of brushes on placards are to regulate people’s hearts. If there is one who understands this and has faith in it, who upholds the scripture with all his heart so that, surrounding herself with incense and fire, refines her essence and achieves success, moving and awakening to the perfected deities so that she can sport with the transcendents, such a person can obtain the ultimate oral teaching. Now people lie and cheat, becoming overly familiar with the Dao and jealous of the gods, glossing over the words of scripture, confusing the rules and methods, recklessly innovating without limit, creating all those false practices that then become customary. I exhort and instruct all of you men and women throughout the realm who have received and worn the contract, and transmit it to each other in ignorance: you cannot control yourselves, yet you take charge of disciples, misleading and deluding the commoners. Those who have committed sins are many, and they will summon forth the test of disaster. Defiling the teachings of the Dao with desire, they will destroy their dharma body. My

¹⁴ *Laojun yinsong jiejing* 老君音誦誡經, 17b–19a; Yang Liansheng 楊聯陞, “*Laojun yinsong jiejing jiaoshi*” 《老君音誦誡經》校釋, *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 28.1 (1957): 51–52.

Intoned Precepts will prune and reform the Yellow and Red, cultivating in its place a purified, unusual method that will have the same merit with the Dao. Those male and female officers and novices who wear the contract of the Yellow and Red, from the promulgation of these *Precepts* on, those who wear it will be inauspicious. If there is someone who does not practice it with care, the Perfected Officer of Earth of the place where they live will inject pneumas and the overseers and emissaries of the oratory or parish will assess and record it independently. I shall give them a test of calamity and when they die, they shall enter the earth prisons. Should their souls be reincarnated, they will be reborn as insect, barnyard animal, pig, or goat. It would be difficult for them to fully repay the sins. I have observed the husbands and wives of the world practicing the Yellow and Red; there was not a single one following the *Heavenly Officer's Essentials*. . . . However, the bedchamber is the basic place to seek life. Moreover, the scriptures and contracts have over one hundred methods, and they are not among the prohibited practices. If a husband and wife delight in the rite, let them strive to ask a pure and upright teacher, then do as he says. Choose whatever you like; to transmit any one rite can be sufficient.

房中之教，通黃赤經契有百二十之法，步門庭之教，亦無交差一言。自從係天師道陵昇僊以來，唯經有文在世，解者為是何人？得長生飛仙者，復是何人？身中至要、導引之訣，盡在師口，而筆謀之教，以官人心。若開解信之者，執經一心，香火自纒，精練功成，感悟真神，與仙人交遊，至訣可得。今後人詐欺，謾道愛神，潤飭經文，改錯法度，妄造無端，作諸偽行，遂成風俗。勸教天下男女受佩契令，愚闖相傳。不能自度，而相領弟子，惑亂百姓，犯罪者眾，招延災考。濁欲道教，毀損法身。吾《誦誠》斷改黃赤，更修清異之法，與道同功。其男女官、鑲生、佩契黃赤者，從今《誦誠》之後，佩者不吉。若有不慎之人，所居止土地真官注氣，靖治典者使者當自校錄。吾與之災考，死入地獄，若輪轉精魂、蟲畜、豬羊而生，償罪難畢。吾觀世人夫妻修行黃赤，無有一條按《天官本要》所行。……然房中，求生之本。經契故有百餘法，不在斷禁之列。若夫妻樂法，但慙進問清正之師，按而行之。任意所好，傳一法亦可足矣。

Here it seems that at least one, and perhaps many, types of Merging the Pneumas rite are correct and without prohibition, but they are often abused and lead to the misfortune of their practitioners.

A similar response from a more mainstream book can be found in the *Scripture of the Bright Protocol for the Four Extremes* 太真玉帝四極明科經. This text damns the rite with faint praise, as a “minor art,” and then warns about all the evil things it can lead one to:¹⁵

The *Yellow Book with a Red Border*, the way of the Perfected One. This is a minor art of sexual intercourse, but it is also a secret matter among the Daoists. Its principle is subtle but vital, all tied in with the two simulacra (*yin* and *yang*) separating and uniting, the three pneumas harmonizing together, blocking disaster and dispelling cyclical misfortune. By returning the essence you nourish the gods, causing one to not die. Among those who have received this rite are some who do violence to their correct pneumas, develop attachments and desires, mix in the muck with no discrimination, become jealous and suspicious, slander and defame each other. That is why the prohibition is particularly heavy. Should anyone commit this sin, they themselves and their seven generations of ancestors would all be sentenced to serve as the left and right guards. Treading through the mountains, eating fire, carrying rocks to fill the river, they suffer the five torments of the three [unfortunate] paths.

