

Zeitschrift:	Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band:	52 (1998)
Heft:	3
Artikel:	Counting good deeds and days of life : the quantification of fate in medieval China
Autor:	Kohn, Livia
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147433

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 30.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

COUNTING GOOD DEEDS AND DAYS OF LIFE: THE QUANTIFICATION OF FATE IN MEDIEVAL CHINA

Livia Kohn, Boston University

Human life is by nature unpredictable and full of surprises. From ancient times, people have tried to establish some measure of control over it, furnishing explanations of why good people suffer and bad people prosper, developing methods of fortune-telling and divination to predict the outcome of certain affairs, and devising means of meditation and faith that allow a maximum of equanimity and calm in the midst of life's turbulent seas. Among the many measures taken to make life more stable and predictable, two features of Chinese religion stand out as unusual, if not unique: the bureaucratic nature of the Chinese otherworld and the high degree of quantification and measurability of cosmic and human events.

Ever since the Shang dynasty, the Chinese have conceived of their supernatural world in bureaucratic terms. First there was just an “elaborate hierarchy of ancestors, each with his specific jurisdiction” (Shahar and Weller 1996:4; Keightley 1978), later various celestial administrators, such as the Arbiter of Destiny (*Siming* 司命) already mentioned in the *Shujing* 書經 (Book of History), kept “a record of the moral behavior of men and bestowed upon them either a long or a short life” (Eberhard 1971, 179; see also Welch 1965, 100; Yü 1987, 383). Although assumed originally to have been patterned on bureaucratic structures in the real world, the otherworldly administration is now understood as the foremost expression of a basic religious model which helped to create “an ordering control over the world” (Shahar and Weller 1996:8). Bureaucrats and their offices are predictable and reliable; bound by intricate rules, they can yet be circumvented, bribed, or tricked if only one understands their nature and that of the rules they follow. As a result, both cosmic and personal crises can be dealt with efficiently, giving people a large measure of control over their lives and nature (Keightley 1978:224; Seidel 1990:256).

The same holds true for the high degree of quantification and a preoccupation with measuring in Chinese religion. The energies of the earth, for example, thought to rise with increased velocity at the beginning of spring, were measured with the help of different-sized pitch-pipes in a

method known as *houqi* 候氣 or “watching for the ethers” (Bodde 1959; Huang and Chang 1996). Calendar arrangement and the designation of lucky and unlucky days were advanced even to the point of science as early as the Han dynasty (Loewe 1988). The development of printing, moreover, has been linked with the Chinese urge to copy as many Buddhist sutras as possible, trying to garner a larger quantity of merit for their efforts (Goodrich 1925), and nowhere were recitations of the name of Amitābha counted so assiduously and in such large numbers as in China.

In addition, the Chinese are unique in that they have an established monetary system for their otherworldly interactions (McCreery 1990). Spirit money, available in different forms for ghosts, ancestors, and gods, is readily burnt not only to pacify the spirits and ensure blessings for the living, but also to maintain a good balance in one’s account at the celestial treasury. Life itself, moreover, is seen in currency terms: it begins when the celestial treasury advances a loan to the person and ends when it calls it in, serious overdrafts – incurred through immoral actions – being payable in punishments in hell or other forms of suffering (see Hou 1976; Seidel 1978).

Another form the quantification of fate in China takes is the regular keeping of so-called ledgers of merits and demerits (*gongguo ge* 功過格), popular since the twelfth century. Writing down one’s sins and good deeds on a daily basis helps ascertain the supernatural credits a person accumulates and thus not only makes his or her future life predictable but allows a maximum of personal control over one’s destiny (Brokaw 1991).

Both the elaborate otherworldly bureaucracy and the quantification of fate have been known in their basic forms from ancient times but reached their present elaborate state only after an expansion that occurred in the Chinese middle ages under the influence of religious Daoism. Daoists added pure gods of the Dao to the celestial pantheon and placed starry deities at the center of human and social affairs; they also described an extensive network of deities and divine palaces within the human body, making the entire universe into an intricate network of supernatural administrators (Homann 1978; Maspero 1981, 92). Thus it is not surprising that the key characteristic of Daoist ritual is that it transforms the Daoist into a celestial

bureaucrat who gains control over life and death with the help of written memorials (Schipper 1974).¹

At the same time, Daoists developed the precursors of the later ledgers of merit and demerit by establishing rosters of good and bad deeds that linked happiness and suffering to the numbers performed and by creating a system of specific subtractions from the lifespan. Either method allowed people to explain why they found themselves in a certain predicament or predict what afflictions or good fortune they could expect from their given record. Fate, as with the help of the supernatural bureaucracy, was made into a predictable and controllable quantity which could be managed not unlike an investment portfolio.

Several medieval scriptures describe the Daoist system of quantified fate. They furnish lists of numbers of deeds and their results and give cosmological explanations of the nature of human life, thereby providing an illuminating insight into the moral thinking of medieval China and the continued effort of the Chinese to make life more measurable and thus gain more control over it.

Master Redpine's Essential Precepts

The main and earliest text that deals with questions of personal and quantified fate is the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* 赤松子中戒經 (Essential Precepts of Master Redpine, DZ 185) in one scroll and eleven pages.² Cited already in Ge Hong's 葛洪 *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185, 6.5a),³ it goes back to the fourth century, when it was available in south China, but in its extant edition dates only from the Song dynasty (Ren and Zhong 1991, 135-36). This is indicated by the preface which features the story of the Song official Xue Yuan 薛瑗 and the Daoist master Gongming zihao 公明子昇. The official has ten sons, all

1 For more on the role of bureaucracy in Daoist ritual, see Seidel 1990:255; Strickmann 1996:48.

2 Texts in the Daoist Canon 道藏 (abbreviated DZ) are cited after Schipper 1975.

3 This book was compiled about 320 C.E. See Ware 1966 for a complete translation of the “Inner Chapters”; Sivin 1969 for details on the life of the author; and Sailey 1978 for more on Ge Hong and a translation of the “Outer Chapters.”

afflicted with various sicknesses, deformities, or disabilities, which no physician can cure. Upon the Daoist's advice to change his lifestyle to a more altruistic pattern, the problems of his children improve dramatically (pref. 1a-2a; Yoshioka 1960, 730). The text is mentioned in various Song catalogs (Loon 1984, 110) and cited in works of that period, such as the well-known *Ganying pian* 感應篇 (On Impulse and Response, DZ 1167),⁴ and to the present day forms a part of popular retribution culture.

In terms of doctrine, the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* is yet entirely free from Buddhist influence, its pattern of retribution being strictly limited to natural agencies and the celestial administration. It mentions the underworld realm of Fengdu 鄭都 (5b), which came to play an important role in the cosmology of Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清; see Robinet 1993), and is not unlike the *Taiping jing* 太平經 in its link of people's fate with the position of the stars (Penny 1990; see also Staal 1984), thus combining the doctrines and ideas of various early schools. Its only trace of Song-dynasty thinking is found in the emphasis placed on the "constellations of the Three Terraces and the North Culmen" (2a), which are the central deities in the Song school known as the Celestial Heart (Tianxin 天心; Boltz 1987, 33-38; Drexler 1994, 85-94). As these constellations also appear earlier and much of the text's content is otherwise found in various Six Dynasties' scriptures, the work can be safely placed in the fourth century.

In content the text consists of a dialogue between Huangdi 黃帝 (Yellow Emperor) and Chisongzi 赤松子 (Master Redpine), both classical figures in the Daoist tradition who have first hagiographies in the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Immortals' Biographies, DZ 294) of the Former Han dynasty (Kaltenmark 1953, 50 and 35). The Yellow Emperor, in particular, is the classical student who learns from Guangchengzi 廣成子 (Master of Wide Perfection) in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (ch. 11), from Zhibo 支伯 in the medical classic *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor), and from Sunü (Pure Girl) in the sexual manual *Sunü jing* 素女經. Chisongzi, on the other hand, closely associated with various dietary and gymnastic practices (Yamada 1979, 104), is a highly inspiring immor-

4 Written by the scholar-official Li Changling 李昌齡, the *Ganying pian* is dated to 1127-1150. See Hervouet 1978:370-71 for a critical discussion; Suzuki and Carus 1973 for a translation; Bell 1992 on its printing history. Its relation to the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* is described in Yoshioka 1960:731; 1970:220.

tal who has lived both in the heavens and on earth for a very long time and can reliably report on the workings of the universe.

