

Article

# The Relationship between Daoist Rituals and Theatrical Performance: The Case of *Xianggong Tapeng* in Puxian Theater

Lijuan Zhang

Institute of Religious Studies, Sichuan University, 29 Wangjiang Road, Chengdu 610064, China;  
E-Mail: leajuan@xmu.edu.cn; Tel: +86-139-501-35159

External Editor: Peter Iver Kaufman

Received: 9 August 2014; in revised form: 11 September 2014 / Accepted: 25 September 2014 /

Published: 14 October 2014

---

**Abstract:** Daoism is a traditional Chinese religion. Daoism has had a deep and pervasive impact on the lives of China's peoples. Chinese theatrical performances were often integrated with religious activities, thereby gradually giving rise to many forms of popular drama that are deeply inflected with religious overtones. *Xianggong Tapeng* (相公踏棚, Xianggong stamps the shed) is one component of Puxian opera's rites for stage cleaning that is closely linked with Daoist thought. First, Xianggong is both a theatrical spirit within Puxian opera and a member of the Daoist pantheon. Second, the lyric "luo li lian" featured in *Xianggong Tapeng* bears a remarkable resemblance to the two Daoist spells *Yuanshuai Zhou* (元帅咒, Incantation of Yuanshuai) and *Xiangmo Zhou* (降魔咒, Incantation for Subduing Demons). This is due to the fact that traditional Daoist verse often features phrases such as "luo li lian". Moreover, the stage cleaning rites that are characteristic of Puxian opera share many similarities with Daoist altar purification rites. A detailed investigation and comparison reveal that *Xianggong Tapeng* is an adaptation of the Daoist altar purification rite to the needs of popular custom and theatrical performance.

**Keywords:** *Xianggong Tapeng*; cleaning the stage; Daoism; purifying the altar

---

## 1. Introduction

The origin and development of theatrical performances are inseparable from their ritual impacts. This has been verified by numerous studies. In 1910, Jane Ellen Harrison expounded the ways in which

sacrifice turns into an art, by researching Greek drama [1]. Harrison was the first to propose to combine drama, ritual, and sacrificial rites together for research. This significantly inspired later generations of scholars. In regards to the relationship of Chinese theater with religion, E.T. Kirby has argued that Chinese theater originated in the practices of Daoist Shamans [2]. Paul Kuritz further pointed out that “Chinese theater, in fact, seems to have begun in the exorcist rites of the *wu* (巫) priests during the early feudal age of the Zhou Dynasty” ([3], p. 84). Prof. Piet van der Loon from Oxford University also believed that Chinese theater arose from religion [4]. However Eli Rozik disagreed with Kirby’s view and believed that “Kirby appears to derive too many important cultural entities from the one single source of shamanism” ([5], p. 88). These works indicate a relationship between Chinese theater and religion. However, the methods the researchers used were mostly limited to literary research, alignment, and analysis. In the late 1980s, the study of Chinese theater and ritual ceremonies became a hot topic in the academic field. “Mulian opera” (目連戲) and “Nuo opera” (儺戲) were especially popular research foci. Also, anthropological field research had started to be applied in such studies. Scholars such as Japanese researcher Tanaka Issei (たなか いっせい, 田仲一成) believe that ritual is the womb for the birth of theater ([6], p. 250); Prof. Yung Sai Cheng (容世誠) discusses the religious purposes of the Singapore ritual theater [7]. These researchers have linked ritual to folk religion and sacrificial rites, but have not specifically studied the origin of the relationship between theater and Daoism. In recent years, the relationship between Daoism and theater has been attracting the interest of researchers. For example, Taiwan researcher Chiu Kun-Liang first analyzed the textual structure and performance elements of Daoist rites; in particular, he discussed the dramatic components and stage effects of Daoist rites. He then studied the priests’ identities [8]. Other works have merely discussed the influence of Daoism on theater (e.g., Prof. Zhan Shichuang’s *Daoism and Theater* [9], Ni Caixia’s *Studies on Daoist Ritual and Theatrical Performance Forms* [10], etc.). However, field research concerning the impact of Daoist rites on theater has been rare. In particular, research is sparse concerning the specific content of the theater, performing processes, Daoist texts, etc.

Puxian opera originated in the Puxian region of present-day Fujian during the Southern Song. Religious activity has been prevalent in this region since antiquity, with a myriad temples and abbeys dotting its landscape. The *Xinghua Putian Xian Zhi* (《興化莆田縣志》, *Xinghua Putian County Gazetteer*) states: “Previous gazetteers have records of Daoist palaces and Buddhist temples, their names are already many. Other sites include newly constructed quiet chambers and clay huts. They are ubiquitous within and without the cities.” [11]. Nearly every *Lishe* (里社) [12] has its own temple with a cult to its own deity. Moreover, many temples simultaneously worship many spirits of varying degrees of seniority, each with their own birthday and taboo days. Whenever these religious holidays are celebrated, it is necessary to honor the spirits through undertaking various religious activities. Thus, within the span of a year, activities centering on spirits within the Puxian region are nearly constant. These events are magnificent affairs among the people. They include taking bodhisattvas on tour, the welcoming of spirits, processions, and other such enterprises aimed at the amusement of both man and the gods. Such activities, which take the regional and kinship ties underpinning the village and the *Lishe* as their foundation, in truth are the bond that unites the tribes or clans. They further serve to affirm the region’s inner members and present an exclusive face to the outside world. Every temple event celebrating a god’s birthday is a display of the power of a tribe, ancestral clan or a surname clan. Because such displays serve as a kind of showing off, the participating groups often compete with one another. In

this way, the scope and duration of the god's birthday can be expanded and extended over the course of generations. This dynamic has ensured the sustained flourishing of events centering on dance, music, acrobatics, and assorted plays. It is against this social and cultural background that Puxian opera developed, having Daoism as its most striking source of inspiration.