太玄都四極明科司《黃書赤界》真一之道。此交接之小術，亦道手之秘事。其理妙峻，皆二象離合，三氣相和，濁災解厄，還精養神，令人不死。受此法者，有虧損正氣，心生愛慾，混濁不節，嫉妬疑貳，攻伐師本，更相譏訕。其禁尤重。有犯此罪，己身及七祖同充左右二官之罰，履山食火，負石填河，三塗五苦。

This Shangqing scripture reflects opinions of the Perfected who appeared to Yang Xi 楊羲. As Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 records, three of them spoke about the nature of the ritual.¹⁶ The Perfected of Pure Vacuity 清虛真人 notes that it was used originally by Zhang Daoling to convert the profane and asserts that it has brought disaster upon all those he knows to have attempted it. The Lady of Purple Tenuity 紫微夫人 argues that although it is a path to longevity, it is a lower path, and will result only in a lowly position in the Water Office. The Perfected of Purple Yang 紫陽真人 warned of attachments formed

¹⁵ *Taizhen yudi siji mingke jing*, 1.11b.

¹⁶ *Zhen'gao*, 2.1a–2a.

through the ritual. All favored a new practice call “pairing the phosphors” whereby one communed directly with a perfected being; this sort of solitary practice clearly did not fill the same social function as the Merging the Pneumas rite.¹⁷

Despite the condemnation of the rite by several of the Perfected, their declarations also acknowledge the many advantages claimed by its practitioners, which are recounted in the following passage:¹⁸

Recently young students have been stirring each other up and competing. Most use the methods of mixed completion and the *Yellow Book with a Red Border*. This truly is the perfected essentials of how the living unite the two simulacra by pairing together. If you can use the Dao to copulate, you can escape from the net, bring a convergence of the Six Seams, circulate the various nodal pneumas, repel disaster and dispel worry, link essence into a precious embryo. If upward it causes the god of the brain to lack for nothing and if downward causes the three [Cinnabar] Fields to be filled to the brim, so that advancing or retreating you will gain passage and the calamity will be eliminated, all around respond to you and you enjoy continuous peace, your enemies hold your reins and do not drop them, the six armies go on a long campaign and all return safely, then you have obtained its benefit. But it is not a big deal among the families of transcendents.

又頃者末學，互相擾競。多用混成及《黃書赤界》之法，此誠有生和合二象匹對之真要也。若以道交接，解脫網羅，推會六合，行諸節氣，却災消患，結精寶胎，上使腦神不虧，下令三田充溢，進退得度而禍除，經緯相應而常康，敵人執轡而不失，六軍長驅而全反者，乃有其益。亦非仙家之盛事也。

This makes the rite sound most inviting. In addition to safety from supernatural justice and its consequent disaster, it assures that your body is fully energized, and that no external force can defeat you. The speaker may disparage this as not an ultimate goal, but it surely was attractive to many of the age.

¹⁷ No details are given of this practice, but the Perfected repeatedly deny that it involves the same behavior as that practiced by a mortal husband and wife. See *Zhen'gao*, 2.2a.

¹⁸ *Zhen'gao*, 6.4b–5a.