The dialogue then consists of nine questions put by the Yellow Emperor, which Master Redpine answers in varying degrees of detail. The questions are:

1. Why are people different in their fortunes?
2. How long is a typical human life?
3. Why are there miscarriages and the deaths of infants?
4. How can one improve one's lot?
5. Which sins are punished by subtractions from the lifespan?
6. Do sins and punishments match one another?
7. How can one dissolve the sins already accumulated?
8. Can one find the Dao even in ordinary human life?
9. What types and ranks of wise ones are there?

Answering these questions, Master Redpine presents an outline of how human fortune comes about and the various ways to control and improve it. His key points are five:

1. The stars govern human life through the celestial administration and the gods in the body.
2. Sins and good fortune are inherited within families.
3. Certain numbers of good or bad deeds bring specific results in terms of health, fortune, and length of life.
4. The celestial administration effects subtractions from the lifespan for specific misdeeds
5. Moral rectitude will alleviate harm and even lead to salvation.

The Celestial Administration

People coming to life are all in isolation, each depending on one particular star. There are big stars and small, each governing a specific person's longevity and shortness [of life], decline and prosperity, poverty and wealth, death and life.

Those who do good, good energy will surround them ... Those who do bad, bad energy will surround them ... Day or night, whenever people do evil, the gods in their bodies and the Arbiter of Destiny will submit a report to the stars and constellations above, who in turn will effect a subtraction from their lifespan, so that the light energy of heaven will leave them and the heavy energy of earth will cluster around them. (1ab)

Thus Master Redpine answers the Yellow Emperor's first question, placing the central control over human life and fate in the stars above, while the execution of the stars' judgment lies both in the immediate response of heaven and earth, which surround people with good or bad energies, and in the hands of the celestial administration, whose members keep track of human behavior and effect subtractions from the lifespan. The link of people's fate with stars and the positions of the planets at birth, as expressed in the eight cyclical characters for the hour, day, month, and year of birth, is very ancient. It has played a key role in Chinese fate-calculation since at least the Han dynasty and is central to the fortune-telling methods described in the *Taiping jing* (Scripture of Great Peace, DZ 1101, ed. Wang 1960; see Chao 1946; Penny 1990).

Similarly, the idea of a celestial administration, and especially the Arbiter of Destiny, keeping accounts of people's activities and providing corresponding rewards or punishments is very old, mentioned first in the *Shujing* and recently brought vividly to life in a manuscript unearthed at Fangmatan 放馬灘, which describes the resurrection of a man named Dan 丹 in 297 B.C.E. Having killed another, he committed suicide and was buried after three days of public exposure, only to reappear, alive but not quite hale, after three years. His resurrection was effected through the workings of an otherworld bureaucracy, to whom a surviving friend petitioned on the grounds that Dan had been taken before his allotted time had run out. Accordingly, "he made a declaration to the senior scribe of the Director [Arbiter] of Destiny, who then had a white dog dig up the pit to let Dan out." Reporting on his experiences in the otherworld, the wronged man explains that "the dead do not want many clothes" and people "sacrificing at tombs should not spit" (Harper 1994, 14).⁵

5 Similar reports have recurred over the ages and are still current today. See Teiser 1988, 1994; Pas 1989.

While the celestial administration in ancient China watched over people and kept records of their deeds, it was only in medieval Daoism that it began to have agents right in the human body in form of the so-called body-gods. No longer merely external deities who observed the activities of people from a distance, the gods now had an active presence within the individual's body, both of positive forces of long life and happiness, such as the gods of the center and the Three Ones, who left if not treated properly with meditations and purifications (see Andersen 1980; Kohn 1989), and negative forces of sickness and death who tried to make people commit evils and reported all misdeeds to the administrators above. The most prominent among the latter are the so-called three deathbringers or three corpses (*sanshi* 三尸), who developed from the observation of three parasitic worms which, as described both in Wang Chong's 王充 *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced Discussions) of the second century and in the biography of Hua Tuo 華陀 in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Record of the Three Kingdoms) of the third century, gnawed on people's intestines and could be expelled with herbal remedies (Kohn 1995, 36-37).

The early medical view of the worms developed into a more religious vision under Daoist influence, as is documented in the *Baopuzi* in a citation that may refer to an early version of the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*. Here we have:

As the “Inner Precepts of the *Changes*,” the “Scripture of Master Redpine,” and the “River Chart Talisman of Recording the Lifespan” all state, there are gods in heaven and earth who administer [people's] transgressions. In proper accordance with the seriousness or lightness of a person's offense, they effect a subtraction from [that person's] reckoning. Once the reckoning is lessened, the person will be impoverished and exhausted, ill and sick, and frequently encounter sorrow and distress. There are several hundred things that can cause such a subtraction from one's lifetime. They cannot all be discussed here.

The same texts also maintain that there are three deathbringers in our bodies. Although not fully corporeal, they are like our inner energies, like numinous powers, ghosts and spirits. They want us to die early. After our death, they become our ghosts and move about at will to where sacrifices and offerings are laid out.

On every *gengshen* day [of the sixty-day cycle], they ascend to heaven and file a report on our misdeeds with the Arbiter of Destiny. Similarly during the last night of the month, the Stove God makes a journey to heaven and reports on our behavior. For the more important misdeeds, three hundred days are deducted from our lives. For lesser sins, they take off three days. (6.5ab; see Ware 1966, 115-16)

This passage first systematically describes the medieval Chinese system of fate. As it states, the starry gods above command the celestial administration and the various gods and spirits on earth and in the human body to keep close tabs on human behavior and give due rewards and punishments. Here also for the first time precise numerical values are mentioned, specifying that a lesser misdeed will cost three days of life, while more serious offenses are punished with the subtraction of three hundred.

Both the consequences of having one's lifespan reduced and the reference to "several hundred things that can cause a subtraction" correspond to the content of the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* as we have it today. The text first describes human life energy as particularly contained in a "Perfect Talisman of Great Unity" (*taiyi zhenfu* 太一真符) that is placed on people's foreheads by the Arbiter of Destiny and the Arbiter of Emoluments (*Silu* 司錄). The starry essence of this talisman then changes in accordance with the subtractions made by the gods. As the text has it, in Chisongzi's answer to the third question:

If they subtract one year, the star [essence] on the person's head becomes lack-luster and he or she runs into lots of difficulties. If they take off ten years, the star begins to fade and the person encounters disasters and disease. If they subtract twenty years, the star is extinguished and the person runs into legal trouble and is imprisoned. If they make a reduction of thirty years, the star dissolves and the person dies. (2ab)

Here the lessening of the human lifespan, as a result of evil deeds and their punishment by the gods, is visualized as the gradual dimming and extinction of a bright star. At the same time, the fading of life's energy has direct physical and social consequences in the person's life, making it clear that punishment is not only a shorter life but also a much less happy, healthy,

and successful one. Both sickness and legal troubles are part of the overall fortune of the person, who brings them upon himself by immoral acts.

These immoral acts, moreover, described as running into the hundreds in the *Baopuzi*, are specified in an extensive list in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*. As Master Redpine states in his answer to the Yellow Emperor's fifth question about the nature of human sins:

People have no respect for heaven and earth, the demons and spirits; they are unfilial toward their fathers and mothers. They curse the wind and the rain, reject and denigrate the sages and scriptural teachings, desecrate and destroy the altars to the earth and the ancestors. They dig up tombs and graves to steal the valuables of the dead, never even hesitate to cheat the blind, the deaf, and the dumb. They enter and defile other people's residences to steal gold and brocade, take off their clothes to expose themselves in public, and throw impure substances into food and drink. Silently cursing all living beings, they bury good talismans deep within the earth; envious of those wise and able, they raise nasty worms to prepare the Gu poison. ... (6ab)

The list goes on and on, covering, as the text has it, "over eight hundred sinful items." It shows evil behavior in medieval China was defined socially, consisting mainly of disregarding one's family and other people, thus causing harm to the social network and the integrity of the larger universe.⁶ All these sins, then, are noted duly by the three deathbringers in the body and the stove god at the family's hearth. Reporting them to the Arbiter of Destiny and through him to the starry gods above, these supernatural agents see to the subtraction of days or years from the offender's lifespan, causing him and his family ill health, trouble, and early death.

