religions

MDPI

*Article*

# What Do the Lingbao Celestial Scripts Tell Us about Some Fundamental Characteristics of Daoism?

**Pengzhi Lü**

School of Humanities, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu 611756, China; lpzcn2000@hotmail.com

**Abstract:** Toward the end of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420) and the beginning of the Liu Song 劉宋 (420–479) Dynasties, a series of scriptures, what we now know as the ancient Lingbao scriptures (*gu Lingbao jing* 古靈寶經), emerged. The texts contained various kinds of celestial scripts, which were regarded as the archetype of all the Lingbao scriptures. Among them, the 3 most important were the 672 graphs of the Perfected Script on Five Tablets in Red Writing (*Chishu wupian zhenwen* 赤書五篇真文), found in the *Scripture of Celestial Writing* 天書經 (*DZ* 22), the 256 graphs of the Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Secret Language of the Great Brahmā (*Dafan yinyu ziran yuzi* 大梵隱語自然玉字), found in the *Inner Sounds of All the Heavens* 諸天內音 (*DZ* 97), and the 64 graphs of the Jade Script of the Five Directions and Five Sprouts (*Wufang wuya yuwen* 五方五牙玉文), found in the *Preface to the Five Talismans of Lingbao* 靈寶五符序 (*DZ* 388). This article traces the origins of these Lingbao celestial scripts, analyzing and explaining the content of their images and text, as well as the beliefs and practices related to them. It then summarizes how Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477), a prominent Daoist of the Liu Song Southern Dynasty, classified and understood the various scripts in his *Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures* (*Lingbao jingmu* 靈寶經目). Such discussions reveal some basic characteristics of Daoism that distinguish it from other religious traditions: the veneration of written symbols, the pursuit of longevity and immortality, and the synthesis of philosophy and belief. Beliefs concerning celestial writing and scripts occupy a pivotal position in the broader system of Daoist scripture and teachings.

**Keywords:** Daoism; Buddhism; ancient Lingbao scriptures; Lingbao celestial scripts; *Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures*; Daoist philosophy

check for updates

**Citation:** Lü, Pengzhi. 2023. What Do the Lingbao Celestial Scripts Tell Us about Some Fundamental Characteristics of Daoism? *Religions* 14: 1146. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091146

Academic Editor: Wu Guo

Received: 15 June 2023
Revised: 27 August 2023
Accepted: 4 September 2023
Published: 7 September 2023

**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## 1. Introduction

As is widely known, Daoism does not have a clear and definite founder. In my view, Daoism is a religious tradition that took shape when the scriptures of the "Three Caverns" (*Sandong* 三洞) (Cavern of Spirit (*Dongshen* 洞神) or Three Sovereigns (*Sanhuang* 三皇); Cavern of Perfection (*Dongzhen* 洞真) or Upper Clarity (*Shangqing* 上清); and Cavern of Mystery (*Dongxuan* 洞玄) or Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao* 靈寶)) and "Four Supplements" (*Sifu* 四輔) (Great Mystery (*Taixuan* 太玄), Great Peace (*Taiping* 太平), Great Clarity (*Taiqing* 太清), and Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi* 正一)) were defined.[1] Because these bodies of scripture are differentiated from one another by their time periods, origins, contents, and character, Daoism became a religion that encompassed different traditions. The concepts of the "Three Caverns" and "Four Supplements" emerged separately at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries and fifth and sixth centuries, respectively, when different scriptural traditions were united, forming an ever-broader tradition under the standard of "Daoism." Though the "Three Caverns" scriptures that emerged in succession during the Western and Eastern Jin 晉 (265–420) and Southern Dynasties 南朝 (420–589) in the Jiangnan 江南 region and the "Four Supplements" scriptures produced in different areas during the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220) and Six Dynasties 六朝 (220–589) all claim the banner of venerating the Dao, many of their beliefs and practices are quite different. Among the characteristics that differentiate the two categories of scripture, there is the common religious belief shared across the

"Three Caverns" scriptures concerning celestial scripts (*tianshu* 天書). Though we see a similar idea in some of the later scriptures of the "Four Supplements," generally speaking, these scriptures are the result of the influence of the "Three Caverns" scriptures.

The scriptures of the "Three Caverns" offer a unique perspective on the formation of scripture; that is, the archetype of Daoist scripture is believed to be graphs and symbols that originated in the heavens, which are referred to as "celestial script" (*tianwen* 天文) or "celestial writing" (*tianshu* 天書). In Daoist history, the prototypical or most representative instances of such celestial writing or script are the several kinds presented in the ancient Lingbao scriptures that appeared toward the end of the Eastern Jin (317–420) and the beginning of the Liu Song Dynasties (420–479). Through an examination of these ideas on Lingbao celestial writing, we can not only come to understand some key Daoist beliefs and practices but also distinguish some important characteristics that differentiate Daoism from other religious traditions. In previous work, I wrote on the concept of celestial writing in Lingbao scriptures (Lü 2003); however, this article, though exploring similar materials pertaining to the three kinds of celestial writing in this body of scriptures, aims to take the discussion in a new direction.

## 2. The Origins of the Lingbao Celestial Scripts

The concept of the Lingbao celestial script comes from earlier sources, which I briefly lay out here according to historical chronology:

1. "Yarrow and Turtle" (*Shigui* 蓍龜) and "Yellow River Chart and Luo River Documents" (*Hetu luoshu* 河圖洛書), recorded in "Appended Remarks" (*Xici* 繫辭) of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), Warring States 戰國 (481–221 BCE)

   "Appended Remarks" part I reads:

   > In order to determine the auspicious and inauspicious under Heaven…there is nothing greater than the 'Yarrow and Turtle.' This is why Heaven gives birth to divine beings, and sages take them as models. Heaven and Earth transform, and sages imitate such changes. Heaven bequeaths an image, manifesting the auspicious and inauspicious, and sages emulate it. The Yellow River brought forth a chart, and the Luo River brought forth writings, and sages took them as models.
   >
   > 以定天下之吉凶……莫大乎蓍龜。是故天生神物，聖人則之。天地變化，聖人效之。天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之；河出圖，洛出書，聖人則之。(Wang et al. 1980, p. 82)

The passage discusses how sages, though it is unclear who these figures are, model themselves on the prognostications of the yarrow stalks, divine tortoise, images of heavenly and earthly transformation, the Yellow River Chart, and the Luo River Writings. In effect, it describes how sages received various kinds of revelation from the gods.

"Appended Remarks", part II reads:

> When Bao [Fu] Xi ruled the world in ancient times, he looked up to examine the images of Heaven, and looked down to examine the models of earth. He examined the patterns of the birds and the beasts, as well as the appropriate [structures of] the terrain. Near at hand he took [patterns] from himself, and at a distance from objects. Thereupon he first created the eight trigrams in order to communicate with the spirits and in order to categorize the natures of the myriad objects.
>
> 古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。(Wang et al. 1980, p. 86; translation from Bokenkamp 2010, p. 25)

This passage points out that Fu Xi 伏羲, noted in the text as Bao Xi包犧, was the sage who "began to compose the eight trigrams" 始作八卦. The Yellow River Chart, Luo River Writings, the eight trigrams (including the trigram images of yang 陽, a solid line, and yin 陰, a broken line, revealed through yarrow divination), and turtle patterns were, in

actuality, graphic symbols embodying divine traces or divine meaning, a kind of written revelation bestowed upon humanity from the gods. These were the earliest examples of "celestial script".

2. Celestial Script, Perfected Script, Vermillion Script, Talismans, Registers, Yellow River Chart, and Luo River Writings, recorded in Prophetic Weft Texts (*Chenwei* 讖緯), Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220)

Since the Zhou 周 Dynasty of upper antiquity, an intimate relationship between an emperor's rule and Heaven has existed in Chinese thought. To determine whether an emperor's rule was legitimate, there was a need to discern whether the ruler had been granted the right to preside over the state. This was what was known as the heavenly mandate (*tianming* 天命). How was this expressed and made clear to the ruler and ministers?

A heavenly mandate was primarily demonstrated through the reception of heavenly sent signs or omens, perhaps as precious objects, such as jade stones or mysterious birds, or a phoenix (*fenghuang* 鳳凰). A passage of the "Eulogies of Shang" (*Shangsong* 商頌) of the *Shijing* 詩經 notes: "Heaven commanded the mysterious bird;/It descended and gave birth to the Shang" 天命玄鳥，降而生商 (Maogong et al. 1980, *j.* 23, p. 622). These signs and omens could also be images or texts, such as the Yellow River Chart or the Luo River Writings, auspicious signs regarded as symbolic of the heavenly mandate. Where did the Yellow River Chart come from? According to legend, a dragon emerged from the Yellow River with a divine pattern inscribed upon its back, which was indeed the Yellow River Chart. And what about the Luo River Writings? Legend has it that a tortoise climbed out of the Luo River with red characters inscribed upon its back. Han prophetic weft texts made great efforts to disseminate these kinds of visual and textual signs and omens. Among the terms used to refer to such phenomena, those most frequently mentioned are the Yellow River Chart, the Luo River Writings, the Perfected Script (*zhenwen* 真文), the vermilion script (*chiwen* 赤文), and the celestial script (*tianwen* 天文), as well as talismans (*fu* 符) and registers (*lu* 籙), terms which carry similar meaning. In the prophetic weft texts, these are regarded as signs or omens descended from heaven, symbols of the heavenly mandate.

The celestial scripts described within the ancient Lingbao scriptures are quite similar to the heavenly-sent images and writing mentioned in the prophetic weft texts, with only slight differences; while the latter directly claim to be auspicious responses of the heavens, the ancient Lingbao scriptures, on the other hand, assert that other various kinds of auspicious responses accompany the appearance of the Lingbao celestial scripts in the world. This distinction may be related to the impact of Buddhist ideas that were prevalent at the same time the ancient Lingbao scriptures appeared. Buddhist scriptures often claim that at the time of the birth and nirvana of the Buddha, various kinds of auspicious responses occurred. Putting aside this slight difference, we can, however, see that the prophetic weft texts were a significant source of inspiration for the ancient Lingbao scriptures, as well as for the entirety of the Daoist tradition. (See also Seidel 1983).

3. A Series of "Reduplicated Scripts" (*Fuwen* 複文) in the *Scripture of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經)

The *Taiping jing*, a Han Dynasty Daoist work, not only mentions celestial writing, numinous treasures, celestial books, and perfected writing, it also introduces a series of "reduplicated scripts" in the shape of tadpoles, such as in the "Reduplicated Scripts for Flourishing Above and Eliminating Harm" 興上除害複文, fascicle 104 of the scripture. (M. Wang 1960, pp. 473–82; see also Gong 1992).

4. Celestial Scripts referenced in Ge Hong's 葛洪 (283–343) works

First, there is the statement from his master Zheng Yin 鄭隱, recorded in the "Wide Reading" (*Xialan* 遐覽) chapter of the *Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Bao puzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇): "The talismans that came forth from the Elder Lord are all celestial writings" 符出於老君，皆天文也 (M. Wang 1985, p. 335).

