

## Article

# An Overview of the Weiyi (威儀 Dignified Liturgies) of Taoism

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**Abstract:** Dignified liturgies (weiyi 威儀), one of the fundamental concepts in the Taoist scriptures, shows the overall image of Taoism displayed at the altar of the retreat (zhai 齋) and offering (jiao 醮) rituals. By examining the weiyi and Weiyi Masters in Taoist history, the dignified image of Taoist priests, the dignified duties of ritual masters, and the weiyi at the altar of the zhai and jiao rituals, we argue that the weiyi, which embodies the sacred dignity of the zhai and jiao altar, is key to understanding the meaning and function of Taoist zhai and jiao rituals. An overview of the weiyi is a new perspective in Taoist ritual studies, as in Taoist history its image as a state religion was displayed through dignified liturgies.

**Keywords:** Taoism; weiyi; zhai and jiao rituals; state ceremony

## 1. Introduction

Weiyi is one of the fundamental concepts in Taoist scriptures but has not been widely studied by scholars. Weiyi has various meanings. It refers to the appearance of the Taoist priest and the ritual protocols, and it can refer to the dignified image of Taoist ceremonies. As an important section in Taoist scriptures, it is ranked seventh among the twelve divisions of the *Taoist Canon* and generally covers all Taoist zhai and jiao rituals. International Taoist scholarship has placed increasing emphasis on the study of Taoist zhai and jiao rituals. For example, European and American scholars (such as Kristofer Marinus Schipper (Schipper and Verellen 2006), Anna Seidel (1988), John Lagerwey (1986, 2010), Kenneth Dean (1995), and Livia Kohn (2003)), Japanese scholars (such as Ōfuchi Ninji (2005), Maruyama Hiroshi (Maruyama 2004), and Asano Haruji (Asano 2005)), and Chinese scholars (such as Chen Yaoting (Chen 2003), Liu Jih-Wann (Liu 1967), Lee Fong-mao and Xie Conghui (Lee and Xie 2001), Zhang Zehong (Zhang 1996, 1999), Lai Chi Tim (Lai et al. 2007), Xie Shiwei (Xie 2010), Lü Pengzhi (Lü 2008), Zhang Chaoran (Zhang 2015), and Lin Xilang (Lin 2006)) have all studied Taoist zhai and jiao rituals in various ways. However, the nature of weiyi, its construction in Taoist rituals, and its influence on society are still issues worth exploring in Taoist studies. The dignity of the zhai and jiao ritual altar is demonstrated by the weiyi, the key to understanding the meaning and function of zhai and jiao rituals. The approach we take in this article, an overview of the meaning of weiyi, is a new perspective in Taoist ritual studies.

## 2. Weiyi in the History of Taoism

Weiyi is the overall image of the Taoist zhai and jiao ritual altar, including the streamers and banners, the ceremonial settings of the altar, and all the rules and observances presented by the ritual masters. Taoism is a scriptural religion, and its teachings and rituals are all based on scripture. Historically, Taoist scriptures have been divided into twelve divisions, which cover the various disciplines of scripture and ritual. The twelve divisions are basic texts (本文), divine talismans (神符), jade instructions (玉訣), numinous charts (靈圖), catalogs and registers (譜錄), precepts and observances (戒律), dignified liturgies



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(威儀), methods (方法), techniques (眾術), records and biographies (記傳), encomia and lauds (讚頌), and memorials and announcements (表奏) (Schipper and Verellen 2006, p. 21; Pregadio 2008, p. 1257).<sup>1</sup> In the *Taoist Canon* of the Zhengtong Reign Period of the Ming Dynasty 正統道藏 (hereafter abbreviated as ZTDZ), the scriptures were cataloged according to the Three Caverns (三洞) and the Four Supplements (四輔), and the scriptures of the zhai and jiao rituals were all classified under the category of weiyi of the Three Caverns. The category of weiyi of the Cavern of Mystery (洞玄) includes a total of 99 rituals, such as the rituals of the Golden Register (金錄), the Yellow Register (黃錄), and the Jade Register (玉錄), the Great Offering of All Heaven (羅天大醮), the Three audiences code (三朝科) and the Penances rituals (懺儀). There are 30 rituals in the Cavern of Perfection (洞真), including the rituals of Lamps (燈), Penances (懺), Prayer and Exorcism (祈禳), Announcement (奏告), Deliverance, and Salvation (拔度). Moreover, 26 rituals in the Cavern of Spirit (洞神), such as the jiao rituals of Orthodox Unity (正一), the rituals of Penances, Atonement (仰謝), Precious Stanzas (寶章). This method of classifying different kinds of weiyi scriptures in the Three Caverns of Dongzhen, Dongxuan, and Dongshen reflects the categorization view of the compilers of the ZTDZ in the Ming dynasty.

### 2.1. Weiyi in the Lingbao Retreat

The Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶) Retreat method is the mainstream of Taoist classified rituals (keyi 科儀), and the Lingbao tradition was the first to use the term weiyi. The Taoist priests believe that the Lingbao tradition's patriarch Ge Xuan (葛玄, 164–244) wrote the *Instructions on Retreats and the Dignified Liturgies* 敷齋威儀訣, which is a famous text quoted in the Tang and Song rituals<sup>2</sup>. In the early Lingbao scriptures, the term weiyi is already found in the titles. Ancient weiyi scriptures (namely, *Tablets of the Jade Register, for the Ceremonial of the Three Principles*, and *True and Spontaneous Scripture* 洞玄靈寶玉錄簡文三元威儀自然真經) compiled in 530 contain parts of the *Tablet of the Jade Register of the Median Principle* 中元玉錄簡文, which is one of the fundamental texts of the Lingbao liturgy. The *Essential Instructions on the Scriptures on the Dignified Liturgies for Lingbao Retreats, Expounded by the True Man of the Great Ultimate* 太極真人敷靈寶齋戒威儀諸經要訣, compiled by Ge Chaofu (葛巢甫, fl. 402), is also a famous text from the ancient Lingbao scriptures (DZ, vol. 9, p. 874). This work is also often abbreviated as *Lingbao weiyi jingjue* 靈寶威儀經訣 or *Fuzhai weiyi jing* 敷齋威儀經, and its contents are often quoted in the keyi scriptures of the Tang and Song dynasties to discuss the essentials of the Lingbao Retreat. The Taoist priest, “after seeking and receiving the Lingbao scriptures, should devoutly consecrate them as supreme treasures, not divulge them at will and not pass them on to those who are not qualified” (求受靈寶經, 永為身寶, 宗奉供養, 不敢妄泄至真, 傳非其人。), so says the Dunhuang manuscript p. 2452 *Lingbao weiyi jingjue (shang)* 靈寶威儀經訣 (上)。

