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Revisiting Du Guangting: Theoretical Contributions and Religious Transformations Within Daoism During the Late Tang and Five Dynasties Periods

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Abstract: In this study, we re-evaluate Du Guangting's (850–933 C.E.) contributions to Daoist philosophy and religious practice during the late Tang and Five Dynasties period (755–960 C.E.), emphasizing his method of "broadly drawing upon various texts and thoroughly exploring their meanings" (廣引眾文, 窮指詳采). Through a primary analysis of *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* (道德真經廣聖義), and supported by the *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* (仙傳拾遺), this paper introduces a novel perspective on Du Guangting's redefinition of Daoist practices, emphasizing self-cultivation and moral integrity over traditional alchemical methods. This shift not only addressed the spiritual demands of his era but also set a precedent for ethical practices in Daoism, thereby reflecting its adaptability to socio-political changes. This research underscores how Du's work significantly contributed to both the transformation of Daoist philosophy and the evolution of its religious practices, thus influencing subsequent developments in Chinese thought and spirituality.

Keywords: Du Guangting; Daoism; religious transformations; Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods

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1. Introduction

Daoism, as China's indigenous religion, has a rich history spanning nearly two millennia. The innate human desire for health and immortality aligns closely with Daoist principles, resonating with the hearts and minds of the people. Daoism's profound impact on Chinese culture is evident in the realms of philosophy, medicine, literature, and art, illustrating its significant role in the evolution of Chinese religion and cultural heritage (Schipper 2005, pp. 45–78).

Daoism's foundational text, the *Daodejing* (道德經), credited to Laozi (老子), has been influential for centuries.

From China's early medieval period (魏晉南北朝 220–589 C.E.) through to the Sui and Tang Dynasties (隋唐 581–907 C.E.), there was a pronounced evolution in the reverence and interpretation of Daoist texts. During the Tang Dynasty (唐朝 618–907 C.E.), a significant shift occurred with the formal enshrinement of Laozi as a divine ancestor. As reflected in historical accounts, "the Daoist religion at the imperial court, the beliefs of the most influential sects of Daoism, and the common sense of the whole society have recognized that the central object of worship in religious Daoism should be Laozi and his *Daodejing*" (Ren 1994, p. 360).

Among the numerous commentaries and annotations on Laozi during the Tang Dynasty, Du Guangting's (杜光庭, 850–933 C.E.) contributions stand out, particularly his work *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* (道德真經廣聖義).[1] This text offers a detailed summary of over sixty commentaries on the *Daodejing* from the Han to the Tang Dynasties, encapsulating the progression of Daoist

and Laozi Studies; notably, its Preface outlines the core principles, terminologies, structure, and goals of the *Daodejing*, while also providing a catalog of historical commentaries and relevant biographical details about Laozi. By studying Du Guangting's work, one can not only grasp the theoretical level of Daoist *Daodejing* exegesis during the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods but also trace the development trajectory of Daoist thought concerning Laozi across these eras.

In addition to his significant theoretical contributions, Du Guangting's work reflects broader trends in Daoist practice during the Late Tang period, a time marked by a transition from ingestion of elixirs to internal alchemy. Numerous new Daoist scriptures emerged during this period, emphasizing the importance of personal cultivation in attaining transcendence—a concept central to Du Guangting's framework of "self-cultivation and governance 修身理國先己後人" (Du 2020, p. 636).

While these scriptures offer valuable theoretical perspectives, there is a discernible gap between the religious practices outlined in these texts and the actual practices of the period. The extent to which these new theories were embraced by practitioners in the Late Tang Dynasty remains uncertain; today, we have access to a vast array of textual materials that far exceed what was available to individuals during that era, complicating our ability to fully gauge the influences of these scriptures. However, hagiographies and various records from the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods, particularly Du Guangting's *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* (仙傳拾遺), serve as vivid and tangible aids for understanding the historical practices of transcendence. By providing detailed accounts of the interplay between ritual practices and Daoist ideals of transcendence, these hagiographical writings offer a practical and illustrative complement to the theoretical frameworks found in the Daoist scriptures of Du Guangting.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on the historical and philosophical contributions of Du Guangting within Daoist studies. Although Du Guangting's extensive literary corpus is well documented, pinpointing the exact timeline of his works remains challenging. Recent studies have emphasized Du Guangting's role in the evolution of Daoist thought, as highlighted by scholars such as Franciscus Verellen, Sun Yiping 孫亦平, Kim T'ae-yong 金兌勇, Dong Enlin 董恩林 and Zhou Xibo 周西波[2].

In this paper, we uniquely integrate Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* with his hagiographical writings to explore the transformation of Daoist thought in the Late Tang period. Unlike the authors of previous studies, who treated these texts in isolation, we combine them to reveal how Du Guangting's work marks a significant development in Daoism, diverging from earlier Tang traditions. This approach provides new insights into how Du's synthesis of Daoist philosophy and cultural narratives contributed to the evolution of Daoist practices and intellectual life during this transformative era.

Du Guangting's work also reflects the intricate relationship between religion and culture during this period. According to Sun Yiping, the Tang Dynasty was a golden age for religious Daoism, marked by imperial patronage that elevated religious Daoism to its status as the imperial religion. This era saw significant advancements in Daoist philosophy with the integration of Daoist practices and state governance. The Daoist immortality cult became highly popular, with many seeking spiritual elevation through elixirs. However, the An Lushan Rebellion introduced challenges that necessitated a shift in Daoist practices. Du asserted that inner spiritual cultivation can lead to transcendence, and this inner work was intrinsically connected to effective governance (Sun 2018, pp. 1–15). His reinterpretations of Daoist texts demonstrate how religious beliefs and practices were deeply embedded within the cultural and socio-political fabric of the time. By examining these cultural interactions, we gain a deeper appreciation of the ways in which Daoist thought not only adapted to, but also influenced, the broader cultural context, highlighting the mutual influence between religion and culture during this transformative era.

In order to understand these contributions more comprehensively, we employ a textual and historical analysis approach in this study to examine Du Guangting's contribu-

tions to Daoism during the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. By investigating primary sources, such as *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* and *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies*, alongside secondary sources that explore the socio-political context and the evolution of Daoist practices, we aim to bridge the gap between written scriptures and actual practices of the period. Drawing on the work of scholars like Kohn (2001) and Li (2010), who highlight the disparity between textual records and practical application, we critically assess the extent to which new Daoist theories on transcendence were reflected in the lived experiences of Late Tang adepts. This comprehensive analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how Du Guangting's interpretations contributed to the broader trends in Daoist thought and practice during this transformative period.

Our aim in this article is to dissect the nuances of Du Guangting's interpretations, as well as his pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Daoist thought. By examining his systematic and historical analyses, we can appreciate how his contributions not only reveal the complex development of Daoist theoretical structures but also highlight significant religious transformations during the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, Du Guangting challenged the conventional belief that transcendence could be attained solely through the ingestion of elixirs. By emphasizing the necessity of self-cultivation and merit accumulation, he redefined the approach to spiritual elevation, steering it towards a more integrated religious and philosophical framework, a shift which is crucial to understanding the broader trends in Tang Dynasty Daoism, as the synthesis of diverse doctrines significantly enriched and expanded Daoist religious and intellectual life.

