

Beyond the Kingly Metaphor: A Sociological Reading of the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign**

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“. . . Then sacrifice to the air!” “I do not attend to the air”, answered Pionius, “but to him who made the air, the heavens, and all that is in them.” The proconsul said: “Tell me, who did make them?” Pionius answered: “I cannot tell you.” The proconsul said: “Surely it was the god, that is Zeus, who is in heaven; for he is the king of all the gods.”¹

1 Introduction: Mediumistic Origins

In this paper I shall engage with the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*² (YHJ, after *Yuhuang jing* 玉皇經), focusing on the issue of scriptural structure and reception.³

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¹ *Martyrium Pionii* 19.9–13, Musurillo (1972, 160ff.), in Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 1.

² Extant recensions include CT 10, CT 11, and CT 1440.

³ An unfortunate example of this kind of scholarship can be found in Chen Jianxian's 陳建憲 *Yuhuang dadi xinyang* 玉皇大帝信仰 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1995). Chen Jianxian's Marxism-Leninism is one of the many examples of Chinese indoctrination maintained by those who never read a sentence of Marx, may it be in Chinese or in any other language.

The former deserves a more appropriate assessment, since it has been misrepresented or simply ignored by modern scholarly discussions.⁴ The latter, in its turn, remains practically unexplored. The first question I would like to ask is: what is the YHJ about? Is it about the Jade Sovereign? What do we mean when we state that a certain scripture is about a determined god? Are we saying anything *positively* relevant at all?

⁴ Due to the problem of space, it will not be possible to furnish a complete account of the bibliography related to the Jade Sovereign and his scripture here. I do provide with a more critical assessment in this respect in my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign: A Study and Annotated Translation of Its First Chapter*,” *Monumenta Serica* 62 (forthcoming). The fundamental account on the god is still that provided by Henri Maspero in *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises* (1926; Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971). The first philological contributions were those furnished by H. Y. Fêng 馮漢驥 (Feng Hanji), “The Origin of Yü Huang,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 1936), pp. 242–50; Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dōkyō no kenkyū* 道教の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1952), p. 292. Japanese scholars have been focused on the issue of the cult of Yuhuang 玉皇 during Song times. See, for instance, Akizuki Kan’ei 秋月觀暎, *Dōkyōshi* 道教史 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1987), p. 60; Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠, *Dōkyōshi* 道教史 (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1977); Watanabe Yoshio 渡邊欣雄, “Gyokukō jōtei tanshin no matsuri zoku ni kansuru hikaku kenkyū” 玉皇上帝誕辰の祭俗に関する比較研究, *Musashi daigaku Jinbun gakkai zasshi* 14, no. 1 (October 1982), pp. 47–112; Sunayama Minoru 砂山稔, “Gyokukō taitei to Sōdai Dōkyō: So Shoku o chūshin ni shite” 玉皇大帝と宋代道教—蘇軾を中心にして, in *Dōkyō no kamigami to kyōten* 道教の神々と經典, ed., Noguchi Tetsurō 野口鐵郎, Sunayama Minoru, Ozaki Masaharu 尾崎正治, and Kikuchi Noritaka 菊地章太 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1999), pp. 55–74. As for Chinese scholarship, we may identify a variety of approaches to the god and his scripture. Wang Jianchuan 王見川, for instance, discussed the issue of the rumours according which the post of the Jade Sovereign had been occupied by Guandi, in his “Taiwan ‘Guandi dang Yuhuang’ chuanshuo de youlai” 臺灣「關帝當玉皇」傳說的由來, *Taipei wenxian* 118 (December 1996), pp. 213–32. Chen Jianxian dedicated a series of papers and a book to the topic. See his *Huaxia zhushen: Yuhuang dadi* 華夏諸神：玉皇大帝 (Taipei: Yunlong chubanshe, 1999). Long Yan 龍延 tried to explain the Buddhist elements one finds in the YHJ in his “Fojiao dui Daojiao dianji de yingxiang qianlun: Yi Gaoshang Yuhuang benxing jijing wei li” 佛教對道教典籍的影響淺論——以《高上玉皇本行集經》為例, *Chaohu xueyuan xuebao*, 2004, no. 1, pp. 23–27. Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韓秉方 demonstrated that the YHJ would be worshipped not only by Daoists but also by sectarian groups, in their *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), p. 880. Zheng Canshan 鄭燦山 argues that the YHJ contributed to elevate the status of the Jade Sovereign in the Chinese pantheon, in his “Cong Yuhuang benxing jijing kaocha Yuhuang dadi de shenge” 從《玉皇本行集經》考查玉皇大帝的神
(Continued on next page)

In making these questions, the modest goal of this paper is to accurately describe the argument presented in the YHJ, situating the text against the discussions that have evolved around it. The YHJ has been described understandably as “the most sacred scripture” of modern Daoism,⁵ but I hope to achieve my goal by means of a historically oriented approach, combined with an insistence on the avoidance of the inflationary usage of words as “sacred,” “holy,” “divine,” and other vocabularies which call for our scrutiny, but not necessarily our adoption. While respecting the views of any scriptural proponent with regard to the holy nature of their religious products, my insistence on this matter is connected to the fact that we learn nothing when applying these terms, which have little analytical value. I will use the words “scripture” and “scriptural” several times in this paper, but I should make it clear that I do not read the YHJ as a scripture but rather as a document that tells us about some noteworthy aspects of Chinese religion as a social phenomenon.⁶

(Note 4—Continued)

格 (paper delivered at Daojiao shenqi xueshu yantaohui 道教神祇學術研討會, Taipei: Baoangong 保安宮, 14 June 2008). The fundamental contributions to the topic, however, come from Hsieh Tsung-hui 謝聰輝, the sole scholar to establish a reasonable hypothesis for the problem represented by the YHJ, in a series of papers. See Hsieh Tsung-hui, “*Yuhuang benxing jijing chushi de beijing yu yinyuan yanjiu*” 《玉皇本行集經》出世的背景與因緣研究, *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao: Zongjiao, lishi yu shehui* 1 (2009), pp. 155–99; idem, “*Zhengtong Daozang ben Yuhuang benxing jijing chengshu shijian kaoding*” 《正統道藏》本《玉皇本行集經》成書時間考定, *Qinghua xuebao*, n.s., 40, no. 2 (June 2010), pp. 193–220. These two papers and other important contributions are reunited in Hsieh’s *Xin tiandi zhi ming: Yuhuang, Zitong yu feiluan* 新天帝之命: 玉皇, 梓潼與飛鸞 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013). In this book Hsieh Tsung-hui dealt with the reception of the YHJ in Daoist circles, offering important studies on the issue of the extant Ming and Qing recensions of the text. Hsieh Tsung-hui did not discuss, however, the issue represented by Christian and Buddhist polemics around the YHJ.

⁵ See Kristopher Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 1096.

⁶ My own account on scriptural content is not embedded in the misleading premise that scriptural products are necessarily about mystical experience, epiphany, revelation, etc. As I hope to demonstrate, the YHJ presents narrative and descriptive statements, usually about actions or behaviours; my approach will therefore be analytical. I am not interested in unearthing from the text more than it states in its earliest commentary, but at the same time I make no claims of absolute objectivity. I shall analyze the text from the viewpoint of a deflationary philosophy of religion and history, not in the sense that I will try to debunk the non-physicalist nature of the YHJ, but in the sense that I shall not make claims with regards to the possibility of interpreting the scripture as a Daoist might do. In this sense, I shall not make claims of furnishing a direct description of scriptural content, but a description of my thinking about it.

My task will be to clarify the following: (1) the argument of the YHJ; (2) how this argument is based on the reformulation of the model of divinity that had been connected to the Jade Sovereign; (3) how the textual apparatus forming the YHJ depicts the issue of scriptural authority; (4) how different readers reacted to the claims of authority made in the YHJ. As a matter of academic honesty, I should emphasize that my attempt to explain the YHJ is largely based on the conceptual clarification offered by contemporary scholarship.⁷ In stating that the YHJ has an argument, however, I am not suggesting it is a philosophical work, nor am I proposing a philosophical reading of it. Rather, I am convinced that this argument is intrinsically connected to the circumstances leading to the appearance of that text as recently demonstrated by Hsieh Tsung-hui 謝聰輝. The YHJ is not Plato, i.e., it is not the product of aristocratic culture in times of peace, but a vivid depiction of the concerns of an oppressed society. The YHJ offers an argument that certainly should be read against the disturbing moment in which the text appeared. I shall attempt to demonstrate that the YHJ was conceived as a *soteriological tool*. I am interested in explaining the text by means of its causal connections to ritual, assuming that this is a multifaceted issue. There are at least four manners in which the YHJ relates to the domain of “ritual.”

The first manner refers to the fact that that scripture is undeniably connected to spirit-writing séances. Hsieh Tsung-hui demonstrated convincingly that the earliest recensions of the YHJ (CT 10, CT 11) are connected to the mediumistic cult of Wenchang 文昌 and that the text took its current form around 1218, in the Sichuan area. From the extant materials it is possible to know that Ming and Qing versions of that scripture were revised in the context of mediumistic rituals. Also, a recension produced in Changsha demonstrates that the scripture would continue to be revised via spirit-writing rituals until the beginning of the twentieth century. The second aspect relating the YHJ to the realm of ritual is connected to the fact that our scripture would be used as the primary source for the compilation of new liturgies and even precious scrolls (*baojuan* 寶卷). The text acquired a fundamental role in the

⁷ Especially Robert Campany and Michael Puett. My perception of the YHJ as a scripture concerned with depicting the Jade Sovereign as an efficacious god would not be possible without a series of papers and books written by Campany that discuss the problem of *presence* in Chinese religion. Also, I am trying to adopt the historically oriented approach of Puett’s works in my own survey of the intellectual history of the Jade Sovereign. Instead of trying to understand what the term Jade Sovereign or Jade Thearch means in the document X or Y, I am pursuing a form of discussion which contextualizes statements on the Jade Thearch from a pluralist perspective, i.e., a perspective concerned with demonstrating that these statements cannot be understood as isolated events, but rather are part of an ongoing dialogue between speakers of different milieus.

context of the Qingwei 清微 school of Daoism, being also utilized by the Chanhe 禪和 school.⁸

The third way the YHJ relates to ritual is in the phenomenological sense Robert Campany refers to in an article on Guanshiyin 觀世音.⁹ Having as his primary evidence miracle tales connected to that deity, Campany demonstrates how these tales contributed to convey the argument of Guanshiyin being a *present* god. Not by coincidence, the appearance of the YHJ was followed by the compilation of the first set of miracle tales related to the Jade Sovereign and his scripture.¹⁰ This endorses the view proposed by Campany, according to which this kind of literary genre argues effectively by diminishing the distance between gods and devotees. Following the argument proposed by Campany I shall argue that the YHJ depicts the Jade Sovereign as a ritually efficacious deity. The fourth dimension relates to the problem represented by the specific ritualized behaviours alluded to in our text and its earliest commented recension (CT 11). I shall argue that the YHJ is a soteriological device conceived for the sake of a great variety of individual or personal demands.¹¹

This fourfold connection to ritual should be summarized as follows: (1) the YHJ has its origins in a ritualistic, mediumistic context; (2) it depicts the efficaciousness of the Jade Sovereign as a function of ritualized behaviours; (3) it provides descriptive statements on the nature of such behaviours; (4) finally it became the primary source of new liturgies. It will not be possible to deal with (1) and (4) in this paper, but in its first three sections I shall discuss the argument of the YHJ, i.e., its connection to (2) and (3).

A historically oriented approach aims first of all at understanding basic problems, such as authorship, date and place of composition. Fortunately, due to the efforts of Hsieh Tsung-hui, we now have satisfactory answers for these basic questions. Hsieh demonstrated that the earliest known recension of the YHJ is connected to the cult

⁸ The Chanhe school appeared in Fuzhou and is very prominent today in Taiwan. The “Yuhuang zan” 玉皇讚 (Hymn of the Jade Sovereign) of the *zaoke* 早課 ritual performed by Chanhe priests in Taiwan is inspired by passages of the YHJ.

⁹ See Robert F. Campany, “The Real Presence for Joseph M. Kitagawa,” *History of Religions* 32, no. 3 (February 1993), pp. 233–72.

¹⁰ Hsieh Tsung-hui discusses the provenance of these tales in his “Zhengtong Daozang ben Yuhuang benxing jijing chengshu shijian kaoding,” pp. 197–201.

¹¹ I am not taking for granted, however, the existence of a universal category called “individual.” One of my tasks will therefore be to explain how the YHJ defines such an instance. I shall argue that in the YHJ the idea of the individual is related to three dimensions: (1) the individual as a phenomenological apparatus, (2) the individual as a social organism, and (3) the individual as a receptacle for benefits and punishments.

of Wenchang,¹² having been compiled at a spirit-medium altar of the Sichuan area in 1218. He argues that the Jin invasion of 1217 is the possible historical background leading to the final redaction of the YHJ as an edited text.¹³ Hsieh's account is based on a detailed philological survey of the various recensions of the YHJ and it presents the scripture as a product of the immediate concerns of the Sichuanese population. In Hsieh's interpretation, the content of the YHJ reflects local concerns, being a scripture conceived for the sake of the maintenance of national safety and social order, as well as the accomplishment of eschatological goals.¹⁴ The hypothesis proposed by Hsieh with regard to the YHJ calls for a reevaluation of the relationship between the texts forming the Sichuanese cult to Wenchang and the YHJ. Here, I shall only sketch some notes regarding what I consider fundamental for our preliminary understanding of such relationship.

Terry Kleeman demonstrated that the Wenchang cult in the Sichuan area has as one of its most important features the “supervisory role played by representatives

¹² Terry Kleeman has several fundamental articles on this topic. See his “The Expansion of the Wen-ch'ang Cult,” in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), pp. 45–73; “Senshu: Seitōteki na chihō shinkō” 川主：正統的な地方信仰, *Tōhō shūkyō* 80 (1992), pp. 33–50; 81 (1993), pp. 43–50. “Shidō teikun shinkō kenkyū no genjō” 梓潼帝君信仰研究の現状, trans. Maruyama Hiroshi 丸山宏 and Tanaka Fumio 田中文雄, in *Dōkyō bunka e no tenbō* 道教文化への展望, ed. Dōkyō bunka kenkyūkai 道教文化研究会 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1994), pp. 238–41; “The Lives and Teachings of the Divine Lord of Zitong,” in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 64–71; “Sources for Religious Practice in Zitong: The Local Side of a National Cult,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 10 (1998), pp. 341–55. Also, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), in which the author refers to the importance of the Jade Sovereign in the context of the Wenchang cult: “Atop the sacred realm of the *Book of Transformations* sits an autocratic ruler, the Jade Thearch, often simply called the Thearch. He rules through a vast bureaucracy of divine officials that extends down to every village and household of this world and encompasses all the realms of the dead, the divine, and the demonic.” (p. 41)

¹³ See Hsieh Tsung-hui, “*Yuhuang benxing jijing* chushi de beijing yu yinyuan yanjiu,” pp. 155–99.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–66. Hsieh Tsung-hui states that “李豐楙教授的相關重要研究，除鋪陳此一重要觀點外，更進一步闡析其宗教的核心思想，乃是「罪與解罪」的問題，即由於人性失序、社會失序而致宇宙失序。因此若能透過祈請祝禱的儀式，讓這些「救劫」經文不斷地被反覆誦唸，聲聲達於天聽，宗教人即認為可達成其「救劫度世」的願望。” In this explanation, the YHJ and related texts are described as tools developed for the sake of keeping the “social order.”

of the central government.”¹⁵ He argues, “The state realized the disruptive potential of divine pronouncements in a cult setting and kept a close watch on the literary products of the cult.”¹⁶ In his *A God's Own Tale*, Kleeman recognizes that: “In dealing with cults like that to the Divine Lord of Zitong [梓潼] it is difficult to distinguish motives of self-interest from larger concerns about the well-being of society, but the ecumenical approach to diverse religious traditions and the unitary sacred realm portrayed in the scriptural products of the cult would have furthered such a goal.”¹⁷

Kleeman also distinguishes two important moments of the Wenchang revelation, that of 1181 and that of 1194. He understands that the “1181 revelation, which ended with the apotheosis of the god in the fourth century, had not included any of the historical or quasi-historical incidents from the fourth century on that had become part of cult lore.”¹⁸ But the 1194 revelation demonstrates “a concern with external invasion and a support of Sinocentrism that sought to rally support for traditional Chinese values and cultural norms.”¹⁹ According to Kleeman, a “second distinguishing characteristic of the 1194 revelation is a more narrowly religious tone. This is evident in chapter 83, wherein the god [Zitong] saves people from a natural disaster and is rewarded by the Ancient Buddha with the title of Tathāgata.”²⁰ The YHJ is also characterized by a high degree of syncretism. That scripture, indeed, depicts the Jade Thearch as a Tathāgata, which certainly is not a coincidence.²¹

But does the syncretism we find in the YHJ arise from competition between “Buddhists” and “Daoists”? Does it represent an extension of the *huahu* 化胡 ideology, to use a hypothesis advanced by Christine Mollier with regard to the Sichuanese statuery of the Tang period?²² Or does it correspond to a high level of cooperation

¹⁵ Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The characterization of the Jade Sovereign as the Tathāgata is connected to CT 385 *Tai-shang dongxuan sandong kaitian fenglei yubu zhimo shenzhou jing* 太上洞玄三洞開天風雷禹步制魔神咒經. Cf. CT 10 1:6b 5/1–6/7 and CT 385 1b 9/1–2a 1/4. Also, see CT 1220 140:10a–14b.

²² In a recent paper, Christine Mollier argues that the blending of Daoist and Buddhist motifs we see in Sichuanese art from Tang on is due to an imperially sanctioned manifestation of the *huahu* ideology. See Christine Mollier, “Iconizing the Daoist-Buddhist Relationship: Cliff Sculptures in Sichuan during the Reign of Tang Xuanzong,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 2 (2010), pp. 95–133.

between scriptural proponents of distinct backgrounds, for whom affiliation to this or that “ism” would not be perceived as an important issue at all? The ecumenical model alluded to by Kleeman might be a good preliminary explanation for the blending of traditions we can detect in the YHJ. Much evidence supports Kleeman’s view. Wei Qi 衛琪, the Yuan compiler of the *Yuqing wuji zongzhen Wenchang dadong xianjing* 玉清無極總真文昌大洞仙經 (Transcendent scripture of the Great Grotto of Wenchang, CT 103), for instance, states that “the four Perfected Ones mentioned in the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* and the four Perfected Ones of the *Lengyan jing* are in reality the same” 《玉皇經》中四真人與釋教《楞嚴經》之四真，其實一也。 This kind of record suggests that the compilers of new Daoist scriptures in the Sichuan area did not necessarily intend to compete against other religious movements.

The extant evidence points to the Sichuan area as the place of composition of the YHJ. The *Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing zhu* 元始無量度人上品妙經注 (Commentary on the Book of Salvation, CT 88) preserves a so far ignored passage, which might be the earliest known quotation of the YHJ. This exegetical work corresponds to three different layers, attributed to a certain Donghai Qingyuan zhenren 青元真人, the Old Man of Qinghe 清河老人, and Guo Gangfeng 郭岡鳳, the latter being a Jingming 淨明 disciple. Judith Boltz argues that the reference to Qinghe and Donghai might signify that the text was composed in Jiangsu after 1270.²³

We have good reasons, however, to believe that CT 88 was composed in Sichuan, not Jiangsu. Kleeman’s research on the Zitong cult demonstrates that the term Qinghe is associated with the influential Zhang family of the Sichuan area.²⁴ This term is not likely to be connected to the name of the Jiangsu district of same name. In the texts pertaining to the Sichuanese cult to Wenchang we find references to this Old Man of Qinghe, and the inspired poetry in CT 88 appears in the same exact way in CT 5 *Taishang wuji zongzhen Wenchang dadong xianjing* 太上無極總真文昌大洞仙經.