By the Eastern Han dynasty, Daoism had already entered into the Puxian region. According to the notes of the *Puyang Bishi* (《莆阳比事》) of the Song literatus Li Junfu (李俊甫), “At first, Zhao Sheng (趙昇) took Zhang Daoling (張道陵) as his master, living as a hermit on Mount Heming. He once rode an iron barge to the mouth of the Putian river. To this day, the traces of his boat are still in the stones. Because of this, an ancestral temple was established. He was bestowed with the title ‘The Perfected Lord Who Manifests Protection.’” [13]. Daoism thrived in Puxian during the Tang and Song dynasties, when many palaces and temples were built. Daoist priests deeply penetrated each and every village, where they provided the people with prayers for blessings and protection from disasters. Utilizing various forms of ritual, these priests officiated diverse ceremonies at specific junctures in the course of the people's lives. Over time, many colorful forms of song, dance, and performance accumulated around these events. These cultural forms have played an important role in the creation and development of Puxian opera. Four aspects of this process have been identified by Chen Jilian (陳紀聯): (1) The influence of Daoist music on Puxian opera; (2) the assimilation of Puxian Daoist dance by Puxian opera; (3) the large amount of subject matter pertaining to the divine transcendence of Daoism that has served as the fundamental content for the plays of Puxian opera; and (4) the mediating role played by the Daoist priest in the performance of Puxian opera [14]. This account is quite accurate, yet these four aspects have still yet to be adequately addressed. This essay aims to investigate the influence of Daoism on Puxian opera from the vantage point of Daoist intellectual culture, Daoist ritual, and other perspectives. It also hopes to use this discussion as an experimental effort in expanding the scope of research on Daoism's influence in Chinese theater.

## 2. The Content and Sequence of *Xianggong Tapeng*

In accordance with a performance's requirements, as dictated by its object and local conditions, the first act of any Puxian opera requires a set of ritualistic performances. In Puxian opera, this form of ritual performance is called “coming on stage” (*paichang* 排場). *Paichang* performances typically have the following eight segments: the three drums, contemplation of the mother's family, the *Xianggong Tapeng*, the warrior appearing as a demon, the fetching of the eight Immortals, the management of the five blessings, the double capping ceremony, and the Guanyin cleaning of the palace. The most important segment within *paichang* performances is the one that carries the most religious overtones: the *Xianggong Tapeng*. The meaning of *tapeng* is “purifying the shed”. Below is an account of the content and sequence of the *Xianggong Tapeng*. This account is based on several sources, including interviews with senior actors in drama troupes, a film found in the Lisheng drama troupe (鯉聲劇團) collection documenting the group's performance of *Xianggong Tapeng* in 1991, records of a performance of *Xianggong Tapeng* at Wenfeng Palace in Putian on 1 November 2009, as well as *Xianyou Xian Xiqu Zhi* (《仙遊縣戲曲志》, *Monograph of Operas in Xianyou County*), *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi—Fujian Juan* (《中國戲曲志·福建卷》, *Monograph of Chinese Operas—The Fujian Chapter*), and other materials.

The *Tapeng* has six roles: the *sheng* (male lead 生) plays Tian Xianggong (田相公), the *chou* (comic 醜) plays General Lingya (靈牙將軍), the *dan* (female lead 旦) and *tiedan* (young female 貼旦) play the two lads Feng and Huo (風火二童), the *jing* (painted face 淨) and the *mo* (supporting 末) play the two generals, left and right Tieban (左右鐵板將軍). Here we summarize their appearances. Tian Xianggong has a red face with an inverted *chun* (春 spring) character on his forehead and a crab painted on his mouth. He wears a sagely cap of red cloth with a brocade inserted on both sides, two braids hanging from his chest, a gown of red silk, and a pair of green military boots. General Lingya wears a dog mask, has red cloth tied to his head with gold brocade on both sides, dons a white outfit with a skirt bound at the waist, where he also has a belt secured, wears straw sandals, and has a command flag inserted behind his back. The two generals left and right Tieban wear military helmets. Their faces are painted red and black. They are dressed in black, don green armor, and bear a close resemblance to heavenly divinities. The two lads Feng and Huo have white-powdered countenances. Their hair is kept in two buns in the fashion of a young boy. They wear blue and white vests, don belts, wear flower-ornamented shoes, and play the roles of transcendent lads. According to custom, once the actor playing Xianggong applies facial makeup and paints his face as a crab, he is no longer allowed to speak. He must solemnly sit on the costume trunk and wait to perform.

The *Xianggong Tapeng* in actuality is a group of ritualistic dances. The content of its performance may be divided into three groups, in accordance with the language of incantations: “upper words” (*shangci* 上詞), “central words” (*zhongci* 中詞), and “lower words” (*xiaci* 下詞).

Concerning the first group, before the actor ascends the stage, a chorus of female voices from the backstage intones the incantatory language of the upper words: “*luo li lian*”, sometimes called the “Incantation of Yuanshuai”. Its incantatory language reads as follows:

Li li li *luo lian*, *luo lu* *luo li lian*, *lian lu* *luo li lian*, *li lu* *luo lu* *li*, *li lu* *lian*, *luo lu* *li lu* *lian*...

This sequence has no fixed order, and is repeatedly sung in accordance with the melody or the meter of the dance.

As for the second group, after the “*luo li lian*” sequence of the upper words concludes, a male choir backstage recites in unison “send out the color!” At this time, General Lingya sprinkles pieces of colored paper and begins to dance. He then crouches at the stage entrance and uses his hand to support the left foot of Tian Xianggong. As Tian Xianggong’s right foot crosses the threshold of the stage entrance, the other four characters closely follow. At that time, the female choir sings the “central words” in unison from behind the stage: “By request, the senior master has been enticed to appear, guiding various roles onto the stage. The *sheng*, the *dan*, the *liangzhuang*, the *mo*, the *lao*, the *tie*, the *chou*, together shout ‘Send out the color!’ to the audience. With a humorous appearance, they sing and dance together, each displaying their charming talent. They sing their tones loud and clear, and the audience smile in harmony.” When the left leg of Tian Xianggong is raised forward by General Lingya, the index and middle fingers of the former’s right hand assume the form of a sword pointing toward heaven. Whether coming or going, he uses a single foot to jump left and right. At that point, Tian Xianggong, General Lingya, the two lads (Feng and Huo), and generals left Tieban and right Tieban join in the dance. When the singing concludes, Tian Xianggong, Feng, and Huo stand atop three seats placed directly in front of the audience. Left and right Tieban stand atop two seats placed to the left and right of the stage. General

