DAOISM IN RELIGIOUS TERMS

In the Mongol world, Daoism encompassed a set of practices, beliefs, and institutions centered on the manipulation of natural forces. These forces were mediated or embodied by a pantheon of hundreds of deities inhabiting various heavens, the earth, and the human body. Many Daoist techniques targeted the practitioner’s own body with the goal of attaining health, a long life, and even immortality – though not necessarily in one's earthly body. One did not need to be a religious professional to learn and practice these techniques of self-cultivation. The chief requirements were time, the necessary knowledge (ideally gained through training from a teacher possessing secret techniques), and perhaps money to procure the rare ingredients used in some medical formulae.

In speaking of Daoism as a ‘religion’, we refer to the fact that in addition to the circulation of these ideas and practices, Chinese society contained professional Daoist clergy who practiced rites in dedicated ritual buildings. While Daoist priests were expected to be accomplished in self-cultivation, they provided a broader range of religious services, such as aiding the transmigration of the souls of the deceased, healing the living, and protecting communities from natural disaster, with exorcism rites in particular often employed to resolve worldly difficulties. Priests might be identified with a school or sect; in some, such as the Heavenly Master sect (Tianshidao) prominent in southern China, priesthood was inherited from father to son. Generally, though, each local priest was effectively autonomous and not overseen by any ecclesiastical hierarchy.

In the centuries preceding the Mongol conquests, the creators and leaders of Daoist sects were concentrated in southern China, although Daoist priests, temples, and adherents could be found in the north as well. Almost everywhere they existed, Daoist clergy and abbeys were outnumbered many times over by their Buddhist counterparts but enjoyed enough social and cultural importance that educated elites conventionally referred to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism as the ‘Three Teachings’, comparable and complementary. As in all periods of East Asian history, the overwhelming majority of people did not define themselves as an adherent of...
one particular religion but instead drew on beliefs and practices from all of the Three Teachings as well as popular religious traditions, which, in some cases, might overlap with elements of the three. In the five centuries before the creation of the Mongol Empire, some imperial courts had occasionally given special recognition to certain Daoist priests and deities, favoring them over their Buddhist counterparts. Except for brief episodes, however, the officially sanctioned Daoist teachings were not widely promoted, and the clergy was not granted political power. By the time of the Mongol conquests, some Daoist self-cultivation techniques and metaphysical concepts had spread from China throughout East Asia, becoming combined with existing traditions wherever they reached. In Koryo, a small number of Daoist rites and buildings were operated by and for the state, probably in emulation of their patronage by the Song imperial court, but they lacked followers among the broader population.

THE MONGOL ENCOUNTER WITH DAOISM

The founding and growth of several new Daoist sects had been a major religious trend in northern China during the half-century preceding the Mongol conquests. The creation of the Jurchen empire in the 1120s had separated the northern population from the centers of the main Daoist sects, which, located as they were in the south, remained under the control of the hostile Song state. By the end of the twelfth century, several new Daoist sects in Jin territory attracted large followings, with the Quanzhen (Completing Authenticity) sect being the most successful. Quanzhen was founded by Wang Zhe (called Wang Chongyang, 1113–1170), a member of the literati in 1159. Three decades later, his chief disciples fashioned the sect into a network with a coherent origin story, clearly defined lineage of patriarchs, and closely knit network of adherents spread throughout the Jin empire. While Daoist metaphysics, pantheons, institutions, and indeed clergy had long overlapped with other traditions, Quanzhen was even more syncretic. The sect used Confucian and Buddhist concepts and texts in teaching its lay followers, and for its clerics prescribed a monastic regimen borrowing extensively from Chan Buddhism. Its leaders gained a reputation for rigorous cultivation through demonstrations of ascetic devotion, walling themselves in isolation for months or years at a time, or exposing their bodies to the harshness of the elements in public places where their austerities could advertise the sincerity of the movement. Through purification of the body and mind, Quanzhen priests were believed to gain not only health and longevity but also the powers to predict the future, heal the sick, resurrect the dead, summon mirages, and manipulate the weather. In the late 1180s, two high Quanzhen clergy were hosted personally by the Jurchen emperor, but the sect was still seen as enough of an upstart that in the 1190s it was banned until gaining official recognition in 1197. Although Quanzhen probably represented less than half the Daoist clergy in northern China and numbered far fewer than Buddhist monks, they exhibited exceptional organizational cohesion between localities and so enjoyed significant authority and influence in society.