Second, Ge Hong's *Records of Divine Transcendents* (*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳) includes the story of Bo He 帛和, who according to the instructions of Lord Wang 王君, a transcendent figure of Mount Xicheng 西城, stares at a cave (lit. "stone chamber" 石室) wall for three years and is thus able to see the "method of divine cinnabar of the *Scripture of Grand Purity*, as well as the *Celestial Writings in Large Characters of the Three Sovereigns* and the *Charts of the Perfected Forms of the Five Marchmounts*, all carved by someone in ancient times" 古人之所刻太清中經神丹方及三皇天文大字、五嶽真形圖 (Chen 2014, p. 58; translation adapted from Campany 2002, p. 135). Here, Ge Hong explicitly refers to the Writ of the Three Sovereigns (*Sanhuang wen* 三皇文) as "celestial script in large characters" (*Tianwen dazi* 天文大字).

## 5. The "Writings of the Flying Celestials of the Three Primordials, Eight Conjunctions, and Multitude of Directions"

The *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真誥), a Shangqing revelatory text of the Eastern Jin, claims that the exhortations transmitted by the perfected stemmed came from the "Writings of Flying Celestials of the Three Primordials, Eight Conjunctions, and Multitude of Directions" (*Sanyuan bahui qunang feitian zhi shu* 三元八會群方飛天之書). (Tao 2011, p. 11). It is necessary to note that before the ancient Lingbao scriptures appeared in the world, the early Shangqing scriptures were the most detailed account of celestial writing since the Eastern Jin. When Shangqing scriptures use the term "scripture" (*jing* 經), they do not imply that they were written by human beings but instead were naturally taking shape in the heavens above, formulated by the coalescence of qi. These scriptures were initially obtained by sages, who perfected them in the heavens and then gradually transmitted them to people who cultivated the Dao in the world. Isabelle Robinet (1932–2000), a French Daoist Studies scholar, has offered an incisive outline of heavenly writing in Shangqing scriptures, briefly discussing how this concept came to have an impact on the ancient Lingbao scriptures (Robinet 1979, pp. 29–57; 1984, pp. 112–22, 193–94; 1991, pp. 128–31).

The ideas and texts presented above were the indigenous sources of the concept of Lingbao celestial scripts. According to several scholars, there were also external or foreign origins of such ideas (Zürcher 1980, pp. 110–12; Bokenkamp 1997, pp. 385–89; Hsieh 2010, pp. 78–87). In his "Preface to [the Translation of] the Verses on the Dharma (Skt. Dharmapada)" 法句經序, Zhi Qian 支謙, prolific layman translator of early Buddhist scriptures while residing in the Wu Kingdom 吳國 (220–280), writes: "Moreover, the various emergences of the Buddha have all occurred in India, where the sounds of the language are different from the Han and they call writing 'heavenly writing' and spoken language 'heavenly speech'. As the terms for things are so different [in the two languages], the transmission of any substance is not easy" 又諸佛興，皆在天竺，天竺言語與漢異音，云其書為天書，語為天語，名物不同，傳實不易." (Sengyou 1995, p. 273). The *Sūtra of Univesal Radiance* (*Puyao jing* 普曜經; Skt. Lalitavistara), translated in 308 by Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護), another prominent translator of Mahayana Buddhist texts working during the Western Jin 西晉 (265–317), is perhaps the earliest scripture that mentions Indian script in Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras; in the 10th fascicle, the *Puyao jing* lists 64 kinds of Indian script.[2] Among these, the first is Brahmic script (*Fanshu* 梵書) and the second is Kharoṣṭhī script (*Qulou shu* 佉樓書), which were the basis of the majority of early Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras. Moreover, from the early fourth century, discussions of the origins of the Sanskrit language and Brahmic script began to appear in Chinese Buddhist teachings. The prevailing view was that the Sanskrit language and Brahmic script were forms of celestial language and writing, respectively, created by the god Brahmā. Another interpretation posited that they were created by the Buddha. Sanskrit and Brahmic writing were essentially sacred languages differentiated into spoken and written languages in the mundane world of the central lands. Such ideas had a profound impact on the ancient Lingbao scriptures and the beliefs in the celestial writing evident therein. The ancient Lingbao scriptures both carried on and greatly developed earlier indigenous and Buddhist ideas of celestial writing to form a rich and complex set of beliefs concerning celestial writing.

## 3. Three Kinds of Celestial Writing Recorded in Three Texts of the Ancient Lingbao Scriptural Corpus

Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾 referred to the group of scriptures recorded in the *Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures* (*Lingbao jingmu* 靈寶經目), compiled by Liu Song 劉宋 Daoist Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477) in the 14th year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 period (437), as the "ancient Lingbao scriptures" (*gu Lingbao jing* 古靈寶經). The vast majority of these scriptures were composed by Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫 (fl. 402), the grandnephew of Ge Hong, during the Longan 隆安 period (397–402) toward the end of the Eastern Jin in the Jurong句容 area of Jiangsu 江蘇.[3] Among the ancient Lingbao scriptures listed in *Lingbao jingmu*, there are altogether 27 extant texts, all of which are now preserved in the *Daozang* 道藏 or Dunhuang manuscripts. They are listed according to their abbreviated titles and *Daozang* or Dunhuang manuscript number:[4]

(1) Chishu wupian zhenwen 赤書五篇真文 (DZ 22); originally titled Yuanshi wulao chishu yupian zhenwen tianshu jing 元始五老赤書玉篇真文天書經; also known by the title Tianshu jing 天書經;
(2) Chishu yujue 赤書玉訣 (DZ 352);
(3) Kongdong lingzhang 空洞靈章 (P. 2399);
(4) Shengxuan buxu zhang 升玄步虛章 (DZ 1439);
(5) Jiutian shengshen zhang jing 九天生神章經 (DZ 318);
(6) Zhenyi wucheng jing 真一五稱經 (P. 2440, DZ 671);
(7) Zhutian neiyin 諸天內音 (DZ 97);
(8) Zuigen shangpin dajie 罪根上品大戒 (DZ 457);
(9) Zhihui shangpin dajie 智慧上品大戒 (DZ 177);
(10) Lingbao sanlu jianwen 靈寶三籙簡文 (no longer extant as a standalone text, but largely reconstructed through citations in other texts);
(11) Mingzhen ke 明真科 (DZ 1411);
(12) Zhihui dingzhi jing 智慧定志經 (DZ 177);
(13) Benye shangpin 本業上品 (P. 3022);
(14) Falun zuifu 法輪罪福 (DZ 346);
(15) Wuliang duren shangpin miaojing 無量度人上品妙經 (DZ 87); also known by the title Duren jing 度人經;
(16) Zhutian lingshu duming 諸天靈書度命 (DZ 23);
(17) Miedu wulian shengshi miaojing 滅度五煉生屍妙經 (DZ 369);
(18) Sanyuan pin jie 三元品戒 (DZ 456);
(19) Ershisi shengtu 二十四生圖 (DZ 1407);
(20) Lingbao wufu xu 靈寶五符序 (DZ 388);
(21) Taiji yinzhu baojue 太極隱注寶訣 (DZ 425);
(22) Zhenwen yaojie 真文要解 (DZ 330);
(23) Zhenyi ziran jing jue 真一自然經訣 (P. 2356);
(24) Fuzhai weiyi jue 敷齋威儀訣 (DZ 532);
(25) Benyuan dajie shangpin 本願大戒上品 (DZ 344);
(26) Xiangong qingwen 仙公請問 (DZ 1114 and S. 1351);
(27) Zhongsheng nan 眾聖難 (DZ 1115).

Among this group of scriptures, numbers 1, 7, and 20 separately describe the three most important types of celestial writing recorded in the Lingbao scriptures: (1) the Perfected Script on Five Tablets in Red Writing (*Chishu wupian zhenwen* 赤書五篇真文) in the *Tianshu jing*; (2) the Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Inner Sounds of All the Heavens (*Zhutian neiyin ziran yuzi* 諸天內音自然玉字) in the *Zhutian neiyin;* (3) and the Jade Script of the Five Directions and Five Sprouts (*Wufang wuya yuwen* 五方五牙玉文) in the *Lingbao wufu xu*.

1. Perfected Script on Five Tablets in Red Writing in the *Tianshu jing*

The central theme of the *Tianshu jing* is the formation of the Lingbao Perfected Script on Five Tablets, which is naturally generated in the void before the formulation of heav-

ens, earth, sun, and moon. Later, Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning) refines the script by using the vermillion qi in the Halls of Flowing Fire (*Liuhuo zhi ting* 流火之庭) to form talismans inscribed with a kind of seal script which embody the Dao; later Daoist texts refer to these talismans as cloud seals (*yunzhuan* 雲篆). The Perfected Script or celestial writing described in the *Tianshu jing* is initially differentiated according to the five directions, which is why it is known as the Lingbao Perfected Script on Five Tablets; the perfected writings of each direction are also, based on their different capacities, distinguished into four groups. For example, the Perfected Script of the East is titled *Dongfang anbao hualin qingling shilao jiuqi qingtian chishu wupian zhenwen* 東方安寶華林青靈始老九炁青天赤書玉(五)篇真文 (DZ 22, 1.7b). The phrase "Green Heaven of Nine Qi" (*Jiu qi qingtian*) in the title comes from the five phases (*wuxing* 五行) cosmology, in which the number nine and the color green are associated with the east. The Perfected Script of the East includes four groups of seal script talismans; the first group has twenty-four graphs, while the second, third, and fourth groups all have thirty-two graphs.

The *Tianshu jing* clearly indicates that these four groups of the Perfected Script each have different uses and capabilities. For example, the scripture describes the four groups of the East:

> As for the Jade Tablet in Red Writing of Numinous Treasure of the Eastern Green Thearch, the upper [group] has 24 graphs, transcribed in the Primordial Terrace of the Nine Heavens. Their principal [function] is to summon the Upper Thearchs of the Nine Heavens, who audit the charts and registers of divine transcendents. Below this is [the group] of 32 graphs, transcribed in the Eastern Floriate Pavilion of the Purple Tenuity Palace. Their principal [function] is to summon star officials and bring order to the divisions and numbers of the heavens. Below this is [the group] of 32 graphs, transcribed in the Lodges of Controlling Numina in the Eastern Mulberry [Fields]. Their principal [function] is to arrest ghosts and demons and quell the qi of the nine heavens. Below this is [the group] of 32, transcribed in the Cinnabar Terrace of the Northeastern Jade Watchtowers in the Nine Heavens. Their principal [function] is to control the water thearchs of the eastern seas and the periods of great kalpas and floods, and to summon wyverns, dragons, and watery divine spirits. Altogether, there are 124 graphs, all of which are the naturally generated writing of Primordial Beginning.
>
> 東方青帝靈寶赤書玉篇，上二十四字，書九天元臺，主召九天上帝，校神仙圖籙。其下三十二字，書紫微宮東華殿，主召星官，正天分數。其下三十二字，書東桑司靈之館，主攝鬼魔，鎮九天氣。其下三十二字，書九天東北玉闕丹臺，主攝東海水帝，大劫洪災之數，召蛟龍及水神事。合一百二十四，皆元始自然之書也。
>
> (DZ 22, 1.10a–b)

The passage notes that these groups of the Perfected Script, four in total, each have a different function; not only are the functions different but the form of the seal script graphs, the number of graphs, and the heaven in which they are written are all different.