The *Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures* 靈寶中盟經目, compiled by Lu Xiujing (陸修靜, 406–77), also contains a volume of weiyi scriptures, namely, *Scriptures on the Dignified Liturgies from the Dongxuan Lingbao Canon of the Most High* 太上洞玄靈寶敷齋威儀經<sup>3</sup>. In the Dunhuang manuscript (p. 2237 靈寶中盟經目 of the *Codes and Precepts for the Practice of Taoism of the Three Caverns*, Vol 5 三洞奉道科誡儀範卷第五), a scripture is named *Taishang Lingbao fuzhai weiyi jing* 太上靈寶敷齋威儀經一卷. Among the Taoist scriptures on keyi of the Song dynasty (960–1279), there are also several works devoted to weiyi. Among the 55 rubrics in the *Great Rites of the Numinous Treasure of Highest Clarity* 上清靈寶大法 compiled by Jin Yunzhong (金允中, fl. 1224–1225), volume 17 is entitled Rubric of weiyi 鎮信威儀品. In the *Standardized Rituals of the Supreme Yellow Register Retreat* 無上黃錄大齋立成儀, compiled by Jiang Shuyu (蔣叔輿, 1162–1223), we can also find the title *Fourth Weiyi* 威儀第四 in the rubric of keyi. The *Golden Book of Salvation according to the Lingbao Tradition* 靈寶領教濟度金書 (hereafter abbreviated as GBSLT), compiled by Lin Lingzhen (林靈真, 1239–1302), consists of 320 volumes and is considered to be the most comprehensive work on the weiyi of the Lingbao Retreat.

## 2.2. Taoist Weiyi Masters of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties (581–960)

During this period, “Taoist Weiyi Master” was an Official Taoist title bestowed by the central government.<sup>4</sup> Historical Taoist priests with this title include Hu Ziyang (胡紫陽, fl. 742), Yuan Danqiu (元丹丘, fl. early 8th century), Shen Fu (申甫, fl. 766–779), Zhang Zhan (張湛), Deng Qixia (鄧啟遐, fl. 904–907), Wang Qixia (王棲霞, 882–943), Zhao Changying (趙常盈, fl. 825), Sima Xiu (司馬秀, fl. 723–733), Ren Keyan (任可言), Qie Yisu (卻彝素), Nie Shidao (聶師道, 841–911), Wang Xuzhen (王虛貞), Qie Yuanbiao (卻元表), Xiao Xuanyu (蕭玄裕), Liu Xuanjing (劉玄靜), Bai Yuanjian (白元鑒, fl. 756), Zhu Xiaowai (朱霄外, fl. 951), etc. The earliest Taoist priest to hold this title was Wang Yan (王延, 520–604), the master of the Mysterious Metropolis Temple (玄都觀) in the Sui dynasty (581–618). In volume 85, *Wang Yan*, of the *Cloudy Bookcase with Seven Labels* (雲笈七籤), we can see that Wang Yan was appointed Taoist Weiyi Master by imperial edict, an official position that has existed ever since (詔以延為道門威儀之制, 自延始也。)(DZ, vol. 22, p. 603). In 586, Emperor Wen of Sui (隋文帝, 541–604) summoned Wang Yan to the Daxing Hall (大興殿), and “he was given the title of Taoist Weiyi. This title has been used ever since” (因職以道門威儀。威儀之名, 自茲始矣。)<sup>5</sup>. During the Sui and Tang dynasties (581–907), the Taoist Weiyi Master, as a Taoist official appointed by the emperor, was responsible for supervising and guiding the Taoist priests (Wang and Yang 1988, p. 605). The central government was to “protect and support Taoism and Buddhism, thus establishing the position of Weiyi to clean up religious affairs” (道釋二教, 必在護持, 須置威儀, 令自整肅。)(Dong et al. 1966, p. 3154). Weiyi was also a title in Taoist practice, and in the Tang dynasty (618–907), Ritual Masters, Weiyi Masters, and Ordination Masters were collectively known as the Three Masters (道士修行有三號, 其一曰法師, 其二曰威儀師, 其三曰律師。)(Li 1992, p. 125). The Tang dynasty had a strict selection system for Taoist Weiyi Masters, and those who served as Weiyi Masters were all well-known Taoist masters. For example, Qie Yisu was the master of the Prosperous Tang Temple (興唐觀) and the Great Clarity Temple (太清宮), and Zhang Tanxuan (張探玄) was the master of the Saint Reality Temple (聖真觀) and the Mysterious Origin Temple (玄元觀).

