

Women's Salvation and Collective Order: A Penitential Ritual for Deliverance from the Lake of Blood Performed in Hong Kong*

Neky Tak-ching Cheung
University of Macau

I. Introduction

In traditional Chinese society, it is believed that unnatural deaths such as premature death, violent death, death by accident, and the like would lead to imprisonment in the netherworld. The departed souls of women who died in childbirth or those who had contaminated the water with their bodily effluvia would have to be imprisoned in *xuehu* 血湖 (Lake of Blood) after their death. According to Daoist texts,¹ *xuehu* is situated in the earth prison at Xiashi 硤石無間地獄 underneath the boundless water quarters to the north of Fengdu 酆都. It is so named because it is filled with post-partum blood from childbirth or menstrual flow of women. The place is dark, gloomy, filthy, and stinky. The imprisoned women, however, would be delivered from the infernal afflictions through proper ritual performances. The Ritual for Deliverance from *xuehu* is to be performed in a woman's funeral, on the anniversary of her death 死忌日, or during the Yulan 盂蘭 or Ghost Festival.²

* I am most deeply grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewers for their very useful comments. My thanks are also due to Professor Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, Daoist Masters Ng Yiu Tung 吳耀東 and Cheung Nin 張年, who helped in arranging my field visit; and to all the scripture chanters (*jingsheng* 經生) who performed the ritual.

¹ See Appendix I for a list of texts that have significant references to *xuehu* in major collections of Daoist texts. The collections include the *Ming Zhengtong Daozang* 明正統道藏, *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, and *Zhuanglin xu Daozang* 莊林續道藏.

² See also ミシエル・スワミア (Michel Soymié), "Ketsunbonkyō no shiryōteki kenkyū" 血盆經の資料的研究, in *Dōkyō kenkyū* 道教研究, vol. 1, ed. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊 and
(Continued on next page)

The concept of the *xuehu* is not exclusive to Daoism. Buddhism has similar beliefs but the term it refers to is *xuepen* 血盆 (blood basin). Some textual study on the scriptures of *xuehu* or *xuepen* has been done. Both Michel Soymié and Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福 have worked on the relationship between the Buddhist and the Daoist scriptures. Xiao points out that the idea of *xuepen* did not appear in Buddhist or Daoist scriptures until the Tang to Song dynasties, and that the idea of *xuehu* has a closer affinity to the taboos related to female blood in Daoism. According to Xiao, the *xuepen* hell mentioned in Buddhist texts is situated in Zhuiyang xian 追陽縣, Yuzhou 羽州—a place in China, not India. He therefore considers Buddhist *xuepen* an imitation of the Daoist *xuehu*.³ Soymié, however, has remarked that the liturgies of Daoist *xuehu* appeared after those of the Buddhist *xuepen*. He points out, nonetheless, that the *Xuepen jing* is not included in the *Tripitaka* 大藏經, while the *Xuehu jing* 血湖經 is incorporated in the *Daozang* 道藏, indicating that the concept of *xuepen* is not taken as seriously in Buddhism as it is in Daoism. A variety of names such as *xuehu*, *xuechi* 血池, *xuehu diyu* 血湖地獄, *xueyuchi* 血汗池, *xueyuhe* 血汗河, *xuehe* 血河, *xuehechi* 血河池, and *xuechiyu* 血池獄 are recorded by Soymié in his essay.⁴ Besides possible reference to the use of a basin during child delivery in ancient China, the concept of *xuepen* may have affinity to scriptures dedicated to repaying debts, particularly those owed to the parents. For example, *Shi'ende* 十恩德 has lines mentioning the post-partum blood filling up a basin, the *Fumu enzhong jing jiangjingwen* 父母恩重經講經文 collected in the *Dunhuang bianwen ji* 敦煌變文集 (Dunhuang Collection of Transformation Tales) mentions the pains [the mother] suffers and the blood spilling on the ground during childbirth.⁵ The *Yue Wumu wang jiangba nannü bao'en jing* 岳武穆王降拔男女報恩經 collected by Yoshioka Yoshitoyo explicitly connects the female bodily discharge to the sin of pollution and the eventual suffering in the Lake of Blood.⁶ Neky Cheung has also documented *xuepen* being mentioned in a rite called *bao niang'en* 報娘恩 (Repaying the Debt of Mother's Kindness) in her study of the ritual *jiezhu* 接珠 (Receiving Buddhist Prayer

(Note 2—Continued)

Michel Soymié (Tokyo: Shōrinsha, 1965), p. 141. On the Ghost/Middle Prime Festival, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Lü Pengzhi, “The Lingbao Fast of the Three Primes and the Daoist Middle Prime Festival: A Critical Study of the *Taishang Dongxuan Lingbao Sanyuan Pinjie Jing*,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011), pp. 35–61.

³ Xiao Dengfu, *Daojiao yu Fojiao* 道教與佛教 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1995), pp. 298–99.

⁴ Soymié, “Ketsunbonkyō no shiryōteki kenkyū,” pp. 127–50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Beads) performed by the menopausal women in the western part of Fujian, China. The women make an oath to observe the rite of the blood basin to repay the debt to the mother.⁷ The idea of repaying the mother's debt is also found in the *baogao* 寶誥 in this ritual (see ritual programme number 17 on page 297).

Kenneth Dean has briefly documented a performance of *xuehu* rites as part of a funeral he saw in Fujian. He observes that the “*Xuehu* 血湖 (Lake of Blood) Ritual generally takes only one day, but it can be inserted into a larger ritual sequence.”⁸ The *xuehu* rites for delivering “two souls from the Lake of Blood Hell” were included in a funeral ritual.⁹ Dean states that *xuehu* “is the hell to which women who die in childbirth are sent, destined forever to drown in blood. Here, too, go all suicides. It is very difficult to extract someone from the Lake of Blood, and special gods and goddesses must be invoked to lend their aid. The priest performed these rites wearing a red headband and apron and blowing a metal or buffalo horn. The dress, ritual implements, and ritual actions all are part of the Lüshan tradition.”¹⁰

As scholarly study in religious traditions has turned away from casting off religious practices as mythical, irrational, or merely superstitious, can we explain the *xuehu* belief by reference to medical or hygienic principles, such as killing germs? However, compared to the pre-modern period, deaths of the mother or child during childbirth are minimized due to the advance in medical treatment and knowledge; so why do rites pertaining to the women allegedly suffering in *xuehu* still continue? It has always been performed as part of the Ghost Festival in Hong Kong, though not being properly studied as such. Despite the recent increasing interest in women's rituals, this unique ritual for women has not been attracting the scholarly attention it deserves. I hope this article may contribute to the ethnographic record of women's ritual. I hope it may also add a little momentum to the ethnographic and textual study of *xuehu*. I will therefore first document a penitential ritual of *xuehu* performed at Yunquan xianguan 雲泉仙館 in Hong Kong. I will then examine what the women are asked to confess in order to be saved from *xuehu*. I argue that while the aim of the rite is to deliver the women from *xuehu*, it is also strongly normative in nature. Daoism is known to be a liturgical religion, which gives its teachings through ritual performances. Therefore, an important function of the ritual is to teach women how to behave. I propose that the concept of *xuehu* operates as a symbolic system—to maintain hierarchical social relations rather than physical hygiene. In a discussion

⁷ See Neko Tak-ching Cheung, *Women's Ritual in China: Jiezhu (Receiving Buddhist Prayer Beads) Performed by Menopausal Women in Ninghua, Western Fujian* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), pp. 148–49.

⁸ Kenneth Dean, “Funerals in Fujian,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 4 (1988), p. 42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

on religious retribution, Gary Seaman cites the “Ceremony of the Bloody Pond” or “Breaking the Blood Bowl” as “a ritual that shows gratitude and pity for women’s fate on the one hand while dramatizing women’s pollution on the other.”¹¹ Indeed, the ritual aims to save the women from infernal suffering and at the same time it reinforces the view of female bodily uncleanness.¹² The confession of sins is pivotal to penitential litanies; I will focus on the confessions and moral codes, especially those concurrent to the blood/childbirth related “sins.” I propose that the ritual, on the one hand, shows a sympathetic attitude to the women’s deprived position, and it is therapeutic to the women to ensure avoidance of afflictions after death. On the other hand, the salvation is taken as crucial in a greater mission of maintaining the harmony of the family, society, nature, and ultimately the cosmos,¹³ to which women are seen as a great threat if not bridled.