During his invasion of the Jin, Chinggis Khan was told by his subordinates of the social importance of the Quanzhen clergy and the mastery of healing and longevity practices attained by its current patriarch, Qiu Chuji (1148–1227). A group
of senior Quanzhen clerics, including Qiu, was consequently summoned to the khan’s presence, resulting in the farthest documented movement of Daoist clergy and ideas across the Mongol Empire. The clerics embarked in 1220, escorted by Mongol soldiers; they met Chinggis Khan at his camp in modern Afghanistan in spring 1222 and returned to northern China in 1223. A chronicle authored by one of the clerics in the group described their travel through Turkistan, southern Siberia, and the Central Asian territories formerly governed by the empires of Qara-Khitai and Khwarazm. Although the Quanzhen clerics noted with interest the practices of Manicheans and Muslims in the areas traversed on their journey westward, in contrast to their zeal in recruiting followers in northern China they recorded no attempts to attract support in regions where Daoism had no preexisting following. The furthest recorded geographic extent of the clerics’ missionary activity was a community of several thousand artisans from northern China who the Mongols had relocated to southern Siberia and among whom the Quanzhen leaders had to confront hostility toward their sect.

After reaching the khan’s camp, Qiu Chuji delivered a series of lectures to Chinggis Khan summarizing Quanzhen Daoist cosmology, metaphysics, and physiology; the history of the sect; and advice for rulership. Qiu did not modify the content of the message to fulfill his listener’s expectations, but rather urged a set of self-cultivation methods and moral precepts similar to those espoused by Quanzhen leaders on other occasions, including their advice to Jurchen emperors in the 1180s–1190s. Qiu’s admonishments against vigorous exertion, sexual activity, and the taking of life were not the ‘medicine for longevity’ that Chinggis had requested of him and conflicted with the figure of martial hero and august patriarch expected of a Mongol leader. Even so, the khan showed neither disappointment nor displeasure at the criticism of his habits; his responses assured the delegation that he understood, respected, and to some degree accepted their views. The Daoist delegation’s recollection of Temüjin as gracious, encouraging, and open-minded thus complements the more common image of him as a stern and merciless commander, adding nuance that may help explain his popularity as a leader.

**DAOISM IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE**

Evidence suggests that the Quanzhen account of a positive reception from the khan was accurate, with even authors, such as Yelü Chucai, who were critical of the sect observing that they subsequently enjoyed favor from the Mongol rulers. Their privileges included nominal authority over all Daoist and Buddhist institutions and clergy in former Jin territory, exemptions for their followers from government exactions, and free use of the post system’s resources in their travels. Epigraphy from the decades following the Mongol conquest of the Jurchen empire shows a spread of Quanzhen abbeys northward into areas where evidence of earlier Daoist sites is rare or absent. As their organizational and economic resources increased and their political support grew, between 1237 and 1244 Quanzhen leaders compiled and printed the largest Daoist canon ever produced up to that time, comprising 7,000 chapters. Undertaken in southern Shanxi, then the center of the printing industry in northern China, the project received support from at least two members of the Chinggisid ruling family. A stele dated 1240 contains
the text of an edict (bichig) from Töregene Khatun, then in the role of Ögödei’s consort, placing a Chinese local official in charge of managing the carving of the printing blocks for the Daoist canon and constructing buildings necessary for the work; it also prohibited interference by anyone, including other officials. To publicize the order, a Daoist priest reproduced the full text of the edict in Chinese script on the stele. He also appended fragmented and poorly written phrases from the Mongolian text, apparently intending that the visual presence of the script on the stone marker would improve its effectiveness in protecting the project. In ca. 1240–1241, Köden, the second son of Ögödei, who had been granted territory in Shanxi, issued further edicts authorizing nearby administrative districts to establish offices for the carving of printing blocks and reproduction of the printed canon; he also conferred an honorific title on the priest who had initiated the project. These shows of patronage for Daoist canon projects and the religious professionals who led them demonstrated continuity with the role taken by Jurchen imperial relatives, who had patronized the compilation and printing of Daoist canons by Quanzhen clerics in the 1180s–1190s.