Lingya continues to dance for about half a minute and then stands atop a chair with his back to the audience. In this way, the six actors form the shape of a rectangle. Then they recite: “The elder Fu was a vegetarian and practiced charity, erected flags and banners and provided aid to the starving people. Liu Sizhen (劉四真) led his son to escape; Mulian rescued his mother and enabled her to ascend to the Western Heaven.” According to the *Monograph of Operas in Xianyou County*, the ‘four phrase’ stage words are: My family resides in Hangzhou Prefecture, I have loved the gong and drum my whole life. Upon request, I take to the stage and dance”.

Concerning the third group, once the actors have finished reciting, the backstage choir again starts to sing the incantatory sequence “luo li lian”. The generals left and right Tieban change positions with the two lads Feng and Huo, while Tian Xianggong and General Lingya change places, but they each soon return to their original position. At this point, everyone leaves their seats and dances in figures of eight. Then generals left and right Tieban and the lads Feng and Huo exit the stage, leaving Tian Xianggong and General Lingya remaining. Tian Xianggong repeatedly lifts his left leg, using it to leap in a counter-clockwise direction. Then he joins in a martial dance with General Lingya, as though the two were in battle. Finally, by means of General Lingya stooping down and propping up Tian Xianggong’s left leg, the latter leaps off the stage using a single foot. Here the *Tapeng* dance ends.

Each drama troupe will exhibit subtle differences in particular aspects. For example, with regards to costumes, the color of each character’s clothing will have slight differences; the order of the incantatory phrase “luo li lian” varies; differences are also seen in the recitation of the four phrases in the middle section. However, generally speaking, the content and sequences are all similar.

### 3. The Daoist Origins of the Spirits of Puxian Opera

Why do new drama troupes or new theater sheds want to perform *Xianggong Tapeng* at the opening of a performance? And what is the background of Tian Xianggong?

According to the statistics of Zheng Zhenman (鄭振滿), professor of history at Xiamen University, as of October 1999, there are more than one hundred temples in the Puxian region that venerate the Tian Gong Yuanshuai as their primary deity. Ninety-eight temples in this region accord Tian Gong subsidiary status in their program of worship. Eight hundred ninety-nine temples offer the same status to “The Great Man Tian Gong” (*Tiangong Daren* 田公大人). Upwards of 1463 temples refer to Tian Gong as “Tian the Sage” (*Tian Shengren* 田聖人) [15]. Most of these temples belong under the supervision of Daoist institutions. Therefore, faith in Tian Gong is an important constitutive element of both Puxian vernacular religion and Daoism. The earliest temple dedicated to Tian Gong in the Puxian region is the Xianyou Taiyuan Zudian. A Ming dynasty couplet preserved at this site reads:

The Third Prince did not seek after the mundane. In pursuit of talent, he neglected his role as a prince.

The great man naturally transcends the vulgar. There is no harm in generously establishing such as man.

The third prince mentioned in this couplet is no other than the Tian Yuanshuai, who is venerated as the god of theater by drama troupes in Puxian. This is because Tian Gong is held to be identical with the third prince of the Jade Emperor. The *Manuscript of Gazetteer of Putian County* (*Putian Xianzhi Gao*)

states: “It is kind of absurd to regard Tian Gong as The Third Prince of Vast Heaven. Yet his cult in each locale is only marked by sincerity. He is especially revered in the theater.” [16]. In his *Jishi Sanshou* (即事三首), the Putian-based Southern Song poet Liu Kezhuang says: “Filial women documented in the histories are at present lining up to offer sacrifices, the [Third] Prince in the literature has become god after death. Although the exorcistic rite (*nuo* 雩) during the twelfth lunar month did not belong to Confucian ritual, how can one residing in the state of Lu distinguish the people of Lu?” [17]. Liu Kezhuang wrote a voluminous amount of poetic verse on the customs and social movements of the Puxian region. This poem describes the scene of an exorcistic rite in Puxian during the twelfth lunar month. The phrase, “The [Third] Prince has become god”, is likely related to the story of Tian’s identity as the Third Prince. The Puxian puppet show piece entitled *Yuan* relates the story of the theater god General Tiangong’s life: The Third Prince of the Jade Emperor took great pleasure in theater. He wished to descend to the mundane realm and render dramatic performances based on *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) as well as pray for blessings and protection from disasters on behalf of the people. Once the Jade Emperor came to know that the Third Prince wished to surreptitiously descend to the mundane realm, he demoted him to the human domain. Just at the time when the third prince was descending, he happened upon a white-dog-spirit who, having transformed into a scholar, was attacking a respectable woman. Once he subdued this noxious spirit, it followed him. On the road, he came across the wife of the high official Tian Jun making offerings of incense in a rear flower garden. The Third Prince came into the world by reincarnating himself within her womb (*toutai* 投胎), assuming the name Tian Zhibiao (田智彪). After Tian Zhibiao grew up, he studied the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) and became proficient in the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). Once on the road toward the capital to take the imperial examination, Tian Zhibiao subdued the two goblins Feng and Huo, bringing them into his service as attendants. After he entered the capital, Tian Zhibiao cured the emperor’s mother of her illness. On behalf of the emperor, he donned a cangue in order to redeem a vow. He recommended that the top scorer of the imperial exam construct a temple at Mount Tai for the sake of worldly people who wished to redeem their vows and eliminate disaster. The many great services rendered by Tian Zhibiao delighted the emperor, who hosted a feast to entertain the wonder worker. Intoxicated, Tian Zhibiao collapsed on the steps behind the palace. The princess admired his talents and features, then took a coloring brush and painted the character “*chun*” on his forehead as she wished him perpetual youth comparable with an eighteen year-old. Yet, because his appearance had been altered, Tian Zhibiao had no way of getting back into the palace. At that time, the heavenly court sent down a directive encased in jade. It appointed Tian Zhibiao as the Loyal General of the Fenghuo Court, thus enabling him to morally rectify the masses by performing the *Records of the Grand Historian*.

