

Religious Ethics in the *Taiping jing*: The Seeking of Life*

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Abstract

This paper is based on sections of the Scripture on Great Peace that do not mention the Celestial Master and are often introduced by the particle *wei* 惟. These sections, here termed *wei* material, are treated as if they were one coherent textual layer. They have so far attracted little scholarly attention. The aim here is to present ideas and terms that characterise the philosophical content of this layer. It is argued that it contains a distinctive although not well organised set of values and moral guidelines. The anonymous authors see the concept of life as their main value and declare seeking life to be men's most important activity. The term is used broadly and refers to the aim of living as long as is predestined by personal fate, as well as to improving this fate, and also to transcending the limits of mortality, leading thus to salvation from death. Since heaven gives and takes life, life is heaven's gift and seeking life consists of gratitude to heaven for the receipt of this gift. Men are expected to document gratitude through religious rituals and by adhering to moral rules of conduct. These rules of conduct are the focus of this paper. It is argued that they integrate rather than oppose established rules of conduct. By submitting to heaven's will, men are good; that is, they

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are self-disciplined, considerate, cooperative, filial, loyal and obedient. To this catalogue are added the virtue of being “with heart” and prohibitions against self-reliance and resentment. The authors stress that seeking life provides social as well as personal benefits since, out of fear of death and heaven’s anger, the believer will become aware of moral rules and thus contribute to social order and peace. This paper’s approach is largely descriptive. It makes much use of the narrative elements spread through *wei* material which depict a believer’s career from being converted to his ascent to heaven in broad daylight where a career as celestial bureaucrat awaits him. The narration is conducted through dialogues between the believer, celestial spirits and Celestial Lord, who reigns supreme as heaven’s representative. The paper’s longish quotations will provide a glimpse of this.

Keywords: *Scripture on Great Peace*, religious ethics, seeking life, man with heart, Celestial Lord