

## The *Book of Transformations*

The *Book of Transformations* is a revealed scripture, transcribed through spirit writing over a limited period of time, probably no more than a few days. There were four mediums involved in the project, though Liu Ansheng seems to have been the primary recipient of the message. We know relatively little about the process of spirit writing revelation in premodern China, even less about the intertextual relations between such revealed material and its antecedents or models. Some of the material that found its way into the *Book of Transformations* was already part of cult lore, since it occurs in earlier sources, but may have undergone substantial revision in the process of revelation. Other elements may have been wholly new, “original” creations of the mediums and their controlling deity. This section will discuss the composition and structure of the *Book of Transformations*, primarily on the basis of internal evidence.

The *Book of Transformations* seems to divide naturally into several discrete sections. Some relate continuous narratives that span as many as twenty chapters; others seem to be collections of independent, chapter-length stories with only relatively abstract unifying themes. Since we know that four mediums took part in the revelation, it is tempting to see in these changes the alternation of different mediums, each with a distinctive message and mode of presentation. I have, however, been unable to discern consistent variations in diction or vocabulary that would confirm such a thesis. Moreover, there seems to be an overarching, unifying theme to the work: the spiritual development of the god. Perhaps this unifying structure was the result of a group of mediums accustomed to working together and sharing a mature, well thought-out conception of the god. Liu Ansheng had been the instrument of the Divine Lord’s revelations for at least thirteen years when the *Book of Transformations* was produced, and the sons and cousin who shared in the revelation were probably not neophytes. But it may also be the result of intentional manipulation. The revelatory process itself permits a certain amount of editorial supervision. Spirit writing requires, in addition to the medium, an interpreter who writes out the oracular script in more understandable, fixed form, and can thus shape the message to a certain extent.

One must also admit the possibility of considerable editing and “correcting” after the fact; such emendation is common among modern spirit writing groups.<sup>92</sup> The mature development of this editorial process is visible in a newly annotated edition of Wenchang’s *Scripture of the Great Grotto* dating to 1936.<sup>93</sup> The postface lists the editorial board, which includes, in addition to the two actual mediums, styled Controllers of the Phoenix, two men in charge of promoting and disseminating the scripture, an “inner” and “outer” recorder, an editorial chief and a chief of scribes, as well as sixteen individuals assigned to collate, check, copy, and recollate the text. With a staff like this, a manuscript came out well polished indeed. We will never be certain how much of an editorial apparatus Liu Ansheng had, but the result was an extended prosimetric narrative with a coherent message tailored to a specific audience.

The first twenty chapters constitute one continuous narrative, the longest in the *Book of Transformations*. It is a tale of considerable dramatic power, centering on the god’s incarnation as a man named Zhang Shanxun 張善勳. The narrative is a well-integrated whole, tracing the god from celestial origins through birth, childhood, education, religious ordeals, a successful career, return home in old age, religious enlightenment, and final apotheosis with the attainment of a divine position. If this does not represent the incorporation of a pre-existent tale, and I have found no antecedent, direct or indirect, this narrative alone must be judged a significant literary achievement.

There are several striking features of this story. One is its regional character. The god is born into an as-yet un-Sinified (at the time of the tale, ca. 1000 B.C.) region of Southeast China. Local culture is described in some detail, as is the incarnated god’s first encounter with Chinese civilization and his subsequent efforts to promote this high culture in his native land. The location of the all-important first incarnation of this Sichuanese deity in the distant Southeast is curious. Perhaps it reflects a conscious attempt to appeal to the people of this region, to which the cult was in the process of expanding. In the late twelfth century the Southeast was the center of both political power and literati culture.

A second singular feature of this tale is the prominent role played by the Zhang clan. In chapter 2 the god is born to a man surnamed Zhang in part

92. Gary Seaman, personal communication, March 1993. Seaman described a case in which the god himself directed the insertion of a passage from another work into the record of his own communication.

93. *Dadong xianjing zhushi*, ch. 2, Lu 1b, in *Zangwai daoshu* 4:412a.

because the constellation Zhang was ascendant. Chapter 3 relates the origin myth of the Zhangs, linking this clan specifically to the Wu region. In chapter 18, after retiring from an illustrious career, Zhang Shanxun returns to his native land and devotes himself to charitable works centering on the less fortunate members of his clan. Now the god of Zitong had long been associated with the surname Zhang and the Song was a time when lineage ties were becoming more and more important. Still, it seems that there was more to this connection than a simple concurrence of cult lore with historical trends. The predecessor to the *Book of Transformations* was a much shorter version of this work known as the *Esoteric Biography of Qinghe* (*Qinghe neizhuan* 清河內傳) and Qinghe was the choronym of one of the most prominent Zhang clans.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, we know that members of this Qinghe Zhang clan held hereditary posts controlling the main temple outside Zitong.<sup>95</sup> If the medium revealing these scriptures were himself a Zhang, our conclusion would be simple, but, in fact, of the individuals named as participants in the revelation not a single one is surnamed Zhang, nor does the revelation take place at the main temple itself. This does not preclude the possibility that some of these men had affinal ties to the clan, or that they were in some sense sponsored by the clan, but it also raises the possibility that the Zhang clan had already created and circulated in some form legends of the god's incarnations that featured the clan prominently.