During the Tang dynasty, when Taoism flourished, Taoist Weiyi Masters were active in Chang'an (長安) and on various famous mountains, and they played an important role in social and political life. Mount Mao (茅山) was held in high esteem by the imperial family of Tang, and the Taoist Weiyi Master of Mount Mao was even called the Mountain Gate (山門) Weiyi Master. Sun Zhiqing (孫智清), the sixteenth Patriarch of the Shangqing Tradition of Mount Mao, was the Mountain Gate Weiyi Master in 832<sup>6</sup> and signed himself in the scriptures as “Sun Zhiqing, Weiyi Master of the three temples of Mount Mao”.<sup>7</sup> According to the *Monument of Deng Qixia* (鄧啟遐), *Taoist Weiyi Master of Mount Mao* 茅山道門威儀鄧先生碑, written by Xu Kai (徐鍇), Deng became the Weiyi Master of Mount Mao in 912 (Dong et al. 1966, p. 9283). One of the courtyards in the Palace of the Ten-thousand-fold Longevity (萬壽宮), over which he presided, was named Weiyi. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang (685–762), Bai Yuanjian (白元鑒), a Taoist Weiyi Master at the Supreme Emperor Temple (上皇觀) in Chengdu, was known as “Weiyi Master Bai” (白威儀先生) (Deng 1987, p. 443). The description of Taoist Weiyi Masters that we can see in the Taoist scriptures of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties is a demonstration of their sacred image.

## 2.3. Two Street Merit and Virtue Officials (兩街功德使) and Left- and Right-Street Weiyi Masters (左右街威儀) in the Tang Dynasty

In the Tang dynasty, the post of the merit and virtue officials was established to manage the affairs of Buddhism and Taoism, and the Taoist priests were selected to serve as the left- and right-street Weiyi Masters under them.<sup>8</sup> For example, Cao Youzhi (曹用之) and Tan Zixiao (譚紫霄, 823–973) were the left-street Weiyi Masters, and Yin Sixuan (尹嗣玄) and He Chonghui (何冲徽) were the right-street Weiyi Masters. The full title of the inscription on the funerary stelae of Master Xuanji (玄濟先生), found in 1993 in the Tang tomb at Tianjiawan in the eastern suburbs of Xi'an (西安), Shaanxi (陝西) Province, is *Inscription with*

*preface for Master Cao, Master of the Palace of Great Clarity in the Tang Dynasty, Great Master of the Three Religions, Weiyi Master of the Left Street, given the posthumous title of Xuanji Master by the Emperor* 唐故太清宮內供奉三教講論大德左街道門威儀葆光大師賜紫諡玄濟先生曹公玄堂銘並序 (Wu 2005, p. 218). This shows that Cao Youzhi (曹用之, fl. 846–871) was a left-street Weiyi Master. Tan Zixiao (譚紫霄, 823–973) was also appointed as the left-street Weiyi Master. Yin Sixuan (尹嗣玄), the Taoist priest of Bronze Goat Temple (青羊宮), was appointed as the right-street Weiyi Master (Dong et al. 1966, p. 8574). According to the description of Du Guangting (杜光庭, 850–933) in the *Collected Works of the Master of Broad Accomplishment* 廣成集, “Twenty-one people, including He Chonghui, the right-street Weiyi Master, spent seven days and nights in the new temple to set up a golden register altar” (DZ, vol. 11, p. 232). During the Tang in Chang’an, there was a group of two street Weiyi Masters who actively participated in the state religious activities. According to the *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat of the Most High* 太上黃籙齋儀, compiled by Du Guangting, the scriptures written in the 2 streets amounted to 5300 volumes (DZ, vol. 9, p. 346). This is a historical record of the participation of Taoist priests in the writing of scriptures in the Tang dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Zhenzong of the Song (宋真宗, 968–1022), the title of Weiyi was replaced by that of the Taoist register, but the term Weiyi was always used at the Taoist ritual altar.

### 3. Dignified Image (威儀形象) of Taoist Priests, Dignified Duties (威儀職責) of Ritual Masters

#### 3.1. Requirements for the Dignified Image of the Taoist Priests

The way Taoist priests walk, live, sit and sleep is referred to in the scriptures as the “Four Weiyi”. Taoism advocates always maintaining a dignified appearance and never giving up one’s solemnity (常持法相、不舍威儀。) (CPWDTC, DZ, vol. 24, pp. 750–51). Taoist priests must strictly observe the precepts inwardly while appearing outwardly dignified (內執戒律，外持威儀。)<sup>9</sup> From its earliest days, Taoism placed great emphasis on the cultivation of the Taoist priest’s solemnity, and for this reason, detailed rules were laid out in the scriptures. The *Tablets of the Jade Register, for the Dignified Liturgies of the Three Principles of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery* (洞玄靈寶玉籙簡文三元威儀自然真經), an early fifth-century scripture, contains eighty rules for the liturgies of a Taoist priest attending or serving the master, such as, “When attending the master, sit upright, with a solemn and dignified posture” (詣師威儀，當執手平坐，儼然無虧，為眾所觀。)(DZ, vol. 9, p. 862). Another fifth-century scripture, the *Scripture on the Dignified Liturgies of Orthodox Unity* (正一威儀經), contains 132 requirements for Taoist priests, including ordination, daily practice, clothing, and living. For example, for the psalmody, a Taoist priest must wash his hands and burn incense before picking up a scripture (DZ, vol. 18, p. 254). These are some of the requirements for the daily practice of the Taoist priests of the early Lingbao and Zhengyi traditions. The *Ten Items of Taoist Dignified Liturgies* (玄門十事威儀), compiled at the end of the 8th century, lists 10 items for Taoist priests to practice daily and a total of 144 rules, including rules concerning behavior towards the master, the use of certain objects (sitting platforms, water flasks, 5 eating bowls, and 2 napkins), and hygiene. These remarkable regulations are for all monastic communities and for daily practice. In Taoism, a qualified and virtuous grand master should always maintain a dignified demeanor in his daily practice, that is, maintain the weiyi.