Near the end of the Ming and beginning of the Qing, the people of Puxian began to combine the stories of Tian Zhibiao and Lei Haiqing (雷海青), a loyal martyr actor. According to the analysis of Ye Mingsheng, this is due to the intensity of the conflicts between the Han and Manchu ethnicities, particularly in the Puxian region. The Southern Ming king Fu once took refuge in the region of Putian. Compared with other regions, this area’s anti-Qing, pro-Ming activities were more passionate and sustained. In order to stir popular sentiment and boost morale, literati and scholar-officials invented the traditional narrative of Lei Haiqing miraculously rescuing king Fu on the open sea. On the one hand, this narrative emphasizes the orthodox status of the Ming dynasty. On the other hand, it serves as an encomium of the loyalty of Lei Haiqing, who is none other than the Tiangong of later stories [18].

Here we supplement our discussion with a summary of Lei Haiqing's life, according to the appended notes of the *Miscellaneous Records of the Lustrous Sovereign* (*Minghuang Zalu* 明皇雜錄). According to this source, Lei Haiqing was a famous musician during the reign of Xuanzong (玄宗). He was adept at the lute and often entered the palace to attend on the emperor and Jiang Meifei (江梅妃). In terms of comportment, Lei Haiqing was honest and steadfast. He habitually loathed the wanton arrogance of An Lushan (安祿山), who had frequently called upon Lei Haiqing to entertain him with a lute performance only to be tactfully rejected by the musician. After the An-Shi Rebellion, An Lushan invited a host of dignitaries to a banquet. Clutching a dagger, he coerced the actors to enliven the festivities by singing opera. Lei Haiqing threw down his lute in protest, prompting An Lushan to order that the musician be dismembered in public. On hearing this news, the famous poet Wang Wei (王維) was deeply pained and composed a poem to eulogize Lei Haiqing [19]. Later, Xuanzong conferred the title "Premier Head Official of the Theater" (*Tianxia Liyuan Du Zongguan* 天下梨園都總管) upon Lei Haiqing and stories of his loyal deeds spread throughout the land. Although Lei Haiqing had not been regarded as the God of theater, folk artists commemorated him by molding his statue. During the An-Shi rebellion, a number of Lei Haiqing's disciples and peers fled the capital and became stranded in Fujian. According to the traditional narratives of seasoned actors, the Puxian drama troupes originally venerated Emperor Pangu (盤古大帝) as the god of theater, but each also enshrined and worshipped Lei Haiqing. Once upon a time, a boat belonging to a drama troupe encountered a violent storm at sea. Nearly capsizing, the entire troupe cried out to heaven and earth for aid. Suddenly, the wind and waves ceased and the boat was saved. At that time, someone on the boat looked high in the sky and saw a horde of spirit soldiers surrounding a heavenly general. One could faintly see on the general's flag the character "tian" (this is because the top of "yu" was obscured by the clouds). Everyone came to call this life-saving spirit "Tian Yuanshuai". Another boatman saw the spirit soldiers and a spirit general in the clouds, but he said, "It seems that the character on the general's flag is 'lei', the top half of the character is obscured by the clouds, therefore you can only see the 'tian' character on the bottom half". The whole drama troupe apprehended that this was the same Lei Haiqing venerated by the drama boat for his miraculous rescue. However, the actors all thought that the elimination of "yu" and the retention of "tian" were of profound significance, indicating an act of divine intention that ought not be rashly altered. Therefore, each troupe still calls this spirit "Tiangong Yuanshuai" and each successive generation continues to worship him as the god of theater.

Through the oral traditions of the senior actors we can also see the traces of how the stories of the Third Prince of the Jade Emperor and Lei Haiqing were blended in the Puxian region. This blending was the result of the skill and piety of the actors and common folk (with regard to Lei Haiqing), the psychology informing their prayers to the sons of the Jade Emperor for blessings and protection, the intellectual culture of Daoism, and the propagation of Daoist scriptures. The Jade Emperor is the spirit of the sky and earth within Daoism. The Daoist Canon not only has the *Gaoshang Yuhuang Benxing Ji Jing* (《高上玉皇本行集經》 *Combined Scriptures of the Founding Acts by the Jade Emperor on High*), a text that accounts for the life and supernatural powers of the Jade Emperor, but also the *Gaoshang Yuhuang Xinyin Jing* (《高上玉皇心印經》 *Scripture on the Mind-Seal of the Jade Emperor on High*), a work that expounds Daoist alchemical cultivation, the *Gaoshang Yuhuang Taixi Jing* (《高上玉皇胎息經》 *Scripture on the Embryonic Respiration of the Jade Emperor on High*), a work that elaborates on Daoist practices for nourishing life, and others. The chapter on "Tian Yuanshai of the Fenghuo Court" in the *Sanjiao Yuanliu Soushen Daquan* (《三教源流搜神大全》 *Great Anthology of the Source and Flow of*

the *Three Teachings in their Search for Divinity*), the earliest source that refers to Tian Yuanshuai as Zhibiao, is likely the origin of the Puxian exorcistic drama *Yuan* (愿). This chapter also provides an account of Tian Yuanshuai assisting the Heavenly Master in subduing demons. In this account, Heavenly Master Zhang wishes to capture a disease demon. Though he performs the necessary rites many times, they are of little use, leading him to seek out Tian Yuanshuai for help. Tian Yuanshuai exhibited his tremendous artistic skill by faking a conflict for a piece of silk brocade. The disease demons were attracted to struggle to be the first to watch, allowing Heavenly Master Zhang to subdue and destroy them with ease. Heavenly Master Zhang made progress in establishing the “Mysterious Altar” (*xuantan* 玄壇) and Tian Xianggong became one of the divine transcendents of Daoism. These two figures worked together to eliminate the supernatural and subdue the demonic. Therefore, Heavenly Master Zhang recommended Tian Xianggong, giving him the status of duke (*hou* 侯) [20]. Through this story, we can see that Tian Xianggong’s high degree of technical skill resulted in his capabilities being exaggerated to the point of establishing him as a deity and, in the end, the god of theater. Events surrounding leading Daoist figures played a rather significant role in this process.