II. The Penitential Ritual for Salvation from *Xuehu* Performed at Yunquan Xianguan, 2009

Yunquan xianguan is a Daoist temple in Hong Kong,¹⁴ with its origin from Guangdong Xiqiaoshan 廣東西樵山. The temple was founded by a group of literati including Li Zongjian 李宗簡 and Deng Jiantang 鄧鑑堂 in the mid-nineteenth century in Xiqiaoshan. It bloomed and expanded to having some 150 members living in the temple from the Republican era to 1938. Due to the Japanese occupation, it moved to Hong Kong in 1938.¹⁵ The temple claims to belong to the Chunyang 純陽 sect, having Lüzu 呂祖 as their patriarch deity.¹⁶ See illustration 1.

¹¹ Gary Seaman, “The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution,” in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), p. 381.

¹² See Emily M. Ahern, “The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women,” in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 193–214.

¹³ Li Yiyuan 李亦園 has proposed that harmony in a person involves, in one way or another, religious practices such as divination, geomancy, temple worship, etc. Thus, an individual’s harmony with the cosmic level constitutes the core of cultural harmony. See Li, “Hexie yu junheng: Minjian xinyang zhong de yuzhou quanshi” 和諧與均衡：民間信仰中的宇宙詮釋 (Harmony and Balance: Cosmos in Local Religion), in Li, *Wenhua de Tuxiang (xia): Zongjiao yu zuqun de wenhua guan cha* 文化的圖像(下)：宗教與族群的文化觀察 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1992), pp. 64–94.

¹⁴ Yunquan xianguan is located at Ping Che Road 坪輦路, Ta Kwu Ling 打鼓嶺, New Territories, Hong Kong.

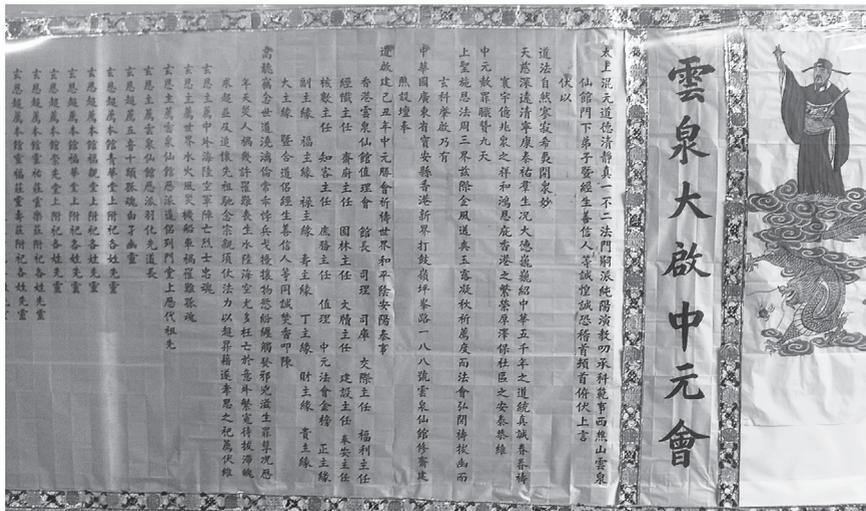


Illustration 1: The banner of the Yunquan Prime Middle Festival states the temple's lineage to Chunyang

The penitential ritual for deliverance from *xuehu* was part of a five-day Zhongyuan yulan fahui 中元盂蘭法會 performed at Yunquan xianguan in 2009, Hong Kong. The ritual practice of Zhongyuan yulan has its origins in the Daoist Zhongyuan festival, along with the Buddhist concept of *yulan* [pen 盂]. The date of both festivals falls on the fifteen day of the seventh lunar month. In Hong Kong, the two are, in many cases, merged together, and is therefore termed Zhongyuan yulan jie 中元盂蘭節. The main purpose of the festival is to offer sacrifices to ancestors and the desolate souls;

¹⁵ See Yau Chi-on 游子安, “Xiqiao Yunquan xianguan de beiji ji qi yuan, liu, bian” 西樵雲泉仙館的碑記及其源、流、變, *Newsletter*; Centre for Studies of Daoist Culture, 13 (April 2009), pp. 4–5; 14 (July 2009), pp. 8–10. For more information on the history and background of Yunquan xianguan, see Lai Chi-tim, Yau Chi-on, Wu Zhen 吳真 et al., *Xianggang daotang keyi lishi yu chuancheng* 香港道堂科儀歷史與傳承 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 42–49; idem, *Xianggang Daojiao: Lishi yuanliu ji qi xiandai zhuanxing* 香港道教：歷史源流及其現代轉型 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), pp. 15–16, 124–25, 165–66, 173–74.

¹⁶ As emphasized by Daoist Master Cheung Nin, Yunquan xinguan does not belong to the Zhengyi 正一, and it also distinguishes itself from the Quanzhen 全真 by claiming to be the Chunyang sect, with Lüzu as their patriarch deity. As Vincent Goossaert mentions (“The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700–1950,” in *Religion and Chinese Society*, ed. John Lagerwey [Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2004], p. 741), the vast majority of the Quanzhen members maintained a family life; most Daoists in Hong Kong, like Cheung Nin, are married. For lay Quanzhen communities worshipping Lüzu, see Goossaert, “The Quanzhen Clergy,” pp. 741–47.

it is therefore also known as the Ghost Festival, making it one of the major universal salvation rituals (*puduyi* 普度儀) performed during the year. Unlike the *jiyou* 祭幽 ritual that attracts a large audience,¹⁷ the penitential rites had no audience. The purpose of performing the *xuehu* penitential litany at Yunquan xianguan was generally described as saving the departed souls of women who died in childbirth. The liturgical text they used was called *Lingbao jidu xuehu fachen* 靈寶濟度血湖法懺 (Lingbao Penitential Litany for Salvation from *Xuehu*).

The performers of the ritual were called *jingsheng* 經生 (scripture chanters). Among them was a Chief Officiant (*zhuke* 主科), a Second Officiant (*ershou* 二手), and a Third Officiant (*sanshou* 三手).¹⁸ The *jingsheng* of this penitential ritual were all female. This is not mandatory. I have seen another *xuehu* penitential ritual that had a mix of men and women *jingsheng*.



Illustration 2: All the scripture chanters are female lay Daoists

The ritual took place at the Chunyang baodian 純陽寶殿 (Precious Hall of Purified Yang) in Yunquan xianguan. The sanctuary was set in the form of a *wulao tan* 五老壇 (sanctuary of the five elders)—a table was placed at each of the four corners and one in the middle of the sanctuary. Each table had an image of one of the elders. See appendix II for the ritual programme.

¹⁷ The *jiyou* rites performed at the Ghost Festivals are dramatic, performed in an open area, involving burning of a huge paper “Ghost King” 鬼王.

¹⁸ All these ritual performers are lay Daoists.

The Ritual

At 8:00 a.m. on 30 August 2009, all the *jingsheng* gathered in the *jingsheng* room, where they put on their robes, headdress, and shoes. The teacher-master of the *jingsheng* was Master Cheung Nin. At 9:00 a.m., Master Cheung enunciated: “Rectify your deportment, hold on to the *taiji*, and enter the altar” 整肅儀容，手抱太極，進壇。The procession went up to the Chunyang baodian, which was one storey up the *jingsheng* room.

With three bell chimes, the ritual commenced. The Chief Officiant worshipped and invited deities from the ten directions. The rite started with singing of the phrase “*Linlang zhenxiang*” 琳瑯振響, which is typical of most opening rites in Daoist penitential rituals. The deity being called upon at the end of this session was Wulong danghui tianzun 五龍蕩穢天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Five Dragon Filth Removal). I present below the description of the ritual process.

1. Purification of the sanctuary: The Chief Officiant began by reading a *Chishui wen* 敕水文 to call upon Changqing changjing tianzun 常清常淨天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Invariable Purity) to purify the water. She held a *chishui* cup (*chishui bei* 敕水杯) in her left hand and wrote the word *chi* 敕 (order) in the air over the water with her index and middle fingers (symbolizing a sword). Then she sprinkled the water into the air with her fingers as she was circumambulating the centre table. This was done to cleanse and consecrate the sanctuary. While all this was going on, the Second Officiant chanted a *Chengshui zan* 澄水讚 (Praising the Purified Water) that ended with the invocation of Fashui danghui tianzun 法水蕩穢天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Ritual Water Filth Removal).