Inherited Evil

Just as the sins are socially defined, so the punishments do not stop with the individual offender. Already the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*, continuing the passage on the dimming star cited above, says:

6 The same sins also appear in the prohibitions and precepts given to Daoist masters of the same period. See Penny 1996.

If at this time [when the sinner dies], the reckoning is not complete and further disasters are needed, they will be visited upon the person's descendants, sons and grandsons. Should that not be sufficient either, they extend to his retainers and servants. The latter, of course, have no idea where they went wrong and only know that they are suffering from a reduced lifespan. (2a)

This is the gist of the doctrine of inherited evil (*chengfu* 承負), another major development of the Chinese understanding of fate in medieval Daoism. It goes back to the ancient thinking of mutual reciprocity and the retribution of deeds caused by the ancestors. They, as early as the Shang dynasty (1766-1025 B.C.E. ?), were held responsible for good and bad fortune. Ancestors acted benevolently if they were treated well and given the right kinds of sacrifices, but caused disasters if neglected or offended (Brokaw 1991, 28). Poor harvests, natural catastrophes, and other misfortunes were seen as caused by the “curse of an ancestor” (Unschuld 1985, 19), and much political and religious energy was expanded to either pacify the ancestors or divine their will with the help of the so-called oracle bones.

Under the Zhou (1025-256 B.C.E.), the system of reciprocity on the social plane continued supernaturally with the notion that the dead could persecute or haunt the living for misbehavior and evil deeds (Yamazaki 1957, 456), on occasion people even killing themselves so that they could become obnoxious specters and haunt their enemies in revenge (Lin 1990, 73). Overlaying this concept, a new level of reciprocity was developed with the idea of the “mandate of heaven/sky” (*tianming* 天命), which added a moral dimension to the ritual world of the Shang by indicating the right of a certain upright person or family to rule the country (Yamazaki 1957, 456). In the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), the notion of personal retribution of deeds was expanded to include good and bad fortune experienced in this life. It is documented in several anecdotes about military leaders who ordered massacres of enemy soldiers and found themselves in disgrace or dire straits later on (Hsü 1975, 52), as well as in reports on immorality seekers who “practiced a variety of charitable acts – the feeding of orphans, the repair of roads and bridges, and so forth – in the quest for eternal life” (Brokaw 1991, 30). At the same time, collective punishments became the legal norm, holding entire families responsible for the misdeeds of one.

In medieval Daoism, the various notions of ancestral wrath, personal retribution, and collective punishments were joined in the doctrine of inherited evil. Indicating an especially close relationship between ancestors and descendants, it stated that the actions of the ancestors (*cheng*) were put as a load on the backs of their descendants (*fu*; Hendrischke 1991, 8; see also Kamitsuka 1988; Chen 1986). As Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* has, in a passage very similar to that of the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*:

Whenever you interfere with or steal another's goods, the gods may take into account [the lifespan] of your wife, children, and other members of your household in order to compensate for it, causing them to die, even if not immediately. (6.7b; see Ware 1966, 117)

In greater detail the notion was formulated in the *Taiping jing*, dated in its first inception to the second and its reconstituted edition to the sixth century.⁷ Here "inherited evil" meant that "when someone strives to be good but evil results, this is because he receives and transmits the mistakes men have formerly made" (Hendrischke 1991, 10). The kind of evil that was inherited could be created both physically in bad deeds or mentally in a hostile or resentful attitude. Its existence took some pressure off the present generation in that reasons for failure could be found among earlier family members, but at the same time heightened the responsibility of the individual for his many generations of descendants (Hendrischke 1991, 11).⁸ *Chengfu* also extended to other social units beyond the family, such as the groups of five families that had joint responsibility according to the legal codes, and in the case of an emperor involving the fortune of the entire country (Hendrischke 1991, 16-17). Daoist practice, purifications, exorcisms, the establishment of an open and harmonious community, as well as individual meditations (Hendrischke 1991, 18-19), were all geared toward the alleviation and eventual termination of this situation in the hope of creating a purer world of Great Peace.

7 The same sins also appear in the prohibitions and precepts given to Daoist masters of the same period. See Penny 1996.

8 The "extension of errors" or bad fortune to one's descendants is called *yanwu* 延誤 and as such mentioned variously in early Daoist literature. See Zürcher 1980: 137 n. 98; Akizuki 1964:36. For more on *chengfu*, see also Lai 1996:309-12.

The very same notion characterizes the position of the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*, where the Yellow Emperor raises the issue in his third question.

He asked: “On occasion there are those dying while still in the womb or those who only live to a see a few years. They have not yet done anything in the world, so what prohibition or taboo would they have violated?”

Master Redpine explained: “Things like these happen because the sins of the ancestors and forebears are bequeathed upon the descendants, causing them calamities. Ever since antiquity, heroes and wise men have established corresponding teachings, which have been documented in the books of the immortals. They all admonish people to do good and know the very incipience of evil, so that even from high antiquity on they can give nothing but good fortune to their numerous generations of descendants.” (1b-2a)

Prosperous families, therefore, have to thank their long line of morally good ancestors for their good fortune, while slaves and outcasts are inheriting their forebears’ bad inclinations. Moral rectitude or turpitude continue over generations, offering both consolation for bad situations and a good hope for the future. There is always opportunity for improvement, and if the entire world improves Great Peace is reached.

Good and Bad Deeds

Within the life of the individual, on the other hand, the more immediate concern lies with the effects of one’s deeds in the here and now, from which the future fortune of the family might unfold. Both good and bad deeds having been defined and the importance of one’s kin established, the Yellow Emperor in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* can turn to the specifics of the individual’s concrete situation. Asking accordingly about the ways to improve one’s lot, he receives a detailed accounting of the benefits of doing good and the harm created by evil.

Both benefits and harm accrue as they increase in numbers (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Deeds and Their Effects according to Chisongzi zhongjie jing 4a-5b*

Good Deeds	
1	spirit and intention calm and at peace
10	energy and strength strong and vigorous
20	body free from affliction and harm
30	all goals pursues come out as planned
40	be well-off and cheerful
50	have long line of sons and grandsons
60	no being cheated, exposed to violence or legal affairs
70	excel and be noble in his studies
80	attain earth's benefits
90	get protection from spirits of heaven
100	good emolument with heaven's help, meet wise and sagely
200	famous for generations, descendants officials
300	3 gen. descendants rich and noble, prosperous and happy
400	4 gen. descendants rich and noble, official employment
500	5 gen. descendants feudal lords, aristocrats
600	many gen. descendants loyal and filial, rich and noble
700	family has many wise men and philosophers
800	family has men of Tao and virtue
900	family has sages
1,000	family has immortals

Bad Deeds	
1	intention not calm and at peace
10	energy and strength hollow and declining
20	body afflicted by much sickness and disease
30	nothing planned comes to pass
40	constant difficulties, facing decay and destruction

Bad Deeds (continued)	
50	never finding equal partner
60	line of descendants dies out
70	harmed by <i>yin</i> demons
80	disasters of water and fire, being burnt and drowned
90	poor and cold, in distress and weak, hungry and going mad
100	harmed by energy of heaven, affairs bad, prison, execution
200	harmed by energy of earth, robbed and stripped by brigands
300	descendants humble and common
400	descendants poor and lowly, destitute and begging
500	descendants cut off family line
600	descendants blind and deaf, mute and mad
700	descendants rebels, unfilial and criminal
800	family has ministers and unfilial sons, cause destruction and beheadings to entire clan
900	family has demonic and evil people, cause destruction to their own and other clans
1,000	descendants malformed and crooked, looking like maimed animals or wild birds

While one good deed makes spirit and intention calm and at peace, ten give the person strong physical energy, twenty keep the body free from affliction, thirty ensure that all one's goals are achieved as planned, and so on, until hundreds of good deeds will make certain that one's family brings forth noble, prosperous, and well honored people, if not actually sages and immortals. In reverse, one bad deed makes one restless and nervous, ten cause one's energy to decline, twenty create physical afflictions, thirty prevent one's plans from being realized, forty will put one in constant difficulties, and so on, until a hundred bad deeds see one in prison and even suffering execution, and several hundred cause one's family to decline, become lowly, destitute, and criminal. In each case, good deeds accumulated by one's ancestors result in the emergence of nobles, sages, or immortals in later generations, while "the misfortune that comes from accumulating evil overflows and causes calamities to strike for many generations to come. First the Arbiter of Destiny subtracts time from the sinner's life-span, then the star on his head tumbles and his body dies, then his soul is

captured in the dark realm of Fengdu, and finally the misfortune hits his descendants of later generations" (5b).