According to Robinet, CT 5 was “revealed in 1168, revised in 1264, with an addition dated 1302.”²⁵ The layer attributed to Qingyuan zhenren is probably the oldest one. In explaining the meaning of the character “commencement” (*shi* 始), Qingyuan zhenren narrates the fundamental plots making up the first chapter of

²³ John Lagerwey refers to Boltz’s comments on CT 88 in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, pp. 713–14. See Judith M. Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature, Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 1987), p. 328, n. 572: “HY 88 may have been compiled sometime between 1274 and 1285.”

²⁴ See Kleeman, *A God’s Own Tale*, p. 30: “Qinghe was the choronym of one of the most prominent Zhang clans.”

²⁵ See Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, p. 1207.

the YHJ.²⁶ This evidence only argues in favour of Hsieh Tsung-hui's demonstration with regard to the place of composition of the YHJ.

With the philological survey of the recensions of the YHJ presented by Hsieh Tsung-hui we are now allowed to discuss in a deeper manner what the text and its sources suggest in terms of its purposes. Hsieh understands the colophon written by Cheng Gongxu 程公許 as the definitive proof demonstrating that the YHJ occurred after the so-called Shudinan 蜀敵難, i.e., the Jin invasion of 1217.

During the calamity [represented by] attacks against the Shu area, Qiqu Mount produced the grand book through spirit-writing, urging people to continue their recitation of this scripture [i.e., the YHJ]. There were those who, with profound faith, stayed faithful to the recitation without pause. Many became aware of and therefore corrected their faults, moving toward goodness: some were injured by blades and arrowheads, but did not die. Some were kept captive with their entire family, but they could escape. Some encountered enemy forces, but the enemy behaved as if it did not see them. Officials and scholars came from distant places of refuge and clearly described each of these events to Cheng Gongxu. Thus, these are not spurious comments.²⁷

This record is fundamentally a miracle tale. But we should agree with Campany when he states that: “Historians often dismiss such texts [Campany is referring to miracle tales] as sources because of what they take to be the contaminating presence of the miraculous. In my view, the miraculous elements of these narratives are part of what the historian should seek to understand. They, too, if read with the right questions in

²⁶ CT 88 12b.7–13a.3: 元始在清微天宮說法，是時玉帝至於會前，舉六神通放大光明，徧照無極梵剎，乃分其身，示諸天宮。今彼天宮各現玉京金闕，光明寶座。一一寶座各有化身玉帝，一一玉帝各於其方演說解脫之道。此諸天豈各有玉帝者哉。設教示人，分真垂化者也。This layer also suggests a strong connection between Qingyuan zhenren and the Jingming school, since Qingyuan Zhenren demonstrates knowledge of the latter's theoretical and ritual lore. The layer attributed to the Jingming disciple Guo Gangfeng quotes Buddhist works which are posterior to 1220, but because of a Jingming work—the CT 1110 *Jingming zhongxiao quanshu* 淨明忠孝全書, compiled in 1327—there is no doubt that this Donghai Qingyuan zhenren was active in the Sichuan area. The Jingming work refers to Qingyuan zhenren, affirming him to be the author of CT 88. The reign names alluded to in the miracle tales added to Qingyuan zhenren's layer suggest that it might have been composed anytime after 1204, so that an earlier version of the YHJ might have been in circulation already one decade before its final redaction in 1218. Until now, however, I have not found decisive evidence supporting this conjecture.

²⁷ The original text might be found in Hsieh Tsung-hui, “*Yuhuang benxing jijing chushi de bei-jing yu yinyuan yanjiu*,” p. 160.

mind, constitute important historical evidence, not necessarily of what happened but of what some people believed and wanted others to believe had happened—itsself a matter of considerable historical interest.”²⁸

The colophon written by Cheng Gongxu fits perfectly into the description furnished by Campany. Cheng wanted us to believe that the YHJ appeared miraculously for the sake of the salvation of the nation, which is a common concern for the intellectual class of China. Hsieh Tsung-hui, following the evidence furnished by Cheng, reasonably argues that the YHJ occurs after the Jin invasion of 1217.²⁹ Different from Cheng, Hsieh does not understand the YHJ as a scripture that came from nothing. Rather, he recognizes that the text is formed from received materials. Also, Cheng’s colophon demonstrates that during the Song, people would see the YHJ as a soteriological device conceived for personal salvation. In this case, the record describes how people escaped from the perils of war. One should note that the colophon narrates the salvation of individuals, not of the Song dynasty. As we will see, this is not the sole miracle tale associated with the YHJ. Also, protection against the perils of war is not the sole demand the text promises to be capable of satisfying.

The hypothesis proposed by Hsieh Tsung-hui certainly illuminates one of the aspects of the social reality connected to the YHJ, explaining the circumstances in which the text appeared. Hsieh has good reason to believe that the YHJ reveals national concerns. The evidence he puts forth suggests that the final redaction of the text is indeed connected to a fundamental anxiety with regard to external invasion. Following Hsieh, I shall accept that foreign invasion stands as the primary concern leading to the final redaction of the YHJ. In this paper, therefore, I take as a premise that the Jin invasion of 1217 might explain the circumstances leading to the final redaction of the YHJ. Throughout this paper, however, I shall argue that that particular scripture demonstrates a greater preoccupation with “motives of self-interest” rather than “social well-being.” Are these “motives of self-interest” accidentally connected to the received materials which make up the YHJ or do they reveal the concerns of the compilers in a legitimate manner? As I understand them, these motives reveal important elements concerning the sociology of scriptural content and the way scriptural content relates to the historical reality revealed by Hsieh’s research. The very appearance of

²⁸ See Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012), p. xii.

²⁹ See Hsieh Tsung-hui, “*Yuhuang benxing jijing chushi de beijing yu yinyuan yanjiu*,” p. 161: “南宋程公訢1240年所看到的《玉皇經》版本，載明有「天樞上相張真人校正表文及逐章注解，敘述誦持大義；北極天猷副元帥為之序；七曲靈應張大帝為之跋」，又言「蜀敵難，七曲託鸞大書」。由其敘述邏輯可見，先有「蜀敵難」的現實背景，而後「七曲託鸞大書」《玉皇經》出世，方有天樞上相張真人張良校經注解。”

the YHJ might relate to national concerns, but one should admit that its soteriology is directed toward personal salvation.

The YHJ certainly deserves the title “combined scriptures” (*jijing* 集經): that document preserves passages related to Six Dynasties, Tang, and Song sources.³⁰ These received materials are not immediately connected to the invasion of 1217, but the fact that they constitute a large portion of the YHJ suggests that the compilers saw a strong connection between these sources and their own immediate concerns as proponents of a new scripture. Deprived as we are of a Southern Song physical copy of the YHJ, we have to rely on the evidence suggested by the received materials of the YHJ in order to understand the intentional patterns of the compilers in gathering these materials together as if they were a coherent unity, a “text” in its own regard. We should praise Hsieh Tsung-hui for discovering a causal connection absent from the internal evidence provided by the scriptural content, recognizing that the Jin invasion of 1217 stands as the best hypothesis for the possible reason leading to the compilation of the YHJ. But at the same time, since Hsieh’s research ignores a more serious engagement with the received materials of the YHJ, we are allowed to assume that the scholarly problem represented by the very nature of the YHJ as a piece of religious rhetoric has still not been touched upon. The issue of textual history is much more complex than suggested by the causal relation with the Jin invasion and the obvious connection with CT 22 *Yupian zhenwen* 玉篇真文. The sources of the YHJ demonstrate that the spirit-medium (or the group of mediums) responsible for revealing the scripture was deeply familiar with Daoist and Buddhist literature, especially liturgical texts of the Song period. In the following, I shall demonstrate that the scriptural content of the YHJ connects that text to ritual performances of Daoist and Tantric³¹ provenance. A discussion of the ritual performances alluded to in the YHJ might help us to gain a more nuanced view of how scriptural content relates to historical reality. The earliest commentary to that scripture seems to confirm this hypothesis in a compelling manner.

³⁰ For a detailed account on this issue, see my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” section 6 “On the Sources of the YHJ.”

³¹ I classify some of the Chinese Buddhist sources of the YHJ as “Tantric” by means of the following criteria: (1) some of these sources define themselves as esoteric (*mi* 秘) scriptures, in a clear opposition to the exoteric (*xian* 顯) ones; (2) some of these sources were included in the Esoteric Section (*mijiaobu* 密教部) of the *Taisho Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經. But as argued by Ronald Davidson and Charles Orzech, “Tantra in Western nomenclature has achieved forms of signification independent from its Sanskritic use and has become a somewhat promiscuous category applied to various rituals otherwise not easily classified.” See Ronald M. Davidson and Charles D. Orzech, “Tantra,” in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., editor

(Continued on next page)

This paper can be divided into six sections. The first three sections deal with the issue of scriptural structure. In the first of these sections, I shall deal with the issue of how the YHJ depicted the Jade Sovereign as a national deity. The second section will focus on the ritualized behaviours described in the text. I shall demonstrate that the ritual framework of the YHJ draws on Daoist and Tantric liturgical sources according to which some forms of ritual and even non-ritualized actions might promote salvation, at the price of scriptural *adherence*. The third section discusses how the YHJ describes its promises of personal welfare, and what these promises have to reveal with regard to the intended audience of our text.

The last three sections deal with the issue of scriptural reception. The Jade Sovereign is usually described as the “chief deity of the Chinese pantheon.” But one of the questions I shall pursue with regard to the history of scriptural reception is: before modern scholarship standardized our understanding of what that god might be, how did different people relate to the Jade Sovereign? In the epigraph that opens this article, Quintilian establishes a comparison between Zeus and Deus, inferring a relation of identity between these two deities. Similarly, Christian, Buddhist, and Daoist scriptural proponents would move from the Naïve Simile Theory to the Identity Theory when establishing connections and comparisons between deities as diverse as the Jade Sovereign, Indra, Shangdi, and Deus. Different proponents would say that the god X resembles the deity Y and both X and Y are nothing but different names that *refer directly* to the same divinity Z. Buddhist, Catholic, and Daoist proponents would define Z—the thing in itself—in different ways. Their accounts reflect an essentialist view of language.³² As we will see, however, the discussion around the identity of the Jade Sovereign is inseparable from commonsensical beliefs with regard to language,

(Note 31—*Continued*)

in chief, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), p. 820. Also, see Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially chapter 4 “The Victory of Esoterism and the Imperial Metaphor,” pp. 113–68. Taking into account the arguments presented by Davidson and Orzech, I would not affirm that the YHJ should be seen as a “Tantric” scripture.

³² The Naïve Simile Theory understands that metaphors replace and abbreviate explicit literal comparisons. For an introduction to the philosophical discussions involving the issue of metaphor, see William G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 175–90. For a general introduction to the philosophy of language, see Barry Lee, ed., *Philosophy of Language: The Key Thinkers* (New York: Continuum, 2011). Robert Campamy also makes important observations to the issue of metaphor in his “Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales,” *History of Religions* 52, no. 2 (November, 2012), pp. 99–141.

(*Continued on next page*)

having no connection with philosophical reasoning at all.³³ How might these different views with regard to a god's identity be explained?

In order to answer this and other questions, in the last sections of this paper I shall engage with various records from the late imperial period. The fourth section deals with jottings that demonstrate different attitudes toward the YHJ and a noteworthy tension between the topics of scriptural authority and scriptural adherence. The fifth section focuses on records that show how Buddhist readers reacted to the YHJ. I shall argue, in a preliminary manner, that the discussions on the identity of the Jade Sovereign we find in Buddhist records seem to be about theology, but they should be translated into an attempt to diminish the political potential of the Jade Sovereign as a national deity. The last section of this paper is dedicated to Christian records that demonstrate how Western missionaries and Chinese converts read the text. These records, similar to those written by Buddhist preachers, demonstrate a virulent attitude toward the YHJ that suggests the extent to which scriptural proponents would strive in order to acquire state recognition.

(Note 32—*Continued*)

The observations I have made in this paragraph are connected to my own perception of gods being linguistic phenomena of whom it is possible to say reliable things as long as we understand that our own statements do not refer directly to deities, but to what we do believe we know regarding the records we read. I should emphasize, however, that I am by no means an advocate of atheism or any other naturalistic religion, nor am I defending a Fregean notion according which “god” is a concept with no instantiation, like “unicorn.” For a philosophical interpretation of Frege, see Barry Lee, ed., *Philosophy of Language*, p. 39. What I am implying is that sinologists and historians have nothing to say about *gods as such*, so that it is necessary to carry out a kind of therapy upon sinological and historical discourses in order to avoid the *naïveté* that characterizes part of what has been done in terms of scholarly accounts on the Jade Sovereign. The problem of *gods as such* therefore remains an exclusive problem for philosophers and theologians.

³³ One should note that research on metaphor has reached a level of complexity and sophistication that I could not summarize here. An introduction to the state of the art might be found in Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3: “Metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, but a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualize the world and their own activities.” When applying the notion of metaphor to my own research I am taking as an axiom that the conflicts we see in the extant Buddhist, Christian, and Daoist sources in Chinese reveal verbal disputes related to the domain of everyday life, not highly formalized philosophical discussions. Most studies involving metaphor place this phenomenon against the concerns of disciplines as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and anthropology. I am assuming that this category might be relevant for the study of Chinese religion and its intellectual history.

2 Internal Structure

In this section I argue that the YHJ is primarily concerned with giving directions for a soteriological performance. This section discusses the nature of such a performance, demonstrating for whom it was designed. I hope to demonstrate that what I am calling here “ritualized behaviour” seems to be different from liturgical performance. The compilers of our scripture borrowed from Daoist liturgical materials and Tantric sources, but the final result of their efforts is not a liturgical manual. Rather, they produced a piece of religious rhetoric whose veiled references to liturgy would be correctly identified only by ritual specialists. The didactic nature of the YHJ, however, would allow non-specialists to benefit from the scripture and its teachings. The YHJ offers several explanatory and descriptive statements which deal with (1) hypothetical circumstances in which the scripture could be useful, (2) the reasons to keep faith with the scripture, and (3) the consequences for disdaining its authority. Also, the scripture will reveal a disconcerting degree of self-awareness with regard to its own condition as a text.

2.1 The Jade Sovereign as a National God

According to the *Songshi* 宋史, both Zhenzong 真宗 (968–1022) and Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135) promoted the assimilation of the Jade Sovereign and the Great Heaven (*haotian* 昊天). Zhenzong and Huizong tried to transform the Jade Sovereign into a state god in the strict sense, i.e., a god worshipped according to the standards defined in the state canon and whose power therefore would emanate from the ritual actions of the state authorities, not from divine revelation. The YHJ—a scripture composed in the context of mediumistic rituals and therefore a product of divine revelation—presents the Jade Sovereign as a national deity, but not as a state god. Confucians never try to describe gods such as Haotian Shangdi 昊天上帝 (Superior Thearch of the Vast Heaven) in a fashion similar to that of the YHJ. State gods represent the national ethos *par excellence*, requiring sacrifice and sanctioned violence against animals in a ritual context.³⁴ The YHJ depicts the Jade Sovereign as a moral deity and

³⁴ Regarding the issue of sanctioned violence in China, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990). Also, see Terry F. Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 7, pt. 1 (June 1994), pp. 185–211. Paul R. Katz offers an interesting account on the relationship between banner worship and human sacrifice during the late imperial period, see his “Trial by Power: Some Preliminary Observations on the Judicial Roles of Taoist Martial Deities,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 36 (2008), pp. 54–83.

the Great Heaven as a god submitted to the authority of the former.³⁵ The YHJ—a scripture which advocates vegetarianism as so many sectarian teachings persecuted in China did³⁶—does not represent the ethos of the state cult.

Several early sources—as those connected to the Shangqing 上清 and Lingbao 靈寶 movements—recorded the titles of various gods named Yuhuang 玉皇 and Yudi 玉帝, including Gaoshang Yuhuang 高上玉皇, the god after whom the YHJ is named. In these early sources, Yuhuang appears as a stellar deity, a receiver and transmitter of scriptures, the god responsible for controlling peoples' destiny, a divine post attainable by those who perform Daoist ritual practices, a celestial ruler, and also as the theme of cosmic scriptures. The idea of the Jade Sovereign as a bureaucrat, a supreme ruler, is also prominent in Tang sources, as the commentaries of Li Shaowei 李少微 and Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 to the CT 1 *Duren jing* 度人經 demonstrate.³⁷ But in order to understand the model of divinity on which the YHJ elaborates, we should turn our attention to the efforts of contemporary scholars. Modern scholarship usually depicts the Jade Sovereign as a god who represents a continuity of the “primitive cult to Heaven” or a Daoist version of the state authority. Henri Maspero describes the idea of a heavenly Thearch in the following terms: “Xiwangmu est restée la reine des Immortels, et l'Auguste de Jade, chargé de diriger tous les dieux et les Immortels fonctionnaires de l'administration céleste, tend à se transformer populairement en un roi divin du monde, et on lui élevait des stèles au temps des Six Dynasties. Il était un des Seigneurs du Dao *daojun* et en avait un grand nombre sous ses ordres, toute la hiérarchie administrative dépendant de lui.”³⁸

Maspero was one of the first scholars to notice the prominent place occupied by the Jade Sovereign already during the Six Dynasties period. He was also the first to notice that in early sources the human head is connected to the Palace of the Jade Thearch, corresponding to the place inhabited by that deity.³⁹ How to interpret this depiction of the Jade Sovereign as a body deity? As argued by Michael Puett against a long tradition of sinologists who hold opposite views, classical Chinese thought implies rupture and discontinuity between humans and Heaven; but discourses on self-deification in which this discontinuity would give place to a strong sense of

³⁵ See CT 10 3:1a and CT 11 3:1a. In CT 11 (3:3b), Zhang Liang does not suppose a relation of identity between the Jade Sovereign and Haotian, referring to them as distinct deities.

³⁶ See J.J.M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Müller, 1903–1904).

³⁷ See my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” in which I present a more detailed account on the sources forming the first chapter of the text.

³⁸ Maspero, *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises*, p. 395.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

harmony and continuity were also connected to social uprisings and real attempts in the sense of questioning and replacing the status quo of political authority. If read against Puett's argument, the early depiction of the Jade Sovereign as a part of human anatomy suggests that in Six Dynasties sources that god was somehow imbued with a disruptive political power. Even though the Jade Sovereign as depicted by the YHJ does not conflate with the model of Six Dynasties sources, I argue that they are equally disruptive. Different from the gods of the state cult, the Jade Sovereign is not a capricious deity who sends disasters:

Great Heaven, unjust,
Is sending down these exhausting disorders.
Great Heaven, unkind,
Is sending down these great miseries.
Let superior men come [into office],
And that would bring rest to the people's hearts.
Let superior men do justly,
And the animosities and angers would disappear.⁴⁰
昊天不備，
降此鞠誼。
昊天不惠，
降此大戾。
君子如屆，
俾民心闕。
君子如夷，
惡怒是違。

⁴⁰ *Book of Poetry*, “Jie Nanshan” 節南山, translated by James Legge. This characterization of the deity Haotian as an unjust god occurs many times in the *Shijing* 詩經: 191 “Jie Nanshan,” 194 “Yu wuzheng” 雨無正, 198 “Qiaoyan” 巧言, 202 “Lu e” 蓼莪, 254 “Ban” 板, 256 “Yi” 抑, 257 “Sang rou” 桑柔, 258 “Yun han” 雲漢, 264 “Zhan yang” 瞻仰, 271 “Haotian you chengming” 昊天有成命, and 273 “Shi mai” 時邁. It also appears in recovered fragments of the *Shijing* preserved in several early sources such as *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, *juan* 4, 6, and 7; *Xinxu* 新序, “jieshi” 節士 section; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳, Cheng gong 成公, seventh year; *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書, “Jigong jie” 祭公解. *Cai Zhonglang ji* 蔡中郎集 preserves important epigraphic materials in which the characterization of Haotian as an unjust god functions as a rhetoric element utilized in the eulogies of several deceased people of social prestige or their dead relatives. For a study on the *Shijing*, see
(Continued on next page)

The image of state gods as the Great Heaven agrees with Puett's argument on the discontinuity of human and divine realms, which had as a consequence the humanization of the emperor's person.⁴¹ The YHJ would furnish an alternative image for the Jade Sovereign. Unlike the Great Heaven (*haotian*), the Jade Sovereign of the YHJ is not the personification of misfortune and disaster, but an external source of power concerned with the salvation of the myriad of beings, particularly the tormented souls. The YHJ depicts the Jade Sovereign as a "personal protector," in the sense formulated by Robert Hymes. In his work on Song models of divinity, Hymes asks: "What were the Chinese gods? Were they heavenly officials, governing the fate and fortunes of their worshippers as China's own bureaucracy governed their worldly lives? Or were they personal beings: patrons, or parents or guardians, offering protection to those who relied on them?" He thus responds these questions: "Two models informed how the Chinese saw gods, and whether they were bureaucrats or personal protectors depended and still depends on who worships them or who tells about them, in what context, and to what purpose."⁴² Endorsing this view, I shall argue that the Jade Sovereign as depicted in the YHJ does not behave solely according to the idea of a heavenly bureaucrat.⁴³ Rather, the YHJ suggests the coexistence of the bureaucratic and the personal models in the same scripture. The image of the

(Note 40—*Continued*)

Martin Kern, "Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shijing* and the *Shangshu*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice During the Western Zhou," in John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 143–200.