Illustration 3: In the centre of the sanctuary stood the First Officiant, who was pressing her right index and middle fingers (symbolizing a sword) on the edge of a *chishui* cup

2. *Xiang zan* 香讚 : The Chief Officiant stood with a *ruyi* 入意 in her arms, joined by all the other *jingsheng*, chanted a *Xiang zan* to call upon the Xiangyun fugai datianzun 香雲浮蓋大天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Incense Cloud Afloat) to allow the incense to reach both the heaven and the netherworld.

3. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚 : *Buxu zan* (hymn for pacing the void) is a popular ritual hymn composed of 5-syllabic poetic verses. The Chief Officiant stood with a *ruyi* in her arms, joined by all the *jingsheng*, chanted a *Buxu zan* that asked the deities to turn *xuehu* into a warm spring (*wenquan* 溫泉), and to save those who died in childbirth from *xuehu* to head for rebirth in the land of utmost happiness (*jile guo* 極樂國).

4. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : This *zan* pleaded on behalf of the female souls (*wangling xinnü* 亡靈信女) and asked for opening up of the blood marsh (*xuezhao* 血沼). The name of Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren 血湖教主寶相真人 (Perfected Being of Precious Appearance and Master of Salvation from the Lake of Blood) was invoked.

In the meantime, the Officiant in Charge of the Incense replaced the incense sticks with newly lighted ones. The Chief Officiant went on her knees holding the *ruyi* upright in her hands and announced to the three realms (*sanjie* 三界)¹⁹ that invitations were going to be sent to the celestial deities through the Officer of Talisman (*fuli* 符吏). In the meantime, one of the *jingsheng* was getting a handheld incense burner (*shoulu* 手爐) ready for the Chief Officiant to invite the deities in the next session of *Qingsheng*.

5. *Qingsheng* 請聖 : This was a litany to summon the presence of deities. All the *jingsheng* went on their knees. The Chief Officiant held the handheld incense burner across her arms and read aloud the names of the deities to be invited. They were Sanqing 三清 (Three Purities), Celestial Emperors of the Four Cardinal Directions, Celestial Worthies, Saviours of the Ten Directions, Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren, who was described as having the greatest compassion (*daci dabei* 大慈大悲), city gods, regional gods, and all powerful spirits of the world.

6. *Ruyi* 入意 : It was time to read a *yiwén* 意文 (petition). A *yiwén* is a document that solemnly declares the worshipers' intention, in this case, to confess. It was read by the Second Officiant. The document gave the date, the place, the names of the council members of Yunquan xianguan, and the reasons for performing this ritual. Request for salvation for the fetus spirits (*yingling* 嬰靈) from Xuehu Xiashi diyu 血湖硤石地獄 (the hell of *xuehu* in Xiashi) was made. Upon finishing the reading, the name Chaoli jianglinlai tianzun 朝禮降臨來天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Ritual Audience) was invoked. This document was not burnt at this stage. It would be read

¹⁹ *Sanjie* refers to the heavenly realm (*tianjie* 天界), the human realm (*renjie* 人界), and the netherworld (*youjie* 幽界).

again near the end of the programme, then to be sent off to the celestial realm in a burning rite.

7. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚: The ten Compassionate Kings of the Ten Hells were respectfully welcomed in this *Diaogua zan*.

8. *Baogao* 寶誥: A *baogao* is meant to be an imperial mandate that praises the deeds and capacities of the deities; and is also an admonition given by one or more deities. This *baogao* comprised six passages. Each typically began with the phrase “*Zhixin guiming li*” 志心皈命禮. The Chief Officiant went on her knees holding a *ruji* in her arms, made a bow every time after she chanted the first line and the last line of each passage. The first passage praised Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren for saving one's mother from *xuehu* leading to her ascension to heaven. The second passage praised the Shifang huahao jiuwu tianzun 十方化號救苦天尊 (Celestial Worthy Saviours of the Ten Directions) for opening up the hells. The third passage praised the Star Deities of all directions 日月星辰天曹列聖 for bestowing ritual rain to let [the departed souls] enter the Southern Palace [to be purified] and reach eternal happiness. The fourth passage praised the deities in charge of the netherworld for stopping the five painful penalties (*wuku* 五苦) and the three unfortunate stations (*santu* 三塗).²⁰ The fifth passage praised the deities of the netherworld for removing the sins that were committed by the departed souls when they were alive (陽過消除). The last passage praised the Ghost Kings (*guiwang* 鬼王), officers and soldiers (*lizu* 吏卒) of *xuehu* for turning all the punishing tools into lotus flowers, the blood in the lake into sweet dew.

9. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚: The name of Daluo sanbao tianzun 大羅三寶天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Three Treasures of Daluo) was invoked at the end of this hymn.

10. *Songjing* 誦經: They started to recite a scripture. The content was very similar to that of the *Taiyi jiuwu tianzun shuo badu xuehu baochan* 太一救苦天尊說拔度血湖寶懺 and the *Yuanshi tianzun jidu xuehu zhenjing* 元始天尊濟度血湖真經.²¹

It began with a scene of the deities having an audience with Yuanshi tianzun, who was giving a talk on the existence of *xuehu* in the nine-fold darkness of the netherworld. He expressed deep sympathy for the departed souls of women that were stuck in the ceaseless afflictions brought about by the sins they committed

²⁰ *Wuku* refers to the five kinds of pains in the netherworld: at knife-mountain (*doushan* 刀山), at sword-tree (*jianshu* 劍樹), at copper-pole (*tongzhu* 銅柱), at soup boiling pan (*huotang* 鑊湯), and the pain of boundless-cold (*mingleng* 冥冷). *Santu* refers to the three kinds of unfortunate stations: the unfortunate station to be punished by fire (*huotu* 火塗), chopped by knife or sword (*daotu* 刀塗), and torn apart by beasts (*xuetu* 血塗).

²¹ DZ 9:892 and DZ 2:36 in *Daozang* (1988; reprint, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe; Shanghai: Shanghai shudian; Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006).

on earth. Profoundly touched, Jiuku tianzun came up, holding a tablet in his hands and knelt before Yuanshi tianzun. He resolved to fulfil his duties to save the poor souls from suffering. Yuanshi tianzun, after a moment of deep mental concentration, ordered Jiuku tianzun to disclose to the sentient beings the scripture that contained the talismans, and the instructions for ritual performances. The text stated that if the sentient beings take refuge and perform rituals accordingly, they would be spared from the suffering in *xuehu*. It ended with a statement of confession made on behalf of the departed female souls: “Pious confession made by the souls of dead females.”

11. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : While the Officiant in Charge of the Incense replaced the incense sticks with newly lighted ones. A *Diaogua zan* was being chanted. The Chief Officiant made a deep bow at the end of the first line, “*Zhenxin qingjing Dao wei zong*” 真心清靜道為宗 (Pacify the true heart to have the Dao as the essence). A *jingsheng* passed her a *shoulu* censer. The scents coming out from the *shoulu* were referred to as *xiangyin* 祥煙 (auspicious smoke) that reached the clouds in the heavenly realm.

12. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of twenty-two deities were being venerated. They included the Sanqing, the Great Emperors of the Netherworld, Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren, and sixteen *zhenren* (perfected beings) from various realms.

13. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚 : A *Buxu zan* was being chanted by all the *jingsheng*, to be followed by the recitation of a penitential text (*chanwen* 懺文).

14. *Song Chanwen* 誦懺文 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant a penitential text with the Chief Officiant. The text began with a declaration of confession made whole-heartedly by the departed souls of women and ended with another statement of confession by the departed female souls: “Pious confession made by the souls of dead females.”

The text described the penalties that one had to go through in *xuehu*, gave explanation of their afflictions, and advised the living beings to recite scriptures as a means of forestalling such consequences. It also pleaded that one take refuge in the Three Purities (Sanqing shangsheng 三清上聖), the Four Royalties (Siyu 四御), the Nine Celestial Palaces (Jiuchen 九宸), the Celestial Worthy Saviour from Suffering (Taiyi jiuku tianzun 太乙救苦天尊), and various celestial sages and perfected beings 諸天聖眾真人.

15. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of another forty *tianzun* were being venerated.

16. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : A *Diaogua zan* was being chanted by all the *jingsheng*. The Chief Officiant made a deep bow at the end of the first line, “Various kinds of ignorance are roots of bitterness” 種種無名是苦根. Then she knelt and made three bows at the end of every other line. Jiuyou bazui tianzun 九幽拔罪天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Deliverance from Sin [in the Realm of the] Nine-fold Darkness) was invoked at the end of this hymn.

17. *Baogao* 寶誥 : This *baogao* was an admonition by Zhongjie jiku tianzun 終劫濟苦天尊. All the *jingsheng* went on their knees and chanted the litany. It acknowledged parenting and the debt of gratitude to one's parents. It explained the suffering in *xuehu* due to the sins of defiling the terrestrial deities and contaminating the rivers by washing clothes stained with female blood due to childbirth. It offered a readily available means of salvation: infernal suffering could be averted by turning to the holy words, and paying homage to the Venerable Worthies.

This litany would be repeated three more times in the later part of the programme, each of which ended with the invocation of the name of the *baogao* patriarch deity, Zhongjie jiku tianzun.

18. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of another forty *tianzun* were being venerated.

19. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant a long passage that began with a confession made on behalf of the departed female souls, who vowed to take refuge by calling upon the readily responsive, holy name of Shifang jiuku tianzun (十方救苦·隨應天尊聖號). This was followed by a confession of sins. The sins mentioned were extensive: ranging from those related to female bodily fluids and childbirth to behavioural, carnal, filial, and social culpabilities.

20. *Baogao* 寶誥 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant this *baogao*. It contained vivid descriptions of the suffering in *xuehu*. It urged that one should take refuge in the sacred teachings and do good deeds. Yuhuang shezui datianzun 玉皇赦罪大天尊 (Great Heavenly Worthy of Jade Emperor of Pardon) was invoked at the end of this session.

21. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of twenty-four officials of the netherworld (*mingguan* 冥官) in charge of *xuehu* 血湖海獄 at Fengdu Luoshan 酆都羅山 were being venerated.

22. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : All the *jingsheng* chanted a *Diaogua zan* to praise the compassionate Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren, who allowed deliverance from the marshy blood. The Chief Officiant made a deep bow at the end of the first line, "Tianzun shenghao busiyi" 天尊聖號不思議 (Wonderful Holy Name of the Heavenly Worthy). She knelt and made three bows at the end of every other line. Then a *jingsheng* passed her a *shoulu* censer that she held on to until the end of this session. Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren was invoked at the end of the session. This *Diaogua zan* would be repeated two times in later part of the programme.

23. *Baogao* 寶誥 : This was a repetition of the *baogao* mentioned in programme number 17.

24. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : Twenty-four *kaogui mingguan* 考鬼冥官 (Judiciary Officials of the Ghosts in the Netherworld) in charge of twenty-four sub-hells of *xuehu* (*xuehu haiyu* 血湖海獄) at *Fengdu Luoshan* were being named and venerated.

25. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : All the *jingsheng* chanted a *Diaogua zan* to praise the compassionate Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren, who allowed deliverance from the marshy blood. This was a repetition of the *Diaogua zan* described in programme number 22.

26. *Baogao* 寶誥 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees and chanted a text which was the second repetition of the *baogao* described in programme number 17.

27. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of twenty-five *kaogui mingguan* in charge of another twenty-five sub-hells of *xuehu* at Fengdu Luoshan were being venerated.

28. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of twelve *dong mowang shengzhong* 洞魔王聖眾 (Sages of the Devil Kings of Caves) in charge of another twelve *tian-gong* 天宮 (eternal residence) of *xuehu* at Fengdu Luoshan were venerated.

29. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚 : All the *jingsheng* chanted a *Diaogua zan* to praise the compassionate Xuehu jiaozhu baoxiang zhenren, who allowed deliverance from the marshy blood. This was the second repetition of the *Diaogua zan* described in programme number 22.

30. *Baogao* 寶誥 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant a text which was the third repetition of the *baogao* described in programme number 17.

31. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of thirty-three groups of ministry staff (*buzhong* 部眾) under thirty-three *guiwang* 鬼王 (Ghost Kings) of *xuehu* at Fengdu Luoshan were being venerated.

32. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant the third penitential text. On behalf of the female departed souls to make confession to the Officials of the Netherworld. They acknowledged the sins they committed on earth, hence their imprisonment at *xuehu* in their after-life. The text mentioned that salvation could be sought by copying scriptures, meditating the teachings, and setting up temples and statues as told by Yuanshi tianzun.

33. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚 : All the *jingsheng* chanted a *Buxu zan* to exalt the deliverance from the earth prison (*diyu* 地獄) at Xiashi to head for *Nangong* 南宮 (Southern Palace, the place where the souls would be refined and sublimed for rebirth).

34. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees to chant the fourth penitential text. On behalf of the departed female souls they made wholehearted confession for refuge in the boundless celestial sages, the hundred billion spirits of the netherworld, all the perfect celestial beings of *xuehu*, and all the ritual performers on earth. Having heard the true teaching, they sought the deities' mercy to have their hearts and bodies cleansed.

35. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮 : The names of thirteen *tianzun* were being venerated. The *tianzun* included: one from the Big Iron Mountain (大鐵圍山); one from

the Small Iron Mountain (小鐵圍山); one from the earth prison with boundaries (有間地獄); one from the earth prison without boundaries (無間地獄); and nine from the sub-hells of *xuehu*.

36. Baogao 寶誥 : All the *jingsheng* went on their knees and chanted this *baogao* that was dedicated to Taiyi jiuku tianzun. It praised his omnipresence and the readily available salvation for the needy souls.

37. Songjing 誦經 : Everyone knelt and chanted a scripture that was a continuation of the scripture chanted earlier. It said Yuanshi tianzun further instructed all the Celestial Immortals, the Perfected Beings, the Emperors of the Netherworld, the Ghost Officials of Hells to disseminate this scripture to the ten directions of the world. The scripture expounded that salvation would be bestowed if the Daoist followers prostrate their whole body and perform liturgical rites with a sincere mind during the following specific fete days: *sanyuan* 三元 (the 15th day of the first, seventh, and tenth lunar month), *bajie* 八節 (four equinoxes and four solstices), *wula* 五臘 (the 1st day of the first month, the 5th day of the fifth month, the 7th day of the seventh month, the 1st day of the tenth month, the 8th day of the twelfth month), *shizhiri* 十直日 (the 1st, 8th, 14th, 18th, 23d, 24th, 28th, 29th, 30th day of each month; the 27th day for the month of less than 30 days); and various *zhaihui* 齋會. The fete days mentioned were almost the same as those mentioned in the *Taiyi jiuku tianzun shuo badu xuehu baochan*, except that it left out *sanfu* 三伏 (dog days), and the dates of birth or death.

38. Fuyuan 伏願 (Vow-making): Before offering vows, the Chief Officiant chanted a passage saying that they had respectfully listened to this scripture that had been disseminated to ten thousand states, nine prefectures, and ten directions of the universe. It was also stated that rebirth could be sought by listening to this scripture. The *jingsheng* then went on to chant three passages of vows. The first passage asked for dissolving the antagonism from previous lives. The second passage asked for cutting off the continued corrupted contagions from the past (*qianchan* 牽纏), and evil paths of existence (*equ* 惡趣), the departed souls to be refined and sublimated (*shoulian* 受煉). The third passage reverently sought mercy from the compassionate fathers (*Linian cibeifu* 禮念慈悲父); the Great Mercy Worthy of Three Spaces (Daci sanjingzun 大慈三境尊); the Celestial Worthies Saviours of the Ten Directions (Shifang jiuku tianzun 十方救苦天尊); and all the Perfected Beings of the Ten Directions (Shifang zhu zhenren 十方諸真人). The departed souls had listened to the scripture and were converted, by confessing and performing rituals; they would cross over *xuehu*.