#### 3.2. Requirements for the Ritual Vestments of the Taoist Priests

The ritual vestments (法服) best reflect the dignified image of the Taoist priests, and Taoism stipulates that all registered Taoist priests must take off their lay clothes and put on the religious vestments. In the scriptures, the clothes worn by ritual masters at the jiao ritual altar are called weiyi ritual vestments (威儀法服), and according to the rules, a master cannot officiate at a jiao ritual without wearing them. According to the *Code of the One Thousand Realities of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery* 洞玄靈寶千真科 (hereafter abbreviated as OTRLCM), the color of the Daoist weiyi ritual vestments varies according to tradition,



with the Shangqing tradition being purple, the Lingbao tradition being yellow, and the Zhengyi tradition being crimson (See Figures 1 and 2).



**Figure 1.** Dignified image of Taoist priests from Baiyun Temple in Beijing at the Great Offering of All Heaven, Mount Qingcheng, 8 October 2018.



**Figure 2.** Dignified image of Taoist priests at the Great Offering of All Heaven, Mount Qingcheng, 8 October 2018.

These different ritual vestments must be strictly adhered to, and as stated in chapter 9 (*Prescriptions about vestments*) of the *Summary of Important Ceremonies, Rules, and Codices to be Practiced* (要修科儀戒律鈔·卷九衣服鈔), compiled by Zhu Faman (朱法滿, early 8th century), if the Taoist priests are to perform the ritual and worship the deities, they must wear the appropriate ritual vestments according to their rank (若朝修行事, 禮謁眾聖, 皆威儀法服, 隨法位次。) (DZ, vol. 6, p. 960). Since the well-dressed ritual vestments are the best way to reflect the dignity of the altar, both male and female Taoists must first focus on the vestments during the rituals (CPWDTC, DZ, vol. 24, p. 760). In the *Treatise on the Code of Ritual Vestments for the Entire Liturgy* (三洞法服科戒文), which contains 46 rules on ritual vestments, Zhang Wanfu (張萬福, fl. 713) says that “a Taoist priest should take care of his vestments as if he were taking care of his eyes or his hands and feet” (道士護持法服, 當如兩眼, 又如手足。) (DZ, vol. 18, p. 231). For the Taoist priests, the ritual vestments are not only symbolic of a dignified image, but they are also symbolic of the law of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang, and the Five Phases (五行).

### 3.3. Requirements for the Dignified Duties of the Ritual Masters

Taoism attaches great importance to the dignity of the altar of the zhai and jiao rituals, and there are clear requirements for the image and duties of the ritual masters, who “must not lose their dignity in the presence of the altar” (不得登壇之際, 少懈威儀。) (DZ, vol. 9, p. 478). An altar is a sacred place, and the masters who preside over the rituals must present a dignified image and adhere strictly to the ritual protocols. In the *Essence of the Supreme Secrets* 無上秘要, there are seven positions of ritual masters at the altar of the zhai and jiao rituals, namely, the High Priest (高功), the Chief Cantor (都講), the Inspector of

the Retreat (監齋), the four Intendants of the Scriptures, the Incense, the Lamps, and the Seats (侍經, 侍香, 侍燈, 侍座) (DZ, vol. 25, p. 172). These masters are also known as the Deacons of Weiye (威儀執事), and they perform their respective duties while ascending the altar. As the head of the masters, the High Priest must be highly moral and have a great presence (See Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 3.** Incense burning in the dignified liturgy, Mount Heming, Sichuan.



**Figure 4.** Dignified image of the High Priest at the worship of the deities in the Middle Qiongtai temple, Mount Wudang, 17 October 2012.

In the *Comprehensive and Requisite Manuals of Taoism* 道門通教必用集, compiled by Lü Taigu, “the task of the high priest is to have both inner and outer qualities, and when he gives the call for the visualization of the spirit, all the spirits come to listen” (高功之任, 道德威儀, 檄召存思, 百靈咸聽。) (DZ, vol. 32, p. 3). During the ritual, the High Priest stood at the head of the congregation, and the other masters stood in front of the altar in left and right order (DZ, vol. 31, p. 220). Today, Taoism still attaches great importance to the appearance of the High Priest, whose dignified appearance is generally a major factor in his selection.

The consecration of the altar in the zhai and jiao ritual is performed by the Head Cantor. “All the dignity of an altar comes from the guidance of the cantor, and it is natural that the cantor should be responsible for the ritual of the consecration” (一壇威儀, 皆自都講贊導也。則敕壇, 當是都講為之爾。) (DZ, vol. 32, p. 37). In the *Jade Mirror of the Numinous Treasure* 靈寶玉鑑, it is mentioned that, for the consecration, “first the water and the sword are placed at the Door of Earth, and the cantor, holding the tablet in his hand, goes to the door and performs the ritual” (先以水劍安地戶上, 還有威儀道士, 具壇簡, 詣劍水處地戶者。) (DZ, vol. 10, p. 224) and then consecrates the altar by visualizing (存想) the Three Primes (三元). According to the *Ritual for the Transmission of the Covenant of Spontaneity* 靈寶自然齋儀 (Dunhuang Manuscript, S. 6841), the duty of the Inspector of Seats is to proclaim the rules and observances of the dignified liturgies. All in all, the masters at the altar are required to keep their spirituality intact and maintain their dignity.

The hymns of the Pacing the Void (步虛) are the dignified rhythms at the ritual altar in honor of the deities. The pacing and chanting during the ritual symbolize the pilgrimage

to the heavenly Jade Capital (玉京). During the zhai ritual, “the twelve boys who will be in charge of the dignified liturgies must first learn the scriptures of Pacing the Void and be skilled in practicing the ten great hymns of Pacing the Void and chanting as they walk around the circle during the zhai ritual.” (應執威儀道童十二人，須要先習步虛經、大步虛十首令熟。正齋旋繞時隨聲贊詠。) (SRSYRR, DZ, vol. 9, p. 658). Taoists believe that the Three Purities (三清) reside on Mount Jade Capital in the Capital of Mystery (玄都), the most prestigious and sacred place among the Three Heavens (三天). Thus, “chanting and praising the Three Purities while walking in a circle is a very dignified ritual procedure” (登壇朝奏，吟詠步虛，一象玄都玉京也。威儀法式，莫不備焉。) (SRSYRR, DZ, vol. 9, p. 383). In general, the various rules and observances of the ritual masters are designed to fulfill a ritual function, that is, “to maintain dignity externally and to be sincere and respectful internally.” (外則合其威儀，內則盡夫誠敬。) (DZ, vol. 10, p. 147).

