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Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
<i>Friederike Assandri</i> , Examples of Buddho–Daoist interaction: concepts of the afterlife in early medieval epigraphic sources	1
<i>Carmen Meinert</i> , Buddhist Traces in Song Daoism: A Case From Thunder-Rite (Leifa) Daoism	39
<i>Henrik H. Sørensen</i> Looting the Pantheon: On the Daoist Appropriation of Buddhist Divinities and Saints	54
<i>Cody Bahir</i> , Buddhist Master Wuguang’s (1918–2000) Taiwanese web of the colonial, exilic and Han	81
<i>Philip Garrett</i> , Holy vows and realpolitik: Preliminary notes on Kōyasan’s early medieval <i>kishōmon</i>	94
<i>Henrik H. Sørensen</i> Buddho–Daoism in medieval and early pre-modern China: a report on recent findings concerning influences and shared religious practices	109

Research Articles

Buddhist Traces in Song Daoism: A Case From Thunder-Rite (*Leifa*) Daoism

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Topic

AFTER the turn of the first millennium the Chinese religious landscape had developed to a degree that the production of hybrid Buddho-Daoist ritual texts was a rather widespread phenomenon. With the rise of a Daoist trend referred to as Thunder Rites (*leifa* 雷法), which matured during the mid- to late-Song 宋 Dynasty (960–1279) and did not solely pertain to any particular branch of Daoism, a new type of (often Buddho-Daoist) ritual practice had emerged, largely exorcistic in nature and that would eventually be incorporated into classical Daoist traditions.¹ Practitioners of Thunder Rites were either members of the established Daoist orthodoxy or itinerant thaumaturges, referred to as ritual masters (*fashi* 法師).² They had received powerful ritual techniques (*fa* 法) which, by using the potency of the thunder, aimed to correct the world's calamitous powers to regain a state of balance or harmony.

In the final years of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), from 1122 to 1126, it was the Daoist ritual master named Wang Wenqing (王文卿, 1093–1153) who functioned as the court preceptor of one of the most prominent Thunder Rite lineages, the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao 神霄) teachings. Among his repertoire of ritual techniques were, unsurprisingly, also rainmaking rituals, namely ones that, as I will demonstrate, are examples of

1. For an overview of Daoist ritual transformations in Song dynasty see Skar, Lowell, "Ritual Movements, Deity Cults, and the Transformation of Daoism in Song and Yuan Times", in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), 413–463.

2. For the development of the *fashi* as Daoist ritual master see Davis, Edward L., *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 33–34.

such hybrid Buddho-Daoist productions. In fact, the weather in general was a paramount concern in early and medieval Chinese religion and thus religious professionals were expected to perform therapeutic and apotropaic practices as well as demonstrating the attainment of supernatural powers through their rituals. Thus rainmaking rituals have a long history from the early Han religious and throughout the medieval Daoist and Buddhist world.³ Although the Daoist and Buddhist textual examples of rainmaking rituals dealt with in this short paper are merely a minor discovery, they might, nonetheless, contribute to understand the modes and degrees of appropriation of Esoteric Buddhist knowledge into Daoist Thunder Rites in the Song Dynasty. The main argument here with regard to Buddho-Daoist hybrid ritual texts is: By the early twelfth century elements of Esoteric Buddhism were fully embedded in the interstices of prevailing Daoist ritual practices, at least in the Thunder Rites, namely—and that is important—to a degree that they were almost rendered invisible!

Before turning to the concrete textual examples, however, I will first briefly contextualise the historical background that allowed someone like the Daoist ritual master Wang Wenqing to leave impacts of his teachings at the highest imperial level, and second sketch the major shift that is visible in Song Daoism that allowed for Thunder Rites to emerge.

