CHAPTER 8

The Troublesome Ghosts: Part 1

Introduction

Most of the pingmin [common people] who lived in China in the late Qing and the Republic (from 1850 to 1949) knew that many deities and ghosts had the power to affect their daily lives. Temples and shrines to these supernatural beings dotted the countryside and were an ever-present sight in all the villages, towns, and cities throughout China. Their images were frequently encountered, whether as statues in an incense-filled shrine or in printed representations pasted on the gates of homes to ensure protection, and all major festivals of the Chinese calendar contained references to the gods or the ghosts that populated both heaven and earth.¹

Almost all premodern societies organized their belief and value systems around their perceptions of the world of spirits, gods, ghosts, and demons. These were powerful forces that had abilities far beyond those possessed by mere human beings. When large phenomena such as unexpected storms or thunder were encountered, or when smaller maladies such as a severe headache or sudden vomiting occurred, troublesome events that did not seem to have a clear or immediate cause, it was widely assumed that the influence of the superhuman forces was in play.

Because these forces were all-pervasive and not always predictable in their actions, they elicited both awe and fear among human beings. The big issues for China’s pingmin were how to approach these powers, how to demonstrate one’s respect for them, and how best to avoid their displeasure. Over the centuries in China, a large body of literature emerged to describe these powerful forces.

¹ The great number of religious believers, who exceeded the secular Confucians, is characterized by Benjamin Elman as follows: “In a sea of 100–300 million imperial subjects, Ming-Qing Confucian literati never outnumbered the pious adepts of Chinese religion, Buddhism, or Daoism: vast numbers of each mind-set accommodated the imperial system to the greater society that supported it.” See Elman, Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China, 2. Thoughtful views on the Chinese supernatural and their relation to deities are expressed in Susan Naquin, Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35–48.
Prepared by literate authors and published in woodblock texts, many volumes of writings have been handed down through the generations that discuss and explain the mysterious forces that toyed with human existence.

At the same time, an even more widespread body of popular assumptions existed about these mysterious all-powerful spirits. The common people passed down stories about their own encounters with the gods and ghosts. Some of the popular assumptions might eventually make their way into the printed literature, but the chaoben discussed in this book are an excellent source, virtually a first-hand source, for glimpsing how China’s common people actually felt about supernatural beings, how they described them, and how they attempted to control them. These chaoben about gods and ghosts were used by the common people when they had to encounter the more powerful realm of the spirits.

Scholars usually define the beliefs and practices of the Chinese pingmin in regard to the perceived suprahuman forces as “popular religion.” Chinese popular religion consisted of identifying a number of deities drawn from the Buddhist and Daoist pantheons of “organized religion,” then expanded to include all sorts of frightening and “unknowable” powers lurking about but usually ready to interfere in the lives of human beings. Given the pervasiveness of the perception among the people of the existence of so many spirits, gods, and ghosts, it was not surprising that many chaoben dealing with this aspect of popular culture appear in the flea and antiques markets of China.

At the top of the celestial hierarchy as perceived by the common people were the spirits associated with the power of nature and the passage of time through millennia. So powerful and extensive were these phenomena that they had an almost philosophical, ethereal existence. Just below them was a wider category, what I call the middle rank of spirits who carefully watched over human beings, to record their good deeds and transgressions to keep a register of human actions. People approached these deities in great numbers to ask for their help in preventing catastrophes and dangers or to forgive sins of the past and bring blessings in the future. The middle rank of deities could also be called upon for help, because they interacted with the lower rank of spirits, the ghosts and demons who were waiting to trouble the common people as they went about their daily activities. The middle rank of deities was stronger than the troublesome ghosts, and when sincerely asked for help they could marshal the spirit generals [shenjiang 神將] and ghost soldiers [yinbing 陰兵 or shenbing 神兵]; the spirit of a dead soldier who had been wandering around] to chase away the evil spirits.

Some of the middle-ranking deities were even prepared to enter the gates of Hell if necessary to rescue an unfortunate sinner. Some middle-ranking deities changed their appearance from that of a deity [shen 神] to that of a
ghost [gui 鬼] in order to deal with demons [mogui 魔鬼] and goblins [dousha 斗煞, yaogui 妖鬼] who vexed and harassed the common people. For many of China’s common people, so many of these deities could be beneficial or harmful, either god or ghost, that approaching the gods was something not to be done lightly and always with signs of ritual respect, such as burning incense or setting off firecrackers. This aspect of the changing nature of the deities is discussed below in this chapter and Chapter 9.

The spirits at the bottom of this hierarchy were the troublesome ghosts considered closely in Chapter 9. They caused everything from a headache and a feeling of lethargy to violent vomiting and irrational behavior. They could be driven away by a ritual specialist, such as a Daoist master [daoshi 道士] or a yinyang master. They could also be chased away by the afflicted people themselves, if they knew how to confront the troublesome ghost and how to scare it away.

Using the chaoben that I collected, this chapter and Chapter 9 trace how people in China once regularly approached the deities and ghosts. It presents an overview of the rankings of some deities. And it shows, through their own writings and instructions, how the common people conceived of the troublesome ghosts that bedeviled them in everyday life. In this chapter I attempt to reconstruct the popular views of the common people in China during the late Qing and Republic on the mysterious beings and natural forces that impinged on their daily lives. Although buttressed in places by printed sources and scholarly studies, as far as possible I use the chaoben I have collected to accomplish this goal.

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2 Confucians regularly debated the differences between spirits and ghosts. The standard phrase was “ghosts and spirits” [guishen 鬼神], as used (apparently) by Confucius himself. An overview of these debates with original insights is offered in Koyasu Nobukuni 子安宣邦, Kishinron: Juka chishikinin no deskuru 鬼神論: 儒家知識人のデイスクウル [On Ghosts and Spirits: The Discourse among Confucian Intelligentsia] (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1992). Special talisman designed to summon the power of spirit generals are in the chaoben in my collection titled Cao Suosen 曹鎖森, as on the cover. This book is 9 in (22.86 cm) h × 5 in (12.7 cm) w, has seventy-seven pages, and was purchased in Shanghai in 2014. See p. 18 for summoning General Ding [Ding jiangjun 丁將軍], and p. 19 for summoning General Xu [Xu jiangjun 徐將軍].
The Deities of Religious Daoism

Higher-Ranking Deities

Religious Daoism in China offers the Chinese people a panoply of deities who influence the existence of human beings in various ways. Each deity has an honorific title, often several titles, attesting to their attributes and powers. These deities are called gods. These are the deities represented as statues, sometimes in paintings, in Daoist temples. They are honored with incense and are given treats of fruits and flowers by the common people who honor them at the temple. When especially honored or when invited to descend from their otherworldly thrones into a temple to participate in a ceremony, they are welcomed by exploding fireworks often accompanied by clouds of incense smoke and sometimes the chanting of religious works by the officiating religious specialists. During the ceremonies, they are often asked for their favor or blessing or intercession in some matter. Both the religious specialists and the common people can join in requesting the intercession. As the ceremony concludes, they are thanked and sent away skyward by the clashing of cymbals, fireworks, and incense, all symbols of celebration and honor.

The Daoist deities are all ranked in a hierarchy that roughly resembles the official government bureaucracy of premodern China. Many deities carry the appellations of emperor [dì 帝], lord [díjun 帝君], prince [gōng 公], or duke [jùn 君]. These titles descend in rank, so, by knowing their titles, we can judge their relative position within the hierarchy. The exact hierarchy of the deities varies somewhat, depending on the particular school of Daoism honoring them, and it has been modified over time. Since the Qing dynasty, a standard hierarchy has been widely accepted in China, and it continues to be used in popular religious Daoism as practiced in Chinese communities around the world today.3

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3 The hierarchy I use in this chapter follows a scroll of Daoist deities I bought near Baiyunguan in Beijing in 2014 titled “Daojiao quanshen tu 道教全神圖 [Chart of All the Daoist Deities].” This follows the same hierarchical ranking as that used by Baiyunguan. See Beijing Baiyunguan, which describes the Baiyunguan grounds and deities and is offered free to visitors. The textual explanations show that the hierarchical ranking mentioned here is followed by the temple. This hierarchy of deities is not followed in all Daoist temples or by all schools of religious Daoism. This point is mentioned again below in relation to the Jade emperor, who is considered the highest deity by many of the common people. For a history of the Baiyunguan in the late Qing and Republic, see Vincent Goossaert, The Taoists of Peking, 1800–1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).
At the pinnacle of the typical hierarchy used today sit the Three Pure Ones [Sanqing 三清]. These deities are involved in the most basic responsibilities of human existence in the universe. They seem to sit at the highest reaches of Daoist imagination, almost unmoving and never falling into temptation or under the influence of any other phenomenon. Their titles can be translated as celestial worthy or lord [tianzun 天尊]. First is the Universal Lord of Primordial Being [Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊], who created the physical heaven and earth. In philosophical terms, this was the energy [qi 炁] that gave expression to the dao 道. Second is the Universal Lord of Numinous Treasure [Lingbao tianzun 靈寶天尊], who divides time into epics, of which the millennia during human existence is only a small part. The third of these highest deities is the Universal Lord of the Way and Its Virtue [Daode tianzun 道德天尊]. This is Laozi, well known as the philosopher who taught humans about Daoist thinking. He is popularly titled the Most Ancient Noble [Taishang laojun 太上老君]. He came to earth in the form of a man to teach the about the Dao.4

The teachings of Laozi were and continue to be known and respected in China. A relatively short text probably composed in the Song dynasty, Taishang ganying pian 太上感應篇 [Folios of the Most High on Retribution], has been generally interpreted as the work of Laozi. It is being widely reprinted and distributed by Daoist temples all over China even now. These are printed versions, and so far I have not found any chaoben copies of this work, perhaps because the position of Laozi is so exalted in the heavenly bureaucracy that the common people hesitated to approach him and thus did not often follow the custom of copying one of his texts in order to gain merit.5

Daoist masters living among the common people, however, were sometimes bold enough call upon Laozi for help. A chaoben I bought in June 2014 is titled Secret Text for Summoning the Snake [Shechuan miben 蛇傳秘本]. One would not guess from its title that this work involved Laozi. In this case, one of the highest deities would be summoned to an altar by a very common person through the help of a Daoist ritual specialist, in a colorful and possibly

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4 In Chinese, each of these deities has several honorific titles. Their titles are translated in English in different ways by different scholars. The English translations used in this chapter are taken from many sources, so are not consistent with any particular English-language work. The word for “energy” [qi 炁] is often written in this way by Daoists. It is equivalent to the more common way of writing it, 氣.

5 For a complete translation into English, with the Chinese original, see Li Xinjun 李信軍, ed., Taishang ganying pian 太上感應篇 [Treatise on Sympathetic Response, (Spoken by) the Supreme] (Beijing: Baiyunguan, 2008). Incantations by a Daoist master regularly invoke Laozi. Most scholars doubt that this was written by Laozi, and many doubt that Laozi actually existed.
unostentatious way. Deities can easily transform themselves into other forms, and a snake was a popular form for some deities to take. Foxes and rodents were other forms encountered. On the one hand, most common people did not treat Laozi as just another of the exalted deities and did not seem to view him as a deity to be negotiated with. On the other hand, his name was regularly invoked in the ritual exhortations of Daoist specialists to quickly bring into force an incantation for assistance, as discussed below.\(^6\)

The bulk of the twenty-nine-page work consists of incantations calling on Laozi for assistance. On pages 3–4 and 9–18, ten incantations [\textit{zhouyu} 咒語] are addressed to Laozi 老子 by his official title Taishang laojun. They are all titled “respectfully submitted” [\textit{fuyi} 伏以] and they all end with the words “I petition” [\textit{wu feng} 吾奉], and the standard phrase used to conclude Daoist incantations and ritual petitions to the deities, “Promptly, promptly, decree in accordance with the statues and ordinances” [\textit{jiji ru lüling} 急急如律令].\(^7\)

They are addressed to Laozi, who brought Daoist teaching to earth, but whose form, according to the text, is now that of a snake [\textit{she} 蛇]. This can be seen on page 8, where the following phrase appears: “Master Lao's present form is the snake; go deep into the mountain district” [\textit{laojun xianshen shi she; songgui shenshan, difu} 老君現身是蛇；送歸深山，地府]. This phrase makes up the middle section of a stylized Daoist character with a “rain” element at the top [\textit{yu} 雨], a “ghost” at its base [\textit{gui} 鬼], and a final element at the bottom, “hidden” [\textit{cang} 藏]. Daoist specialists thought the rain element represents a call to the god of thunder [Leigong 雷公] discussed below. The snake deity is addressed as Great Spirit of the Southern Snake [Nanshe dashen 南蛇大神] seen in the incantation on page 11.