2. Early Daoism and Du Guangting's Catalogue of the Commentaries on *Daodejing*

If we look back in history, we realize that Confucianism and Daoism have had the greatest influences on later generations among the Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家, from the 6th century B.C.E. to 221 B.C.E.). Among the Daoist works, the most influential is undoubtedly Laozi's *Daodejing*. Although philosophical Daoism declined as a School of Thought after the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E.–9 C.E., 25–220 C.E.), its ideas were preserved by generations of scholars through the commentaries and interpretations of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, as well as other works of Daoism[3], which had profound impacts on Chinese culture. For example, in the article 'From the Mysterious Studies of China's early medieval period to the Twofold Mystery School of the Early Tang Dynasty', Prof. Tang Yijie 湯一介 suggests that "investigating the commentaries on *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* by generations of scholars is the pivotal issue for a comprehensive understanding of the development of Chinese philosophy" (Chen 1992, p. 21).

Consequently, the worship of Laozi and the *Daodejing* became a major part of early Daoist religious beliefs; however, in the process of history, Laozi, the *Daodejing*, and religious Daoism have been unified as a trinity. For this reason, the term "Laozi Studies" (老學) is conventionally regarded as a synonym for the philosophy of Daoism in Chinese history (Mou 1999, p. 96). If "Laozi Studies is a systematic discipline based on the thought of Laozi" (Xiong et al. 1997, p. 518), then the Daoist interpretation of the *Daodejing* during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which can be divided into four distinct stages, provided the theoretical impetus for its continued renewal through the exegetical method in the Tang Dynasty.

In its initial stage, the *Daodejing* was regarded as a manual for internal cultivation and achieving immortality. The most widely circulated commentary during this period was the version attributed to Heshang Gong 河上公, which was closely aligned with the ideas presented in the *Sectional Explanation* (節解). The second stage saw the *Daodejing* being interpreted through the lens of Buddhist thought, with Cheng Xuanying 成玄英's *Commentary on Laozi* (老子疏) being a representative work of this phase. In the third stage, interpretations of the *Daodejing* emphasized both internal cultivation and external governance. Some works linked self-cultivation to the quest for immortality, such as Li Rong 李榮's *Commentary on Laozi* (老子注), while others promoted the ideals of a clear mind

and minimal desires, as seen in Emperor Xuanzong's *Commentary on the Daodejing* (道德經注疏). Regarding governance, some interpretations advocated for the principles of non-action and tranquility, such as those by Li Rong, Emperor Xuanzong, and Li Yue 李约's *New Commentary on Laozi* (老子新注). Additionally, there were attempts to interpret Laozi's teachings through Confucian principles, as exemplified by Lu Xisheng 陸希聲's *Commentary of the True Scripture of the Dao and the De* (道德真經傳). This third stage was the longest and most significant period of Daoist *Daodejing* interpretation. The fourth stage occurred during the Late Tang Dynasty, marked by Du Guangting's work *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* (道德真經廣聖義), which primarily focused on using Laozi's teachings to discuss physical immortality.

Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* is a significant work in Daoist philosophy, as it reflects Du's comprehensive understanding of Daoist texts, as well as his efforts to synthesize Daoist practices with governance principles. Kim T'ae-yong's analysis emphasizes the importance of this commentary in the context of Tang Dynasty Daoism, highlighting Du's role in advancing Daoist thought (Kim 2005, pp. 1–3). Similarly, Sun Yiping asserts that this work is not merely a commentary on the *Daodejing*, but a significant elaboration of his own Daoist philosophical and theoretical system (Sun 2018, p. 73). Together, these scholars illustrate how Du Guangting uses this work to demonstrate his profound understanding of Daoist classics and his unique contributions to their interpretation and development.

The structure of *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* differs from that of typical commentaries on the *Daodejing*; in addition to quoting and interpreting the original text of the *Daodejing*, this work also references and analyzes Emperor Xuanzong's *Commentary on the Daodejing*. The content of *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* is broadly divided into two parts. The first part primarily discusses the *Daodejing* as a text and Laozi as its author, with this material found in the Preface section (Volumes 1–5). The second part addresses the philosophical ideas of the *Daodejing* and is contained within the commentary on the text itself (Volumes 6–50).

In the Preface of Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, there is a well-documented catalog of the commentaries and annotations on the *Daodejing*, which can give us many helpful hints. This catalog provides a comprehensive summary of more than sixty commentaries and annotations on Laozi's work, spanning from the Han to the Tang Dynasties. To present this information more clearly and accessibly, we have reorganized the list as follows (Du 2020, pp. 3–9):

1. *Sectional Explanation* (節解), interpreted by Lord Lao (老君) and Yinxi (尹喜)—two volumes;
2. *Xiang'er Commentary* (想爾注), attributed to the Celestial Master Zhang Daoling (張道陵)—two volumes;
3. *Chapters and Phrases of Laozi by The Elder upon the River* (河上公章句), by Heshang Gong (河上公)—two volumes;
4. *Return to the True Scripture* (指歸) by Yan Junping (嚴君平)—14 volumes;
5. *Commentary by Wang Bi* (王弼), courtesy name Fusi (輔嗣)—four volumes;
6. *Commentary by He Yan* (何晏), courtesy name Pingshu (平叔)—four volumes;
7. *Commentary by Guo Xiang* (郭象), courtesy name Zixuan (子玄)—four volumes;
8. *Commentary by Zhong Hui* (鍾會), courtesy name Shiji (士季)—two volumes;
9. *Commentary by Sun Deng* (孫登), courtesy name Gong He (公和)—four volumes;
10. *Commentary by Yang Hu* (羊祜), courtesy name Shu Zi (叔子)—four volumes;
11. *Commentary by Kumārajīva* (鳩摩羅什), a foreigner from the West who entered China from the Yumen Pass (玉門關) during the reign of Fu Jian (符堅)—two volumes;
12. *Commentary by Fotudeng* (佛圖澄), a monk from the West during the Later Zhao period (後趙)—two volumes;
13. *Commentary by Sengzhao* (僧肇) during the Jin Dynasty—four volumes;