⁴¹ See Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), p. 29: "The new sacrificial system put in place at the end of the first century bc involved a rejection of any claims to self-divinization or theomorphism on the part of humans. Humans and Heaven were posited as normatively correlated with each other, but they were also distinguished, with each given its proper sphere of activity. Divine kingship was rejected; the ruler was defined as human. Thereafter, self-divinization and ascension came to be associated with millenarian movements opposing the imperial court."

⁴² Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 1.

⁴³ Indeed, Stephen R. Bokenkamp invites us to rethink the issue of Chinese pantheons in his "Daoist Pantheons," in John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 1169–1203. In this important study, Bokenkamp argues that "while the pantheon is a central feature of the religion, the Daoist pantheon does not really function in the ways centuries of scholarship have led us to expect that pantheons should behave" (p. 1170).

Jade Sovereign as a bureaucrat pervades the revealed edicts in which the Daoist gods determine that Zhang Liang 張良 (c. 250–186 B.C.E.) should descend to the human realm in order to revise the YHJ.⁴⁴ But at the same time, the YHJ elaborates on a model of divinity that transcends the idea of a supreme bureaucrat ruling from above, being more accurately described as a god concerned with personal salvation.

The sources connected to the Song layer of the YHJ emphasize the role of the Jade Sovereign as the supreme god of China, depicting him as the deity who controls the powers of thunder in order to subdue minor gods and destroy illicit cults.⁴⁵ In promoting the cult of the Jade Sovereign, however, the purposes of the compilers of the YHJ seem to differ from those of the Song Chinese emperors. The YHJ is a scripture whose claims of authority seem to be connected to the general tone of anxiety that characterizes the confusing period in which the text was written. The text describes the conditions through which it might help the state. In demonstrating itself willing to cooperate with the state, the text depicts its audience as loyal to the *guo* 國, or the *sheji* 社稷,⁴⁶ the cultural and geographical polity that the Jade Thearch would embody.⁴⁷ The YHJ therefore relies on a collaborative model in order to present the Jade Sovereign as a national god. In the story of the past lives of the Jade Sovereign, for instance, the would-be Tathāgata-Thearch renounces his throne only to help the state under the identity of a charitable ascetic, a paternalistic narrative in which any possible sense of political pragmatism is sacrificed in order that one might sustain bold claims of authority. The text suggests that the state should patronize the compilation of the Daoist Canons and the expensive liturgies of Daoist purification so that it might receive the benefits generated by the mantic powers of the YHJ. In doing so, the YHJ makes claims of its own Chineseness not by means of revering the authority of the state cult, but by means of depicting itself as a source of blessing *for* the state, a claim that has no basis in the scriptural canon of Ruist provenance from which the Chinese state would derive its own ritual practices.

What we can learn from the sociology of the YHJ therefore is that its model of divinity presents an account according to which authority does not emanate from the state. The Jade Sovereign depicted in the YHJ follows a model of divinity that

⁴⁴ See CT 11 1:1a–6a.

⁴⁵ See CT 385 *Taishang dongxuan sandong kaitian fenglei yubu zhimo shenzhou jing*, 2a. Also, see CT 1220 140:10a–14b.

⁴⁶ For a study on the notion of *she* 社, see Kominami Ichirō, “Rituals for the Earth,” in Lagerwey and Kalinowski, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part One*, pp. 201–34.

⁴⁷ The term *guo* appears various times in the scripture, in passages connected to Six Dynasties sources. The term *sheji* appears only once, see CT 10 1:5a.

is antithetical to that defining the mode of existence of the state gods. This deity not only refuses meat offerings, but also promises the fulfilment of goals that are completely strange to the immediate concerns of the Chinese state. As we will see, the YHJ addresses individuals of every gender, age, and social class, offering individual guarantees. The argument of the YHJ seems to be akin to the forms of solidarity connected to civil organizations that began to appear especially from the Song onwards and that would furnish Chinese “citizens” with certain services neglected by the state. The YHJ and related scriptures, basing themselves on a model of divinity alien to classical Chinese thought, represent an instance of the Chinese culture in which deities call for an attenuation of social relations by furnishing the individual with guarantees, where the state would require his sacrifice. The YHJ not only desires the nation to win its wars, it also hopes that its soldiers will return home safely. The YHJ represents a model of *parallel* authority, and in this it is similar to many Chinese scriptures despised by Confucian fundamentalists.⁴⁸

But would such claims of parallel authority be tolerated by the state? As demonstrated by Kleeman, the state would keep constant surveillance of the products appearing in the context of the Wenchang cult. The idea of the YHJ as a source of authority and benefit *for* the state but not *from* the state could certainly produce horrible consequences for its proponents. In spite of its failure in debunking the military prowess of its external enemies, such as the Jin, the Liao, and the Mongols, the state could easily apply violent measures against the civil population responsible for the compilation of newly revealed texts.

⁴⁸ This seems to be the case of the Ming official Zhou Qi 周琦 (b. 1441), who in his *Dongxi ritanlu* 東溪日談錄 reveals derogatory views with regards to Chinese religion, stating that Daoism “worked in cooperation with Buddhism in order to create chaos in the truth of our way” 與佛氏並行以亂吾道之真也, i.e., classical Chinese culture, which should be represented by Confucianism. He argues that Laozi wrote only one text, the *Scripture of the Way and its Power*, so that Daoist scriptures such as *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* and *Scriptures of the Southern and Northern Bushel* were spuriously fabricated by Zhang Daoling 張道陵. He also states that Song Huizong created a certain *Yuhuang gao* 玉皇誥 (Declaration of the Jade Sovereign). Zhou Qi demonstrates that he is aware of the existence of certain liturgies, such as the *Qingjing xiaozai jing* 清淨消災經, which he attributes to the Song Daoist priest Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025). Zhou Qi also accuses Daoists of plagiarism, asserting that Daoist rituals are nothing but imitations of Buddhist liturgies. These are the views of a Confucian fundamentalist, for whom the sole source of scriptural authority are the texts sanctioned by the state. It reveals the views of someone concerned with endorsing the authority of the state canon against that of Daoism and Buddhism; but we should understand that the views of Zhou Qi do not represent those of other members of the Chinese administration, who would demonstrate diversified attitudes toward Daoist scriptures.

Zhang Liang, the spirit who wrote a commentary to the YHJ (CT 11), offers some views that are antithetical to the claims of supreme authority made in that scripture. Different from what is in fact argued in the text, Zhang Liang asserts that there is no religious scripture capable of averting natural disasters and wars—only the foolish and the childish would believe in such a chimerical approach to religious texts.⁴⁹ He says that only Heaven, i.e. the state god, might promote natural and social transformations. In stating that Heaven, and not the Jade Sovereign, is the supreme source of authority, Zhang Liang furnished an account that could satisfy state authorities. His commentary suggests that scriptural proponents realized the harmful effects that claims of parallel authority could exert over its advocates. As we will see, during the Ming-Qing period, claims of authority such as those perpetrated by the YHJ will hardly maintain their status without the aid of complex negotiations between religious proponents and the scriptural authority of the state. We should be careful therefore not to assume that the Chinese state would interpret the YHJ as a canonical work in which its own concerns are depicted in a legitimate manner. In the following, I would like to demonstrate how the YHJ derives its authority from its claims of ritual efficaciousness.

2.2 Ritualized Behaviours

A close reading of the YHJ demonstrates that ritualized behaviour—and the constellation of promises and threats connected to it—constitutes the fundamental content of the scripture. At the same time, this set of promises and threats, when interpreted as a coherent whole, contributed to the formation of what I would call the theology of the omnipotent scripture, i.e., the idea according to which the scripture as such is an independent entity endowed with salvific and punitive functions. This idea is also prominent in Tang Daoist literature. The *Benji jing* 本際經, for instance, declares itself to be the “king of all scriptures.” The same statement can be found in the YHJ.⁵⁰ One should notice, however, that the idea of religious scriptures as “omnipotent tools” whose mantic powers could satisfy national, familial, and personal concerns was first announced in Buddhist and Daoist scriptures of the Six Dynasties. Indeed, it rests at the core of the T 387 *Dafangdeng wuxiang jing* 大方等無想經 (Skt.: Mahāmegha-sūtra), a Six Dynasties Buddhist scripture which is likely one of the sources consulted by the compilers of the YHJ.⁵¹

⁴⁹ CT 11 2:42a2–b9.

⁵⁰ See CT 11 3:10a.

⁵¹ Cf. CT 10 3:9a 5/1–3:9b 10 and T 387 4:1096c16–1097a9. This scripture is a Northern Liang 北涼 (397–439) Chinese translation attributed to the Buddhist monk Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433), who came from central India.

By utilizing a set of promises and threats, the scripture establishes a relation of mutual solidarity with the faithful: the scripture and its god shall provide the faithful with all her spiritual and material needs, while the user shall reaffirm her adherence to the scripture through ritualized behaviour that does not necessarily include expensive, complex liturgical acts. The pragmatic relationship established between user and scripture might explain the existence of so many records conceived in order to validate the efficacy of such implements. CT 11, indeed, not only explains in a more detailed manner the ritualized behaviours proposed by the YHJ, it also presents miracle tales destined to prove the efficaciousness of that scripture.

(1) Destroying obstacles. The first ritualized behaviour proposed by the YHJ is the so-called “method to remove obstacles.”⁵² This “method” is announced in the first chapter and consists of repeating the Jade Sovereign’s titles “as if one were near to the Thearch.”⁵³ These titles are furnished by two gods, the otherwise unknown Heavenly Lord of the Pure Brightness⁵⁴ (Qingming Tianzhu 清明天主) and the Superior Thearch of the Vast Heaven (Haotian Shangdi), the central figure of the state cult. If successfully practised, this ritual shall lead to salvation, defined as the fulfilment of familial and personal concerns. Zhang Liang, the commentator of CT 11, furnished detailed instructions with regard to the method to remove obstacles, which is not the sole ritual practice mentioned in the YHJ. In a commentary to a passage coming from the *Book of Salvation*, Zhang Liang also referred to the “art of refining the form by means of the supreme yin” (*lianxing taiyin zhi shu* 練形太陰之術). This ritual method is to be found in Daoist sources from the Song onwards. In Qing sources, it appears as an alchemical method designed for the exclusive usage of women.⁵⁵

⁵² CT 10 1:10a6.

⁵³ CT 10 1:11a1/14–17

⁵⁴ A certain Qingming Tiandi 清明天帝, however, is mentioned in earlier sources.

⁵⁵ An adequate appreciation of this specific practice, however, would require too much space. When explaining a sentence of the YHJ whose *locus classicus* is the *Book of Salvation* (CT 11 1:3a9), Zhang Liang also mentioned another ritual practice attested in Song Daoist scriptures. This suggests that even theological motifs of Six Dynasties Daoist literature would be interpreted by Song practitioners as referring to a ritual context. The theoretical approach taken by Zhang Liang is also worth mentioning. The exegete interprets the passage as a metaphor (*yu* 喻), demonstrating that Song Daoists would not read the miracles we find in scriptures as the *Book of Salvation* in a literal sense: “As for dried bones and sleeping corpses arising to life, one ought to understand it by metaphorical means.” (CT 11 1:14b2) Zhang Liang establishes a comparison between the regenerative powers of water—he believes that the rotten bones of fishes and dried duckweeds are resuscitated by it—and the “supreme kindness of the supreme Thearch” (CT 11 1:14b5): “A corpse is the [product
(Continued on next page)

With regard to the “method to remove obstacles,” Zhang Liang argues that there are two kinds of practitioners: those who recite with their mouths and those who recite with their minds, but “mind and mouth must complement each other so that the merit might be established. If there is only one, and the other is discarded, there will be no accomplishment of merit.”⁵⁶ Zhang Liang continues his explanation stating: “those who recite the *Scripture of the Jade Thearch* ought to observe and practise the merits of the Thearch, imitating and admiring his cultivation and accomplishment.”⁵⁷ This implies a form of self-deification that seems to be connected to the stories illustrating the virtues of the Jade Sovereign. The task of emulating the Thearch’s behaviour should be conducted by means of five different gateways:

(a) *To venerate and respect.* Regarding this practice, Zhang Liang states that “it is what the scripture calls visualizing the venerable countenance by means of creating a thearchical image (*dixing* 帝形) and praising his title.”⁵⁸ This is a simple form of visualization used in the moment one repeats the Jade Sovereign’s name. As stated before, Zhang Liang does not provide detailed information with regard to the physical features of the Jade Sovereign; (b) *Repenting from sins in order to destroy the obstacles.* Zhang Liang affirms that this is nothing but “the ritual for destroying obstacles referred to in the scripture.”⁵⁹ This kind of occurrence reinforces the oral nature of CT 11 and its relation to mediumistic séances, since it is quite clear that the text was not submitted to a careful edition. Rather, the resulting text itself was intended to represent a revision of the YHJ. This passage nevertheless suggests that Zhang Liang was concerned with standardizing the attitude to be adopted when one

(Note 55—Continued)

of the] transformation of a person. The bones are the [product of the] decomposition of a corpse. The bones are the corpse, and the corpse is the person. A human being receives the *yin* and *yang* pneumas from heaven and earth and then is generated. [If a person] might be [transformed into] bones, how much more the things. The bones are transformed by the essence. Today, the learned men are capable of refining the essence, so that the essence is transformed into the elixir made up of golden jade, and then keeping their bodies living in the world, they live a long life as divine transcendents. Their bones are transformed by the essence, being different from the mundane objects. Therefore, the myriad of things are covered by earth and become putrid in some years. Only the human bones do not transform themselves long after being buried in the earth. This is so because of the transformation caused by the essence. Because of the compassion of the Superior Saint, appeared the art of refining the form by means of the supreme *yin*.” (CT 11 1:14b5–1:15a3)

⁵⁶ CT 11 1:33b10–34a1.

⁵⁷ CT 10 1:34a4–5.

⁵⁸ CT 11 1:34a8–9.

⁵⁹ CT 11 1:34a10.

repeats the name of the Thearch; (c) *Accumulating merit by means of benefiting and saving [other beings]*. Zhang Liang relates this gateway to scriptural content, stating that it corresponds to the passage of the YHJ in which the Thearch divides his body in order to deliver his teachings, so that this method is connected to the practice of “preaching the religious teaching.”⁶⁰ This passage suggests that scriptural content would be disseminated in the context of public gatherings and that oral teachings would play an important role in its transmission. The narrative framework of the first chapter and the explanatory nature of the extant chapters suggest that this conjecture is likely to be true; (d) *Visualizing the countenance in order to penetrate the luminous [realm]*. Zhang Liang defines it simply as “the skilful means of compassion.”⁶¹ (e) *The transformation of the authentic oneness*. Zhang Liang furnished a vague explanation for this vague gateway: “this is what is called in the scripture the pure and tranquil body,”⁶² in a reference to the passage in the YHJ that describes the incorruptibility of the Thearch’s body.

Zhang Liang’s commentary on the specific methods above allows us to assume that the text speaks about ritualized behaviours, but not necessarily about liturgy and expensive ritual settings. The acts of self-deification, visualization, and intonation of the names of the Jade Thearch are quite simple. We may suppose that he intended to present practices that could be adopted by a wider audience. The explanations furnished by Zhang Liang—who addresses “the people of Nanzhou 南州,” i.e., the Sichuanese population—strongly suggest that mediumistic séances would also work as the occasion in which new religious practices would be disseminated among larger audiences. The practices referred by Zhang Liang situate the relation between user and scripture at a non-mediated level. His commentary suggests that no liturgical interference, and therefore service of a priest, is necessary in order to guarantee the efficaciousness of the religious practice. Indeed, liturgical elaborations around the YHJ took place only after the scripture began to circulate beyond the limits of the Sichuan area. These elaborations seem to be completely antithetical to the very message of the text, since the ritual practices the YHJ teaches pertain to the order of the simplest forms of religious behaviour. This becomes especially clear in the third chapter of the YHJ, “Chapter on the Merits of the Jade Sovereign” 玉皇功德品, which presents a set of circumstances in which the scripture is meant to be useful. This chapter furnishes explanations concerning simple and inexpensive ritualized behaviours that could be practised by any individual. These include:

⁶⁰ CT 11 1:34b2.

⁶¹ CT 11 1:34b4.

⁶² CT 11 1:34b4–5.

(2) Scriptural recitation. Those people who died and therefore went to the Terrestrial Prison shall be freed if someone in the familial circle recites the scripture on their behalf. The same passage also describes a simple ritual: “[they] shall keep the recitation of the authentic scripture on behalf of the deceased person *or* [they] shall install a field of the Dao (*daochang* 道場), making offering with blazons and flowers.”⁶³ We should note that this passage suggests that various acts such as scriptural recitation and offering are equally efficacious.

(3) Conversion. Those who recite the scripture shall be able to save the spirits who inhabit “all the divine shrines.” Similar statements are to be found in earlier Buddhist scriptures.⁶⁴ Scriptural proponents would see themselves in terms of belonging to a tradition. They would expect to create this sense of belonging not only in the minds of their human clients, extending their power and influence over the spiritual realm.

(4) Repetition of the Thearch’s titles. The scripture asserts that even those who lived an entire life of sin shall obtain salvation, on the condition of repeating the Thearch’s name on behalf of the deceased sinner:

If a person in this world has not acted according to the principle of filial piety with regard to their parents, has not demonstrated respect for the Three Treasures, has killed or stolen, has indulged in perverse lasciviousness or false words, or has committed all sorts of grave sins, but there are beings of upright faith who, when the pneuma of this deceased person has yet to be interrupted, nurture a great compassion in their hearts, recite the venerable title of the Thearch next to the deceased’s head for 17, 27, 37, 47, or even one hundred, one thousand times, all bad karmas created by that dead person before he was born will be annihilated, so that he will not fall into the evil paths, ascending in spirit to the Nine Heavens. How many more [benefits shall achieve] he who receives and keeps faith with this scripture!⁶⁵

(5) Making standards. Another ritualized behaviour is to “make a long standard and write the Thearch’s title on it, hanging [it] by a long rod in a temple or at home” so that once the standard has been blown by the wind, all beings in the corresponding direction will receive benefits and have their sins expunged.⁶⁶

(6) Writing the Thearch’s names. Similarly, one should write the Thearch’s title over the surface of musical instruments, like bells and chime stones, so that all beings

⁶³ CT 10 2:13b5–6.

