

Florian C. Reiter

The Prison of Fire for Demons 道教法術

A Study of Taoist Exorcist Devices

Asien- und Afrika-Studien 55
der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Harrassowitz Verlag

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Band 55

2020

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <https://dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <https://dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

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Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printing and binding: Rosch-Buch Druckerei GmbH, Scheßlitz

Printed in Germany

ISSN 0948-9789

ISBN 978-3-447-11550-6

e-ISBN 978-3-447-39080-4

Contents

Preface.	VII
Introduction.	1
Part I.	23
Characteristic Features of the Exorcism in Divine Empyrean Taoism, in Five Thunders Magic Rituals, and the Prison for Demons	23
The Great Rituals of the Five Thunders and Fire Carriages of the Most Supreme Three and Five Shao-yang with the Iron Face 太上三五邵陽鐵面火車五雷大法	35
Part II	49
Prisons for Demons	49
The Prison of Fire for Demons	52
The Fire Registers 火籙部	62
The Style of Official Declarations for Operating a Prison of Fire 火獄行遣牒式	95
Aspects of the Prison of Fire in the Collection: Pearls Inherited from the Sea of Exorcist Rituals 法海遺珠	100
Part III.	111
The Divine Stick of T'ien-p'eng 天蓬尺	111
Bibliography	119
Abbreviations	119
Reference Works in Western Languages	119
Reference Works and Sources in Asiatic Languages	122
Sources from the Taoist Canon.	123
Glossary of Personal Names.	125

Preface

We study the sources in the *Taoist Canon* of the Ming period that offer insights into the history and the workings of Taoist exorcism 道教法術 that we understand as a constituent part of Heavenly Masters Taoism 天師道. Some canonical biographical sources illustrate the vast range of ritual and exorcist activities that the Taoist Priests or Ritual Masters 道士/法師 displayed. They used two different modes, namely the *Tao-Arena* 道場 and the *Exorcist Arena* 法場. Whereas the *Tao-Arena* was the frame for large communal offering- and fasting-festivities 醮/齋, the *Exorcist Arena* offered treatment for individual problems that plagued individuals and also communities which is the special field of Taoist proficiency that attracts our interest.

It is striking how much more the *Tao-Arena* captured the interest of Western scholars whereas the activities in the *Exorcist Arena* were widely neglected. The reality of daily life, for example in Taiwan, shows Taoist exorcism to be very much present in the life of common people, and some Taoist families even manage to live alone on performing so-called small rituals of exorcism 小法事 at the home altar and sometimes in the Taoist Office 道士部 at major temples.

We find it fascinating to connect what we see in Taiwan with reports and documents in the *Canon*, which sheds light on the long history of Taoist exorcist culture in imperial China as well as in present times. Of course, it is hardly possible to prove definite lines of transmission concerning specific exorcist practices including the many ritual devices and tools, but we can certainly document the existence of some well-known ritual devices for the periods Sung to Yüan, and they existed most likely even much earlier. We use materials from the Sung to the Ming periods that the *Canon* preserves in extended literary collections that illustrate the fascinating religious culture of Taoism.

Our studies were greatly facilitated by a research project at the *Centre for the Studies of Chinese Religions* at the National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan, and financially supported by the CCKF-foundation for which I am very grateful indeed. I also want to express my heartfelt thanks to my Taiwanese friends and colleagues at the religious department of Fu Jen University, to the Center for the Studies of Chinese Religions at the National Chengchi University, and also to the Center for Chinese Studies at the National Library in Taipei. They all granted me kindly every support they could provide.

Berlin, October 2020

Florian C. Reiter

Introduction

Generally speaking, demons play an essential role in Chinese religions and especially in Taoist religious culture. We address this basic aspect of Taoism and consider some important notions concerning demons and the means to deal with them. In the main part of the book we take up information from the informative texts that the *Taoist Canon* from the Ming-period 正統道藏 preserves.

The question what the term *demons* 鬼神 implies must not be summarized with the notion that the souls of the deceased can become demons that haunt people. The veneration of ancestors at the family altar and once a year at the grave are thought to be crucial to keep the souls of the ancestors appeased and prevent them from becoming deserted souls and possibly baleful demons. The average person wants to feel sure that there is no need to think of them as demons. On the other hand, the vicissitudes of life and the reality of nature seem to create almost indefinite lots of demons independent from any ancestors or human society.