The *Tianshu jing* records the seal script graphs, but it does not elucidate any of their corresponding Chinese characters. Each graph is imbued with meaning and can be translated into a standard Chinese character. But, because the *Tianshu jing* does not provide these translated characters, there is no way at all of understanding the meaning of the graphs; indeed, the script is abstruse heavenly writing, distinct from any ordinary script meant to be circulated in the human world. The *Chishu yujue* (DZ 352), another ancient Lingbao scripture that explains the *Tianshu jing*, contains the meanings of this celestial writing and perfected script. For example, the translated Chinese characters for the four groups of Perfected Script of the East are differentiated as follows:

> The nine qi of the east began in the August Green Heaven. Within the thickly massed cyan auroras, there is an elder being, who manages the evaluation of charts and registers and controls qi to raise transcendents (24 characters). Jupiter assists the liver; the *jiao* and *kang* lodgings secure perfection. The *di* and *fang*, *xin*

> and *wei* and, these four effulgences circle and turn. The *ji* presides over the seven celestial bodies; the jade *dou* illuminates the wheel. Receiving qi and capturing wrong shall sweep away hosts of disasters (32 characters). The divine spell of the eastern mountain controls and summons [the celestial beings] of the nine heavens. The talismanic commands in red writing govern and assemble [celestial beings] of Mount Fengdu. They bind demons and send off ghosts; for that which you aim to inflict punishment, there is no mitigation. All shall call upon the Wood Palace—do you dare delay? (32 characters) Below, they regulate those of the eastern river, the water deities of the great seas. During a flood disaster of a great kalpa, the *jiao* dragon shall bear you upon its body. The water bureau opens the path, so that those who pass through the number in the hundreds of thousands. With the red writing of the green thearch, wind and fire have no space. (32 characters)
>
> 東方九炁，始皇青天。碧霞鬱壘，中有老人。總校圖録，攝炁舉仙。（24字）歲星輔肝，角亢鎮真。氐房心尾，四景迴旋。箕主七辰，玉斗明輪。承炁捕非，掃除災群。（32字）東山神呪，攝召九天。赤書符命，制會酆山。束魔送鬼，所誅無蠲。悉詣木宫，敢有稽延？（32字）下制東河，溟海水神。大劫洪災，蛟龍負身。水府開道，通徑百千。青帝赤文，風火無間。（32字） (DZ 352, 1.8b–9b)

We also find a list of the *Wupian zhenwen's* original seal script and their translated Chinese characters in Du Guangting's 杜光庭 (850–933) *Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* 太上黃籙齋儀 (DZ 507, 54.1a–21b).

## 2. The Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Inner Sounds of All the Heavens in the *Zhutian neiyin*

The *Zhutian neiyin* enumerates in order the Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Inner Sounds that are written in the 32 heavens. These heavens are divided according to the 4 cardinal directions (NSEW), and in each direction, there are 8 heavens, each containing 8 graphs for a total of 256 graphs. For example, the eight heavens of the eastern quadrant contain sixty-four seal script graphs, collectively known as the "Celestial Script for Administering All of the Nine Qi" (*Jiuqi zongzhu tianwen* 九炁總諸天文), a title that also employs the principles of the five phases, in which the number nine is correlated with the east (DZ 97, 1.1b–4b).

The prefatory passage to the third *juan* of the *Zhutian neiyin* relates the origins and nature of the jade graphs, recounting the meeting between *Yuanshi tianzun*, the Upper Thearchs of the Five Elders (*Wulao shangdi* 五老上帝), and the masses of great sages (*dasheng* 大聖) and divine spirits (*shenling* 神靈) of the ten directions beneath the tall mulberry trees at the Cypress Mound Lodge (*Bailing she* 柏陵舍) in the fragrant groves and gardens of the Realm of Vermillion Brilliance (*Chiming shijie* 赤明世界). At that time, heaven and earth had not been illuminated for three days and three nights, and so the Upper *Wulao shangdi* sincerely asked *Yuanshi tianzun* to reveal the wondrous auspicious images to open the heavens. The deity agreed, and thereupon:

> In the span of brief moment, heavenly qi became brilliant and well-ordered, and the tenebrous dark dispersed and dissipated. A bright radiance of five colors penetrated throughout the five directions. Suddenly, there was celestial writing, each graph one *zhang* square, that generated naturally and appeared atop the empty darkness. In the five-colored brightness, the colorful script shined and shimmered. The eight corners [of each graph] suspending its luminosity, its purity and brightness boggling the eyes so that one could not look upon them.
>
> 俄頃之間，天氣朗除，冥晦翳消，五色光明，洞徹五方，忽然有天書，字方一丈，自然而見空玄之上，五色光中，文彩煥爛，八角垂芒，精光亂眼，不可得看。
>
> (DZ 97, 3.2a)

*Yuanshi tianzun* explains that the graphs are too abstruse and profound, and so he orders the August One of Heavenly Perfection (*Tianzhen huangren* 天真皇人) to transcribe the

celestial writing into a script that can be recognized and read. *Tianzhen huangren* completes the task and adds a final comment on the celestial writing:

> The Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Inner Sounds of All the Heavens are the hidden language of Grand Brahmā found within all the heavens. When the qi flying in the heaven coheres to merge and harmonize with the sounds of the five directions, they are generated atop Primordial Commencement. They emerge from within the empty cavern and, following the cycles of opening and salvation, they universally become the merits of heaven and earth. This script is venerable and wondrous, not to be comprehended by the ordinary… [it] is not something that can be thoroughly understood by those with foolish emotions or deficient reflection.
>
> 諸天內音自然玉字，皆諸天之中大梵隱語，結飛玄之炁，合和五方之音，生於元始之上，出空洞之中，隨運開度，普成天地之功。斯文尊妙，不譬於常…非愚情短思所能洞明。 (DZ 97, 3.6a–b)

From the "Illimitable Cavern Stanzas of the Hidden Language of the Grand Brahmā" (*Dafan yinyu wuliang dongzhang* 大梵隱語無量洞章), found in *juan* three through four of the same scripture, we know that the Self-Generating Jade Graphs were transcribed into Chinese characters, such as the sixty-four of the eight heavens of the east (DZ 97, 3.7a). (See Table 1)

**Table 1.** Transcriptions of the Sixty-four Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Eight Heavens of the East.

| Heaven | Transcription |
| --- | --- |
| *Taihuang huangzeng tian* 太黃皇曾天 | 亶婁阿薈，無恕觀音 |
| *Taiming yuwan tian* 太明玉完天 | 須延明首，法攬菩曇 |
| *Qingming hetong tian* 清明何童天 | 稼那阿奕，忽訶流吟 |
| *Xuantai pingyu tian* 玄胎平育天 | 華都曲麗，鮮菩育臻 |
| *Yuanming wenju tian* 元明文舉天 | 答落大梵，散煙慶雲 |
| *Shangming qiyao moyi tian* 上明七曜摩夷天 | 飛灑玉都，明魔上門 |
| *Xuwu yueheng tian* 虛無越衡天 | 無行上首，回踸流玄 |
| *Taiji mengyi tian* 太極濛翳天 | 阿陀龍羅，四象吁員 |

The Jade Instructions for the Celestial Sounds (*Tianyin yujue* 天音玉訣), recorded in *juan* one through two in the same scripture, indicate where these seal script graphs are written in the heavens, what function they have, and how they are to be used. For example, the Jade Instructions explains the eight graphs of the first heaven in the east, *Taihuang huangzeng tian*, as follows:

> The first, second, and third graphs are written atop a tall tower in the Mystic Capital. This script, in order to rectify the divisions of heaven and earth, controls and summons the great deities and masses of perfected of the ten directions. The fourth and fifth graphs are written atop the southern pavilion of the traveling terraces of the thearch lords. They control the self-generating divine perfected born within the empty nothingness. The sixth, seventh, and eighth graphs are written at the gates of the sun and moon. They control the light that penetrates the Ninefold Darkness and open the bureaus of the long nights. Each graph is one *zhang* square, their eight corners radiating brightly within the Huangzeng heaven. The August One of Heavenly Perfection stated: 'To cultivate the path of the flying transcendent, on the days of the ten monthly *zhai*, you should write the first three graphs of the Huangzeng heaven [on paper] in red. Then facing the flourishing direction, ingest it [the paper], and recite the incantation according to

the ritual methods. For a hundred days, the myriad spirits will pay court before you.'

東方九炁青天八會書音皇曾天中，第一、第二、第三三字皆仰書玄都長樓之上，其文以正天地之度數，主召十方眾真大神。其次第四、第五二字則書帝君遊臺南軒之上，主空無之中生自然神真。其次第六、第七、第八三字書日月之門，主通九幽之光，開長夜之府。字皆方一丈，八角煥明皇曾天中。天真皇人曰：修飛仙之道，當以月十齋之日，朱書皇曾天中第一、第二、第三三字，向王服之，呪如法，百日萬神朝己。 (DZ 97, 1.15b–16a)

The *Wuliang dongzhang* embeds the eight jade graphs from each heaven in a pentasyllabic poem and provides an explanation of the implicit meanings of the jade graphs. Again, the example, from the first heaven is illustrative:

| | |
|---|---|
| 皇曾亶元紀， | Huangzeng ends with primal strands. |
| 婁都界上京。 | Loudu borders the upper metropolis. |
| 阿那震琳響， | Within Ana, the shaken jade-slips sound— |
| 薈秀何宛延。 | How long and winding [the road to] Huixui. |
| 元無中生真， | Within primal nothingness Perfected are born, |
| 恕答通明梁。 | Through Heda the bright bridge extends. |
| 觀覺朗四冥， | Guanjue brightens the stygian realms in the four directions. |
| 音韻自成章。 | The rhymes by themselves form strophes. |

Tianzhen Huangren's explanation is appended immediately thereafter. It reads:

*Loudu* is the name of a tall tower in the middle of the heaven. Above, it joins with the Palace of Great Mystery, which is on Jade Capitoline Mountain. *Ana* is the overseer of *Loudu*, in charge of the regulation of the Six Brahmā [*qi*]. When the numbers indicate the conjunction, the drums of *Loudu* sound and the Perfected all assemble in audience. *Huixiu* is the Thearchical Lord's loft building for roaming. *Heda* is the gate of the sun and moon. The Perfected ride golden chariots to open the stygian blackness; the Jade Maidens carry floriated banners to unloose the bonds [confining the dead to the underworld]. *Guanjue* is responsible for the registers of [those in the postmortem halls] of eternal night. In the tenebrous regions of the directions, he plucks for the [the dead] from the nine stygian halls.

婁都者，天中心長樓之名，上承太玄之宮玉京之山也。阿那以婁都之監，主六梵之數，數交則婁都鼓鳴，眾真上朝。薈秀則帝君之遊臺，恕答則日月之門戶。真人乘金輪以開冥，玉女仗華旛而披紐。觀覺主長夜之録，四冥拔出九幽之府。

(DZ 97, 3.7b–8a; Translation from Bokenkamp 2014b, p. 196)

The first graph *dan*亶is not explained, but according to Li Shaowei's 李少微 (fl. 625?) commentary in *juan* four of *Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing sizhu* 元始無量度人上品妙經四注, we find that it means the "appearance of something even, vast, and distant" 坦然廣遠貌 (DZ 87, 4.6b).

Lu Xiujing's *Lingbao jingmu,* recorded and transmitted by Song Wenming 宋文明 (fl. 549–551) of the Liang 梁Southern Dynasty in his *Tongmen lun* 通門論, incisively summarizes the main content of the *Zhutian neiyin*:

These 256 characters theorize the divisions and appointed times of assemblies in all the heavens; the names, taboo names, positions, and titles of the great sages, perfected, and transcendents; all the palaces, bureaus, cities, terraces, and locations governed by these divine beings; the grades and ranks of divine transcendents that transform and rise or descend; the various kinds of masses of demons; and the karma of human beings and ghosts in the cycles of life and death.