⁶⁴ CT 10 2:15a2.

⁶⁵ CT 10 2:15a4–b1.

⁶⁶ CT 10 2:15b5–8.

can receive the benefit brought by the sound produced by such instruments, whose reverberation shall project the Thearch's title throughout the Ten Directions.⁶⁷ Here, salvation occurs through aesthetic means and perceptual engagement.

(7) Non-ritualized behaviours. Finally, the text also states that the simplest actions, if performed by those who keep faith with the scripture, might turn into soteriological behaviours. Those who accumulated “millions of sins upon themselves,” for instance, shall be forgiven if they are fortunate enough to have their bodies covered temporarily by the shadow of those who recite the YHJ, “as if they were absorbed by the Thearch's light.”⁶⁸ The YHJ describes other instances in which simple actions performed by the faithful will turn into the source of salvation. The text defines actions as mental and physical. Those who “generate the heart of grand compassion” when rain is falling shall benefit all beings in the direction of the drop of water created by means of the contact of their bodies with the rain. The sins of all beings shall be annihilated, they shall be healed from all their illness, and acquire rebirth in a lotus flower of the pure lands.⁶⁹ The faithful who have their bodies touched by dust when walking in the road shall benefit all beings in the direction taken by the particles of dust.⁷⁰ In a similar manner, the faithful shall bring benefit upon all aquatic beings if they bathe themselves in the waters of the rivers, ravines and seas.⁷¹ Those who enter in the mountains in order to cultivate perfection shall save “all the categories of living beings, those who possess form and those who do not possess form, those who are born by means of foetus, eggs, humidity and transformation, animals, vegetables, birds and aquatic creatures,” removing all their sins only by means of gazing at them.⁷² The same statements are to be found in scriptures connected to esoteric Buddhism.⁷³ The YHJ furnished a *terminus ante quem* for some of these scriptures.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ CT 10 2:15b8–2:16a2.

⁶⁸ CT 10 2:15b1–5.

⁶⁹ CT 10 2:14a8–b2.

⁷⁰ CT 10 2:14b3–6.

⁷¹ CT 10 2:14b7–10.

⁷² CT 10 2:16a2–7.

⁷³ For the provenance of this kind of practice, see T 1956 (1011b03) and T 1955 (1005b21). I offer a more detailed account on this issue in “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” section 6 “On the Sources of the YHJ.”

⁷⁴ Cf. CT 10 2:14a 8/17–2:14b 1/16 and T 1955 2:1005b21–1005b24 = T 1956:1 1011b9–1011b11. T 1955 is a Yuan compilation, but the connection with the YHJ and T 1956, which is a Tangut (1038–1227) compilation, demonstrates that T 1955 preserves received materials that precede the foundation of the Yuan dynasty.

The conceptual scheme of the YHJ implies that the text was conceived in an opposition to liturgy, or that certain ritual practices once accessible only to an elite of Daoist priests and Ritual Masters would be popularized via mediumistic séances. These practices were simplified to the point we could call them *ritualized behaviours*, but not liturgy. In its explanatory statements the text suggests that influential clients could patronize expensive Daoist rituals in which the scripture would be recited. However, as the statements from (1) to (6) demonstrate, the text also allows its usage outside the liturgical context. Also, in stating that the faithful—or the scriptural user—shall benefit the beings living in a lake by means of the simple action of bathing herself in that lake, or that the scriptural user will benefit any forms of life just by means of gazing at them, the text is not arguing that there are liturgies or rituals for bathing and gazing. While liturgy establishes a complex setting of coordinated and previously stipulated behaviours as furnishing the exceptional occasion in which an effective communication between human and divine instances might occur, the YHJ argues that whatever scriptural users might do, their most simple actions will also become a source of benefit and salvation.

The text does not extend itself to the details of the metaphysics implied by this argument, but the final consequence of this way of reasoning is that the faithful will turn into a source of blessing not only because of what she does, but simply because she exists. The text therefore claims for its users a share of participation in its own status as a distributor of welfare. It derives its own authority from the extent to which it might benefit others. But in bringing benefit to others, the text will require from its user the recognition of it being a source of benefit, if not the *sole* source of benefit.

The above elements explain what the text expects its user to do in order to achieve her goals, but it does not make clear who the intended users or beneficiaries of the scripture are. In the YHJ, the individual is defined as one of the *ideal types* that the scripture is meant to benefit. As the object of salvation, the individual is not only a phenomenological apparatus, but also a *social organism*. The text presents salvation for diverse social organisms, i.e., individuals thus defined in accordance to the roles and goals connected to determined social positions and behaviours.

One has only to read the promises presented throughout the text to understand that the YHJ is a soteriological implement projected in order to satisfy the demands of clients as distinct as (1) political patrons;⁷⁵ (2) sailors, fishermen;⁷⁶

⁷⁵ CT 10 2:12a9–b5. The YHJ speaks about the salvation of any of the “innumerable countries in the Ten Directions of the Three Realms.” In my interpretation, from this statement it is possible to infer that the compilers addressed to Chinese political patrons willing to promote the text.

⁷⁶ Those who “enter in the rivers and the seas,” and so could “be faced with bad winds” shall not experience danger, and sail safely (CT 10 2:12b7–8).

(3) prisoners;⁷⁷ (4) pregnant women;⁷⁸ (5) merchants;⁷⁹ (6) soldiers or military officers in general;⁸⁰ (7) exorcists;⁸¹ (8) those who desire offspring;⁸² (9) men trying to make a career as officials;⁸³ (10) those who feel themselves under the influence of bad luck;⁸⁴ (11) those who pray on behalf of the deceased, and (12) those in pursuit of spiritual perfection, or the clergy.⁸⁵ These are not empirical individuals, but ideal, functional types that could lead a larger audience to create a sense of identification with the text. Each type corresponds to a variety of possible circumstances in which the text describes itself as a useful tool. The text accommodates the needs of several religious workers, as laymen who would perform ritual services and also ordained priests. One could not expect clearer instructions with regard to the purposes of the existence of the scripture. Again, the obvious meta-textual scheme utilized by the compilers made their purposes clear and unequivocal.

⁷⁷ Those who are imprisoned shall be freed, as long as they feel themselves victims of injustice. The text, however, does not set the limits for what would constitute injustice, so that we can suppose that the text addresses anyone in prison (CT 10 2:12b10–2:13a1).

⁷⁸ Women who are faced with difficulties in the moment of parturition shall be safe, and the children they give birth to shall be “loved and respected by people” (CT 10 2:13a7–8).

⁷⁹ Those who look for riches—i.e., merchants and businessmen in general—shall achieve everything they want for thousands of generations (CT 10 2:13b1–2).

⁸⁰ Those who fight in the war shall obtain victory (CT 10 2:12b9).

⁸¹ Those who are possessed (*suojia* 所加) by evil spirits shall be released (CT 10 2:13a1–3).

⁸² Those who are desirous of having offspring shall be blessed with sons who are “eloquent and wise, noblest among all men” (CT 10 2:13a5–6).

⁸³ Those who look for official posts shall obtain it, “and their descendants shall be glorious and noble during generations and without interruption” (CT 10 2:13a9–10).

⁸⁴ Those who believe themselves to be under the influence of “bad stars” shall receive blessings, not misfortune from them (CT 10 2:13b3–4).

⁸⁵ Those who enter in the mountains and forests and are endangered by poisonous beasts shall be protected by “the god of the mountain,” so that “ferocious beasts shall withdraw spontaneously” 猛獸自退 (CT 10 2:12b5–7). The divine kings from the Ten Directions shall protect the place where the scripture is deposited, and the same for those who recite it, for they will acquire the right of calling themselves the “Perfected Beings of the Orthodox Unity” (CT 10 2:13b9–10). (13) Those who recite the scripture shall not meet with the “terrifying images of the terrestrial prisons,” so that they shall be escorted by the Jade Maidens, acquiring rebirth in heaven or, in the case their “heavenly blessings” had come to an end, they will acquire rebirth in the human world, being kings or ministers (CT 10 2:14a3–6). All the promises of personal welfare listed above are directly connected to Song Daoist liturgy. Please see my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” section 6 “On the Sources of the YHJ.”

Finally, one should note that: (1) the YHJ predicted various critical circumstances, but the text is not necessarily a description of any actual occurrence. The hypothetical horizon of the scripture shows itself with great force in the repetitive usage of the conjunction *ruo* 若, which demonstrates that the text was conceived for usage in a variety of *possible situations*; (2) there is no hierarchical division between the critical circumstances described by the text; (3) so that we should not infer from scriptural content that a determined event was understood as being more important than any other by the compilers. From this perspective, the scripture presents, for instance, war and plague as being as important as difficulties during the parturition; (4) the degree of importance of a given circumstance alluded to by the text will vary according to real demands faced by the user; (5) the fact the text addresses more than twenty different circumstances therefore should not be interpreted as if the compilers were stating that the scripture is useful *only* in these circumstances. Rather, such a comprehensive set of circumstances suggests that the text would be useful in the face of *any* crisis, as if it were an all-encompassing and omnipotent tool.

2.3 Personal and familial welfare

In stating that the YHJ is about personal and familial welfare, I am following a fundamental insight by Edward Davis, for whom the debate on civil society also applies to “the nature of the pre-modern state, elites, and local society, the relations among them, and the role that religion plays in those relations.”⁸⁶ The concern with personal welfare we detect in the YHJ leads us to an important dimension of the idea of the individual in the scripture. It has been argued elsewhere that the YHJ is a morality tract (*shanshu* 善書).⁸⁷ I would say that this is not completely accurate, though the text clearly endorses Chinese mainstream morality. As I interpret it, that scripture was written not only to endorse Chinese values, but most importantly to provide the promise of safety and welfare in a disturbing world. The scriptural model adopted by the compilers of the YHJ is not unique to that text, but makes part of the textual

⁸⁶ See Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 200.

⁸⁷ See Hsieh Tsung-hui, “*Yuhuang benxing jijing chushi de beijing yu yinyuan yanjiu*,” p. 165: “「轉經」中超越此界的誦唸聲波是天之隱韻，讓神尊重新又感應到當時「救劫」之念，凡在歷劫中虔誠的奉道行道者，即有機會經檢選而得救；而那些需要救度者在聽經聞懺之後，若能覺悟、懺悔後皈依，也有緣得被度脫。這自是最簡易方便的法門，具顯《玉皇經》作為善書普傳救劫的目的。” It is difficult to understand what Hsieh means by “the gateway of the skilful means.” It is clear, however, that he understands the YHJ to be a morality tract, an argument I would not endorse.

strategy of a determined number of Chinese scriptures that, in spite of their affiliation to Buddhism, Daoism, or “sectarian teachings,” possess a common prominent concern with individual and familial welfare.

In the YHJ (and again, in related scriptures), the *individual as such*, is defined as a receptacle for grace and punishment. This is also the case in Chinese law and morality tracts, but we should pay attention to the nuanced manners of depicting the individual in these different literary genres. Unlike morality tracts such as the *Ganying pian* 感應篇, punishment is not connected to good or bad behaviour. Also, different from the legal codes of the nation—the very *formalization* of the Confucian ethos—, in the YHJ punishment is not connected to juridical transgressions or strict national concerns.⁸⁸ The text does not deviate from mainstream morality in a dramatic

⁸⁸ See, for instance, the interesting arguments sustained by the Tang source *Tongdian* 通典: 前志曰:「夫人,有生萬物之最靈者也。然而爪牙不足供其欲,趨走不足避其害,無毛羽以禦寒暑,必役物以為養,任智而不恃力者也。故不仁愛則不能群,不能群則不能勝物。群而聚之,是為君矣;歸而往之,是為王矣。人既群居,不能無喜怒交爭之情,乃有刑罰輕重之理興矣。刑於百度,其最遠乎!」又曰:「聖人因天討而作五刑。大刑用甲兵,次用斧鉞;中刑用刀鋸,次用鑕鑿;薄刑用鞭扑。大者陳諸原野,小者致之市朝。」又曰:「鞭扑無弛於家,刑罰無廢於國,征伐無偃於天下;但用之有本末,行之有次第爾。」歷觀前躅,善用則治,不善用則亂。在乎無私絕濫,不在乎寬之與峻。又病斟酌以意,變更屢作。今摺掇經史,該貫年代,若前賢有誤,雖後學敢言,亦庶幾成一家之書爾。前代搢紳之徒,多設三皇之言,又不載其刑法,故以五帝為首云。」In sum, ancient Chinese law defines the individual as a receptacle for punishment. Physical punishment—the so-called five penances (*wuxing* 五刑)—forms the very essence of the ancient legal system of China, and when this law provides benefits for the individual, it does so by addressing the empirical, historically localizable individual. The scope and content of the five penances varies according to the legal code consulted. The distinction between the individual as an empirical and as a theoretical instance therefore is very important. We can find records, for instance, in which Chinese law guarantees certain benefits for soldiers and their families. But this should not be seen as the very definition of the *individual as such* given by Chinese jurisdiction, because not all individuals are soldiers or their dependents. In Chinese law, the individual as such is he who is predisposed to being physically punished by the state. At the same time, the laws of the state understand that members of the imperial house are not susceptible to these punishments. This makes complete sense since those living in the Chinese state were not seen to be individuals but were rather the very incarnation of the state, as defined by the religious framework of Confucianism. The state is the sacred, and as such the state has the power of inflicting physical punishments over individuals. According to the setting furnished by Chinese *positive* law, therefore, the individual is formalized as he who is an object for punishment. This individual has duties, and all the benefits he might access will have to be sanctioned in terms of being harmful to the Chinese state or not. Ancient Chinese
(Continued on next page)

manner. It also shows sympathy for the state. But it is not about morality or the state. The fundamental argument of the *Ganying pian* is that good and bad karmic retributions are as certain as the physical phenomenon of the shadow following the movements of a person's body. The entire text has statements on good and bad behaviours and their consequences. The YHJ seems to be quite different. The YHJ provides explanatory statements, but they seem to be about scriptural authority and behaviours that allow a person to have access to such authority. Also, the YHJ does not present punishment as a consequence of actions directed against the state. It passes silently over this sensitive topic. As we will see, in the YHJ, *adherence*—and not moral or patriotic behaviour—is the price to be paid for those in search of individual guarantees. In the YHJ, the individual might become object of sanctioned violence, but what determines whether this will be the case are the behaviours directed *toward the scripture*, not towards the community of human beings or the Chinese state. Zhang Liang explains quite accurately that the threatening statements one finds in the last chapter of the YHJ are destined to warn those who recite it, so that they generate fear and respect for the scripture and its teachings. Here, karmic retribution (*baoying* 報應) arrives not because of immoral behaviour as such, but as a consequence of improper attitudes toward the YHJ and toward those who keep faith with the scripture.

Among the statements demonstrating these facts, we have: (1) those who keep faith with the scripture will have their sins purified;⁸⁹ (2) those who think bad things or say bad things about those who keep faith with the scripture will die and be reborn in the terrestrial prisons;⁹⁰ (3) the same for those who (a) touch the scripture with filthy hands,⁹¹ (b) recite it outside of a vegetarian fast,⁹² (c) deposit it on unclean surfaces,⁹³ (d) scorn and laugh at the scripture.⁹⁴ Offences against the

(Note 88—*Continued*)

law understands that the individual as the receptor of benefits must be specified as this or that historical, empirical individual, not the individual as such. The concern with punishment is present even in Chinese contemporary manuals on law. See, for instance, *Zhongguo falishi* 中國法律史, ed. Zhang Jinfan 張晉藩, comp. Sifabu faxue jiaocai bianjibu 司法部法學教材編輯部 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1995).

⁸⁹ CT 10 3:6b10–a2.

⁹⁰ CT 10 3:7a2–6.

⁹¹ CT 10 3:7a6.

⁹² CT 10 3:7a7.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ CT 10 3:7a8.

scripture are deemed as a felony, so that the consequences are even worse: (a) the individual will die and go to the terrestrial prison;⁹⁵ (b) he will bring calamity upon the nine generations of his ancestors, who will be tortured in Fengdu 豐都;⁹⁶ (c) his descendants will also be affected by the consequences of his crimes, suffering in the terrestrial prisons for innumerable kalpas⁹⁷ until a sage rescue them so that they might achieve rebirth as animals, *foreigners*, women, miserable, disabled, and abandoned people.⁹⁸

Also, the scripture will show no mercy toward those people who “although having kept faith in the beginning, became arrogant again afterwards,”⁹⁹ i.e., those who abandoned the scripture in order to keep faith with other teachings. The penalties for those people will be severe. The Lads of Good and Evil will report the fact to the Three Officials, who shall “write their names in the black registers”¹⁰⁰ and decrease their life span.¹⁰¹ After they die, they will be “locked in the abysmal prisons,”¹⁰² or they will “appear in this world with all kinds of diseases,”¹⁰³ such as leprosy and ulcers. Also, the unfaithful will be imprisoned, die because of poisoning, be devoured by ferocious beasts, become the target of revenge, or die in unimaginable horrible ways.¹⁰⁴ These explanations on karmic retributions are directly connected to Tang Daoist sources and, therefore, correspond to an important content of the Tang layer of the YHJ.¹⁰⁵

Also, in certain aspects the text adopts a transgressive posture,¹⁰⁶ protecting the faithful even when she is presumably wrong. Those who keep faith with the YHJ shall be protected even in the case their actions do not conform to the highest moral standards. The YHJ states, for instance, that everything said by those who recite the

⁹⁵ CT 10 3:7a9.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ CT 10 3:7a10–b1.

⁹⁸ CT 10 3:7b1–6.

⁹⁹ CT 10 3:7b7.

¹⁰⁰ CT 10 3:7b7–8.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ CT 10 3:7b9.

¹⁰⁴ CT 10 3:8a1–5.

¹⁰⁵ For the connection between the YHJ and Tang sources, see my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” section 6 “On the Sources of the YHJ.”

¹⁰⁶ This is certainly connected to the fact that the YHJ borrows from Chinese Tantric sources. For an intelligent criticism of Tantra as an interpretative category, see Hugh B. Urban, “The Conservative Character of Tantra: Secrecy, Sacrifice and This-Worldly Power in Bengali Śākta Tantra,” *International Journal of Tantric Studies* 6, no. 1 (2002).

scripture—it does not matter if what is said is good or bad—shall be heard as the “pure sound of the Dharma” by all celestial demons and practitioners of heterodox teachings.¹⁰⁷ A similar statement can be found in a Tang Tantric source.¹⁰⁸ The YHJ therefore makes a clear distinction between “us” and “others,” between those who adhere to it and those who are indifferent or against it. Basing itself on a principle of absolute loyalty and transgressive morality adopted from its Tantric sources, the text affirms that those who adhere to it shall live, while all the others will die.

Threatening statements, therefore, do not pretend to create in the individual a sense of strict ethical behaviour, but represent the means through which the YHJ establishes respectful behaviour towards the scripture itself. These threats are used to guarantee that the user will respect the scripture as an entity in its own right. Also, the very nature of this application of threats is fundamentally different from coercion, as we see, for instance, in Chinese law. In the YHJ, punishment—similarly to the benefits to be brought by the scripture—is a hypothetical instance. It pertains to the realm of the imaginary and functions as an element compensating the (also imaginary) benefits arriving from such simple ritualized behaviours as repeating the Thearch’s name. Fortunately, the miracle tales that accompany the text in its earliest commented version emphasize the benefits of the scripture, not its punitive aspect.

The last chapter of the scripture furnishes a list of 30 benefits¹⁰⁹ to be derived from ritualized behaviours. It comes with no surprise that the YHJ refers to the

¹⁰⁷ CT 10 2:14b10–2:15a2.