The incantations on these pages appear to be standard forms of incantations to be used as reference material by the Daoist masters who wrote them down. Because they are standard incantations, some have places where the name of the specific petitioner and the date of the petitions can be inserted. (We see this in the incantations on pp. 15 and 18.) Writing information as reference

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\(^6\) Secret Text for Summoning the Snake is 6\(\frac{3}{4}\) in (17.14 cm) h \times 7\(\frac{1}{4}\) in (18.41 cm) w, with twenty-eight pages. I bought it in Beijing in June 2014. For examples of deities who could be called upon to protect humans, to relieve suffering and sickness, and who took the form of a fox, snake, rodent, etc., see Huang Qiang 黃強, “Wuxi yu shouhu fuzhuling: Guanyu Dongbei diqu wuxi de Huxian Xinyang 巫覡與守護輔助靈：關於東北地區巫覡的胡仙信仰 [Medi- ums and Protective Spirits: On the Medium and Belief in the Immortal Hu in Northeast China],” \textit{Minsu quyi} 民俗曲藝 [Popular Arts], no. 118 (March 1999). Daoist ceremonies concerning the snake were practiced in Hengyang, Hunan, in 1899. See Peake in China, 95.

\(^7\) On magical incantations, see Zhang et al., \textit{Daojiao fuzhou}, xuan, jiang. Ronald Suleski - 9789004361034
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material in the conduct of one’s professional life was one of the basic purposes of chaoben across all the occupations discussed in this book. In other words, in this case the Daoist master would consult the reference text he had written in this book when writing out a petition on behalf of an individual who wished to address a request to the deity.

Several Daoist followers were involved with the petitions to the deities in this booklet; their names appear in two of the incantations: Ye Faling (葉法靈, with the grass radical of the Ye surname omitted), Zhou Fahui 周法輝 (p. 3), and Zhou Fadao 周法道 (pp. 15–17). These are all Daoist religious names taken after ordination. In the margin on page 26, in a section of the booklet dealing with medical prescriptions is another Zhou name, that of a woman, Zhou Nixian 周妮賢. Her name appears to be a standard given name and not an ordination name. This book seems to have belonged to the Zhou family, which seems to be a standard given name, rather than a Daoist ordination name. From the handwriting and color of the ink that are different from the rest of the book, this final female name appears to have been added at a later date.

In the incantation on page 15 the Daoist masters Zhou Fahui and Zhou Fadao indicate where the name of any petitioning individual and the date of the petition can be inserted and sent to Laozi. As mentioned above, all these incantations appear to be general as to the specific complaint or request being made, but they all ask various deities to be marshaled and they ask Laozi to fulfill the request.

An example of a general incantation to drive away evil and troublesome spirits is on page 14. In this case, the Daoist master would use a live chicken and probably conduct the ceremony in public or with an audience present. The words and actions here could have been those of a yinyang master, and it illustrates how the two occupations of Daoist ritual specialist and yinyang master had many similarities. It also illustrates the degree of spectacle that the Daoist masters could incorporate into their rituals to impress the people who had gathered to watch.

The entry begins with a comment:

This chicken is not an ordinary chicken. It is the Queen Mother’s dawn-crowing cock. It is when the cock crows and the phoenix crows that the Daoist master achieves the Dao.

_Ciji feishi fanji, wangmu niangniang baoxiaoji, jinji jiao fenghuang tizheng, shi shifu dedaoshi._

此雞非是反雞，王母娘娘報曉雞，金雞叫鳳凰啼正，是師父得道時.
Secret Text for Summoning the Snake [Shechuan miben 蛇傳秘本]. Page 14, Daoist Ceremony Using a Live Chicken. In this example of a colorful ceremony by a Daoist ritual master, the entry reads: “This chicken is not an ordinary chicken. It is the Queen Mother’s cock that crows at dawn. It is when the cock crows and the phoenix crows that the Daoist master achieves the Dao” [Ciji feishi fanji, wangmu niangniang baoxiaoji, jinji jiao fenghuang, tizheng, shi shifu dedaoshi 此雞非是反雞，王母娘娘報曉雞，金雞叫鳳凰啼正，是師父得道時]. Starting at the right-hand margin of the page, these are the beginning lines, just before the ritual master makes his official invocation [fuyi 伏以, “respectfully submitted”] to the deities. Using a live chicken in ceremonies to link the deities with humans was probably not frequent, but not unknown, in rural China at the time. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

The petition reads:

Heaven and Earth reveal the opportunity, the auspicious day and suitable time are requested. Heaven evil, earth evil, year evil, month evil, day evil, also injuries: heaven evil go back to heaven get away from the earth; evils
go away and hide in the ground. The thirty-six major evils, the seventy-two minor evils, wherever there are bad spirits, evil spirits will not be honored. This disciple, me, I have a heroic chicken coming to ward off evil. I humbly petition. Lord Laozi, promptly, promptly, decree in accordance with the statues and ordinances.

伏以。天地開張，日吉時良。天殺，地殺，年殺，月殺，日殺，並時傷，天殺歸天去地，殺歸地藏。三十六大殺，七十二小傷，若有兇神，惡殺不服者，弟子我有雄雞來抵擋。吾奉，太上老君急急如律令。

On occasion, part of the ritual of chanting the incantation was to click the teeth a set number of times. This was not specified in the document we are considering here.8 Humans, especially children, must pass through numerous gates [guan 關], or crises points, in their life journey, so ritual texts on keeping

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8 The character 殺 sha here is the equivalent of "noxious influence" or "evil force," also written 煞. The equivalence of these two characters is explained in Min Jihui 閔智會, *Shinsalhak chonso 神殺學全書 [Complete Book of Spirits and Evil]* (Paju, Korea: Tongyang sojok, 2005). The equivalence is also mentioned in *Han-Han daesajon 漢韓大字典 [Chinese-Korean Dictionary]* (Seoul: Minjong solim, 1988), 775. See also Yi, Zhongguo shenguai dazidian 中國道教生死書 [《中國道教生死書》] (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2009), 148–155; Wu Kang, Zhonghua shenmi wenhua cidian 中華神鬼文化詞典 [Chinese-Korean Dictionary] (Seoul: Minjong solim, 1988), 775. The equivalence is also mentioned in Han-Han daesajon 漢韓大字典, 775. See also Yi, Zhongguo shenguai dazidian, 425–426. On dealing with sha, see Song Daoyuan 宋道元, *Jietu Zhongguo daojiao shengsishu 解圖中國道教生死書 [《解圖中國道教生死書》]* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2009), 148–155; Wu Kang, Zhonghua shenmi wenhua cidian, 2–3, 204. On examples in which clicking the teeth [kouchi 叩齒] was prescribed, see Zhang, *Daojiao fuzhou 道教生死書 [《道教生死書》]* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2009), especially pp. 12 (click three times), 13 (click seven times), and 15 (click thirty-six times). The evil force sha and how it affects human actions are illustrated in Nimaru ichigo Heisei nijūshichi-nen jingukan kaiunli 平成二十七年神宮館開運暦 [《平成二十七年神宮館開運暦》] (Tokyo: Jingukan, 2014), 7–9. The chaoben Petitions to the Thunder Altar [Fengzhi chiling leitan 奉旨敕令雷壇] has drawings of some of the sha forces on pp. 2–5 of this sixty-seven-page work. The title page and some of the early pages have fallen off this book, so I assign the title based on the first talismanic character that appears on the first extant page. Based on dates that appear in the text, this chaoben was likely written between 1886 and 1900. Bought in Beijing in January 2015, it is 9 in (22.8 cm) h x 10 in (25.4 cm) w. Use of a chicken as a potent animal to ward off evil spirits is mentioned in Plopper, *Chinese Religion Seen Through the Proverb*, 134.
evil at bay while they traverse these gates have also been developed, but in this case the Daoist master apparently did not use this sort of text.9

This compilation also contains other material, consisting of herbal recipes to treat a dog bite (p. 26) and a chart (p. 28) showing the sixty combinations of the ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches [tianggan dizhi 天干地支], explained in Chapter 9. This indicates that these Daoist masters were involved in more than conducting rituals dealing with the deities; they also offered medical advice and helped to identify auspicious and inauspicious days and times. These are all typical skills of those who were able to read and write well and dealt with the concerns of the common people.

It appears that originally this compilation might have been bound with a sheet of red paper. One end of it appears now (in the string-bound version I currently have, just after the front cover on page 2) with the words “Hide your tongue,” meaning “don’t speak out” [wenkou duocangshe 穩口躲藏舌]. The other edge of this red paper is a long piece folded to form the final page (p. 29). It reads, “Your foolish younger brother Zhou” [yudì 周愚弟]. The word “foolish” is a polite way to refer to oneself or one’s relatives, and it reinforces the idea that this booklet was written and owned by a member of the Zhou family.

At least two seals appear either on the cover and on various pages of the text above. They were seals bearing an incantation or a magical character (as on pp. 4 and 10), or the name seals of people who owned a copy of the text or who were involved in the writing of portions of it. The two name seals on the cover are for Zhan Jialiang 詹佳良 and Yang Yifan 楊簃范. The great power and prestige of Laozi was invoked in the incantations written in this chaoben.

The chaoben shows us that even in the case of Daoism’s highest ranked and most venerated deity, some of the common people were able to interpret their relationship with the venerable Laozi as being enacted using a special chicken controlled by a Daoist master. The ritual specialist even claimed that Laozi had taken the shape of a snake. That approach seems as far from the generally accepted communication with Laozi as could be imagined, but it also shows the malleability of local culture, which was influenced by all sorts of ideas.

To return to the standard charts of Daoist deities, just below the Three Pure Ones mentioned above sit four celestial lords (sometimes called the Four Sovereigns [Sìyù 四御]) who have the rank of emperor. They each have a broad

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9 See Zhang Zhenguó 張振國, “‘Rangguan dusha ke’ de gongneng ji qi tese 禰關度煞科的功能及其特色 [The ‘Exorcist Gate to Overcome Evil’: The Function and Special Characteristics of This Text],” Shanghai daojiao 上海道教 [Shanghai Daoism], no. 4 (2013), 38–40.
responsibility to regulate the known universe and the fates of the beings who dwell there. The Emperor of the North [Beiji ziwei dadi 北極紫微大帝] presides over the stars, the sun, moon, the wind, and rain (i.e., the climate). The Emperor of the South and Long Life [Nanji changsheng dadi 南極長生大帝] controls people's happiness, misfortunes, and longevity. The Emperor of the Military Forces [Gouchen tianhuang dadi 勾陳天皇大帝] presides over the North and South Pole, as well as the military in heaven and on earth. The Empress of the Earth [Houtu huangdi zhi 后土皇帝祗] presides over the mountains and the rivers and the birth of all creatures on earth.

The Jade Emperor

At about this level of ranking is the Jade emperor. He is sometimes included as among the Four Sovereigns, but in most celestial organizational charts he is given a special place above the sovereigns because he is considered the great executive director or chief administrator of all the deities. In particular, he commands and supervises the deities who rank below him, which includes hundreds of supernatural beings. Because of this great power, the common people often approach the Jade emperor when they decide to “go to the top” in making their request for assistance. Often in popular ceremonies, when other deities are invited to descend to an altar to receive the prostrations and entreaties of the common people, the Jade emperor is also invited and is the highest-ranking deity present.