#### 4. The Daoist Origins of the Lyric “Luo Li Lian”

In addition to the Daoist origin of the protagonist Tian Xianggong, we may also note that the “luo li lian” lyric within the *Xianggong Tapeng* is also a kind of link tying together Puxian opera and Daoism. One of the key moments in Daoist ritual is the petitioning of spirits. At this time, the ritual master will read an incantation beseeching the intervention of spirits. The Daoist Canon contains a prodigious amount of such incantations, such as the *Lingbao Lingjiao Jidu Jinshu* (《靈寶領教濟度金書》 *Golden Book of Salvation according to the Lingbao Tradition*). The two hundred seventy-ninth scroll of this source reads:

Incantation of the Great Brahma Talisman from Stygian Depths for Commanding Spirits: I respectfully entreat the divine king of great transformation whose magical powers know no limit and fill the world. An zha li shi li shi li. Quickly, quickly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances!

Incantation of the Nectar Talisman for Commanding Spirits: An weng luo li chang can tuo ta nituo ye duo jia mi tuo. Quickly, quickly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances! [21].

Scroll thirty-six of the *Lingbao Yujian* (《靈寶玉鑒》 *Jade Mirror of the Numinous Treasure*) reads:

An weng luo li tuo ta ne tuo ye ta mi luo li luo li xiang luo li da duo zhui duo. Together ascend to Great Clarity. One, two, three, four, five, Lord Lao comes to deliver from suffering. The Duke of the East, the Queen Mother of the West, and the Heavenly Venerated Great Monad send down their nectar [22].

The incantations cited here are all onomatopoeias and have no specific meaning, but are rather the preludes to the Daoist ritual master’s petitioning of the spirits. Of greater interest is the preservation of the two spells *Yishi Pangshuai Mizhou* (役使龐帥秘咒 “The Secret Incantation for Commissioning General Pang”) and *Yishi Liushuai Mizhou* (役使劉帥秘咒 “The Secret Incantation for Commissioning General Liu”) in the *Daofa Huiyuan* (《道法會元》 *Collected Sources on Daoist Rituals*), a large scale



compilation of Daoist rituals. These spells record incantations for respectfully petitioning two generals' spirits. Respectively, they contain sixty-four and sixty-two instances of onomatopoeia. Among them, there are a number of sounds that are repeated, including "luo li" ([23], pp. 237–38). Furthermore, the spell *Xiao Xiangmo Zhou* (小降魔咒 "Minor Incantation for Subduing Demons") contained in this source is entirely comprised of seventy-four instances of onomatopoeia, including "luo li" ([23], p. 335). As seen above, in the context of the *Xianggong Tapeng* of Puxian opera, it is only after the choir behind the stage sings "luo li lian" that Tiangong Yuanshuai comes on stage to perform. It can be said that this "li luolian" is equivalent to the Daoist spells' petitioning of spirits. Or, more precisely, it is equivalent to incantations for petitioning Yuanshuai. Further, in the third segment of *Xianggong Tapeng*, when Tian Xianggong and General Lingya fight, the backstage choir also begins to sing "luo li lian". This is identical to the Daoist *Incantation for Subduing Demons*.

In addition, sentences comparable with "luo li lian" are often featured in Daoist poetic compositions. The *Shangqing Taixuan Ji* (《上清太玄集》 *Anthology of the Great Mystery of Upper Clarity*) contains the poem *Man Ting Fang* (滿庭芳 *A Fragrance Fills the Court*). The second half reads:

Because of sudden realization, I became uninhibited. No matter the front streets or back ports, I sing and dance, peaceful and at ease, in an unfettered state. Li ling luo li. What harm is the comedown?" [24].

A poem from the *Jinzhennren Yulu* (《晉真人語錄》 *The Discourse Records of Jin the Perfected*) reads:

Once I'm hungry I beg from house to house. Once I am full I sing 'Li lianluo li'. Pay no attention to other's ridicule, saying that I am a lazy fool man. Who knows me? [25].

A poem from the *Xianyue Ji* (《仙樂集》 *The Anthology of Transcendents' Music*) reads:

The true heart-mind venerates faith, li ling li luo. Being diligent and engaged is inferior to leisurely sitting. Formerly, I made careless mistakes. I feel deep regret for the harm. Constantly practicing clarity and benevolence are superior to giving away material wealth [26].

A poem from the *Shui Yun Ji* (《水雲集》 *The Anthology of Water and Clouds*) and many poems from the *Chongyang Quanzhen Ji* (《重陽全真集》 *The Anthology of Complete Perfection by Chongyang*) contain the Ci poem "daolianzi". Such works all employ "luo li ling, li ling luo" as a coda for each line of poetic verse. For example:

Daolian Zi (Song of Pounding and Washing Cooked Silk with a Pestle).

Dao Lianzi, how does ten come after nine? Only without burden can one be dedicated to practice and cultivation. Luo li ling, li luo ling.

If you want to fawn on someone, you need to help him attain his aim. You should start over and detail the way forward. Luo li ling, li luo ling.

Once you become a human being, you become a mortal. How can the four origins that bring about temporary life bring about truth? Luo li ling, li luo ling. You seek the esoteric path and liberation from the maze. You should cultivate essence, energy and spirit in all tranquility. Luo li ling, li luo ling... [27].