其二百五十六字，論諸天度數期會，大聖真仙名諱位號，所治宮府城臺處所，神仙變化升降品次，眾魔種類，人鬼生死轉輪因緣。 (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, p. 511)

In other words, these graphs contain the entirety of the profundities of all the heavens, sages, perfected, divine transcendents, ghosts, demons, and humanity.

The graphs are also a kind of pseudo-Sanskrit, which imitate Buddhist *dharani* (*tuoluo ni* 陀羅尼) incantations. Stephen R. Bokenkamp first recognized that among the eight graphs—陀羅育邈，眇炁合雲—of the third heaven of the north, the *Taiwen hanchong miaocheng tian* 太文翰寵妙成天, the first two are "tuo luo" 陀羅. The *Foshuo huaji tuoluo ni zhou jing* 佛説華積陀羅尼神咒經 (T. 1357), translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 of the Wu 吳 state during the Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–280) period, was circulated early on in the Jiangnan 江南 region. This sutra refers to divine incantations in various ways with approximatly the same pronunciation as the two characters "tuo luo". Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫, the figure who composed the ancient Lingbao scriptures, and others were perhaps inspired or influenced by this sutra in creating a Daoist version of the *dharani* incantation. The *Zhutian neiyin* refers to the celestial script as the "Hidden Language of the Great Brahma" (*Dafan yinyu* 大梵隱語), a title that also reveals foreign Buddhist influence.

We should add two further points with regard to the Daoist version of the *dharani* incantation and the *Dafan yinyu*. First, the Daoist version is similar to the Buddhist *dharani* in that it is considered a kind of password to the cosmos of the grand emptiness. Those who wish to control or manipulate the universe must be skilled in reciting this secret language. In addition, the *Duren jing* 度人經, which is also from the ancient Lingbao corpus, adopts the *Dafan yinyu* celestial script in 264 graphs from the *Zhutian neiyin,* referring to it as the "Illimitable Sounds of the Hidden Language of the Great Brahma within All the Heavens" (*Zhutian zhong dafan yinyu wuliang yin* 諸天中大梵隱語無量音), and suggests that it be recited to save the dead. Second, Wang Haoyue 王皓月has suggested that the Chinese characters used to translate the esoteric sounds should be interpreted and punctuated according to explanations in the *Zhutian neiyin*; in other words, we cannot simply break the lines into a tetrasyllabic verse (H. Wang 2017, pp. 336–37).

## 3. Jade Script of the Five Directions and Five Sprouts in the *Lingbao wufu xu*

The *Lingbao wufu xu* notes the existence of a third kind of Lingbao celestial script, the "Various Heavenly Names of the *Scripture of the Most High Perfected One* from the August One" (*Huangren Taishang zhenyi jing zhu tianming* 皇人太上真一經諸天名), which later Daoist texts refer to as the "Jade Script of the Five Directions and Five Sprouts." (DZ 388, 3.14a). The *Lingbao wufu xu* considers the ingestion of this celestial script as quite similar to the ingestion of the cloudy qi of the five directions. The original text uses seal script graphs and a form of incantatory language to explain them. The Tang Dynasty Daoist scripture *Shangqing jinmu qiuxian shangfa* 上清金母求仙上法 records both the seal script and explanatory text for this particular celestial script; the comparison between these two kinds of writing is clear. For example, the east has twelve seal script graphs followed by the corresponding Chinese characters and explanatory text that reads "For the green sprout of the east, ingest green sprouts and imbibe them with dawn auroras" 東方青芽，服食青芽，飲以朝霞(華) (DZ 391, 18a). The meaning is evident and is much easier to understand than the explanations of the *Zhutian neiyin* script. The entry for the "Various Heavenly Names" in the *Lingbao wufu xu* recounts the various methods of ingestion used for the celestial script and their effects, as well as the myth describing their origins. The tale chronicles the journey of the Yellow Emperor to visit the divine transcendents of the four cardinal directions in his search for the essential prescriptions for ingesting the script. According to the story, the Yellow Emperor fails to obtain any instructions from the transcendents until he receives directions from the August One of Mount Emei (*Emei shan huangren* 峨嵋山皇人).

The prefatory section of the first *juan* of the *Lingbao wufu xu* describes the history and nature of the celestial script. It recounts the story of Yu the Great 大禹, who after successfully subduing the floodwaters, receives this celestial script. The divine being who transmits the text to Yu warns that his body is too weak and that his life will soon come to an end; so, the divine being transmits the oral instructions for using the celestial script, which will allow Yu to refine and cultivate his body. After ingesting the celestial script, Yu ascends in flight to become a transcendent. But before departing, he copies the celestial script and conceals the writings in a cavern within Lake Dongting 洞庭湖. Helü闔閭

(r. 514–496 BCE), King of Wu 吳 during the Spring and Autumn Period, asks the Elder of Draconic Awe (*Longwei zhangren* 龍威丈人), a recluse of Mount Bao包山, to enter the grotto and retrieve the writings. However, Helü does not understand the meaning of the script, and so dispatches an emissary to Kong Qiu 孔丘 (Confucius), a high official in the state of Lu 魯 at the time, to inquire about them. Helü instructs the emissary to falsely claim that the celestial script came from a red bird who descended before them holding the texts in its beak and conceal the matter of the Elder of Draconic Awe being sent to retrieve the scripts from the cavern. However, Confucius is already aware of the truth of the matter, and so offers instead a children's song that recounts the matter and foretells the impending downfall of the Wu kingdom. The emissary can only admit that he has made up the story and then returns to the King of Wu to report on the episode. The passage concludes:

> Helü felt pity for himself and became weak. Sighing, he cut off any further hopes. Thereafter, he never again sought an explanation [of the writs]. Then, he deposited the numinous texts in a divine lodge, where he secretly treasured them. Later, on days of leisure, he would take them out to look at. The writings were never unsealed from their storage place, and eventually their location was lost. Fuchai obtained them at Mount Lao, but in the end, suffered death and elimination; Helü acquired them in the [caverns] of Lake Dongting, and subsequently [Wu] became a state subsumed by Goujian. These [events] were what [Kong] Qiu explained in the lyrics of the children's song—Helü's defeated kingdom was a testament [to Kong Qiu's statements]. The bestowal of this divine script is not something people can initiate so the texts can be gathered up—rarely does [such a situation] not result in misfortune. If the celestial writings are transmitted to someone who does not share in the Dao, whether one should suffer punishment for such matters lies with the Mystic Capital.
>
> 闔閭自傷方薄，歎息而絶望，遂不復重求解釋也。乃藏之神館，秘貴靈文，其後閑旦，親自取視，函封不脫而失書所在矣。夫差獲之於勞山，終有殺滅之患，闔閭探之於洞庭，遂爲勾踐所並。是由丘所説童謡之言，喪國閭徵矣。夫神文非啟授而攬之者，鮮不爲禍也。天書非道同而傳之者，無有不嬰罰於玄都也。
>
> (DZ 388, 1.11a)

In the story, Helü does not receive a divine transmission but instead asks the Elder of Draconic Awe to retrieve the celestial writs. In the end, his actions lead to the destruction of the Wu kingdom. Goujian 勾踐, King of Yue 越, driven by his steadfast resolve to destroy Wu and restore Yue from a position of humiliation, which had come at the hands of Fuchai, Helu's son, in battle several years earlier, finally puts an end to Wu. The story is also briefly recounted in the "Bianwen" 辨問 section of the *Bao puzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇. Chen Guofu 陳國符 believes that earlier sources *Yuejue shu* 越絶書 and *Hetu jiangxiang* 河圖絳象 served as the basis for the story (Chen 2014, pp. 49–50)[5]. Bokenkamp has also argued that the details of the story about the Elder of Draconic Awe retrieving the celestial writs from the caverns of Mount Bao were an important source of the Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365–427) famed *Record of the Peachflower Fount* 桃花源記 (Bokenkamp 1986).

## 4. The Classification and Interpretation of the Lingbao Celestial Scripts in Lu Xiujing's *Lingbao jingmu*

Lu Xiujing, who lived during the Liu Song 劉宋 (420–479) of the Southern Dynasties 南朝 period, was the first great master in Daoist history to compile, edit, and propagate the ancient Lingbao scriptures. His *Lingbao jingmu* is not preserved in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) *Daoist Canon,* though the preface to this work survives in *juan* four of the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, a Daoist encyclopedia compiled in the Song Dynasty (DZ 1032, 4.4a–6a). The catalog itself survives in *Lingbao jing yishu* 靈寶經義疏, also known as the *Tongmen lun* 通門論, written by Song Wenming during the Liang (502–557) (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, pp. 509–18). In this work, Lu Xiujing classifies and interprets the Lingbao celestial scripts

that have been recorded in the ancient Lingbao corpus. The document helps us to corroborate and more deeply understand the scripts.

1. The Relationship between the Celestial Scripts of the "Old" (*jiu* 舊) Lingbao Scriptures transmitted by *Yuanshi tianzun* and the "New" (*xin* 新) Scriptures received by the Transcendent Duke 仙公

Lu Xiujing's catalog divides the ancient Lingbao corpus into two categories: (1) the "Old Lingbao Scriptures from *Yuanshi tianzun*" 元始舊經, classified according to their meaning and further divided into ten sections; and (2) "all the new scriptures, which contain the teachings, precepts, instructions, and essentials, as well as explanations for proper conduct and behavior, received by the Transcendent Duke Ge" 葛仙公所受教戒訣要及説行業新經. The catalog asserts that the entirety of the ten sections of the "old" scriptures, those expounded and transmitted by *Yuanshi tianzun,* were celestial scripts and writings. A statement in the *Kongdong lingzhang* 空洞靈章, one of the scriptures of the ancient Lingbao corpus, affirms that "The numinous tablets expounded by *Yuanshi* [*tianzun*] are the writings of the flying heavens in ten sections" 元始敷靈篇，十部飛天書.[6] Moreover, the "new scriptures" received by the Transcendent Duke were "transmitted through the oral instructions of transcendents and sages" 仙聖口訣相傳;[7] they were also rooted in the celestial writings in ten sections and believed to be further expositions and elucidations of the *Yuanshi tianzun's* "old scriptures". In other words, all of the Lingbao scriptures were regarded as celestial writings, and the notion of celestial writing ran through the entire Lingbao scriptural system.

Lu Xiujing's catalog asserts that the Lingbao celestial scripts, from their initial formation to the time when *Yuanshi tianzun* "sent down teachings" 下教 from the heavens and "saved heavenly beings" 救度天人, underwent five periods of transition: Draconic Magnificence (*Longhan*龍漢), Extended Vigor (*Yankang* 延康), Vermillion Brilliance (*Chiming* 赤明), Opening Luminary (*Kaihuang* 開皇), and Higher Luminary (*Shanghuang* 上皇). In the final one, the "Six Heavens proceeded in their cycles, and the multitudes of sages hid themselves or rose up" 六天運行，眾聖幽昇, which led to the "scriptures being returned to the Grand Veil [Heaven] 經還大羅. It was not until the end of the Eastern Jin and early Liu Song that they were transmitted into the human world. During Lu Xiujing's time, the false and true scriptures had become mixed and the collection was in disarray, conditions that necessitated his undertaking to bring order to them. At the end of his preface to the catalog, Lu clearly notes that the scriptures he organized should be divided into two categories: (1) *Yuanshi tianzun*'s old scriptures, those recorded in the "old catalogue" (*jiumu* 舊目) in ten sections, and (2) the new scriptures received by the Transcendent Duke Ge. *Lingbao jingmu* provides supplementary proof of the celestial origin of the ancient Lingbao corpus and the original relationship between the old and new scriptures.