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10 The “Chart of All the Daoist Deities,” mentioned above, has the Jade emperor holding a special place flanked by the Four Sovereigns. A source listing him as one of the Four Sovereigns is Li Dianyuan 李殿元, Tianshen diqi: Daojiao zhushen chuanshuo 天神地祇: 道教諸神傳說 [Heavenly Deities, Earthly Gods: Legends of Daoist Gods] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2012), 25–27. When one of the four, he is flanked by the Supreme Emperor [Taihuang 太皇], who is Emperor of the North [Ziwei beiji dadi 紫微北極大帝]; the Heavenly Emperor [Tianhuang 天皇], who is Emperor of the Military Forces [Gouchen tianhuang dadi 勾陳天皇大帝]; and the Earthly emperor/empress [Tuhuang 土皇], who is Great Empress of the Earth [Houtuhuan diqi 后土皇地祗] and is often portrayed as a female. When the Jade emperor is given his own special ranking, he is replaced as one of the Four Sovereigns by Great Emperor of the South and Long Life [Nanji Changsheng dadi 南極長生大帝], as seen in the “Chart of All the Daoist Deities” and the rankings of deities at Baiyunguan in Beijing.

11 Among many people in China today, the Jade emperor is considered the highest Daoist deity, and they strongly assert that this is the case. Although the standard hierarchy of deities used by the Complete Perfection [Quanzhen 全真] school has the Three Pure
Among the common people, he was colloquially referred to as the Grandfather of Heaven [Laotianye]. Perhaps this is because the Jade emperor holds such an important position in Daoist rituals. For many of the common people of China who paid less attention to the official theological ranking and more attention to the deities that everyone said were most effective in granting requests, the Jade emperor was at the very top of the supernatural pantheon. He was the one they preferred to honor. He is venerated in every major ceremony of the general liturgy and a number of texts have been written for worshiping the Jade emperor. Because of the power of this deity, it was considered that a good way to gain blessings from the Jade emperor was to hand-write one of the texts dedicated to him. I bought a copy of what is considered his principal text, the *Collected Scripture of the Deeds of the Jade Emperor* [Gaoshang Yuhuang benxing jijing 高上玉皇本行集經], with an additional text of about six pages titled *Scripture of Repentance* [Chanhuijing 懺悔經]. The entire copied version is in three twine-bound volumes on bleached handmade paper and was written in practiced and attractive though not elegant calligraphy. On the cover page of each volume, the location of copying is given as the Hall of Profound Virtue [Houdetang 厚德堂]. The total of 124 leaves was lovingly written by Gu Ones at the very top, a major Zhengyi temple in Shanghai, the Hall of Receiving Grace [Qinciyangdian 欽賜仰殿] has the Jade emperor in its innermost and therefore most important building. But I recall seeing him also seated in one of the inner halls as one of the Four Sovereigns. The temple is dedicated to the Emperor of the Eastern Peak [Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝], who presides over purgatory, and it is common these days for people to hold a ceremony asking the powerful Jade emperor to help the soul of their departed loved ones to be released from Hell (since the Jade emperor outranks the Emperor of the Eastern Peak), in a ceremony known as “crossing over” [chaodu 超度], in which the souls cross the bridge out of Hell to be reborn or to enter Paradise. See Ding et al., *Yinciyangdian yu Dongyue dadi xinyang*. For a description of the crossing-over ceremony, see Duan Ming 段明, “Chaodu wanghun de guoqiao jisi yishi [Ceremony of the Soul Crossing Over],” *Minsu quyi 民俗曲藝 [Popular Arts]*, no. 118 (March 1999). This issue is devoted to ethnographic field reports of popular Daoist religious ceremonies observed in China and Taiwan in the 1990s concerning belief in the soul [hunpo xinyang 魂魄信仰], with photos of many of the ceremonies in progress.

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For mention of the common assertion that the Jade emperor was the supreme Daoist deity, see Li, *Tianshen diqi*, 28. In December 2014 a Chinese scholar with whom I was discussing the place of the Jade emperor in the hierarchy of Daoist gods also expressed her belief that the Jade emperor was at the very top, because that is what she grew up believing. This idea is reinforced in the illustrations in Zhang Xianchang 張憲昌 and Zhang Moxue 張默雪, *Zhongguo minsu baitu 中國民俗百圖 [An Album of Chinese New Year Paintings]* (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009). The folk art illustrated on pp. 2–7 all shows the Jade emperor as the supreme deity.
Yitang 顧義堂 (which may have been his “religious” or “ordination name”) in the spring of 1879. The cover of each volume is stamped with a large seal reading “The Three Treasures of the Dao, the Scriptures, Our Teachers” [道, 視, 龍, shi, jing, bao 道經師寶]. These three volumes are each titled “Number Seven,” so were presumably part of a larger collection.

When religious scriptures were transcribed in order to gain merit, the copyist would try to follow the printed text and not make changes. Unlike the typical chaoben discussed in this book that were used as reference material by a person acting as a fortuneteller or a legal advisor or a writer of New Year’s couplets, for example, the copied religious texts were not treated as reference notebooks. Instead, they follow the standard content that, by the time of the late Qing, was already available in printed editions in woodblock, lithograph, or movable type. Faithfully copying the standard text without mistakes would have been done in order to gain full merit in heaven for the act. The manuscript version I have is a faithful copy of a standard printed version that I bought at the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing in 2010.

Another chaoben in my collection addressed to the Jade emperor is the Repentance in Homage to Heaven, Complete [朝天懺, 全卷]. The full title, written on the first and final inside pages is “Correct Way, Thirty-Eight Apologies of Repentance in Homage to Heaven” [正一朝天三八謝罪法懺]. The phrase “correct way” or “orthodox unity” [zhengyi] might refer to the Zhengyi school of Daoism, which today is more popular in South China. It is a school that in general does not form religious communities but allows its masters to travel about singly or in small groups, visiting temples and conducting ceremonies either in the temples or in the homes of individual families. The PRC government discourages

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13 Collected Scripture of the Deeds of the Jade Emperor [高上玉皇本行集經] is 9½ in (24.13 cm) h × 5 in (12.7 cm) w. Vol. 1 [shang 上] has forty-five leaves; vol. 2 [zhong 中] has thirty-eight leaves; vol. 3 [xia 下] has forty-one leaves. I bought this in June 2012 in Shanghai. The Jade emperor as a high deity regularly approached by the common people is also mentioned in Chapter 7.

14 Many Daoist temples in the PRC have obtained lithograph versions of the sacred texts, which are simply reprinted on inexpensive paper and sold in the temple bookshops. In many cases, all publishing identification has been omitted. We can expect that more attractive and expensive copies of these texts will gradually appear for sale.

15 This is a standard Daoist text. My copy faithfully follows a printed version of the text. See: http://www.daoisms.org/article/sort026/info-3847.html, accessed November 25, 2014. I am not clear on the exact meaning of the phrase san ba 三八, which was not evident from reading the text, because both three and eight can have many symbolic meanings.
Figure 8.2

*Collected Scripture of the Deeds of the Jade Emperor* [Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijing 高上玉皇本行集經], *Cover of the Middle Volume*. This was prepared in 1879 at the Hall of Profound Virtue [Houdetang 厚德堂]. It was lovingly copied by Gu Yitang 顧義堂, which may have been a “religious” or “ordination name.” Many woodblock print versions of this title circulated, from which Mr. Gu produced his copy.

Photo by Author
FIGURE 8.3
Collected Scripture of the Deeds of the Jade Emperor [Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijing 高上玉皇本行集經], Final Two Pages of the Middle Volume. This shows that the text was copied in 1879.
PHOTO BY AUTHOR
FIGURE 8.4
Repentance in Homage to Heaven, Complete [Chaotian chan, quan quan 朝天懺，全券]. Cover. It was copied in the Hall of Heaven’s Emolument [Tianlutang 天祿堂]. The full title of the text, written on the first and final inside pages, reads: “Correct Way, Thirty-Eight Apologies of Repentance in Homage to Heaven” [Zhengyi, chaotian sanba xiezui fachan 正一朝天三八謝罪法懺]. The same Daoist and Buddhist works regularly circulated under several different titles. Copies were supposed to be exact duplicates of the original printed work, but often were not.
PHOTO BY AUTHOR
FIGURE 8.5

Repentance in Homage to Heaven, Complete [Chaotian chan, quan quan 朝天懺, 全券], Page 2, Details of the Text. This sixty-three-page booklet appears to have been written by Liu Borong in his study [Liu Borong tang 劉柏榮堂]. He put his seal and some instructions at the end of each incantation addressed to the Jade emperor.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR (WHOSE SEAL IS AT THE BOTTOM: XUE LONG 薛龍)
the performance of Daoist rituals in private homes.\textsuperscript{16} This is possibly a Republican-era text written on machine-made paper.\textsuperscript{17}

This string-bound volume of sixty-three pages was copied in the Hall of Heaven’s Record [Tianlu tang 天綠堂]. It appears to have been written by Liu Borong in his study. He must have been a ritual master, as shown because he placed his seal and some instructions at the end of each incantation addressed to the Jade emperor. For example, on ten occasions in the text when he wrote one of the elaborate titles to address the Jade emperor “Jade Sovereign, Great Celestial Worthy, Exalted Emperor in Mysterious Eminence” [Yuhuang datianzun, xuanqiong gaoshangdadi 玉皇大天尊玄穹高上大帝], in each case he added the phrase “In the following, after each sentence say the sacred title of the celestial worthy one time” [yixia meiju chenghe tianzun shenghao yibai 以下每句稱和天尊聖號一拜]. He then placed his honorary [hao 号] seal over the instructions. The seal reads “At the Drum Wall Prefecture Gate” [Guchengjun men 鼓城郡門]. Doing so reinforces the idea that he was acting as the ritual master leading the worship or as the master who was an instructor for those using the text.

I bought this chaoben in Beijing in 2009, but was told by the person selling the book that he originally acquired it in Hengyang 衡陽, Hunan Province. This person was from Hengyang and had come to the Panjiayuan Market in Beijing with a few boxes of Daoist religious texts from there.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} On the government discouraging Daoist rituals in private homes, see Adeline Herrou, \textit{A World of Their Own: Daoist Monks & Their Community in Contemporary China} (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2013), 92. Local authorities in China sometimes turn a blind eye to some activities in order to reach compromises with local religious practitioners. See Adam Yuet Chau, \textit{Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China} (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 224.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Repentance in Homage to Heaven, Complete [Chaotian chan, quan quan 朝天懺，全券]} was purchased in Beijing in March 2009 but is originally from Hengyang, Hunan. It has sixty-three pages and is \(10\frac{1}{2}\) in (26.67 cm) h \(\times\) \(5\frac{3}{4}\) in (14.6 cm) w.