Context

The flourishing and lasting impact of religious trends in medieval China was, at least to a certain degree, depending on official or local, if not imperial support. As for the Song Dynasty an important shift in imperial patronage is noticeable, which was intimately interwoven with the fabric of statecraft and emperorship and which also had an immediate influence on imperial patronage of our Daoist ritual master Wang Wenqing. The early decades of the Song Dynasty saw a remarkable degree of imperial patronage of Buddhism, which, however, is in scholarship now partly understood as an instrument of civil policy: internally to demonstrate the Song court's emphasis on literary learning as a modality for integrating the formerly divided country, and externally as a tool in diplomatic relations with neighbouring empires along the northern border.⁴ One important project in favour of Buddhism at the time was the establishment of the Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures (Yijing Yuan 譯經院) which operated for around a century (982—1082) and allowed a large body of Esoteric Buddhist literature, including the latest ritual techniques, to be translated from Sanskrit into Chinese—with the assistance of Indian and

3. The following PhD thesis gives an excellent overview of the historical developments of rainmaking rituals and related topics in medieval Chinese religious history: Capitanio, Joshua, "Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods: Rainmaking, Magic, and Ritual in Medieval Chinese Religion" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008).

4. Sen, Tansen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade. The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 133.

Central Asian monk-scholars.⁵ However, Buddhist monks and texts became increasingly entangled in foreign affairs and turned into an instrument of diplomacy. This holds particularly true for the time of the rising of the independent states of the powerful Khitan (Liao 遼, 916–1125) and Tangut (Xixia 西夏, 982–1227) tribes in the tenth century, both of whom endorsed Buddhism as a state religion, yet simultaneously continued to remain a major military threat to the Song court.

And it was precisely this military threat at the northern borders of the Song Empire that eventually contributed to a decisive shift in the imperial religious patronage in favour of Daoism. The latter had already started with the Northern Song Emperor Zhenzong (真宗, r. 997–1022) who developed a sense of humiliation about the treaty of Shanyuan in 1005, which he had signed and which had ended warfare with the Khitan in the north, yet at the price of paying tribute to the Khitan. In the course of this event, in 1008 Zhenzong is said to have discovered a yellow silk scroll that had descended from the sky, the Heavenly Text (*tianshu* 天書), which announced heaven's approval of his rule despite the problematic results of the Shanyuan treaty. The text was venerated in a suitable Daoist temple complex and the whole affair eventually triggered the establishment of Daoist temples in each prefecture of the empire. Thus Emperor Zhenzong was at the centre of this Daoist renewal in the early years of the Song.⁶

Thereafter the Northern Song emperors' support for Daoism remained unchanged. It reached its climax under the last emperor of the Northern Song, Emperor Huizong (徽宗, r. 1100–1126) who finished the task set by Zhenzong and finally installed Daoism again as the state religion in 1116. However, his mission was perhaps accomplished only through the assistance of his Daoist advisors at the time: firstly Lin Lingsu (林灵素, 1076?–1120), a ritual master of the Divine Empyrean Thunder Rites, helped to install Emperor Huizong himself as the reincarnation of a Daoist deity and thus also as a divine emperor, and secondly our ritual master Wang Wenqing continued Lin's work and remained Huizong's Daoist councillor from 1122 until the latter's abdication in 1126. With the support of both, Huizong attempted to promote the translocal integration of society through a religious medium during times of severe military threats: the establishment of a unified empire-wide hierarchical structure of Daoist institutions, based in the prefectures and centred in the capital with himself at the top of this Divine Empyrean order. Along the way Huizong turned Buddhist institutions and monastics into Daoist ones.⁷ Yet even these religious

5. Orzech, Charles D., "Esoteric Buddhism under the Song: An Overview", in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 425–426.

6. Cahill, Suzanne E., "Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair", in *The Bulletin of Sung-Yuan Studies* 16 (1980): 23–44.