### 3.4. Dignified Image of the Divine Immortals

The belief in divine immortals is characteristic of Taoism, and many vivid descriptions of the dignified images of their epiphanies can be found in Taoist scriptures. When the goddess Xiwangmu (西王母) and the Shangqing female deity Shangyuan Furen (上元夫人) completed the transmission of the scriptures and talismans to Emperor Wu of the Han (漢武帝, 156 B.C.–87 B.C.) and were ready to depart, “men, horses, dragons and tigers, the ceremonial procession was as large and dignified as when they first appeared” (臨發，人馬龍虎，威儀如初來時。) (DZ, vol. 5, p. 56). In the *Biographies of Immortals* 神仙傳, we can see that the Immortal Cai Jing’s (蔡經) epiphany is “as dignified as a general’s campaign, with five dragons pulling a wagon, with a feathered roof for him, and an entourage waving banners before and behind him” (乘羽蓋之車，駕五龍，龍各異色，前後麾節，旌旗導從，威儀如大將軍出也。) (DZ, vol. 22, pp. 743–44). The ritual masters establish communication with the deities through visualization and imagination, and the scriptures contain many descriptions of the epiphany of the immortals during this process. In the rituals of the Tang and Song Lingbao Retreats, masters summon merit officials (功曹) and other officials hidden in their five bodies (五體) through visualization and imagination, which is called externalizing the officials (出官). As it is described in the *Essential Instructions on the Scriptures on the Dignified Liturgies for Lingbao Retreats, Expounded by the Real Man of the Great Ultimate* 太極真人敷靈寶齋戒威儀諸經要訣, “the officials summoned wear neat official uniforms and are very dignified” (出者嚴裝顯服，冠帶垂纓，整其威儀。) (DZ, vol. 9, p. 857). In the rites for presenting petitions (伏章), the masters imagine the dignified image of the Most High Lord Lao (太上老君), “wearing a crown of nine virtues and a robe of nine colors of clouds, sitting in the main hall” (太上戴九德之冠，著九色雲霞之帔，正殿而坐。) Another description in the *Spinal Numinous Writ of the Hidden Writing of Shangqing* 上清隱書骨髓靈文 of the *Secret Essentials of the Most High Principal Zhenren Assisting the Country and Saving the People* 太上助國救民總真祕要 (DZ, vol 32, p. 81). In the *Ritual for the First Night Communication of the Retreat of the Eight Nodes* 洞玄靈寶八節齋宿啟儀, there is also the visualization of “the immortal girls and boys, the sun and moon lords, the star lords, the five emperors, the nine billion horses and soldiers, the retreat inspectors, and all the officials of the three worlds” (仙童玉女、天仙日月、星宿五帝、兵馬九億萬騎，監齋直事，三界官屬，羅列左右，威儀肅肅，不有懈怠。), all of whom are so dignified (DZ, vol. 32, p. 747). The Dunhuang manuscript S. 203, *Ritual of Zhengyi Registration* 度仙靈錄儀, describes the image of the masters’ visualization as follows:

*The merit officers, the brave generals, the cavalymen, the officials of the Three Offices, and the heavenly soldiers each appear in numbers of 340, magnificently dressed and very dignified. 功曹使者、郎吏虎賁、察奸鉤騎、三官僕射、天鄒甲卒等官各三百冊人出。出者嚴莊顯服，正其威儀。*

### 4. Weiyi at the Altar of the Zhai and Jiao Rituals

The dignity of Taoism is embodied together by the ritual rules in the Taoist scriptures and the ritual practice of the masters at the altar. According to the *Great Meaning of the*

*School of Mysteries of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery* 洞玄靈寶玄門大義, there are twelve Taoist retreats divided into Three Registers (三錄), namely—the Golden Register Retreat (金錄齋), the Jade Register Retreat (玉錄齋), and the Yellow Register Retreat (黃錄齋)—and Seven Sections (七品), namely, the Retreat of the Three Emperors (三皇齋), the Retreat of Spontaneity (自然齋), the Retreat of Shangqing (上清齋), the Retreat of Teaching (指教齋), the Retreat of Mud and Charcoal (塗炭齋), the Retreat of Luminous Perfection (明真齋), and the Retreat of the Three Primes (三元齋). Each ritual has a specific function. For example, the Golden Register Retreat is for blessing the emperor and eliminating natural disasters, the Yellow Register Retreat is for salvation, and the Teaching Retreat is for the expiation of sins.

#### 4.1. Ritual Banners and Streamers at the Zhai and Jiao Altar

The Taoist zhai and jiao altar is a sacred place for communication between humans and the deities, and the ritual banners and streamers (幡, 幢) placed on the altar show the dignity of Taoism in holding, protecting, and practicing the Tao. Banners and streamers existed in the ritual system of the pre-Qin rituals. However, the Taoist scriptures record that they came from heaven (See Figures 5 and 6).



**Figure 5.** Banner at the altar of the Great Offering of All Heaven in Yuxu Temple, Mount Wudang, 26 July 2012.





**Figure 6.** Streamers at the sending deities' part of the Great Offering of All Heaven in Yuxu Temple, Mount Wudang, 26 October 2012.