\textsuperscript{18} In my collection is a recently printed text titled \textit{Exalted Jade Emperor Precious Repentances for Forgiveness of Sins [Gaoshang Yuhuang youzui baochan 高上玉皇宥罪寶懺]}, that I bought at the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing in 2005. This is a liturgical text developed for worship of the Jade emperor. I compared it with the handwritten text \textit{Repentance in Homage to Heaven, Complete [Chaotian chan, quan quan 朝天懺，全券]} to see if the printed text followed the handwritten text. I found that only a short portion of my handwritten text followed the material in the printed text: “Supreme Flourishing One in the Highest Heaven, beyond the subtle and mysterious true border, where there is the distant purple gold watchtower (Golden Portal) of the Supreme and Pure Palace. Supreme Holy One without Limit, in the vastness issuing light, silently without doctrine,
Beneath the Jade emperor sit the Five Lords \textit{[dijun 帝君]}, who were labeled with one of the five colors: yellow \textit{[huang 黃]}, green \textit{[qing 青]}, red \textit{[chi 赤]}, white \textit{[bai 白]}, or black \textit{[bei 黑]}. This ranking, of course, represents the five directions—center, east, south, west, north—which testifies to their wide areas of influence. Like the Three Pure Ones at the very top, they sit calmly in the heavens with their broad powers. They maintain the somewhat impersonal aura of power holders at a great remove from the common people on earth. In Korean shaman rituals, these deities of the five directions, perhaps personified as the somewhat-lower-ranking Five Generals \textit{[Obang janggun 오방 장군/五方將軍]} are frequently invoked.\footnote{Alan Carter Covell, \textit{Folk Art and Magic: Shamanism in Korea} (Seoul: Hollym International, 1993), 93–97. In Korea, “the lesser Five Direction Forces abide in every room, storeroom, and stock pen within the walls, and in at least one city home, in the dog house.” See Laurel Kendall, \textit{Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1985), 114. A number of Chinese Daoist deities, such as the Jade emperor and the Seven Stars \textit{[Qixing 七星]}, make appearances in Korean shamanic ceremonies, along with the Five Direction Forces \textit{[Generals of the Five Directions; in Chinese, Wufang jiangjun 五方將軍]}, but the Koreans treat them more as “comrades,” and they do not regard the Generals of the Five Directions with much more formality; they may be different entities than the Five Lords mentioned in my text above. Ideas on Korean shaman ritual behavior are in Laurel Kendall, \textit{Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009). Kendall refers to them as the Spirit Warriors of the Five Directions \textit{[Obang sinjang 五方神將]}, in \textit{God Pictures in Korean Contexts: The Ownership and Meaning of Shaman Paintings}, ed. Laurel Kendall et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015).} In China, one can find representations of the Five Lords in temples, but they are much less likely to be approached for assistance by a supplicant. For most Chinese, they are pervasive and impassive deities.
Middle-Ranked Spirits: The Three Officials

Just below this level of the most august deities are the deities who have interactions with human beings on a regular basis. These deities seem to be more active in exercising their influence over the lives of others. They should be routinely honored by humans because their beneficence can be directed at particular individuals. Well known among deities at this level is the Star Goddess [Doumu 斗姆], who presides over the star constellations in the heavens. Because a person’s fate is influenced by the star under which he or she was born, individuals should honor their star, along with the Star Goddess who regulates the movements of the constellations. She can grant posterity and chase away illness, ensure painless childbirth, and overcome sterility. She is honored at temples where people gather to pray to the stars of fate. She is said to be of Indian origin and is often portrayed with nine arms, each representing one of her powers, just as Hindu gods are visualized with many arms, each signifying one of their special powers.20

The Three Officials Great Emperors [Sanguan dadi 三官大帝] are deities who are approached by the common people frequently, for assistance with all sorts of difficulties. These deities, discussed in earlier chapters, are responsible for three crucial areas of human life: the Official of Heaven [Tian’guan 天官] can bestow happiness and blessings on people; the Official of Earth [Diguan 地官] can absolve people of their sins; the Official of Water [Shuiguan 水官] can remove disasters that befall people. These three are grouped together at altars. Based on the larger number of hand-copied texts addressed to them that I have found in markets in China, they seem to have been among the most frequently approached of the Daoist deities in the Qing and Republican periods. They are often present in the Daoist temples that are reopening or being reestablished in China today.

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20 Chen Liangsheng 陳蓮笙 et al., Taisuishen zhuanlue 太歲神傳略 [Biography of the Star Goddess] (Beijing: Zongjiaowenhua chubanshe, 2005). This deity is normally assumed to be female. The openness of Daoism toward gender issues, in the sense of accepting the idea that male and female elements exist in a mixed and complementary way, has been a factor in allowing some new “Christian” religions in China to rapidly gain a following by accepting female leadership as equally valid with male leadership. A case in point for the Forerunner Christian Church [Muzhu xianfeng jiaohui 慕主先鋒教會] is discussed in Joy K.C. Tong and Fenggang Yang, “The Femininity of Chinese Christianity: A Study of a Chinese Charismatic Church and Its Female Leadership,” Review of Religion and Chinese Society 1, no. 2 (2014): 208–209.
One of the titles used collectively for these deities, as mentioned in Chapter 7, is Sanguan dadi. In the popular imagination, for hundreds of years they have been conflated with the Three Primes [Sanyuan 三元] who rule over various four-month periods of the lunar calendar. The Three Officials are said to maintain a register of the acts of humans, and some believe they can pass judgment on the souls who die. But they can also distribute blessings and absolve transgressions, which is why they are so regularly approached in Daoist temples. They are not afraid to maintain contact with the underground Hell, known as Fengdu 豐都. This is thought of by the Chinese as an underground purgatory where the deceased who were virtuous in life are sent to be reborn in the living world, while sinners are sent to one of the underground torture hells (called “earth prisons” [diyu 地獄]). Thus as we descend along the celestial hierarchy, they are among the first deities and were once seen as interacting with
the ghosts and malevolent supernatural beings of the netherworld regularly. In earlier times, some believed that they used torture to conduct inquisitions of people who had probably committed sins, but their overly stern approach to humans takes second place these days to the positive ways in which they assist living beings. They are popularly seen more as gods than as ghosts.21

Below is an examination of several chaoben I bought that deal with the Three Officials. Because of the similarity in their titles, for this discussion I label them A, B, C, and D.

21 See Terry Kleeman, “Three Officers,” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Pregadio, 2: 833–834.
Text A

The text of Repentances to the Three Officials [Sanguan chan 三官懺] comprised three string-bound volumes hand-copied in September 1876. The copyist identified himself by his given name as Mr. Yuruo [Yuruo shi 雨若氏] of the Clear World Pavilion [Shi qing tang 世清堂]. The text contains a number of written talisman characters, yet I am inclined to see the copyist as a layperson because of his use of “mister” [shi 氏] following his name. In practice, Daoist masters were sometimes addressed as “mister” [xiansheng 先生; perhaps in such cases, a good translation of the phrase would be “master”]. Because on his title pages and a few text pages he used layout formats similar to those found in woodblock printed editions, Yuruo seemed to be copying from a printed text. For example, drawing a border around edge of the title page, placing the copy date in the upper-right-hand corner, and the title of his studio in the lower-left-hand corner were all conventions of woodblock print books. He also wrote the title of the work in the fold of the outer pages, the area called the “fishtail,” another convention of woodblock prints.22

In Volume 1, on page 34, Yuruo explained why he had copied this text. After giving the date of the copy he wrote:

The words I have written in this volume were all as told by the Most High Lord of the Dao [Taishang daojun 太上道君], who is Laozi, directly to the Universal Lord of Primordial Being, to offer forgiveness, asking the deity to descend, and it was intended as an offering. My name [the copyist’s name?] is different, but it is my ordination [Daoist] name.23

Danquannei chenzi, jieshi Taishang Daojun zai Yuanshi tianzun mianqian kouqi, yu qichan, jiangsheng bichu. Chen jin fengwaizhi. Chenzi butong, shi fashi zicheng.

22 Talisman characters are specially written words that appear to be versions of Chinese characters, but they are not standard characters. They have special powers allowing them to control the gods or repel ghosts; the words can offer protection from harm and sickness. Many of them are illustrated with brief explanations in Fuzhou tonglingshenfa 符咒通靈神法 [Talisman as a Way to Contact the Spirits and Gods] (Taipei?: Dashan shudian, n.d. [ca. 2000s]). This work has the phrase longtange cangban 龍潭閣藏版 [From Blocks Held by the Dragon Pond Pavilion]. Repentances to the Three Officials [Sanguan chan 三官懺] was bought in Beijing in January 2010, but it was originally from Hengyang, Hunan. Its volumes are 8¼ in (20.96 cm) h × 5¼ in (13.33 cm) w. Vol. 1 has thirty-five pages; vol. 2 has twenty-two pages; vol. 3 has twenty pages.

23 This last phrase is confusing and could also be translated as “If my words are different [not correct?] they were [intended to conform to] the words as spoken by the deity.”
In other words, Laozi said this to the Universal Lord of Primordial Being. In the ranking of the Three Pure Ones, Lord no. 1 was told this by Lord no. 3. The Most High Lord of the Dao is known to have revealed sacred scriptures, and Laozi has a special position in Daoism as transmitting those teachings to human beings. This transmission was given above by Yurou and is indicated in the full title of the work on the inside pages: Repentances to the Three Officials as Taught by the Universal Lord of Primordial Being [Yuanshi tianzun shuo Sanguan zuifa 元始天尊說三官罪法].
Yuruo was determined to carry out his vows to better himself, which is probably the reason he was copying this text in the first place: to gain merit after having reformed himself. His was a very concrete plan to get back into the good graces of the deities. In the text he copied, when he wrote of some specific sins Yuruo may have been speaking of his own transgressions:

The sin of reviling nature, the wind, thunder rain, and marsh lands; Harboring an evil heart that destroys people’s spirit; The sin of striving for wealth and treasures; The sin of taking someone’s wife forcefully; The sin of worshiping idols, of glorying in lavish decorations, of mistreating the holy books and Daoist objects. ... On this day I resolve to seek understanding and repentance, to be humble and to seek forgiveness. I resolve to repent, to respect all human beings [red circles are used here for emphasis]. I resolve to honor the rituals.
Jade Emperor [Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝]. He is considered the great executive director or chief administrator of all the deities; he commands and supervises the deities who rank below him, which includes hundreds of supernatural beings. The Jade Emperor is often invited to popular ceremonies, where he descends to an altar to receive the prostrations and entreaties of the common people, and where he is the highest-ranking deity present. Among the common people, he is colloquially referred to as the Grandfather of Heaven [Laotianye 老天爺].

MING DYNASTY PAINTING HELD BY THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS IN BOSTON
A volume titled Repentances to the Supreme Three Primes to Forgive Sins [Taishang sanyuan youzui fachan 太上三元宥罪法懺] is another Daoist religious text supplied in Beijing by my friends from Hengyang, Hunan. There is no date in the handwritten string-bound volume of forty-seven pages. The unbleached handmade paper suggests a late Qing date.24

This text was copied in the Hall of Auspiciousness [Rui tang 瑞堂] by Qin Yicheng 秦一誠, who was seeking the Dao but had not yet found it. We know this because in his signature at the end of volume 2 [quan zhong 券中] on page 30, he described himself as “Least of the Dao” [modao 末道, which could also be translated as “Not yet having achieved the Dao”], and on page 47, where he signed his name again at the end of the three volumes, he describes himself as having “superficial learning” [qianxue 淺學].

It is clear to see in this text how the Three Primes [Sanyuan 三元] were conflated with the Three Officials [Sanguan 三官], a point mentioned in Chapter 7. For example, at the beginning of volume 2 on page 18, the title beginning with “Supreme Three Primes” [Taishang Sanyuan 太上三元] is shortly followed by the phrase “Middle Prime Official of the Earth, with your hundred officials” [Zhongyuan diguan, zhulu baisi 中元地官, 主錄百司]. The term “middle official” [zhongguan 中官] is the Official of the Earth.25

24 The text of Repentances to the Supreme Three Primes to Forgive Sins [Taishang sanyuan youzui fachan 太上三元宥罪法懺] is 9¾ in (24.76 cm) h × 8¼ in (20.95 cm) w and was purchased in Beijing in March 2009. The three volumes have a total of forty-seven pages. This title was discussed in Chapter 7. On the inside pages is the title Taishang sanyuan miezui miaochan 太上三元滅罪妙懺. The word miao 妙 can be translated as "mysterious." It is a word often used in reference to spiritual matters.