“Luo li ling” was originally an onomatopoeia word among the northern dialects. When it is frequently intoned in writing (as seen above), it enhances a composition’s expressiveness. Because the *Ci* (詞) Lyric was originally a written poem that accompanied instrumental and vocal music, it is also called a “*Quzi Ci*” (曲子詞 tune lyric), *i.e.*, a poem featured in a song. In China, *Ci* Lyrics were a form of literary expression that enjoyed broad appeal among the masses. A wealth of poetic compositions, including *Ci* Lyrics, was created in the initial stages of the propagation of Quanzhen Daoism in the north. The motive of these works was to use the style of orally transmitted songs to exhort the masses to study and cultivate the Dao. The widespread transmission of these catchy poetic compositions to the north and south of the Yangtze River played an important role in the propagation and development of Quanzhen Daoism, causing Quanzhen Daoist thought to deeply penetrate each level of society. Moreover, the fact that “luo li ling” later became a frequently used function word in Yuan dynasty songs can give insight into the transitional role played by the writing of the Quanzhen sect in the transformation of lyrical music [28]. On this basis, we can conclude that within the Puxian region, a bastion of Daoist faith, the “luo li lian” seen in the *Xianggong Tapeng* of Puxian opera certainly bears a close relationship with the use of poetic verse to propagate Quanzhen Daoism.

## 5. *Xianggong Tapeng* and the Daoist Rite for Purifying the Altar

On the basis of the protagonist Tian Yuanshuai and the lyric “luo li lian”, it may be tentatively inferred that the origins of *Xianggong Tapeng* are deeply rooted in Daoism. Of course, this is just a partial comparison and investigation. Because the performance of *Xianggong Tapeng* is a part of the ritual for purifying the stage belonging to the Puxian drama troupes, in what follows, we will use the motives and sequence of this ceremony as a basis for comparison with the Daoist rite for purifying the altar.

The British anthropologist Victor Turner advanced the theory of liminality in a ritual context. In his view, the period of liminality within the ritual process eliminates the inequalities of social status, causing a unique bond to form among the ritual’s participants. This is a kind of “*communitas*” [29]. In Daoist ritual, this kind of *communitas* can be viewed as an equality of communication and exchange between humans and spirits. Furthermore, the Daoist ritual area seeks to develop the distinctive space of these exchanges. Due to the sacred nature of this space, one must ensure its purity. The rite for purifying or cleaning the altar is one of the important rituals found within the repertoire of Daoist *zhai* (齋) and *jiao* (醮) ceremonies. Daoism holds the ritual space of the altar to be the site where the three effulgences open and enliven an icon’s eyes, where the five phases pervade, where myriad patterns are restored and proliferate, and where yin and yang arise and descend. Prior to performing a *zhai* rite for communicating with spirits or petitioning the gods to offer protection from calamity, the Daoist ritual master will want to observe divine law by dispelling any impure vapors from the space of the altar. Performing the rite for purifying the altar ensures the cleanliness of the altar space. The *Jiao Sandong Zhenwen Wufa Zhengyimeng Weilu Licheng Yi* (醮三洞真文五法正一盟威策立成儀 *The Complete Ritual for Offering to the Gods of Registers of the Three Caverns, the Five Methods, and the One and Orthodox Covenanti*), a text authored by the Tang Daoist priest Zhang Wanfu, is an important scripture that records the rituals of the Orthodox Unity sect. Below is an excerpt concerning the purification of the altar and the dispersing of impure vapors:

Now, the purpose of purifying the altar is to clean out the stale *qi*, to spread the fragrant moisture of perfection and the numinous, to make the inner and outer pure and open, to make humans and spirits mutually stimulated. Whenever one starts a *jiao* rite, he should purify the altar. Inscribe the talisman addressed for dispersing the impure vapors on the paper of a kingly book. The water should come from the flesh of a peach, bamboo leaves, agalloch eaglewood, the tongue of a chicken, the leaves of an arbor vitae, and other materials. Trim these ingredients into a thin bag and submerge them in boiling liquid. Sprinkle this liquid onto the altar and the ritual implements, then perform ablutions. Some use the fresh water from a clear spring. This can also be used. Once [the ritual space] is arranged in accordance with the previous chapter, don the ritual clothes and place a sword and water on the terrestrial threshold, first the sword, then the water. Put three steps of distance between each. Present a report [to the gods] and do the steps of the three potencies. On finishing the steps, clench your fists and close your eyes. Visualize the scriptures and *Dushi* in the west. Visualize General Tang carrying a sword and holding a seal on the left. Visualize General Ge holding a halberd and carrying a sword on the right. Visualize General Zhou carrying a sword and holding half a tally in the front. The perfected wear vermilion garments and ride nine phoenixes. Pace the dipper, come to the altar and arrest the impurities. With the canopy of the seven stars of the Big Dipper already covering your head and the handle of the Dipper pointing forward, do not let it cover your eyes. Having finished, open your eyes and recite the four numinous incantations. The incantation reads: The emerald dragon is the east, it is the essence of the *jiao* and *kang* constellations... (and so forth, proceed according to custom), use your hand to pat your heart. Stand a T-shape. The incantation reads: I call on the hundred spirits. Having arrived, you should immediately commence to tour [the ritual space] (and so forth, next is the pacing of the three potencies). Next is the decree to water, saying that the lakes, great rivers, and the Huaihai are not ordinary bodies of water, and so forth. Spit out the water, sing and call upon [bodies of water] three times. Next, once the invocation of each position has been completed, solemnly petition the emerald dragon of the east to descend so that its perfected *qi* can enter into the body, and so forth. Next, do the pacing of the three potencies, the nine traces or the *jiji* (既濟) hexagram. Next, petition the five youthful lords, and so forth. The rest is per usual. Next, do the steps of the Big Dipper. [The] sprinkling [of] the contents of the water vessel completes [the rite] [30].