14. *Commentary by Tao Hongjing* (陶弘景), art name Master Zhenbai (貞白先生), during the Liang Dynasty (梁朝)—four volumes;
15. *Commentary by Lu Yu* (盧裕) from Fangyang (范陽), art name White-haired Elder (白頭翁)—two volumes;
16. *Commentary by Liu Renhui* (劉仁會) from Liang County, Yi State (伊州梁縣)—two volumes;
17. *Commentary by Gu Huan* (顧歡), a hermit from Wu County (吳郡), courtesy name Jing Yi (景怡)—four volumes;
18. *Commentary by Transcendent Songling* (松靈仙人), who lived in seclusion on Mt. Qingxi (青溪山)—unknown number of volumes;
19. *Commentary by Pei Chu'en* (裴楚恩), from Hedong (河東) during the Jin Dynasty—two volumes;
20. *Commentary by Du Bi* (杜弼) from the Capital (京兆)—two volumes;
21. *Commentary by Zhang Ping* (張憑) from Henan (河南), courtesy name Changzong (長宗)—four volumes;
22. *Commentary by Emperor Wu of Liang* (梁武帝) by Xiao Yan (蕭衍)—four volumes;
23. *Commentary by Emperor Jianwen of Liang* (梁簡文帝) by Xiao Gang (蕭綱)—10 volumes;
24. *Commentary by Zhang Si* (張嗣) from Qinghe (清河)—four volumes;
25. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Zang Xuanjing* (臧玄靜), courtesy name Daozong (道宗), during the Liang Dynasty—four volumes;
26. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Meng Anpai* (孟安排), called Meng Senior (大孟), during the Liang Dynasty—two volumes;
27. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Meng Zhi Zhou* (孟智周), called Meng Junior, during the Liang Dynasty—five volumes;
28. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Dou Lue* (竇略) during the Liang Dynasty—four volumes;
29. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Zhu Rou* (諸糅) during the Chen Dynasty—six volumes;
30. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Liu Jinxi* (劉進喜) during the Sui Dynasty—six volumes;
31. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Li Fan* (李播) during the Sui Dynasty—two volumes;
32. *Commentary by Fu Yi* (傅奕), the Imperial Court Historian during the Tang Dynasty—two volumes;
33. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Wei Zheng* (魏徵), from Mt. Song (嵩山) during the Tang Dynasty—five volumes;
34. *Commentary by Daoist Ritual Master Song Wenming* (宋文明)—five volumes;
35. *Commentary by Transcendent Hu Chao* (胡超)—10 volumes;
36. *Commentary by Daoist Monk An Qiu* (安丘)—five volumes;
37. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Yin Wencao* (尹文操)—five volumes;
38. *Commentary by Daoist Ritual Master Wei Jie* (韋節)—four volumes;
39. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Wang Xuanbian* (王玄辯)—10 volumes;
40. *Commentary by Imperial Advisor Yin Xi* (尹惜), The Master of Temple Su Ming—15 volumes;
41. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Xu Miao* (徐邈)—four volumes;
42. *Commentary by Daoist Monk He Siyuan* (何思遠)—two volumes;
43. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Xue Jichang* (薛季昌) from Mt. Heng (衡山)—10 volumes;
44. *Commentary by Master Hongyuan* (洪源先生) from Wang Xi (王襲)—two volumes;
45. *Commentary by Daoist Ritual Master Zhao Jian* (趙堅)—six volumes;
46. *Commentary by Crown Prince's Advisor Yang Shangshan* (楊上善), during the reign of Emperor Gaozong during the Tang Dynasty—20 volumes;
47. *Commentary by Ministry Official Jia Zhi* (賈至)—11 volumes;
48. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Che Bi* (車弼)—seven volumes;
49. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Li Rong* (李榮)—two volumes;
50. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Li Yuanxing* (黎元興) from Chengdu (成都)—four volumes;
51. *Commentary by Wang Guangting* (王光庭) from Taiyuan (太原)—two volumes;
52. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Zhang Huichao* (張惠超)—four volumes;

53. *Commentary by Daoist Ritual Master Gong* (龔法師)—four volumes;
54. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Ren Taixuan* (任太玄) from Tongyi County (通義郡)—two volumes;
55. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Master Chongxu* (沖虛先生)—five volumes;
56. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Zhang Junxiang* (張君相) from Mt. Min (岷山)—four volumes;
57. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Cheng Xuanying* (成玄英)—six volumes;
58. *Commentary by Han Province's Governor Wang Zhen* (漢州刺史王真)—two volumes;
59. *Commentary by Daoist Monk Fu Shaoming* (符少明)—two volumes;
60. *Commentary by Emperor Xuan Zong* (唐玄宗)—two volumes, with six volumes of explanation and annotation (講疏).

If we reconsider it from textual and philological perspectives, we will find that Du Guangting's catalog of the commentaries on the *Daodejing* exceeds those recorded by the *Old Book of Tang* (the section on Classics) 舊唐書·經籍志 and the *New Book of Tang* (the section on Literature) 新唐書·藝文志 during the Song Dynasty, in terms of both type and number. Moreover, Du's record also surpasses the number of commentaries on the *Daodejing* included in the *Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon* 道藏 during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The "Section of Supreme Mystery" (太玄部) in the Ming version of the *Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon*, with over fifty and over three hundred titles and volumes, respectively, contains mainly Laozi's *Daodejing* and various commentaries on and interpretations of it, including all we know today (Zhu 1996) and showing that, as time passed, many of the exegetical and hermeneutic works on Laozi were lost for various reasons. However, the abundant information revealed in Du's catalog provides important information for our studies on the transformation of Daoism during the Tang Dynasty.

3. Analysis of the Comprehensive Scope of Du Guangting's Catalog

Although there have been numerous summaries and catalogs on the *Daodejing* and its commentaries, mainstream research often concentrates on pinpointing a single "correct" interpretation of this work, with limited acknowledgment of its extensive exegetical background and historical diversity. The primary concern is the "original" text and its "original" meaning.

However, Du Guangting's studies on Laozi 老學 provide a valuable alternative, by emphasizing the cultural and historical significance of the many commentaries on the classic. Du Guangting's comprehensive approach has further encouraged an understanding of the religious terms "Daoism" and "Laozi Studies" that is both syncretic, in the sense of integrating multiple traditions, and cultural, in reflecting their broader significance within the cultural fabric.

Firstly, the sixty or so scripture commentators recorded by Du Guangting have diverse identities. Two-thirds of them are Daoist monks, and the rest are hermits (such as Yan Junping 嚴君平 and Sun Deng 孫登), Buddhist monks (such as Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, Fotudeng 佛圖澄, and Seng Zhao 僧肇), philosophers of Mysterious Learning (such as Wang Bi 王弼, He Yan 何晏, and Guo Xiang 郭象), imperial officials (such as Fu Yi 傅奕, Wei Zheng 魏征, and Jia Zhi 賈至), and monarchs (such as Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝, Emperor Jianwen of Liang 梁簡文帝, and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗); this suggests that the protagonists leading the development of thought from the Han to the Tang Dynasties were Daoist scholars. The religious interpretations and hermeneutic studies of Laozi's doctrine by Daoist scholars laid the theoretical foundations for Daoist belief, and this trend undoubtedly became the principal method for the following ideological developments, from the Han to the Tang Dynasties. Moreover, individuals with various social identities and different cultural backgrounds also participated in the exegetical and hermeneutic movement related to Laozi, which, in turn, demonstrates that the commentary on and annotation of the *Daodejing* is not simply the prerogative of religious Daoism.

Secondly, Du Guangting pointed out that all generations of these commentators on the *Daodejing*, from the Han to the Tang Dynasties, had their specific intents and meanings.

"They each provide different reasons for their purports; some of them are well acquainted with the theory of the Twofold Mystery and did not stick to the debate between Being and Nonbeing, some of them indulge themselves in the principle of Karma and the three ages of Buddhism, some of them combine it with Confucianism, and some of them want to return to the Buddhist emptiness. All of them compete for exploring the gorgeous room and capturing the stunning pearl; all of them compete to climb the Bell Mountain and to see the treasure" (Du 2020, p. 9). Du Guangting believed that the source of the issue is that the text of the *Daodejing* contains abundant meanings and rich content; thus, the later generations' commentators would have had sufficient condition and possibility for expanding their ideas. He said,

"The exalted *Daodejing* contains diverse meanings and intents that point to different positions and viewpoints. Heshang Gong 河上公 and Yan Junping 嚴君平 both know how to govern the State; Transcendent Songling 松靈仙人, Sun Deng 孫登 of the Wei State, Hermit Tao 陶隱居 of the Liang Dynasty and Gu Huan 顧歡 of the Southern Qi period all know how to take care of the body; Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 during the reign of Fu Jian 符堅, Tu Cheng 圖澄 during the Later Zhao period, Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 and Daoist monk Dou Liao 竇略 during the Liang Dynasty all know the principle of Karma and the reasons in all things; Daoist monks like Meng Zhizhou 孟智周 and Zang Xuanjing 臧玄靜 during the Liang Dynasty, Zhu Rou 諸糅 during the Chen Dynasty, Liu Jinxi 劉進喜 during the Sui Dynasty, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, Cai Zihuang 蔡子晃, Huang Xuanze 黃玄賾, Li Rong 李榮, Che Xuanbi 車玄弼, Zhang Huichao 張惠超 and Li Yuanxing 黎元興 during the Tang Dynasty all know the learning of Twofold Mystery; He Yan 何晏, Zhong Hui 鐘會, Du Yuankai 杜元凱, Wang Fusi 王輔嗣, Zhang Si 張嗣, Yang Hu 羊祜, Lu Shi 盧氏 and Liu Renhui 劉仁會 all know the way of Ultimate Emptiness, Non-Action and the governance of family and State. Accordingly, different aims and intentions are revealed by different commentators' interpretations" (Du 2020, p. 94).