25 The mixing up of the Three Officials with the Three Primes is also discussed and documented in note 32 in Chapter 7.
In 2008 in Beijing I bought a hand-copied religious text called Chants of Repentances to the Three Primes [Sanyuan fachan 三元法懺]. It is a string-bound text of fifty-one pages copied in February 1909 by Wang Shuxiang 王恕, who felt that he had low social status and thus asked readers [p. 49]: “don't look at my unsightly writing and snicker” [chou wu xiao 醜勿笑]. Master Wang had the Daoist religious name of Wang Observing the Dao (or Wang Protecting the Dao) [Wang Shoudao 王守道], which he wrote at the end on page 51. But he also had another name, Wang Who Has Achieved [Wang Youda 王有達], which he stamped in black ink on various pages. The stamp reads “Recorded by Wang Youda” [Wang Youda ji 王有達記]. Clearly he was proud to claim ownership of having produced this copy.

The text consists of ritual repentances [fa chan 法懺] for sins committed and is addressed to each of the Three Officials and refers to both as the Three Primes and the Three Officials, as in the title discussed earlier above.

This text also lists the fears of the common people who lived in a world of many actual and perceived dangers. In one section of this text, the Middle Prime is asked for help:

Universal Lord of Primordial Being, again call on the Middle Prime the Earth Official, and on the sacred multitude, henceforth, in this world wherever there are people who are not at ease, who suffer the three calamities and the five poisons spread out, when robbers come to bully and plunder and when all is burned up and destroyed, when the people lose their source of income, when government officials and all are worried, when all the fields are barren in the thirty surrounding counties and villages, when both those living and the spirits are starving, when the kinfolk all scatter, when flesh is separated from the bone, when the dead become holy but only are ghost soldiers, when the king of demons causes troubles, then order the Middle Prime to receive these many, who have suffered with no place to live, to examine all, and to let these things pass away.

Yuanshi tianzun, fugao Zhongyuan Diguan, jizhushengzhong, zijin yilai, tianxia rou you renning bu’an, sanzai jingqi, wudu xingxing, daozei qinling, renzao tutan, renmin shiye, yishujinghuang, saxian xiangcun, tianyuan huangmo, shengling epiao, qinqi xiangshu, gurou fenli, siwang zhisheng,

26 This work is described in Chapters 1 and 2. Chants of Repentance to the Three Primes [Sanyuan fachan 三元法懺] is 9¼ in (25.46 cm) h × 5½ in (13.97 cm) w.
FIGURE 8.11
Chants of Repentance to the Three Primes [Sanyuan fa chan 三元法懺], Pages 20 and 21, Calling on the Deity for Help. This text was copied in February 1909 by Wang Shuxiang 王恕鄉. He wrote on page 21 (fourth line from the right of vertical text, beginning with the sixteenth character), “Universal Lord of Primordial Being” [Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊], again call on the Middle Prime the Earth Official, and on the sacred multitude, henceforth, in this world wherever there are people who are not at ease, who suffer the three calamities and the five poisons spread out, when robbers come to bully and plunder and when all is burned up and destroyed, when the people lose their source of income [Yuanshi tianzun, fugao zhongyuan diguan, jizhushengzhong, ziji yilai, tianxia ruo you renming buan, sanzai jingqi, wudu xingxing, daozei qinling, renzao tutan, renmin shiye 元始天尊，復告中元地官，及諸聖眾，自今以來，天下若有人名不安，三災競起，五毒興行，盜賊侵凌，衽遭塗炭，人民失業].

PHOTO BY AUTHOR

cishi guibing, mowang zaihai. Xingxing ling Zhongyuan zhiren, shouzhu kunao wuchu cunhuo, liangliang xiangkan, buneng weiji.

元始天尊，復告中元地官，及諸聖眾，自今以來，天下若有人名不安，三災競起，五毒興行，盜賊侵凌，衽遭塗炭，人民失業，益屬競惶，卅縣鄉村，田園荒沒，生靈餓殍親戚相疏，骨肉分離，死亡至聖，此是鬼兵，魔王災害。興行令中元之人，受諸苦惱，無處存活，兩兩相看，不能為記.

pp. 20–21
Text D

Among the chaoben I collected related to the Three Officials is one that is quite Buddhist in its orientation. It illustrates that, in Chinese popular religion, Buddhist and Daoist ideas were conflated and integrated, so most people did not draw distinctions between their beliefs.

The book is titled Precious Repentances to the Three Primes [Sanyuan baochan 三元寶懺]. This handwritten account of seventy-five pages was rebound in heavier paper sometime in the 1950s or 1960s, and it appears the title and the name of the altar where it was held were cut from the original cover and pasted onto the newer heavier cover. In the same red paper as the title, the altar is given as Record of the Altar of the Mysterious Thunder Deity [Xuanmiao leitian zhi 玄妙雷壇誌]. The book is organized into three volumes, and each volume calls upon one of the Three Officials for assistance.

But on the first page of text the title is given as “Precious Repentances to the Yoga Three Primes, Complete” [Yujia sanyuan baochan, quanbu 瑜伽三元寶懺全部]. Yoga is a system of linking the mind and the body through controlled meditation. It is part of Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist religious discipline for many people, but in the popular Western imagination is probably associated mostly with Buddhism. In the text, many Buddhist deities are cited by name and called upon for help. Among these are Amida [Namo amituofo 南無阿彌陀佛], who presides over the Western Paradise; the chubby and laughing Maitreya [Namo mile zunfo 南無彌勒尊佛], expected to be a Buddha in the future (both are on p. 6); and the much-loved Goddess of Mercy [Namo guanshiyin pusa 南無觀世音菩薩], who anoints all with mercy (p. 21). Namo 南無 comes from a Sanskrit word that can be translated as “worshipful.” Pusa 菩薩 comes from a Sanskrit word to indicate a divine being who has put off enlightenment in order to help sentient beings in the world achieve enlightenment; such deities are called bodhisattvas. These and numerous other Buddhist deities are called upon throughout the text.

In fact, the first Buddhist deity so addressed is the Worshipful Bodhisattva of the Fragrant Cloud Canopy [Namo xiangyungai pusa 南無香雲蓋菩薩] (p. 2). This is a god associated with medical healing. The canopy refers to its protective
power and is depicted in art to resemble the ritual umbrellas used to shade deities and high power holders. This deity can cure illness, forgive sins, and increase fortune. 31

The first page of text sets the stage for the prayers to follow. It reads in part:

Offering incense with smoke that curls upward to the lotus cave from where the many buddhas and bodhisattvas can descend from their heavenly palace and the Luohan saints on the Cold Mountain can come to be worshipped [missing character]

Gongxiang yanliaorau lianhuadong zhufu pusa xiatiangong qingliangshan luohan nashou renjian gong x.

供香煙繚繞蓮花洞諸佛菩薩下天宮清凉山羅漢納受人間供囗. (p. 2) 32

The Daoist Three Officials are called upon frequently in the work. One example repeated in some version in each volume of the work is

31 This is the Buddhist deity Gandharaja, also called Fragrant King Bodhisattva [Xiangwang pusa 香王菩薩]. See Sawa Ryōken 佐和陵研 [Dictionary of Buddhist Statues] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kubunkan, 1978), 96. This healing Buddha is also known as a manifestation of Guanyin, called the Fragrant King Guanyin [Xiangwang Guanyin 香王觀音]. The word “fragrance” [xiang 香] refers to flowers and herbs used to make medicine. The sutra mentioning this deity is the Xiangwang pusa tuoluoni zhoujing [Sutra of Appealing to the Fragrant King Bodhisattva], http://www.suttaworld.org/collection_of_buddhist/chiarnlurng_tripitaka/42-48_372-537/501.htm, accessed December 7, 2014. In Buddhism, medicine cures both physical illness and the ills caused by spiritual ignorance. This is alluded to in the citation: “Gandharaja’s (Fragrant King Bodhisattva’s) point is that when conducting a ceremony or evening prayers, one should first face the Buddha, lighting incense (i.e. making a fragrance) and concentrate the mind. One can then clearly understand one’s heart, as if one truly perceives the things being seen, to know that the fragrance comes from your own pure heart, and it is also from your basic nature. This is the Law made real through the incense. This incense can spread to all corners of the known universe.” See “Gandharaja’s (Fragrant King Bodhisattva’s) point is that” Xiangyungai pusa de yiyi 香雲蓋菩薩的意義, at Xiangwang pusa toluo nozhoujing 香王菩薩陀羅尼呪經 (Sutra of Appealing to the Fragrant King Bodhisattva)

http://www.tzuchi.org.tw/community/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=318:68870e46ce89d4c285771e004a8a0f&catid=164:2010-01-22-03-41-46&Itemid=197/, accessed December 14, 2014.

32 The missing character could be “offerings” [feng 奉], to complete the phrase “to be worshiped,” or “to receive offerings” [gongfeng 供奉]. The luohan 羅漢 are similar to Christian saints, individuals who are following a holy path and wish to help others.
Upper Prime, the Heavenly Official and Emperor who gives blessings, with your forty-two officials and many heavenly spirits and immortals, please decrease our transgressions of the past.

Shangyuan cifu tianguan dadi sishiersi zhutianshenxian qiushuai chanhui guoqu.

Although I bought this in Beijing, it is another of the religious items obtained by my friends from Hengyang, Hunan. I bought it in 2010, but this text was copied out in the autumn of 1863. It was “Respectfully given by Mr. Tian Yicheng for use on the altar” [Jing yu Tian Yicheng xiansheng tanzhong yingyong 敬於田一澄先生壇中應用; p. 75]. As mentioned above, the word for “mister” can also be used to address Daoist masters, so we cannot know whether Mr. Tian was a layperson or a religious specialist.

Although the structure of these four texts, such as calling on the deities for help and vowing [zhixin 志心] to follow the teachings of the text, and most of the imagery, such as those referring to numerous palaces [gong 宮] or offices [fu 府], are similar, only occasionally do portions of the texts seem to have been taken from the same source. None of these texts resemble a printed version, the Precious Repentances to the Supreme Three Officials [Taishang sanguan baochan 太上三官寶懺], which I bought at Baiyunguan in Beijing in 2010. This printed version should have been treated as the “standard and correct” version of the text to be copied, and it was likely available to all the writers of these chaoben from the late 1800s onward. But this printed text was not used as the single source for their chaoben, even though they were not writing original text but were copying pages from some other source.

However, two of the handwritten texts resemble each other in portions. This indicates a single source, whether hand-copied or printed is not clear, to which both writers were referring. They are Text a, Repentances to the Three Officials, and Text c, Chants of Repentances to the Three Primes. For example, in the section addressing the middle prime [zhongyuan 中元], they both have the wording “All males and females can achieve total redemption” [Yiqie nanmu, jie shouhudu, juheng xiaoyao 一切男女, 皆受護度，俱亨逍遙; as seen in Repentances to the Three Officials, vol. 2, p. 3]. Text c (p. 20) has the same sentence with the simple insertion of “In accordance with Daoist practices, all males and females can achieve total redemption.” The inserted phrase is “In accordance with Daoist practices” [Yiqie daosu 一切道俗]. The two versions have some slight differences.
Figure 8.12

Repentances to the Supreme Three Primes to Forgive Sins [Taishang sanyuan youzui fachan 太上三元宝罪法懺]. Cover. The title is also written on the inside pages as Taishang sanyuan miezui miaochan 太上三元滅罪妙懺. Each of the three volumes addresses one of the Three Officials [Sanguan 三官] and gives the text of memorials [zou 奏] that can be written to approach them, often followed by the text “after delivering this memorial, it is burned” [toubiao fenhua 投表焚化; e.g., p. 30].

Photo by Author
If these two works followed a printed text, which they likely should have, the difference between them would mean they were violating the idea of copying a “standard” or printed version faithfully. Possibly the copyist was reciting as he was writing, and the text as recorded became more “colloquial,” as if it were being spoken. That might account for some of the “extra” words added in places. If we accept this idea, we can conjure up a nice image of the copyist fully engaged in his work, chanting and writing at the same time. I find this a comforting and “human” image.