In a less mythological description, the effect of increasing numbers of good or bad deeds can be said to move parallel and expand in concentric circles. Beginning with influencing the person's mind and attitude toward life, they cause changes in his or her physical wellbeing, which in turn lead to a tendency to succeed or fail in one's ventures. This next leads to a gain or loss in his or her own social standing, which in turn influences first the prosperity of the immediate descendants, then the social standing and excellence of later generations. Looked at from this perspective, the system, although formulated in rigid lists and explained in mythological terms, has a certain psychological and sociological logic, through which it provides a framework for understanding one's present situation and shows a possible way out of the predicament.

This description of the effects of good and bad deeds as first presented in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* played an important role in the Chinese understanding of fate and had a strong influence on the development of the later ledgers of merit and demerit. In fact, it is taken up by a number of medieval and Song-dynasty texts, both in a minor variant with essentially the same content and in a different and expanded version.

The basically same list – it varies in phrasing, such as in “mind at peace and body calm” for “spirit and intention calm and at peace,” and in leaving out the exact numbers of generations affected – reappears three times in Daoist literature:⁹ in the *Xuandu lüwen* 玄都律文 (Rules of Mystery Metropolis, DZ 188, 2a-3a), a compilation of six sets of rules for the Celestial Masters community, dated to the sixth century;¹⁰ in the *Zhiyan zong* 至言總 (Comprehensive Perfect Words, DZ 1033, 5.5b-6a, 9ab), a ninth-century compilation of Daoist practices of longevity and visualization;¹¹ and in the supplement to the *Ganying pian* (11.2b-3b), a guide to

9 For a comprehensive table of all the various versions of the list, see Yoshioka 1967:294-99.

10 The date is based on the citations of the work which range from the seventh to the eleventh centuries. See Ren and Zhong 1991:137-38; Robinet 1984:2,280; Kobayashi 1990:206; Noguchi et al. 1994:132.

11 On the date of this text, see Yoshioka 1967; Li 1991:1881; Ren and Zhong 1991: 777.

moral merit and retribution that is, as already mentioned, dated to the twelfth century.

The reappearance of the same list over a number of centuries shows its continued relevance in Daoist worldview and its adaptability to different schools and sets of followers. Where the *Xuandu lüwen* concerns primarily lay followers of an organized group, the *Zhiyan zong* is a manual for practitioners of longevity and meditation. The *Ganying pian*, finally, compiled by a Confucian official, addresses a much wider circle of popular followers interested in improving their lives. It is especially the latter that made the list of good and bad deeds part of popular retribution culture and assured its influence down to the present day.

Two variant versions of the list, moreover, occur in Tang Daoist literature, one in the *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* 要修科儀戒律鈔 (Notes on Essential Rules and Observances, Precepts and Statutes, DZ 463, 12.11b-12a and 12.10a-11a), a ritual compendium of the mid-Tang, and also in the *Zhiyan zong* (5.4b and 5.6b-7a); the other in Du Guangting's 杜光庭 (850-933) *Yongcheng jixian lu* 壽城集仙錄 (Record of the Assembled Immortals in the Heavenly Walled City, DZ 783, 1.4a-6a).

As regards the first, it consists of two parts, a list of the effects of good deeds from ten to one hundred, cited after the *Dongshen jing* 洞神經 (Cavern Spirit Scripture), the canonic title of the *Sanhuang wen* 三皇文 (Texts of the Three Sovereigns), which was lost in the seventh century (see Kohn 1995a, 207-8); and a description of bad deeds from 120 to 3,600 cited after the *Xuandu lüwen*, in whose present edition it does not appear (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Deeds and their Effects according to Yaoxiu keyi 12.11b-12a and 12.10a-11a*

Good Deeds	
10	give birth to fortunate sons
20	gain protection by heavenly spirits
30	avoid persecution by evil demons
40	avoid death even if close
50	no bad fortune for the whole life

Good Deeds (continued)	
60	Lord of Dao spontaneously present
70	attain rapport with the five sacred mountains
80	have name removed from registers of the dead
90	will become a spirit immortal
100	will ascend to the nine heavens
Bad Deeds	
120	much bad luck, little good fortune
180	six domestic animals do not breed
190	easily catches sickness and disease
530	have miscarriages and abortions
720	no sons, many daughters
829	become dumb and deaf
1,080	die violent early death
1,200	family brings forth rebels
1,260	family line dies out
1,400	misfortune reaches to five generations
1,620	no descendants
1,800	family brings forth slaves
1,900	family brings forth madmen
2,340	family brings forth rebels
2,520	family brings forth people dying from starvation
2,600	family brings forth people dying in war
2,700	family brings forth those possessed and shamans
2,800	family brings forth those weak in bone and muscles
3,060	family brings forth those afflicted by incurable diseases
3,240	family brings forth those involved in legal affairs, imprisoned and executed
3,420	family brings forth beggars whose corpses are thrown away in the wild
3,600	there is nothing but death all around

This list of good deeds matches the earlier version in that it specifies deeds in round numbers from ten to one hundred and focuses entirely on the person's own fate within that framework. It differs, however, in that it assures

a celestial career even with as few as eighty good deeds, allowing the person to ascend to the nine heavens and become an immortal with ninety or a hundred. The list of bad deeds, on the other hand, is different not only in its numbering system, which is odd to say the least, but also in that it does not begin until 120 and then goes beyond a thousand to 3,600. Also, it does not detail effects on later generations until after 1,080 bad deeds have been committed which cause the person to die an early death. In addition, the list places a higher emphasis on sickness and various physical afflictions and is somewhat less systematic in its presentation of consequences – early death and no descendants being mentioned twice. More significantly, though, it names each item with a specific term: thus 120 bad deeds cause one *bing* 痘 or “sickness,” 180 bring about one *hao* 耗 or “waste,” 190 one *lou* 漏 or “loss,” and so on, going through the entire gamut of terrible events, from bad luck and misfortune through calamity, disaster, destruction, disgrace, and affliction to obstruction, incidents of violence, and catastrophes.

While this version of the list still matches the first to a certain extent, the second Tang variant is more radically different. More oriented toward the otherworld rather than toward effects in this life, it shows a distinct Buddhist influence and appears in the *Yongcheng jixian lu* (1.4a-6a), dated to about 900, as part of the biography of the “Mother of the Dao” (*Shengmu yuanjun* 聖母元君).¹² Still, the list begins as the others with the assurance that a single good deed causes one’s mind and spirit to be at peace, while ten good deeds will make one’s energy and vigor grow (see Table 3).

12 On Du and his works, see Verellen 1989. For details on the *Yongcheng jixian lu*, see Cahill 1986. The biography of the Mother of the Dao is translated in Kohn 1989.