2. Celestial Writing at the Forefront of the Twelve Categories of Daoist Scripture

In *Lingbao jingmu,* Lu divides Daoist scriptures into twelve categories as follows (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, p. 511):

(1) Origin of Scripture: the script of the eight conjunctions of the self-generating celestial writings 經之來源，自然天書八會之文;
(2) Divine Talismans: the script of the self-generating cloud-seal 神符，自然雲篆之文;
(3) Jade Instructions: explanations of the script of the eight conjunctions of celestial writings, all set forth by the heavenly sages 玉訣，玄聖所述，解釋天書八會之文;
(4) Numinous Charts: images of divine transformation and numinous changes, all set forth by the heavenly sages 靈圖，玄聖所述，神化靈變之象;
(5) Ledgers and Registers: names and taboo names of the sages and the perfected, and the positions and ranks within the divine palaces, all set forth by the heavenly sages 譜録，玄聖所述，聖真名諱，神宮位第;
(6) Precepts and Regulations: statutes of transgression and blessing, all set forth by the heavenly sages 戒律，玄聖所述，罪福科目;

(7) Ceremonial Protocols: ritual standards and ceremonial sequences and the grades and standards of *zhai* and rites of expiation, all set forth by the heavenly sages 威儀，玄聖所述，法憲儀序，齋謝品格;
(8) Methods and Acroama: divine medicines, numinous mushrooms, and measures for making gold, water, and jade pliant, all set forth by the heavenly sages 方訣，玄聖所述，神藥靈芝，矛(柔)金水玉之法;
(9) Various Techniques: methods for contemplating deities and actualizing perfection; fasting of the mind and sitting in oblivion; pacing the void and flying in the emptiness; supping on and imbibing the qi of the five directions; and guiding and pulling the three luminaries, all set forth by the heavenly sages 眾術，玄聖所述，思神存真，心齋坐忘，步虛飛空，餐吸五方元〔炁〕，道引三光之法;
(10) Records and Biographies: methods of study and training for obtaining the Dao and realizing perfection, all set forth by the heavenly sages 記傅，玄聖所述，學業得道成真之法;
(11) Heavenly Stanzas: lyrics for extolling the multitudes of sages, all set forth by the heavenly sages 玄章，〔玄聖所述，〕讚誦眾聖之辭;
(12) Memorials and Announcements: documents for transmitting and receiving scriptures and ritual protocols for ascending the altar and proclaiming a covenant, all set forth by the heavenly sages 表奏，玄聖所述，傳授經文，登壇告盟之儀.

Lu Xiujing's primary aim with this classification was to address the divisions of the Lingbao scriptural corpus; however, later Daoists extended this system to incorporate all Daoist scriptures in the Three Caverns (*Sandong* 三洞). Each cavern had twelve classes of scripture, which then collectively became known as the "36 divisions" (*sanshiliu bu* 三十六部). Two points must be noted about this classification. First, celestial writing is placed at the head of the twelve divisions and is regarded as the origin of the scriptures. This illustrates the fact that Lingbao celestial writings are the most important scriptures of the Lingbao corpus, and why Song Wenming in his *Lingbao jing yishu* 靈寶經義疏, therefore, changed their title to "Basic Texts" (*Benwen* 本文). The "script of the eight conjunctions" 八會之文 refers to writing formed when the three forms of qi (*xuan yuan shi* 玄元始) and the five phases converged. This idea stems from the Shangqing revelations recorded in the first *juan* of the *Zhen'gao* 真誥 that notes the "writings of the flying heavens of all the directions, the eight conjunctions, and three primordials" 三元八會群方飛天之書. Second, before this list, divine talismans were regarded as celestial script, but here they are distinguished from the first category, and, like the numinous charts that are similar to celestial script, are listed as a discrete kind of Daoist scripture.

## 3. Various Kinds of Lingbao Celestial Script and the Number of their Graphs

In discussing the celestial script, the first category of twelve in his *Lingbao jingmu*, Lu Xiujing explains in detail:

> First is the origin of scriptures, the script of the eight conjunctions of the self-generating celestial writings, altogether comprised of 1190 graphs. Of these, 668 are the original root of the Three Powers, which give birth to heaven, establish earth, and inaugurate the transformation of human beings and divine spirits—they are the root of the myriad things. Thus, to say that there is a heavenly way, earthly way, human way, and divine way is a statement of this. To cultivate and use this method, generally there are four classifications…These 256 graphs theorize the divisions and appointed times of assemblies in all the heavens; the names, taboo names, positions, and titles of the great sages, perfected, and transcendents; all the palaces, bureaus, cities, terraces, and locations governed by these divine beings; the grades and ranks of divine transcendents that transform and rise or descend; the masses of demons of various kinds; and the karma of human beings and ghosts in the cycles of life and death. These 63 graphs are the names and titles of the primordial essence of the five directions, methods of ingesting elixirs in search of transcendence, refining the spirit and transforming

> the body, and rising and vaulting upward in broad daylight. The remaining 123 graphs lack any explanation of their sounds.
>
> 第一經之本源，自然天書八會之文，凡一千一百九字。其六百六十八字，是三才之原根，生天立地，開化人神，萬物之根。〔故〕云有天道、地道、〔人道〕、神道，此之謂也。修用此法，凡有四科：……其二百五十六字，論諸天度數期會，大聖真仙名諱位號，所治宮府城臺處所，神仙變化升降品次，眾魔種類，人鬼生死轉輪因緣。其六十三字，是五方元精名號，服禦求仙，練神化形，白日升騰之法。餘一百二十三字，闕無解音。 (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, p. 511)

In this section, the several forms of the Lingbao celestial script that Lu Xiujing distinguishes are identical to the three divisions in the ancient Lingbao corpus discussed above; even the number of characters is essentially the same. First, there is the "Perfected Script on Five Tablets in Red Writing" of the *Tianshu jing* with 668 characters (actually 672). Second are the "Self-Generating Jade Graphs of the Inner Sounds of All the Heavens" of the *Zhutian neiyin* with 256 characters. Next is the "Jade Script of the Five Directions and Five Sprouts" of the *Lingbao wufu xu* with 63 characters (actually 64). Finally, there is a category of celestial writing, of which the celestial graphs "lack any explanation of their sounds." This last category includes the "Jade Script in Three Tablets of the Eight Effulgences of the Three Regions" (*Sanbu bajing sanpian yuwen* 三部八景三篇玉文) (96 characters) that originated in the *Ershisi shengtu jing*二十四生圖經; the "Given Names, Taboo Names, and Talismanic Names of the Demon Kings of the Five Directions in the Eight Effulgences Registers" (*Bajing lu wufang mowang xingwei fuming* 八景籙五方魔王姓諱符名) (10 characters) that also originated in the *Ershisi shengtu jing*; and the "Celestial Script of the Middle Primordial that Pacifies the Spirits, Settles the Divinities, and Refines and Saves the Five Transcendents, from the Yellow Emperor of the Lingbao Heavens" (*Lingbao Huangdi liandu wuxian anling zhenshen zhongyuan tianwen* 靈寶黃帝鍊度五仙安靈鎮神中元天文) (16 characters) that originated in the *Wulian shengshi miaojing* 五鍊生尸妙經. Altogether, this last category consists of 123 characters (actually 122) (C. Wang 2009; H. Wang 2017, p. 110).

4. The Perfected Script on Five Tablets in Red Writing, the first kind of Lingbao Celestial Script, Divided into Four Classification (*sike* 四科) based on Function

Lu Xiujing explains in his *Lingbao jingmu* that "generally there are four classifications" of the Perfected Script:

> With regards the cultivation and use of these methods, generally there are four classifications: (1) those that control and summon the Upper Thearchs of the Nine Heavens, who audit the charts and registers of divine transcendents; these are methods of seeking transcendence and effecting perfection; (2) those that control and summon the starry officials of the celestial lodges, bring to order the divisions and numbers of the heavens, protect the kingdom and bring peace to the people; if the sequence of the five planets is in disarray or the four times seven (i.e., the twenty-eight Mansions 宿) are disaster-stricken, implement the way of the eight junctions, enact the wonders of the celestial writings, harmonize heaven and pacify earth—then the myriad disasters will naturally be dispelled; (3) those that arrest and control Fengdu, abolish and cut off the six heavens; with these, the hordes of demons will surrender and be subdued, while ghosts and sprites will be abolished and thwarted; (4) those that command the water thearchs and summon dragons to ascend to the clouds; no spirit of the seas or waterways will fail to revere them.
>
> 修用此法，凡有四科：第一〔主〕召九天上帝，校神仙圖録，求仙致真之法；第二主召天宿星官，正天分度，保國寧民，若乃五星録（錯）越，四七受災，施八會之道，行天書之妙，和天安地，則萬禍自消；第三攝制酆都，鹹斷六天，群魔降伏，鬼妖滅爽；第四敕命水帝，召龍上雲，海瀆之靈，莫不敬奉之也。 (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, p. 511)

The classification encompasses four distinct functions: (1) seeking transcendence; (2) warding off and eliminating celestial disasters of the stars and lodges; (3) arresting and summoning ghosts and demons; and (4) warding off and eliminating flood disasters. Clearly, Lu Xiujing's description of the classifications is identical to the *Tianshu jing*.

## 5. Some Fundamental Characteristics of Daoism: A Perspective from the Celestial Scripts of the Lingbao Scriptures

From the above discussion, we find that the Lingbao celestial scripts are deep reflections of several significant Daoist beliefs and practices. Comparative analysis also suggests that these scripts typically represent some basic characteristics that differentiate Daoism from other religions.

1. The Daoist Veneration of Written Symbols

The Lingbao celestial scripts, so to speak, are a kind of written revelation granted to human beings from the gods. Such written revelations are not what the gods speak but rather those graphs and scripts that express divine meaning, which can only be given to humanity to view. This is quite different from the oral revelations God grants prophets in the Christian *Bible*. For example, in the "Book of Genesis" in the *Old Testament:* "Then God said 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (1.3) (Coogan et al. 2010, p. 11). The "Gospel of John" in the *New Testament* reads "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the people (1.1–3) (Coogan et al. 2010, p. 1881). The "Book of Exodus" in the *Old Testament* reads "Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets…As soon as he [Moses] came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (32.15–19) (Coogan et al. 2010, p. 129). The Ten Commandments were written on the tablets. After Moses broke them, God later allowed Moses to prepare new tablets after listening to His oral transmission. Stephan Peter Bumbacher has suggested that God's intention was to hide his form from human sight and not allow human beings to see His own personal writing; thus, he suggests that the story implies that Christianity emphasizes the oral as opposed to written text (Bumbacher 1995). John Lagerwey has also written an article that discusses oral and written language in Eastern and Western religious traditions, which also aims to lay bare this key distinction between Daoism and Christianity (Lagerwey 1985).

Of course, Daoism does not reject considerations of voice and sound. According to explanations in the *Tianshu jing* and the *Chishu yujue*, Daoist priests utilize the Perfected Script on Five Tablets primarily as written seal script talismans, complementing this with spoken incantatory verse. When priests use the Perfected Script on Five Tablets, they generally write or inscribe the script on some object and then cast or arrange these objects in the appropriate place. According to the *Zhutian neiyin* explanations, the use of the Self-Generated Jade Graphs emphasizes dharani-like sounds supplemented by the use of written seal script talismans; practitioners can recite the Jade Graphs but can also transcribe them onto paper, which they then ingest. In short, Daoism utilizes both voice and text.