39. Yiwén 意文 : All other *jingsheng* went to a prostrated position, while the Second Officiant read the petition. Then everyone resumed a standing position. The Chief Officiant put the documents into a long yellow envelope called *wenshutong*

文書筒，which was addressed to the various Celestial Jade Palaces (*Zhutian qiong-quegong* 諸天瓊闕宮) and had a red printed seal that read “*Yufeng yuqing ruxiang chunyang Lüzu fuyou dijun baoxi*” 玉封玉清入相純陽呂祖孚佑帝君寶璽 (Precious Seal of the Pure Yang Lüzu Fuyou Dijun) on its back. The documents were ready to be sent to the heavenly realm by a burning rite. They all turned to face the main entrance of the hall; the Chief Officiant used a burning *shoujin* 壽金 “pen” to draw a talisman over the long yellow envelope and had it burned in a *huabaopen* 化寶盆. While the documents were burning, the Chief Officiant held a *ruyi* in her arms and everyone joined her to sing:

經壇土地，神之最靈，升天達地，出幽入冥，為吾傳奏，不得留停，有功之日，名書上清。

The deities in the sanctuary are the most efficacious. They go up to the heavens and down to the netherworld to pass on our messages without procrastinating. When the duties are fulfilled, names will be recorded in the books.

稽首皈依，天地前，爐起爐起祥雲，十洲三島，盡遙聞，萬聖萬聖臨軒，天仙地仙，水府，四功曹，值符吏，進表傳言，慈悲，若人若人求懺悔，福力福力無邊。

To take refuge by kowtowing before the heaven and earth, auspicious scent arises from the censer, reaching far and wide over the ten continents and three islands; the hall of the numerous sages; the celestial immortals, the terrestrial immortals; the water offices; the four messengers and the talisman officers who deliver the memorial, passing on the messages of confession with their boundless auspicious power.

A *songshu wenzan* 送梳文讚 (Hymn to Dispatch the Memorial) was then sung to complete the delivery of the documents.

40. *Jiechan xiaozan* 結懺小讚 : Everyone turned to face the altar again and chanted:

罪名消北府，生籍注南宮，志心求懺悔，得道早超生。

The record of sins are erased in the netherworld; rebirth to be registered in the Southern Palace; making confession with a pious heart; rebirth sought through affiliating with the Dao.

The name of *Jieyuan shijie datianzun* 解冤釋結大天尊 (Great Celestial Worthy of Untying the Knots of Bitterness) was invoked, followed by a brief concluding praise (*Jiechan xiaozan* 結懺小讚) that ended with the invocation of *Chaoli shengtian dedao tianzun* 朝禮生天得道天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Ceremonial Tribute for Attainment of Dao). Thus ended the Penitential Ritual.

I will also put in a few words about the structure of the penitential litany. The rites of entrance that commenced with the Chief Officiant worshipping and inviting deities from the ten directions are typical of most Daoist penitential rituals. The rite of sanctuary purification, followed by a number of Praises and Hymns, and the Invitation of Deities can be conceived as a common pattern for ritual opening. The core of the programme consisted of: reading of *yiwén*, recitation of scriptures, chanting of *baogao* and penitential texts. For the recited scripture, though there were omissions, additions, and occasional transposition of verses and sessions, the content was very close to that of the *Yuanshi tianzun jidu xuehu zhenjing*, and the *Taiyi jiuku tianzun badu xuehu baochan*, collected in *Daozang*. Although there is not a session named “Taking Refuge,” the message of declaring refuge in the deities was embedded in the chanting during the burning rite sending off the *yiwén*. The programme ended with the concluding rites of vows and praises. These rites are in line with the general structure of the Daoist liturgical tradition. However, it should also be noted that some ritual actions were simplified. For example, instead of using a sword, the Chief Officiant used her index and middle fingers to write the talismanic *chi* 敕 in the air during the rite of sanctuary purification. The burning rite was simply done by putting the burning documents into a *huabaopen* instead of having paper-made horse(s) and messenger(s) to “carry” the documents. To make conclusive remarks on the structure of Daoist liturgy is beyond the purpose of this study. Further comparison is necessary to lay claim to a larger structural analysis. Issues such as the simplification of ritualistic acts due to factors such as urbanization etc. would need to be dealt with in greater length and depth. My preliminary observation was that the overall structure of the Penitential Ritual for Deliverance from *xuehu* performed at Yunquan xianguan, Hong Kong, in 2009, was supporting the super-structural framework of the Daoist liturgical tradition.

III. The Concept of *Xuehu*: Pollution, Salvation, and Control

The purpose of the ritual is to beseech salvation for the departed souls of women who are suffering at *xuehu* in the netherworld. The scripture recited in the *songjing* rite (see ritual programme number 10) provided the location of *xuehu*, which is not different from that being mentioned in other Daoist texts, such as the *Taiyi jiuku tianzun badu xuehu baochan* and the *Yuanshi tianzun jidu xuehu zhenjing*.²² The location of *xuehu* is situated in the earth prison at Xiashi (*Xiashi wujian diyu* 硤石無間地獄) in Datiewei shan 大鐵圍山 underneath the boundless water quarters to the north of Fengdu. *Xuehu* is 12,000 *li* 里 in

²² DZ 9:892 and DZ 2:36.

length, 84,000 *li* in circumference. A door underneath it, called Zhangloubo 仗婁波,²³ is headed by the Xuehu deity (Xuehu dashen 血湖大神). It is composed of five prisons: Xueying yu 血盈獄 (Blood Overthrowing Prison), Xueleng yu 血冷獄 (Cold Blood Prison), Xuewu yu 血污獄 (Filthy Blood Prison), Xuezi yu 血滋獄 (Blood Multiplying Prison), and Xuehu yu 血湖獄 (*Xuehu* Prison). *Xuehu* prison has three sub-prisons: Xuepen yu 血盆獄 (Blood Basin Prison), Xueshan yu 血山獄 (Blood Mountain Prison), and Xuehai yu 血海獄 (Blood Sea Prison). This is a diagram of a *xuehu* lamp that depicts the location of *xuehu*.²⁴

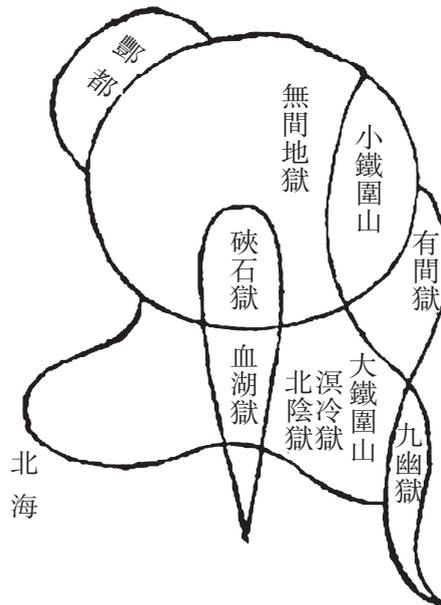


Illustration 4: *Xuehu* lamp

The prisoners at *xuehu* are women who died in childbirth or those who had committed aborticide. Cases of deaths related to childbirth include: the mother died but the child survived, the mother survived but the child died, both the mother and the child died, and stillbirth due to miscarriage and the like. There are also cases such as pregnant women knifed to death, or women died of sicknesses before or after the child was born. Whether it was the death of the mother or the child, they do not live to their given lifespan (*weijin tiannian* 未盡天年).

²³ It is Fubo 伏波 in the *Taiyi jiuku tianzun badu xuehu baochan*, but not mentioned in the *Yuanshi tianzun jidu xuehu zhenjing*.

²⁴ DZ 31:5 *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, *juan* 34.

The departed souls of these women are considered blood-soaked, filthy, and stinky. The place is described as dark, gloomy, hazy, encircled by an iron fence and tangled with iron webs. Toxic fluids flow in from eight directions, streams of blood oozing from the ground, rumbling thunder and striking wind. The souls are subject to bites by tigers, snakes, eagles, and dogs; and incessantly beaten by the officers of Ghost Kings. Bodies are tossed; heads and hearts eaten. These afflictions, among many others, are bitter and hard to endure. Given the horrible concept about *xuehu*, not only does the ritual manage to provide explanation for infernal suffering, it also gives reason for the pain that the women suffer during childbearing and childbirth.

Salvation for Women

Women in traditional China were seen as inferior to men. They were advised to stay confined in their inner chambers and were discouraged to participate in social issues.²⁵ It has been noted that Daoism has a more liberal and sympathetic view on women. Chen Yaoting 陳耀庭 writes in *Daojiao yili* 道教儀禮 that *xuehu* rituals show compassion towards women.²⁶ The ritual certainly reflects a certain degree of sympathy towards the female lot.

