Authority and Discipline in the Early Daoist Church*

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Abstract

The early Daoist church formed its own faith-based communities, in which the authority of the state was wholly supplanted by that of the Daoist church and its representatives. Even after such Daoist communities became rare, Daoists continued to revere and support financially the local master who instructed them, as well as more distant figures in the church hierarchy. The master exercised...
considerable authority in relation to his flock of Daoist citizens and novices, overseeing their conduct and determining religious punishments for those who strayed. He also instructed novices and awarded them registers as they strove to become libationers. Novices who attained the status of full libationer passed through a stage as itinerant preachers before being assigned to a specific parish, at which stage they posed a challenge to the settled flocks of libationers who served established communities. One source of the Daoist libationer’s authority was ongoing revelation from dead church founders and leaders, with church officials tasked with verifying such spirit communications. In spite of these strict limitations on conduct, church membership is experienced as empowering for the great majority of its adherents.

Keywords: authority, Celestial Masters, precepts, revelation, empowerment

Early Daoism (second to seventh centuries C.E.) was China’s first indigenous organized religion and possessed its own distinctive faith communities, system of social status distinctions, and definition of transgression. Although we now have a basic understanding of some of the sets of precepts that governed behavior and defined transgression or sin within the community, we do not have a very good idea of how individuals interacted within the Daoist community, how the precepts were enacted and enforced, and how punishment was meted out among these various segments of the church community. More broadly, we do not have an adequate idea of how authority was defined and constituted, who possessed power and how they exercised it, or what recourse individuals had in the face of this authority. This is the primary focus of this article.

Early ordination documents divided the Daoist world into three groups: Daoist citizens 道民, novices 籌生, and officers 男官、女官.

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2 Although the term daomin is sometimes interpreted as a Daoist “laity,” this usage is misleading. Min was in Han China an administrative term referring to
早期道教教團內的權威與懲罰
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摘 要

早期的天師道教團形成以信仰為核心、政教合一的共同體，即公元後191年於漢中建立的道教千年王國。在以「天師治」為單位的信仰共同體內，天師道祭酒取代中央政府的地方官行使權力。雖然天師治逐漸式微，道教徒還是繼續尊奉本治的祭酒，持續供奉租米和各種信物。各個天師治祭酒對本治內的道民與籙生擁有相當的權威，經常檢查他們的日常行為，有罪則分配適當的懲罰。此外，祭酒必須訓誨籙生，教之如何上章、如何畫符等等，然後對優秀的籙生授予，度為祭酒。初度為祭酒之籙生須經一段遊行宣化的生活，以傳教方式累積功德，達到一定的功行才能拿到帶有治位的治籙。處於遊行教化階段的祭酒，對已擁有信眾的某治祭酒造成某種程度的競爭與威脅。道教祭酒獲受權威還有另一種途徑，即是神仙以及已成仙的天師所降下的神示；道官系統內設有專門檢定這種啟示的官位。當道教徒並不簡單，天神觀察信者所作所為甚嚴。然信徒既有道教神祇的保佑，又能向宇宙最高的神靈請求心願，故比起一般俗民更加有權威。

關鍵詞：權威、戒律、啟示、天師、受權