2. The Daoist Pursuit of Longevity and Immortality

As noted above, the first group of the celestial script in the east, described in the *Wupian zhenwen*, is used to cultivate transcendence. In the list of eight Self-Generating Jade Graphs from the first of the eight eastern heavens, the first three are used to "cultivate the path of flying transcendents" 修飛仙之道. The Lingbao *wufu* graphs were also originally intended as oral formulas for the practice of imbibing qi and cultivating transcendence. The *Lingbao wufu xu* that records the celestial writing includes numerous methods of ingestion, and all are intended for nourishing life and cultivating transcendence. The prefatory sec-

tions of both the first and third *juan* in the scripture suggest that such methods originated from celestial writing. In short, the three kinds of Lingbao celestial scripts indicate that Daoism prescribes active engagement in the pursuit of longevity and immortality, exploring and expounding on all sorts of techniques for nourishing life and cultivating transcendence. The majority of these require the application of a secret formula (*mijue* 秘訣), a fact that demonstrates Daoism to be an esoteric religious tradition, whose practitioners do not lightly divulge the mysteries of the heavens. Indeed, the Lingbao celestial scripts are considered the greatest mysteries of the heavens. Daoism's emphasis on secret transmission very clearly differentiates it from Christianity, which aimed at spreading the Gospel, and Buddhism with its goal of universal salvation.

Cherishing life and detesting death might be said to be one of Daoism's most basic values, and many Daoist scriptures clearly address the issue. For example, the "Earthly Perfection" (*Dizhen* 地真) section of the *Bao puzi neipian* states that "Life should be held dear, and death feared" 生可惜也，死可畏也 (M. Wang 1985, p. 326). The *Dongxuan lingbao zhai shuo guangzhu jie fa deng zhuyaun yi* 洞玄靈寶齋説光燭戒罰燈祝願儀 (DZ 524) notes "Among the myriad things humanity is of top priority, and humanity considers life a treasure … all know that they must fear death and take joy in life" 夫萬物以人爲貴，人以生爲寶……一切皆知畏死而樂生 (DZ 524, 5b). In order to propagate this central tenet, some Daoist scriptures adopt metaphorical and comparative rhetorical techniques to vividly illustrate the principle that death is inferior to life. For instance, the "Earnest Seeking" (*Qinqiu* 勤求) chapter of the *Bao puzi neipian* notes:

> Among the ancients, there was a saying: 'The living is in me, and the benefits are also great therein'. To discuss the value of this statement, though nobility may become thearchs or kings, they are insufficient in comparison with this law. To discuss its seriousness, though good fortune extends to all those under heaven, it is not sufficiently easy to come by as using this technique. Thus, there is the suggestive expression 'a dying prince takes joy in being a living mouse.'
>
> 古人有言曰，生之於我，利亦大焉。論其貴賤，雖爵爲帝王，不足以此法比焉。論其輕重，雖富有天下，不足以此術易焉。故有死王樂爲生鼠之喻也。
>
> (M. Wang 1985, p. 259)

The *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (DZ 1205) also mentions "The true way delights in life and abhors destruction. That which pertains to long life is the Dao; that which pertains to death and destruction is not the Dao. A dead prince is not worth a live rat … life is valuable" 真道好生而惡殺。長生者，道也；死壞者，非道也。死王乃不如生鼠……生可貴也 (DZ 1205, 1.10a; translation from Bokenkamp 1997, p. 224).

Compared with Daoism, Buddhism is precisely the opposite, promoting the principles of detesting life and cherishing death. Such values are not only expressed in early Buddhist texts but are also reflected in early Daoist materials. (Tang 1998, pp. 305–6). The *Santian neijie jing* records:

> Laozi is the lord of living transformation; Śakyāmuni is the lord of transformation by death. As a result, Laozi was born from his mother's left armpit and is lord of the left. The left is the side of yang breaths that gover the Azure Palace with its Registers of Life. Śakyāmuni was born from his mother's right armpit and is lord of the right. The right is the side of yin breaths and the black records of the Registers of Death. In this respect the differences between the teachings of Laozi and Śakyāmuni are those between the laws of left and right. The transforming influences of the left accord with the palace of the left, so that the pneumas of life cause the adept's body to rise and fly off in transcendence. The transforming influences of the right accord with the palace of the right, so that the pneumas of death cause the adept to pass through oblivion and be reborn. Buddhist dharma robes are entirely black. [Buddhists] are made to wear these black garments in order to model themselves on the breaths of yin and to represent the fact that their names are entered in the black records.

> 老子主生化，釋迦主死化。故老子剖左腋而生，主左，左爲陽氣，主青宫生録。釋迦剖右腋而生，主右，右爲陰氣，主黑簿死録。是以老子、釋迦教化，左右法異。左化則隨左宫生氣，使舉形飛仙。右化是隨右宫死氣，使滅度更生，法服悉黑，使著黑衣，以法陰氣，入於黑簿也。 (DZ 1205, 1.9b–10a; translation from Bokenkamp 1997, p. 223)

A lost piece of Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 commentary in the *Zhen'gao* 真誥 also reads:

> The *Nirvāna Scripture* states: "When life is obliterated it is obliteration with no remainder –Total obliteration is bliss." In this way, Buddhists take life to be an illusion and regard death as a joyful thing. In the Fangzhu kingdom, life is blissful and death is a calamity. This is why [Buddhists] call their practices "the methods of the Buddha" and not "the Way of the Buddha."[8]

> 《涅槃經》云：'生滅滅矣，寂滅爲樂。'是以生爲幻，死爲樂。方諸國以生爲樂，死爲患也。故稱佛法，不稱佛道。

## 3. The Daoist Synthesis of Philosophy and Belief

In a manner of speaking, Daoism is a religious tradition that merges Daoist philosophy, beliefs, and practices concerning divine transcendence. We might consider a piece of the preface to the *Tianshu jing* that describes the celestial writs:

> The Perfected Writs in Red Writing on Jade Tablets from the Numinous Treasure Cavern Mystery of Primordial Commencement were born within the empty cavern prior to Primordial Commencement. Heaven and earth had not yet established their roots; sun and moon had yet to emit light. All was dark and tenebrous, with neither ancestor nor primogenitor. The numinous writs remained hidden and shadowed; no sooner were they present, then they disappeared. The Two Principles awaited them [the writs] in order to be differentiated; the sun awaited them in order to shine. The numinous charts altered cycles; the mystic images pushed forward changes. Seizing the opportunity and responding to the moment, at that time [the writs] came into existence therein. Heaven and earth obtained them and were thereby distinguished; the Three Effulgences obtained them and emitted radiance … At this time, heaven sent down twelve mystic signs, and earth manifested twenty-four corresponding resonances … Heaven treasured them [the writs] and so brought about its floating suspension; earth secreted them away and so brought about peace. The five thearchs controlled them and so brought obtained restraint. The Three Luminaries mounted them and so become loftily illuminated; the higher sages revered them and so brought about perfection; the Five Marchmounts followed them and so obtained numinosity. The Son of Heaven obtained them and so brought about ordered governance; stately throne enjoyed them and so arrive at Great Peace … The Perfected Writs in Red Writing on Five Tablets [of the Heavenly Worthy] of Primordial Beginning and the Five Elders emerged from within the Self-Actualizing of the empty cavern. [They] generated heaven and established earth, opened the transformations and made divine the brightness. Those above refer to them as numinous, for they effect protection of the Five Marchmounts, pacify the state and lengthen its existence. Those below refer to them as treasured, for they are the mystic wonders of numinous treasure and are what is revered by the myriad things. The [Celestial Worthy] of Primordial Commencement opened the charts and twelve numinous signs arose above, while twenty-four corresponding resonances were manifested below.

> 元始洞玄靈寶赤書玉（五）篇真文生於元始之先，空洞之中，天地未根，日月未光，幽幽冥冥，無祖無宗。靈文晻藹，乍存乍亡，二儀待之以分，太陽待之以明。靈圖革運，玄象推遷，乘機應會，於是存焉，天地得之而分判，三景得之而發光……是時天降十二玄瑞，地發二十四應……天寶之以致浮，地秘之以致安，五帝掌之以得鎮，三光乘之以高明，上聖奉之以致真，五嶽從之以得靈，天子得之

> 以致治，國祚享之以太平……元始五老赤書玉（五）篇出於空洞自然之中，生天立地，開化神明。上謂之靈，施鎮五嶽，安國長存，下謂之寶，靈寶玄妙，爲萬物之尊。元始開圖，上啟十二靈瑞，下發二十四應。 (DZ 22, 1.1a–b)

From this, we can see that the celestial scripts had already been born within the empty void prior to the emergence of the heavens, earth, sun, moon, stars, and other celestial bodies. When the celestial writings came into the world, it was as if the great Dao had been made manifest, marked by the various celestial signs and earthly corresponding resonances. Heaven, earth, and the myriad things, as well as both gods and human beings, all relied upon this celestial writing to be established. Indeed, the scripts serve as the origin of the world and are its most lofty principle. In fact, there is no difference between this type of celestial writing and the Dao itself, the cosmological or ontological foundation of everything, which is discussed in the *Daode jing* 道德經. The celestial script described in the *Wupian zhenwen* is explicitly endowed with all the characteristics and functions of the Dao.

In the ancient Lingbao corpus, several places more clearly articulate the idea that celestial writing is equivalent to the origin of the universe and the myriad things and the loftiest principle. The *Duren jing* claims:

> Above it [red script 赤文] there is no further parent; Only the Dao constituted its body. The Five-Part Script spread abroad, planting everywhere its spiritual power. Without the script, there would be no light; Without the script, there would be no brilliance. Without the script, nothing would be established; Without the script, nothing would have been formed. Without the script, there would be no salvation; Without the script, there would be no life.
>
> 上無復祖，唯道爲身。五文開廓，普植神靈。無文不光，無文不明，無文不立，無文不成，無文不度，無文不生。 (DZ 87, 2.7b–9a; translation from Bokenkamp 1997, pp. 415–16)

The passage views the Lingbao scriptures as the root of the heavens and the body of the Dao. Moreover, it suggests that without the script, absolutely nothing would occur, an evident instance of the texts and scriptures being elevated to the status of cosmological origin or loftiest principle. In addition, the Lingbao scriptures consider the emergence of celestial writing and the operations of the Dao to occur at the same time. For example, the *Tianshu jing* claims "Once the numinous texts stirred, the Dao then thereupon began to act" 靈文既振，道乃行焉 (DZ 22, 1.4b). The *Zhutian neiyin* reads: "Once the sounds were clear, then the Dao thereupon began to operate" 其音既朗，其道行焉 (DZ 97, 3.3b). These kinds of statements reveal, without a doubt, the correspondence between celestial writing and the Dao.