Salvation obtained from this *xuehu* penitential ritual is two-fold. First, it delivers the female souls from *xuehu*; second, perhaps more important, it ensures the living of their exemption from infernal sufferings after death. This was mentioned in a *baogao*, repeated four times: “Knowing that there will be retribution, why not confess and repent now before it is too late” 早知有此業冤，何不生前懺悔，如今方省，盡是虛徒。 Then how will salvation be given? “Turn your heart to moral perfection. Death may be untimely, in order not to end up at the dark bureau of the netherworld, invoke the name of the sacred beings in the morning, and pay respects to the compassionate worthies in the evening” 奉勸世上之人，早早回心向善，朝參聖號，暮禮慈尊，百年命到無常，不墮陰司地府。 Invocation of the names of deities, of Jiuku tianzun in particular, is an effective means for salvation to be obtained.

The penitential ritual gave specific instructions for securing impunity from infernal suffering: by scripture recitations and proper performance of rituals. The possibility of exemption from infernal suffering is offered by the merciful Yuanshi tianzun, who instructed Jiuku tianzun and other deities to disseminate the scripture

²⁵ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 7–8.

²⁶ Chen Yaoting, “Dengyi he Shanghai Daojiao de ‘Jiuyoudeng yi’” 燈儀和上海道教的「九幽燈儀」, in Chen Yaoting, ed., *Daojiao yili* (Hong Kong: Qingsong guan Xianggang Daojiao xueyuan, 2000), pp. 292–93.

to teach the sentient beings how to seek salvation. The following verses were recited during *songjing*: “After hearing the sufferings of women in *xuehu*, the deities and Jiuku tianzun all felt very upset and their passion to help these souls came on strong” 諸天聖眾，救苦真人聞此聖言，悉皆悽慘，各興慈憫，欲拔淪糈。The third *baogao* mentioned, “Upon the mercy of Jiuku tianzun, [we] perform the ritual of confession for cutting off the retribution” 仰賴救苦天尊慈悲，禮懺解冤。The *baogao* that was repeated four times in the ritual has this: “The Officials of Hell, having listened to the poor women, were touched and became sympathetic towards the women” 獄官慈憫，聽說緣因。

Talismans were, moreover, sent along with the scripture. The first chanting of *baogao* mentioned that the true talisman was bestowed by the Celestial Emperor all the way down to *xuehu* to deliver the mother from hell for ascension to heaven (蒙上帝賜真符，直下血湖救慈母，出離地獄昇天堂)。The third *Buxu zan* had: “Riding on the talisman to head for rebirth” 乘符往生去。But how is a woman to make sure that the true talisman be given? The answer is again through scripture recitations and proper ritual performances.

Scripture recitations have a strong soteriological overtone. The following verses were sung at the rite of sanctuary purification, “Reciting the jade scripture by Yuanshi [tianzun] one time can put sickness away and extend one’s lifespan” 元始玉文，持誦一遍，卻病延年。The second *Buxu zan* mentioned, “Reciting the true Emperor’s book one time accomplishes the ascension to the Great Purity, a second recitation allows reunion with the Great Emptiness” 一念昇太清，再念歸太無。The scripture is believed to be authentic. The first scripture being recited in the ritual says it was given as a Three-Cave Holy Scripture (三洞仙經) by Jiuku tianzun, being formulated by the accumulation of *qi* (聚炁成文); and it also provides instructions for rituals (萬天儀範)。It entailed the filial descendants to take heart in setting up an altar to do sacrificial rites by offering incense, flowers, lamps, and candles to praise and invoke the holy name of *tianzun* (孝子賢孫，能發道心，修齋設醮，香花燈燭，禮拜供養)，then Jiuku tianzun and the community of celestial sages would appear at Xiashi, Fengdu; as such, the various hells of *xuehu* would be illuminated, the iron fence be removed, the blood be dried up, and the lake be transformed into a precious lotus pond (救苦天尊真人，諸天聖眾，……遍步五嶽九幽，艷都硤石，血湖諸獄，普沐光明，照曜幽暗，鐵城摧毀，血海拈乾，血湖化作寶蓮之池)。The second scripture recited in the ritual mentioned that the act of copying scriptures is counted as a deed of merit. The same text asked also for the concentration of one’s mind to set up an altar and to erect images [of the deities] (靜念而建壇立像)。The first scripture recited in the ritual mentioned, “Take heart to set up an altar to perform sacrificial rites, . . . all the departed souls in *xuehu* would be blessed with sweet dew, able to see the light and allowed to depart the land of darkness” 發心建醮道場，……血湖之眾魂，均沾甘露之恩，得睹光明，出離陰境。

And the good news is: besides being spared from infernal sufferings, rebirth may also be attained. All the three passages of vows mentioned “Rebirth could be sought by listening to the scripture” 聞經得道，隨願往生。And after the burning rite of sending off the *yiwen*, the *jingsheng* chanted, “The record of sins committed are erased in the netherworld; registration of rebirth to be recorded in the Southern Palace; making confession with a pious heart; rebirth is sought through affiliating with the Dao” 罪名消北府，生籍注南宮，志心求懺悔，得道早超生。

The *xuehu* penitential ritual provides comfort to women first by offering an explanation for their pain in childbirth. As Christianity uses the etiological story of Eve having lured Adam to eat the forbidden fruit to explain the pain women have to suffer during childbirth, Daoism has it explained by the system of reward and retribution. This is how it operates: deeds done in the past are manifested as effects in the present; deeds done in the present will be manifested as effects in the future. The idea is that the deeds one created and accumulated in the present will determine one's future. These effects can be beneficial or harmful depending on the nature of the deeds one had done. For harmful effects, let us call them “the forces of retribution.” Retribution may come from several sources. First, retribution in the present life for deeds created now (*xianshibao* 現世報); second, retribution in the subsequent lives for deeds created now (*laishibao* 來世報); and third, retribution in the present life for deeds created in past lives (*sushibao* 宿世報).

The sufferings and difficulties that women have to endure during childbearing and childbirth is given an etiological reason: “the haunting fetus.”²⁷ A fetus is thought to have interacted with its mother in the past lives. The intention of a fetus to come forward in this life is to cause afflictions to the mother. It is generally believed that a ghost that died from unnatural causes “remains angry and will prey on the innocent living, not so much in desperation as out of resentment and desire for revenge.”²⁸ A child who passed away soon after birth, an aborted or a miscarried fetus, is believed to be indignant and vindictive. An aborted or a miscarried fetus is thought to be unhappy about having been killed because it has been deprived of its right to exist as a human being. As a vengeful and angry spirit entering a woman's womb, it has reason to revenge the injustice forced on it in the past. A pregnant woman is inevitably subject to all sorts of attacks made by the fetus. Thus explains the labour

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of the concept of “haunting fetus,” see Mark L. Moskowitz, *The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

²⁸ Stevan Harrell, “Men, Women, and Ghosts in Taiwanese Folk Religion,” in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 99.

pains. A woman's affliction in her present life is a *xianshibao* if she has aborted, miscarried, or committed infanticide in her present life. It could also be a *sushibao* with the vindictive fetus coming forth due to the deeds she has done in her past lives.

Xuehu rituals bring therapeutic comfort especially to a woman immediately after a willing or unwilling abortion, during which time she has to deal with the strong physical and emotional fallout brought about by the event. The afflictions that a woman has to face are attributed to the vengeance of the fetus spirit who was not able to become a human being due to the woman, in this life or in her previous lives. One may naturally ask: having an explanation is fine, but how about the horrors of the penalties at *xuehu*? Indeed, not only does the ritual explain the women's afflictions related to childbirth, it also provides the women with the hope that infernal suffering could be avoided and that rebirth might also be attained through ritual performances.