Through the above inference, different aims and intentions are revealed by different commentators' interpretations, as drawn by Du Guangting, who replied to the question of why Daoism began to be divided into the Daoism School 道家派 (Philosophical School), Daoist School 道教派 (Religious School), Mysterious School 玄學派, Buddhist School 佛學派, Twofold Mystery School 重玄派, etc., between the Han and the Tang Dynasties. According to Du's explanation, this cultural phenomenon was due to the specific knowledge backgrounds and cultural perspectives of all the scholars in history who performed hermeneutic studies on Laozi; on the basis of their own understandings, the various 'meanings and ideas' of the *Daodejing* were interpreted and represented. However, Du Guangting further points out that his judgement that different aims and intentions are revealed by different commentators does not mean that their works are often arbitrary, rather than based on fixed criteria, as the exegetical research was always simultaneously related to both the specific mentoring relationships and the different Schools of Thought. He continued,

"In addition, their mentoring relationships and ideological aims were quite different: Yan Junping was based on the principle of Mysterious Vacuity 虛玄; Gu Huan on the principle of Non-Action 無為; Meng Zhizhou and Zang Xuanjing on the principle of the Dao and the De 道德; Emperor Wu of Liang on the principle of Neither Existence Nor Non-existence 非有非無; Sun Deng is based on the principle the Twofold Mystery 重玄. Among the above Schools of thought, Sun Deng's is the best and most wondrous" (Du 2020, p. 94).

It should be noted that the Early Tang Daoist scholar Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–655) made a similar evaluation: "As for interpreting and explaining the classic scriptures, one ought to grasp the aims and intentions. Moreover, all the commentaries and annotations in history are different in their own understanding. For instance, the core concept of Yan Junping's *Return to the True Scripture* 指歸 is Mysterious Vacuity, Gu Huijun's *Tanggao* 堂誥 on Non-action, Meng Zhizhou and Zang Xuanjing on Virtue, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty on 'Neither Existence nor Non-existence,' and Sun Deng of the Jin Dynasty on the Twofold Mystery. Today, in spite of such different focuses, we consider Sun Deng's work as orthodox" (Cheng 1981, p. 546). Cheng Xuanying was a prominent

Daoist scholar in the Early Tang Dynasty, known for his extensive commentaries on Daoist texts. His works significantly shaped the understanding of Daoist philosophy during this period, by emphasizing the need to grasp the intentions behind the scriptures (Assandri 2021, pp. 1–32). Du Guangting might have been referring to Cheng Xuanying's statement in specifically choosing the terms "Mysterious Vacuity 虛玄", "Non-Action 無為", "the Dao and the De 道德", "Neither Existence nor Non-existence 非有非無", and "Twofold Mystery 重玄" to define the ideological belongings of each School, which objectively describes the reality of philosophical Daoism's theoretical development toward multiple directions from the Han to the Tang Dynasties.

Thirdly, it should be noted that, since the commentaries on the *Daodejing* are numerous and from so many authors, Du Guangting's record might have some errors; for example, the chronological records of some commentators' dates and ages are inaccurate, such as that of Meng Anpai. In addition, Du did not clearly indicate the titles and volume numbers of the commentaries by Transcendent Song Ling, Wang Bi, He Yan, Zhong Hui, Guo Xiang, Sun Deng, etc. Moreover, the information of several commentators' identities is suspect; for example, Du Guangting argues of the Hermit Sun Deng, 'his courtesy name is Gong He and lived during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Ming of Wei'. Cheng Xuanying, who lived before Du Guangting, had already pointed out that "Sun Deng lived in the Jin Dynasty and he considered the Twofold Mystery as the main idea" (Cheng 1981, p. 546). Prof. Meng Wentong 蒙文通argued that "the reason why Du Guangting mistakenly believed that Sun Deng lived in the period of Wei State is because he confused him with another homonymous Sun Deng, who had the mentor Su with Ji Kang 嵇康 and Ruan Ji 阮籍. This is a serious mistake. Sun Deng, who had annotated the Book of *Laozi*, was from the Eastern Jin Dynasty" (Meng 1980). Lu Guolong 盧國龍, following the path of Prof. Meng Wentong, asserts that Du Guangting confused the Hermit Sun Deng of the Wei State with another Sun Deng of the Jin Dynasty, who emphasized the concept of Twofold Mystery (Lu 1993, p. 2). However, the Korean scholar Choi Jin-cheol says, in his article 'A Brief Discussion on Sun Deng', "There are two main reasons why Du Guangting could not have mistaken Sun Deng of the Eastern Jin Dynasty for Sun Deng of the Wei. First, in his record on the Hermit Sun Deng, Du Guangting explicitly said, 'his courtesy name is Gong He and lived during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Ming of Wei.' Second, Du Guangting regarded Sun Deng's 'core idea' as 'the way to take care of the body', which is in fact the same as Sun Deng's emphasis on 'the way to protect the body' in the dialogues with Ji Kang 嵇康" (Chen 1992, p. 132).

However, what is the historical reality? Due to the lack of sufficient evidence from historical materials, this academic problem is still controversial and needs further textual research. All of the abovementioned issues remind us to distinguish the accuracy of Du Guangting's record before citing his work.

4. Du Guangting, Xuanzong, and the Diverging Daoist Philosophies on Self-Cultivation and Governance

Religious Daoism saw a golden age during the Tang Dynasty, with significant support from the ruling Li family, who venerated Laozi and integrated philosophical Daoism into political, social, and cultural spheres. Daoists, in turn, supported the ruling family, predicting their descendants' rule. Du Guangting's catalog ends with the two-volume *Dao and the De* 道德, which is annotated by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 (685–762). On the one hand, it reflects Du's admiration for the highest governor of the Tang Dynasty; on the other hand, it also implies that the numerous commentaries on the *Daodejing* emerged after the Middle Tang had already adopted a different paradigm. Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* is a continuation of the writing of Emperor Xuanzong. Du Guangting's original purpose was to carry forward the "Most Sacred Religion" through the "Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary", and he expected the return to tradition. Du Guangting's work reflects this adaptation, integrating various philosophical elements to maintain Daoism's

relevance; this work reflects Du's comprehensive understanding of Daoist texts and his efforts to synthesize Daoist practices with governance principles.