The Taoists of old thought to have the ritual power to neutralize demons and to bar them from doing harm to human life. They had designed exorcist means either to put demons to service or to ban and destroy them. An old and well-known documentation is the book *Pao-p'u tzu nei-p'ien* 抱朴子內篇 by Ko Hung 葛洪 (283–343). The author features amulets that are said to protect people who have to enter mountainous regions.¹ It was essential to know the names of the demonic spirit forces which, for example, the canonical text *Nü-ch'ing kuei-lü* 女青規律 documents in long lists of names. Chapter 1 of the *Kuei-lü* lists hundred demons that allegedly are related to the heavens, to the sexagesimal cycle, the twenty-eight Stellar-Mansions 二十八宿, the Six Chia 六甲 periods, the wind and the stars of the Dipper of the North 北斗星. Chapter 2 lists the demons of mountains and seas, trees and animals. Especially noteworthy is chapter 4, listing the demons of wind and water that dwell in tombs, or demons that sorcerers and heterodox Taoists allow to roam through the world.²

1 *Pao-p'u tzu nei-pien* ch. 17. Chung-hua shu-chü, Taipei 1967. See Kristofer Schipper, in *Companion*, pp. 70–71.

2 Sorcerers and heterodox Taoists were seen as a problem, see for example TT 1220 *Tao-fa hui-yüan* 198.12b–13a *The Ritual Master Encounters on His Way a Wicked Shaman* 法師路遇邪巫品. See Florian C. Reiter, “Taoist Thunder Magic and the Elimination of Obnoxious Spirits, with Reference to *A Corpus of Taoist Rituals* (道法會元) and Exorcist Rituals in Northern Taiwan”, pp. 277–296, esp. p. 292, in the same author ed.: *Exorcism in Daoism, A Berlin Symposium*, in AAS 36.

Chapter 6 lists plague demons and those of death and the grave. Immoral behaviour provoke such demonic forces to harass people.³

Of course, in the following centuries after the *Kuei-lü* was compiled new names of demons kept appearing since any geographic location such as mountains, marshes, water ways, roads and pools were perceived as areas where demonic forces would be lingering around, possibly interrupting the roads where salesmen commuted. Demons could appear as water monsters in the form of venomous snakes. Such water demons or monsters were no partners for any ritual communication and could be destroyed or banned through exorcist means. However, a priest may in some other case communicate with a demon, which the following spell shows. The spell implies that a positive engagement of demonic forces is possible. We quote the formula of an admonition for a Thunder demon 雷鬼:⁴

I know your name, I know your surname, I am your elder brother, you are my younger brother. If you do not come, I will scold your nine ancestors. If I turn my back on you, younger brother, I will fall down into Hades for eternity. When I call your name, all the world will know, night demons in the Thunders, black crows in the clouds. Thunder demon, Thunder demon, come speedily. I present the law and the order of the Thunder Ancestor, the Great God-Emperor.⁵

On the other hand, we have the example of a destructive spell that is meant to keep out demons or to destroy them:

Open the Gates of Heaven; Close the Windows of Earth; Keep open the Gate of Men; Bar the way of the demons; Pierce the heart of the demons; Crush the belly of the demons!

The spell is called *The Six Instructions* 六訣 and is often incorporated in the descriptive and magic texts that direct the silent recitation and meditation on single graphic components of an amulet. We have many canonical texts that present the amulets in *disassembled form* 散形, illustrating and naming the merit of each single dot and stroke with the writing brush that finally altogether compose the respective amulet in its *assembled form* 聚形.

In the Sung period Taoist priests and scholars such as Lin Ling-su 林靈素, Wang Wen-ch'ing 王文卿, and Sa Shou-chien 薩守堅 formulated the essential features of the Divine Empyrean exorcism *Shen-hsiao fa* 神霄法 which was designed to destroy and kill demons, and also to amend the harm they had

3 TT 790, 3rd ct. (?). See Adrianus Dudink, in *Companion*, pp. 127–129.

4 TT 1220: 83.5a–5b.

5 TT 1220: 83. 3a–5b. Also see Florian C. Reiter, “Taoist Thunder Magic (Wulei fa 五雷法), Some Aspects of its Schemes, Historical Position and Developments”, pp. 27–46, esp. p. 33, in the same author ed., *Foundations of Taoist Ritual, A Berlin Symposium*, in AAS 33.

caused.⁶ Wang Wen-ch'ing introduced and promoted in his time the name and the practice of the Five Thunders Magic exorcism *Wu-lei fa* 五雷法.