The purification of the altar within Daoism has its own inner meaning. *Zhai* and *jiao* rites are particularly concerned with abstention and purification. A sincere offering to the gods is their foundation. Because of this, removing impurities is the first task in conducting *zhai* rites. This enables correct, perfected, nascent *qi* (炁) to transform and circulate, thereby making the ritual space become a spotlessly clean site without a speck of polluting influence. The purification of the altar first requires a sword, water, and an incense burner table to be installed on the terrestrial threshold to the south-east of the *zhai* altar. The terrestrial threshold is the site where the *qi* of heaven and earth is first generated, where the humans and things of the mundane world enter and exit. The ritual master must employ a specially prepared holy water (or clean, fresh water) for ablutions. He must sprinkle holy water all over the altar, the ritual implements and the offerings. Contemporary Daoist ritual still has a sequence called

“sprinkling clean”. Holding a sword, the ritual master lifts up a water vessel and enters into space of the altar. He paces the stars of the Big Dipper, visualizing the four great spirits while also visualizing the seven stars of the Big Dipper covering his head. The handle of the Dipper points forward without covering up his ears or eyes. Then he clenches his fists, pinching his knuckles with his thumbs while reciting formulas and incantations. He issues edicts, sings, and spits out water. He visualizes various spirits and ever-transforming perfected *qi* returning again to his body. Lastly, he paces the Big Dipper and sprinkles the purifying water. At that point, the *zhai* and *jiao* altar immediately becomes a sacred altar.

The stage of the theater is also a mystical space where the joys and sorrows of life play out year around: love and hate, passion and enmity, fantastic encounters with gods and ghosts and the myriad conditions of living things. Sometimes, these events unfold in the mundane world, at other times, they transpire in the abodes of transcendents or even the netherworld. As encapsulated in expressions such as “theater is like human life, human life is like theater” and “the dance platform is human life in miniature, human life is a great dance platform”, the actors on stage and the audience together have lived through the vicissitudes of life. Theater uses ritualistic performances to transport both actors and the audience into an imagined domain. Within a set time and space, both groups are pulled into this fantastic realm where they realize the significance of life itself. This kind of theatrical stage, which can be likened to a threshold, similarly requires the implementation of efficacious measures to maintain its purity. Through investigation of the ritual for purifying the stage in Puxian opera, the author has discovered that this ritual bears many similarities with the Daoist rite for purifying the altar, including congruent sequences and procedures:

- (1) Setting up the altar. According to notes in *The Complete Ritual for Offering to the Gods of Registers of the Three Caverns, the Five Methods, and the One and Orthodox Covenant*, the first component of the Daoist *jiao* rite is establishing the site of the altar. Before the Puxian drama troupe makes offerings on the stage, they typically set up an incense case serving as a “spirit platform” in the center of the stage. The ceremony of sprinkling the blood of three sacrificial animals serves as an offering to the gods. The leader of the drama troupe and even the local official lead the actors to the stage. The masses mount the stage and commence to worship, or burn incense and light lamps in front of the ancestral spirit icon located behind the stage.
- (2) The fasting and ablutions performed by the individual presiding over the ritual. In the Daoist context, when an altar is being purified, the ritual master must use holy water (or the fresh water of a clear spring) for ablutions. In the Puxian opera rite for purifying the shed, all participants must wash and purify their bodies.
- (3) The dancing sword, dagger, axe or ruler. The sword is a very important ritual implement within Daoism. Its powers include the ability to spur on divine generals, convene spirits, behead demons, cleave heterodoxies, break open the prisons of hell, and liberate the dead. Usually, it should be worn in passing. In the process of purifying the altar, the ritual master will use the sword to submit reports to the gods. In *Xianggong Tapeng*, even though the actors do not carry and wield swords, they symbolically use the postures of sword dancing by making the index and middle fingers of their right hand assume the shape of a sword pointing toward heaven.
- (4) Talismans and incantations. In the *Xianggong Tapeng* of Puxian opera, the 108 syllable Yuanshuai spell “luo li lian” that is frequently sung at the beginning of a performance indicates

the cluster of thirty-six stars near the Big Dipper and the group of seventy-two stars surrounding the *Disha* (地煞) asterism. While this sequence is distinct from the incantations for Yuanshuai and the subjugation of demons proper to the Daoist ritual master, their function is the same.

- (5) Step the Gang. Gang means the handle of the big Dipper. To Step the Gang is to pace the asterisms. During the *zhai* and *jiao* ritual, the ritual master steps out the positions of the big Dipper to venerate the asterisms and petition the spirits. This is an important component of Daoist rituals. The ritual of pacing the stars is typically not well attested to on the theatrical stage. In *Xianggong Tapeng*, this mode of ritual action expresses itself in the form of actors' forward and backward movements by means of the left and right feet, using a single foot to leap and dance. It is also represented by the two lads Feng and Huo, as well as by the two generals left and right Tieban, who follow the dance movements of Tiangong.
- (6) Petitioning the spirits. Within the context of the Daoist ritual for petitioning spirits and transforming their energies, the ritual master reverently makes requests of heavenly worthies by means of visualizing the four spirits of the cardinal directions as well as the spirit generals, who are but permutations of the perfected *qi* within his body. Daoists call this practice "lighting the incense burner" (*falu* 發爐), and its meaning lies in the desire to seek aid from the sacred domain by causing sidereal lords to descend. The practice of "cleaning the stage" within theatrical performance seeks to enlist the aid and protection of spirits; practices geared toward this end have become essential in the theatrical repertoire. In the context of the Puxian theatrical ceremony for purifying the shed, the selection of an auspicious day and the designation of an appropriate site for "petitioning [spirits] and burning incense" (*qingxianghuo* 請香火) is identical with the Daoist rite for petitioning spirits.
- (7) Arresting impurities. In the context of Daoist rituals, the arresting of impurities is completed in two steps. First, the ritual master visualizes *zhenren* (真人 perfected) descending to the altar to arrest the impurities. Second, the ritual master recites incantations and draws talismans on water. He spits water outward toward the four cardinal directions, what is called "sprinkling purity". Puxian opera troupes may release fireworks and scatter paper money. Such acts are intended to effect the salvation of the dead and also resemble the Daoist rite for arresting impurities. Some theatrical rituals for purifying the stage involve actors assuming the roles of spirit soldiers, spirit generals, demons and goblins. The theatrical performances of the spirit generals and the soldiers' conquest over the noxious demons indicate the completion of good's conquest over evil.