A third feature of this first narrative is a decidedly Daoist slant. Most of the god's actions, whether assuming a divine or human identity, through the course of the *Book of Transformations* are free of sectarian character. They reflect beliefs about right and wrong, the composition of the universe, and the role of the divine world that are part and parcel of the diffuse, "popular" religion that was common to all Chinese of the day. The chapters concerning Zhang Shanxun also partake of this common worldview, but Daoist deities and scriptures play a more prominent role. For example, elsewhere in the *Book of Transformations* the high god is referred to simply as Di 帝, "the Thearch," or Shangdi 上帝, "the Supreme Thearch," both of these

94. On choronyms and their significance, see Johnson 1977.

95. This is one conclusion that can safely be drawn from the intriguing but badly damaged "Cliff Record of the Late Zhang Zihou of the Song Dynasty" ("Song gu Zhang Zihou yanji" 宋故張子厚巖記) preserved in the *Zitong County Gazetteer* (*Zitongxian zhi* 梓潼縣志: 4/24b–26b). The subject of the inscription, Zhang Guang 張光 (1062–1131), was at least the third generation of this clan to control the temple. Although Zhang Guang must have been a prominent figure in Zitong (he is the only figure from the Song commemorated with an inscription), he seems to have left no trace in historical records. The Zhang Zihou mentioned in *Songshi* 69/11476 as a son of Zhang Jun 張俊 (1086–1154) is too young.

being common references to the Jade August Supreme Thearch 玉皇上帝 who rules over the popular pantheon. But in this narrative Zhang Shanxun finds, worships, and is aided by a statue of the Primordial Heavenly Worthy 元始天尊, a distinctively Daoist analog of the high god and one of the three pure emanations of primordial vapor who constitute the highest Daoist trinity.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Zhang Shanxun comes into possession of the *Transcendent Scripture of the Great Grotto* 大洞仙經, one of the holiest of Daoist scriptures and the centerpiece of the fourth-century Maoshan revelations.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately he receives as well a *Rite* and a *Register of the Great Grotto*, secretly transmitted texts that are used to activate the *Transcendent Scripture*, and through them gains command over the fell troops of the other world that Daoists used to such advantage in eliminating the malefic demons and sprites worshiped in popular cults. Finally, this tale concludes with Zhang Shanxun's encounter with the Ancient August Master 古皇先生, a mysterious figure preaching a doctrine similar to that found in the "Laozi converting the barbarians" literature.

The primary medium Liu Ansheng styles himself "Phoenix Transcendent," a title reflecting his role as a spirit writing medium, but he was probably an ordained Daoist as well. As discussed above, among the scriptures revealed through him prior to the *Book of Transformations* was a new recension of this same *Transcendent Scripture of the Great Grotto* and a *Precious Register* that is meant to accompany it. Thus whatever role preexisting legends created by or for the Zhang clan had on the formation of this Zhang Shanxun tale, its final form must owe much to the training and creative efforts of Liu Ansheng.

The second narrative, consisting of chapters 21 through 30, tells the tale of Zhang Zhongsi 張忠嗣, better known by his cognomen, Zhang Zhong 寂仲. The distinguishing feature of this series of chapters is the identification of the god with the formative period of Chinese classical antiquity. In the Zhang Shanxun incarnation the god had already assisted and collaborated with the fabled Duke of Zhou 周公 and his nephew King Cheng 成王. Here we see the god coming to the aid of the besieged King Xuan 宣王 (r. 827–782 B.C.) and assisting in the imperial restoration. In the course of his official career Zhang Zhong composes two poems that become part of the normative *Scripture of Poetry* (*Shijing*) and is praised by name in a third.

This sort of classical foundation for a cult was of great importance. Clas-

96. On these highest figures of the pantheon and their relationship, see Kubo 1986: 126–32.

97. Wenchang is still worshiped through the recitation of this scripture in Yunnan province. See below, pp. 82–83.

sical canons like the *Record of Rites* largely proscribed popular worship, but left loopholes for the worship of figures who had contributed to the well-being of the state or their native region.<sup>98</sup> Conservative critics could always dismiss the claims made for a god in a work like the *Book of Transformations* and argue for the banning of the cult as “licentious sacrifice” (*yinsi* 淫祀). But the material presented in the *Book of Transformations* at least provided his supporters with ammunition with which to argue that the god was indeed worthy of worship. Moreover, faced with a popular god of proven numinous efficacy and a specialization in affairs of the most acute concern to the literati (childbirth, the examinations, and the official career), many were no doubt delighted to have this way of rationalizing their devotion.

The first two narratives, concerning Zhang Shanxun and Zhang Zhongsi, share several features. Most prominent of these is a focus on the concerns of the gentry class from which most officials were drawn. The Chinese dress that Zhang Shanxun adopts is that of the gentry, not Chinese peasant garb. The strict mourning practices he observes upon the death of his parents could only be pursued by individuals of sufficient means and leisure to remove themselves from worldly affairs for years at a time. The roles of spiritual healer and medical physician adopted by Shanxun were professional positions requiring literacy and training (Hymes 1987). They were open to members of the lower intelligentsia but were also often pursued by younger sons of high gentry lineages. Shanxun's actions at court, recommending worthy individuals and remonstrating with the ruler at his own peril, are exemplars of proper conduct directed at aspiring officials.

The Zhang Zhongsi incarnation displays a similar intent. The father in this incarnation had been a high official in the Zhou court and Zhongsi inherits this position. He composes one poem now found in the *Shijing* to counter the slanders of scurrilous officials and another to exhort the ruler to use talented men (chs. 24 and 25). Placing the interests of the state above his own honor, he recommends for office the worthy son of a family enemy (ch. 26) and then intercedes to assist the marriage plans of a dead colleague. He dies, in the end, because of his opposition to the enthronement of an unworthy heir apparent. These themes are all common in the standard historical sources used to indoctrinate young members of the gentry.