Ritual as Moral Teaching

Unlike confessional religions such as Christianity, Daoist theology rests upon its liturgies, that is, Daoist teaching and thoughts are expressed through rituals. Kristofer Schipper mentions that "Ritual (Chinese: *i*, lit. 'rule') . . . is understood as a sequence of rites (*fa*, lit. 'model', 'to conform', 'law'). . . . Ritual in its social function, that is, as liturgy, is called *k'o*. This word originally means 'measure' or 'class.' The liturgical tradition of Taoism is called *k'o-chiao*, that is, 'teaching embodied in ritual.'"²⁹ That is why Daoism is also known to be a liturgical religion. Another purpose of performing the penitential ritual is to caution the living beings concerning the infernal suffering that mischief would bring. A set of moral codes was stipulated in the three penitential texts. The first text, in particular, provided a lengthy list of guilt and sins. It mentioned that these women ended up in *xuehu* for the wrongdoings they did on earth, and that their sins stacked up like mountains (積罪如山). Some examples of the sins were: hurting people or damaging objects with vicious intentions (血湖之獄，受此冤報，蓋謂生前，多懷狠毒，損物傷人); being dishonest and shameless (無廉無恥); lacking gratitude and loyalty (無恩無義); and being given to the five-turbid-evil-realms or to the six emotional senses (耽淫五濁，染迹六情). These sins include, but are not limited to, those related to the contamination by post-partum fluids, the blood and bodily effluvia of women. The sins range also from filial, behavioural, carnal, and social culpabilities to the acts of offending against nature, against religious decorum, or violating the precepts for women.

²⁹ Kristofer Schipper, "An Outline of Taoist Ritual," in Anne-Marie Blondeau and Kristofer Schipper, eds., *Essais sur le rituel*, vol. 3 (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1995), p. 99.

The litany asks the women to confess childbirth-related sins including abortion and wrongdoings that would lead to the death of the fetus, such as refraining from proper rest (懷胎含孕，不肯全息); tripping due to anger or brutal behaviour (恣行凶暴，怒忿打跌，傷損墮胎，落子之罪); infanticide by intoxicating, drowning, burying, famishing, or aborting the fetus for the reason of having had too many children (男女嫌多，故服毒藥傷害，或淹死凍死，土埋可壓，餓死丟棄之罪); and contaminating the wells, lakes, and rivers by blood discharged in a menstruating cycle or in childbirth (月經遍體，洗浣污身，或生產之時，下血穢濁江河海，溝渠井泉洗浣神，井竈門戶之罪).

Then we see confessions of sins directing to the behaviour of women: being hedonistic (貪樂愛財); having evil thoughts (心邪念亂); being heavily accessorized with gold, silver, pearl, or jade ornaments (戴首飾殊翠，金銀八寶等物); acting forcedly factitious (過分造作之罪); indulging in alcohol and meat (飲酒食肉); and having pleasure at inappropriate time (非時作樂). They should not give in to seven sentiments and six desires (七情六慾); the sins that violate female virtues (不守閨訓或不守婦道); carnal sins that include swerving from chastity (不守貞潔); acting indecently (恣肆荒淫之罪); offending heaven and earth by sleeping on grass and plants (眠花臥柳，冒犯天地之罪); and wearing indecent clothing in the daytime or not well covering the body in bed (晝則衣服不整，夜則蓋臥不齊).

The moral codes apply also to failures in the women's roles in keeping a harmonious family: neglecting the duties of a wife, a mother, or a grandmother; committing three kinds of disobedience (to the father, husband, and son) and ignoring the four virtues of women (不遵三從四德); disinclining to duties (惟務懶惰之罪); coaxing and deceiving the husband (巧言美舌，欺侮夫主); complaining about insufficient clothing, food, tea, fruits, salt, sauces, wine, vinegar, oil, rice, or firewood (狼籍衣食，茶果鹽醬，酒醋油米，柴薪廣用不足怨恨之罪); distracting the husband from his other wives and concubines (迷惑夫主與諸妻妾); as well as conspiring to win over the husband's favour by malicious plot (陰謀爭寵，毒害之罪); disobeying or not being attentive to parents and parents-in-law (不孝父母公姑); being disrespectful to teachers and seniors (不敬師長); dishonouring parents and husband (玷辱父母夫主); and plotting against the masters (反謀師父之罪).

As I have proposed, the moral codes are meant for a bigger mission in maintaining a harmonious society, hence: the women should not criticize people behind their backs (背前面後，論人是非，說人長短); say yes but mean no (口是心非); distort truth (變白為黑，指是作非); be gossipy (向此說彼，向彼說此); ruin the kin or friendly relationship among other people (離人骨肉，破人良友); covet or crave other people's belongings leading to stealing, robbery, making sniping attacks, or refusing to return things borrowed (借用他人器皿，寄附金銀財寶衣物，埋沒隱藏，屢討推詞，不肯相還). They should not lack loyalty and righteousness. They

should avoid: disharmony with family members, neighbours, or friends (不睦眷屬，斷絕四鄰，不容妯娌，相識交情之罪); spanking and scolding day and night (朝打暮罵), having disproportionate diet (飲食不均); humiliating and ill-treating lowly people, causing them to suffer in cold and heat (凌辱下賤冤屈痛苦，忍寒受熱之罪); acting contrary to social decorum (不守禮儀); being jealous (心生嫉妒); flattering someone face to face but discrediting that person behind their backs (面諛背毀在眾人中); disclosing the weaknesses of other people (揚人之羞); bragging and showing off at gatherings (在席上則誇己之能); fabricating rumours (捏合是非); reproving instead of providing for the poor, the widows, the orphans, the old, or the sick even there are food leftover (遇貧窮孤寡，老病之人，前來求吃，廚有餘食冷飯，不肯減割救濟，反行嗔罵之罪); subjecting people to dangerous beasts (用虎狼蛇猛獸害人); having grudges against rendering help [to others], especially to those who are pregnant or due to give birth (婦人懷孕，臨產不忿不生救濟之罪); being lofty or immodest (不遜不謙); exploiting civilians if a family member holds a government position (家有為官為吏，恣使豪富，刻削細民); and putting private interests over public interests (背公循私).

Daoism has a long tradition in its concern with keeping harmony with nature. We see in the ritual confession that the women are told to avoid: blaming and reprimanding heaven and earth, rain and wind, day and night, heat and cold (只嗔天罵地怨，雨呵風，埋怨晝夜長短，憎暑厭寒之罪); picking flowers to make cosmetics to lure unintelligent and stubborn people (拆毀鮮花，飭用裝戴，搽胭抹粉顏色妖艷，引誘愚頑之罪); disrespecting agricultural labour by letting crops, agricultural produce, food, or soup go to waste (將五穀移作糞土，反以拋遺，撒豆麥而入塵灰，每將狼戾，張酒有肆，建糲房，火漿連飯以充食，成團而餵狗，不思農夫之苦，輕為拋撒之心，憎嫌飲食羹湯蔬菜，鹹酸苦淡之罪); disrespecting sericulture by squandering piece goods (剪裁綢絲綾羅，絹帛布疋，不肯愛惜，輕視衣服，不思養蠶煮繭織女勞苦之罪); killing birds, insects, fishes, cattle, and livestock such as pigs, cows, lambs, horses, chickens, dogs, geese, or ducks (殺豬牛羊馬，雞犬鵝鴨，飛禽走獸，水族魚鱗); setting mountains on fire (放火燒山); and splashing hot soup to the ground thus hurting the insects or damaging the plants (熱湯潑地，傷害百蟲，樹木花果之罪).

The ultimate mission is certainly to be in harmony with the religious cosmic realm. As such, we see sins related to religious decorum: snatching other people's loved ones (欺凌貞潔，捉人殘害，奪人恩愛); refraining from incense offering (或不燒香); offending the gods (冒瀆仙聖之罪); disbelieving in retribution of sins (或不信罪福因果); displeasing heaven and earth (辜天負地); breaking purification rules and precepts (破齋犯戒); setting fire to temples (燒毀宮觀); listening to evil masters and making vicious curses at others (聽信邪師，陰肆魔禱，咒詛他人);

failing to observe monastic ways of life, in the present or the previous lives (或前生今世，出家不了守志不堅); acting against reason or propriety (不循理法); not accumulating merits (不積陰功之罪); and not following calendric religious observances such as *sanyuan*, *wula*, *shizhi*, and *bajie*. And a specific female sin is defiling the sacred places by entering temples without having the body and mouth purified (不淨身口，擅入壇場宮觀，聖迹染污), which is essentially a directive to prohibit women in their menstrual period from entering temples.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In sum, the penitential ritual for deliverance from *xuehu* does show sympathy towards the female lot, despite the inevitable pain and the less than desirable social position that women have to live by. The existence of individual lives in the present world is explained through the deeds done in previous lives. The retribution system explains the labour pains during childbirth. Exemption from infernal suffering through ritual performance, and the promise of salvation and rebirth are therapeutic for both the bereaved and the living. Call it a placebo effect, if you will: the women are given the options to perform ritual seeking for exemption from infernal suffering after death. The hope and promise for rebirth can be arranged through achievable means such as invocations of the names of deities, Jiuku tianzun in particular, scripture recitations, proper ritual performances, confessing and refraining from sins and guilt.