Table 3: Deeds and their Effects in the Late Tang according to Yongcheng jixian lu 1.4a-6a

Good Deeds	
1	mind and spirit at peace
10	energy and vigor grow
100	treasures and good omens descend
1,000	reborn with spirit of perfection
2,000	position of heavenly attendant with rank of sage, perfected, or immortal
3,000	position of official with rank of sage, perfected, or immortal
4,000	leader of religious matters on earth with rank ...
5,000	master teacher in heaven with rank ...
6,000	minister in heaven with rank ...
7,000	feudal lord in heaven with rank ...
8,000	emperor in heaven with rank ...
9,000	lord of the Five Emperors of Primordial Beginning
10,000	Jade Emperor on High

Bad Deeds	
1,000	uncanny and stubborn in a later life
2,000	fall into slavery
3,000	contract six diseases, be orphaned and poor
4,000	meet with pestilence or become an outlaw
5,000	turn into a ghost in one of the five mountain hells
6,000	imprisoned in twenty-eight hells
7,000	punished in hells of all directions
8,000	punished in ice hell
9,000	punished in deepest hell on fringes
10,000	punished in hell of hungry ghost

From a single bad deed, this list jumps immediately to one thousand and into the realm of rebirth – typically located in heaven and in the position of

a celestial administrator with the rank of sage, perfected, or immortal.¹³ With ten thousand good deeds, one may even become the Jade Emperor himself. Similarly, the list of bad deeds is introduced only briefly with the note that “one bad deed committed will lead to ten thousand,” then moves right up to one thousand. Various bad forms of rebirth are specified with each additional thousand, reaching from an unpleasant personality through becoming a slave, leper, or outlaw to an existence as a ghost or in one of the hells.

Both the increased numbers and the focus on rebirth and the other-world as well as the details of the hells reflect the Buddhist vision of karma and retribution. This, although prominent in Daoist belief from the fifth century,¹⁴ represents a parallel system to that of the quantification of fate, on which it impinges only at a rather late stage without leaving a lasting impact, as the continued prevalence of the first list since the Song shows. Belief in rebirth was present but kept separate from the counting of good deeds and the effects envisioned for them in this life and for future generations.

Subtractions from the Lifespan

Another numbering system devised by medieval Daoists that became influential later was the attachment of precise numerical values to the various deeds, accounting for bad deeds with subtractions of days from one’s life and for good deeds with additions to it. Its basic premise was the fixation of an exact number of days for the ideal human lifespan, given already in the *Taiping jing* as 120 years or 43,800 days of life (Penny 1990, 5), from which appropriate periods were being deducted. The *Baopuzi*, in a passage cited earlier (6.5ab), distinguishes between a unit of reckoning (*suan 算*)

13 There are altogether twenty-seven ranks in this Daoist version of the heavenly bureaucracy, as documented in the literature from the fifth century: nine each of sage, perfected, and immortal. Its structure and organization matches the ranks of Confucian officials on earth. See Ishii 1983.

14 Especially shaping the doctrines of the school of Numinous Treasure, personal karma and rebirth became a major aspect of Daoist teachings in the middle ages. See Zürcher 1980.

and a period (*ji* 紀). Most commonly the “unit” is one day of the lifespan, but on occasion it is also described as three days (DZ 1, 29.18a), as sixty days (DZ 1125, 1.12a), or as one hundred days (Yoshioka 1970, 187-89). The range of a “period” similarly varies between a hundred days and as many as twelve years (Yoshioka 1970, 190).

The *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* does not detail exact numbers of days or periods for specific sins. It does, however, address the issue in the sixth question asked by the Yellow Emperor:

When people violate the prohibitions and taboos of heaven and earth, they receive a certain subtraction from their lifespan. What is the relationship between the exact measure of the subtraction and the sin committed? (7a)

Master Redpine answers that numbering sins is a highly complicated affair, because although people might “present an outward appearance of harmony and compliance to the world, they may yet on the inside harbor thoughts of darkness and jealousy.” This then would constitute one sin already, a second one being committed when negative action is taken on the basis of these emotions. Still, the Master assures the Emperor, “whatever people do is properly registered and memorialized by the Arbiter of Destiny one sin after the next, and people are punished in accordance with them” (7a). Not only is the amount of punishment equal to the number of sins but usually the retribution matches the deed, so that “someone who has killed, for example, will himself be caught up between two armies and suffer death on the battlefield.”

Intentionality also plays a key role in the degree of punishment received. As Master Redpine says:

If people accidentally commit an act against the way [of heaven], they can offer proper repentance of their transgression and thus be exonerated. If they learn what is evil but do not believe it, if they know they are at fault but do not change their ways and still commit bad deeds, or if they vacillate a lot and keep poisonous thoughts in their hearts, their sins are intentional and cannot be exonerated. (8a)

While the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* does not discuss the issue further, a more detailed accounting of sins and punishments is given in two other

medieval texts: the *Xuandu lüwen*, the sixth-century collection of statutes for a lay community already mentioned earlier, and the *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 (Rules and Precepts for Worshiping the Dao, DZ 1125; Kohn 1997), a manual for Daoist monastics ascribed to Jin Ming Qizhen 金明七真 of the mid-sixth century but actually dating from the early Tang (see Reiter 1988, 58).

The *Xuandu lüwen* names subtractions of days, years, or periods from the lifespan as punishments for infringements on the communal and ritual code of the Celestial Masters in three of its six sections. Typically it outlines a rule, addressed to “all Daoists, whether male or female, register disciples, and people of the Dao” (*daoshi nüguan lusheng daomin* 道士女官籲生道民), then ends its instruction with the formula: “Failure to comply with this statute is punished by the subtraction of ...” (3b-4a). More specifically, its second set of rules (3a-5a) consists of twelve statutes on concrete ritual practices, such as the visualization of gods, the chanting of scriptures, the eating of sacrificial food, as well as the ritual schedule and attitudes toward teachers and family. It is introduced with a list of basic undesirable attitudes of a deceiving nature, such as taking evil for good, crooked for straight, pure for turbid, and so on. Each statute, moreover, is associated with a particular subtraction, ranging from three hundred days to five years.

Section five (11a-18b), too, gives punishments in the form of subtractions from the lifespan. It consists of twenty-seven statutes of communal and ritual import, warning against various improper actions, such as not following the inheritance procedures when taking over the teaching from one's father, squabbling over the transmission after the death of a master, failure to register a new family member, attend assemblies, or pay the right amount of tax, seeking fast promotion, making mistakes in setting out banquets, creating disturbances during the three annual meetings, failing to worship properly, at the right times, or in a state of proper purification, and so on. Subtractions from the lifespan in this section are not given in days or years but range from one to three periods. The length of a period is not specified, but the third statute on the necessity of registering properly and paying the right amount of rice tax has the following: “The head of the [offending] household will be punished by the subtraction of two hundred days; the members will each be punished by the subtraction of

two periods" (11b). This suggests that one period was less than one hundred days, possibly thirty or sixty.

The last section of the *Xuandu lüwen* (18b-22a), finally, has sixteen items that deal with the presentation of written memorials. It specifies the importance of choosing the right day and the right hour, of being properly purified and attired in ritual vestments, and of performing the rite for the sake of the entire community and not for personal gain. Punishments in this section vary. Some items do not specify any, others indicate a reduction in rank by one or two levels. Others yet again have a subtraction of days or periods from the lifespan, and there is the occasional case when the offender is punished by sickness for a given number of days. For example, the ninth rule specifies that memorials to pray for wealth and high rank are only to be submitted on specific days, then states: "Failure to comply with this statute is punished by the visitation of sickness for fifty days" (20b). The three deathbringers, moreover, are mentioned as divine emissaries who report people's thoughts and actions to the celestial administration (21a).

The *Xuandu lüwen* of the sixth century is clearly addressed to lay followers of the Celestial Masters and accordingly includes sins such as lack of filial piety, infringements on community order, and failure to pay taxes and join assemblies. The *Fengdao kejie* of the early seventh century, on the other hand, while following the *Xuandu lüwen* in diction and ideas, is directed toward a monastic community of celibate recluses who are no longer bound by ordinary social patterns. While they are organized in ranks and still observe a communal order, they are much more deeply involved with ritual procedures, formal vestments, and the development of a deep personal religiosity. The text accordingly specifies punishments in terms of days subtracted from the lifespan for a large variety of offenses, ranging from the appointment of personal favorites to office over failure to follow the correct ritual procedure during various services to using non-regulation pillows or passing a fellow Daoist without formal greeting (see Table 4).

