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Man, Nature and the Infinite
The Scope of Taoist Thunder Magic Rituals

2013
Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden
Contents

Foreword .......................................................................................................................... VII
Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
Part I: Aspects of the Pantheon in Thunder Magic .................................................... 8
Part II: Thunder Rituals of the One Breath of Anterior Heaven (TT 1220: 90) ............ 32
Part III: Great Rituals and Prayers of the Emissary Joy of Heaven (TT 1220: 91) ....... 68
Part IV: Great Rituals and Prayers of the Emissary Joy of Heaven and the Six I of Anterior Heaven (TT 1220: 92) .............................................................. 86
Part V: Man, Nature and the Infinite: The Unity of Thunder Rituals ......................... 123
Part VI: Chang Shan-yüan: Comprehensive Discussion of All Rituals (TT 1220: 67)... 132
Part VII: A Tabular Survey and Formal Assessment of Chapters 90-92, Concerning Divine Names, Amulets, Spells and Practical Applications ............................................. 153
Concluding Observations .............................................................................................. 163
Appendix .......................................................................................................................... 165
I) The Most Important Amulets ...................................................................................... 165
II) Bibliography:
   Reference Works in Western Languages ................................................................. 169
   Taoist Canonical Sources .......................................................................................... 172
   Chinese and Japanese Reference Works ................................................................. 173
   Abbreviations ............................................................................................................. 175
Glossary of Personal Names .......................................................................................... 176
Man, Nature and the Infinite, the Scope of Taoist Thunder Magic Rituals is a theme that the oscillating and often opaque presentations in A Corpus of Taoist Rituals Tao-fa hui-yüan 道 法 會 元 (TT 1220) suggest. Almost every chapter of Great Rituals in the canonical collection provides methods and ritual devices that are comprehensive means of help and relief.

Thunder Magic rituals represent the exorcist Taoism and a vast range of ritual competence: calling in rainfall, making the skies clear up and expelling any sort of distress. Everything will be fine and every trouble will be resolved as long as this or that Great Ritual is performed and the marvellous Thunder amulets are properly produced and applied.

The intent and the provisions of the individual Great Rituals in A Corpus of Taoist Rituals may remind us of old Ling-pao scriptures like the Charts and Scriptures of the Twenty Four Vital Energies of the Numinous Jewel in the Grotto Heaven Tung-hsüan ling-pao erh-shih-ssu sheng t`u-ching 洞 玄 靈 寶 二 十 四 生 圖 經 (TT 1407) that also offers an individual and comprehensive avenue to salvation.

We understand that a Taoist priest never had at his avail the whole set of all canonical titles, and he relied on the limited canon that he had received from his teacher masters. The same holds true for the transmission of the documents of Thunder Magic rituals. The priests could perform them as singular exorcist events that could also be accommodated within the frame of larger rituals with a troupe of practitioners participating. Rituals of salvation, for example, may provide such a ritual frame.

We described the basic conditions of Taoist Thunder Magic rituals in vol.61 of Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes (AKM) relying on sources that we attributed to Wang Wen-ch’ing 王 文 賜 (1093-1153) who was a renowned early protagonist of Thunder Magic rituals. In the Sung-period Taoist exorcism came to be labeled Thunder Magic rituals 雷 法/五 雷 法.

Wang Wen-ch’ing and his followers rationalized and organized long established Taoist exorcist methods as an erudite occupation for the priest of Heavenly Masters Taoism. The priest and Thunder specialist could rely on the intellectual schemes of internal alchemy, of astrology and other crafts that were used to interpret nature. The priest would use ritual means for the sake of his client to interfere in the course of nature. The actual ritual procedures and the individual religious preparations show Thunder Magic rituals to be markedly different from any shamanist approaches.
Thunder Magic rituals were means of operation for the Taoist exorcist who was devoted to cultivate fortuitous matters 吉事/红事. It was a late development to widen the competence of the Thunder specialist to include the care for the souls of the deceased 白事 which happened after the time of Wang Wen-ch'ing. The present study sticks to such late materials and traditions that, however, still maintain the preoccupation with fortuitous matters.

No doubt, the scholars in traditional China observed and recognized the vast range of exorcist concerns throughout Taoist history. The guardians of the imperial libraries were especially vigilant observers. They formulated, for example, the bibliographic description of the Taoist Scriptures 道经 in the History of the Sui-Dynasty, Sui-shu, ching-chi chih 35, 30, pp.1091-1094 隋書經籍志 ed. Chung-hua Comp., Peking 1973, and arranged them to appear after the end of the four proper sections of the Literary Monograph 經籍志 in the History of the Sui-Dynasty.

The History of the Sui-Dynasty Sui-shu 34, 29, p. 1003 speaks about tao道 and its unfathomable meaning. The kings in antiquity 先王 are said to have feared that common people would get bewildered and had the respective Taoist books assessed as beyond the limit 方外, especially as they rarely talked about matters in the sense of the Six Classics 六經之義. Taoism and Buddhism finally were seen as teachings 教 that were beyond the limit and far off the track of the Saints 聖人 op. cit. p.1099.

The Sui-shu accommodates the Taoist exorcist rituals that are used to expel disasters and distress 消災除厄之法, in the section Taoist Scriptures between the description of both, the rituals of purification and offerings namely the chai- and chiao-liturgies 齋/醮, pp.1092, 1093.

In the T'ang-period the Taoist priest and scholar Chang Wang-fu 張萬福 who flourished in the early 8th ct., can represent the many Taoists who made efforts to advertise and describe the welter of Taoist exorcist competence. We additionally name as outstanding representatives of exorcist Taoism the Heavenly Masters Chang Hsü-ching 張虛靜 (1092-1126) and Chang Yü-ch'u 張宇初 (1361-1410) who variously showed the tradition of exorcist rituals to be integral parts of the Taoist profession and also proved the indispensability of ritual Taoism for society.
There are three liturgical pillars for the Taoist vocation, and exorcism is one of them. It is wrong to assume that the eventual use of blood in exorcism disqualifies such rituals as part of Heavenly Masters Taoism. The prohibition of blood sacrifice refers to committing human sacrifice. We remember the renowned Thunder specialist and priest of Heavenly Masters Taoism Sa Shou-chien 薩守堅 who flourished in the early twelfth century. He was reported to have used his Thunder might to destroy such a wicked cult.

The present study takes up the three chapters 90-92 in *A Corpus of Taoist Rituals* that share common divine patrons, ritual devices and the focus on the quality of Anterior Heaven (先天). The materials are useful to illustrate the scope of Taoist exorcism and also to reveal the grand design of integration that relates man, nature, and the infinite.

The purpose of the study is to present conclusive and fascinating materials. Certainly, the practitioner who at that time was initiated receiving the *Great Rituals* from his teacher master was better off than we are today who have no access to those secret oral instructions concerning the ritual performance.

And yet, I found it worthwhile trying to present these materials. I could enjoy the advice and help from friends and colleagues in Taiwan and in USA for which I am very grateful indeed. I am surely responsible for any errors that may remain.

Taking the situation of the modern Taoist profession into account I feel that many more studies of the canonical exorcist traditions are needed and hope that my book is a contribution in this field of study.

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Berlin 2012