A further difference between the printed and the written versions is that two of the rather similar texts are focused more on one’s parents [fumu 父母] than on males and females [nannv 男女]. These two are Text B, Repentances to the Supreme Three Primes to Forgive Sins (p. 25), and Text D, Precious Repentances to the Three Primes (p. 52). Those copying these texts were perhaps most keenly interested in being filial and in gaining blessings for their parents. Perhaps they were older and past the age of constructing their marriage relationships and were more concerned with their aged parents. The copied texts were being adapted to reflect their own concerns, which in their minds must have taken precedence over slavishly copying the standard text in front of them.

In both cases, we see that the hand-copied chaoben were works created by the copyist as he went along. They were, in that sense, documents being brought to life, reflecting not just the material being copied but something of the perceptions of the copyist as well, perhaps his way of speaking or his ideas of how the phrase ought to be stated. They became part of the specific local culture that the pingmin always created. The texts show us that, even in the realm of the suprahuman deities and natural forces, the pingmin interpreted those phenomena with their own eyes. They were not constrained by the distant and exalted deities to transmit only received information. They were, instead, absorbing those received ideas into their more meaningful everyday world.

Gods and Ghosts: The Netherworld

As we continue to descend the hierarchy of Daoist deities, we arrive at the altar of the Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering [Taiyi jiuku tianzun 太乙救苦天尊]. Here is a deity whose responsibilities are clearly designated to deal with the lives of the common people. When facing worrisome and disturbing situations, this deity is specifically ready to receive the pleadings of human beings and to assist them in overcoming their difficulties. He sits as impassively as do the
Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering. [Taiyi jiuku tianzun 太乙救苦天尊] is usually approached by people at funerals or when they are worried about a serious health issue. By transforming into a ghost, the Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering can descend to the netherworld to assist those suffering there. The top illustration shows him as a deity, the bottom after his transformation into a ghost.

Zhang Mengxiao 張夢逍, Tujie Daojiao: Jieshi Zhongguoren Zuiyinmi de Mengxiang 圖解道教：揭示中國人最隱秘的夢想 (Daoism Illustrated: Revealing the Most Hidden Dreams of the Chinese People), Xi’an: Shaanxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe 陝西師範大學出版社, 2010, 139.
other venerated deities, but he casts his eyes on the particular people who approach him for help.\textsuperscript{33}

The common people of China, involved in their daily lives and struggles, interpreted their concerns and fears in very concrete terms. They were fearful of the transgressions and sins they had committed against their fellow humans and against the deities. They were apprehensive about the ultimate fate of death and dreaded the punishments they might face when their souls descended to the netherworld, which was commonly referred to as the underground prison or Hell \([\textit{diyu} \text{ 地獄}]\). In the popular conception, when people died, their soul or spirit \([\textit{hun} \text{ 魂}]\textsuperscript{34}\) descended to the lower world, where they

\textsuperscript{33} The printed religious text for this deity is \textit{Precious Repentances to the Lord Who Relieves Suffering} \([\textit{Taiyi jiuku baochan} \text{ 太乙救苦寶懺}]\), a copy of which I bought at Baiyunguan in 2012. With its many repeated words and phrases, this is clearly a text written to be chanted aloud.

\textsuperscript{34} In the popular conception, people had two or more souls. The soul left the body at death and descended into the netherworld, where it could suffer and then be reborn or sent to
would be judged by various deities. The judges would examine the record of each person, which had been compiled during the person's life on earth. Each person had to pass through ten gates, each commanded by a judge [pan’guan 判官] who would assign them a punishment based on the sins or transgressions they had committed. Most people knew that in the course of their lives, they had done things that they regretted. In the commonly circulated explanation, each gate had several minor hells, in which the dead, reunited with their physical body in Hell, had to undergo horrendous punishments, being tortured and mutilated. Very graphic illustrations were produced detailing the awful punishments. The punishments could last for a long time, perhaps hundreds of years. At the end of the punishment, they proceeded to the next gate, to be assigned other punishments if they had sins in that category of punishment. At the conclusion of this period of “purgatory,” those who had suffered the punishments and thus atoned for their sins would be freed from Hell and sent across a bridge in order to be reborn as a sentient being, whether an animal or a human.
The punishments were administered by ghosts. Some texts in Chinese refer to these as “small ghosts” [xiaogui 小鬼]. When we come to the level of the common people in China in the late Qing and Republican periods, we encounter ghosts. Some ghosts were the souls of former human beings. As mentioned above, the Chinese popular imagination said a person had two souls: the hun 灵 was the spirit that had to undergo punishments and be cleansed; the po 魂 soul stayed with the physical body, even as it decayed, and stayed in the world. Thus the po soul of a person who had died a tragic death or who had no relatives to offer sacrifices to him after death might wander the earth as an orphan ghost [gugui 孤鬼], seeking revenge on living humans.\(^{37}\)

From the level of the Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering on down the hierarchy, we need to accept that many ghosts exist. In fact, some of the Daoist deities at these levels can transform themselves into ghosts. This means they are both deity/spirit and ghost. These spirits can assert themselves either as deities or as ghosts. The most powerful of these deity/ghost figures is probably the Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering. In order to descend to the netherworld to locate a spirit whose relative has beseeched the deity for help, the Celestial Lord transforms himself into a ghost, thereby to examine the various hells and to extract the dead person who is suffering punishment. Because of this important role, traditional funerals might carry a banner in the funeral procession with the name of the Celestial Lord, to indicate he was requested to assist the souls of the recently departed. I found these banners for sale near Baiyunguan in Beijing in 2014.\(^{38}\)

One text I bought in 2012 is titled Supreme Morning Text for Becoming an Immortal [Taishang xiuzhen chenke 太上修真晨課]. There is no date on the

\(^{37}\) Livia Kohn, *Introducing Daoism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 128; Song, *Jietu Zhongguo daojiao shengsishu* 120–129. This belief in multiple souls is of ancient origin in China, going back to at least the first century CE. See Jean M. James, “The Iconographic Program of the Wu Family Offering Shrines,” *Artibus Asiae*, 48, no. 1 (1988–1989): 47.

\(^{38}\) A mention of the Celestial Lord Who Relieves Suffering as a deity who changes into a ghostly form in order to enter the gates of Hell is in Song, *Jietu Zhongguo daojiao shengsishu*, 103. This source shows that the banner calling the soul back to the body can be carried at the head of the funeral procession by the eldest son. See ibid, 261. The manner in which this spirit transforms from a deity into a ghost is illustrated in Zhang Mengxiao 張夢逍, *Tujie Daojiao: Jieshi Zhongguoren zuiyinmi de mengxiang* 圖解道教： 揭示中國人最隱秘的夢想 [Daoism Illustrated: Revealing the Most Hidden Dreams of the Chinese People] (Xi’an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 139.
forty-eight-page handwritten text, and it could as easily be from the late Qing (1890–1911) as from the mid-Republican period (1920s–1930s). I bought this in Shanghai, but someone (in the 1940s or later) wrote in ink: Kui奎 Village, Wujin武進 County. Today this area is called Wuzhou武洲 district in Changzhou常州, in Jiangsu Province. The city is in the southeast region of the province, just south of the Yangtze River on the Grand Canal in a very luxuriant region of China. Early on, it became a distribution center for agricultural products and fish. Cotton mills flourished in the 1920s. Today it is considered one of the most developed cites in Jiangsu Province and is on the main Shanghai-Beijing rail line.39

The text is meant to be chanted as part of the morning services offered by the Daoist masters. As the text begins, a deity addressed as Supreme Great Celestial Worthy [Wushang da tianzun無上大天尊] is called upon by two formal names Great Holy Fragrant Cloud Achieving Trust Great Celestial Worthy [Dasheng xiangyun daxin da tianzun大聖香雲達信大天尊], Ever-Pure Ever-Silent Supreme Great Celestial Worthy [Changqing changjing wushangda tianzun常清常靜無上大天尊; p. 2]. But after some ceremonial incantations to pacify the altar and to approach the deities by “opening the scripture” [kaijing開經; pp. 3–11], the prayers are directed to the Three Officials. This idea is confirmed on the final page (p. 44), where we see that the deity so named is in fact the Three Primes. We might therefore have placed this text with those mentioned above that are directed to the Three Officials. It is in this section, however, because the text goes on to earnestly call for assistance from the Three Officials, in particular from the water official, for help in escaping from the tortures of Hell.

As mentioned above, the Official of Earth can absolve people of their sins, and the Official of Water can remove disasters that have befallen or might befall people. Both of these deities are earnestly addressed in this text. One cause of anguish is the death of children, so the following text reads: “One’s child dies in the womb, or the child is born then dies. The child dies at age three, six or nine years. The child dies at age twelve or fifteen. One day and one night, there are ten thousand deaths and ten thousand births” [Zaishen erwang, shengxiaerwang. San, liu jiu sui erwang. Shi‘er wu sui erwang. Yi‘er yi ye, wansi wansheng在身兒亡, 生下兒亡. 三六九歲兒亡, 十二五歲兒亡. 一日一夜, 萬死萬生; p. 39].

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39 Supreme Morning Text for Becoming an Immortal [Taishang xiuZhen chenke 太上修真晨課] is 8¾ in (22.22 cm) h × 5 in (12.7 cm) w, with forty-eight pages. I bought it in Shanghai in January 2012.
**Figure 8.15**

*Supreme Morning Text for Becoming an Immortal* [Taishang xiuzhen chenke 太上修真晨課].

**Cover.** This is a Daoist text meant to be recited in the morning as part of the devotions that begin the day, and at places in the text are indications that a particular phrase should be spoken three times: "Ever pure, ever serene, most supreme heavenly worthy, three times" [Changqing changing wushang datianzun, san sheng 常清常靜無上大天尊，三聲, p. 2], along with prayers to "cleanse my heart" [jingxin shenzhou 凈心神咒], "cleanse my mouth" [jingkou shenzhou 凈口神咒], both p. 3]; "cleanse my body" [jingjingshen shenzhou 凈淨身神咒, p. 4]. Also written on the cover is Kui 奎 Village, Wujin 武進 County, now called Wuzhou 武洲 District, Changzhou 常州, Jiangsu 江蘇 Province.

Photo by Author
Supreme Morning Text for Becoming an Immortal [Taishang xiuzhen chenke 太上修真晨課], Pages 32 and 33, Begging to Be Released for a Better Life. The text on these pages asks for release from Hell. “The cycle of birth and death, take me out of the earthly prison [Hell]. Then turn me toward the Eastern Ultimate Heaven, past the gate of saving from suffering, to the place on the earth for altering my actions, where there is heaven without the earthly Hell. Where the King of Hell dare not raise his voice” [Lunhui shengsi, chuli diyu, jiwang dongji tianjie. Jiuku menting, jiuruo dishang haoxiuxing. Zhiyou tiantang wu diyu. Yanwang yijian, bugan gaosheng 輪廻生死，出離地獄，即往東極天界。 救苦門庭， 救若地上好修行。 只有天堂無地獄。 閻王一見， 不敢高聲].

PHOTO BY AUTHOR
The text goes on to ask for release from Hell.

The cycle of birth and death, take me out of the earthly prison [Hell]. Then turn me toward the Eastern Ultimate Heaven, past the gate of saving from suffering, to the place on the earth for altering my actions, where there is heaven without the earthly Hell. Where the King of Hell dare not raise his voice. Where the children of righteousness raise their hands in supplication. Where the Oxhead [Niutou 牛頭] and the Horse Face [Mamian 馬面] completely take refuge from the eighteen earthly Hells, all the Hells where they ramble in the thirty-three Heavens the heavenly palaces, all the palaces are there, beyond the boarder of being born in Heaven, where there are no sounds of Hell. Take me out of Hell, forever away from hardship, toward the human Heaven, reborn in the Pure Land, happiness without measure. Going and coming, without anxiety, without obstruction.