The prevalence of this practice in Chinese society is attested in the polemical works of anti-Daoist authors. Perhaps the best known is the account of Zhen Luan 甄鸞 (535–566), who claims to have undergone initiation in this fashion at the age of twenty:¹⁹

Long ago, when I was twenty years of age, I was fond of Daoist arts and went to the Daoist priests. First we practiced the *Yellow Book's* Way of Merging the Pneumas involving the coupling of men and women to the timing of 3-5-7-9. With four eyes, four nostrils, two mouths, two tongues, and four arms, they cause their hearts to face each other directly. Male and female model themselves on the numbers of the twenty-four pneumas in performing the Dao. The true secret lies in the Cinnabar Field. Keeping it secret is critical; you are not to reveal it in public (lit. on the roads). You must not be jealous of each other. Disasters and cyclical dangers confronting the performers are all eliminated. They proclaim: "The Perfected has survived the generation and extended his/her years." They exchange husbands and wives with sex as their primary motivation. Fathers and elder brothers stand before them, with no sense of shame. They call this the "true art of the central pneuma." Nowadays Daoist priests among the people often practice this rite. Using this to seek the Dao, there is something there I cannot understand.

昔年二十之時，心好道術，就諸道士。先行《黃書》合氣三五七九男女交接之道。四目四鼻孔兩口兩舌四手，令心正對，陰陽法二十四氣之數行道，真訣（=訣）在於丹田。唯以禁祕為急，不泄道路，不得更相嫉妬。行者災厄皆除，號為「真人度世延年」。交夫易婦，唯色為先。父兄立前，不知羞恥。自稱「中氣真術」，今民間道士常行此法。以之求道，有所未詳。

This passage makes several claims: that the Merging of Pneumas was taught to beginners new to the faith, that it involved an exchange among married couples, and that close relatives observed the ritual. The emphasis on the erotic character of the rite is in

¹⁹ *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論, in *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 (T.2110), 52.546a3–10; cf. the abbreviated version in *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (T.2103), 52.152a27–b3 (Buddhist sources are cited by the serial number of the text in the Taishō Tripitika, followed by the volume, page, and register). Cf. Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 149–150.

accord with statements by many of our Daoist reformers, though they identify this as a perversion of the rite. This account does show a familiarity with the technical terminology, and reflects a Daoist understanding that the rite is intended to avoid disasters and prolong the lifespan.

Buddhist polemical sources provide further information concerning Daoist practice, but it is equally difficult to evaluate. In particular, there are quotations in Buddhist sources of Daoist scriptures that do not survive in any Daoist version. Consequently, we do not know what sort of texts they were, who used them, for how long, or in what context. For example, we find the following passages quoted by Falin 法琳 (572–640) in his *Discourse on Distinguishing the Correct* (*Bianzheng lun*):²⁰

Laozi said: My master taught me the Golden Elixir Scripture, causing me to concentrate on nourishing the jade stem. With three, five, seven, and nine [breaths] return the *yin* essence, breathing at the Jade Pool, enter the Mystic Darkness. In performing the Dao preserve half and ascend to Great Purity.

老子曰：我師教我金丹經，使我專心養玉莖，三五七九還陰精，呼吸玉池入玄冥，行道半守昇太清。

Laozi said: My master taught me to circulate my master's essence, meeting to consume the golden elixir to ascend to Great Purity. I circulate the three and five, dwell in the seven and nine. Breathing in the Great Mystery at the mouth of the Gate of Life. Resolutely guarding the Jade Pool and worship the Dao Mother.

老子曰：我師教我通師精，會食金丹昇太清，我行三五住七九，呼吸太玄生門口，堅守玉池拜道母。

These passages both refer to the Merging the Pneumas rite unambiguously, and use a variety of terminology associated with it; moreover, the format of seven-character lines rhyming each line, fits the Celestial Master poetic genre known as *qiyan* 七言. On the other hand, certain terms, like *jindan* 金丹 or “golden elixir” seem quite unusual in a Celestial Master context, and it is curious that both

²⁰ *Bianzheng lun*, 52.545c20–24.

passages quote five lines, when Celestial Master poems were all in even numbers of lines.

Even assuming these quotes are authentic references to the rite, they do not seem to tell us much new about it. Other quotations make more direct claims concerning Daoist sexual ritual. The first is a seemingly innocuous comment concerning the audience ritual to be observed toward one's teacher at regular intervals:²¹

The *Statutes for Perfected Performing the Inner Audience Ritual Inside* says: "According to the rules for ritual, on the day of the full or new moon, men and women should first fast for three days then enter to pay court to the master, entering his/her private chamber. Come to the teacher to establish merit. Both male and female submit their fates [?], and are permitted to establish merit, then leave once done. They should establish merit at six different times during the day and night."