## 6. Conclusions

Through these elements, we see that the ceremony for purifying the stage, having aspects of both ritual and theatrical performance, is brimming with religious overtones. This ceremony has inherited the structure, pattern, and religious function of the Daoist rite for purifying the altar. Through the continuous adaptation of many of the ritualistic behaviors characteristic of Daoist ritual, a new mode of vernacular religious rite has emerged in a lively form. Of course, there are many divergences between Puxian opera's rite for cleaning the stage and the Daoist rite for purifying the altar. Whereas the Daoist rites for petitioning the aid of spirits rely on visualization techniques, Puxian dramatists tap into their specialized abilities to transform these ritual motifs into theatrical performance. For example, the rite for cleaning

the stage found in Puxian opera involves the sacrifice of chickens and lambs, whereas Daoism extols the sanctity of life and rarely incorporates sacrifice. Further, the rite for cleaning the stage has been influenced by Puxian customs, giving it a highly local character. One salient example is the practice of selecting an auspicious day for lifting up the icon of a deity onto a palanquin in the dark of the night and setting forth to petition the aid of spirits and burn incense.

## Acknowledgements

The paper is sponsored by the Postdoctoral Science Foundation of China (No. 2014M552376).

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References and Notes

1. Jane Ellen Harrison. *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Geoffrey Cumberlege: Oxford University Press, 1913.
2. Ernest Theodore Kirby. *Ur-Drama: The Origins of Theater*. New York: New York University Press, 1975.
3. Paul Kuritz. *The Making of Theater History*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1987.
4. Piet van der Loon. "Les origines rituelles du theater chinois." *Journal Asiatique* 265 (1977): 141–68.
5. Eli Rozik. *The Roots of Theater: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002.
6. Issei Tanaka, and He Bu, trans. *Study on Chinese Sacrifice Theater* (《中國祭祀戲劇研究》). Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008, p. 250.
7. Saisheng Yung. *Study on Drama Anthropology: Ritual, Theater and Community* (《戲曲人類學初探：儀式、劇場與社群》). Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2003.
8. Kun-liang Chu. "Daoist, Ritual and Theater: Take *Taishang Zhengyi Chishui Jintan Xuanke* from Leijin Altar for Example (《道士、科儀與戲劇—以雷晉壇〈太上正壹敕水禁壇玄科〉為中心》)." *Taipei Theater Journal* 11 (2010): 23–127.
9. Shichuang Zhan. *Daoism and Theater* (《道教與戲劇》). Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2004.
10. Caixia Ni. *Studies on Daoist Ritual and Theatrical Performance Forms* (《道教儀式與戲劇表演形態研究》). Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press, 2005.
11. Biqi Liao, ed. "22 Notes." In *Gazetteer of Putian County in Xinhua Prefecture* (《興化府莆田縣誌》). Putian: Library of Putian City, 1757, p. 1.
12. *Lishe* is the social structure that combined administrative region and the belief of *She* god. *She* is the god of the soil and altars to him. The original *she* temple dedicated to the god of soil only. As the times changes, the *she* temple expanded to worship multi gods. See Zhenman Zheng. "The Development of Lishe Organization in Fujian Province during Ming and Qing Dynasties (《明清福建裡社組織的演變》)." In *Folk Beliefs and Social Space* (《民間信仰與社會空間》). Edited by Zhenman Zheng and Chunsheng Chen. Fuzhou: Fujian People's Publishing House, 2003, pp. 335–53.

13. Junfu Li. “Puyang Bishi.” In *The Revised Continuation of the Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* (《續修四庫全書》). Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1995, vol. 734, p. 255.
14. Shangxian Zheng, and Pingzhang Wang, eds. *Discussions on the History of Puxian Opera* (《莆仙戲史論》). Beijing: Chinese Opera Press, 2006, p. 3.
15. Zhenman Zheng. “The Birthdays of the Luminous Gods (《神明誕》).” Paper presented at Conference on Vernacular Culture and the Arts, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China, 15 October 1999.
16. Qin Zhang, ed. “Altars and Temples: Tiangong (《壇廟•田公》).” In *Manuscript of Gazetteer of Putian County* (《莆田縣誌稿》). Putian: n.p., 1941, vol. 18, p. 66.
17. Kezhuang Liu. *The Great Anthology of Mister Houcun* (《後村先生大全集》). Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2008, vol. 21, p. 185.
18. Mingsheng Ye. *Cultural Ecology of Puxian Theater* (《莆仙戲劇文化生態研究》). Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2007, pp. 317–19.
19. Chuhui Zheng. “Miscellaneous Records of the Lustrous Sovereign—Appended Notes (《明皇雜錄•補遺》).” In *Collection of Tang and Song Historical Materials and Notes* (《唐宋史料筆記叢刊》). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997, p. 41.
20. Anonymous. *The Illustrated Great Anthology of the Source and Flow of the Three Teachings in Their Search for Divinity* (《繪圖三教源流搜神大全(外二種)》). Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1990, p. 242.
21. Lingzhen Lin, ed. “Golden Book of Salvation according to the Lingbao Tradition.” In *Daozang* (《道藏》) *Taoist Canon*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 8, pp. 458–59.
22. Anonymous. “Jade Mirror of the Numinous Treasure.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 10, p. 391.
23. Anonymous. “Collected Sources on Daoist Rituals.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 30, pp. 237–38.
24. Shanyuan Hou. “Anthology of the Great Mystery of Upper Clarity.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 23, p. 816.
25. Zhenren Jin. “The Discourse Records of Jin the Perfected.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 23, p. 700.
26. Chuxuan Liu. “The Anthology of Transcendents’ Music.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 25, p. 435.
27. Zhe Wang. “The Anthology of Complete Perfection by Chongyang.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 25, p. 764.
28. Zhengming Luo. “Artistic Daoist Cultivation.” *Frontiers of Daoist Studies* 1 (2014): 3–44.

29. Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969, pp. 94–97.
30. Wanfu Zhang. “The Complete Ritual for Offering to the Gods of Registers of the Three Caverns, the Five Methods, and the One and Orthodox Covenanti.” In *Daozang*. Beijing: Cultural Relic Press; Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House; Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988, vol. 28, p. 493.

© 2014 by the author; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).