Table 4: Subtractions of Days of Life in Daoist Monasticism (according to the Fengdao kejie, giving section numbers together with the DZ scroll and page or number of the Dunhuang manuscript)

10 years of life	
3,600	appointing personal favorites to office (7/2.12a)
3,600	taking or granting ordination out of the proper order (13/5.2b)
3,600	assuming a rank without the proper authorization (13/5.3)
3,600	not following the proper procedure in ritual vestments (14/5.4a)
3,600	wearing underwear of a color other than dusty yellow (9/3.7a)
7-8 years of life	
2,800	not having a thanksgiving three days after ordination (20/S. 809)
2,400	disturbing the peace by not obeying rules (7/2.15a)
2,400	not following the ritual for reading or chanting scriptures (11/4.3b)
2,400	wearing the wrong ritual vestments (14/5.6a)
2,400	neglecting to ascertain rules for observances (18/6.11b)
2,400	handing out blank scrolls during ordination (20/S. 809)
4½ years of life	
1,600	not following the ritual for noon meal (16/6.7a)
1,600	not following the ritual for assemblies (16/6.9b)
1,600	not sitting in right order of ranks (23/P. 3682)
1,600	not developing a compassionate attitude (24/P. 3682)
1,400	wearing fancy or wrong shoes (14/5.7b)
3 years and 4 months of life	
1,200	wearing vestments outside of formal occasions (9/3.6b)
1,200	not following the ritual for lecturing on scriptures (12/4.4b)
1,200	being ignorant about or confusing the ranks (13/4.4b)
1,200	not attending regular community meetings (13/5.3a)
1,200	not wearing ritual vestments at ceremonies (14/5.6b)
1,200	leaving ritual vestments out unfolded (14/5.8a)
1,200	not following the ritual for daily services (15/6.4a)
1,200	not following the ritual for ordinations (18/6.11b)
1,200	not following details during ordination (20/S. 809)

3 years and 4 months of life (continued)	
1,200	master not setting up procedures properly (20/S. 809)
1,200	not staying in proper order of ritual rank (20/S. 809)
1,200	sitting with ordinary people while with ritual implements or in vestments (23/P. 3682)
	almost 2 years of life
680	saving on the number of incense burners (8/3.6a)
	1 year of life
360	using non-regulation pillows (9/3.8a)
360	taking fine fabrics among ordinary people (9/3.8a)
360	having more than regulation furniture (10/3.9a)
360	seeking personal gain from being a Taoist (22/ <i>Miaomen youqi</i>)
	8 months of life
280	using refectory dishes elsewhere (10/3.9a)
280	placing shoes directly on the ground (14/5.7b)
280	carving hairpins in fancy shapes (14/5.8a)
260	not properly storing hairpins (9/3.7b)
240	wearing non-regulation or fancy shoes (9/3.7b)
240	women wearing a garment of dull color (9/3.6b)
	4 months of life
130	not blessing the donor when receiving donation (23/P. 3682)
120	not building a proper bath house (10/3.9b)
120	not keeping the well clean (10/3.9b)
120	not keeping the outhouse clean (10/3.10a)
120	sleeping not alone (10/3.8b)
120	screening one's room with curtains or screens (10/3.8b)
120	getting angry with ordinary people (23/P. 3682)
120	being arrogant toward ordinary people (23/P. 3682)
120	passing Taoists without formal greeting (23/P. 3682)

	about 3 months of life
100	saving on making paper lanterns (8/3.6a)
80	leaving the water pitcher uncovered (10/3.9b)

Additions of Days of Life in the Fengdao kejie (P. 3682)

1,200	wishing to create goodness and sympathy for all
820	wishing to distribute charity to all
720	praying for the enslaved
720	praying for the poor
620	praying for family and lords
620	praying for those in cages and dungeons
620	wishing to distribute food to all
520	praying for the hungry and cold
520	wishing to purify all
520	wishing to distribute medicines to all
520	wishing to destroy demons with talismans
420	wishing for good roads and bridges
360	wishing for free lodges for all
360	wishing for free wells for all
360	wishing for free fruit for all
320	praying for the depressed
320	praying for the old, sick, and imprisoned
220	wishing for free juice for all

One oddity that results from this special situation is that offenses we would describe as highly disparate in nature are punished with the same severity. For example, the highest subtraction of 3,600 days is imposed on failure to observe the proper order of rank or ritual, a rather serious infringement on community harmony, but also on the wearing the wrong type of under-wear. As the text has:

All Daoists, whether male or female, must wear breeches and leggings, tunics and shirts of dusty yellow. They must not use any other color, including white. Failure to comply carries a subtraction of 3,600 [days of life]. (3.7a)

Similarly placing adornments on one's shoes is punished with almost the same subtraction as not following the proper ritual during the noon meal, and not folding one's ritual vestments properly is on the same level as not staying within the proper order of ritual rank. Physical actions and details of daily routine in the monastery, therefore, although they might seem minor to us, are valued as highly as acts that involve the immediate performance of ritual or the upholding of the proper order of ranks.

At the same time, actions that we would consider seriously disturbing to the order are valued rather less. For example, celibacy:

The residences and sleeping places of all Daoists, whether male or female, should be surrounded by four walls and built for single occupancy. There should not be several bunks [in the same room] either in front or behind each other. Whether sitting or sleeping, Daoists should always be alone and one per bed. Failure to comply carries a subtraction of 120 [days of life]. (3.8b)

Punished only with 120 subtracted days, this ranks on the same level as not keeping the well or the privy clean or behaving arrogantly toward ordinary people. It is only slightly more serious than leaving one's water pitcher uncovered, a truly minor offense in our understanding that will not affect the entire community as a breach of celibacy might.

Then again, another aspect of the system that only appears in the monastic rules is the possibility of winning an addition to the lifespan through a good and helpful attitude. A list of such attitudes and their corresponding rewards is found in a section entitled "Compassionate Attitudes," contained in a fragment of the Fengdao kejie recovered from Dunhuang (P. 3682; Ofuchi 1979, 219-21). It begins with a warning:

The Rules say: After becoming an ordained monk [or nun], always make compassion foremost. In each affair, serve with your whole heart and always bring forth loving mindfulness. Whether walking, sitting, lying down, or resting, constantly think of the salvation [of all]. Among all the myriad activities, this is the most urgent. If you fail to comply with this behavioral [attitude], you cannot attain the Dao. Failure to comply carries a subtraction of 1,600 [days of life].

Then, however, it switches over to positive attitudes, usually expressed in wishes or prayers the recluses are encouraged to have on behalf of the

wider populace. Certain typical formulas stand out, such as the repeated wishful thought, "May they all attain good fortune without measure!" People in distress, the sick, poor, orphaned, enslaved, imprisoned, or old are given particular consideration, and in keeping with the ancient tradition of the Celestial Masters, the wish for free supplies to travelers is prominent. To give an example:

The Rules say: All Daoists, whether male or female, whenever [encountering] fords and stream crossings, roads and ways that are blocked and impassable, or bridges and overpasses under construction or repair, should always be mindful and develop the good intention that all living beings, past and future, should be free from obstacles and obstructions. May they all attain good fortune without measure! This attitude carries an addition of 420 [days of life].

A devout practitioner of the Dao can thus both increase and diminish his life expectancy and good fortune in accordance with the rules laid out. Placed in a precarious position within the larger cosmic framework, Daoist recluses have the power to determine the quality and length of their lives, not to mention the good fortune of their families and states and their own status of rebirth. More vulnerable than ordinary people, who too are subject to the same principles of supernatural rewards and punishments, they must watch not only over their ritual and religious acts but be conscious of every physical detail of their day-to-day lives and try to maintain a positive and compassionate attitude to all around them. They are models for humanity, idealized and thus more vulnerable figures under the sway of the celestial administration.