7. For an overview of Huizong's activities and the establishment of the Divine Empyrean order, cf. Chao, Shin-yi, "Huizong and the Divine Empyrean Palace Temple Network", in *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 324–358; Strickmann, Michel, "The Thunder Rites of the Sung: Notes on the Shen-xiao Sect and the Southern School of Taoism", in *Tōhō shūkyō* 46 (1975):

policies could not prevent the invasion of the Song capital by Jurchen tribes from the north and the ensuing huge loss of territory, with the result that Huizong eventually abdicated in 1126 on the recommendation of Wang Wenqing and continued as merely a divine or heavenly emperor.⁸ Thus for a short moment in history our ritual master Wang Wenqing stood at centre stage of the Song Empire and was able to have his expression of the Thunder Rite exorcistic rituals promoted through imperial patronage. Moreover, Wang's close interaction with the secular administration—when advising Huizong in the light of the Jurchen military threat—demonstrates his intermediary position between the profane and the transcendent spheres of reality.

The emergence and maturing of Thunder Rites during the Song Dynasty may be seen as an expression of a general reorientation in the history of Daoism. Three features may be characteristic for the Thunder Rites movements, namely (1) new revelations were therapeutic and exorcistic in nature rather than liturgical and meditational; (2) their pantheons were dominated by martial, humanized, and historicized deities rather than by cosmic powers, immortals, or emanations of Dao; and (3) texts often reflected practices of the unorganized class of lay Daoist practitioners and ritual masters (*fashi*). Moreover, in his prominent study of society and the supernatural in Song China, Edward L. Davis provided the following, very convincing argument of how the pantheon of Song Thunder Rites may have developed:

The summoning of Thunder Gods to bring rain and to exorcise demons came to be supported by a vast ethical, cosmological, and ritual scaffolding. First, the destructive power of thunder became ethicized. Long thought to be an expression of heavenly anger, particularly with respect to unfilial behavior, thunder became, in its divinized and personified form, the executor of heavenly punishment. And the Daoist practitioner who embodied and directed its power on behalf of Heaven was, above all, an administrator of justice, upholding orthodox values against evil demons and the cults lay behind them. It was this function that would highly recommend Thunder Magic to Song magistrates.

Second, thunder became bureaucratized and cosmologized. On the one hand, the various schools of Thunder Magic created complex systems of imperial courts, departments, and prisons, infinitely tessellated hierarchies of officials, spirit-generals and -soldiers, and mythic genealogies linking all these to the supreme divinities of the Daoist heavens. On the other hand, thunder was transformed from a manifestation of nature in to the controlling power of the cosmos itself, the pivot of Heaven and Earth and the power of transformation behind the continuous alternation of *yin* and *yang*. The point of Thunder

15–28.

8. Reiter, Florian C., “A Preliminary Study of the Taoist Wang Wen-ch'ing (1093–1153) and his Thunder Magic (*lei-fa*)”, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 152 (2002): 167.

Magic, therefore, was to plug into this cosmic force and, as one text says, literally to “hold the power of transformation in the palm of one’s hand.” To do so, Daoists erected a vast ritual apparatus defined above all by the complex meditations of internal or physiological alchemy (*neidan*). Using these meditations, which vary endlessly with respect to the school and task, the practitioner learned to reproduce and store thunder within his own body, to generate and summon the Thunder Gods, and to create, vitalize, and project the talismans that embody their power.⁹

One important issue in Song Thunder Rite traditions was that a new understanding of evil and the demonic is discernible: the blame for misfortune was shifted to an aberrant demonic agency. With the use of an Esoteric arsenal of incantations, talismans, and seals to summon and interrogate and type of offending spirits or evil may be expelled.

What do we then actually know about Wang Wenqing’s Thunder Rites? There are several texts attributed to Wang Wenqing in an early Ming anthology of various Thunder Rite texts, the *Collection of Principal Methods of the Dao* (*Daofa huiyuan* 道法会元), available in the Ming edition of the Daoist canon. It is now thanks to the thorough work by Florian Reiter that some of these texts are easily accessible. Thunder Rites in general and rainmaking rituals in particular may thus be described in Wang’s own words from the “Prefatory Statement on [Thunder] Rituals” (*Faxu* 法序) as follows:

These rituals completely pertain to the Five Thunders of the Jade Pivot. They are [employed] to pray for rain, offer sacrifices to clear the skies, examine bewitching and evil forces, decapitate and extinguish animals spirits around mountains, rocks, earth and woods and the illicit (*buzheng*) ghosts and spirits. In case that the Original Yang, the sun, [shines] a long time the crops get burnt and dry out. [This is due to] the load of crimes [committed] by the living beings in all the world, which are that deep reaching and heavy. [...]