¹⁰⁸ See T 1060 1:109a28. Also, see T 1955 2:1002c22.

¹⁰⁹ These benefits are to be found in CT 10 3:11b1–12a4 and can be translated as follows: (1) All the transcendents shall praise and respect [you]. (2) Your ancestors shall ascend to heaven. (3) Liberation from the karmic retributions determined by previous lives (*suyang* 宿殃). (4) You will arrive wherever you are intending to go. (5) You will not be afflicted by robbers and thieves. (6) You will achieve anything you wish. (7) Disasters by water and fire will be eliminated. (8) Violent events will vanish (i.e., you will not be victim of this kind of event). (9) You will have auspicious dreams. (10) You will not become ill. (11) You will be wise and intelligent. (12) People will like you upon seeing you. (13) You will have rich clothes and foods. (14) Your descendants will bring you honour and glory. (15) Your family will love you upon seeing you. (16) Your clan will be harmonious. (17) The three bad karmic retributions will be eliminated. (18) You will be reborn as a man [in your next life]. (19) You will have a solemn appearance. (20) You will be a minister. (21) You will reborn as a king. (22) The ghosts and deities will respect you. (23) You will know your previous lives. (24) All deities will protect you. (25) The nine generations of your ancestors will be protected. (26) You will live a long life. (27) The sentient beings will depend upon your benevolence. (28) The Demon Kings will protect and welcome you. (29) You will transcend the Three Realms. (30) You will ascend in broad daylight.

set of promises and benefits it should bring upon those who keep faith with the scripture as “beneficial matters” (*liyishi* 利益事),¹¹⁰ a term borrowed from Buddhist scriptures¹¹¹ but that could perfectly reproduce the sense of reciprocity between scripture and follower that the YHJ successfully contributed to create. These benefits form the other side of karmic retribution. This kind of list demonstrates why the YHJ would be appealing for a wider audience, and how the YHJ (and related scriptures) contributed to create an instance of the Chinese culture in which the individual as such would be defined as the receptacle of benefits, not punishment.

What should attract our attention is not only that the YHJ promises X and Y, but the very existence of these lists in so many scriptures, and the fact that many promises do repeat themselves throughout different lists. Here, we find a connection between the YHJ and T 412 *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 (DZPS). In the DZPS, the Earth God (Chinese: Jianlao Dishen 堅牢地神, Skt.: Pṛthivī) addresses the World Honoured, stating that people should pay homage to paintings¹¹² or statues of Dizang Pusa, so that they might achieve ten types of benefits (*shizhong liyi* 十種利益).¹¹³ Some of these benefits are the same as we find in the YHJ: (a) your ancestors will ascend to heaven; (b) you will achieve anything you wish; (c) you will not experience disasters related to water and fire; (d) your dreams will be auspicious (the DZPS states that nightmares will be eliminated); (e) the gods will protect you; (f) you will live a long life. The benefit (a) appears in both scriptures written in the same exact way.

These lists suggest that the proponents of scriptures might be labelled as Daoists, Buddhists, and sectarians, but their promises of worldly and spiritual benefit do not correspond to any form of religious affiliation. The argument that the scripture X *and not the scripture Y* is the source of power and personal benefit is of principal importance in these sources.

In the YHJ, however, personal welfare does not have any connection with psychological or ethical egoism. Egoists and individualists will demonstrate a great sense of self-awareness by means of which they try to represent themselves as completely conscious of a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Some will claim themselves to be unrelated to certain social values and standards. As is widely known, individualism is not strange to classical Chinese thought, and we can see expressions of it in texts attributed to such figures as Zhuangzi 莊子 and Yang Zhu

¹¹⁰ See CT 10 3:1a5.

¹¹¹ The term appears as early as in the translations attributed to Zhiqian 支謙. See, for instance, T 200: 204a7.

¹¹² The YHJ also suggests that scriptural users should make a painted image of the Jade Sovereign. See CT 10 3:11a.

¹¹³ T 412 5:787a23.

楊朱. Statements as “you will achieve whatever you desire,” which can be found not only in the YHJ and the DZPS but also in various other Chinese scriptures, give room for the accommodation of the most varied personal goals, including those connected to forms of psychological and ethical egoism eventually kept by different scriptural users. We have no access, however, to empirical records dealing with how individuals would interpret this kind of statement.

It is clear even from the grammatical structure utilized in the statements related to promises of personal welfare, however, that the text addresses individuals and their familial concerns. The text makes suppositions with regard to the specific content associated with the goals of the individual. In these statements, personal welfare is usually represented as what the individual would desire as a member of a society who acts in accordance with mainstream morality. This is a subtle element of the text that requires our attention. One must understand that the text supposes the individual to be interested in the fulfilment of certain familial and social roles. The scripture takes for granted, for instance, that any person would desire to fulfil her filial obligations. The text makes this kind of supposition because it accords with mainstream Chinese morality, not because it describes the real intents of any individual. One should note, however, that “goals which are connected to the welfare of others” are still the goals of a determined individual. Statements on familial welfare are not related to those who would purportedly benefit from them. Rather, they are meant to furnish scriptural users with immediate solutions for their concerns, which are generally connected to their familial and social responsibilities.¹¹⁴

The preliminary remarks provided above suggest that the YHJ was not conceived in order to provoke an intellectual engagement with its content. The text explains clearly its own purposes and the usages one should learn from it. Ritualized behaviours such as reciting the title of the Thearch or writing his name on the surface of objects could be easily learned. Knowing how to write only two to ten Chinese characters does not make one literate and yet this was the level of literacy required in order to put into practice some of the ritualized behaviours described in the

¹¹⁴ To clarify this point, imagine that *X* is the scriptural user; *Z* a social role connected to *X*; *Y* a person related to *X*; and *f* a goal apparently connected to the well-being of *Y*. The YHJ states that since *X* plays the social role *Z*, *X* will necessarily desire that *Y f*. The text also implies that *Y* would desire that *X* desire that *Y f*. But note that *f*—as stated in this particular language-game—is not a function of *Y*, but of *X*. In this sense, the fulfilment of *f* represents the achievement of a goal for *X*, but it says nothing about *Y*. In this context, *Y* is nothing but an extension of *X*. Also, *f* is a goal of *X* as someone who plays the role *Z*, but says nothing about what *Y* desires for herself. In a real-life situation, it could be the case that *Y* would not desire *f* at all.

YHJ. The ritual framework offered by the YHJ represents the exact opposite of the Confucian rites patronized by the Chinese state and corresponds to the same promises of welfare described in the elaborate Daoist rites of cosmic renewal patronized by local communities and associations. That text forms a self-aware system indicating all the maladies that could afflict different users. The text, of course, also provided the remedies for these predicted maladies. The YHJ is simultaneously the physician, the recipe and the medication.

3 The YHJ and Its Readers

The history of scriptural reception demonstrates that YHJ had many readers, both inside and outside Daoism. These engaged with the scripture at an interpretational level, even if this was not the purpose of the text. The history of scriptural reception also shows that those readers understood the argument proposed in that scripture, so that they were forced to demonstrate in a clear manner whether they would stand in favour of or against the text. In the following, I shall deal with records that demonstrate how different users depicted the issue of scriptural efficaciousness as it relates to the YHJ. Also, I shall demonstrate how Buddhist and Christian readers reacted to that scripture.¹¹⁵

3.1 Depicting Scriptural Authority

The issue of scriptural authority in China has a long history. Puett has argued that the first centuries of the common era saw not only the appearance of the practice of spirit visualization, but also “the claim that at least some texts are not the products of humans but are rather the result of divine revelation.”¹¹⁶ Texts attributed to divine revelation make compelling claims for authority that are not necessarily based on a close connection to the authority of the state canon and its sagely writings. The YHJ, for instance, does not recognize the source of its own authority in any of the scriptures revered by Ruists. Rather, the text argues that its authority comes from ritual efficacy, which should be capable of helping even the state. Indeed, as we have seen, the Great Heaven, a central figure in the state cult, is depicted as a subordinate of the Jade

¹¹⁵ I have dealt briefly with the issue of scriptural reception in a previous contribution, see my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*.” Here, I would like to read the information brought by various documents against the concerns of a social history of Chinese scriptures.

¹¹⁶ See Michael Puett, “Becoming Laozi: Cultivating and Visualizing Spirits in Early Medieval China,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 23, pt. 1 (June 2012), p. 223.

Sovereign, demonstrating that the compilers intended to create a god superior to those venerated by the state. These claims are quite understandable in a period of Chinese history in which the state demonstrated itself incapable of dealing with external invasion. But how long could such bold claims of authority sustain themselves upon the restructuration of the state during the Ming? Not very long, I believe.

Scriptural authority, as long as it refers to the case of the YHJ, has been represented in various ways. The miracle tales at the end of CT 11 confirm the fact that already during the Song people conceived the YHJ as a soteriological tool for personal usage, arguing its ritual efficacy to be the sole source of scriptural authority. Arranged around fictitious individuals, these tales are meant “to prove that the merits of this scripture are inconceivable” 以證此經功德不可思議.¹¹⁷ These tales certainly emphasize “the power of the scripture” (*jing zhi li* 經之力), but they also described the active role played by individuals in their search for salvation. Miracles will happen only when an individual takes a positive and active attitude towards the YHJ.¹¹⁸

We may summarize the miracles stated in CT 11 as follows: (1) Chen Wangbao 陳王暴 was saved from drowning; (2) the hut (*caowu* 草屋) inhabited by the Old Man of Yinshan 銀山老人 was the sole not to be destroyed during a great fire which devastated the thousands of households in the area of Yinshan; (3) Murong Wenyuan 慕容文遠 resuscitated seven days after his death; (4) Dou Dexuan 竇德玄 had his lifespan increased and acquired promotion in the public service; (5) Sima Qiao 司馬喬 and Li Xiu 李修 fulfilled their filial obligations. Sima’s mother “acquired rebirth in heaven,” while Li’s father “ascended”; (6) Lü Wenzhan 呂文展 experienced counter-ageing effects. He also produced both rain and clear weather at the request of local officials by means of reciting the scripture. Scriptural users were meant to: (1) possess a physical copy of the scripture, as in the tale of Dou Dexuan, in which a ghostly emissary suggests that Dou look for a Daoist priest named Yin Sixuan 尹嗣玄¹¹⁹ in order to get his own copy; (2) memorize the text, a skill especially useful in dangerous or extreme situations, in which one needs even more to access the mantic powers of the scripture without the aid of an available copy. The inflationary accounts with regard to the ritual efficacy of the YHJ we see in CT 11 will give space to other forms of representation in several documents from the Ming and Qing periods.

Appearing as an edited text in the context of the Wenchang cult of the Sichuan area by 1218, the YHJ will spread its influence over several areas during the Yuan.

¹¹⁷ CT 11 3:21a2.

¹¹⁸ The tale of Murong Wenyuan seems to be the sole exception to this tendency, which I do not take as a rule.

¹¹⁹ This priest appears in a compilation of miracle tales attributed to Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933).

The text found its way into mainstream Daoism via its adoption by Pure Tenuity¹²⁰ (Qingwei 清微) practitioners. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing times, Pure Tenuity practitioners saw the institutionalization of their own practices and contributed in a definite manner to transform the YHJ into a canonical text. The relationship between the YHJ and the Pure Tenuity school urges the student of Daoism to keep a cautious attitude in order not to confound what a text became with what a text was in its beginnings. The YHJ seems to be a ritualized setting conceived in order to emphasize the efficaciousness of several simple, inexpensive ritualized behaviours, which

¹²⁰ The Qingwei school is certainly one of the least studied Daoist movements. Piet van der Loon discussed the date of CT 1220 *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元. See Piet van der Loon, “A Taoist Collection of the Fourteenth Century,” in Wolfgang Bauer, ed., *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), pp. 401–5; idem, *Taoist Books in the Libraries of the Sung Period: A Critical Study and Index* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984). Kristopher Schipper wrote the most important essay on Pure Tenuity to date: “Master Chao I-chen 趙宜真 (?–1382) and the Ch’ing-wei 清微 School of Taoism,” in *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* 道教と宗教文化, ed. Akizuki Kan’ei (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1987), pp. 715–34. Judith Boltz also presented an initial discussion on the topic in her *A Survey of Taoist Literature*. Following this, we have the account provided by Lowell Skar in “Ritual Movements, Deity Cults and the Transformation of Daoism in Song and Yuan times,” in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 413–63. Chinese scholars also made their contribution to the topic of Pure Tenuity. See Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, editor-in-chief, *Zhongguo Daojiaoshi* 中國道教史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990); Qing Xitai 卿希泰, editor-in-chief, *Zhongguo Daojiaoshi* 中國道教史, 4 vols. (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1996). Ding Qiang 丁強 has a paper on the *Daofa shuniu*, which he analyses briefly, see “*Qingwei daofa shuniu jianxi*” 〈清微道法樞紐〉簡析, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu*, 2002, no. 2, pp. 100–103. From the same author, see “‘Shufu lufa’ suo tixian de xiangzheng yiyun: Yi Qingwei pai ‘Yuchen jingfa’ liandu keyi wei li” 「書符籙法」所體現的象徵義蘊——以清微派「玉宸經法」煉度科儀為例, *Yunnan minzu daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, 2006, no. 2, pp. 99–101. Zhang Qin’s 張欽 “Lun Qingweipai fashu yu dangong xiang jiehe de neilian sixiang” 論清微派法術與丹功相結合的內煉思想 (*Zongjiaoxue yanjiu*, 2003, no. 4, pp. 16–40) deals with what the author understands to be the philosophical content of Pure Tenuity texts. Also from a theoretical perspective, there is Li Zhihong’s 李志鴻 “Shilun Qingweipai de ‘huidao’ yu ‘guiyuan’” 試論清微派的「會道」與「歸元」, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu*, 2005, no. 3, pp. 116–25. Qing Xitai seems to be one of the first scholars to explore the connection between the Pure Tenuity rituals and the Quan Zhen lineage from Wudang. See his “Wudang Qingweipai yu Wudang Quanzhendao de wenti” 武當清微派與武當全真道的問題, *Shehui kexue yanjiu*, 1995, no. 6, pp. 31–34, 70. This is also the topic of Zhang Ling’s 張玲 Master’s thesis, “Wudang Qingweipai yanjiu” 武當清微派研究 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue, 2012).

could be introduced to the largest possible audience. In other words, the text would require from its users that they should establish a *personal* relationship with the Jade Sovereign by means of simple actions that could be carried out by anyone. The Pure Tenuity appropriation of the YHJ, however, would remove the text from its original framework in order to transform it into liturgy in the strict sense.

Hsieh Tsung-hui demonstrated that during the Yuan the YHJ became known beyond the limits of the Sichuan area.¹²¹ CT 12 *Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jingsui* 高上玉皇本行經髓 (Essentials of the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*) is an abridged version of the YHJ. It is also the earliest known reference to a connection between the YHJ and Pure Tenuity practitioners. According to the testimony of the Qingwei priest Liu Chuyuan 劉處源, that abridged version of the YHJ was mysteriously transmitted to him by a transcendent in the fourth year of Zhizheng 至正 (1344). The identity of Liu Chuyuan as a Qingwei priest is beyond any doubt. The text refers to Liu as an Emissary of the Primaeval Brightness of the Pure Tenuity, [holding] the Scriptures and the Register of the Five Thunders of the Three Grottoes from the Highest Clarity (*Shangqing sandong wulei jinglu qingwei ming yuanshi* 上清三洞五雷經錄清微明元使).¹²²

The *Mingshi* 明史 preserves the biographies of Pure Tenuity practitioners who enjoyed a certain degree of influence at the court, such as Zhao Yizhen 趙宜

¹²¹ For this matter, see Hsieh's account on the National Palace Museum version of the YHJ, in "Gugong huangling ben *Yuhuang jing* zai Daojiao jingdian shi shang de gongxian" 故宮黃綾本《玉皇經》在道教經典史上的貢獻, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2009), pp. 43–70.

¹²² According to a document preserved in CT 1220 *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 *juan* 10, this corresponds to the fifth grade of the Qingwei hierarchy. The "Qingwei fazhi pingge" 清微法職品格 (Grades of the ritual posts of the Pure Tenuity) distinguishes a total of nine grades. The document states that the second and the first grades "cannot be received by the median and inferior scholars." In the extant Qingwei sources, Huang Shunshen's 黃舜申 position in this hierarchy is consistently mentioned as corresponding to the post known as the Investigation Commissioner of the Pure Tenuity [holding] the Scriptures and Registers of the Three Grottoes (*Sandong jinglu qingwei chafang shi* 三洞經錄清微察訪使). See *Daofa huiyuan*, *juan* 9, 15, 16, 25, 32, 33. The post of *Qingwei chafangshi* also pertains to the fifth grade of the Pure Tenuity. Here, one sees the conflation of human and heavenly bureaucracy, since the term "Changfang shi" is the same as a title used in the Song administration. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), p. 105. If even Huang Shunshen—the historical founder of the lineage—never acquired the highest posts, we can suppose that they do not correspond to any attainable position. The absence of records demonstrating that others attained such high posts seems to confirm this conjecture.

真,¹²³ Liu Yuanran 劉淵然, and Shao Yizheng 邵以正.¹²⁴ Pure Tenuity practitioners saw in the YHJ a source for the compilation of new liturgies and scriptures. The Daoist canon preserves some *litanies* (*chan* 懺) dedicated to the Jade Sovereign, which are classified by Florian C. Reiter as Qingwei texts.¹²⁵ These litanies reworked the scriptural content of the YHJ in order that it could fit into a strictly liturgical programme. In these liturgies we see that Qingwei Daoists adopted the iconographical setting offered by the first chapter of the YHJ, but they did not make use of the explanatory statements discussed in the second part of this paper, which are about the ritualized behaviours several commoners could adopt in order to benefit from the scripture.¹²⁶

Several jottings (*biji* 筆記) from the Ming and Qing periods attest to the interest of Chinese scholars towards religion in general and the the YHJ in particular. These jottings demonstrate that, in spite of the efforts made by mainstream Daoists in the sense of standardizing the usages of the YHJ, the text would continue to be used by laymen and even non-Daoist users who happened to work in the business of ritual services. These records also shed some light on the issue of scriptural authority. Some revealed derogatory views against Chinese religion in general, while others are more ecumenical; all of them seem to be inflationary. What is clear from these records, nevertheless, is the existence of conflict. This conflict, I will argue, arose between different scriptural proponents, whose claims for authority were based on similar standards and concerns.

¹²³ The most complete study on Zhao Yizhen to date is that presented by Schipper, “Master Chao I-chen 趙宜真 (?–1382) and the Ch’ing-wei 清微 School of Taoism,” pp. 715–34. Other interesting studies may be found in Gai Jianmin 蓋建民 and Chen Long 陳龍, “Zhao Yizhen Daomai yu zhushu wenxian xinkao” 趙宜真道脈與著述文獻新考, *Sichuan daxue xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexue ban*), 2009, no. 5, pp. 56–63, in which the authors emphasize the diversified ritual skills of Zhao Yizhen, well-versed not only in Qingwei, but also the Jingming and Quanzhen systems.

¹²⁴ Shao Yizheng seems to have worked in the final compilation of the Daoist Canon. See Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, p. 32: “During the Zhengtong 正統 reign, beginning in 1436, the work was finally continued and completed. We do not have much information about the editors, except that the registrar (*daolu si* 道錄司) Shao Yizheng 邵以正 was entrusted with the final revision in 1444. It was probably he who included ZHANG YUCHU’s collected writings, the *Xianquan ji* 峴泉集, into the Ming canon, and the place of its insertion probably marks the point at which Shao introduced his additions to the work of the former Heavenly Master.” It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer an assessment of the careers of these important figures.

¹²⁵ See Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, pp. 1099–1100.

¹²⁶ The history of textual transmission, however, requires further research.