The performance of any Thunder Magic exorcism was based on the transformation of the priest 變神 into a divine *alter ego*, which was a specific Thunder divinity that the priest could let emerge within his body.⁷ He would exteriorize that divinity, following an appropriate meditation. In fact, the priest focusses on the spiritual and energetic power of the intestines which results in a religious application of *internal alchemy* 內丹. Wang Wen-ch'ing gives a good example in his tract *Refining the Spiritual Force* 鍊神:⁸

Let your divine forces congeal and sit quietly in meditation. You concentrate on the one most shining point in the *Kidney Palace* 腎宮. Within a short moment, fire arises, gradually engulfing your body all around. You blow out one load of breath⁹ from your mouth, and the ashes altogether are blown away. Concentrate on the breaths in the five colours of the five directions which mix and combine to shape one united aura of radiant shining in purple and golden colours, and this [aura] transforms itself into an infant 嬰兒 that gradually grows big. [This image] has the beak of a phoenix with silver teeth, red hair and a body like a quail. Both eyes let fiery shining penetrate [a distance] of ten thousand *chang* 丈. The two wings also have [the shining of] fire. A head with eyes emerges on both forelegs, and each of them also emits a fiery shining. The belt has the colour of gold. The left hand clutches a fire auger and the right hand clutches a mallet with eight angles. A fiery dragon winds around the body.¹⁰ Thereupon you concentrate and see yourself as this *Divine General of the Five Thunders*. Standing on the earth the head touches heaven. Close around you there are fiery clouds that wrap you up with the divine and fierce might of blazing fire. This is Blazing Fire, the Heavenly Lord Teng 焱火鄧天君 who is the ruling and commanding divinity in the Rituals of the Fire Chariots *Huo-chü fa* 火車法.

Heavenly Lord Deng is the leading figure in a trio of Thunder divinities that Wang Wen-ch'ing championed. The other two names are Hsin Han-ch'en 辛

6 Florian C. Reiter, "Some Notices on the Magic Agent Wang (Wang *ling-kuan*) at Mt. Ch'i-ch'ü in Tzu-t'ung District, Szechuan Province," in ZDMG 148, pp. 323–342, referring to the report about Sa Shou-chien in TT 1476 *Sou-shen chi* 2.24a–26a.

7 Florian C. Reiter, *Basic Conditions of Taoist Thunder Magic* 道教雷法, in AKM 61.

8 TT 1220: 124.1b–2a, for the translation see Florian C. Reiter: "A Preliminary Study of the Taoist Wang Wen-ch'ing (1093–1153) and his Thunder Magic (*lei-fa*)," in: ZDMG 152, p. 172.

9 In this case the translation *breath* 氣 is convenient and reasonable. However, the intrinsic meaning of vital energy or energies must always be kept in mind.

10 The text TT 1220: 80.1a–1b *Yen-huo lü-ling Teng t'ien-chün ta-fa* 焱火律令鄧天君大法 shows a very good example for later (probably 13th ct.) *addenda* and embellishments of the status symbols for this divinity. The divinity is said to have, among some other characteristics, three eyes, and below the two wings there are two heads. The left one is in charge of the wind, and the right one is in charge of the rain. The whole body of the divinity is engulfed in fierce fire and is riding a red dragon. There is no definite canon of such marks of identity which religious imagination moulds and enlarges on the basic pattern of the body of a quail.

漢臣 and Chang Yüan-po 張元伯. The comprehensive exorcist might of that divine trio is expressed in the *Amulet of the Comprehensive Support due to the Commands of Thunders and Thunderclaps* 雷霆號令總攝符:¹¹

/a/ Superior God-Emperor of Jade Clarity and Great God-Emperor of Supreme Clarity 玉清上帝上清大帝,

Great God-Emperor of Greatest Clarity, Great God-Emperor of the Green Flowery [Palace] 太清大帝青華大帝

/b/ Decree and summon the Thunder divinities, call forth and dispatch generals and troops:

(10b) /c/ Fast commander of fire-bells and blazing fire, great divinity Teng Po-wen 鄧伯溫,

/d/ Fierce messenger Hsin Han-ch'en 辛漢臣,

/e/ Fire Wheel Sung Wu-chi 宋無忌, Terribly Fast Chang Yüan-po 張元伯,

/f/ General of the Fire Carriages of Heavenly Thunders, Liu Chung 劉忠: do speedily descend!