One sets out memorializing to the Supreme God-Emperor of Prime Origin (Yuanshi Shangdi) and displays all this hardship [down on earth]. One begs to be granted the sympathy that [the God-Emperor of Prime Origin] orders and dispatches the Original Holy Lord of Thunder and Fire (Leihuo Yuansheng Jun) who keeps the amulets as to proclaim orders authorizing the operations of the Three Offices of the Five Thunders. They state their official warrant to unite those [forces] of all regions that can thoroughly extend their help, wriggling they move their intrinsic magic might and fully grant their merciful protection.

This effort is surely not a little one. It is this ritual system that my immortal master had transmitted orally. In my heart I received one amulet and

9. Davis, Edward L., *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001, 25–26; also partly quoted in Capitano, “Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods”, 204.

one spell. Pointing to my palm and having secret visions I sat in meditation and called out for wind and rain. Immediately they greatly reacted. As to all the secret texts, the instructions on [handling] the breath, the ritual paces (*bugang*), the amulets and seal writs, I do not dare to hide them away in secrecy. On the basis of what I had received I completed [this] file [of texts], so that later students shall be informed on the principles and be enlightened in their hearts. However, the Thunder spirits are fierce, and [these matters] must not be erroneously transmitted. One should select the person to whom one transfers [these matters] for initiation. In case that there is any light-handed leak, you cannot receive any pardon. Recorded by the Supreme Counsellor of Purple Tenuity, the Grand Master of Great Purity, Attendant Wang Wenqing.¹⁰

Here we learn from Wang Wenqing that he held Thunder Rite teachings that were entrusted to him through an oral initiation. He performed exorcism with the use of amulets and other ritual means in order to extinguish obnoxious forces etc. His teachings encompassed meditations by means of visualisation of generals and whole armies with whose help he was able to transform even the natural environment, for example in the case of rainmaking rituals.

Examples

When we turn to examples of Wang Wenqing's actual rainmaking activities, a number of influences may be identified. Wang's ritual knowledge certainly grew out of a long and diverse Chinese ritual tradition and from several religious backgrounds. A relevant episode from his life is found in the collection of anecdotes *Record of Hearsay* (*Yijian zhi* 夷堅志) by the almost contemporary scholar Hong Mai (洪邁, 1123–1202). These miscellaneous writings of the Song literati and former officer include about two hundred stories of spirit-possession and exorcist rites performed by Daoists and sorcerers in twelfth century South China—stories which, in fact, he either heard through others or witnessed himself. Here we learn about Wang Wenqing that he took part in a Daoist offering established by the local Yamen to bring rain. During the ritual Wang Wenqing held a sword in his hand and danced the Steps of Yu (*yubu* 禹步). It is said that a rainstorm followed immediately upon Wang's submission of a writ to heaven. This story was transmitted to Hong Mai by a resident of Fuzhou named Liu Cunli (劉存禮) who, however, remained skeptical of Wang's skills and instead accused the latter of fraud.¹¹

10. *Daofa huiyuan* 124, 1a–b. The translation is by Florian Reiter with minor emendations by the present author. Cf. Reiter, "The Taoist Wang Wen-ch'ing", 171.

11. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, 55. A copy of the *Yijian zhi* was not available to me at the time of writing of this article. The passage may be found in the following edition: Hong Mai 洪邁, *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 1049 [Record of Hearsay] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1981).