The *Yilin buyi* 易林補遺 (Supplement to the *Forest of Changes*) reunited several notes by the Ming scholar Zhang Shibao 張世寶, of whom little is known. In his preface to that work, the otherwise unknown Gu Erfu 顧爾符 states that Zhang Shibao became blind as a child, but “blindness reached his eyes, not his mind” 盲于目而不盲于心. Basically, the *Supplement* is a monumental work on divination whose primary concern is to offer solutions to several demands, including therapeutic and legal ones. Zhang Shibao demonstrates a high degree of tolerance toward Buddhist and Daoist scriptures. This record suggests that scriptural users were much more interested in efficaciousness than adherence. In a section dedicated to the treatment of various personal demands, for instance, Zhang recommends the usage of several scriptures, none of them connected to the state and its canon.

The *Yushu jing* 玉樞經 (Scripture of the Jade Pivot) could be useful for preventing abortion (*linpen zhi fei* 臨盆之廢). The *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 (Scripture of Guanyin) might eliminate the diseases caused by sprites who adhere to herbs and trees (*yicao fumu zhi yao* 倚草附木之妖). The *Dizang jing* 地藏經 (Scripture of Dizang) should be used in order to save the deceased (*chaodu* 超度). The *Zhenwu jing* 真武經 (Scripture of the Perfected Warrior) exorcises the pathological agent known as *jingmei* 精魅, sometimes simply described as a form of perverse pneuma (*xieqi* 邪氣). The *Diamond Sūtra* 金剛經 may “create benefits for the next life” (*zuo laisheng zhi fuli* 作來生之福利). The *Sanguan jing* 三官經 (Scripture of the Three Officials) might be of benefit for merchants and *jianghu* 江湖, a derogatory term referring to marginalized groups, as criminals and prostitutes.¹²⁷ Those making use of the *Dadong zunjing* 大洞尊經 (Venerable Scripture of the Grand Grotto) should establish an altar for Zitong and pray for the deliverance of offspring. The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* and that dedicated to Bhaiṣajyaguru (commonly referred to as the Medicine Buddha 藥師佛) may guarantee longevity.

The prescription presented by Zhang Shibao does not correspond to the way these texts describe their functions. It is, therefore, completely arbitrary with regard to the manner with which these texts depict themselves. As we have seen, the YHJ, for instance, promises itself to be capable of fulfilling all the demands Zhang attributed to so many different scriptures. Why group scriptures together? Why not chose only one of them? The fact that Zhang groups these scriptures together reveals that they share a similar status as soteriological devices. The arrangement proposed by Zhang suggests

¹²⁷ In listing businessmen and merchants as pertaining to the same class of the *jianghu* people, Zhang Shibao revealed the typical Confucian bias against people dealing with profit for the sake of profit. For a study on the topic, see Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jing-shen* 儒家倫理與商人精神 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004).

not only that scriptural users would ignore an inflexible distinction between different “isms”; they would select the scriptures to be used under certain circumstances on the basis of personal standards, instead of the authority represented by an external orthodoxy. Also, one should note that each of these scriptures is connected to one fundamental deity. But in the arrangement proposed by Zhang, all the hierarchical distinctions one would expect between, for instance, the Jade Sovereign and other minor deities, such as Zitong, simply disappear. In such an arrangement, the Jade Sovereign will not appear as the chief of the Chinese pantheon, but as a deity who executes a determined role—similar to the normal actions of other deities.

In this sort of religious environment, it would be quite difficult to claim for oneself a privileged status as a unique source of scriptural authority. And yet, from the extant records, we understand that this is exactly what happened during the Ming and Qing periods. The case of the *Gengsi bian* 庚巳編,¹²⁸ attributed to Lu Can 陸粲 (1494–1551), suggests that the issue of *scriptural adherence* involves a complex set of negotiations between scriptural proponents and scriptural users.

Lu Can, styled Ziyu 子餘, was a person from Suzhou. In 1526, he was accepted as a Metropolitan Graduate (*jinshi* 進士), achieving the position of Hanlin Bachelor (*shujishi* 庶吉士 or *shuchang* 庶常) and the post of Supervising Censor (*jishizhong* 給事中) of the Office of Scrutiny for Works (*gongke jishizhong* 工科給事中).¹²⁹ The post of Supervising Censor was of a very high responsibility. It would allow one to live in the Forbidden City, inspect the work of the Six Ministries (*liubu* 六部) and even attend daily audiences with the emperor. The records concerning Lu Can are few, but from his biography, preserved in the *Mingshi*,¹³⁰ we may understand that he was a brilliant scholar with a solid classical foundation. Indeed, *Mingshi* emphasizes his talent, stating that, when he was still young, a local scholar called Wang Ao 王鏊 predicted that Lu Can would become famous for his literary skills. *Mingshi* also states that Lu Can attended the exams seven times, achieving the first place in all them. Zhang Cong 張聰 (1475–1539) and Gui E 桂萼 (d. 1531) were also accepted

¹²⁸ A revised, punctuated edition of the text may be found in Tan Dihua 譚棣華 and Chen Jiahe 陳稼禾, eds., *Gengsi bian, Kezuo zhuiyu* 庚巳編·客座贅語, *Yuan-Ming shiliao biji congtan* 元明史料筆記叢刊 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987).

¹²⁹ I am following the translation suggested by Hucker in his *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, pp. 167, 143, 129, 293. According to Hucker: “MING-CH’ING: **Office of Scrutiny for Works**, one of the Six Offices of Scrutiny (*liu k’o*) staffed with *chi-shih-chung* (Supervising Secretaries, Supervising Censors).”

¹³⁰ See *Mingshi* 明史, *juan* 206. I have consulted a punctuated edition, see Zhang Peiheng 章培恆 and Yu Suisheng 喻遂生, eds., *Ershisi shi quanyi: Mingshi* 二十四史全譯：明史 (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), pp. 4137–38.

as Hanlin Bachelors,¹³¹ but they had to settle for posts in the Central Government (*bucuo* 部曹) and the District Magistrate (*xianling* 縣令),¹³² respectively. Only Lu Can was talented enough to occupy the position of Supervising Censor.¹³³ Lu Can's social skills, however, were not as developed as his scholarly abilities. The emperor sent him to jail for quarrelling over the legal case of a certain Zhang Fu 張福.¹³⁴ Lu Can then understood the implacability of law, since even a high official like him could be punished with thirty strokes of the stick¹³⁵ (*zhang sanshi* 杖三十). Moreover, a complaint against Zhang Cong and Gui E caused Lu Can's exile to Guizhou and a demotion.

According to Chen Jiahe, the characters *gengsi* 庚巳 in the title *Gengsi bian* probably refer to the date of composition of the work. If Chen is correct, the work was probably written around 1510, when Lu Can was between 16 and 25 years old, i.e., before he commenced his public career.¹³⁶ In this case, scriptures as the YHJ and the DZPS could furnish the potential official with all the promises and guarantees of success someone in his position would welcome. *Gengsi bian* attests that Lu Can was quite interested in religion. The work comprises various miracle tales recorded by Lu Can, with curious titles as “omens before succeeding in the exam” (*dengke xianzhao* 登科先兆), “the demonic armies” (*gubing* 鬼兵), “numinous excrescences” (*lingzhi* 靈芝), “the god Zitong” (*Zitong shen* 梓潼神), “the Daoist priest Zhang” (Zhang daoshi 張道士), “the Perfected Warrior manifests miracles” (*zhenwu xianying* 真武顯應) and many others.

In the tales dedicated to Zitong and Zhenwu, for instance, Lu Can tells stories that emphasize their miraculous powers. Zitong helps a man called Chen Ximin 陳僖敏 achieve success as an official as a reward for his father's benevolence.¹³⁷ Zhenwu is a somewhat capricious god. Ding Sheng 丁生, a rich man from Songjiang 松江, implores him for a son, and has his wish fulfilled by Zhenwu. When the boy completes his sixth year, Ding Sheng decides that it is time to take him to Mt. Wudang 武當山 in order to pay homage and show his gratitude to the god. When

¹³¹ For biographies of Zhang Cong and Gui E, see *Mingshi*, *juan* 196.

¹³² See Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, pp. 393, 242.

¹³³ See *Mingshi*, p. 4137.

¹³⁴ According to *Mingshi*, this occurrence is described details in the “Biography of Xiong Jia” 熊浹傳. Xiong Jia (1478–1544) was another Ming official. This biography can also be found in Chen Menglei 陳夢雷 (1650–1741), ed., *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成.

¹³⁵ This form of punishment, especially conceived for officials at the court, was known as *tingzhang* 廷杖.

¹³⁶ Tan and Chen, eds., *Gengsi bian*, p. 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

they are resting at a tavern near their destination, however, his son suddenly dies. The man becomes desperate, and can do nothing but deposit the corpse in a coffin. He nonetheless fulfils his vow to go to Mt. Wudang, only to discover later that one of his servants had had his son brought back home, safe and healthy.¹³⁸ These tales suggest that Lu Can was quite sympathetic to Daoism. But this impression will vanish as long as we continue reading his compilation.

A short story called “Thunder Gets Rid of a Daoist Priest” (*Leiqian daoshi* 雷譴道士) shows a sense of humour that Daoist priests would not necessarily deem as acceptable. A drunkard priest named Li 李 writes “*fuzun*” 夫尊 instead of “*tianzun*” 天尊 and “*quandi*” 犬帝 instead of “*dadi*” 大帝, when preparing some talismans. Lu Can tells that “one day, he was killed by a thunderbolt. On his back one could distinguish two lines written in red, saying: ‘manly worthy is forgivable, but doggy-thearch is difficult to tolerate’ 夫尊可恕，犬帝難容。”¹³⁹

Another tale makes direct mention of the YHJ. It is the story of You Hongyuan 尤弘遠 and his journey to the terrestrial prison.¹⁴⁰ You Hongyuan lived in Dongcheng 東城 with his wife. His neighbours, the Zhuang 莊 clan, had a female servant, whom Hongyuan took as his concubine. His wife, as expected, was not happy with her husband’s decision. She then “made use of all kinds of *methods for obtaining victory by means of suppression* [*yasheng fa* 厭勝法, i.e., sorcery], thus cursing [the concubine] before the gods, as she desired to cause her to die quickly.” The sorcery worked quite well, and the concubine died in a few days. The ghost of the concubine appears to the man’s wife, desirous of revenge. Afterwards, as expected, Hongyuan’s wife dies. Hongyuan understands that he was somehow guilty of his concubine’s death and decides to pay homage to a Daoist priest, who recites the YHJ and makes ritual services on his behalf. Hongyuan also sought the advice of Zhenwu by means of oracle services.¹⁴¹ One day Hongyuan falls ill and his soul is escorted to the hell. Once there, he discovers that both his wife and his former concubine have filed a sepulchral complaint against him. His wife, however, repents of filing the complaint, as does the concubine she once cursed. Furious, Hongyuan accuses his wife of using sorcery against the poor concubine. Hongyuan’s wife is sent to Fengdu; the concubine is declared innocent. The officials of the terrestrial prison, however, allow Hongyuan to analyse the proofs of his wife’s sin, i.e., the written scriptures that she used when cursing the concubine. To Hongyuan’s surprise and terror, he could read

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁴¹ The text refers to the *huanjiao* 環皎, an oracular tool made of jade.

in the documents: “Even though this is the fault of the practitioner [of sorcery, i.e., Hongyuan’s wife], you [i.e., Hongyuan] are guilty as well.” The “numinous official” then kicks Hongyuan’s back and says: “Go!”

Had the story finished here, we should conclude that the moral of the story is “be good to thy wife.” But there is more. Hongyuan, still in the underworld, meets with a group of six Buddhist monks, who impede him from entering the “Department of the [Gods of the] Five Plagues” (*wuwen si* 五瘟司). Hongyuan says: “I do not know anything about the Five Plagues, but I have heard about the Pneuma of the Oneness of the Anterior Heaven!” One of the Buddhist monks replies: “So you know how to revere Daoism, forgetting Buddhism?” The monk then advises Hongyuan to recite the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua jing* 法華經) in order to eliminate his sins. This record therefore states clearly that the *Lotus Sūtra* is preferable to the YHJ. It promises long life for those who keep faith with the *Lotus Sūtra*, and death for those who follow the YHJ (and Daoist practices in general). It is not surprising, therefore, that this tale will appear again in the *Fahua jing chiyan ji* 法華經持驗記 (Records of Miracles Caused by Recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra*), compiled during the Qing dynasty by the Buddhist layman Zhou Kefu 周克復.

In his tales, Lu Can referred to both “Buddhist” and “Daoist” deities, but he did not take sides at all. We can learn from the *Gengsi bian* that Lu Can was much more interested in recording miracles that he probably heard about than selecting those that were connected only to one tradition. He did not defend one tradition to the detriment of other. This reflects the possible role of Lu Can as a scriptural user, and is coherent with the fact that he was not writing as a proponent of scriptures. Zhou Kefu, on the other hand, will select the specific tale of Hongyuan, due to its Buddhist appeal.

A curious pattern seen during the Qing dynasty is the presence of the YHJ in various literary works. It is true that these records do not represent any specific argument on that scripture, but they reveal that the YHJ was probably quite popular by that time. Also, they constitute a privileged source for those interested in the history of Chinese private life, including its religious aspects. Even if they do not depict real individuals and actual events, these records are clearly inspired by the religious experience of the Chinese people. They depict in a vivid manner the relationship individuals kept with the scriptures they would consume. As miracle tales, Qing literary works also deal with the issue of scriptural authority.

Zi buyu 子不語, by the Qing poet, literary critic, and essayist Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797), is a work whose title is obviously inspired by a passage of the *Analects*: “The subjects on which the Master did not talk [*zi buyu*], were—extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings” 子不語怪、力、亂、神 (Legge’s translation). Things of which Kongzi would not talk are the preferred subject of Yuan Mei in this particular work. Yuan Mei tells the story of two women surnamed Hu

胡. During the Qingming Festival 清明節, the spirit of the Earl of Guazhou 瓜洲 appeared to them and possessed (*sui* 祟) both women. “Their family invited a Daoist priest to recite the YHJ in order to avert it” 其家請道士念《玉皇經》解禳之, but it was in vain, since the priest would run away after the spirit threw out a soaked object in the direction of the scripture.

The Qing scholar Yu Yue’s 俞樾 (1821–1907) *Youtai xianguan biji* 右臺仙館筆記 (Jottings on the Transcendent Pavilion of the Dexter Terrace) also deals with the issue of scriptural authority. He tells the story of a man called Zhou Jinglou 周鏡樓, who died when his daughter was still a child. Zhou will possess his daughter’s body in order to solve a ghostly quarrel involving the former wife of his friend Xie Xinyu 謝心畬, who died by ingesting abortive medicaments. Zhou, speaking through his medium-daughter, asserts that he will invite a Daoist priest to recite scriptures, but the ghost-woman says: “If you invite a Daoist priest in order to recite scriptures, I hope it will be the *Dafan jing* 大梵經 [Scripture of the Great Bhraman]. Should it be the *Yuhuang jing*, then [I will be sent to] the lowest lands of the underworlds, a result I do not hope to achieve.” As long as they relate to the YHJ, the Ming and Qing records consulted above do not represent the issue of scriptural authority as the miracle tales of CT 11 would, but they are still concerned with whether scriptures might fulfil their promises or not.¹⁴²

The moral behind all the records and stories presented above is that the whole story is not a matter of morality at all. From a certain perspective, what scriptural proponents had to offer was adherence. But Chinese scriptural proponents would find themselves in a quite difficult position. The records above suggest that the Chinese scriptural user was much more interested in *efficaciousness* than adherence. The

¹⁴² Other curious records include *Qiudeng suoyi* 秋燈瑣憶 (Fragments of memories under the autumn lamp) that, for instance, registered the frugal and yet romantic life the literati Jiang Tan 蔣坦 spent in the company of his wife, Qiu Fu 秋芙, whom he married by 1789. The work, composed after Qiu Fu’s death, describes Jiang Tan and his wife as a harmonious couple who would find great pleasure in engaging in cultural activities together. *Qiudeng suoyi* are a kind of intimate story in which Jiang Tan turns his own biography into the subject of a remarkable literary accomplishment. This record also suggests that the couple had great interest in religious activities. Narrating in the first person, Jiang Tan says that during his late life he did “many things that would violate his good conscience” (*duo e* 多屙), and so he “mounted an altar with the help of Qiu Fu in order to practise the *Litany of the Jade Sovereign* for forty-nine days” 與秋芙結壇修玉皇懺儀四十九日. Jiang Tan praises his wife’s literary skills: “Qiu Fu wrote a memorial (*shuwen* 疏文) using parallelisms, it was profound and rich both in form and content, but it is a pity that I did not keep the draft nor could I memorize it” 秋芙作駢儷疏文, 辭義奧艷, 惜稿無遺存, 不可記憶.

dynamic of the religious sphere, therefore, would lead to the appearance of a self-sustainable and ever increasing scriptural economy in which new scriptural proponents would make bold assumptions with regard to the efficaciousness of their tools. In the majority of these records, the YHJ has its authority denied, being represented as a useless, not a ritually efficacious tool. These records therefore suggest the existence of conflicts between scriptural proponents, as it is clear from the Buddhist record in which it is said that the *Lotus Sūtra* brings life and the YHJ only death, or the tale of Zhou Jinglou, wherein the dead wife of Xie Xinyu demonstrates herself to be suspicious of the efficaciousness of the YHJ. In the following, I shall deal with the attitudes toward the YHJ demonstrated by Buddhist and Catholic readers, confirming the existence of conflict between scriptural proponents. The next section will demonstrate that, during the late imperial period, such conflicts might have had their roots in the need of securing imperial sanction for non-orthodox scriptures.

3.2 Buddhist Polemics

Ming and Qing records related to the YHJ demonstrate a great preoccupation with the state. These same records give no room for the existence of a Chinese ecumenism in the late imperial period, when the Daoist gods begin to demonstrate a fundamental concern with competition between “isms,” now increased by the appearance of a new and somewhat dangerous opponent: Christianity. The Chinese altars of the Ming-Qing period continued to improve the revealed text of the YHJ through revisions carried out by spirit-mediums.¹⁴³ The various deities who manifested themselves via spirit-writing presented rational, completely understandable arguments with regard

¹⁴³ However, as argued by Leonard L. Thompson in an article on the Book of Revelation, “Among the many explanations for spirit possession, spirits are taboo,” because “to mention spirits as real powers is a transgression, for it erodes our notion that a body is a fixed and stable entity, separated spatially from other discrete bounded objects of the world.” See Leonard L. Thompson, “Spirit Possession: Revelation in Religious Studies,” in David L. Barr, ed., *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 137. This interesting book has various essays on the Book of Revelation written by different scholars. I will not avoid explaining the YHJ as a work authored, transmitted, and explained by spirits. The fundamental reason is that the spirit-writing background, from which the text derives, far from representing a mysterious instance of human experience, is above all a form of rational exercise, as any other act of communication that involves the usage of language. In this, I do follow the Dummettian argument with regards to linguistic acts. For an introduction to the philosophy of language proposed by Michael Dummett, see Barry Lee, ed., *Philosophy of Language*, pp. 225–48.

not only to the status of the YHJ as a sacred text, but also the circumstances connected to the transmission and the reception of that scripture. I would argue that the topic of scriptural authority is a central one in the extant records. These Ming and Qing documents reveal not only undeniable conflicts between scriptural proponents, they also demonstrate that scriptural proponents of different affiliations held a common desire of recognition as a legitimate part of the orthodoxy represented by the state and its scriptural canon of Ruist provenance.