We can also see somatic precepts for women being spelt out in detail; filial, behavioural, ethical, religious, and social precepts are also dwelt upon in length. There is no doubt that the precepts reinforce the allegedly polluting and defiling nature of the female body; they promote and mark gender hierarchy that works as patriarchal control over women. The women are not only called upon to confess to their “sins” relating to their bodily “dirt,” but also to seek forgiveness for sins that disturb the family, the society, the nature, and the religious cosmic realm. I therefore conclude that the confession in the penitential ritual constitutes a symbolic system that largely supports social relations, and the well-being and salvation of the women are taken as significant in a mission of maintaining the social and cosmic harmony.

Appendix I

The following is a list of texts that have significant references to *xuehu* in major collections of Daoist texts. The collections include the *Ming Zhengtong Daozang* 明正統道藏, *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, and *Zhuanglin xu Daozang* 莊林續道藏.

A. Ming Zhengtong Daozang

1. *Yuanshi tianzun jidu xuehu zhenjing* 元始天尊濟度血湖真經³⁰ (True Scripture for Salvation from Xuehu, [Revealed] by Yuanshi Tianzun)
2. *Taiyi jiuku tianzun shuo badu xuehu baochan* 太一救苦天尊說拔度血湖寶懺³¹ (Litany for Deliverance from Xuehu, Preached by Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun)
3. *Taishang jidu zhangshe* 太上濟渡章赦³² (Writs of Pardon and Memorials, from the Book of Salvation of the Most-High)
4. *Lingbao yujian* 靈寶玉鑑³³ (Jade Mirror of the Numinous Treasure)
5. *Wushang xuanyuan santian yutang dafa* 無上玄元三天玉堂大法³⁴ (Great Method of the Jade Hall of the Three Heavens, of the Supreme Mysterious Origin)
6. *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法³⁵ (Great Rites of the Shangqing Lingbao)
7. *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu* 靈寶領教濟度金書 (Golden Book of Salvation According to the Lingbao Tradition)

B. Zangwai daoshu³⁶

Zangwai daoshu contains twelve books devoted to *xuehu* rituals. All in volume fourteen, they are:

1. *Xuehu zhengzhao quanji* 血湖正朝全集 (A Complete Collection of Xuehu Authentic Audience)
2. *Xuehu qishi quanji* 血湖啟師全集 (A Complete Collection of Xuehu Ritual to Seek the Master)
3. *Xuehu dazhai sanshen quanji* 血湖大齋三申全集 (A Complete Collection of Xuehu Big Fast Rituals to Submit Three Requests)
4. *Guangao Fengdu xuehu guanjiang quanji* 關告酆都血湖官將全集 (A Complete Collection of Announcement Made to the Generals and Officials at the Gate of Xuehu in Fengdu)
5. *Xuehu yingzhen ji* 血湖迎真集 (A Collection of Xuehu Rituals to Welcome the Perfect Immortals)

³⁰ DZ 2:36.

³¹ DZ 9:892.

³² DZ 5:818.

³³ DZ 10:139.

³⁴ DZ 4:1.

³⁵ DZ 30:649.

³⁶ *Zangwai daoshu* (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 1992–1994).

6. *Xuehu dazhai hunyuan liumu quanji* 血湖大齋混元六幕全集 (A Complete Collection of Six Screens of Primordial Chaos)
7. *Xuehu santu wuku quanji* 血湖三塗五苦全集 (A Complete Collection of Three Punishments and Five Pains in Xuehu)
8. *Po'an randeng quanji* 破暗燃燈全集 (A Complete Collection of Rituals that Break the Darkness and Light the Lanterns)
9. *Xuehu qushe quanji* 血湖曲赦全集 (A Complete Collection of Rituals to Seek Pardon for Xuehu by Special Decree)
10. *Xuehu dazhai kepin quanji* 血湖大齋科品全集 (A Complete Collection of Big Fast Ritual for Xuehu)
11. *Lingbao yulu xuehu* 靈寶玉籙血湖 (The Ritual of Xuehu Lingbao Jade Register)
12. *Xuehu zhengzhao ji* 血湖正朝集 (A Collection of Xuehu Authentic Audience)

C. *Zhuanglin xu Daozang*³⁷

1. *Taiyi jiuku tianzun shuo badu xuehu baochan* 太乙救苦天尊說拔度血湖寶懺 (The Precious Penitential Litany for Deliverance from Xuehu, Preached by Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun)
2. *Taishang dongxuan lingbao yuli xuehu duming shezui miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶玉曆血湖度命赦罪妙經 (The Wonderful Acquittal Scripture for Salvation from Xuehu by Jade Calendar of the Numinous Treasure of the Most-High)

Appendix II

The following are the Twelve Penitential Rituals performed at the Yunquan xianguan during the Middle Prime Festival Ritual 2009:

1. 玉皇錫福寶懺
2. 三元滅罪寶懺
3. 太乙錫福寶懺
4. 呂祖無極寶懺
5. 十王利幽寶懺
6. 北斗延生寶懺
7. 坤元后土寶懺
8. 東嶽往生法懺
9. 城隍集福寶懺

³⁷ *Zhuanglin xu Daozang*, ed. Michael Saso (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1975).

10. 九幽拔罪寶懺
11. 血湖濟度法懺
12. 度靈往生法懺

Appendix III

The following is the ritual programme of the Penitential Ritual for Deliverance from the Lake of Blood performed at Yunquan xianguan 2009:

1. Purification of the Sanctuary 灑水淨壇場
2. *Xiang zan* 香讚
3. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚
4. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
5. *Qingsheng* 請聖
6. *Ruyi* 入意
7. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
8. *Baogao* 寶誥
9. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚
10. *Songjing* 誦經
11. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
12. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
13. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚
14. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文
15. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
16. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
17. *Baogao* 寶誥
18. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
19. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文
20. *Baogao* 寶誥
21. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
- A Break*
22. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
23. *Baogao* 寶誥
24. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
25. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚
26. *Baogao* 寶誥
27. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
28. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
29. *Diaogua zan* 吊掛讚

30. *Baogao* 寶誥
31. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
32. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文
33. *Buxu zan* 步虛讚
34. *Song chanwen* 誦懺文
35. *Zhixin chaoli* 志心朝禮
36. *Baogao* 寶誥
37. *Songjing* 誦經
38. *Fuyuan* 伏願
39. *Jiechan yiwen* 結懺意文
40. *Jiechan xiaozan* 結懺小讚

從一個在香港舉行的血湖懺罪儀式探討婦女的救贖 與天地人之間的和諧關係

(摘要)

張德貞

中國傳統社會相信死於非命、早逝、暴斃等會導致死者的靈魂困於陰間地府受苦，而婦女在生理週期排出的經血、因墮胎或因生產而排出的腥穢物等，對河川流水造成污染、或因生產而死亡等皆構成她們死後要在酆都硤石無間地獄內的血湖受苦。該處名為血湖，是因為湖內盡是婦女生理週期及生產時排出的污染物。血湖內幽暗、污穢、腥臭。通過為婦女濟度而舉行的血湖懺儀式，婦女的亡魂可以得以免於墮落血湖受苦。

作者以2009年香港雲泉仙館在中元節舉行的血湖懺儀式為個案研究，探討社會對女性生理及生殖有關的污血禁忌。作者認為，血湖懺儀式一方面對婦女因生理週期的經血及與生產有關的污血穢物等，導致墮落血湖受苦的不安起心理治療作用；另一方面，儀式中的懺悔告罪內容反映對婦女的個人救贖之外，對家庭及社會間的人際和諧關係以至與自然及宇宙間的均衡追求更是關切。

關鍵詞：血湖懺 女性生理及生殖有關的污血禁忌 婦女宗教儀式 家庭、社會、自然界及宇宙間的和諧關係 香港雲泉仙館

Keywords: penitential ritual for salvation of women from the Lake of Blood; taboo on female bodily pollution; women's ritual; family, social, and cosmic harmony; Yunquan xianguan in Hong Kong