For our context it is not relevant to question the truth about Wang's skills as Liu Cunli did.¹² What is significant, though, are the little but important pieces of information that (1) while dancing the Steps of Yu, Wang (2) held a sword in his hand. Here we see two quite different aspects of a rainmaking ritual that seem to hint at two rather different sources and layers of influence. Ritual dancing in rain ceremonies is, in fact, a very ancient topic in Chinese religions. Evidence for dance rituals as a method of ritual appeasement intended to bring rain, go back as far as Shang oracle bone inscriptions. Here, however, appears the name of ritual dance known as Yu (雩)—written with a different character though. Joshua Capitanio has summarized the sources up to the Han Dynasty where the dance of Yu appears as an important part of rainmaking rituals.¹³

Wang Wenqing's dance described as the Steps of Yu, however, probably originate from the Han Dynasty ritual context of Ceremonial Masters (*fangshi* 方師), which was appropriated from the early Six Dynasties (220–589) onwards into Daoist ritual practice under the more commonly known term Walking the Guidelines (*bugang* 步罡 or 綱). In fact, the term *bugang* also appears in the above quoted "Prefatory Statement on [Thunder] Rituals" which is attributed to Wang Wenqing himself. Walking the Guidelines is a ritual walk or dance that follows the basic cosmic patterns and is a development of certain shamanistic dances attested since the late Warring States (475–221 BCE).¹⁴ The ancient term for these dances (*yubu*) relates to the legend of Yu who, according to Chinese mythology, is known as the one who regulated waters after the great flood by walking through the world. Thus Yu's steps provide a model for the ritual Steps of Yu which became widespread in Daoist texts from the Song Dynasty onwards and were adopted in subsequent ritual milieux.¹⁵

A slightly more elaborate description of the Steps of Yu than the one found in the *Record of Hearsay*, occurs in the Daoist ritual text *Guide to the [Scripture] of the Golden Lock and Flowing Pearls* (*Jinsuo liuzhu yin* 金鎖流珠引), which may be the earliest text associated with the Thunder Rites movement and which dates approximately to around the ninth century. The relevant passage reads as follows:

First, compose a proclamation detailing the unwillingness of the [local] earth spirits and dragons to bring rain. That night, in a courtyard with no people around, pace the earthly cord and heavenly net, each three times; exit with the Steps of Yu, advancing three paces with nine footsteps, each three times. Donning garments, circumambulate three times a pool of water three fingers deep located in the "Gate of Heaven".¹⁶

This passage actually mentions that the Steps of Yu encompass nine footsteps, which, ac-

12. In fact, Liu's criticism of Wang Wenqing does not hold true when reading the sumptuous materials about Wang which Florian Reiter has studied and which depict him as a serious Daoist practitioner (Reiter, "The Taoist Wang Wen-ch'ing").

13. Capitanio, "Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods", 39–56.

14. Anderson, Poul, "The Practice of Bugang", *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989), 15.

15. Anderson, "Bugang", 21, 36, 47.

16. The translation is from Capitanio, "Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods", 207.

According to the study of Poul Andersen, correspond to the nine stars of the Great Dipper. This is not the context to further elaborate on the deeper meaning of that dance, which was also known to Wang Wenqing.¹⁷ Yet it should be clear that Wang's knowledge derived from an ancient ritual tradition that was gradually appropriated into Song Dynasty Thunder Rites.

The second important piece of information provided in the episode about Wang Wenqing in the *Record of Hearsay* is that he held a sword in his hands during the rainmaking ritual. I suggest that the sword in this context hints of a Buddhist influence and in fact demonstrates a synthesis with current Buddhist Esoteric imagery. In order to provide evidence for this assumption, let us turn to the following explicit meditation instruction in Wang's rainmaking ritual, a passage that immediately follows the above-quoted "Prefatory Statement on [Thunder] Rituals", attributed to Wang. The passage is entitled "Assembling the Divine Force" (Lianshen 練神).

Congeal the divine force, sitting quietly in meditation. Concentrate the vision on the one most shining point in the Kidney Palace. Within a short moment fire arises that gradually engulfs the whole body all around. Blow out one mouthful of breath, and the ashes are blown away completely. Furthermore, concentrate the vision on the breaths in the five colours of the five directions. They mix up and combine to shape one united aura of radiant shining in purple and golden colours, and then this radiant shining transforms itself into an infant (*ying'er*). The infant gradually grows big, [showing] the beak of a phoenix, silver teeth, red hair and a blue body. Both eyes let fiery rays penetrate [a distance] of ten thousand *chang*. Both wings also have [the glimmering of] fire. The left and right arms have each a head with eyes emerging underneath, and they also emit fiery shining. The belt has the colour of gold. The left hand clutches a fire auger, and the right hand clutches a mallet with eight angles. There is a fiery dragon winding around the body.