The canon printing marked the high point of Daoist support from the Mongol rulers, and a counterreaction followed. Critics charged that Quanzhen clerics abused the privileges they had received from the Mongol rulers and their representatives; Chan monks’ material grievances concerned Quanzhen efforts to seize Buddhist monasteries and attract their adherents, but what prompted action from the Mongol state were complaints, joined by Tibetan clergy, that texts and images printed by Quanzhen clergy denigrated Buddhism. The offending publications featured the centuries-old claim that Buddhism had been founded when the Daoist sage Laozi journeyed west to ‘transform the barbarians’; the Quanzhen version may have drawn parallels to Qiu Chuji’s journey to preach to Chinggis Khan and thus insulted the Mongols as well. Under Möngke and Qubilai, a series of debates were held between representatives of the Quanzhen Daoist and Chan Buddhist orders, with the Mongol arbitrators declaring Buddhist victory each time. After the final debate in 1281, the Yuan court ordered the abolition of the Quanzhen order and the burning of its newly printed Daoist canon, although inscriptions from the time suggest that Quanzhen activity was unaffected outside Daidu. The court’s position softened over the following decades, however. After the execution of Sengge (or Sangha, d. 1291), one of several Tibetan officials who had been particularly forceful in urging the destruction of the canon, Daoist texts without anti-Buddhist content were freed from prescription. Throughout these vicissitudes and particularly during the violent early decades of the Mongol takeover, the size, transregional character, and political privileges of Quanzhen institutions and organizational structure helped them provide support to inhabitants in former Jin territory during the violent disruption of the Mongol takeover, complementing a similar role played by Buddhist institutions. Over time, the Mongol rulers came again to offer formal gestures of support for the sect, and under Qaishan its rehabilitation was made official, with new posthumous honorific titles granted to thirty founding figures of the Quanzhen movement in 1310. The move came only after edicts from Qaishan conferring new titles on Confucius in 1307 (see chapter 38 in this volume) and generations of Heavenly Masters of the eponymous southern sect of Daoism in 1308, suggesting that the court’s focus was not so much a favoring of Quanzhen...
as a willingness to include it among the groups recognized as respectable forms of elite religion.\textsuperscript{34}

Daoism in southern China reflected the Mongols’ less disruptive conquest of that region compared to the north, with the commercial economy continuing its growth and local religious institutions receiving minimal interference.\textsuperscript{35} One ongoing trend in that region that reached its culmination in the Mongol epoch was the founding of the Zhongxiao Jingming Dao sect. During the centuries before the Mongol conquest, the cult and teachings of the Daoist priest Xu Xun (or Xu Sun, 239–272), which focused on the value of filial piety (\textit{xiao}), had grown in popularity.\textsuperscript{36} The tradition had retrenched in the south after the fall of northern China to the Jurchens, with new leaders adding an emphasis on political loyalty (\textit{zhong}). Their activity culminated under Mongol rule with the founding in 1297 of a new sect called Zhongxiao Jingming Dao. The sect remained prominent for three centuries thereafter, featuring in popular literature despite being respected by scholar-officials.\textsuperscript{37} It produced the first ‘ledgers of merits and demerits’, guides enabling practitioners to quantify their spiritual cultivation according to the number and type of virtuous and sinful acts performed and which reflected the actuarial mindset accompanying the commercialization of southern Chinese society.\textsuperscript{38}