One of the most notable characteristics of Emperor Xuanzong's *Commentary on the Daodejing* is the extensive interpretation of the text as a theory of imperial governance, reflecting a pronounced political bias. This is evident in the following three main ways: Firstly, terms within the *Daodejing*, such as "sage" (聖人), "gentleman" (君子), "man" (人), and "great man" (大丈夫) are consistently interpreted to mean "emperor". Secondly, the annotations frequently use political terminology, including "non-action" (無為), "emperor" (帝王), "ruler" (仁君), "sovereign" (仁主), "governing the world" (理天下), and "governing the state" (理國), with titles like "ruler", "marquis and king", and "sovereign" appearing over 200 times. Thirdly, passages in the *Daodejing* that were not originally intended as theories of governance are reinterpreted as such.

Following Emperor Xuanzong's commentary, religious Daoism increasingly developed towards becoming a state religion, shifting from its traditional focus on immortality and transcendence to an emphasis on moral self-cultivation. This evolution brought Daoist thought more closely in line with Confucian political philosophy. For instance, Lu Xisheng's endorsement of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism as complementary teachings highlights the growing influence of Confucian thought within philosophical Daoism. This influence extended beyond the adoption of specific Confucian virtues, such as loyalty, filial piety, integrity, and righteousness, leading to a convergence of core doctrines, including the alignment of human behavior with natural law, governance of the state, and self-cultivation through the mind and the restoration of nature.

However, this developmental trend posed a significant risk for religious Daoism, potentially reducing it to an outer shell of its former self, while its essence or soul transformed into a form of Confucianism—a process metaphorically described as "liberation by corpse" (屍解). In response, Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* represents a concerted effort to resist this assimilation and preserve religious Daoism's foundational doctrines, particularly those concerning immortality and transcendence.

In his commentary on the *Daodejing*, Emperor Xuanzong once stated, "The essence of governing the state is nothing more than governing oneself". In other words, the key to governing the state lies in self-cultivation, although he did not elevate "self-cultivation" to a fundamental principle. In contrast, Du Guangting, in his *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, explicitly proposed that "the foundation of governing the state lies in self-cultivation". He asserted, "It is unheard of for the body to be well-governed while the state is not", "Knowing how to govern oneself leads to knowing how to govern the state", and "The sage governs by observing himself; when the body is upright, the entire world is upright; when the body is well-governed, the entire world is well-governed" (Du 2020, p. 134).

In contrast to Xuanzong's politically focused interpretations, Du Guangting's work consistently adheres to the principle of "self-cultivation and governance" (修身理國) in his interpretations of both the *Daodejing* and Xuanzong's commentary. Regardless of whether the original text or commentary contains meanings related to self-cultivation or governance, Du Guangting invariably interprets them through these dual lenses. Concepts such as "governing the body and governing the state" (理身理國), "governing the state and governing the body" (理國理身), and "self-cultivation and governance" (修身理國) permeate *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, a phenomenon then unprecedented in commentaries on Laozi (Du 2020, p. 580). As Dong Enlin observes, "Cheng Xuanying regarded the *Daodejing* as a Daoist manual for self-cultivation, while Emperor Xuanzong treated it as a political philosophy for state governance… Du Guangting rejected these extreme interpretations and repositioned the *Daodejing* within the framework of 'governing the body and the state'" (Dong 2002, pp. 274–78). Although Du Guangting's work centers on this dual principle, its ultimate goal is to elevate the importance of "governing the body" within the broader framework.

Moreover, while Du Guangting emphasizes moral and spiritual self-cultivation, he views these practices not as ends in themselves but as methods for achieving a complete transformation of both body and spirit, ultimately leading to immortality and transcendence. By employing concepts from Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism in his interpretation of the *Daodejing*, Du Guangting seeks to integrate these teachings, yet his interpretations remain firmly rooted in Daoist principles, resisting complete assimilation into Confucian ideology. In his interpretation of Daoist philosophy, Du Guangting posits that the terms "Dao" (道) and "De" (德) in the *Daodejing* pertain to the "source of the generation and nourishment of all things" (道德生畜之源) and the "profound principles for governing the state and cultivating the self" (經國理身之妙) (Du 2020, p. 21). The "source of the generation and nourishment of all things" refers to the origin of the creation and existence of all things in the cosmos; the "profound principles for governing the state" relate to the rules by which the emperor and lords govern the state; and the "profound principles for cultivating the self" pertain to the ways in which both monks and laypeople cultivate themselves. In summary, the concepts of "Dao" and "De" encompass the esoteric meanings of the natural world, humanity, and the realm of immortals. Consequently, Du Guangting's Daoist philosophical system, as established in his exegesis of Laozi, revolves around these two central themes.

Therefore, it is evident that, during the period of Daoist development and the transformation of Daoist thought during the Tang Dynasty, the classical commentaries on the *Daodejing* played a crucial role. From Emperor Xuanzong's *Imperial Annotations and Commentaries* to Du Guangting's *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, these exegetical texts served this purpose effectively. As Du Guangting pointed out in the Preface to the first volume in the section, titled 'General Meaning and Explanatory Notes on the Scripture' (敘經大意解疏序引), "The *Daodejing* is the profound essence of heaven and earth. It encompasses the Dao of heaven, the Dao of humanity, and the Dao of the divine, embracing the vast and the minute; thus, it is to be revered" (Du 2020, p. 21).

Building on Du Guangting's framework, the allure of achieving transcendence significantly boosted the popularity of elixir ingestion among those seeking spiritual elevation, a trend persistent throughout the Tang Dynasty (Pregadio 2006, pp. 7–9). Wang Yongping's 王永平 recent book, *Beliefs and Customs: Tang Dynasty Daoism from the Perspective of Socio-Cultural History* (信仰與習俗—社會文化史視野下的唐代道教), provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of Tang attitudes toward transcendence. According to Wang, the quest for immortality peaked during the Tang Dynasty, with everyone from emperors to commoners engaging in Daoist cultivation and longevity techniques. This period was marked by a distinctive vogue for immortality lore, documented through narratives of immortals and feats of Daoist priests, alchemists, and practitioners (Wang 2023, pp. 16–93).

This pursuit, however, was not without its complications. As Kirkland (1997, p. 97) points out, the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion (安史之乱, 755–763 AD) revealed that official records and scholarly writings began to show growing hostility toward certain Daoist practitioners, especially those skilled in alchemical practices.

Although it is not accurate to claim that Daoist ideas and practices began to wane in popularity following the An Lushan Rebellion, the dynamics within Daoist communities were undoubtedly evolving, partly due to the fact that attributing the political upheaval after the ninth century solely to elixir ingestion was insufficient. Consequently, political leaders and scholars of the time found substantial grounds to link the failures of the dynasty to certain deceitful Daoist practitioners and their alchemical activities. Meanwhile, Confucianism extended its political control by actively intervening in societal activities through state power.

Possibly influenced by these circumstances, Du Guangting chose to pursue a new direction. In contrast to Emperor Xuanzong's approach, which involved reforming and promoting religious Daoism through imperial power, Du Guangting engaged in discourse by drawing on spontaneous social forces. We might say that, as a knowledgeable practitioner,

Du Guangting also held a certain degree of control over societal resources in a formal sense. Clearly, this was not merely an academic development, nor a dialogue and integration of scholarship and religion; rather, it could be seen as a conscious discursive shift.

The significance of the shift led by Du Guangting may be understood as follows: due to its decline in political influence, religious Daoism was compelled to turn towards a focus on personal cultivation and the religious pursuit of immortality and transcendence. This shift was further emphasized by Du Guangting's deep engagement with concepts such as the "heart-mind" (*xin* 心), "nature" (*xing* 性), "emotion" (*qing* 情), and "knowledge" (*zhi* 知). His introspective method, aimed at achieving transcendence through the refinement of one's inner consciousness, marked a significant evolution in Daoist thought during the Tang Dynasty.