The relevant records are as follows:

*Various types of streamers, flags, and fans, including a pair of jie, a pair of chuang, a pair of jing, a pair of fans (幡) with pearls, a pair of wuming fans, and a pair of crane feathers. 節一對，幢一對，旌一對，珠幡一對，五明扇一對，鶴羽一對。 (SRSYRR, DZ, vol. 9, p. 383)*

*A total of 4 pairs of different types of streamers, (jie, chuang, jing, mo), a pair of wuming fans, a pair of feather fans, a pair of ruyi, 12 yellow silk bags, a vermilion wooden box, 2 black lacquered wooden shelves, 5 liang of agila wood, 5 liang of kapur, 50 pieces of new tea, and 100 liang of silver. These 14 ritual tools are called the 14 dignified items in Taoist scriptures. 節、幢、旌、磨、五明扇、羽扇、如意各一對，單護威儀黃絹袋一十二個、盛威儀朱紅木匣一隻、威儀黑漆立架二座、沉香五兩、腦子五兩、新茶五十片、銀一百兩。此十四種儀仗法器，經書稱之為威儀一十四事。<sup>10</sup>*

*Streamers and banners (jing, jie, chuang, pei) are dignified divine instruments. They are classic, dignified liturgical tools now made by the state. 旌、節、幢、旆，亦神仙所持，既具經典及威儀之限，如今國家所制也。 (CPWDTC, DZ, vol. 24, p. 754)*

*The banners and streamers that flutter in the air are a necessary part of the rituals. 幡幢旌節，折旋回環，外儀之事也。 (DZ, vol. 4, p. 14)*

The wei yi at the altar of the zhai and jiao rituals are divided into two parts: the inner and outer parts. In the Ming dynasty, the outer altar had eight types of ornate banners and streamers, which include celeste deep red jie, vermilion chuang for worship, flying cloudy jing, light silk threads, precious feather instruments, wuming fans, crane feather fans, and ten absolute spirit fans (幡) (仙境絳節、朝元朱幢、飛空霓旌、含虛散絲、殊妙寶翬、五明雲扇、靈鶴羽扇、十絕靈幡). The inner altar had two: the precious streamer of the command of the demons on the inner altar and the lion flag of the exorcism of the Three Heavens on the inner altar (內壇命魔寶幢、內壇三天辟邪獅子之節). These elaborately decorated banners were intended to enhance the sacredness of the altar site (See Figures 7 and 8).



**Figure 7.** Dignified image of the Qingxuan Tan (Altar of the Blue Heaven), Mount Qingcheng, 8 October 2018.



**Figure 8.** Dignified image of the main altar, at the Great Offering of All Heaven, Mount Qingcheng, 8 October 2018.

#### 4.2. Ritual Tools at the Zhai and Jiao Altar

Various types of ritual tools are used in Taoist zhai and jiao rituals to enhance the dignity of the altar. These include command banners, swords, rulers, mirrors, tokens, water bowls and bells, drums, cymbals, chimes, and wooden fish, which are essential to the religious practice of both male and female Taoists. Both bells and chimes are important musical instruments in Taoist rituals, and there is a Taoist scripture entitled *Book of the Protocol for the Bell and the Chime Stone of Lingbao* 洞玄靈寶鐘磬威儀經. According to the Sui-Tang Taoist scripture *Discourse of Zuoxuan of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery* 洞玄靈寶左玄論 (7th century), volume 3, weiyi, “If the weiyi on the altar is well respected, it will be able to summon the true immortals of the ten directions and also subdue all demons and spirits” (其威儀法行若整，則能召制十方真仙法眾，又能降伏一切眾魔鬼魅也。) (DZ, vol. 24, p. 931), which means that the ritual function is guaranteed.

#### 4.3. Ritual Lamps at the Zhai and Jiao Altar

As part of the Yellow Register, the function of the lamp ritual is to enlighten the darkness and save the spirits of the dead. Lu Xiuqing pointed out that the lamp ritual is an important ritual that illuminates heaven and earth and brings back light to the ghosts of the eight directions and nine nights (DZ, vol. 24, p. 773).<sup>11</sup> The protocols of the lamp ritual are recorded in Taoist scriptures such as the *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat* 太上黃籙齋儀 and the SRSYRR. For example, “In the five directions, the five lamps are lit to illuminate the five mountains” (然燈威儀，於五方，然五燈，以照五嶽。) (DZ, vol. 9, p. 369). The lighting of lamps in the altar’s five directions (namely, east, west, north, south, and center) signifies the illumination of the five famous mountains of China (The Five Great Mountains of China 五嶽), namely, Mount Tai 泰山-Eastern Mountain in Shandong),

Mount Huashan 華山-Western Mountain in Shaanxi), Mount Hengshan 衡山-Southern Mountain in Hunan), Mount Songshan 嵩山-Central Mountain in Henan), and Mount Heng 恒山-Northern Mountain in Shanxi). The number of lights lit during the ritual is a symbolic expression of Taoist cosmology. For example, “lighting eight lamps to illuminate the eight trigrams” means that “the path is illuminated in all directions for the sponsor of the retreat” (然八燈以照八卦，為齋主照明八達。)(GBSLT, DZ, vol. 7, p. 113). In Taoism, Three Levels (三部) and Eight Effulgences (八景) together constitute the Twenty-Four Spirits of the human body, and “during the lamp ritual, 24 lamps are lit at the Earth Door to illuminate the 24 spirits of the disciples, bring them blessings, increase their qi (炁) and prolong their lives” (然燈威儀，於地戶上，然二十四燈，以照二十四生氣，為弟子延生益炁，增福安神，注上生名，削除死籍。)(SRSYRR, DZ, vol. 9, p. 500). “The three lamps on the natal destiny illuminate the three celestial souls, the seven lamps illuminate the seven earthly souls, one lamp on the stellar deity Taisui illuminates the whole body, ten lamps illuminate ten directions, twenty-eight lamps mean twenty-eight lodges, and thirty-two lamps enlighten thirty-two heavens.” ((於本命，上然三燈，以照三魂；行年，上然七燈以照七魄；太歲，上然一燈，以照一身。面十方，然十燈，以照十方；二十八燈，以照二十八宿；三十二燈，以照三十二天。)(ISTLCM, DZ, vol. 24, p. 773).) Each number of lamps in the lamp ritual has a clear symbolic meaning.