From the testimony given by Wenchang Dijun 文昌帝君, one learns that Xiwangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) revealed the YHJ, and that Zhang Liang, styled Zifang 子房, the great strategist from the beginning of the Han, was the first deity to carry out its revision. In the various prefaces they composed during the Ming dynasty these spiritual entities demonstrate their preoccupation with a great variety of issues, the revision of the text being a fundamental one. The commentaries provided by these various gods also demonstrate that the YHJ was never thought of as a “finished text,” but as a heavenly scripture whose mundane copies call for constant revision due to the human inability with regard to transmitting the text without altering it.¹⁴⁴

Wenchang Dijun, for instance, states that the proliferation of recensions led to the appearance of both textual and interpretational distortions, with the final consequence of promoting sceptical attitudes toward the text. Thus, the unfaithful would not deposit their trust in the scripture, believing the YHJ would “plagiarize other scriptures.”¹⁴⁵ In another preface, Wenchang Dijun argues that those who do not surrender to the authority of the YHJ are automatically incredulous of the entire Confucian canon, for the Jade Sovereign is the same god referred to as Shangdi 上帝 in other texts including the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Classic of Documents*, and the *Record of Rites*.¹⁴⁶ The spirits were also quite concerned with finding Buddhist counterparts for the Jade Sovereign, affirming that that god is the Daoist manifestation of the Buddha of the past. Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝 reveals himself more concerned with proselytizing, for he argues that “those who encounter this scripture but do not transmit it are

¹⁴⁴ In an article on the *Organon*, Ursula-Angelika Cedzich argues that the search for an Ur-text might be not only a thankless but also questionable scholarly endeavour. See “The Organon of the Twelve Hundred Officials and Its Gods,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 1 (2009), pp. 1–93.

¹⁴⁵ See “Yujing jianzhu hecan sishisi juan” 玉經箋註合參四十四卷, the largest commentary to the YHJ compiled by Zhou Mingzhen 周明真 during the Ming, in Zhou Xiefan 周燮藩, ed., *Zhongguo zongjiao lishi wenxian jicheng: Sandong shiyi* 中國宗教歷史文獻集成：三洞拾遺 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2005), vol. 2, p. 164. The sole reliable scholarly account on this source to date is to be found in Hsieh Tsung-hui.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

obstructing the perfected Dao.”¹⁴⁷ The unfaithful frequently appear as a target of the gods’ reprobation. All this demonstrates that the gods in charge of the revision of the YHJ were quite aware of what was happening in the mundane realm. The existence of the unfaithful, textual distortions, religious disputes, and the identity of the Jade Sovereign constitute the immediate concerns one finds in the various statements they provided. But what is the precise context of the statements proffered by the gods via mediumistic communication?

The history of scriptural reception demonstrates that Christian and Buddhist readers attacked the YHJ with no mercy, declaring it to be nothing but an apocryphal text. The preachers of these two traditions understood the YHJ as a threat, a phenomenon connected to the very argument of the text: the YHJ is an omnipotent tool, and the Jade Sovereign a present deity. Buddhist and Christian proponents would make similar claims with regard to their own scriptures. At least three Buddhist records refer to our scripture in pejorative terms:

Scripture of the Jade Sovereign

The present scripture records the Dharma pronounced by the Heavenly Thearch, [stating that] the Buddhas from the Ten Directions came in order to hear it. This is mistaken, for the celestials are mundane beings. [If even] minor saints as the Srāvakas are respected by the celestials from the times of yore, how is that the god of the gods [devāideva], saint of the saints would listen to the mundane Dharma? Those who hear such spurious statements shall roar with laughter, given their inveracity. [But if] the celestials proclaim the good Dharma, all the Buddhas shall be pleased, protecting [them by means of their] *nirmāna-kāyas*. It is possible that the supreme sincerity [of the celestials would] provoke the merciful response of the Buddhas, so that the Buddhas [would provide] clear proofs for [them]. Such an idea is more likely, but saying that the [Buddhas] would listen faithfully [to the Dharma preached by the Jade Sovereign should be seen as an] extremely erroneous, false [argument].¹⁴⁸

《玉皇經》

本經載天帝說法，十方諸佛咸至聽受，此訛也。天是凡位。聲聞小聖，天尚敬奉。那得天中天、聖中聖，而反聽受凡法耶？齊東之語，聞者絕倒。不然，當是天演善法。諸佛歡喜，化身加被。蓋至誠感佛，佛為證明，理或有之；而謂信心聽受，舛偽殊甚。

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁴⁸ J33nB277 *Yunqi fahui* 雲棲法彙, 15:78b26–78c01.

This record, written by the Buddhist abbot Zhuhong 祿宏 (1535–1615) in a commentary to the *Fahua jing*, ignores the argument of the YHJ, reading that scripture as if it were an apocryphal text. According to the orthodox standards applied by Zhuhong, gods are intrinsically inferior to Buddhas. From this perspective, the Jade Sovereign (the so-called Heavenly Thearch) could at most preach and follow the Buddhist Dharma, but not innovate in matters of religious doctrine. Hongzan 弘贊 (1611–?) would also refer to the YHJ as a spurious writing, but different from Zhuhong, he would not even comment on the text's content.

The views of these late-imperial Buddhist authorities, Zhuhong and Hongzan, regarding the Jade Sovereign, are symptomatic of a process that began during the Song, when the imperial house patronized the deity and Buddhists began to argue that the Jade Sovereign was nothing but a Daoist version of Śakra 帝釋天. This discourse sustained itself until the twentieth century, for a record attributed to Dharma Master Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940) expresses views which are similar to those of Zhuhong and Hongzan: “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* is an apocryphal text fabricated by Daoists by means of plagiarizing the doctrines found in the Buddhist scriptures” 《玉皇經》乃道家竊取佛經之義偽造之經. The same document states that “the Jade Sovereign is the King of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the second heaven of the Desire realm” 玉帝乃忉利天王，是欲界第二天. In Sanskrit and Pali literature, Śakra is also known as Indra, the Lord of Heaven, presiding over the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the highest realm of the divine world.¹⁴⁹

It should be noted that equating the Jade Sovereign with Śakra is by no means a flattering attitude. Śakra is certainly a Lord. But in Buddhist descriptions, he is depicted as a deluded, self-conceited, and infinitely inferior lord, especially when compared to the wise, omniscient Śākyamuni. Jacob N. Kinnard explains that, “Iconographically, Indra is often depicted as subservient to the Buddha. In Gandhāran sculpture, for instance, he is sometimes depicted, along with Brahmā, worshipping the Buddha, sometimes holding an umbrella to shade him from the sun, or sometimes holding the Buddha's alms bowl.”¹⁵⁰ CT 1440, the Ming commentary to the YHJ, has a preface attributed to Wang Chongyang 王重陽 in which he says that “the evil stream [i.e., Buddhists] believes the Exalted and Superior Jade Sovereign to be Indra, who holds an umbrella [to shade the Buddha from the sun]” 邪流遂以張蓋之帝釋為高上玉皇. This demonstrates that the Daoists were aware of the iconography

¹⁴⁹ For a more detailed account on this matter, see my “The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*,” “Scriptural reception.”

¹⁵⁰ See Jacob N. Kinnard, “Indra,” in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, pp. 374–75.

and its derogatory implications. They reacted to such promiscuous identification by arguing that the Jade Sovereign, if described in Buddhist terms, should be seen as *Dīpaṃkara*, not *Śakra*.¹⁵¹ *Dīpaṃkara* is the Buddha of the past, the preceptor of Gautama. If one assumes a relation of identity between the Jade Sovereign and *Dīpaṃkara*, the logical conclusion would be that the former, being the preceptor of the Buddha Gautama, would be seen as the originator of Buddhism itself, in a similar fashion to the arguments brought into light by the *Huahu jing* 化胡經.

The comparison with *Śakra* has a political dimension that should not be ignored. The Buddhist argument is certainly embedded in theological notions, but it also seems to be an attempt in the sense of neutralizing the political potentiality of a god such as the Jade Sovereign. In stating that the Jade Sovereign and Indra were the same entity, Buddhists connected the former to a source of authority completely external to the Confucian canon and, therefore, not recognizable as Chinese by national authorities. In affirming that the Jade Sovereign should be regarded as Shangdi, and not *Śakra*, Daoists demonstrated their desire for a conflation with state authority in statements such as: “The Jade Thearch is equally respected by all the three teachings. The foolish call him the Lord of Heaven (*tianzhu* 天主)” and “Confucianism calls him the Superior Thearch. Buddhism calls him *Dīpaṃkara*. Daoism calls him Mysterious Lord.”¹⁵² Reading this statement against its context, one should read “Buddhists” for “foolish” and “*Śakra*” for “Lord of Heaven.”

The majority of records defining the Jade Sovereign as *Śakra* came from the hands of Chan monks. Not by coincidence, a preface attributed to Liu Haichan 劉海蟾, also in CT 1440, uses a way of reasoning similar to that implied by the Buddhist argument on the nature of the Jade Sovereign in order to attack Chan Buddhism. The text states that the logic behind the statements made by Buddhists regarding the Jade Sovereign is connected to the “foreign” nature of Buddhism, for “when Chan practitioners first revered the Buddha and then the Jade Thearch, this situation means the same as foreigners who first pay respect to their lord, and then to the Chinese emperor.” The attitude of Chan Buddhists toward the Jade Sovereign therefore seems to correspond to an argument on the political nature of the Thearch. Chan Buddhists were interested in denying the Thearch’s status as a national god. In this sense, Buddhists reacted against Daoist claims of authority, to which Daoists reacted by stating that the Jade Sovereign was no less than Shangdi, the highest god of the state cult. The political dispute for elite and state recognition was intensified with the appearance of the Roman Catholic Church in Chinese territory. The orthodoxy

¹⁵¹ For Daoist reactions against Buddhist speculations see CT 1440 1:4b, 11a, 12b, 13b.

¹⁵² CT 1440 1:4b.

represented by the state and its scriptural canon showed itself again as the most active presence in Chinese public life.

3.3 Christian Readings of the YHJ

This section explores the Christian reaction to the YHJ. It is a truism that Western missionaries would find in their particular interpretation of the Confucian canon both (1) a manner of arguing in favour of the alleged universality of the Christian revelation and (2) a form of presenting their faith as acceptable for the Chinese elite from whom they sought patronage. It therefore comes as no surprise that Western missionaries would try to distance themselves as much as they could from Buddhism and Daoism, avoiding any conflation between their god and the gods worshipped by the Chinese commoner.

Certain aspects of the story told in the first chapter of the YHJ, however, allow one to make comparisons between the YHJ and the Christian gospels. The story told in the first chapter of the YHJ, in which the future Thearch is described as a charitable prince who renounces his kingdom and achieves spiritual perfection, is not directly connected to Buddhist sources, but to Tang Daoist liturgy. Without a doubt, the passage on the birth and enlightenment of the Jade Sovereign deploys a narrative and “literary” structure, but one should notice that this story is told for an assembly of spiritual beings and to the souls of the deceased. This fact suggests a strong relation with ritual practices concerned with the welfare of the departed.¹⁵³ The narrative offered in the first chapter of the YHJ seems to be not only a “story,” but a soteriological composition to be utilized according to specific ritual schemes to which, unfortunately, we have no direct access. The first chapter of the YHJ does not represent, therefore, an attempt to construct a narrative account similar to that found in the Christian gospels, but Western missionaries and Chinese converts read the YHJ as if it were such an attempt.

The stories of Jesus and the Jade Sovereign are, in certain aspects, quite similar. In both cases it is claimed that a god incarnated as a human being. The theological device known as the *hypostatic union* allowed Christians to explain the possibility of their god incarnating in human form. The YHJ, without the aid offered by such theological implement but with the aid offered by the notion of *fangbian* 方便,

¹⁵³ These practices figure prominently in the very sources the compilers of the YHJ borrowed from in order to construct such a narrative. The same story appears in precious scrolls (*baojuan* 寶卷) dedicated to the salvation of the deceased. See *Zhongguo Heyang baojuan ji* 中國河陽寶卷集, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2007).

presented the story of a god who *incarnated* (*huashen* 化身) without sacrilege to his divine nature: “Although in the past the Thearch descended into the human realm to cultivate [the Dao] and convert [people] in the course of innumerable eras while manifesting grand divine powers, his body has been pure and tranquil throughout, for he never abandoned the Golden Gate.”¹⁵⁴

Similar to Jesus, the Jade Sovereign is a god whose sense of self-sacrifice and compassion was developed enough so that he would transform himself into a human organism and then would sacrifice this organism (the so-called blood and flesh) in order to save humanity. But it is obvious that similar plots and narrative structures do not necessarily argue for the same thing in different contexts and that there is no universal purpose underlying those stories. A dialogue between a Christian missionary and a Chinese convert, however, demonstrates that the narrative framework of the YHJ would lead a Chinese audience to suppose a relation of identity between the Jade Sovereign and the Christian deity.

In the *Kouduo richao* 口鐸日抄 (Diary Transcriptions of the Father’s Teaching),¹⁵⁵ Lai Shizhang 賴士章 asks: “God is the master of heaven, earth and the myriad of creatures. According to Buddhism, the Heavenly King Maha-Brahman has the authority to rule over the three thousand worlds. I was wondering whether he is the same as God or not?”¹⁵⁶ The Catholic priest Giulio Aleni¹⁵⁷ (1582–1649) replied, denying any possible relation of identity between God and Brahman: “No! No! God is the supreme, incomparable, authentic Lord, and he is in charge of heaven, earth, and the myriad of creatures” 否，否！夫天主者，乃至尊無上之真主，而主宰天地萬物者也。

Aleni would continue his exposition saying that “The Heavenly King Maha-Brahman, about whom Buddhism talks, stands at the side of Śākyamuni in order to receive his teachings; how is it possible that he would be the authentic Lord of heaven

¹⁵⁴ CT 10 1:9b4–5.

¹⁵⁵ This work was compiled by Li Jiubiao 李九標, one of Giulio Aleni’s Chinese students.

¹⁵⁶ All the Christian records consulted by me when writing this paper can be found in the monumental compilation provided by Zheng Ande 鄭安德 (Andrew Chung), ed., *Mingmo Qingchu Yesuhui sixiang wenxian huibian* 明末清初耶穌會思想文獻彙編 (Beijing: Beijing daxue zongjiao yanjisuo, 2003).

¹⁵⁷ For an introduction to the Jesuit activity in Ming-Qing China, see Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2007). A fundamental study on Aleni is to be found in Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek, eds., *Scholar from the West: Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China* (Brescia, Italy: Fondazione civiltà bresciana; Sankt Augustin, Germany: Monumenta Serica Institute, 1997).

and earth?” 釋氏所謂大梵天王，立釋迦之旁受教，豈為天地真主？ Judging from the perspective offered by Christian theology, there was more to say, since there are things that Brahman “does not know and is not capable of accomplishing” 尚有不知不能，and he “never existed, being only a concept spuriously created by Buddhism” 本非實有，乃釋氏私立名相。Aleni also stated that “those who worship the Buddha do not have the Heavenly King as their lord, only Śākyamuni” 奉佛者，亦不以梵天王為尊，只以釋迦為尊，so that as a Christian he considered that “it would be a great blasphemy to see the Heavenly King Maha-Brahman as the authentic Lord of heaven and earth” 以梵天王為天地之真主，謬斯大矣。Lai Shizhang, however, was still curious: “Since the Heavenly King Maha-Brahman should not be equated to God, what about the Grand Thearch Jade Sovereign of whom Daoists talk about?” 梵天王既不可言天主，若道家所云玉皇大帝，得無似乎？ Aleni provided a relatively systematized response:

I. On the origins of the “Jade Sovereign.” The Father said: The title Jade Sovereign was created by Huizong of the Song dynasty, not existing before that. Today, therefore, how can we rely upon a concept created by a man, believing wrongly that it points to the God of heaven and earth? II. The Jade Sovereign was a human being who became [a god] by means of cultivation. According to what is theorized in the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*: “The Jade Sovereign cultivated himself for some thousands of aeons and then ascended to the post of the Thearch.” III. The Jade Sovereign is not God. How could it be possible for human beings to transform themselves into the God of heaven and earth by means of cultivation? All the tiny races of human beings were created by God, how is that one could dare to violate His authority calling himself the Lord on High? This is comparable to the mean people who, conspiring in order to usurp the throne of the Emperor, shall be regarded as traitors whose sins are not forgivable. How much more [grave then] it would be to conspire in order to usurp the Throne of the God of heaven and earth? Even if one says that first someone cultivated himself and then the heaven and earth had their Lord, I would ask: before the Jade Sovereign was born, who was the so-called Master of heaven, earth, and mankind? Moreover, the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* also states “above the Jade Sovereign there are [the gods known as] the Three Pure Ones” [i.e., Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊, Lingbao Tianzun 靈寶天尊, and Daode Tianzun 道德天尊]. Since the Jade Sovereign is inferior to the Three Pure Ones, it follows that [that god] could not be the King of the Kings. Now, if one desires to compare [such a deity] to God, the Supreme Lord, could it be more than a blasphemy?

一、「玉皇」的由來。司鐸曰：「『玉皇』名號，乃宋徽宗所加，前此無有也。今以一人私立之名目，何可即妄認為天地真主。」二、玉皇乃人修煉而成。

「據《玉皇經》所論：『玉皇修身几百劫，乃登帝位。』」三、玉皇非天主。「夫天地真主，可以人修成者哉？藐諸人類，本天主所生，何敢僭稱上主？譬諸奸民，謀篡帝王之位，必為反賊，罪不容赦，況謀天地真主之位乎？即云待人修成，然後天地有主。試問玉皇未生之先，所謂主宰天地人物者誰乎？且《玉皇經》又云：『玉皇之上，更有三清。』玉皇既在三清之下，則尤非至尊之主明甚。今乃欲与至尊之真主同日語也，豈不謬哉？」

The attitude demonstrated by the Jesuit priest Giulio Aleni is not part of the agenda of modern, progressive Christian theologians anymore,¹⁵⁸ but the remains of his *weltanschauung* still influence the manner with which modern scholars refer to the Jade Thearch as, “the chief deity of the Chinese pantheon,” whatever such a pantheon might be. This record nevertheless is telling, by many reasons.

It demonstrates that, as expected for someone concerned with proselytizing, the Jesuit priest was relatively well acquainted with some aspects of Daoism, such as the important role played by Huizong regarding the cult of the Jade Sovereign during the Song dynasty and the prominent place given to the Three Pure Ones in some Daoist accounts, even though this last idea is not presupposed by the YHJ, a scripture of which the missionary demonstrated a certain degree of knowledge. His arguments about the origin of the Jade Sovereign however (as other arguments systematically deployed by Catholics against the god) are not accurate, because we know that the Thearch already began to occupy an important place in the religious literature of the Chinese during the Six Dynasties. But the record still sheds some

¹⁵⁸ A significant number of works in the field of Christian studies demonstrates that theologians have made important efforts in the sense of providing with a response to the challenges imposed by philosophers on religion from the nineteenth century on. See Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), which is particularly significant for those interested in a comparative approach to Christianity and Hinduism. Another interesting book dealing with the discussion Christianity-Hinduism is Thomas Thangaraj’s *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994). Thangaraj speaks from the perspective of a Tamil missionary concerned with representing the Christian message by means of Indic symbolism. A more general approach to the issue of contemporary theology can be found in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). In this book, diverse authors presented theological accounts written from unexpected perspectives, such as feminism, deconstructive philosophy, etc. *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), presents with a provocative account on the connections between sex, sexuality, and theology.

light on the malleability that characterizes the Chinese theological imagination. It reveals that a Chinese audience from the late Ming dynasty would accept a conflation of gods such as Brahman and the Jade Sovereign with a new foreign deity, the Catholic god. Giorgio Aleni nevertheless made clear that he was not going to make concessions to his Chinese audience. As a Christian, he had many reasons for denying the assimilation of the Christian god with Brahman or the Jade Thearch. It would be no surprise to find among these reasons the doctrines of the hypostatic union and the threefold office. In fact, the doctrine of the hypostatic union figures among the reasons alleged by the missionary as an explanation for what he understood as the unholy nature of Śākyamuni, in a record to be found in the same document which originated the dialogue presented above.