At birth, all humans are endowed with the Dao-nature (道性), which is inherently pure and untainted. However, after birth, this Dao-nature begins to deviate, gradually becoming "stained by worldly dust" and "obscured within the heart-mind", leading to the loss of the true Dao. Du Guangting referred to this deviation as emotion (情), which shifts one towards being (有), while returning emotion to its original state brings one back to non-being (無). The process of "restraining emotions" → "returning to nature" → "reuniting with the Dao" thus represents a journey from being to non-being. Regarding how one can "reunite with the Dao" or "conform to the Dao", Du Guangting stated:

"The Dharma-nature is inherently pure and in harmony with the Dao. The Dao divides its primordial energy and gives life to humans. The spiritual abode and wisdom-nature were originally pure, but after birth, various desires stain and disturb this true nature, causing a departure from the Dao. Those who are skilled in self-cultivation close off the six desires, calm the five emotions, eliminate perceived phenomena, and extinguish external appearances. By emptying the spiritual platform within and seeking the true nature, they can return to the original purity" (Du 2020, p. 360).

In this context, Dharma-nature (法性) and wisdom-nature (智性) refer to the true, immutable, and omnipresent nature of the Dao, while spiritual abode (靈府) and spiritual platform (靈台) metaphorically represent the human heart-mind. The six desires (六欲) and five emotions (五情) arise from the six roots (六根) and five desires (五欲) of humans, corrupting this true nature and causing a drift away from the Dao. To restore one's original purity, one must eliminate these false emotions, empty the heart-mind internally, and seek out the true nature.

Du Guangting's approach underscores a profound understanding of the relationship between the Dao and human nature, emphasizing self-cultivation and the refinement of the heart-mind as the path to achieving unity with the Dao. His evolving ideas laid the groundwork for a deeper exploration of the heart-mind's role in achieving spiritual liberation and returning to purity and tranquility (清靜).

In *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, Du Guangting describes the highest state of cultivating the body as the "realm of Twofold Mystery" (重玄之境). This "realm of Twofold Mystery" refers to a state of spiritual liberation, in which one transcends both internal and external distinctions. The Twofold Mystery (重玄) School, represented by Du Guangting in the Late Tang period, built upon the earlier Neo-Daoist Metaphysics (玄學) tradition, which is particularly associated with the Wei–Jin period. This tradition incorporated the dialogue between foreign Buddhism and indigenous Chinese thought and critically reflected on the limitations of Neo-Daoist Metaphysics' discourse on the heart-mind and, through discussions on governing the body and the state, supplemented the connection between inner moral nature and the external ideal of political personhood. Indirectly, the Twofold Mystery's theoretical reflection on the heart-mind influenced the development of Neo-Confucianist discourse on the heart-mind during the Song and Ming Dynasties, enabling a dialogue and integration between Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist theories of the heart-mind.

5. The Process of Attaining Transcendence and the Interior Path of Du Guangting

Religious Daoism venerates the concept of immortals, ordinary individuals who achieve transcendence through rigorous cultivation. For practitioners aiming to become immortals and attain longevity in this world, it is essential that both the soul and the body—the spirit and the form—remain healthy and in harmony. From its inception, religious Daoism linked the belief in immortals, derived from various occult practices, with the Daoist theory of the relationship between form and spirit. This theory provided the doctrinal foundation for the belief in immortality, asserting that, as long as form and spirit remain united without separation or destruction, the possibility of achieving immortality is significantly increased.

Building on these foundational ideas first articulated by earlier Daoist adepts such as Ge Hong (葛洪, 283–343), a prominent figure in Chinese Daoism renowned for his extensive contributions to Daoist philosophy and alchemy, Du Guangting further developed these concepts. Ge Hong, in his work *He Who Holds to Simplicity* (*Baopuzi* 抱樸子), classified longevity medicines into different categories based on their effectiveness (Penny 2000, p. 114). Drawing from these insights, Du Guangting advanced the notion that, while physicians primarily apply longevity techniques to restore health, Daoist practitioners like himself and Ge Hong view them as preliminary steps toward transforming the mortal body into a transcendent state (Engelhardt 2000, p. 100).

Du Guangting believed that "the life of the body" is the result of "relying on the Dao and receiving the spirit to give form to the body" (Du 2020, p. 766). "Spirit" (*shen* 神) refers to the subtle interaction of yin and yang; "form" (*xing* 形) refers to the substance of yin; and "pneuma" (*qi* 氣) refers to the vitality of yang. Once the human body (*xing* 形) is born, it operates through "spirit" (*shen* 神) and moves by means of "pneuma" (*qi* 氣). If the "spirit" (*shen* 神) and "pneuma" (*qi* 氣) are intact, life continues; if the "spirit" (*shen* 神) and "pneuma" (*qi* 氣) are depleted, death ensues. Additionally, "form" (*xing* 形) is the dwelling of the "spirit" (*shen* 神), and "spirit" (*shen* 神) is the master of the "form" (*xing* 形). Therefore, when practicing religious Daoism, one must cultivate both form and spirit (*shen* 神). Du Guangting said, "When people practice the Dao, they must externally fortify their form (*xing* 形) to preserve existence and internally maintain their spirit (*shen* 神) to uphold the void. Gradually aligning with the profound void, one can unite with the Dao and achieve longevity" (Du 2020, p. 201). Du Guangting further elaborated, "To preserve the form (*xing* 形), one must cultivate the body and nourish the spirit (*shen* 神), thereby allowing the form (*xing* 形) to endure; however, if the form (*xing* 形) is overworked, and the spirit (*shen* 神) is exhausted, the spirit (*shen* 神) will no longer remain. The spirit (*shen* 神) is born from the Dao, and is sustained by the form (*xing* 形). Only when both spirit (*shen* 神) and form (*xing* 形) are fully integrated can one achieve the Dao and attain immortality" (Du 2020, p. 519).

In his commentary on the *Daodejing*, Du Guangting cites the *Book of Changes* to illustrate this point, as follows: "All the ten thousand things are generated from Non-existence, and all forms are established from the Dao. First, there is the Dao, then there is the form. The Dao is above the form, and the form is below the Dao. Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] says: 'What is above the form is called the Dao; what is below the form is called an object.' Although the form dwells on the boundary between the domains of Dao and the objects, the form is above the objects and is not in the Dao. Only when there are form and matter can there be the use of an object. Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] says: 'What is below the form is called an object.'" (Du 2020, p. 200). This explains why form must be transcended in order to attain the Dao, as form is intermediate between the objects and the Dao but belongs to the realm of the objects (Pregadio 2004).

Expanding on these foundational ideas, Du Guangting introduced a nuanced distinction in his works. He identified the divine elixir (*shendan* 神丹) as a substance obtained through the accumulation of merit, which facilitates transcendental transformation. In contrast, he referred to elixir pills (*danhua* 丹華) as medicinal aids focused on maintaining health. This clear demarcation between the objectives of longevity and transcendence

reflects a significant advancement in the Daoist tradition, demonstrating how Du Guangting's innovations evolved from and expanded upon Ge Hong's earlier efforts.