The King of Hell is called Yama in Sanskrit and Yanwang 阎王 or Yanlouwang 閻羅王 in Chinese. The Oxhead ghost [niutou gui 牛頭鬼] and the Horse-Faced Ghost [Mamian gui 馬面鬼] assist the Kings of Hell [the ten judges mentioned above] by arresting people and delivering them before the hell tribunal for judgment. In this text, the character for “head” [tou 頭] was miswritten as “bean” [dou 豆], as the writer simply omitted the second portion of the character. The Pure Land [Jingtu 淨土] is the Buddhist Heaven into which those who have achieved enlightenment are reborn. After entering the Pure Land, with its everlasting ease and calm, humans are released from the cycle of birth and rebirth.40

40 Yi, Zhongguo shenguai dazidian, on Yama [Yanlouwang], see pp. 610–611; on the Ox-head
Since we have descended to Hell in this narrative, I mention another chaoben that lets us spy the netherworld. The text is titled *Sutra of the City God, Sutra of the Dead* [*Chenghuang jing, Duwang jing* 城隍經度亡經]. It was written in attractive calligraphy, and the leaves are folded, as holy books or sutra in China with accordion-style folds often are. A date that appears is the *wuzi* 戌子 year, which would be either 1888 or 1948. Based on the text and the paper, a date of 1888 seems reasonable. But because at some point the chaoben was falling apart, the pages were pasted onto machine-made notebook paper, so a date of 1948 is also possible. The text may have been written by Xia Linchang 夏林昌, whose name appears. Xia was in Quanzhou 全州, a city in Guangxi 廣西 Province about 100 miles northeast of the often-visited tourist spot, Guilin 桂林. Quanzhou was a key market city and trading center and was seen as the transportation entrance to Guangxi, linking it with Hunan 湖南 Province. This text may have been written on the unused side of pages from Mr. Xia’s ledger. One item that Mr. Xia ordered (or perhaps supplied to someone else) was hard cinnabar [*genzhu* 艮硃]. This is the principal ore of mercury, sometimes called mercury sulfide, or native vermilion. The mineral resembles quartz but is a deep red color. It was used in making Chinese lacquerware and gilded religious statues. Daoist mystics tried to refine cinnabar into magical elixirs to grant immortality, and they often spoke of the cinnabar fields [*dantian* 丹田], three areas of the human body that play a role in breathing, meditation, and inner alchemy [*neidan* 内丹]. So if Mr. Xia was a supplier or customer for the mineral, it could easily have been used by a Daoist master, and in this instance it would be natural for it to be connected to this text.

This text was most likely prepared to be read at a funeral, and all its contents are related to death and to Hell. One function of the city god was to take charge of the souls of the deceased, either by arresting them because they had...
Sutra of the City God, Sutra of the Dead [Chenghuang jing, Duwang jing 城隍經度亡經]. Cover and First Page. Sutra of the Dead inside this text is labeled the Sutra of the Six Hells [Liu yu jing 六獄經]. The city god is approached here on behalf of a woman, possibly someone’s wife, who had died in childbirth with the heavy loss of blood. Unfortunately, because of common beliefs at the time, she would be plunged into the hells of blood. The city god had to arrest people who had committed transgressions and send them to the netherworld, but he could also assist and pardon the poor souls descending to Hell.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR
committed transgressions or to order them to be escorted to the gate of Hell. He was assisted in this task by two jailers, the Oxhead Ghost and the Horse-Faced Ghost. The city god is approached in the Sutra of the City God (pp. 6–8) on behalf of a woman, possibly someone’s wife, who had died in childbirth after the loss of much blood. Unfortunately, because of the beliefs of many at the time, she would be plunged into the hells of blood, which these days Americans would see as a case of “blaming the victim.” The city god could also assist and pardon the poor souls descending into Hell. His scripture is on pages 2 to 17 in this text. The Sutra of the Dead of the title is inside this text labeled as the Sutra of the Six Hells [Liu yu jing 六獄經], on pages 17–43. This actually consists of several shorter Buddhist-inspired texts. For example, the Precious Sutra of the Correct Teaching of the Dizang King [Dizang wang 地藏王] about the Blood Mountain as Revealed by the Buddha [Foshuo dazang zhengjiao xueshan miaojing 佛說大藏正教血山妙經] begins on page 18. He is known for his great compassion; he carries a staff with tiny bells to warn away insects as he approaches, so that they will not be stepped on as he passes. He also has the power to descend to the netherworld and to break open the gates of Hell to release the souls suffering there. He is often associated with the Daoist judges of the underworld and is regularly pictured in illustrations of the underground hells of the netherworld mentioned earlier, Fengdu.44

43 The role of the city god in dealing with souls of the dead is in Song, Jietu Zhongguo daojiao shengsishu, 130–133; Yi, Zhongguo shenguai dazidian, 65–66. For historical comments, see David Johnson, “The City-God Cults of T’ang and Sung China,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 4, no. 2 (December 1985); Cai Limin 蔡利民 et al., Suzhou chenghuangmiao 蘇州城隍廟 [The Suzhou City God Temple] (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011). See also Katz, “Divine Justice in Late Imperial China.” A comprehensive study is Zheng Tuyou 鄭士有 et al., Hucheng xingshi: Chenghuang xinyang de renleixue kaocha 護城興市：城隍信仰的人類學考察 [Protected City and Flourishing Markets: Anthropological Investigations of City God Worship] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2005).

44 Dizang is very popular in northeast Asia. His Sanskrit name is Kṣitigarbha. He is beloved in China and Korea because of his ability to break open the gates of Hell and his desire to protect all sentient beings. He is beloved in Japan as a protector of the souls of innocent children who have died. His sutra is widely reprinted and given away free at temples in China. I have several in my collection, including Dizang pusa benyuan jing 地藏菩薩本願經 [Sutra of the True Intention of the Dizang Bodhisattva], a published work that was reprinted in Jīn’ān, Shandong, and distributed by the Chengnei Guangong miao 城內關公廟 [City Guangong Temple] in 2013. Dizangwang receives a long entry in Yi, Zhongguo shenguai dazidian, 95–96; Sawa Ryōken 佐和陵研, Butsu-zō zuten 佛像図典 [Dictionary of Buddhist Statues] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kubunkan, 1978), 90–92. As
For the unfortunate woman whose soul was consigned to this purgatory, as described in the Sutra of the Six Hells, she might have to experience a mountain of blood \([\text{血山}; \text{ pp.} \ 18–25]\); a lake of blood \([\text{血湖}; \text{ pp.} \ 26–29]\); a sea of blood \([\text{血海}; \text{ pp.} \ 30–33]\); a pool of blood \([\text{血池}; \text{ pp.} \ 33–37]\); or a vessel of blood \([\text{血盆}; \text{ pp.} \ 37–43]\). Although the adjectives used to refer to these places tell of filth and dirt \([\text{穢污}; \text{ p.} \ 34]\) and filthy blood \([\text{穢血}; \text{ p.} \ 34]\), and although the various tortures and the ghosts who rule this realm, the judges and small ghosts \([\text{判官小鬼}; \text{ p.} \ 35]\) occur inside the unwelcome place, there is still redemption, because we also see the phrase “Look into the vessel and pond of blood and there are five lotus blossoms coming forth” \([\text{看見血盆池中有五朵蓮花出現}; \text{ p.} \ 41]\). The lotus is the Buddhist symbol of a pure white flower that grows in the mud. It is a symbol of forgiveness and of overcoming the filth of the world to reach a higher plane.

The event that prompted the copying of these texts to be read at the funeral or at a service remembering the deceased is made clear on the final page of this work. The copyist has written:

The petitioner was filial. Break open the gates of Hell to search for our poor and miserable mother in the vessel and pool of blood. It is hard to think this birth mother has sinned. We call out “mother” and ask that she be rescued and sent to the Western Paradise.

\[\text{尊者行孝。破獄尋娘。血盆池內見恓惶}.45 \text{產母罪難當。叫起阿娘。救母往西方. (p. 43)}\]

The petition ends by calling on the name of the Holy Bodhisattva Dizang King \([\text{南無地藏王菩薩}].\) From this text, we can imagine the anguish and sorrow of those who had suffered the loss of someone they held dear, someone who had died in pain and was unjustly suffering. One can imagine the earnestness and pleading of the bereaved petitioner as this text was being read aloud. This was very likely recited by a priest on behalf of the poor man who had lost his wife, the mother of his children, and who anguished

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45 In Shanxi dialect, xihuang 惶惶 is sometimes used to mean “mother,” according to my colleague Du Yuping 杜玉平. It is also used to mean “poor and miserable.”
**FIGURE 8.18**  
*Sutra of the City God, Sutra of the Dead* [Chenghuang jing, Duwang jing 城隍經度亡經], Pages 42 and 43, Asking for Release from Hell. The person who had this text copied inserted a personal plea: “The petitioner was filial. Break open the gates of Hell to search for our poor and miserable mother in the vessel and pool of blood. It is hard to think this birth mother has sinned. We call out ‘mother’ and ask that she be rescued and sent to the Western Paradise” [Zunzhe xingxiao. Poyu xunniang. Xuepenchinei jianxihuang. Chanmu zuinandang. Jiaoqi aniang. Jiimu wang xifang 尊者行孝。破獄尋娘。血盆池內見恓惶。產母罪難當。叫起阿娘。救母往西方]. On page 43, these are lines 2 and 3, reading from right to left.

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over the suffering he thought she was being forced to endure. It shows complete acceptance of the explanations of Hell and its indignities given to the common people at the time. Their only recourse in the face of such overwhelming loss and impotence compared to the powerful forces governing human life and death was to prepare handwritten texts such as this and to beseech the deities for help.

The Dragon King

Another example of a deity who can be both god and ghost is the Dragon King [Long wang 龍王]. Dragon kings are numerous, probably one for each major river and lake in China. Although some Daoist pantheons list the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas [Sihai longwang 四海龍王] and thus grant them status as universal deities, most dragon kings are local deities tied to a specific source of water. The dragon kings can bring water for growing crops, cooking, washing, and many life actions, so they were often invoked for help in ceremonies asking for rain. The dragon kings can equally bring floods and devastation or withhold needed rain. Chinese farmers were respectful to their local dragon kings in good times, but they could chastise or threaten this deity when its services were withheld. In times of trouble, a dragon king was seen as a bad ghost causing hardship.46

One chaoben in my collection is titled Prayers to the Dragon King [Longwang fashi 龍王法事]. Its more descriptive title is on the inside cover page is Recommended Memorials, Petitions and Certificates for a Religious Service [Gongjin biao shu die fashi 貢進表疏牒法事]. It was written in the renyin 王寅 year; judging from the handmade paper and the twine binding of the work, 1902 seems a reasonable date. I bought it in Beijing in 2010.47

The text is composed of invocations and petitions, spoken and written, that can be offered up to the dragon kings, to ask them to descend to earth to hear the petitions of the people and to address the concerns of those offering the petitions. Petitions were often written and read aloud by the ritual master at the ceremony, then burned so that the smoke would ascend to heaven, where the gods would receive and understand them. This process is the focus of the first subsection of the manuscript. The text is divided into subsections: “Offering up Memorials” [Shang biao 上表] on pages 3–15; “Offering up Petitions” [Shang shu

46 On both worshiping and chastising the dragon king, see Snyder-Reinke, Dry Spells.
47 Prayers to the Dragon King [Longwang fashi 龍王法事] contains thirty-four pages and is 9 in (22.86 cm) h × 5¼ in (13.33 cm) w. I bought it in Beijing in January 2010.
The troublesome ghosts: part 1

The first sentence of this work was recited by the ritual master, possibly also written as a text to be burned after it was read aloud at the altar.

The glory of the mountains and the rivers, each cave is a treasure; the irrigation of the paddies and fields, cannot be accomplished without water. We chant this petition, and today offer it up here.

Shanchuan zhi jingying, meixue weizhibao. Tianye zhi guangai, feishui bunengcheng. Gongbiao yinji, jin wei juchang.