《真人內朝律》云：「真人曰，禮法男女至朔望之日，先齋三日，入朝師，入私房。來詣師，立功德。陰陽並進命，聽許立功。訖出，日夜六時常立功德。」

Zhen Luan's comment on this passage is, "This is so vile and disordered that it cannot be spoken of" 此諸猥雜不可聞說 (52.152a 24), but in fact, it seems to refer to a common Daoist ritual with no known sexual elements to it.²²

Other passages seem to address more directly the conduct of the Merging the Pneumas rite, as we see in this passage from an otherwise unknown text called the *Statutes for Inner Service*:²³

The *Statutes for Inner Service of the Family of the Dao* says: "You must not lose the proper order of inner service. You must not lust after external Daoists and lose the teaching of mounting within. You must not prefer external couplings and lose the rite for inner nourishment. You must not put your preferences first and lose the matter of inner cultivation."

²¹ *Bianzheng lun*, 52.545c14–17.

²² The key term seems to be "jinming" 進命 (presenting the fate), which refers to a rite in which one presents pledge offerings to extend one's lifespan and avoid disasters. The term "bingjin" 並進 was used by Kou Qianzhi to refer to a combination of alchemical and liturgical activities. Neither seems to refer to anything sexual. See *Chisongzi zhangli* 赤松子章曆, 3.20a.

²³ *Bianzheng lun*, 52.545c17–20.

《道家內侍律》稱：「不得失內侍之序。不得貪外道，失中御之教。不得好外交接，失內養之禮。不得好在前，失內修之事。」

This would seem to be an injunction exhorting Daoists to practice the rite only within their own community. This theme is taken up in a passage quoted by Falin that is more explicit:²⁴

The Daoist Statutes for Visiting the Master's Home of the Inner Rites of the Perfected says: "Circulate the pneumas in order. You must not rashly refuse the ugly and approach your favorites, taking from others and superseding the order."

又《真人內禮詣師家行道律》云：「行氣以次，不得任意排醜近好，抄截越次。」

This does seem to refer to the order in which the rite is performed, commanding the participant, presumably the master, to not have favorites. It is possible to imagine this in the context of a public sexual ritual in which participants join with a series of partners in some sort of determined order that should not be perverted by personal preference; a sort of well organized, highly ritualized public orgy. It might also, however, be possible to imagine this as counsel to a Daoist master as he or she sets the schedule of ritual events for the month, urging the libationer to avoid favoritism in scheduling independent sessions with different individuals or families. It certainly indicates that some individuals performed the ritual with a number of partners, and that there was a preferred sequence in which these pairing occurred. Either way, it points to what must have been a recurrent problem in ritualized sexual intercourse: the interference of the personal preferences of the participants, especially the master, in the conduct of the rite.

It is, of course, possible to dismiss these accounts as polemics anxious to show Daoism's worst side. Kristofer Schipper offers a very different view of the rite. He sees it as a marriage rite between two initiated church members who have progressed through the various stages of the novitiate and now are ready to attain full

²⁴ *Bianzheng lun*, 52.545c27–28.

membership in the church by merging physically through the rite.²⁵ At the same time, their registers, which certify their rank and confer generals and clerks as protector figures, are merged, with two Seventy-five General Registers combining to make one Hundred Fifty General Register shared by the couple. They are led in this ritual by a master, but there is no mention of an audience of relatives and friends.²⁶

There is a further dispute concerning whether the liturgy describes a rite practiced by two novices, supervised by a master, or by a novice and a master. Chang Chaojan has made the strongest argument for the latter view.²⁷ One problem with this view is that the two participants are clearly of opposite sexes, but masters were normally of the same sex as their novices, at least according to the *Protocol of the External Registers* 外籙儀.

There is good evidence supporting both views. There is a template for the memorial awarding the Hundred Fifty General Register preserved in the *Protocol of the External Registers*. It is not explicit, but it does seem the ritual involves the merging of two Seventy-five General Registers, and the timeline given in the *Protocol* for receiving registers puts this conferral at around 21 years of age, which seems appropriate by all accounts. Clearly this is not in accord with accounts claiming that the rite was used to initiate new members of the faith.