In connection with the first incarnation, I mentioned the prominent role of Daoism in Zhang Shanxun's life. This element is not absent in the life of Zhang Zhongsi. Zhongsi's mother instructs him in the teachings of a Dao-

98. See above, pp. 4–5 and n.15.

ist scripture, the *Scripture of Inner Meditation*, and recommends to him a number of Daoist practices. The presence of this Daoist material in sections specifically devoted to creating an acceptable gentry image for the god reflects the degree to which Daoist faith and doctrine had penetrated gentry circles of the day.

The first incarnation had ended with Zhang Shanxun passing quietly into oblivion in accord with the teachings of the Ancient August Master, and the interim before his second incarnation was filled with his administration of Monarch Mountain. The second incarnation ends quite differently. Compelled to commit suicide by the new king, the wrathful spirit of Zhong Zhongsi appears as a wraith, haunting the palace for three days. But after this enmity is vented, a similar transition occurs, with the disembodied god proceeding to Snow Mountain and an appointment as Great Transcendent. It is interesting to note that even in the case of divine beings, the ancient Chinese belief in mountains as the primary destination of dead souls still exercises its influence.<sup>99</sup>

Thus the first thirty chapters comprise two long narratives of similar structure and theme. The next thirty-two chapters (31–62) are independent tales focusing on the god's actions as a divine official. Although all these chapters share a certain similarity, they can be divided into two groups, the first (31–40) centering on the god as King of Swordridge Mountain 劍嶺山王, and the second (41–62) in which the god is usually referred to as Master Zhang of the Northern Ramparts 北郭張生.

The first series, which I will call the King of Swordridge Mountain incarnation, is the first to link the god with the Sichuan region. The cult to the god of Zitong had originated on Sevenfold Mountain outside of Zitong, one of the foothills of the Swordridge mountain chain that separates the Sichuan basin from the Han River Valley of southern Shensi province. We may assume, then, that a primary function of these chapters is to legitimize the power of the god in his native place. The first chapter of this series performs this task admirably. First an official rescript transfers the god to this new position, assuring the reader that he is the duly appointed representative of the divine administration for that region. Next the god exercises this authority by summoning together all of the divine beings within his

99. This belief is already evident in Han dynasty tomb contracts, where we find formulations like "The living to Chang'an, the dead to Mount Tai!" and survives in the position of the Lord of Mount Tai as the first of the otherwise Buddhist Ten Kings of Hell. See Sakai 1937; Seidel 1987: 30; Teiser 1988: 170. The belief is also common in Japan, although a Chinese origin for the Japanese formulation of this doctrine has yet to be demonstrated. See Yamaori Tetsuo 1989: 6.



territory and leading them on a mission to rid the region of a predatory tiger of great age and power.

The rest of the chapters in this incarnation record how the god used his power to aid the people of his region. We see him controlling natural forces by quelling a flood (ch. 37), distributing food in a famine (ch. 38), and relieving a drought (ch. 39). He also intervenes directly in human affairs, protecting a filial son and a virtuous widow from those who would harm them (chs. 40 and 34), solving a complicated murder case in which an innocent man was implicated (ch. 35), and punishing a landlord who required his tenant farmers to murder their children (ch. 36). Perhaps most interesting, however, are cases in which he interacts with other members of the divine administration. In one case he punishes a mountain god under his jurisdiction who had ravished a new bride (ch. 32); in another, he succeeds in staying the hand of a superior, the White Thearch, who is about to annihilate a whole town because of the misconduct of one of its members (ch. 33). These demonstrate the extent to which the bureaucratic model was applied to the divine realm in the twelfth century.

The next series of twenty-two chapters follows with no transition. The first chapter of this series, "Northern Ramparts" (ch. 41), introduces the new identity of the god. He is Master Zhang of the Northern Ramparts, also known as Zhang Zhongzi. The setting for these tales shifts to Chengdu, the traditional capital of the Sichuan region. There are two themes that run through these twenty-two chapters: the role of the god in early Sichuan history and his role as a provider of progeny.

The setting for the historical material is the state of Shu during the Warring States period, the latter half of the first millennium B.C. Two chapters center on a dispute between the Shu king Yufu 魚臯 and his younger brother (chs. 42 and 43). But the primary focus of this material is the legendary King Kaiming 開明王 and his strongmen, the Five Stalwarts 五丁. They seem to have an ambiguous status in Shu legend-history, local heroes who end up bringing about the downfall of the state. Master Zhang repeatedly manifests in human form to warn the king about employing them, but he is consistently ignored (chs. 44–46). Finally the Five Stalwarts are sent to escort five jezebels, presents from the King of Qin who hopes to invade and conquer the distracted King Kaiming. Master Zhang resorts to desperate measures, taking the form of a giant snake to do battle with and kill the Five Stalwarts (ch. 47).

This final confrontation between snake and strongmen had been a part of the earliest strata of cult lore. The god of Zitong had been a snake and

the single act he is credited with in our earliest source is the death of the Stalwarts and their charges. To the authors of the *Book of Transformations* this was a climactic event, and it is followed by a retreat to a mountain, in this case the fabled Kongdong where the god meets Laozi and receives his blessing. It is tempting, then, to take this as the end of a series, paralleling the denouements of the first and second incarnations. But this same Zhang of the Northern Ramparts occurs again in chapters 59 and 60, and I believe it best to treat all the chapters from 41 to 62 as one unit.