What is especially worthy of attention is the repeated assertions of the Lingbao scriptures that the celestial script was spontaneously produced. It is given various names within the corpus, such as "self-generated writings" (*ziran zhi shu* 自然之書), "self-generated script" (*ziran zhi wen*自然之文), or "self-generated jade graphs" (*ziran yuzi* 自然玉字), all of which ascribe the notion of "self-generating" as a fundamental characteristic of this celestial writing. The *Daode jing* asserts that "self-generating" is a basic attribute of the Dao, such as in the statement "The Dao takes as its model the Thus-So" 道法自然. In these short phrases, the same two characters, *ziran* 自然, are used to describe the self-generating, spontaneous, and natural formation of both the Dao and the celestial writing, suggesting that the authors of the texts perceived the nature of both entities to be alike. This is why the *Zhutian neiyin* maintains that those who "are able to naturally understand the sounds of all the heavens, will be able to thoroughly penetrate the dark void and merge together with the Dao" 能自然知諸天之音，洞達玄虛，與道合同也 (DZ 97, 2.15a). From the perspective of Daoist practitioners, "to obtain the Dao is to become a transcendent" 得道成仙, a maxim that has always been prevalent amongst Daoists. But this is no different than saying that understanding and utilizing celestial writing is an important path to becoming transcen-

dent. From the various forms of celestial script recorded in the Lingbao corpus, we can see that Daoist philosophy and religious beliefs have been ingeniously fused together.

It is also necessary to note that in addition to the "Dao," *qi* 氣 indicates an original or lofty principle in Daoist philosophical discourse. The concept of *qi* is intimately related to the "Dao". When we speak of the "Dao", whether it be as a creative force or as a constitutive element of all things, we often cannot separate any discussion from *qi*, which is the material foundation of the Dao's operations within the world. The *Laozi* 老子 speaks of the role of *qi* in the creation of the all, though the text does not fully expand on the idea.[9] However, in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and other philosophical works, such as the *Guanzi* 管子, we find further discussion.[10] The ancient Lingbao scriptures fully absorbed these Daoist philosophical concepts on *qi* and developed them in new directions. Within the Lingbao corpus, in addition to the basic theory of the existence of *qi* and the principle of creation that suggests the Dao manifests and functions through qi, there is also the idea that the coagulation of qi explains the formation and nature of celestial scripts. The ancient Lingbao scriptures also suggest that Daoist deities came into being through the coalescence and transformation of primordial *qi* (*yuanqi* 元氣), a notion that links the concepts of divinity with the ontological and cosmological significance of the Dao and *qi.* As the scriptures convey, the various deities are, in their very essence, manifestations of the Dao and *qi*. In truth, *jing* 經 (scripture), *shen* 神 (deity), and *qi* (vital breath) form a trinity and cannot be separated (Lü 2003, pp. 588–90). The concept of *qi* is another example of how the ancient Lingbao scriptures meld together philosophical ideas and religious beliefs.

Many scholars, both inside and outside China, have long tried to separate the study of Daoist philosophy and Daoist religious teachings, arguing that the two are distinct. But from the perspective of the Lingbao celestial writings, this sort of thinking is indeed a misunderstanding. The Lingbao celestial scripts are strong proof that Daoism is a Chinese religious tradition of profound depth and ideology. Thus, we should acknowledge, as Daoist studies scholar Anna Seidel once wrote, Daoism as the "unofficial high religion of China." (Seidel 1997).

## 6. Conclusions

To close, I believe we can glean three provisional conclusions from the discussion above. First, the Lingbao celestial scripts highlight the divine nature of the Lingbao scriptures, a point that is demonstrated in several ways:

(1) The scriptures originated in the heavens and were certainly not ordinary texts meant to circulate widely in the world; thus, many of them carry special designations, such as "Celestial Writing" (Tianshu 天書), "Perfected Script" (Zhenwen 真文), "Red Writing" (Chishu 赤書), or "Celestial Script" (Tianwen 天文), among others.
(2) The scripts were produced by qi coalescing in the heavens; the scriptures were not composed by human beings.
(3) The meaning of these mysterious and abstruse scriptures can be understood only through the annotated explanations of the sages and perfected.
(4) The scriptures were systematically transmitted from the heavens into the human world, and the gods, transcendents, perfected, and Daoist priests involved in this process were not the producers of these scriptures but merely conveyed them to the proper recipient(s).
(5) The scriptures correspond to the Dao and qi, which serve as the origin of all things.
(6) Other various reasons. They are secretly stored in the heavens; they are protected by sage perfected or transcendent lads and jade maidens; their text also conveys divine sounds; they can be transformed into wondrously numinous objects; whoever obtains the scripts can become an undying transcendent, achieve unlimited salvation, expel demons, treat illnesses, and accomplish other amazing ends; only those who are fated to become transcendents may obtain them; they can only be transmitted at certain times according to a fixed number of years; and those who carelessly transmit them or show them irreverence will be punished.

Second, ideas concerning the Lingbao celestial scripts are at the core of beliefs in the Lingbao scriptures. Song Wenming's *Lingbao jing yishu* reproduces Lu Xiujing's *Lingbao jingmu;* both are eminent Daoists in their classifications and explanations of the ancient Lingbao scriptures and indicate the central importance of the celestial scripts within the Lingbao system. After the list of old scriptures from *Yuanshi tianzun*, which Lu had divided into ten sections, he offers a summarizing and clarifying statement:

> Of the 36 *juan* listed in the "Structured Catalogue of Purple Tenuity Scriptures and Old Scriptures [transmitted by the Celestial Worthy of] Primordial Commencement" to the right, 21 *juan* have already emerged. Today, [those that have emerged] have been separated into 23 *juan*, while 15 *juan* have still yet to emerge. The 36 *juan* of the wondrous scriptures in ten sections have all be engraved with golden lettering and transcribed atop jade tablets. The chapter titles have been inscribed in the Southern Balustrade of the Purple Tenuity Palace. The Metropolis of Great Mystery atop the Jade Capitoline Mountain also houses and records these texts. The masses of great sages of the various heavens, according to the regular fasting months and days, ascend to pay a visit to the Jade Capitol, burning incense, circling [the mountain] as they proceed, and reciting scriptures as they travel to pay homage to the celestial scripts.
>
> 右《元始舊經紫微經格目》三十六卷，二十一卷已出，今分成二十三卷，十五卷未出。十部妙經三十六卷，皆尅金為字，書於玉簡之上，題其篇目於紫微宮南軒，太玄都玉京山亦具記其文。諸天大聖眾依格齋月日，上詣玉京，燒香旋行誦經，禮天文也。 (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 5, p. 510)

Several phrases correspond to another explanatory note Lu added to his catalog in ten sections: "[The scriptures] were all transcribed texts in golden [lettering] on [jade] tablets" 皆金簡書文. Moreover, the passage notes that celestial beings "pay homage to the celestial scripts" on the requisite *zhai* days. These ideas demonstrate that the old scriptures originated in the divine scriptures recorded in the heavens. Song Wenming summarizes the essential content of the various sections of the old scriptures:

> Section 1: "Elucidates the corresponding transformations of the source root" 明應化之源本;
>
> Section 2: "Elucidates the cycles and convergences from start to finish" 明運會始終;
>
> Section 3: "Elucidates of universal extension of Heaven's merit" 明天功之廣被;
>
> Section 4: "Elucidates awe-inspiring influence of sagely virtues" 明聖德之威風;
>
> Section 5: "Elucidates the varying grades of precepts and regulations" 明戒律之差品;
>
> Section 6: "Elucidates the bases of human conduct and behavior" 明人行業之由從;
>
> Section 7: "Elucidates the far-reaching [benefits] of delivering all creatures" 明濟物之弘遠;
>
> Section 8: "Elucidates the paths and traces of cause and effect [karma]" 明因果之途跡;
>
> Section 9: "Elucidates the methods and regulations of cultivation practices" 明修行之方法;
>
> Section 10: "Elucidates the substance and functions of regulating the body" 明治身之體用.

Song's succinct phrases, several of which are evidently derived from the foundational belief in celestial writing, encapsulate the beliefs and practices found in the old scriptures. The explanations in sections one and four especially connect to scriptures related to the Lingbao celestial scripts. The explanations in sections five and six coincide with Lu's characterization of the eleven *juan* of "new scriptures, which contain the teachings, precepts, instructions, and essentials, as well as explanations of proper conduct and behavior, received by the Transcendent Duke Ge" 葛仙公所受教戒訣要及説行業新經. If we consider the extant new scriptures alongside the old scriptures and Song and Lu's descriptions, we

see that the former elaborate and further explicate the latter. Indeed, the beliefs and practices found in both bodies of scripture are analogous.

Third, as discussed above, the Lingbao celestial scripts reflect several fundamental characteristics of Daoism: the veneration of written symbols, the pursuit of longevity and immortality, and the synthesis of philosophy and belief. As the *Wushang miyao* 無上秘要, a Daoist collectanea from the Northern Zhou 北周 (557–581) confirms, Daoism is indeed grounded in these three basic, interrelated principles. According to the *Wushang miyao mulu* 無上秘要目錄, recorded in the Dunhuang manuscript P. 2861, the first section of the Northern Zhou compilation is titled "Selections on the Great Dao" 大道品, which contains excerpts of other Daoist scriptures testifying to the ontological and cosmological significance of the "Dao." (Lagerwey 1981, pp. 49–71). Scriptural quotations in the second section, "Selections on the Changes and Transformations of the One *Qi*" 一氣變化品, discuss the same matters with regard to *qi*. The Dao and *qi* were core principles in Daoist philosophical writings, and their close conceptual relationship was often reflected in linking the two terms together to form a composite term (*Daoqi* 道氣) in Daoist works (Lü 2000, pp. 32–34). After the first two sections, the *Wushang miyao,* as the table of contents indicates, contains sections on various cosmic realms, including heaven, earth, humanity, and divine beings, and all four are generated through the transformations of *qi.* The following sections from "Selections on Perfected Scripts" 真文品 to "Selections on Casting Tablets" 投簡品 (29 in total) center on the sources of Daoist scriptures and the rituals and rules for their transmission. These sections reveal that Daoist scriptures, in fact, originate from *qi,* which converges and forms celestial books. Altogether, roughly the first third of the *Wushang miyao* reflects the first fundamental characteristic of Daoism. Thereafter, the *Wushang miyao* encompasses sections on various kinds of Daoist practices, including techniques, methods, rituals, precepts, and regulations, all of which are linked to the worldview based on the Dao and *qi* presented in the first two sections of the collection. Generally speaking, Daoist practices correspond to a particular worldview or principle; for example, cultivation practices concerning the ingestion of *qi* are grounded in broader theories of *qi.* The practices subsequently cited in the *Wushang miyao* can lead to different results, such as becoming a ghost official (*guiguan* 鬼官), the lowest rank for cultivators of the Dao, or casting off all forms to become formless (*wuxing* 無形), the highest aim of such regimens. Regardless, the existence of various realms (heaven, earth, humanity, and deities) and the various practices that may lead a practitioner to them are a testament to the second fundamental characteristic of Daoism. The final sections of the *Wushang miyao* ("Transforming Divine Luminescence" 變神景, "Embodying Double Forgetting" 體兼忘, "Gathering in the Thus-So" 會自然, and "Returning to the Silent Stillness" 歸寂寂) concern the act of returning to the Dao, an exact inversion of the first section that deals with the everything emanating from Dao. All these sections reflect the third fundamental characteristic mentioned above. In short, the structure of the *Wushang miyao* and the relationship between the various sections reflects a comprehensive unified system that organically integrates the three characteristics of Daoism raised above. To borrow the Chinese philosophical concept of substance and function (*tiyong* 體用), I would suggest that the third characteristic speaks of the "substance", while the first two speak of the function. Or, we might also use the term "revelation", employing it in its Western Christian sense. If so, we can think of "substance" as having two important points: (1) the revelation of the Dao and *qi* (characteristic #1) and (2) the revelation of practices (i.e., cultivating the Dao) and the results of fully dedicating oneself to them (characteristic #2). As we can see, beliefs concerning celestial writing and scripts occupy a pivotal position in the broader system of Daoist scripture and teachings.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:** My heartful thanks go to Tyler M. Feezell for translating my original Chinese manuscript into English and to the three reviewers for giving valuable comments and suggestions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

1 On the scriptures of the "Three Caverns" and "Four Supplements", see (Chen 2014, pp. 1–87; Ōfuchi 1981; Lai 2001; C. Wang 2008).