#### 4.4. *Weiyi at the State Zhai and Jiao Ritual Altar in Tang and Song*

During the Tang and Song dynasties, Taoism flourished and the Taoist zhai and jiao rituals were presented to the public as a state ceremony. The imperial family name of the Tang dynasty was Li, so Laozi (whose name was Li Er) was revered as a distant ancestor, and his portrait was sent around the country by order of the emperor to be enshrined in the New Era Temple (開元觀), and “all male and female Taoist priests in the temple were required to hold dignified liturgies to welcome the portrait” (所在道士、女冠道士等，皆具威儀法事迎候。)(Ji 1987, fasc 426, p. 793). During the Song dynasty, Taoism was involved in the state’s suburban offerings (郊祀), and according to the *History of the Song Dynasty* 宋史, “Emperor Huizong revered Taoism, and when he held the rituals, a hundred masters of methods (方士) stood in two rows in front of the altar, holding various streamers and banners” (徽宗崇尚道教，制郊祀大禮，以方士百人執威儀前引，分列兩序，立於壇下。)(Tuo 1985, p. 2543). The masters of methods here were Taoist priests who became an important part of the national ceremonial procession. In 1113, Emperor Huizong held a winter offering and a court banquet at Jingling Palace (景靈宮), also with a procession of a hundred Taoist priests (Editorial Board 2002, vol. 1109, p. 467). According to the *Ancient matters from Wulin Garden* 武林舊事, during the Southern Song (1127–1279), when the emperor was about to arrive at the Great One Palace (太乙宮), the Taoist priests greeted the emperor with a dignified procession in front of Ten-thousand-fold Longevity Temple (萬壽觀) (Ji 1987, fasc 590, p. 181). These are the historical realities of how the Taoists used to welcome the emperor according to the dignified liturgies.

During the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), the Yellow Emperor (Zhao Xuanlang 趙玄朗) was worshipped as a sacred ancestor and given the title “Divine Ancestor of the Highest Direction” (聖祖司命天尊). During the Dazhong xiangfu (大中祥符) reign period of Emperor Zhenzong (1008–1016), he repeatedly proclaimed the myth of the descent of the Heavenly Books and held various ceremonies to welcome them, among which the Taoist Weiyi can be seen. On 19 May 1008, the emperor issued an edict to escort the Heavenly Book from the capital to the foot of Mount Tai with one hundred Taoist Weiyi Masters and thirty people on the road each day (Ji 1987, fasc 315, p. 115). On 1 September 1008, to enshrine the Heavenly Book, Emperor Zhenzong built a Taoist altar in the palace’s Hall of Chao Yuan (朝元殿), with drums and music playing before and after the dignified Taoist procession, and the Book Guardian leading the way (Tuo 1985, p. 2540). On 28 October 1008, the emperor set up a ceremony for the Heavenly Book at the Qianyuan Gate (乾元門), a dignified Taoist procession escorted the Heavenly Book from the palace to the Qianyuan Gate, ascending the jade chariot with yellow banners and drums at the front and back

(Ji 1987, fasc 315, p. 128). In 1012, to revive the myth of the descent of the Divine Ancestor of the Highest Direction, Emperor Zhenzong decreed that more than fifty doors in the palace would be named by himself and filled with gold, and the officials would hold yellow banners with Taoist Weiyi Masters to welcome them to the palace (Ji 1987, fasc 315, p. 128). In the autumn of 1014, a procession of Taoist masters played music and escorted the Heavenly Book from the altar of the Hall of Longevity (萬歲殿) to the Hall of Chaoyuan (Ji 1987, fasc 315, p. 311). To celebrate the descent of the Heavenly Book, Emperor Zhenzong issued an order in the Hall of Chongde (崇德殿) to set up the Great Offering of All Heaven (羅天大醮) in all the provinces of the country and first to build an altar for twenty-seven days (Tuo 1985, p. 2543). This reflects the Song dynasty's special reverence for the Yellow Emperor. The Taoist scriptures emphasize that "to ensure the dignity of the Taoists, the protocols must be strictly observed" (道眾威儀, 事在嚴整。) (OTRLCM, DZ 34: 371). The narrative about the weiyi in the scriptures is in fact the perfection of the zhai and jiao altar pursued by the Taoists.

## 5. Conclusions

In Taoism, the deities should be worshipped as if they were present. The weiyi reflects both the sacredness of the zhai and jiao rituals and the full image of Taoism as a state religion. From the above examination of the weiyi, we can draw the following conclusions.