The second theme running through these chapters is birth and protection of children. The initial chapter, which first introduces Master Zhang of the Northern Ramparts, has him giving an extended lecture on conduct that will aid in the production of children. Related material is found in chapter 50, where the god reconciles an adopted son and his true father; chapter 52, where he reunites a mother and son; chapter 53, where he returns an abducted daughter to her father; and chapter 58, where he punishes a man who mistreats his younger brother and rewards a man who recognizes a bastard son.

In addition there are a number of chapters treating rather standard themes such as the punishment of slanderers (ch. 54), corrupt officials (chs. 49, 56, 62), butchers (ch. 61), dishonest craftsmen (ch. 55), and the like. These chapters would seem to fit equally well in the preceding King of Swordridge Mountain series.

The disparate themes found in the Master Zhang of the Northern Ramparts series are united by a single figure better known as Transcendent Zhang. Today Transcendent Zhang is a bow-wielding patron of dramatic performers, but also a sender of progeny and protector of children. His image in the Song was similar. Su Xun 蘇洵, the father of the illustrious Su Shi and Su Che, is said to have prayed to the god before their birth. Su says, "As to Transcendent Zhang, this god was originally the constellation Zhang and often illuminated [i.e., was born into?] the Zhang clan. Entering Shu, he was called Master Zhang of the Northern Ramparts."<sup>100</sup> The reference to the Northern Ramparts clearly indicates the god's ties to Chengdu.

It appears, then, that two bodies of legendary material have been conflated. There was originally a serpentine thunder deity surnamed Zhang from northern Sichuan, who had vanquished the Five Stalwarts. There was

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100. Guo Zizhang, "Wenchangci ji," Guo goes on to explain: "He wields a bow and carries arrows because the god was originally a scion of the Zhang clan and was the first to make bows and bowstrings for the Yellow Thearch. He does not forget his beginnings." Guo cites several passages from the *Record of Rites* indicating a connection between the birth of male progeny and bows.



another god surnamed Zhang from Chengdu who provided progeny and was linked to the culture hero Hui, offspring of the Yellow Thearch and inventor of the bow. It seems likely that legends also connected this Chengdu Zhang to the Kaiming–Five Stalwarts cycle, but these legends do not survive independently or as part of Transcendent Zhang cult lore. When the Zitong cult expanded to Chengdu, probably in the Tang, the two gods were identified. The link must have seemed self-evident given their common connection to the Five Stalwarts cycle and to the Zhang surname. Eventually Transcendent Zhang tales became part and parcel of the Divine Lord's group of miracles. The earliest surviving tale still attributed to Transcendent Zhang dates from the opening years of the Song. The only surviving scripture dedicated to Transcendent Zhang, the *Perfected Scripture of Wondrous Response for the Injection of Life and Leading-in of Progeny Expounded by Transcendent Zhang, the Great Perfected, Responsive Transformation of Wenchang* (Wenchang yinghua Zhang Xian dazhenren shuo zhusheng yansi miaoying zhenjing 文昌應化張仙大真人說注生延嗣妙應真經), clearly indicates both in the title and in the body of the scripture that the god is to be identified with Wenchang.<sup>101</sup> The subsuming of one cult within another is not unprecedented, but it is curious that the Transcendent Zhang cult should survive as an independent entity.

The next set of four chapters (63–66) documents the incorporation of another local Sichuan cult into the body of Zitong lore. There was an ancient tale of a magical snake/dragon who caused the inundation of an entire city. One version of this tale localized the event in Qiong Pool 邛池, near modern Xichang, Sichuan. By the early tenth century the snake in this legend had been identified as Zhang Ezi, reflecting the appropriation of this legend by the Zitong cult.

In the original tale the serpent had been adopted and raised by an old woman. It grew and its appetites grew with it, until the beast happened to eat the local magistrate's prize horse. When the magistrate retaliated by killing the old woman, the snake caused forty days of rain that flooded the entire town, killing all its inhabitants. The tenth-century tale had changed little, substituting an old couple for the old woman and having the snake save them before the magistrate could effect their deaths.

101. This scripture is found in DZJY, sub *xing*, and the *Wendi quanshu*, chapter 12; an independent edition from the nineteenth century is preserved in the Cambridge University Library. The text is preceded by a preface dated 1734 and attributed to Heavenly Deaf (Tianlong 天聾), an attendant of the Divine Lord since the Song. The text focuses on ten moral injunctions, the observance of which will result in progeny, and each injunction is illustrated by a tale from the *Book of Transformations*.

This tale of a filial but violent nature spirit was acceptable to the cult in the tenth century but was inappropriate for the literati persona of the god being fashioned in the twelfth. The god's actions were rationalized by demonizing the victims. One of the great villains in Chinese history has been the Empress Lü, wife of the founder of the Han dynasty and nearly its usurper. In the *Book of Transformations* the god is said to have been incarnated as the favorite distaff son of the emperor, Ruyi. When the emperor dies, the empress has both the son and his mother, the Lady Qi, killed. The prefect and many of the residents of the town that was to become Qiong Pool were reincarnations of the Lüs, and the old woman who nurtures the snake is Lady Qi. The god's actions are thus understandable, if not wholly defensible, as growing out of filial piety and a sense of injustice. The tale is bracketed by authority figures, further reducing the god's culpability. First the Thearch orders him to be born, against the god's better judgment, as Ruyi (ch. 63); after the incident, the god is punished for his actions, but in the end granted absolution by no less than the Buddha.