Kim T'ae-yong's philosophical studies on Du Guangting illuminate the essential concepts of the "interconnectedness of life" (*tongsheng* 通生) and the "dual cultivation of spirit and body" (*shenxing shuangxiu* 神形雙修) from *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De*, providing deeper insight into Du's approach to achieving transcendence. "Tongsheng" underscores the interconnectedness of all life, advocating a holistic approach to cultivation that seeks harmony with the natural world. Du Guangting emphasized that the way of life's interconnectedness lies in the unity of the myriad things and the harmony between humans and the universe (Kim 2005, pp. 122–29). Furthermore, according to Kim, Du Guangting posited that spiritual refinement and physical health are inseparable in the pursuit of Daoist transcendence. Specifically, the path of cultivating truth requires both spirit (*shen* 神) and form (*xing* 形), as well as both internal and external cultivation. This approach integrates meditation, moral conduct, and physical practices to achieve a harmonious state of being (Kim 2005, pp. 166–71).

To fully grasp Du Guangting's influence on Daoist thought, it is essential to understand how he blended philosophical interpretations with ritualistic practices. This integrated perspective highlights Du Guangting's role in continuing and evolving Daoist thought, reflecting his contributions to the adaptability and resilience of Daoism during the Tang and Five Dynasties period. While the philosophical and textual analyses of Du Guangting's works provide critical insight into his theories, they do not fully capture the practical applications and lived experiences of those seeking transcendence. To bridge this gap, it is necessary to examine his *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* (仙傳拾遺)[4], a work that, despite being one of Du Guangting's lesser known hagiographies, and having faced significant loss during the Yuan-Ming transition, offers invaluable insights into the Daoist pursuit of transcendence.

Unlike his other works, such as *Biographies of Transcendents of the Wang Family* (Wangshi shenxian zhuan 王氏神仙傳) and *Records of Assembled Transcendents of Yongcheng* (Yongcheng jixianlu 墉城集仙錄), which focus on specific themes —transcendents surnamed Wang and female transcendents, respectively—the *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* is unified by the broader theme of the pursuit of transcendence, without adhering to a strict organizing principle. This flexibility allows for a more diverse exploration of the techniques and practices associated with achieving transcendence, as well as the relationships between these practices and the adepts who performed them. Additionally, this text places greater emphasis on figures who achieved transcendence during the Tang period, especially after the Middle Tang. Notably, nearly half of the extant stories contain unique information not found in other Tang literature, offering invaluable insights into the period's spiritual practices.

Given these considerations, including a specific story from the *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* is essential for illustrating how Du Guangting's Daoist philosophies were practically applied and communicated to a broader audience.

In the hagiography of Chen Huixu 陈惠虚, a Buddhist monk, Du Guangting elucidates his doctrines through a dialogue between Chen and the immortal Old Zhang 張老. Faced with Chen's inquiry about the path to studying transcendence, Old Zhang outlines the following dual approach: "Inside, one must maintain the spirit and refine vital energy (qi 氣). Outside, the use of elixir pills (danhua 丹華) is essential. Nevertheless, genuine transcendence hinges on the efficacy of the divine elixir" (Du 2013, p. 1299). This dialogue resonates with the broader Daoist belief, articulated by Wu Yun 吳筠 (? –778) in his *Tract on the Feasibility of Attaining Transcendence through Study* (神仙可學論), that immortality can be attained through diligent practice and cultivation. Wu's teachings align with the concept of "inner alchemy" (内丹), emphasizing the transformation of one's form and spirit to achieve the Dao. As Pregadio (2004) elaborates, "form" (形) serves as an intermediary between the material and spiritual realms, embodying both the corporeal and the divine. In this context, Du Guangting's differentiation between "internal" practices and "exter-

nal" aids underscores the complementary nature of these methods in the journey toward transcendence.

Despite these techniques, Du Guangting emphasizes that transcendence cannot be achieved through the mere ingestion of elixirs; it necessitates the cultivation of personal virtue. He underscores the vital roles of merit (gong 功) and virtue (de 德) in enabling transcendental transformation, proposing that the efficacy of an elixir is indeed a reward for one's accumulation of virtue. This approach links individual spiritual development to broader philosophical and ethical considerations.

In further discussions within the hagiography, Old Zhang imparts to Chen Huixu the moral prerequisites for spiritual ascent: "The accumulation of merit and virtue, along with the elevation of the physical body to Heaven, rely on the unwavering determination of one's intentions" (Du 2013, p. 826). This statement reinforces the idea that ethical consistency and determination are crucial for achieving higher states of being.

Additionally, the narrative elaborates on the practical applications of these philosophical principles, as follows: "Virtue is cultivated by extending kindness to others and owning up to one's faults. By valuing each act of merit and diligently maintaining them, and by promptly correcting missteps, one builds substantial merit. This ethical foundation is pivotal, ensuring that internal cultivation reaches its depth and elixir ingestion realizes its ultimate potential, thereby facilitating a genuine approach toward realizing the Dao" (Du 2013, p. 827).

According to Du Guangting's elucidations, the transformative efficacy of an elixir, essential for the evolution of transcendents, hinges on the accumulation of merit and virtue. Du Guangting explicitly incorporates moral elements into the prerequisites for achieving transcendence through elixir ingestion, suggesting a profound connection between ethical conduct and spiritual advancement.

This focus on moral virtues is not unique to Du Guangting; it was a prevalent theme in several transcendence narratives from the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. Regardless of the specific methods discussed for attaining transcendence, whether through elixir ingestion or other practices, the inclusion of merit accumulation as a key component for achieving transcendence is consistently highlighted in the literary works of the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. This suggests a deep-rooted tradition that pre-dates even the Song period's Daoist schools, in which personal virtue, as Penny (2000, p. 109) has argued, became a more pronounced requirement.

Further illustrating this trend, Du Guangting often depicted Buddhist monks engaging in Daoist practices to achieve transcendence, reflecting the significant cross-pollination between religious Daoism and Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty. As Wang Yongping points out, in works such as *Tract on the Responses and Feelings of Immortals (*神仙感遇傳) and *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies* (仙傳拾遺), Du Guangting provides accounts of Buddhist monks like Huaiyi 懷一, Wuxuan 悟玄, Qixu 契虛, Xuanzhao 玄照, and Hanshan 寒山, who pursued immortality by integrating Daoist practices into their spiritual routines. These narratives underscore the broad appeal of Daoist immortality practices, particularly among Buddhist monks, and highlight the role of moral virtue and merit in these pursuits (Wang 2023, pp. 87–89).

Moreover, the text *Conversations by Lamplight* (燈下閒談), from the same era, extends the potential for transcendence beyond Daoist priests to include ordinary individuals with exemplary records of good deeds; it narrates the story of Li Jue, a grain merchant from Yangzi County in the Huainan province, whose persistent adherence to Daoist principles and accumulation of hidden merits culminated in the following divine acknowledgment:

"The feathered transcendent spoke, 'Li Jue of Yangzi County in Huainan, your family has been in the grain-selling business for three generations. You have always remained devoted to the Dao. Now, your accumulated concealed virtues have met the necessary threshold, and you are destined for ascension to heaven. The supreme emperor has therefore issued a golden talisman with inscriptions to announce this to all.'… A few months afterwards, Li Jue ascended to Heaven in plain daylight" (Anonymous 1913, vol. 1, p. 11).

These narratives illustrate a broader Daoist conviction that transcendent states are rewards not solely for ritualistic or esoteric practices but also for virtuous living and moral integrity. An analysis of the hagiographies authored by Du Guangting reveals that, even before the Song period, moral behavior had already become a significant focus among Daoist thinkers of the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. This growing emphasis on ethics marks a foundational shift in Daoist thought, wherein personal virtue became integral to transcendence, representing a notable development in the tradition.