On the other hand, we have several passages that suggest that Zhen Luan's description is not wholly misguided. First, there is an archaic code of conduct preserved in a third-century scripture called the *Demon Statutes of Lady Blue*. Item ten of that list of

²⁵ Kristofer M. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 151–152.

²⁶ In support of this, one could also cite *Zhengyi fawen taishang wailu yi* 正一法文太上外籙儀, where a master recommending a candidate for initiation affirms that the student has been taught “the perfected words about the dispensations of male and female, the two principles (i.e., *yin* and *yang*) of husband and wife, the essentials of the Seed Citizens, the 3-5-7-9 method of initiating each other so that both emerge from the Three Realms and roam about the Three Pures” 輒具告真言陰陽之施，夫妻二儀，種民之要，三五七九，更相過度，同出三界，逍遙三清 (21a).

²⁷ Chang Chaojan 張超然, “Rudao yu xingdao: Zhao Sheng yixi Tianshi jiaotuan de huangchi jiaofa” 入道與行道：趙昇一系天師教團的黃赤教法, *Taiwan zongjiao yanjiu* 臺灣宗教研究 3 (2003): 49–88.

commandments is the following:²⁸

You must not transmit the Dao to adolescent girls, taking this opportunity to enter their “gate of life,” harming their gods and transgressing against their pneumas. This is refractory, evil, and Dao-less. You will die and leave no posterity. You must not turn men into women (turn men over so that they become women) so that *yin* and *yang* are inverted and confused.

不得傳道童女，因入生門，傷神犯氣，逆惡无道，身死无後。不得反男為女，陰陽倒錯。

The first part of this precept appears to address individuals using the sexual rite to proselytize, and the act would seem to be between a master and a novice or citizen of the opposite sex. It is curiously paired with what looks to be a condemnation of homosexual behavior. Precept twenty-one of this series is also relevant:²⁹

You must not carelessly transmit the red pneumas to profane persons, so that mouth, hand, breast, and heart each come into contact in turn. This is to abandon the Dao and rebel against one’s one master; to be lawless. Heaven will take away 300 counters.

不得以赤炁妄傳俗人，口手胷心更相交接，委道自叛師主无法。天奪筭三百。

This is a prohibition on transmitting red pneumas generated through the sex rite to non-Daoists. This again suggests that the Merging the Pneumas rite was a separate transmission untied to the ranks of the novitiate. Note that this sort of improper transmission is considered a betrayal of both the Dao and one’s personal master. Might this be considered evidence that the master was directly involved in the initiation?

The *Initiation Protocol of the Yellow Book* supports this view that the rite was performed by all church members as they reach adulthood. There we read that:³⁰

²⁸ *Nüqing guilü*, 3.2a–b.

²⁹ *Nüqing guilü*, 3.3b.

³⁰ *Shangqing huangshu guodu yi*, 1a.

When disciples receive the Dao in their master's parish, they must not pass 20 *sui* of age without being initiated. If they receive the Dao when more than 20 *sui*, they are immediately initiated.

夫弟子在師治受道，不得過二十不過度，二十外受道即過度。

So, according to this document, most Daoists would have first participated in the rite in their teens, presumably before marriage, as a way of marking their entrance into the adult community of believers.