The final seven chapters depict the god's apotheosis and ultimate position within the divine hierarchy. Three transitional chapters (67–69) detail three incarnations working off the karma of Qiong Pool. First the god is born as Zhang Xun 張勳 in the first century A.D.. He becomes Prefect of Qinghe, the ancestral home of an important branch of the Zhang clan, and lives a model life of the ideal benevolent local official. Next he is born circa 140 as Zhang Xiaozhong 張孝忠 ("filial and loyal") and lives a rather ordinary temporal life, all the while functioning as a divine judge in his sleep. But some remnant of the karmic disturbance engendered by his inundation of thousands of living souls still remains. Before final apotheosis, he must himself die a violent death. This happens in chapter 69 where, incarnated as an anonymous advisor to Deng Ai (197–264), he meets his death in battle.

Chapter 70 records a triumphal meeting with the Thearch, who praises him for his good works and presents him with a *ruyi* ("as you like it") scepter. This "as-you-like-it" scepter is a feature of one of the cult's earliest myths, wherein the god presents it to a fourth-century military figure, Yao Chang. This chapter is the first surviving reference to the divine origin of this scepter. The incident with Yao Chang is not mentioned at all in the original revelation, but was part of the revelation of 1194. It is possible that the place of the scepter in cult lore influenced the choice of the historical Ruyi, son of Han Gaozu, as the incarnation leading up to the inundation of Qiong Pool (ch. 63).

Chapter 71 begins the god's final incarnation (in this revelation). The

god is again born into the world, and takes as his parents the man and woman who had been his father and mother in so many incarnations; here again he belongs to the Zhang clan. The year of his birth is given as A.D. 287, conforming to accounts placing his historical life in the Jin dynasty. The date of his birth is fixed on the third day of the second lunar month, the date on which festivals to the god are still held.

The next chapter recalls the god to his divine status. The process begins with the god reasserting his power over the element of water. This sign of awakening leads to the arrival of an emissary of Heaven, who informs the god of his previous transformations and leads him back up to the Heavens, where he is reunited with his divine family. The authority over all aspects of the Shu region, including the affairs of living and deceased mortals, is put into his hands. In the final chapter the god is given another, higher responsibility. He is appointed keeper of the Cinnamon Record, a ledger recording the good and evil actions of men and their consequent reward or punishment. This Cinnamon Record was of particular importance because it determined who would succeed on the civil service examinations and what sort of a career he would have.

The final two chapters, then, make powerful claims for the god. First the god is identified as a special protector and judge for the Sichuan region, justifying the widespread devotion the god received there. Then the final chapter boldly makes a further claim to authority over the fates of all officials, living and dead, in all parts of the empire. Whereas the god's special role within Shu was a well accepted fact, the second assertion was a direct, evangelical challenge to a host of local and regional cults specializing in examination aid or prognostication. Whatever the personal histories and meritorious achievements of these examination gods might be, all were now required to acknowledge their subordination to an obscure figure from a remote mountain in Sichuan as the single supreme arbiter of the fates of officials. By setting himself up as the patron deity of the literati, the god claimed a wealthy, socially mobile segment of society that would, by its very nature, protect the god from most claims of heterodoxy and social disruptiveness.

The *Book of Transformations* is composed of disparate parts deriving from different hands. Some are no doubt fresh innovations that presented to the faithful unsuspected episodes in their god's past. Others present age-old features of the cult that would have been familiar to all its adherents. But even these traditional features have been molded to present the god in the best light and to provide the god with a consistent persona.

The image of the Divine Lord depicted in the *Book of Transformations*

was definitive on the translocal level. Within the Zitong community the god continued to be the omnifunctional local deity responding to the immediate needs of the populace that we see throughout traditional China. This is why rebels like Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠, at the end of the Ming, were able to claim the god's support in their battle against legitimate authority and win over the local populace to this interpretation. But on the national level, although the god continued to respond to a variety of requests and function in a variety of ways, all of these aspects are rooted in the complex deity portrayed in the *Book of Transformations*. In this sense the book was a great success and Liu Ansheng can be considered the founder of the modern cult.

### The Teachings of the *Book of Transformations*

The *Book of Transformations* is not merely a hagiography, it is a didactic work, intended to instruct its readers and induce a change in their lives. This purpose is stated explicitly in the Divine Lord's preface to the 1181 revelation:

There are two processes of transformation. There is the transformation of physical transformation (*bianhua* 變化); there is the transformation of moral transformation (*jiaohua* 教化). Entering Being from Non-being, the past becoming the present, the young and vital becoming old and dying, the old and dying becoming young infants, this is the transformation of physical transformation. The Three Mainstays, the Five Constants,<sup>102</sup> right and wrong, deviant and correct, the ruler using mores to influence his subordinates, this is the transformation of moral transformation.

The previous section traced the physical transformations of the god as he evolved from age to age, from incarnation to incarnation. Here we will examine the moral transformation that is the explicit purpose of the *Book of Transformations* by considering the ethical content of the tales therein and the world view that the text embodies.

Perhaps the most obvious message of the *Book of Transformations* is that personal cultivation through appropriate conduct will result in progress toward a transcendent goal, that divinity can be attained through personal

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102. The Three Mainstays are the relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife; the Five Constants are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and credibility. On these seminal ethical terms, see Hsü Dau-lin 1970-71.