Moral Rectitude

As the monastics demonstrate, the avoidance of flaws and the practice of virtue is the way to attain salvation. But is this possible for ordinary people, can it be done even within the common world? The same question occurred to the Yellow Emperor in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing*, who asks it as his eighth. The answer given by Master Redpine begins with an outline of the universal law of reverberation and multiplication, rooted in the human mind-and-heart:

Now, all human practice of good and commitment of evil begin with the mind. The mind is the seed of the five robbers and the root of the myriad evils. When the human mind intends to perform a good deed, then even before it is done, the good spirits already respond to it. In the same way, when it intends to commit a bad deed, even before it manifests, all the inauspicious spirits already know about it. (9b)

The retribution for good and evil as they sprout in the human mind is thus immediate and irrevocable, an automatic process of energies of the same kind attracting and multiplying each other. This matches the overall structure of the cosmos, as outlined earlier in the same text, which works in a pattern of impulse and response, heaven reacting to living beings “like a shadow following an object” and earth responding to human actions “like an echo following a sound” (2b). Larger cosmic forces thus make their will known through signs: heaven “brings forth thunder and lightning, rain and snow, intertwining rainbows, eclipses of the sun and the moon;” earth shows its displeasure by making “rivers and streams dry up and creating landslides and earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes, sandstorms and moving stones, floods and locust plagues, famines and droughts, epidemics and other disasters” (2b). On the individual level, moreover, good and evil spirits and energies attach themselves to the person and cause good or bad fortune in accordance with his or her intentions.

These intentions are rooted in the human mind and come in sets of five: the five robbers and the five virtues, matching each other one by one. Greed and envy, which constitute the first robber, are thus matched by the virtue of benevolence or sympathy, a sense of communion with others rather than one of opposition. Killing and murder, the second, are countered by righteousness or social responsibility, a feeling of personal involvement with the community rather than an egoistic urge. Violence and disorder, third, are alleviated by ritual or proper social etiquette, the inherent code of behavior that keeps a society functioning smoothly. Cheating and betrayal, fourth, are taken care of by wisdom or honesty, a sense of personal worth and understanding that makes dishonesty unnecessary. And deception and flattery, the fifth robber, are held in check by trust or trustworthiness, the feeling of mutual integrity and personal reliance on others (10a). Master Redpine therefore invokes the five basic Confucian virtues

as the basis of good moral behavior and thus the way to prevent evil and attain salvation in the world.

In addition, the text specifies nine ways of thinking that either create evil or develop goodness. The nine thoughts of evil typically are directed toward the destruction or acquisition of someone else's possessions, such as his wealth, rank, wife, or home. In case of debt, for example, a negative hope would be for the moneylender's death. The worst possible thought of this sort, moreover, is the wish that one's parents may die early so that one can get one's hands on their estate (10b).

Whereas bad thoughts increase acquisitiveness and aggression, good thoughts encourage an attitude of humility and compassion, recognizing one's own limitations and wishing for the good of others. More practically and thisworldly oriented than the "compassionate attitudes" recommended for the monastics, these thoughts yet follow the same line of reasoning and have a similar goal. Thus seeing someone prosper, one should realize that one's own good fortune still needs developing; seeing someone pile his rice in one storehouse after another, one should realize that one has not worked hard enough oneself; seeing the beautiful wife or concubine of another, one should realize that one's own partner is not quarrelsome and provides a harmonious home; seeing another's big house, one should think that one can also be content in a lowly cottage (10b). In addition, in cases of debt, whether one owns or owes it, one should think only the best of people and value their efforts on one's behalf. Most of all, one should always remain conscious that one can never repay the kindness of one's parents (10b-11a).

Thoughts like these are the foundation of wisdom, which leads to personal contentment, prosperity, and eventually the great success of one's family as described in the list of good deeds. Wisdom, moreover, comes in three forms: high, medium, and low, depending on one's inborn quality. People of high wisdom have a spontaneous understanding of heaven and earth, knowing without being taught what the proper way of the universe is at any given moment. As a result, "their hearts are full of love and compassion, and they do not take other people lightly. They know success and failure, understand when to advance and retire, and properly distinguish life and death. People like these, although they may be poor, will in the end be rich; although they may be humble for a time, they will in the end be noble" (11a).

People of medium wisdom are book learners, those who have garnered much insight from the study of the scriptures. They follow the rules of ritual propriety, are filial and loyal and never speak a harsh word. In their behavior, “they are always humble and withdrawing, warm and modest. Although they may not study, they yet find awakening in the end; although they do not stand out yet, they will eventually arrive” (11b). People of low wisdom, finally, are devout believers. They follow the rules outlined in the codes and never take anything that is not freely offered. They tread carefully, realizing the dangers of the world, and try to protect their lives and bodies as best as they can. “Like this making continuous efforts, they never undergo loss or failure, never meet with obstructions or misfortune” (11b).

This tripartite division into spontaneous knowers, book learners, and devout believers recalls the division in the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects) of Confucius into four types of humanity: the naturally gifted who are intuitive paragons of morality; those to whom learning and the study of the scriptures comes easily; those who have difficulties but persevere and with sufficient effort will attain the goal; and the hopeless who will only reach the most basic form of moral accomplishment. The three kinds of wisdom in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* match the first three types of Confucius’s division, just as the five virtues form the root of moral rectitude in both systems.

Still, where the goal of good moral behavior is the creation of an ideal society in Confucianism, in the popular Daoist text the ultimate aim is the perfection and even immortality of the individual, allowing him through the accumulation of good deeds a maximum control over his fate and that of his family. By counting the good deeds and the days of one’s life and by knowing what kind of behavior will cost how much in the heavenly ledgers, one gains a sense of being in charge, a feeling of knowing where one stands within the larger cosmic framework. And, of course, the celestial bureaucracy never makes a mistake in their calculations, so that precise numbers of deeds bring just this and no other form of reward or punishment. This sense of absolute exactitude is already documented in the *Bao-puzi*. Here we have:

Anyone wishing to become an earth immortal must establish 300 [good deeds]; if he wishes to become a celestial immortal, he needs 1,200. If after accumulat-

ing 1,199 he suddenly commits even a single bad deed, he loses all the credit acquired earlier and must begin anew. (3.11a; see Ware 1966, 66-67; Brokaw 1990, 30)

The same thinking in exact numbers is also documented in Daoist religious practice. Ten thousand recitations of the *Daode jing*, for example, were believed to guarantee access to heaven and immortality. However, as the *Zhen'gao* (Declarations of the Perfected, DZ 1016) of approximately 500 C.E. documents, there had to be exactly this number and no less. According to this text, a certain Old Lord instructed three members of the Zhou family, the father and two sons, to recite the text. The father and elder brother succeeded in reciting the text ten thousand times and flew off as celestials. The younger brother, however, only reached 9,733 times and did not attain immortality (5.6a; Yoshioka 1959, 123).

Fate and salvation thus quantified in medieval China became countable and accountable, measurable items of life that could be known and described and bartered with. Even a large number of bad deeds, once their consequences made themselves felt, could be eradicated by a change in lifestyle, as documented in the preface of the *Zhisongzi zhongjie jing*. Every good deed, moreover, would appear in the celestial ledgers and count toward the good fortune and eventual salvation of the person. Banished into numbers, fate was made predictable and came to lose some of its menace, turning from a cosmic power into a commodity that was manageable like gains and losses in material investments. The personal traits, social standing, and religious aspirations of the individual thus became investment goals in a cosmic stock market, where good and bad deeds would be exchanged in a currency of days of life and events of good fortune.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AKIZUKI Kan'ei (1964): "Rikuchō dōkyō ni okeru ōhōsetsu no hatten." *Hirosaki daigaku jimbun shakai* 33 (1964):25-60.

ANDERSEN, Poul (1980): *The Method of Holding the Three Ones*. London and Malmø: Curzon Press, 1980.

BELL, Catherine (1992): "Printing and Religion in China: Some Evidence from the Taishang Ganying Pian." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 20 (1992):173-86.

BODDE, Derk (1959): "The Chinese Cosmic Magic Known as Watching for the Ethers." In *Studia Serica Bernard Karlgren Dedicata*, edited by Søren Egerod, 14-35. Kopenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1959.

BROKAW, Cynthia (1991): *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

CAHILL, Suzanne (1986): "Reflections on a Metal Mother: Tu Kuang-t'ing's Biography of Hsi-wang-mu." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14 (1986):127-42.