Another type of evidence comes from records surrounding ordination and promotion in the Daoist church. We have seen that Schipper and Lü Pengzhi argue that the Merging the Pneumas rite was performed at the time of promotion from a Seventy-five General Register to the Hundred Fifty General Register. We see references to something like this in Daoist sources, tied to the key term “mystic dispensation” (*xuanshi* 玄施). The earliest evidence for this term is also our earliest bit of hard evidence for the movement, the Zhang Pu Stele 米巫祭酒張普題字 of 173. There an emissary of the Supreme Lord Lao, a demon soldier named Hu Jiu 鬼兵胡九, announces the promotion of a group of six libationers. He says to them as a group that they “trod the transcendent course and achieved the Dao; the mystic dispensation has extended your lifespan” 仙歷道成，玄施延命. There is also a reference to the mystic dispensation in a document preserved in the *Protocols of the External Register*, the “Petition to Give Thanks for the Grace of Promotion from Seventy-five to Hundred Fifty Register” 七十五進百五十錄謝恩章 mentions in this context that “the Mystic Dispensation is vast and profound” 玄施洪深,³¹ here supporting Schipper's contention that the rite was closely tied to this promotion in rank that denoted full membership in the church as a libationer qualified to minister to the families of Daoist citizens in his or her parish. Finally, we find the term in one of the original Lingbao 靈寶 scriptures, the *Essential Scripture of the Petition Statements for the Transmission of Scriptures of the Perfected of the Supreme Ultimate* (*Taiji zhenren chuanjing zhangci yaojing* 太極真人傳經章辭要經). Here we find a petition for the transmission of the Lingbao scriptures, which records that the

³¹ See *Zhengyi fawen taishang wailu yi*, 6a.

individual, having left behind the demonic profane, takes refuge in the great Dao, entrusting his or her person to the orthodox perfected, and consequently receives the Mystic Dispensation, which authorizes one to wear the Limitless Mysterious Register 三一無終玄籙.³² These records demonstrate that the Merging the Pneumas rite was an integral part of the church's ritual program, intimately linked to promotion within the Daoist bureaucracy, since its inception, and was still considered an essential rite for those aspiring to the higher teachings of the Lingbao revelations. By contrast, the ordination documents and ritual form recorded in Dunhuang manuscript S.203 include materials for promotion from the Seventy-five to the Hundred Fifty General register, but they make no mention of the Mystic Dispensation.³³

There is another important witness, which derives from the Dongyuan 洞淵 or Piercing the Abyss movement. Their primary scripture, the *Scripture of Divine Spells Piercing the Abyss* 太上洞淵神咒經, dates from around 420, the founding of the Liu Song dynasty. The Dongyuan movement was openly millennial, with a firm expectation for world calamity followed by a new world order. Their attitude toward the Merging the Pneumas rite seems ambiguous. It is clear that, pursuant to a specific revelation foretelling the coming cataclysm, the rite was deemed no longer necessary, because the Heavens were directly in control. The movement therefore disparaged Celestial Master adherents as “Yellow and Red Daoists” 黃赤道士, and warned their followers against associating with them.³⁴ At the same time, however, much

³² See *Taishang lingbao weiyi dongxuan zhenyi ziran jingjue* 太上靈寶威儀洞玄真一自然經訣, *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004), 4:99. This part of the manuscript derives from Dunhuang manuscript P.2452. See Wang Ka 王卡, *Dunhuang Daojiao wenxian yanjiu* 敦煌道教文獻研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 104. Here I read “三” for “二,” and “籙” for “錄,” both common graphic errors in manuscripts.

³³ On this text see Lü Pengzhi 呂鵬志, “Tianshidao shoulu keyi: Dunhuang xieben S203 kaolun” 天師道授籙科儀：敦煌寫本 S203 考論, *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica* 77.1 (2006): 79–166. Moreover, this text makes clear that the original generals, clerks, and soldiers of the Seventy-five General Register are all promoted and replaced by new spirits, to which are added seventy-five additional spirits to make the full complement of 150. This element fits uneasily in Schipper's schema.

³⁴ *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing*, 20.20b.

of the scripture seems to speak of a time before this revelation, when the Merging the Pneumas rite was still not only proper, but necessary. One reason was that the merit created through performance of the rite could aid one's dead ancestors in the next world:³⁵

The Dao said: "After someone has died, but only until it reaches the twenty-first day (lit. the third seventh day)—no matter whether they were ten years old, five, or one hundred—you can create retroactive merit. Simply, on behalf of the deceased, perform the ten refinings, do good deeds, and perform the 3-5-7-9 rite³⁶ (i.e., *heqi*) in order to establish merit and redeem faults. If the deceased possess no register, also bestow on him or her a register, and give him/her the *Yellow Book of the Heavenly Mystery*. This is the great scripture. If you receive this one contract, there is nothing that will not succeed."