圖 籍 桂 掌 隸



*Figure 3. The Divine Lord peruses the Cinnamon Record*

effort. This is an old theme in Daoism, recalling Ge Hong's famous proclamation, "I at this very moment know that transcendence (*xian* 仙) can be attained."<sup>103</sup> The Divine Lord of Zitong has a celestial origin in primeval chaos, but he elects to descend to this world and undergo a process of personal refinement spanning two millennia that culminates in his reintegration into the Heavens at the upper reaches of the pantheon. The *Book of Transformations* is a record of his path of cultivation but also a map revealing how an aspiring immortal could pursue his goal through ethical endeavor, service to the state, and religious praxis. We will first examine the sacred realm and its interactions with the temporal world as portrayed in the *Book of Transformations*, then present the fundamental principles that inform that work's ethical worldview.

### *The Sacred Realm of the Book of Transformations*

In comparing the sacred realm of Chinese religion in general and the *Book of Transformations* in particular to that of other cultures, one is immediately struck by the many parallels in the Chinese case between the sacred and profane worlds. Humans move from one realm to the other without dramatic shifts in identity, lifestyle, or social relations. For the most part, officials upon death become divine officials and incarnating divine officials become temporal officials; personal names and lineage membership survive the great transition and actions of dead and living members of a lineage continue to influence each other; moral culpability and merit earned while alive continue to influence the fate of the individual and his family. Parallels in structure and organization are particularly striking.

Atop the sacred realm of the *Book of Transformations* sits an autocratic ruler, the Jade Thearch, often simply called the Thearch. He rules through a vast bureaucracy of divine officials that extends down to every village and household of this world and encompasses all the realms of the dead, the divine, and the demonic. The system is simpler than that of Daoist doctrine in that there is no mention in the *Book of Transformations* of the many homologous superimposed heavens that we find in Daoist sources as early as the fifth-century *Chart of the Ranks and Responsibilities of the Perfected Spirits*.<sup>104</sup> There is a similar dearth of reference to the many celestial

103. *Baopuzi* 3/10/9.

104. 167 *Dongxuan lingbao zhenling weiye tu*. See the summary of this pantheon in Kubo 1986: 111–12.



officers who populate these heavens; only those offices occupied by the Divine Lord at the beginning and end of his journey of transformation are mentioned.

There is, by contrast, considerable detail concerning the terrestrial component of the divine administration. These gods, often referred to as "earth spirits" (*digi* 地祇), are the direct counterparts of mortal officials and like them still require the sustenance of human food in the form of "bloody victuals" (*xieshi* 血食).<sup>105</sup> The upper echelons of this bureaucracy are occupied by figures associated with natural features, primarily mountains and rivers. The gods of the five marchmounts (*wuyue* 五嶽) arrayed in the five cardinal directions (including the center) have general authority over all the gods of their region much as they were thought to have ruled regional feudal lords in Warring States times.<sup>106</sup> Mountain kings (*shanwang* 山王) supervise smaller regions but are near enough to the marchmounts in authority to challenge their actions when necessary (ch. 33). River gods are dragons, subordinate to the Sovereign of the Seas (*hairuo* 海若).<sup>107</sup> No mention is made in the *Book of Transformations* of city gods (*chenghuang shen* 城隍神), but there are village gods (*yishen* 邑神) and hamlet gods (*lishen* 里神, chs. 36–38, 40) as well as tutelary deities (*tudi* 土地) of individual households (ch. 40). These chthonic spirits are aided in their tasks by the family ancestors, who also watch over their descendants and report to the bureaucracy any threat posed to them by mortal or divine malefactors (ch. 60). Terrestrial spirits were once conceived of as semi-zoomorphic divine beings far removed from human experience like the Viper, but in the *Book of Transformations* they are portrayed as dead humans selected to fill bureaucratic posts on the basis of merit, though river dragons still seem to be of a different order.

Demons also retain their monstrous, nonhuman identities in the *Book of Transformations*, but even they are portrayed in a somewhat positive light. Demons have always had an ambiguous role in Daoism. Given free rein, they are vicious, blood-thirsty malefactors who wander about killing, stealing, and sowing disease. But these demons can also be tamed and organized

105. On this topic, see Kleeman 1994; and my article "Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Standards of Religious Orthodoxy in Traditional China," forthcoming in *Asia Major* (1995).

106. Kleeman 1994. See, in particular, the subcommentary to *Shangshu zhengyi* 2/19a.

107. Although these water gods seem to occupy a hierarchy parallel to that of earth gods, they are not completely independent; in chapter 33 a river god is summoned and commanded by the god of Western Marchmount and in chapter 32 a dragon indicts a neighboring mountain god for rape.

under demonic generals and kings into armies that can subjugate unruly ghosts, fend off supernatural attacks, and aid the state in the maintenance of order and the suppression of rebellion. Daoist priests and laymen receive a series of registers giving them control over progressively larger groups of these fell troops.<sup>108</sup> The *Book of Transformations* reflects this ambiguous attitude toward demons. In chapter 12 the Divine Lord first awakens to his divine identity when combatting a group of epidemic demons that had already claimed his parents as victims. After his divine troops have rounded up five half-animal demons, they plead for mercy, explaining that they attack only individuals with "a heavy accumulation of otherworldly offenses" or "those whose heavenly lifespan is at an end." Thus demons are seen to have their proper place in the world acting as Heaven's instruments in collecting the evil and ill-fated, but still subject to the commands of protecting deities like the Divine Lord. In fact, one of the transformational identities of the Divine Lord worshiped in the main temple in Zitong is that of Wenzu 瘟祖, Patriarch of Epidemic Demons.

