

## *Taoist Master Chuang - Michael Saso*

Religious Taoism is a newly recognized field of research among China experts. Only in recent years has it been thought worthy of study by university professors and scholars of Chinese religions. The neglect can be partially ascribed to the secrecy with which the Taoists maintained their esoteric doctrines. The Taoist Canon, a massive collection of works in 1,120 volumes, was not available for scholarly study until modern times. The present edition of the Taoist Canon was commissioned during the reign of the Ming dynasty Emperor Cheng-t'ung, 1436-1450. About 1447, 1,057 volumes were printed by wood block. During the reign of the late Ming Emperor Wan-li (473-1620) a 63-volume supplement was added to the Canon, about 1607. It was not until 1924-1926 that a modern photo-offset edition of the Canon was printed by the Commercial Press in Shanghai and made available to some of the larger scholarly libraries in the West. Finally in 1962, the Iwen Press in Taipei produced an inexpensive photocopy edition of the Canon, which is now found in almost every major university library where Chinese studies are taught. Thus even the possibility of studying religious Taoism is very recent. A second problem in studying religious Taoism was and is the antipathy felt by many Chinese scholars toward Taoism and even Buddhism; the overwhelming majority of scholarly endeavor both in China and the West has been concerned with the intellectual and moral teachings of Confucianism. Since the men who wrote Chinese history were for the most part (at least publicly) Confucian, the Taoist was always relegated (with women) to the last place in the biographies of famous people in the dynastic histories. This is not, of course, to deny the Taoists' profound influence at the Chinese court, nor that of their Buddhist confreres. Nevertheless the Confucian literati felt politically compelled to maintain their hegemony as leaders in the courts of the imperial Chinese government. Eternally on the watch lest the separation of church and state be broken by an emperor who overindulged his religious interests at the expense of good government, the Confucians believed that the balance of powers that maintained China in stability through so many millennia was dependent on keeping the Confucian mandarin on the top, and the Buddhist and Taoist toward the bottom, of the political and social pyramid. In modern times, however, especially after the famous May 4 movement in 1918, many Chinese intellectuals have consciously rejected the entire past in favor of the scientific modernization necessary to maintain China's greatness. Finally, Taoists and their role in Chinese popular religion have been brought to the attention of the West by social scientists (ethnographers and anthropologists) in the field of Chinese religion and society. Where the historian and the humanist were overwhelmed by the abundance of written materials describing the literate Confucian past, the social scientist found the Taoist visibly active in the villages and cities of the Chinese present. Whether in Taiwan, Hong Kong, P'ngang, or Singapore, even in Honolulu City, Hawaii, the role of the Taoist was clearly evident in the practice of festival, burial, and temple and home ritual. Many of the problems in interpreting the newly available Taoist Canon were solved by fieldwork with Taoist priests, who could explain and punctuate passages insoluble to the scholar unfamiliar with esoteric Taoist terminology. The Taoists not only knew how to explain the Canon, but had manuals in their libraries far more explicit than the materials found in the printed Ming dynasty version. By studying with a Taoist priest, it was possible not only to give meaning to the seemingly haphazard order of the 1,120 volumes of the Canon, but to find supplementary materials that had not been previously published or were in clearer form than the printed sources. To illustrate, one need only take a cursory glance at the Ming dynasty Taoist Canon.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, the canon has been divided into seven sections, the first three Tung, or arcana, which were described by Lu Hsiu-ching, who died in 471, and the four Fu, or supplements, which were added shortly after. The Three Arcana are called the (1) Tung-chen Pu, or arcana of the realized immortal, (2) Tung-hsian Pu, or arcana of the mysterious, and (3) Tung-shen Pu, or arcana of the spirits. The first, Tung-chen section of the Canon is supposed to contain the teachings of the elite Taoist monastic group, the Shang-ch'ing (Highest Purity) sect, founded in 370 atop Mao Shan (Mt. Mao) in Kiangsu province, central China. The second, Tung-hsian section of the Canon contains the texts of the Ling-pao order, the popular ritual-oriented Taoists of third and fourth century China, who created the great liturgies of renewal and burial. The third, Tung-shen section of the Canon is named after a manual used by the former Ling-pao Taoists, that is, the San-huang Wen, the Writ of the Three Emperors. But it also contains the teachings of the third early group of Taoists, the Meng-wei (Heavenly Master) sect.