This thematic continuity reinforces the idea that the path to transcendence is accessible to all who embody the Dao through righteous actions, effectively bridging the gap between the sacred and the mundane. Such an interpretation not only aligns with, but also deepens, our understanding of the Daoist pursuit of transcendence as a deeply ethical endeavor, rooted in everyday virtues and communal well-being.

Du Guangting's works, particularly *Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De* and *Anthology of Lost Transcendent Biographies*, highlight the meaningful connection between the "study of the physical cultivation" (身學) and the "study of the heart-mind" (心學) in the practice of Chinese philosophy and Daoist religious beliefs. This integration reflects a significant concern for the human body within the intellectual milieu of the Late Tang period, while also resonating with the possibilities of social mobility within secular politics and society. Du Guangting adeptly applied this dual approach—balancing transcendence with worldly engagement—across religious cultivation, personal conduct, and governance. By emphasizing the cultivation of the heart-mind and spirit, he laid an important bridge between the Twofold Mystery (重玄) thought of the Tang and the emerging focus on inner alchemy and mind cultivation in the Song period. His contributions, therefore, provided a crucial transition that shaped the evolution of Daoist thought and its integration with broader intellectual and social currents.

6. Conclusions

Du Guangting's works, including his catalog of Laozi commentaries, not only illuminate the profound syncretism characteristic of Daoist scholarly pursuit from the Han to the Tang Dynasties but also reflect the critical historical understanding that influenced the development of Daoist thought. By weaving together diverse strands of philosophical and religious thought—encompassing Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Mysterious Learning—Du Guangting and his contemporaries crafted a richly textured tapestry of Daoist scholarship that significantly advanced the intellectual and spiritual landscapes of their time.

The tragic outcomes from elixir ingestion by several Late Tang emperors serve as a poignant reminder of the dangers associated with misapplying esoteric practices. The deaths of emperors like Xianzong 憲宗 (805–820), Muzong 穆宗 (820–824), and Xuanzong 宣宗 (846–859) due to elixir poisoning highlighted the perils of seeking transcendence through ungrounded spiritual shortcuts, leading to a profound political and cultural reevaluation of the practices associated with transcendence and marking a shift in the Daoist approach to spiritual ascension. As skepticism and criticism grew, Daoist thinkers during the Late Tang and Five Dynasties periods emphasized that true transcendence could not be achieved through elixir ingestion alone, without the foundations of self-cultivation and merit accumulation. This period saw the reinforcement of personal virtue as a crucial prerequisite for engaging in transcendental practices, underscoring a philosophical pivot toward more ethically grounded methods of spiritual attainment.

Moreover, the period witnessed the emergence of new Daoist theories and methodologies for achieving transcendence, reflecting the adaptability and flexibility of Daoist practices, as noted by scholars like Kohn (2001, p. 132). This diversity in spiritual techniques allowed Daoist adepts throughout various eras to tailor their practices to meet individual needs, thereby enriching the spiritual choices available within Daoist tradition.

Du Guangting's reforms and developments in Daoist philosophy were initially aimed at consolidating the religious foundations of Daoism. However, through his deep engage-

ment with Confucianism and Buddhism, a new dynamic of mutual influence and complementarity emerged among these traditions. This synthesis not only enriched the content of Daoist thought, particularly the *Twofold Mystery* tradition, but also contributed to the intellectual groundwork that later underpinned Neo-Confucian discussions of 'Li理' (principle) in the Song and Ming periods. By "broadly drawing upon various texts and thoroughly exploring their meanings" (Du 2020, p. 95), Du Guangting expanded the scope of Daoist philosophy, creating a more balanced and integrated framework for understanding both the transcendental and the worldly aspects of human existence. This multifaceted approach laid the foundation for subsequent developments in Chinese intellectual history, wherein the dialogue between Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism continued to shape the evolving discourse on the intricate relationship between the transcendent world and the real world, as well as the complex interplay between spirituality and secularity.

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Notes

1 A Daoist work compiled by Du Guangting in the late Tang dynasty, including various commentaries on *Daodejing*, predominantly expounding on the Imperial Commentary by Emperor of Xuanzong (唐玄宗, 685–762) of the Tang dynasty.

2 Franciscus Verellen's doctoral dissertation, *Du Guangting (850–933): Taoïste de cour* à *la fin de la Chine médiévale*, explores Du Guangting's life from the perspective of social development, illustrating his interactions with society and religion. In his other work, "Such as a Hallowed Land: Du Guangting's Record of Marvels", Verellen argues that while Du Guangting's core philosophy focused on self-cultivation, governance, and Daoist devotion, he also attempted to integrate orthodox Daoist doctrines with Daoist hagiographies. Sun Yiping's work, *Du Guangting's Thought and the Transformation of Tang-Song Daoism* (杜光庭思想與唐宋道教的轉型), places Du Guangting's annotations of the *Daodejing* in the historical context of the Tang-Song transition, emphasizing his pragmatic spirit in governance and personal cultivation. Similarly, Kim T'ae-yong's *Daoist Philosophy in Du Guangting's "Explications Expounding upon the Sage's Commentary on True Scripture of the Dao and the De"* (杜光庭《道德真經廣聖義》的道教哲學研究) underscores Du Guangting's pivotal role during the transition from the Tang's Twofold Mystery重玄 thought to the Internal Alchemy内丹 of the Song and later periods. Dong Enlin's book *Research on Tang Dynasty Laozi Studies—Case Studies of Cheng Xuanying, Li Rong, Emperor Xuanzong, and Du Guangting's Commentaries on the Daodejing* (唐代老學研究——以成玄英、李榮、唐玄宗、杜光庭《道德經》注疏為個案) clarifies the continuity and transformation of Laozi Studies across different periods, with a specific focus on the intellectual lineage from Emperor Xuanzong to Du Guangting. Zhou Xibo's *Research on Du Guangting's Daoist Rituals* (杜光庭道教儀範之研究) builds on Du Guangting's ritual theories, demonstrating through textual comparison that Du's reorganization of earlier Daoist rituals aimed not only at summarizing previous traditions but also at refining and elevating them.

3 Modern scholarship suggests that the early history of Daoism cannot be simply described through the lens of later historiographical sources, which often reflect the biases of the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms periods. Liu Xiaogan劉笑敢 emphasizes that early Daoism revolved around the practices of bodily cultivation found in the *Daodejing* and other early texts, which laid the groundwork for later developments in Daoist practices and beliefs (Liu et al. 2015). This strand of Daoism predates the institutionalized religious movements such as the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi Dao 天師道) founded by Zhang Daoling 張道陵 in the second century CE. Thomas Michael suggests that not only was there a third tradition of "early Daoism", but also that there were two strands of early Daoism: "physical cultivation", (yangsheng 養生) primarily associated with the *Daodejing*, and "sitting and oblivion", (zuowang 坐忘) primarily associated with the *Zhuangzi*. He highlights the importance of understanding

these distinctions to fully grasp the development of Daoist traditions. Furthermore, Michael elaborates that early Daoists often sought seclusion in mountains to practice these techniques, believing that the natural environment was crucial for their spiritual and physical cultivation (Michael 2016).

[4] According to Li Jianguo 李劍国, the original forty volumes contained 429 entries, with 120 narratives traceable to Du's lost book (Li 2017, pp. 1405–28).

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