Buddhist deities have a similarly ambiguous role in the *Book of Transformations*. The tremendous appeal of Buddhism during the Song is evident in the rise of Neo-Confucianism, which rejected Buddhism as foreign while assimilating much of its doctrine and practice into Confucianism. Other Song religious movements, like the Complete Perfection school of Daoism that arose in North China in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, treated Buddhism more straightforwardly as one of three Chinese religious traditions all sharing common goals and ethical standards. The uncertain status of Buddhism in such arrangements is evident in the thirteenth-century polemical debates that pitted representatives of the Complete Perfection school against Buddhists.<sup>109</sup> In the *Book of Transformations* the Buddha is a mighty figure replete with salvific power and the Divine Lord receives from him a Buddhist title, but the Buddha seems to stand outside the Chinese pantheon, neither superior nor subordinate to the Thearch, and no specifically Buddhist role (mendicant world-renouncer, begging monk, master of a paradisaical realm, or fully enlightened Buddha) is ever adopted or even promoted as a serious goal by the Divine Lord.

108. Many Yao tribes still organize their social structure on the basis of such registers. See Strickmann 1982; Lemoine 1982. Lowell Skar is currently investigating the role of Daoism in the Yao society of northern Thailand.

109. For the relations between the Complete Perfection school and Buddhism, see the essays reprinted in Kubo 1992.

The sacred realm of the *Book of Transformations* is an amalgam of the Daoist and popular pantheons. This is evident in the Divine Lord's course of development. One would normally expect him to move through various offices of the terrestrial administration, perhaps paralleling his real world rise in official titles, or if he is to be considered a Daoist deity, to begin with a relatively low-level transcendent position before transferring to progressively more exalted stellar ranks. Instead he seems to jump back and forth between the two pantheons. He becomes sovereign of one of the most famous Daoist grotto-heavens, populated entirely by transcents (ch. 20), then is named Great Transcendent of secluded Snow Mountain (ch. 21) before being appointed a Mountain King with sovereignty over a collection of unruly mountain gods and spirits who still subsist on blood sacrifice (ch. 31). Daoism since its inception had wavered between rejecting the popular pantheon as profane and evil and accepting this pantheon as a debased, clearly subordinate counterpart of the pure Daoist heavens. During the Song this process of accommodation accelerated as Daoist priests increasingly came to incorporate rites to popular deities within the framework of their Offerings (*jiao* 醮) and Fasts (*zhai* 齋) to the celestial pantheon of the Daoist heavens. The Zitong cult, however, seems to promote a more radical amalgam of the two pantheons, one that sees transcents and gods as essentially similar and of comparable rank.

The unifying feature of this syncretic cosmology that I call the unitary sacred realm is an extensive system of recordkeeping and merit-based reward and punishment. Everyone from the lowest tutelary household god to the Thearch himself has a role in compiling, reviewing, and enforcing the dictates of these cosmic records. Just as the Divine Lord in one incarnation is called upon to sit in judgment on the quick and the dead (ch. 68), these records record the good and evil acts of living and dead humans, and all manner of supernatural beings. The actions recorded therein, in turn, determine one's disposition after death, official positions within the divine hierarchy, and eventual rebirth. Judgments based on these records have an independent legitimacy that transcends the barriers of death and rebirth, as we see in the case of the woman who was fated to die by lightning for unfilial behavior toward her mother-in-law but died before the sentence could be executed; thirty years later in a new physical form the punishment still hung over her head (ch. 57).

The god of Zitong has a key role in this scheme as the master of the most important set of records, the Cinnamon Record. A story in the 1194 continuation of the *Book of Transformations* gives us insight into the nature of

this record. A man named Li Deng 李登 has consulted a Daoist priest because in spite of great talent he has been unsuccessful in four attempts at obtaining the *jinshi* degree. The priest consults the Divine Lord, who quotes the following entry in the Cinnamon Record:<sup>110</sup>

When Li Deng was first born he was bestowed a jade seal and was fated to place first on the district examinations at eighteen and be valdedictorian at the palace examinations at nineteen. At thirty-three he should have reached the rank of Chancellor of the Right (*youxiang* 右相). After being selected he spied on a neighbor woman, Zhang Yanniang. Although the affair had not been resolved, he had her father, Zhang Cheng, bound and thrown into jail. For this crime his success was postponed ten years and he was demoted to the second group of successful examinees. After being selected at the age of twenty-eight he encroached upon and seized the dwelling of his elder brother, Li Feng, and this resulted in litigation. For this his success was postponed another ten years and he was demoted to the third group of graduates. After being selected at the age of thirty-eight, he violated Madame née Zheng, the wife of a freeman in his room in Chang'an, then framed her husband, Bai Yuan, for a crime. For this his success was postponed a further ten years and his standing was demoted to the fourth group. After being selected at the age of forty-eight, he stole Qingniang, the maiden daughter of his neighbor Wang Ji. As an unrepentant evil-doer, he has already been erased from the records. He will never pass.

Although clearly subordinate to a figure like the Thearch, the Divine Lord is positioned at the confluence of the myriad streams of reports issuing from officials at all levels of the divine bureaucracy. On the basis of the merits and demerits recorded in the Cinnamon Record the Divine Lord determines two essential aspects of human fate, birth and occupational achievement, functions reflected in his titles as "injector of life" (*zhusheng* 注生) and "director of emoluments" (*silu* 司祿). Since both of these roles are related to the god's new association with the constellation Wenchang, I will first discuss the historical background of this asterism and its worship before considering the ethical significance of the *Book of Transformations*.