山川之精英，每穴為之寶。田野之灌溉，非水不能成。貢表吟偈，今為舉揚。

The dragon kings are sometimes accorded honors or respect, because some of them hold high office with much responsibility. At the local level, they are given a much less exalted rank, although their power can still be great in the local community, especially where a river and its rushing currents are involved or when rain is desperately needed for growing crops. At this local level, the gods and the people seem to have a close relationship or at least sometimes a relationship bordering on the informal. Thus the dragon kings make a good point for us to descend even lower in the hierarchy, to the level of pesky, troublesome ghosts who vex and frustrate people. This aspect of the ghosts who lived with the common people of China in the late Qing and Republican periods is discussed in Chapter 9.

Conclusion: How Should We View These Spirits?

These gods and ghosts at the lower end of the hierarchy could be troublesome creatures, changeable in nature to the point of being unpredictable. They

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48 The honorific titles by which the dragon kings can be addressed are given in Min Zhiting 閔智亭, Daojiao yifan 道教儀范 [Daoist Ceremonies] (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2006), 168.

49 Comments on rituals are in Kohn, Introducing Daoism, 144–148. For comments on how the carved statues of deities are “brought to life” and infused with religious efficacy, see Laurel Kendall, “Things Fall Apart: Material Religion and the Problem of Decay,” The Journal of Asian Studies, 76, No. 4 (November 2017), 861–886.
Prayers to the Dragon King [Longwang fashi 龍王法事], Page 1 and Inside Cover. The more descriptive title is on the inside cover: Recommended Memorials, Petitions, and Certificates for a Religious Service [Gongjin biao shu die fashi 貢進表疏牒法事]. It was written in the renyin 壬寅 year; based on the handmade paper and the twine binding of the work, 1932 seems a reasonable date. The text is composed of invocations and petitions, spoken and written, that can be offered up to the Dragon Kings, to ask them to descend to earth to hear the petitions of the people and to address the concerns of those offering the petitions. Petitions were often written and recited by the ritual master at the ceremony, then burned so that the smoke would ascend to heaven, where the gods would receive and understand them.

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were not harmless pranksters; as we see in Chapter 9, they could cause real unpleasantness and discomfort for human beings. Negative spirits are found or referred to at the temples and shrines of all the world’s major religions, since the holy deities worshiped are to some degree defined in contrast to the negative forces that are also said to exist. Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu literature finds it important to mention the negative powers that lurk. Islam is concerned with the evil of Satan. In religious Daoism, however, negative and uncontrollable spirits are numerous, and even the troublesome spirits might change their course to aid human beings. Like the complementary forces of yin and yang, they contain all aspects of the Dao, and they exist in relation to one another.

Liu Daochao 劉道超, an anthropologist and scholar of popular religious practices in China, has made interesting observations about popular religion in China, a topic he has been investigating since 1984. In his book Zhumeng minsheng: Zhongguo minjian xinyang xinzhihui 築夢民生：中國民間信仰新智慧 [Constructing Dreams for Life: New Thinking about Chinese Popular Beliefs], he assembles a number of ideas about this changeable nature of Daoist deities. When talking about “The Wisdom of Worshiping Evil Spirits” [Jingji e’shen zhi zhihui 敬祭惡神之智慧], he says there are two kinds of spirits, good spirits [shan de shen 善的神] and evil spirits [e de shen 惡的神]. The first part of this chapter discusses the most holy of the Daoist deities, those who rule with grace and absolute authority. Liu says that many spirits bring only blessings and good, including the god of wealth, the city god, Wenchang, the Goddess of Mercy, the Jade emperor, and the Spirit Controlling Locusts [Quhuang shen 驅蝗神].

Among the spirits who can bring either blessings or destruction [keweishan yi keweie 可為善亦可為惡], Liu lists the following: the year god [taisui 太歲], the thunder god [leishen 雷神], the Big Dipper [Beidou 北斗], the god of wind

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50 Liu Daochao 劉道超, Zhumeng minsheng: Zhongguo minjian xinyang xinzhihui 築夢民生：中國民間信仰新智慧 [Constructing Dreams for Life: New Thinking about Chinese Popular Beliefs] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2011), especially 238–249. A study of the earliest Chinese concepts of deities and spirits being both helpful and malevolent is Richard von Glahn, The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). This excellent study touches on many points made in this chapter and Chapter 9. Many of the earliest beliefs and practices continue today among Chinese communities. Some, such as throwing beans near a house to chase away spirits, are not seen much in China but are part of the popular setsubun 節分 festival in Japan celebrating the end of winter and the coming of spring. See Setsuko Kojima and Gene A. Crane, A Dictionary of Japanese Culture (Tokyo: Japan Times, 1993), 298–299.
[fengshen 風神], the dragon king [Long wang 龍王], the king of the underworld [Yanluo wang 閻羅王], the Dizang king, the Emperor of the Underworld [Fengdu dadi 豐都大帝], and the stove god [zaoshen 灶神]. When we look at the horoscopes compiled by astrologers and fortunetellers, we find a number of these spirits cited, sometimes in their helpful form and sometimes in their negative incarnation. Several are mentioned in this chapter, especially the Dizang king, whom I refer to as the Dizang bodhisattva because he can descend to the gates of Hell and help tortured souls to escape their torments there. Some of these spirits have more than one manifestation—for example, the numerous dragon kings.

Liu also lists a number of ghosts frequently encountered in popular religion as among the spirits harmful to human beings [yuren wei e’de shen 於人為惡的神]: the demon of drought [hanba 旱魃], the god of plague [wen shen 瘟神], the tiger spirit [hu shen 虎神], the king of locusts [huangchong wang 蟑蟲王], the god of smallpox [dou shen 痘神], and the snake god [she shen 蛇神]. Most of them ought to be considered plural. It is not clear from Chinese texts whether they are considered one god or one iteration of the god. Liu seems to correctly identify them as harmful spirits, which is the way they appear in most horoscopes. Fortunetellers and astrologers construct horoscopes by listing the “stars” for “forces” that will influence one’s future, and they often refer to these ghosts.

Liu says that people sometimes erected shrines to these harmful spirits, and they worshiped them with offerings or incense or ceremonies. He says the purpose of such worship was to control the evil spirit, as if by offering a bribe, they could mollify the evil spirits or lull them into being passive. He goes on to say that people recited incantations against these plague gods and cursed them. Before the growing season, they burned fields as a way of threatening the locust gods.

Liu describes several other ways in which people dealt with demons and evil spirits. Of course, they could take hold of symbolic items thought to have power, such as a branch of a peach tree [tiaozhi 桃枝] or a ceremonial sword made of wood [baojian 寶劍]. They could curse the ghost [magui 罵鬼], say a magic spell or incantation [fuyu 符語], or “press down” on the ghost to control the evil spirit [zhengui 鎮鬼]. Further, they could chase the ghost to expel it [gangui 趕鬼], they could eat the ghost [chigui 吃鬼], they could send off the ghost [songgui 送鬼], or they could exorcise the ghost [nuogui 儺鬼].

All the symbolic actions and items cited by Liu were those regularly used by ritual specialists when grappling with ghosts or demons. The peach branch was a favorite of yinyang masters, and the wooden sword is a popular item in religious Daoism. If one wanted to send off the high gods after a ceremony,
the reasoning must have been that, by burning incense, setting off firecrackers, and bidding farewell, people could use the same techniques to scare away and banish demons, i.e. they would create an atmosphere of noise and incense through which the spirits, be they deities or demons, could move. We know from observation that putting tablets of the plague gods on a boat and sending them down the river or ritually burning them on a boat was part of the exorcist rites of rural peasants. We also have reports of dragon kings who failed to bring rain being set out under the hot sun to give them a taste of the suffering they were causing to the people by not bringing rain.51

The result of these actions, Liu tells us, was to empower the people in the face of difficulties. Rather than being passive, the people confronted their difficulties. The priests or mediums (he calls them “shaman”) helped the people to organize and confront the demons. Government officials often participated, lending the authority of the government and helping to bind the people and the government together. These actions and ceremonies by the people helped to change a frustrating and threatening situation into an optimistic situation in which the people had hope for a favorable outcome. The actual efficacy of the event, such as changing the weather pattern and bringing rain, was less important than the spirit of optimism and potential that the people gained through the ceremonies and rituals.

Liu’s point about the common people being faced with difficulties and working to empower themselves in the face of these threats is well taken. The practices they devised to confront the demons, such as threatening them with a ritual sword or yelling at them, can be seen as an attempt not to let themselves be overwhelmed by the mysterious and seemingly powerful forces that seemed almost beyond human control. Through the noise and frenetic activity against the demons, they could vent their anger (to the ghosts and to one another) about the situation in which they found themselves.

51 Examples of putting the dragon king statue under the hot sun are in Snyder-Reinke, Dry Spells. Old texts held that the plague gods lived in the rivers and would come at the change of seasons to afflict the people. So it made logical sense as part of the ritual to rid an area of pestilence by sending representations of the plague gods on a boat down the river. The old texts are in Ren, Zongjiao cidian, 1038. For an overview of the plague gods from the point of view of a Western-trained medical man, see John R. Watt, Saving Lives in Wartime China: How Medical Reformers Built Modern Healthcare Systems Amid War and Epidemics, 1928–1945 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 6–8, with other descriptions of plague situations throughout the book. A description of burning the plague gods on a boat is in Donald S. Sutton, Steps to Perfection: Exorcistic Performers and Chinese Religion in Twentieth-Century Taiwan (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 38–39.
Liu’s comments seem positive and contemporary, so I thought it would be interesting to consult with a Daoist master I had met to get his perspective on Liu’s views. I contacted Zhou Xuanyun 周玄雲, a member of the Zhengyi school of Daoism who now lives in the Boston area. Master Zhou’s view was that everyone writing about religious Daoism reflects his own understanding of the phenomenon. From that perspective, he had no special quarrel or criticism of Liu’s analysis. Like Liu, Zhou believed in two types of spirits and ghosts, good and bad. People can pray to the good ones for help, and they can pray to the bad ones to be left alone. If a human being upsets a good deity, the god might be cruel to them. But if a human placates a bad spirit, the demon might be good to the human. Therefore, the important thing is not the alignment of the ghost or spirit but the relationship between the human being and the spirit.52

Concerning Liu’s use of the term “shaman,” Zhou said that was a term used to describe early practices, but in present-day Daoism the terms used for the medium who interfaces with the spirits are nanxi 男覡 for males and niúwu 女巫 for females. Dictionaries translate these terms as “wizard” or “sorceress.” These translations seem somewhat dismissive for describing people who play a crucial role in extending the power of humans with forces that seem to exist in a different realm. Perhaps the term “medium” is a more neutral term. A general term used by Chinese scholars for a medium is wuxi 巫覡, although in practice it often refers to a woman.53

Human beings and the deities of Chinese popular religion have a lively relationship and an energetic exchange of prayers and favors that continues in Chinese communities to this day. When faced with powerful or overwhelming influences, it becomes a comforting and hopeful action to call upon the superhuman or “otherworldly” spirits, whether we label them ghosts or deities. The universe of spirits that seems so distant and ethereal from daily social interactions becomes very real, colorful, and alive when given form by the Daoist masters and ritual specialists and by the fervent believers who participate in addressing the gods of popular religious Daoism. This universe of spirits, ritual specialists, and humans was very much alive and accepted by the pingmin of China in the period 1850–1950. As the anthropologist Liu Daochao outlines, by knowing something of the gods and ghosts and by taking an active stance toward them, the common people empowered themselves as they struggled through life’s vicissitudes.

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52 The comments generously offered by Zhou Xuanyun are in a personal communication dated February 18, 2014. The idea of a troublesome ghost becoming a protective deity is discussed in Huang, “Wuxi yu shouhu fuzhuling,” 291–294.

53 This usage referring to a woman is seen in ibid., 281–314.