But Aleni was not the first Christian to criticize the YHJ. Before him, renowned Chinese converts had noticed the scripture, which they characterized as a spurious falsification. *Destroying illusion (pomi 破迷)*, a document attributed to Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633),¹⁵⁹ contemporary of Aleni, equates Chinese religion and superstition, referring to it by means of purely controversial and depreciative language. That document propagated the idea that the Jade Sovereign is a deified form of Zhang Yang 張佯 or Zhang Yi 張儀, identified as a former general serving the Han dynasty: “In the Yangzi river, people constructed a temple to the Jade Sovereign, canonizing the dead general Zhang Yang as the Jade Thearch, i.e., he who is called today Grand Thearch Zhang” 在洋子江中，起一廟宇為玉皇廟，將陣亡首將張佯封為玉帝，即今稱張大帝也。 This view is by no means corroborated by Daoist sources, but repeats itself throughout Christian documents written in Chinese. Whoever compiled the document¹⁶⁰ also read the YHJ, referring to its first chapter:

Bao [Yue]guang, mother of the king of Guangyan Miaole, had no heirs, and so she looked up to heaven and begged for a child for ten years. The mother dreamt that Yuanshi Daojun brought a jade infant in his arms, and then she got pregnant, giving birth to Zhang Yang in the *wu* hour (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.)

¹⁵⁹ For a reliable account on Xu Guangqi's activities, see Ad Dudink, “Xu Guangqi's Career: An Annotated Chronology,” in Catherine Jami, Peter Engelfriet, and Gregory Blue, eds., *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China: The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 399–409.

¹⁶⁰ I am not excluding the possibility of that document being a Qing forgery attributed to Xu Guangqi. I would have no space in this paper, however, to deal with philological and textual issues in a detailed manner. I do believe, however, that the views exposed in Christian texts from the late imperial period reveal if not an argument, an organized attempt in the sense of diminishing the divine status conferred to the Jade Sovereign by a Chinese audience.

of the ninth day of the first month of the next year. When he was sixteen, the boy abandoned his great position, hiding at the Puming Xiuyan Mountain, completing the elixir and obtaining the Dao. Laojun was a vassal of the King Zhao of Zhou, while the Jade Sovereign was canonized by Jiang Ziya. Since the heaven and earth came into existence more than three thousand and five hundred years ago and these people died successively, how would it be possible they would possess power over the human world, controlling the affairs related to life, death, misfortune, and blessings?

是光嚴妙樂國王之母，寶光無嗣，因而仰天求子十年。母夢見元始道君，手捧玉孩兒因而受孕，次年正月初九午時，生張佯。十六歲棄大位，隱於普明秀岩山，丹成道得。老君是周昭王臣子，玉皇是姜子牙所封。有天地以來，三千五百餘年，先後之人，皆以死故，焉能掌握天權人世，生死禍福之事？

The compiler continues stating that Huizong canonized Zhang Yang as Haotian Yuhuang dadi 昊天玉皇大帝. The emphasis on the role played by Song emperors with regard to the cult of the Jade Sovereign is understandable, if we take into consideration the fact that none of the Christian detractors of the YHJ would have had access to or even the ability to understand the content of the Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures in which one finds the earliest references to the Jade Sovereign. Both Xu Guangqi and Giorgio Aleni focused on the story of the birth and apotheosis of the Jade Sovereign, which at this point found its way into popular literature, as demonstrated by records as the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記.

He Shizhen 何世貞,¹⁶¹ active by the end of the Ming dynasty and beginning of the Qing dynasty, endorsed the views of his predecessors. In the *Chongzheng bibian* 崇正必辯 (Fundamental Debates Regarding the Veneration of Truth, c. 1672), which he signed with other Chinese converts, He Shizhen demonstrated that he also read the YHJ, presenting arguments that are similar, if not directly inspired, to those provided by the text attributed to Xu Guangqi. The Christian convert affirms that the YHJ is a “falsified book” 偽造書記, wherein is stated that the queen Bao Yueguang bore the Jade Sovereign, formerly a “Chinese man as insignificant as an insect” 中國一介小民如蟻蟲,¹⁶² i.e., Zhang Yi, “a man who lived

¹⁶¹ For an introductory account on He Shizhen and his work, see Zhou Pingping 周萍萍, “Jiangnan chuandaoyuan He Shizhen ji qi *Chongzheng bibian*” 江南傳道員何世貞及其《崇正必辯》, in *Guoji Hanxue* 國際漢學, vol. 14, ed. Ren Jiyu (Beijing: Daxiang chubanshe, 2006), pp. 61–70.

¹⁶² This racist sentence probably represents the views of an European interlocutor of He Shizhen or an unfortunate expression of Chinese self-hatred.

during Han times, who never worshipped the Heavenly Lord while alive, a sinner whose soul suffered punishment in hell after his death” 漢時人物，在世未嘗拜事天主，乃罪人也；死後靈魂禁於地獄受刑。He Shizhen also asks: “How could [such a man] be of help to the court?” 豈能助於朝廷？ It is difficult to determine whether He Shizhen is referring to the Chinese court or to the heavenly court inhabited by the Christian deity, but the defaming section of his book dedicated to the Jade Sovereign concludes affirming that:

The Master of heaven, earth, and all the creatures is completely different from those gods, buddhas, bodhisattvas, the Jade Sovereign, Laojun, and Pangu. They were born from their parents after heaven and earth came into being, being nothing more than the people of old times. Before they were born, they could not create heaven, earth, and the myriad of living beings, and after dying they had no power over creation. When alive, they could not protect themselves, and once they passed away they became incapable of protecting others.

天地萬物的主宰，可同不得那些神佛、菩薩、玉皇、老君、盤古。一切神佛、菩薩、玉皇、老君、盤古，他們都是生在天地之後，都從父母所生，不過是古時的人。他們生前不能造化天地萬物，死後不能掌管天地萬物；活著不能保佑自己，死後不能保佑別人。

Finally, the text accuses Buddhists and Daoists of exploiting people by means of promises of salvation that will never be accomplished. Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1562–1627),¹⁶³ an official active by the end of the Ming dynasty, in his *Daiyi xupian* 代疑續篇 also utilizes this type of historicist argument. He states that the Jade Sovereign was formerly known as Zhang Yi, a man who lived during the Han and who was canonized by Huizong under the wicked influence of Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1075–1119). Yang Tingyun makes use of the same argument that will be used by Aleni, according to which there is a contradiction between the place occupied by the Jade Sovereign in the Chinese pantheon and the fact that “the Three Pure Ones are listed above him” 三清列其上. Yang Tingyun also explains why Jesus and the Jade Sovereign are not the same person, proposing that the works and the life of Jesus were predicted by the prophets a thousand years before Jesus came into life, being registered in hundreds

¹⁶³ The best account on the life and the work of Yang Tingyun to date is that offered by N. Standaert in *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988). Chinese translation by Shengshen yanjiu zhongxin 聖神研究中心: *Yang Tingyun: Mingmo tianzhujiao ruzhe* 楊廷筠：明末天主教儒者 (Hong Kong: Luwen daxue Zhongguo Ouzhou yanjiu zhongxin: Shengshen yanjiu zhongxin, 1987).

of thousands of classics (*baiwan zhi dianji* 百萬之典籍), while the same could not be said of the Chinese god.¹⁶⁴

The French missionary Emeric de Chavagnac (1670–1717)¹⁶⁵ also deposed against the Jade Sovereign, arguing that the god could not be Deus. Chavagnac denounced what he interpreted as the logical inconsistencies informing the relationship between the Stove God 灶神 and the Jade Sovereign:

Also, suppose that people do not spend much time in their homes, travelling outside for the most part of their time, i.e., far away from the Stove God. How would the Jade Sovereign know about their bad and good deeds? Supposing that the Jade Sovereign has spontaneous knowledge [of things, i.e., omniscience], it follows that he also must know by his own means the good and bad things practised within families. In this case, what would be the function of the Stove God?

又人少在家而多游於外，其離灶神既遠矣，則玉皇何以知其邪正也耶？若玉皇自知，則亦自知家中之善惡，夫灶神何用之有？

And recurring to the bureaucratic metaphor commonly associated with the Jade Sovereign, the missionary stated that:

If the Jade Sovereign might be deceived by a minor deity [as the Stove God], it follows that other gods and even people could easily trick him. In that case, the fact that the Jade Sovereign would accept erroneously the memorial submitted by a minor deity would lead necessarily to great chaos in heaven and earth.

¹⁶⁴ Yang Tingyun is probably referring to the Christian interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, according to which several passages would foretell the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus.

¹⁶⁵ We found important bibliographic notes on this somewhat unknown Jesuit priest in P. Louis Pfister (1833–1891), *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine, 1552–1773*, tome 2 (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1934): “Nous n’avons aucun détail sur les premières années du P. de Chavagnac, français. Il était profès. Il arriva à Canton sur l’«Amphitrite», après avoir passé vingt jours au mouillage devant Sancian 上川, le 9 sept. 1701, avec plusieurs autres, de sorte que 13 missionnaires nouveaux se trouvèrent alors réunis à Canton.” (p. 567) “Il mourut à Jao-tcheou fou 饒州, le 14 sept. 1717.” (p. 570) The text also cites his works, as the *Zhendao zizheng* 真道自證, from which the passage above comes. According to Standaert, this work “only takes recourse to reason (natural religion) and the Bible (revealed religion); he does not adduce the Chinese Classics and Confucianism for support and is silent on Buddhism and Taoism.” The above record, however, contradicts this assertion. See Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume One: 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 614–15.

玉皇既被小神所瞞，其亦被他神及人所哄易也。然則玉皇因亂納小神奏，必將有蒞天地之大亂也。

This kind of reasoning would appear as particularly persuasive for the Chinese elites.¹⁶⁶ Vincent Yang, in his analyses of how the *Xiyou ji* depicts the Jade Sovereign, for instance, affirms that that text presented a parody of the god, who was also represented as a harmful and unjust deity. Vincent Yang concludes his analyses stating that during the late imperial period, everyone would see Daoist and Buddhist priests as prostitutes. This conclusion takes the views of Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 or other compilers and reads them as if they could represent the views of the majority of the population for whom scriptures as the YHJ were designed. It is also embedded in a modern (and moralistic) notion of religion according to which the circulation of monetary values in a religious environment represents a promiscuous form of reification of the sacred. I would argue, however, that Yang's argument is partially valid, since it reveals that part of the late imperial Chinese intelligentsia would hold derogatory views with regard to the gods worshipped by Chinese commoners, as did Emeric de Chavagnac in trying to denounce logical inconsistencies in the Chinese religious life.

The records consulted above demonstrate that Catholic preachers and converts would produce several arguments against the god and his scripture. The historicity of Christ stood as a fundamental point in their arguments. The YHJ never made claims of its own historicity, but basing themselves on the argument of the centrality of Christian revelation in human history, Catholic preachers would also disseminate the story according to which the Jade Sovereign was in fact a historical figure: a Chinese man who was born during the Han, so that unlike Jesus he could not be the incarnation of Deus. This argument is especially confusing, since sometimes it is said that the Jade Sovereign was canonized by Jiang Ziya 姜子牙 (who, according to traditional accounts, lived during the Shang dynasty), and sometimes that Huizong canonized the god. A Chinese reaction to such ideas can be found in documents as the *Shengchao poxie ji* 聖朝破邪集 (Collection on Destroying the Evil on Behalf of the Holy Court) and the *Pixie jishi* 辟邪紀實 (Recorded Facts for Counteracting Evil), which attempted to defend Chinese religion against the Christian missionary activity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ See Vincent Yang, "A Masterpiece of Dissemblance: A New Perspective on *Xiyou ji*," *Monumenta Serica* 60 (2012), p. 193: "In the eyes of the people towards the end of the Ming era, monks and priests stood low on a par with prostitutes."

¹⁶⁷ The former affirms that "*Deus* is not worthy of being worshipped" while the later presents a more elaborate defence of the Jade Sovereign, written against the false rumour regarding

(Continued on next page)

The quarrel over the identity of the Jade Sovereign is certainly an erudite one, in the sense it was a discussion carried out by a small elite capable of reading scriptures and writing down their arguments. Our documents demonstrate that Christian missionaries and Chinese converts would never accept a conflation of their own god with the Jade Sovereign. There are several possible causes for this. Rendering the Chinese translation for Deus by means of such terms as *Yuhuang* 玉皇 or *Yudi* 玉帝 could not only create an undesirable conflict with the Vatican¹⁶⁸ but would necessarily lead to the non-observance of Chinese converts, for according

(Note 167—*Continued*)

the historicity of that god: “They say that Daoism worships Zhang Yi as the Jade Sovereign, who was canonized as the Superior Thearch Jade Sovereign, arguing that he was canonized by people as the Superior Thearch, and that this person [i.e., God], when compared with the Superior Thearch, is even more important. I would try to ask: if the Heavenly Lord called as *Deus* by that religion [i.e., Catholicism] was not canonized by men, was it the Heavenly Lord who called himself God? What about the fact that there is no such thing in Daoism as worshipping Zhang Yi?” 謂道教祀張儀為玉皇，受封為玉皇上帝，駁其受人之封為上帝，是人較上帝為更大。試問彼教之呼天主為上帝，獨非人加之封，而天主自稱為上帝耶？況道教並無祀張儀為玉皇之事乎？The author of this passage calls herself “the saddest person under heaven” (*tianxia diyi shangxinren* 天下第一傷心人). This record was written as a response to the *Tianlu zhiming* 天路指明, a Christian work attributed to Griffith John 楊格非 (14 December 1831–25 July 1912). The “saddest person under heaven” provides interesting accounts on ritual practices purportedly carried out by Christians in Western countries, with the goal of depicting Christianity as a religion of barbarians. Among these practices, we have: (a) human sacrifices offered to Jesus; (b) oblations made with menstrual blood; and (c) orgies carried out between fathers and brothers. The author also states that Giorgio Aleni was born from an incestuous relationship between his father and his father’s mother.

¹⁶⁸ We are certain, however, that the same Christian missionaries since the time of Matteo Ricci never felt suspicious of such terms as *Shangdi* and *Tian*, and even after the Rites Controversy, the Chinese continued referring to the Christian god as *Shangdi*, in spite of the Papal preference for the term *Tianzhu*. All these deities coming from the Confucian lore share some properties that would lead people at a non-philosophical level to assume that they are the same god, as did Quintilian when relating Zeus and the Christian god. Regarding this specific event, see the balanced account given by Nicholas Standaert, *Chinese Voices in the Rites Controversy: Travelling Books, Community Networks, Intercultural Arguments* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2012). In the twentieth century, James Legge and the Portuguese priest Joaquim Guerra would give continuity to the Christian project of overlapping the Christian god with various deities mentioned by the Confucian canon, but still would not turn their favour to the Jade Sovereign. For an introduction to the work of Joaquim Guerra, see Jorge Baptista Bruxo, *Padre Joaquim Guerra: uma biografia intelectual* (Macau: Universidade de Macau, 2004).

to Christian standards the ritualized behaviours prescribed in the YHJ would be seen as heretical.¹⁶⁹

The Christian reluctance with regard to the possibility of accepting the Jade Sovereign as a good candidate for the position of Deus seems to have its roots in theological reasons, but I would argue that as it happens in the case of the Buddhist attacks, the Christian attitude also denotes the centrality of the state cult as a fundamental source of authority during the late imperial period. I interpret the Catholic objection with regard to accepting a conflation between the Jade Sovereign and Deus as being based not in theology, but in the same principle leading Buddhists to deny the connection between the Jade Sovereign and Shangdi: an acute sense of the fundamental role played by the model of divinity represented by the state cult with regard to how the Chinese elites would interpret their position and their rights in relation to their subjects. At the end, both Daoist and Christian proponents would have to propose a conflation of their own deities with those of the national canon in order to gain the respect and the recognition of the state as legitimate members of the orthodoxy. Daoists would do that by means of identifying the Jade Sovereign as a Daoist version of Shangdi, while Catholic priests would deny any connection between their doctrines and those of non-canonical sources, even if there was a greater degree of compatibility between non-Confucian deities and the Christian god.

4 Final Remarks

In this paper it was my intention to furnish a preliminary survey of the content of the YHJ and the manner different readers reacted to it. I have tried to demonstrate that: (1) the YHJ reveals the implementation of a model of divinity whose authority emanates from the civil society, thus forcing the “roi du monde” to conform to patterns of solidarity and attenuation of social relations, situating the text beyond the immediate concerns of the Chinese state. (2) The text reworked the fundamental metaphor connected to the Jade Sovereign, depicting him as a saviour available for the devotee. (3) It seems reasonable to argue that scriptural reference to the perils of war forms part of what I have called the hypothetical horizon of the text, i.e., a set of potential circumstances against which the scripture was written and that make sense as long as the text refers to the domain of ritualized behaviour that (4) was meant

¹⁶⁹ In fact, Standaert agrees with this statement: “They [Ming-Qing missionaries] readily agreed that the practices of Buddhism and Taoism, considered as the ‘sects of the idolaters and sorcerers’, should be considered ‘false religions’. Therefore, they often insisted on the destruction of statues of Chinese divinities and saints.” See Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume One*, p. 598.

to establish a bond of solidarity between the faithful and the scripture, described as an independent entity endowed with beneficial and punitive powers. (5) The records consulted in the previous sections reveal that, even though the discussion around the Jade Sovereign and his identity represents the views of an elite active during the late imperial period, the concerns behind such discussion are probably connected to the persuasive power religious scriptures could exert over a larger audience. The reaction of Christian and Buddhist critics, even if embedded in theological symbolisms, seems to be motivated by the need of state recognition and patronage instead of pure theological differences. Christian and Buddhist preachers therefore vociferated against the persuasive argument of the YHJ and its pretension of orthodoxy, not against theological issues as such.

帝王隱喻之外：由社會史的角度看 《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容和接受史

(摘要)

Bony Schachter

本文初步探討了《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容與接受史。目前，有關《高上玉皇本行集經》的探討，局限於成書年代和問世背景的問題。據今人的考證，《高上玉皇本行集經》屬於南宋、七曲山文昌崇拜的道經，其最早版本應是1218年、以金人侵入四川為歷史背景的版本。本文主張《高上玉皇本行集經》的內容是值得進一步探討的課題。本文詳細分析該道經的內容，指出它是為了滿足不同社會群眾的需要而設計的。《高上玉皇本行集經》內容主要涉及若干承諾和威脅，以及基於這些承諾和威脅所主張的各種儀式化的行為 (ritualized behaviours)。《高上玉皇本行集經》裏所描述的儀式化的行為，建立起宗教經典的使用者 (scriptural user) 與宗教文本之間的關係，而歷代的編者通過各種靈驗故事來強調或否定這種關係的可靠性和神聖性。筆者介紹了非道教讀者對《高上玉皇本行集經》所做出的種種反應。據筆者的考證，道教、佛教、天主教各種文獻指出，明清以來，玉皇的身份曾經變成為各方激烈爭論的對象：佛教徒認為玉皇只不過是帝釋天的化身；道教徒認為玉皇既可以理解為燃燈佛，又可以視為儒教祀典中的昊天、上帝等神靈，但絕不能與帝釋天等同；天主教徒則堅決反對「玉皇為耶穌、玉皇為神 (θεος)」之說。從《高上玉皇本行集經》的接受史也可以看出，在明清時期，該道經曾遭遇到佛教界和在華天主教界的嚴厲批評。本文擬解釋這些衝突的原因所在，並且提出這些衝突與《高上玉皇本行集經》的論點之間有密切的關係。

關鍵詞： 宗教 儀式 道教 玉皇 《玉皇經》

Keywords: religion ritual Daoism Jade Sovereign *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*