Each of the first three sections of the Canon is divided into twelve subsections:

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| <b>1. Pen-Wen</b>    | <b>Basic Doctrines and Writings</b>                 |
| <b>2. Shen-Fu</b>    | <b>Talismanic Charms for Commanding Spirits</b>     |
| <b>3. Yii-Chieh</b>  | <b>Esoteric Secrets and Rubrical Directions</b>     |
| <b>4. Ling-T'u</b>   | <b>Spiritual Charts And Maps, Illustrations</b>     |
| <b>5. P'u-Lu</b>     | <b>Lists of Spirits' Names and Titles</b>           |
| <b>6. Chieh-Lu</b>   | <b>Vows and Rules for the Initiate</b>              |
| <b>7. Wei-Yi</b>     | <b>Liturgies of Renewal and Burial</b>              |
| <b>8. Fang-Fa</b>    | <b>Shorter Rites of Magic, Cures, and Blessings</b> |
| <b>9. Chung-Shu</b>  | <b>Miscellaneous Magic and Incantations</b>         |
| <b>10. Chi-Chuan</b> | <b>Biographies of Famous Taoists</b>                |
| <b>11. Tsan-Sung</b> | <b>Hymns and Medodies</b>                           |
| <b>12. Piao-Tsou</b> | <b>Documents, Memorials and Rescripts</b>           |

The last four sections of the Canon, or the Szu-fu supporting passages, are not divided into twelve subsections as are the Three Arcane above. The four supplements not only contain ritual, which adds to the materials of the first three sections of the Canon, but also include books of alchemy, breath control, Taoist philosophy, and dictionaries of Taoist lore. The fourth section of the Canon is called the T'ai-hsuan Pu, or the section of the Great Mystery. It is said to support the first Arcanum, the Tung-chen Pu; that is, it supplements the teachings of the first great monastic sect, the Mao Shan Highest Purity order. The fifth part of the Canon, the T'ai-p'ing Pu, or

Great Peace, is supposed to supplement the second Arcanum, the *Tung-hsian Pu*, the teachings of the *Ling-pao* order. The sixth section' of the Canon called *T'ai-ch'ing Pu*, or the Great Purity, is supposed to support the third Arcanum, the *Tung-shen Pu*. Finally, the seventh and last section of the Canon is the repository of the teachings and holdings of the Heavenly Master sect, the *Cheng-i* or Orthodox One order of antiquity. Having established a theoretical structure for the Canon, the Taoists of the Ming dynasty seem to have brought their documents to the *Cheng-t'ung* emperor in such haphazard order that the imperial court as well as the Confucian scholars were totally confused about which documents belonged in each of the seven categories. Thus, one would expect to find the major documents and teachings of the contemplative *Mao Shan* order in the first section of the Canon. But instead, one finds at the very beginning of the *Pen-wen*, or basic teachings, of the first section, the basic document and teachings of the *Ling-pao* order in the *Ling-pao Wu-liang Tu-jen Shang-p'in Miao-ching*, with a commentary in sixty-one chapters. Next, one finds the *Ta-tung Chen-ching*, one of the basic texts of the *Mao Shan Shang-ch'ing* sect, immediately followed by two documents taken almost bodily from the Buddhist Canon, the *Hai-k'ung Chih-tsang* and the *Pen-hsing Ching*. Also in the first section are found the basic doctrines of the various thunder magic sects that are the Taoist counterparts to the vajrayana tantric Buddhism, the manual of interior alchemy known as *Yin-fu Ching*, more texts and commentaries of the *Tu-jen Ching*, commentaries on the *I-ching* (Book of Changes)—texts and documents which in fact cover almost every aspect of religious Taoism. In the second section of the Canon, which should have been exclusively devoted to the *Ling-pao* tradition, one finds the basic texts of the first, *Tung-chen* section, the *Yellow Court Canon*, and the magnificent work of the ninth master of *Mao Shan*, the *Teng-chen Yin-chueh of T'ao Hung-ching*. The great liturgical sections of the *Tung-hsian Pu* do actually contain the rituals of the *Ling-pao* order, including the beautiful *chiao* festivals of renewal and the *chai* *Yellow Registers* for burial. In the third section of the Canon, the *Tung-shen Pu*, the *San-huang Wen*, or *Writ of the Three Emperors*, is the remnant of a strange text, a cryptic document mentioned first in the apocryphal texts of early Han China. The *San-huang Wen* was suppressed during the *T'ang* dynasty for certain excesses in its use by Taoist monks and nuns. Since the text obviously belonged to the *Ling-pao* sect of Taoist practitioners, its use to name the third section of the Canon points to the central role played by *Ling-pao* Taoists from the very beginning in the formation of the Canon. The third *Tung-shen* section contains commentaries on the *Lao-tzu* and the *Cimang-f. ZH*, the registers and rituals of the Heavenly Master sect, and documents deriving from the military *Pole Star* sect from *Wu-tang Shan* in *Hupei* province. The eclectic nature of the canon can be further seen in the four supplements. The fourth, *T'ai-hsian Pu*, does indeed contain one of the basic documents of the first monastic order, the famous *Chen Kao*. Along with this document, which supports and supplements the teachings of the first *Mao Shan* monastic order, are texts of internal alchemy, a grand encyclopedia of Taoist lore (the *Seven Cloud Tally Box*), and texts of alchemy. The fifth, *T'ai-p'ing Pu*, further supports the second, *Ling-pao* section of the Canon with the basic *T'ai-p'ing Ching*, the Canon of the Great Peace. Also in the fifth section of the Canon is one of the earliest and most valuable of the canonical texts, the *Wu-sang Pi-yao*. This partially incomplete text can be safely dated to the sixth century, and its teachings figure prominently in the doctrines of Master *Chuang*, as explained in the main body of the present work. The sixth and shortest section of the Canon contains the *T'ai-shang Kan-ying P'ien*, a morality treatise widely used in China's popular religion, and the works of the most famous Taoist philosophers. The seventh and last section of the Canon is named after the Orthodox One, or *Cheng-i* sect. Known from the earliest times as the Heavenly Master sect as well as the *Meng-wei* (Auspicious Alliance) order, the twenty-four basic registers or *Lu* which identify the Taoist of the *Cheng-i* order are found in clear and explicit form in this last section of the Canon.<sup>4</sup> The *Cheng-i* section, in fact, represents the holdings of the Heavenly Masters, the successors of the first Heavenly Master *Chang Tao-ling* in the southern headquarters of orthodox Taoism at *Dragon-Tiger Mountain* (*Lung-hu Shan*) in the province of *Kiangsi*. Commissioned by the imperial government from *Sung* times to give licenses of ordination to local Taoist priests, the Heavenly Master at *Dragon-Tiger Mountain* kept in his possession the main books and paraphernalia of the various Taoist orders of south China whose members came to the sacred mountain to be licensed. Thus one finds in the seventh section of the Canon the registers of the *Meng-wei* order, the *Ling-pao* order, the *Pole Star* sect, the various *Thunder Magic* sects, and the ubiquitous *Shen-hsiao* sect of the *Sung* dynasty charlatan *Lin Ling-su*. To the lay reader unfamiliar with the complexities of the Taoist Canon or the various sects and orders of religious Taoists, the above brief description is both confusing and brusque. The introduction of Master *Chuang*, in chapter I of this work, will bring order into the seeming confusion. In fact, the first three early Taoist movements are clearly defined in Master *Chuang's* teaching. Though called by various names, a marvelous doctrinal unity was preserved by all the early Taoist groups until the middle of the *Sung* dynasty. The attempts to pull away from orthodoxy or to separate from the mainstream of Taoist tradition were curbed by the Heavenly Masters through their right to grant official licenses of ordination. As seen in the documents of Master *Chuang* and as will be explained in chapter 5, the various sects of Taoists are carefully graded. The status and rank of a Taoist at the time of ordination is awarded according to conformity to the teachings of the Heavenly Masters. In an ordination manual used by the Heavenly Masters at *Dragon-Tiger Mountain* from the mid-*Sung* dynasty (ca. 1120) until the present, the grades of ordination are:

**Knowledge of the teachings and meditations of the *Mao Shan***

***Shang-ch'ing* sect, the *Yellow Court Canon*.**

**Grades Two and Three: Knowledge of the teachings and meditations of the *Ch'ing-wei*, *Thunder Magic*, sect (tan-trie Taoism).**

**Grades Four and Five: Knowledge of the rituals of the orthodox *Meng-wei* sect, the twenty-four registers of the Heavenly Masters.**

**Grades Six and Seven: Knowledge of the rituals of the *Ling-pao* sect, the fourteen registers of popular Taoism.**

*The manual further indicates the kinds of Taoists, that is, the sects and orders of Taoists, who come to Dragon-Tiger Mountain for ordination. For each of the orders, the Heavenly Master provides teachings and instructions in their own sect and in its proper doctrines. Thus if a Taoist from the highly rigorous monastic order known as the Ch'ian-chen sect approaches the Heavenly Master, the integrity of his own order and its practices are maintained. But the rank at ordination will be given according to the monk's knowledge of the above registers or doctrines. There are of course almost a hundred local sects and orders of Taoist men and women who approach the Heavenly Master for documents of ordination.*

**The Main Sects are:**

- 1. The Mao Shan Shang-ch'ing sect, the basic doctrines of which are to be found in the Yellow Court Canon. Meditations of mystical union are the specialty of this order, based on the writings of the Chuang-tzu.*
- 2. The Hua Shan Ch'ing-wei, or Thunder Magic, sect from west China. The powerful exorcism and purification rituals of this order are used to oppose evil black magic.*
- 3. The military Pole Star sect from Wu-tang Shan in Hupei Province. The use King-fu bodily exercises, military prowess involving spirits as well as weapons, and Pole Star magic are proper to this early order.*
- 4. The orthodox Heavenly Master Cheng-I sect, also called Auspicious Alliance Meng-wei sect, with headquarters at Lung-hu Shan in Kiangsi province. The Taoists who belong to the order but live by the firesides of village and city China call themselves Jade Pavilion (Yü Fu) Taoists as a sort of identifying secret title.*
- 5. The popular Shen-hsiao order founded by Lin Ling-su during the reign of the Sung Emperor Hui-tsung, ca 1116, in central and south China. The Taoists of this sect were at first considered heterodox, proponents of a kind of black magic for harming people. But according to tradition, they were drawn back into orthodoxy by learning of Thunder Magic from the famous thirtieth generation Heavenly Master. To all of the minor local Taoists coming to Lung-hu Shan for ordinations in this form of late Sung dynasty Taoism.*