CHAO Wei-pang (1946): "The Chinese Science of Fate Calculation." *Folklore Studies* 5 (1946):279-315.

CHEN Jing (1986): "Taiping jing zhong de chengfu baoying sixiang." *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 1986:35-39.

EBERHARD, Wolfram (1971): "Fatalism in the Life of the Common Man in Non-Communist China." In *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese*, edited by Wolfram EBERHARD, 177-89. Taipei: Chengwen, 1971.

GOODRICH, Charles (1925): *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward*. New York: Ronald Press, 1925.

HARPER, Donald (1994): "Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion." *Taoist Resources* 5.2 (1994):13-28.

HENDRISCHKE, Barbara (1991): "The Concept of Inherited Evil in the Taiping Jing." *East Asian History* 2 (1991):1-30.

HERVOUET, Yves, ed. (1978): *A Sung Bibliography – Bibliographie des Sung*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978.

HOMANN, Rolf (1971): *Die wichtigsten Körpergottheiten im Huang-t'ing-ching*. Göppingen: Alfred Kümmerle, 1971.

HOU Ching-lang (1975): *Monnaies d'offrande et la notion de trésorerie dans la religion chinoise*. Paris: Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises 1, 1975.

HUANG Yi-long and CHANG Chih-ch'eng (1996): "The Evolution and Decline of the Ancient Chinese Practice of Watching for the Ethers." *Chinese Science* 13 (1996):82-106.

ISHII Masako (1983): "Dōkyō no kamigami." In *Dōkyō*, edited by FUKUI Kōjun et al., 1:121-88. Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1983.

KALTENMARK, Maxime (1953): *Le Lie-sien tchouan*. Peking: Université de Paris Publications, 1953.

— (1979): "The Ideology of the T'ai-p'ing-ching." In *Facets of Taoism*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, 19-52. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

KAMITSUKA Yoshiko (1988): "Taiheikyō no shōfu to taihei no riron ni tsuite." *Nagoya daigaku kyōyōbu kiyō* 32 (1988):41-75.

KANDEL, Barbara (1979): *Taiping jing: The Origin and Transmission of the 'Scripture on General Welfare' – The History of an Unofficial Text*. Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1979.

KEIGHTLEY, David N. (1978): *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

KOBAYASHI Masayoshi (1990): *Rikuchō dōkyōshi kenkyū*. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1990.

KOHN, Livia (1989): "Guarding the One: Concentrative Meditation in Taoism." In *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, edited by Livia Kohn, 123-56. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1989.

— (1989a): "The Mother of the Tao." *Taoist Resources* 1.2 (1989): 37-113.

— (1995): "Koshin: A Taoist Cult in Japan. Part II: Historical Development." *Japanese Religions* 20.1 (1995):34-55.

— (1995a): *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

— (1997): “The First Handbook of Monastic Daoism: The Date and Compilation of the *Fengdao kejie*.” *East Asian History* 13 (1997), forthcoming.

LAI Chi-tim (1996): “Shiping Zhongguo xuezhe guanyu ‘Taiping jing’ de yanjiu.” *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu xuebao* 5 (1996):297-318.

LI Yuanguo (1991): *Zhongguo daojiao qigong yangsheng daquan*. Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1991.

LIN Yuan-Huei (1990): *The Weight of Mt. T'ai: Patterns of Suicide in Traditional Chinese History and Culture*. Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1990.

LOEWE, Michael (1988): “The Almanacs (*jih-shu*) from Shui-hu-ti: A Preliminary Survey.” *Asia Major*, 3rd series, 1.2 (1988):1-29.

LOON, Piet van der (1984): *Taoist Books in the Libraries of the Sung Period*. London: Oxford Oriental Institute, 1984.

MASPERO, Henri (1981): *Taoism and Chinese Religion*. Translated by Frank Kierman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.

MCCREERY, John (1990): “Why Don’t We See Some Real Money Here? Offerings in Chinese Religion.” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990):1-24.

OFUCHI Ninji (1979): *Tonkō dōkei: Zuroku hen*. Tokyo: Kokubu shoten, 1979.

NOGUCHI Tetsuro, SAKADE Yoshinobu, FUKUI Fumimasa, and YAMADA Toshiaki, eds. (1994): *Dōkyō jiten*. Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1994.

PAS, Julian F (1989): “Journey to Hell: A New Report of Shamanistic Travel to the Courts of Hell.” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 17 (1989):43-60.

PENNY, Benjamin (1990): “A System of Fate Calculation in *Taiping Jing*.” *Far Eastern History* 41 (1990):1-8.

— (1996): “Buddhism and Daoism in *The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao.*” *Taoist Resources* 6.2 (1996):1-16.

PETERSEN, Jens O. (1989): “The Early Traditions Relating to the Han-dynasty Transmission of the *Taiping jing.*” *Acta Orientalia* 50 (1989):133-71 and 51 (1989):165-216.

REITER, Florian C. (1988): “The Visible Divinity: The Sacred Image in Religious Taoism.” *Nachrichten der deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 144 (1988):51-70.

REN Jiyu and ZHONG Zhaopeng (1991): *Daozang tiyao*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991.

ROBINET, Isabelle (1984): *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme.* 2 vols. Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient, 1984.

— (1993): *Taoist Meditation.* Translated by Norman Girardot and Julian Pas. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

SAILEY, Jay (1978): *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosophy of Ko Hung (A.D. 283-343).* San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1970.

SCHIPPER, Kristofer M. (1974): “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies.” In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, edited by Arthur P. Wolf, 309-24. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

— (1975): *Concordance du Tao Tsang: Titres des ouvrages.* Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient, 1975.

SEIDEL, Anna (1978): “Buying One’s Way to Heaven: The Celestial Treasury in Chinese Religions.” *History of Religions* 17 (1978):419-32.

— (1990): “Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950-1990.” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 5 (1990):223-347.

SHAHAR, Meir, and Robert P. WELLER, eds. (1996): *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.

SIVIN, Nathan (1969): "On the 'Pao-p'u-tzu nei-p'i'en' and the Life of Ko Hung." *Isis* 40 (1969):388-91.

STAAL, Julius (1984): *Stars of Jade: Calendar Lore, Mythology, Legends and Star Stories of Ancient China*. Decatur, GA: Writ Press, 1984.

STRICKMANN, Michel (1996): *Mantras et mandarins: Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

SUZUKI, D. T., and Paul CARUS (1973 [1906]): *Treatise on Response and Retribution*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing 1973.

TEISER, Stephen F. (1988): "Having Once Died and Returned to Life: Representations of Hell in Medieval China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48 (1988):433-64.

— (1994): *The Scripture of the Ten Kings And the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

UNSCHULD, Paul U. (1985): *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

VERELLEN, Franciscus (1989): *Du Guangting (850-933) – Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale*. Paris: Collège du France, Mémoires de L'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises 30, 1989.

WANG Ming (1960): *Taiping jing hejiao*. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960.

WARE, James R (1966): *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of AD 320*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966.

WELCH, Holmes (1965): *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

YAMADA Toshiaki (1989): “Longevity Techniques and the Compilation of the *Lingbao wufuxu*.” In *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, edited by L. Kohn, 97-122. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1989.

YAMAZAKI Hiroshi (1957): “Rikuchō Zui-Tō jidai no hōō shinkō.” *Shirin* 40.6 (1957): 455-75.

YOSHIOKA Yoshitoyo (1959): *Dōkyō to bukkyō*. Vol. I. Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1959.

— (1960): “Chisōshi chūkaikyō to kōka shisō.” In *Fukui hakase soshu kinen Tōyōshisō ronshū*, 722-37. Tokyo: Waseda University, 1960.

— (1967): “Zaikairoku to Chigonsō.” *Taishō daigaku kenkyūjo kiyō* 52 (1967):283-302.

— (1970): *Dōkyō to bukkyō*. Vol. II. Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1970.

YÜ Ying-shih (1987): “O Soul, Come Back: A Study of the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987):380-412.

ZÜRCHER, Erik (1980): “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism.” *T'oung-pao* 66 (1980): 84-147.