First, Taoist Weiyi absorbed pre-Qin Confucian rites and incorporated Taoist theological theories. Pre-Qin Confucianism has a deep tradition of rites. In the current discussion of the origins of Taoist zhai and jiao rituals in Chinese and foreign Taoist scholarship, some argue that Taoism draws on elements of the pre-Qin patriarchal clan system religion (Zhang 1996), and we can argue through our thematic examination that Taoist Weiyi originated from pre-Qin rites. In the *Book of Rites-Doctrine of the Mean* 禮記·中庸, it is mentioned that Confucianism has "three hundred rites and three thousand dignified liturgies" (禮儀三百, 威儀三千。) (Ruan 1980, p. 1633). Since the founding of the first Taoist organization by Zhang Ling (張陵, pp. 34–156) in the Eastern Han Dynasty, he inherited the pre-Qin Taoism and drew on the rites of Confucianism to create the Taoist zhai and jiao rituals, which were refined by successive masters into the Taoist Weiyi. The expression "three hundred rites and three thousand dignified liturgies" is also found in many Taoist scriptures, such as the *Meaning of the Tao and its Virtue* 道德真經指歸, attributed to Yan Zun (59–24 B.C.) (DZ 12: 357) and the *Commentary on the Daode Jing by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong* 唐玄宗御制道德真經疏 (DZ 11: 778). Taoism, however, inherits this statement with a new interpretation from the perspective of Taoist theology. The Taoist priests communicate with the deities at sacred altars through the weiyi, fulfilling the Taoist function of the salvation of the world and humanity. The religious function of Taoism is realized through the strict implementation of its complex ritual procedures. According to the *Essay on the Rectification of Errors on the Altar of Mystery* 玄壇刊誤論, "In order to complete the dignified liturgies, the actions of advancing, retreating, walking, visualizing and imagining, ascending the altar and bowing down during the ritual must be carried out in strict accordance with the rules, so as to meet the requirements of the ritual" (威儀既備, 即俯仰進止, 庠序雅步, 存真念道, 登壇朝奏, 禮拜稽首, 動無虧闕, 方合教化法式也。) (DZ, vol. 32, p. 627). Taoists claim that weiyi, like all the other teachings, comes from the teachings of the Most High Lord Lao (Taishang Laojun 太上老君) and that "weiyi transmitted by the Most High" (威儀太上傳) is a classic phrase from the ritual scriptures (GBSLT, DZ 7: 87).

Second, the weiyi on the zhai and jiao ritual altar is necessary for Taoism to fulfill its state religious functions. The Li imperial family of the Tang dynasty worshipped Laozi of Taoism as a distant ancestor, and the Zhao imperial family of the Song dynasty worshipped Zhao Xuanlang, the Yellow Emperor of Taoism, as a distant ancestor, leading Taoism into a period of prosperity with imperial support. In the feudal society of the Tang and Song, where religion was used to educate the people, Taoism assumed the role of state religion, and Taoist Weiyi became an integral part of state ceremonies, adding to their solemnity.



Weiyi is the method of pleasing the gods at the altar, a place of sacred communication between human beings and the deities, and in Taoism, it is said that “the Three Primes originally had 3, 400 dignified liturgies” (三元本有威儀俯仰之格三千四百條) (DZ 24: 738). As a state religion revered by the central imperial authorities during the Tang and Song, Taoism needed a well-developed ritual procedure to present its image. By the Song dynasty, Taoism already had standardized rules and observances, such as the triple altar great offerings (Great Offering of the Universal Heaven 普天大醮, Great Offering of the Whole Heaven 周天大醮, Great Offering of All Heaven 羅天大醮), which meant that Taoist Weiyi was sufficient to fulfill the functions of the state religion. Weiyi has a rich Taoist cultural connotation. By studying it, we can deepen our understanding of Taoist zhai and jiao rituals. As Kristofer Schipper has said, the study of ritual must always be based on precise examples that come from the observation of a whole and the complete inventory of the elements that constitute it (Blondeau and Schipper 1988, p. VIII). This article is a comprehensive study of the weiyi, and our further work will be devoted to studying in detail various aspects of weiyi, such as the protocols of zhai and jiao rituals, the rules for the performance of rituals at the altar, the daily habits and practices of monastic Taoist priests, the solemn demeanor and appearance of Taoist priests and immortals, the dignity of the ordination ceremony and the official title of Weiyi Master.

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## Abbreviation

DZ *Daozang* 道藏 [Taoist Canon]. Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, Tianjin: Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988 (Daozang 1988).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this article, *The Taoist Canon* and *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* are the main references for the translation of scripture titles and terminology in Taoism.
- <sup>2</sup> See DZ 9: 378, Jiang shuyu (蔣叔輿 1162–1223) compiled, *Standardized Rituals of the Supreme Yellow Register Retreat* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀, fasc 1. Abbreviated as SRSYRR in this article. The form of reference for this work is DZ, vol. p. 378, where 9 is the volume number and 378 is the page number.
- <sup>3</sup> See DZ 24: 758, *Codes and Precepts for Worshipping the Dao of the Three Caverns of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery Section* 洞玄靈寶三洞奉道科戒營始. Abbreviated as CPWDTC in this article.
- <sup>4</sup> For relevant studies, see Zhou Qi’s “Examination on the Taoist Weiyi” 道門威儀考 (Shi Lin 史林, Zhou 2008, vol. 6, pp. 111–14), which examines the Weiyi Taoist priests of the Tang dynasty, and Liu Kangle’s discussion of the Taoist Weiyi Master in the Taoist official system of the Tang dynasty in his book, *A Study of the Taoist Official System in the Middle Ages* 中古道官制度研究 (Ba-Shu Publishing House 巴蜀書社 Liu 2013, pp. 162–70).
- <sup>5</sup> See DZ 5, p. 273, *Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Who Embodied the Tao through the Ages* 歷世真仙體道通鑑.
- <sup>6</sup> See DZ 5, p. 603, *Chronicle of Maoshan* 茅山志.
- <sup>7</sup> See DZ 5, p. 560.
- <sup>8</sup> About merit and virtue officials, see Zha Minghao 查明昊 (Zha 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> See DZ 24, p. 781, *Abridged Codes for the Taoist Community of Master Lu* 陸先生道門科略.
- <sup>10</sup> This is the description of the altar for the sacrifice of the Mao brothers, San Mao Zhenjun, on the 23rd day of the 4th lunar month in Maoshan. See DZ 3, p. 338, *Protocol of the Additional Canonization of the Mao Brothers* 三茅真君加封事典.

- <sup>11</sup> See the lamp ritual part of *Instructions for the Study of the Tao of Lingbao, Cavern of Mystery* 洞玄靈寶道學科儀, signed Chisongzi (赤松子), in DZ 24. Abbreviated as ISTLCM in this article.

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