/g/ General of the Fire Carriages of Earth, Li Yung-chih 李用之 do speedily descend!

/h/ General of the Fire Carriages of the Central Thunders, Chou Wen-ch'ing 周文慶 do speedily descend!

/i/ General of the Fire Carriages of the Thunders of Water, Sung Yung-ning 宋永寧 do speedily descend!

/j/ General of the Fire Carriages of the Thunders of Man, Chu Yung-an 朱永安 do speedily descend!

/k/ The golden amulet with its jade declaration may be made widely public – in heaven and on earth.

/l/ Write and seal it with the fire of the Five Thunders to kill and annihilate wicked monstrosities and commonly, do annihilate cruel disaster.

/m/ The One breath of Thunder-fires (11a) (four characters were lost).

/n/ Bright lightning and dense Thunderclaps with the majestic radiance of fire, decree that all divinities proceed to kill, and they must do so urgently as decreed and supported by the fast orders of the *Commands of Thunders and Thunderclaps*.

The signs /a–n/ indicate the respective constituent, graphic elements of the amulet which in this case are easy to decipher. They form together a large “jade

11 TT 1220: 124.10a–11a. An article discussing this amulet is: Florian C. Reiter, “The Amulet in Thunder Magic Rituals as Prism of Taoist Exorcist Power, The *Amulet of the Comprehensive Support due to the Commands of Thunders and Thunderclaps* 雷霆號令總攝符,” in ZDMG 167, pp. 477–490.

character” which is the compound seal character that constitutes the amulet. Element */a/* is character *big* 大 framing the character *God-Emperor* 帝. Element */b/* is easy to recognize as the character *decree* 敕. Elements */c,d,e/* stand for the word *sun* 日. Elements */f,g,h,i,j/* each combine the characters *thunder* 雷 and *fire* 火 and embody the assumed equal and magic might of the addressed Thunder Generals, who have proper names. Element */k/* presents the character *metal* or *gold* 金. Elements */l,m/* are not clear enough to be identified but possibly are parts of the words *urgent* and *command*. Rather interesting is the last element */n/* on **p. 11a** that resembles the character *field* 田 which we often find at the foot of amulets.

The sign has nothing to do with the character *field* 田 to be written with five strokes of the writing brush. Six strokes are required to draw that design that represents the ubiquitous and already familiar exorcist formula *Six Instructions* 六訣 that finalizes the amulet. We repeat the formula for the sake of convenience:

Open the Gate of Heaven; Close the Window of Earth; Keep open the Gate of Man, Obstruct the way of demons; Pierce the heart of the demons; Crush the belly of the demons.

It is this exorcist power that the priest attains through his transformation 變神, into the divinity Teng Po-wen or into any other divinity of some other exorcist tradition. The priest can transfer that exorcist power onto the amulet, using spells, prayers, *mûdras*, and ritual steps.

Of course, we know many different ideas concerning the transformation into a divine *alter ego*, which depends on the specific line of transmission. For example, the *Great Shang-ch'ing Rituals of T'ien-p'eng who Suppresses Demons* 上清天蓬伏魔大法 present various and partly ambiguous descriptions of the transformation into a divine *alter ego*. See for example the following tract:¹²

The left hand with the *Marshal mûdra* 元帥訣 seals the heart and grasps the breaths of the *kang*-[stars] 罡氣. You visualize how the Marshal enters through the top of your skull, and you transform yourself into the Marshal. Generally speaking, any transformation into a divinity must be based on a correct mind and honest will 正心誠意 that do not let mixed thoughts arise while performing the correct rituals 正法. If you set out to perform a ritual, you always transform properly into the divinity.¹³ ... Recite the spell *Behead the Monsters* 截魔咒 and apply the *T'ien-p'eng Amulet* 天蓬符. Wipe away and expel any heretical recitations¹⁴ ...

12 TT 1220: 158.5a. “The Marshal” is the divinity T'ien-p'eng.

13 In this context a specific divinity is always the object of the aspired self-transformation. Here it is all about the divinity Marshal T'ien-p'eng.

14 外念 may refer to recitations of Buddhist origin. See TT 1220: 159.2b–3a 截魔咒, derived from 天蓬神咒.