道言：「凡人已死不及三七日者，十年五年百年，皆可追作功德耳。但為亡人十鍊行善，行二五七九，立功補過。若先亡人無籙，亦加籙，與之《天玄黃書》，此乃大經。統受此一契，無不包通也。」

In the case of a deceased person who had never received a register, one can through the performance of the rite receive a register on the deceased's behalf. If the deceased already possessed a register, the rite would serve to eliminate faults and build merit, which would aid the deceased in navigating the other world while passing through the Three Offices. This passage suggests that performance of the rite might be necessary in order to receive a register, but that the document directly related to this performance was, rather, a contract. Presumably, all members of the church, whatever their rank, could receive this contract upon successful completion of the Merging the Pneumas rite.

The *Scripture of the Divine Spells* also sheds light on the practice of the ritual among families of Daoist citizens. The following passage introduces two such Daoist families, who respond differently to the challenge of performing the Merging the Pneumas rite:³⁷

³⁵ *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing*, 20.9b.

³⁶ Reading “三” for “二,” a common copyist's error.

³⁷ *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing*, 20.24a–b.

The Dao said: “From this time on, I announce to all people of later ages, when you receive the Dao, husband and wife must receive it as a pair. You must not be just one. Now when you receive the *Yellow Book*, you should be initiated by the three masters, then the Dao will confer the Yellow Contract. If you are not initiated, you personally will be tortured and in future incarnations will not have human bodies again. How much more is this true about pursuing transcendence? You certainly cannot deceive people. If you worship the Dao but do not offer up incense and candles, you will personally experience torture, and the torture will extend to your descendants. Once there were two families, who lived near each other. Each received the *Yellow Book* with the Great Inner and Outer Contracts. One family had the three masters initiate them, and they performed the Dao every day. A Daoist priest dispelled disasters, everything they encountered turned out to be an auspicious day, and all went according to their desire. When the husband and wife ascended as transcedents, the Heavenly beings protected them. There was another family that also received [the *Yellow Book*], but did not go through initiation, nor did they have [initiation by] the three masters. They became jealous of each other and consequently did not perform the Dao. They did not live out their natural lifespan. Within two years all members of the household had perished. The Heavenly beings executed them. When you receive the Dao, you must follow every line of the scripture.

道言：「自今以去，告後世人，汝等受道，夫妻對受，不得偏也。夫受《黃書》，三師過度，道受黃契。不過，身考，後世不復人身也，沉復求仙也？亦不得誑人也。奉道不香火，身必有考，考及子孫。昔有二家相近，都悉受《黃書》、內外大契。一家得三師過度，日日行道。道士消災，觸事好日，不違人意。夫妻上仙，天人護之。有一家，亦受而不過度，而無三師。自共相妬嫉，遂不行道。不終天壽，二年中皆滅門族，天人誅之矣。受道，須一一順其經文也。」

This passage is very suggestive. First we see that receiving the Dao is done in couples, and that married couples must receive it together. The *Protocol of the External Registers* confirms this, telling us that one had to marry someone with the same rank of register, and in preparation for this there were forms to raise the rank of the lower party quickly. It would also tend to confirm that it was often married couples practicing the rite, rather than master and novice. Moreover, it was a sort of initiation for Daoist citizens

rather than officials, and is marked by conferral of a contract (*qi* 契) rather than a register. However, when we move to the example of the two families, we see that the entire first family received initiation, including the blessing of the Three Masters, and practiced the Merging of Pneumas daily. The family that did not receive initiation fell into jealousy, never practiced the rite together, and then came to a very bad end.

How should one interpret this parable? Proper initiation by three masters and regular practice of the rite seem key to achieving longevity, prosperity, and good fortune. The key role of jealousy, also mentioned by Zhen Luan, is intriguing. Is this because the rite truly involved exchanging sexual partners, or merely because of the public nudity involved in performing the rite before an audience? The second family seems to have desired the contracts of the *Yellow Book*, which were talismanic in character and hence protected the possessor from supernatural harm, but did not intend to actually practice the rite. They did not even invite the masters in to instruct them in the correct performance of the ritual, which would have at least involved public sex, if not sex with one or more of the masters.