2 In the first fascicle of the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真誥), the Lady of Purple Tenuity (*Ziwei furen* 紫微夫人) claims to describe the "foundational beginnings of the writing" 為書之本始, which first existed as celestial graphs before differentiating and transforming into mundane script as "64 kinds of writing" 六十四種之書 (DZ 1016, 1.7b). Wang Chengwen 王承文 argues that these "64 kinds of writing" are related to the cosmogonies articulated in the *Apocrypha on the Book of Changes* (*Yi wei* 易緯). See (C. Wang 2010, pp. 788–89). Hsieh Shu-wei suggests, however, that they are directly related to the 64 kinds of script recorded in the *Puyao jing* that the Buddha studied at a young age. As he argues, the 64 kinds of writing known in Buddhist teachings influenced conceptions of celestial writing that we find in revelations recorded in Shangqing works from the Eastern Jin; see (Hsieh 2010, pp. 87–92).

3 On the ancient Lingbao corpus, see (Ōfuchi 1974, 1997, pp. 73–218; Bokenkamp 1983; Kobayashi 1990, pp. 13–188; C. Wang 2002, 2017; H. Wang 2017; Liu 2018). In addition, western scholars have provided English translations of the titles and synopses of the content for the 27 extant ancient Lingbao scriptures. See (Bokenkamp 1983, pp. 479–85; Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 214–39).

4 Works from the Ming dynasty *Daozang* 道藏 are cited according to their numbers as listed in (Schipper and Chen 1996, pp. 258–348).

5 The *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, an Eastern Han (25–220) historical work somewhat later than the *Yue jue shu* 越絕書, but whose content is largely similar, also transmits the same story; see the first appendix, "*Wu Yue chunqiu* yiwen" 《吳越春秋》佚文 in (Jue Zhang 2019, p. 441).

6 *Taishang dongxuan lingbao kongdong lingzhang* 太上洞玄靈寶空洞靈章經, in (Jiyu Zhang 2004, vol. 3, p. 64).

7 *Taishang dongxuan lingbao benxing suyuan jing* 太上洞玄靈寶本行宿緣經, DZ 1114, 5b.

8 *Tianhuang zhidao taiqing yuce* 天皇至道太清玉冊 (DZ 1483), 195b.Translation from (Bokenkamp 2014a, pp. 248–50).

9 See for example, chapter 42 of the *Laozi*: "The Dao gave birth to the one; the one gave birth to the two; the two gave birth to the three; and the three gave birth to the myriad things. The myriad things bear *yin* and embrace *yang*, and surging *qi* makes them harmonious" 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以为和 (B. Wang 2008, p. 117).

10 In the *Zhuangzi,* see the chapter titled "Knowledge Rambled North" (*Zhi beiyou* 知北遊): "That is why it states: 'That which pervades all under heaven is merely the one *qi*'" 故曰"通天下一氣耳". (Guo 1961, p. 733) In the *Guanzi,* see the chapter titled "Pivotal Sayings" (*Shuyan* 樞言): "If something has *qi,* then it is alive; if something does not have *qi,* then it is dead. Whatever lives does so through *qi*" 有氣則生，無氣則死，生者以其氣. (Guo 1984, p. 316).

## References

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 1983. Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures. In *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R. A. Stein*. Edited by M. Strickmann. Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques XXI. Bruxelles: Institut Belges des Hautes Études Chinoises, vol. 2, pp. 434–86.

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 1986. The Peach Flower Font and the Grotto Passage. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106: 65–77. [CrossRef]

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 1997. *Early Daoist Scriptures*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 2010. Word as Relic in Medieval Daoism. In *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective*. Edited by Elizabeth Robertson. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 21–35.

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 2014a. Research Note: Buddhism in the Writings of Tao Hongjing. *Daoism Religion History and Society* 6: 247–68.

Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 2014b. This Foreign Religion of Ours: Lingbao Views of Buddhist Translation. In *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought*. Edited by John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 182–97.

Bumbacher, Stephan Peter. 1995. Cosmic Scripts and Heavenly Scriptures: The Holy Nature of Taoist Texts. *COSMOS the Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society* 11: 139–53.

Campany, Robert F. 2002. *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chen, Guofu 陳國符. 2014. *Daozang yuanliu kao* 道藏源流考, Newly rev. ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Coogan, Michael D., Pheme Perkins, Marc Z. Brettler, and Carol Newsom, eds. 2010. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, rev. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gong, Pengcheng 龔鵬程. 1992. Yi wenzi zhangwo shijie: Youzi tianshu—Zhongguo zongjiao (Daojiao) de xingzhi yu fangfa 以文字掌握世界：有字天書—中國宗教（道教）的性質與方法. In *Wenhua fuhao xue* 文化符號學. Edited by Pengcheng Gong. Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, vol. 2, pp. 157–95.
Guo, Moruo 郭沫若. 1984. Guanzi jijiao 管子集校. In *Guo Moruo quanji: Lishi bian* 郭沫若全集·歷史編. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 5.
Guo, Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896). 1961. *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋. Edited by Xiaoyu Wang 王孝魚. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Hsieh, Shu-wei 謝世維. 2010. *Tianjie zhi wen: Wei Jin Nanbei chao lingbao jingdian yanjiu* 天界之文：魏晉南北朝靈寶經典研究. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshu Guan.
Kobayashi, Masayoshi 小林正美. 1990. *Rikuchō dōkyōshi kenkyū* 六朝道教史研究. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.
Lagerwey, John. 1981. *Wu-shang pi-yao--somme taoïste du VIe siècle*. Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.
Lagerwey, John. 1985. The Oral and the Written in Chinese and Western Religion. In *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien (in Honour of Hans Steininger)*. Edited by Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl and Hans-Hermann Schmidt. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 302–22.
Lai, Chi Tim 黎志添. 2001. Nanchao tianshidao *Zhengyi fawen jing* chutan 南朝天師道《正一法文經》初探. In *Daojia yu Daojiao: Dier jie guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji (Daojiao juan)* 道家與道教·第二屆國際學術研討會論文集(道教卷). Edited by Guying Chen 陳鼓應 and Dawen Feng 馮達文. Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, pp. 162–80.
Liu, Yi 劉屹. 2018. *Liuchao Daojiao gu Lingbao jing de lishixue yanjiu* 六朝道教古靈寶經的歷史學研究. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.
Lü, Pengzhi 呂鵬志. 2000. *Daojiao zhexue* 道教哲學. Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe.
Lü, Pengzhi 呂鵬志. 2003. Zaoqi lingbao jing de tianshu guan 早期靈寶經的天書觀. In *Daojiao jiaoyi yu xiandai shehui guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 道教教義與現代社會國際學術研討會論文集. Edited by Wu Guo 郭武. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, pp. 571–96.
Maogong (Master Mao) 毛公, Xuan Zheng 鄭玄 (127–200), Yingda Kong 孔穎達 (574–648), and et al. 1980. *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義. In *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Ōfuchi, Ninji 大淵忍爾. 1974. On Ku *Ling-pao-ching*. *Acta Asiatica* 27: 33–56.
Ōfuchi, Ninji 大淵忍爾. 1981. The Formation of the Taoist Canon. In *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*. Edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 253–68.
Ōfuchi, Ninji 大淵忍爾. 1997. *Dōkyō to sono kyōten* 道教とその經典. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.
Robinet, Isabelle. 1979. *Méditation taoïste*. Paris: Dervy-Livres.
Robinet, Isabelle. 1984. *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme, tome I*. Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient.
Robinet, Isabelle. 1991. *Histoire du Taoïsme: Des Origines au XIVe Siècle*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf.
Schipper, Kristofer, and Franciscus Verellen, eds. 2004. *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Schipper, Kristofer, and Yaoting Chen 陳耀庭, newly comp. 1996. *Daozang Suoyin: Wuzhong Banben Daozang Tongjian* 道藏索引—五種版本道藏通檢, rev. ed. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian.
Seidel, Anna. 1983. Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha. In *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R. A. Stein*. Edited by Michel Strickmann. Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, vol. 2, pp. 291–371.
Seidel, Anna. 1997. Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China. *Taoist Resources* 7: 39–72.
Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518). 1995. *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集. Edited by Jinren Su 蘇晉仁 and Lianzi Xiao 蕭鍊子. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Tang, Yijie 湯一介. 1998. *Wei Jin Nanbei chao shiqi de daojiao* 魏晉南北朝時期的道教. Xi'an: Shaanxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe.
Tao, Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536). 2011. *Zhen'gao* 真誥. Edited by Yi Zhao 趙益. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Wang, Bi 王弼 (226–249), comm. 2008. *Laozi Daode Jing Zhu Jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋. Edited by Yulie Lou 樓宇烈. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Wang, Bi 王弼, Kangbo Han 韓康伯 (d. ca. 385), and Yingda Kong 孔穎達 (574–648). 1980. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義. *Shisan Jing Zhushu*.
Wang, Chengwen 王承文. 2002. *Dunhuang Gu Lingbao Jing Yu Jin Tang Daojiao* 敦煌古靈寶經與晉唐道教. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Wang, Chengwen 王承文. 2008. Nanchao tianshidao "Qibu jingshu" fenlei tizhi kaoshi 南朝天師道"七部經書"分類體制考釋. *Wenshi* 文史 1: 83–117.
Wang, Chengwen 王承文. 2009. Gu Lingbao jing zhong "tianwen" he "futu" de shidu yu yanjiu 古靈寶經中"天文"和"符圖"的釋讀與研究. Paper presented at International Academic Conference "Daojiao yu Zhongguo wenhua ji shehui de guanxi: Xin de yanjiu fangfa yu shiye" 道教與中國文化及社會的關係：新的研究方法與視野, Hong Kong, China, November 26–28.
Wang, Chengwen 王承文. 2010. The Revelation and Classification of Daoist Scriptures. In *Early Chinese Religion Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*. Edited by John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi. Leiden: Brill, pp. 775–890.
Wang, Chengwen 王承文. 2017. *Han Jin Daojiao Yishi yu Gu Lingbao Jing Yanjiu* 漢晉道教儀式與古靈寶經研究. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.
Wang, Haoyue 王皓月. 2017. *Xijing Qiuzhen: Lu Xiujing yu Lingbao Jing Guanxi Xintan* 析經求真：陸修靜與靈寶經關係新探. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Wang, Ming 王明, ed. 1960. *Taiping Jing Hejiao* 太平經合校. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
Wang, Ming 王明. 1985. *Baopuzi Neipian Jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, rev. ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Zhang, Jiyu 張繼禹, ed. 2004. *Zhonghua Daozang* 中華道藏. 49 vols. Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe.
Zhang, Jue 張覺. 2019. *Wu Yue Chunqiu Jiaozheng Zhushu* 吳越春秋校證注疏, rev. ed. Changsha: Yuelu Shushe.
Zürcher, Erik. 1980. Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Scriptural Evidence. *T'oung Pao* 66: 84–147. [CrossRef]

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.