As a Quanzhen leader observed, Daoist adherents had previously been few in northern China, so the activity and popularity of new sects there under Mongol rule was a new development in East Asian religious history.\textsuperscript{39} The Mongol conquest also made possible the spread of Quanzhen institutions from former Jin to Song territory.\textsuperscript{40} Followers of the sect figured prominently in the Mongol Empire in East Asia; one of many in the service of the Great Ulus was Zhao Liangbi (1217–1286), a Jurchen patron of Quanzhen who served as Qubilai’s ambassador to Koryo and Japan.\textsuperscript{41} Where Mongol control extended into areas where Daoist institutions and clergy were already prevalent, some elites of Muslim background, beginning with Jafar Khoja (traditionally 1110–1227), became involved with Daoism in the course of engaging with Chinese elite society more broadly.\textsuperscript{42} Newcomers to the region, such as Ja’far, encountered Daoism in the company of other advisers and commanders like the Khitan brothers Yelü Ahai and Yelü Tuhua, whose engagement with Quanzhen leaders provided examples for how a layperson with political power utilized the services of Daoist clergy, interacted with them as fellow elites, and granted them patronage.\textsuperscript{43} Involvement of officials in the Mongol service with Daoism could range from associating socially with Daoist clergy and listening to their predictions, as Ja’far did, to, by the fourteenth century, devoting considerable attention to the production of Daoist elixirs. Writing in the late fourteenth century, the poet Wang Feng described a man identified by the name ‘Lamadang’, who had served as a Censor in the Yuan administration but then became a Quanzhen priest, perhaps after the expulsion of the Mongol rulers from Daidu in 1368.\textsuperscript{44} Generally speaking, the documented instances of Daoist adherence among groups from regions (primarily Muslim) where Daoism had previously been absent suggests that it was treated as one aspect of participation in Chinese civil elite society. Its prevalence among these immigrant groups mirrored the patterns seen in Chinese civil elites as a whole. Daoist adherence appears to have been less prevalent among Tibetans, whose political service to the Mongol government was often tied to rank in a specifically Buddhist institutional structure.
Daoist ideas and institutions appear not to have been spread further through the Mongol world, and at most we can only speculate as to relevant factors. As noted at the start of this chapter, Daoist beliefs and practices were quite complex, requiring the participation of dedicated professional ritual masters, and their teachings often centered on proposing particular ways of organizing elements already accepted in Chinese society, whether metaphysical concepts or popular deities. Although Quanzhen clerics pursued adherents in former Jin territory, their appeal presupposed regard for Confucian and Chan Buddhist practices, institutions, and discourses as well. Records of Daoist priests’ interactions with other groups show that they could be readily interpreted as thaumaturges, offering prognostication and prescriptions for longevity that could be evaluated and even accepted without deeper curiosity into the underlying cosmology, theology, or institutions. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, moreover, Daoist priests of any order did not display an impulse to spread their clergy or institutions in areas where Daoism was unknown. At most, Mongol rulers and their officials were treated as patrons or lay adherents who could benefit existing institutions. As a whole, the geographic spread of Daoist practices was a parallel but separate process to the spread of other practices, ideas, and linguistic elements from Sinophone regions southward through the frontier regions into Southeast Asia more broadly.45 In East Asia, Daoist texts were kept in the original orthography, even if their oral interpretation was different in varying Sinoliterate contexts, such as the Korean peninsula and Japanese archipelago. This lack of missionary zeal was common in East Asian religious culture of the time. As most people outside the clergy did not identify as the exclusive adherent of any one religious group, the stakes in seeking adherents were lower than for Abrahamic traditions demanding an exclusive religious affiliation.

NOTES

1 For an overview of the Daoism, see Schipper 1993, 32–43 and 160–182.
2 Goossaert 2001, 118.
3 Teiser 1996, 18–22.
5 On the transmission of Daoism in Japan, see Ajia Yugaku 2005, vol. 73; Richey 2015.
6 Huang 2017, 80–87.
7 For the sects, see Zhan 1989, 2–26; Goossaert 1997, 10–20.
10 See, for example, Demiéville 1986, 809–819; Stein 1979, 53–81; Davis 2001, 115–170.
16 Yelü 1967, 87; de Rachewiltz 1962a, 25.
17 Li 1972. The annotated English translation has many inaccuracies and omits nearly all the poems through which the Quanzhen leaders instructed their devotees: TOA.
18 Li 1972, 48 and 85–57.
19 The account offers only vague descriptions of ‘slander’ encountered there, with far more
detail given to the divine intervention by which it was overcome. Li 1972, 100–101.
20 A portion of Qiu’s lectures is transcribed by Yelü 2004, 25–29. On its authorship, see Yao
21 On Quanzhen lectures to the Jin monarchs, see Eskildsen 2004, 16; Hachiya 1998, 92–94
and 217.
22 de Rachewiltz 1962b, 198.
23 See, for example, the 1236 ‘Lüezuo Yunfeng Zhenren Kang gong mubeiming’, in Manshu
kinseki shiko 1936, vol. 1, 143–146.
24 Chia 2011, 177.
25 Cleaves 1960–1, 63–66 and 74.
27 Chia 2011, 175.
30 Kubo 1977, 324–326.
31 Goossaert 2001, 117.
32 Chia 2011, 182.
35 Smith 2003, 6–9.
36 Shek 2004, 142–144.
39 Li 1972, 108.
40 See, for example, the 1282 inscription by Zhao Daoyuan, ‘Fenzhen daoyuan ji’, in Wang
2005, 237–238; also Li 2015, 219.
41 On Zhao’s diplomatic role, see Su 1996, 226–227; on his Quanzhen activity see Yamamoto
42 YS 2961.
43 On Daoist patronage by Tuhua, Ahai, and Tuhua’s sons, see Li 1972, 17–18; Yao 1996,
213; Biran 2015, 163.
44 For several examples of Daoist interest and practice among these newly arrived groups
under Mongol rule, see Chen 2005, 34–39.
45 See Kleeman 2002, 30–34.
46 For representative examples, see McDermott 2015, 194–215.

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TOA, See List of Abbreviations.


YS, See List of Abbreviations.