What can we conclude, then, from this examination of surviving references to the esoteric ritual of Merging the Pneumas? It is impossible to reconcile all of the evidence; no single picture of how the rite functioned fits all surviving references to it. This was perhaps inevitable, since we are looking at a span of more than four centuries over a vast geographical expanse. Some elements of the rite seem clear, whereas others are murkier. It was clearly an esoteric rite, and that is the source of much of our befuddlement. It was credited with a variety of possible good results, most commonly the avoidance of disaster and the extension of the lifetime, but it also posed dangers for those who could not control themselves during its performance. In the early church, it seems to have been closely tied to millennial ideas of a coming apocalypse that only a small group of Seed People would survive. Performance of the rite was essential to inclusion in that group. Moreover, there is ample testimony that the rite was an important element of proselytization, and that initiation into the movement at some level involved performance of the rite. A Yellow Contract sometimes

marked the completion of the rite, and this was spoken of as the Mystic Dispensation. It therefore seems unlikely to me that the rite was limited only to individuals who had attained the Hundred Fifty General Register and the rank of libationer. It may well be that a full libationer holding this register was required for the initial performance of the rite, whether as a direct participant or as a supervisor and officiant. The libationer would then be not the recipient but the dispenser of the Mystic Dispensation. It seems likely that all libationers had to master the rite and be ready to teach it as part of their pastorly duties. It also seems clear that the rite was sometimes performed between married spouses, and perhaps this was even the norm, but it could not have been true in all cases. Unmarried individuals must also have had occasion to perform the rite, and masters participated, in some fashion, in the rite for a wide variety of people. Given the repeatedly expressed concern for jealousy, the rite certainly involved situations that would have been considered immodest in normal company, involving public nudity and sexual conduct before others if not actual sexual intercourse with partners other than one's spouse. We cannot be certain if the rite was ever celebrated communally or was always confined to the family oratory, celebrated by a single family, perhaps with the addition of a libationer or two. The communal celebration of a sexual ritual like the Merging the Pneumas would have fostered a unique social solidarity, and even communities linked through a common master in a family-centered practice of the rite would have shared a special bond, but jealousy would have threatened both sorts of ties. Moreover, on the personal level, eliminating jealousy meant conquering the emotions surrounding one of the most intimate realms of human experience. Perhaps one function of the Merging the Pneumas rite was precisely learning this equanimity of emotions when faced with the passions of sexual desire, and this control over fleshly desires and their sublimation to the workings of the Dao qualified one to become a Seed Person and enter into the perfected realm of Great Peace. We can be confident, I would argue, that the overwhelming majority or individuals who belonged to the Daoist church and self-identified as a Daoist participated in a Merging the Pneumas rite in some capacity at some point in their life.

早期天師道合炁儀式的踐行與意義

祁泰履

摘要

早期天師道的「合炁」儀式從張道陵創教的二世紀中葉一直秘傳到宋代，為天師道的核心儀式活動之一。雖已有數位道教研究學者對合炁儀式進行過仔細研究，不明之處仍然甚多，甚至對於儀式的最終目標、實踐過程、時間、地點以及參與者的人數與身份都未有全面的了解。本文將檢視現存道教經典，包括與該儀式直接有關的經典和指出其不正確施行方式的科範類材料，還有來自道教外部的對該儀式的批評。由於「合炁」是一種秘傳儀式，天師道經典系統內並不存在一部權威性儀式文本；而現存的《黃書》和《上清黃書過度儀》都屬於上清經系，因此無法作為了解天師道儀式的可靠證據。與此相似，佛教論辯資料中所描繪的儀式樣貌雖可辨識，卻未必完全正確。《道藏》中的間接證據顯示普通的天師道道民也會定期施行儀式，並非局限於祭酒。作為儀式的教導者與傳授者，天師道祭酒扮演著特殊的角色。合炁儀式之目的在於消災，這在《上清黃書過度儀》中表現為著名於「長生玉曆」之上；而防止「更相嫉妬」似也是其一個重要的近期目標。

關鍵詞：合炁、儀式、道教、祭酒