110. DZ 79, 4/18b-19a; DZJY 80, 80a-b.

*The Constellation Wenchang and Its Worship*

The personification of Wenchang as an astral deity is of great antiquity. The earliest reference is found in the "Distant Wandering" ("Yuanyou" 遠遊) poem of the *Elegies of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭). There we read:

I made Wen Chang follow, too, to marshal the procession,  
Disposing the gods in their places in my retinue.<sup>111</sup>

Already Wenchang seems to be in a commanding position, directing other gods and able to keep them in order. The reason for this image of Wenchang lies in the identities of its constituent stars.

The constellation Wenchang consists of six stars in Ursa Major (θ, φ, θ, f, e, and another Ursae Majoris).<sup>112</sup> They are arrayed in a crescent above the ladle of the Big Dipper. The "Monograph on the Heavenly Offices" ("Tianguan shu" 天官書) of the *Shiji* (ca. 100 B.C.) describes the constellation in the following terms:

The ladle (*kui* 魁) of the Dipper wears a basket as a cap. The six stars are called the Palace of Wenchang. The first is called the Superior General (*Shangjiang* 上將); the second is called the Subordinate General (*Cijiang* 次將); the third is called Noble Minister (*Guixiang* 貴相); the fourth is called Director of Fates (*Siming* 司命); the fifth is called Director of the Interior (*Sizhong* 司中); the sixth is called the Director of Emoluments (*Silu* 司祿). The stars in the middle of the ladle of the Dipper are the prison of noble personages.<sup>113</sup>

Later sources give a slightly different enumeration of the stars composing Wenchang. In the *Hanshu* the fifth star is the Director of Emoluments and the sixth star is the Director of Disasters (*Sizai* 司災). Astrological treatises in the dynastic histories from the *Jinshu* on give the fourth star as the

111. Hawkes 1985: 197. In his notes to this line (p. 202) Hawkes explains Wenchang's role by saying that he was a patron of officials, "well qualified to see that the attendant deities were arranged in correct order of precedence," but this is anachronistic. He is more a representative of high officials than a patron.

112. Ho 1966: 74. Yi Shitong (1981: 19) lists six primary and eight "supplemental" (*zeng* 增) stars associated with Wenchang (items 233–46), one of which does not have a Western name (p. 167).

113. *Shiji* 27/1293; *Shiki kochū kōshō* 27/9. The last sentence of this passage probably refers to only four of the six, a group sometimes called the Heavenly Administrators (*Tianli* 天理). The *Fijie* commentary to this passage quotes a *Tradition* ("Zhuan") identifying four stars within the ladle as the *Tianli*. Wang Yuanqi 王元啓 (1714–86) speculates that the characters *sixing* 四星, "four stars," have dropped out of the text.

Director of Emoluments, the fifth star as the Director of Fates, and the sixth star as the Director of Bandits (*Sikou* 司寇).<sup>114</sup>

The identifications made in the *Shiji* seem to have been the most widely accepted during the Han. The *Chunqiu yuanming bao* 春秋元命包, one of the "apocrypha" texts of the Han dynasty, explains the function of each star as follows:

The Superior General establishes awesome martial (might); the Subordinate General rectifies the attendants; the Noble Minister administers written affairs; the Director of Emoluments rewards achievement and promotes scholars; the Director of Fates is in charge of disasters and divine punishment; the Director of the Interior is in charge of aiding and administering.<sup>115</sup>

In the "Treatise on Astrology" ("Tianwen zhi") of the *Jinshu* we are told that these six stars are the Six Offices (*liufu* 六府) of Heaven, and that they are in charge of "assembling and calculating the Way of Heaven" (*jiji tian-dao* 集計天道).<sup>116</sup> In traditional portent astrology they had special relevance for high officials of state, and stellar irregularities (comets, novae, etc.) occurring in this constellation were thought to foretell a threat to or from one of these officers.<sup>117</sup>

Some of the constituent stars of Wenchang have a history of worship even longer than that of the constellation as a whole.<sup>118</sup> There are poems dedicated to the Greater and Lesser Directors of Fates among the Nine Songs of the *Elegies of Chu*. In the *Zhouli* we read of burnt offerings made to the Director of Fates and the Director of the Interior at the Southern

114. *Hanshu* 6/1275 and *Jinshu* 11/291.

115. Quoted in the "Suoyin" commentary to the *Shiji* 27/1293; *Shiki kōchū kōshō* 27/9.

116. *Jinshu* 11/291; Ho 1966: 74; cf. *Suishu* 19/532. Ho identifies these six offices with six similarly named heads of tax offices, a group Hucker (1985: 3789, p. 317) calls the Six Tax Supervisors. If this identification is correct, the unifying element must have been their common function in "keeping the books," with the stellar counterparts maintaining ledgers of constantly increasing and decreasing personal balances of life and fortune much as the tax supervisors kept track of governmental income and outlays for their departments. But the functions attributed to the six constituent stars in various sources seem far removed from tax collection, and it may be that the Six Offices are unrelated positions within the divine hierarchy. It is uncertain exactly what the phrase concerning calculating the Way of Heaven originally referred to, but it could certainly have been interpreted as a reference to his stewardship of the original registers.

117. Schafer 1977: 91, 121.

118. Yamada (1975: 148) goes so far as to suggest that the focus of popular worship had already in Warring States times shifted to the Director of Fates.