Thereupon concentrate your vision on this Spirit General of the Five Thunders. His head touches heaven, and he stands on earth. Fiery clouds are close around him that wrap up his divine and fierce might of blazing fire. This is "Blazing Fire, the Heavenly Lord Deng" (Yanhuo Deng Tianjun) who rules and commands divinity in the system of the fire chariots.¹⁸

This ritual description is a very good example of a "complex meditatio[n] of internal or physiological alchemy (*neidan*)", described by Edward L. Davis as an important feature of Daoist Thunder Rites.¹⁹ Here, Wang Wenqing identifies himself with the divinity, namely

17. Andersen's article is a very comprehensive study of the development of this ritual dance. The author also provides sketches of how to perform the Steps of Yu.

18. *Daofa huiyuan* 124, 2a. The translation is by Florian Reiter with small emendations by the present author. Cf. Reiter, "The Taoist Wang Wen-ch'ing", 172.

19. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, 26. The full quotation from E. Davis is found above, p. 43.

the Heavenly Lord Deng, through a process of visualization. This soteriological technique of identification with the divinity through a visualization is in fact also the characteristic feature of Esoteric Buddhism that distinguishes it from other forms of Buddhism.²⁰ In this Thunder Rite context, however, the identification is with the Daoist divinity, the Heavenly Lord Deng, and not with a Buddhist deity. Florian Reiter was able to trace the allegedly historical origins of Lord Deng in the text “Sacrifice to the Great Divinity of Law and Order” (*Ji lüling dasheng* 祭律令大神). Here, Lord Deng could be identified as Deng Bowen (鄧伯溫) who allegedly helped the Yellow Emperor to suppress Chi You (蚩尤), the first renowned rebel in Chinese history and who was later appointed a general of Henan province.²¹ Interestingly enough, the worldly name persisted after the hero’s deification and inclusion in the Thunder Rites pantheon. Florian Reiter rightly notes that “[i]t is rather seldom that we learn how internal and external, historic aspects of a ritual tradition combine”.²² However, what he failed to understand is that the hero’s imagery was most likely appropriated from an Esoteric Buddhist context, or is, in other words, an example of a phenomenon described by Stephan Bokenkamp as “Buddhist deities in Taoist guise”.²³

For a scholar of Buddhist studies certain key expressions in Wang Wenqing’s visualization of the Heavenly Lord Deng are quite striking, namely “the infant gradually growing big [showing]” (1) “the beak of a phoenix [...] and a blue body”, (2) “wings also have [the glimmering] of fire”, and (3) “a fiery dragon winding around the body”. These descriptions may remind us of an Esoteric Buddhist figure, namely of that of a Garuḍa (金翅鳥), the King of Birds, trampling on the King of *nāgas*, Nāgarāja.²⁴

A close look at equivalent Buddhist materials proves that Esoteric Buddhist rain rituals were in fact also circulating during the Song Dynasty. Perhaps such Buddhist texts started to circulate as an immediate reaction to an imperial edict of the year 999, when the court ordered the circulation of the “Regulations for Praying for Rain” (*Qiyu fa* 祈雨法)

20. For this definition see Eastman, K. W., “Mahāyoga Texts at Tun-huang”, *Bulletin of Institute of Buddhist Cultural Studies* 22 (1983), 45.

21. *Daofa huiyuan* 56, 14b; Reiter, “The Taoist Wang Wen-ch’ing”, 174–175. For the story of the suppression of Chi You, cf. also Chang, Kwang-Chih, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period”, in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China, From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. M. Loewe and E. L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge, 1999), 69. In fact, there is also a tradition of rainmaking rituals in Han dynasty associated with Chi You, e.g. one that depicts Chi You as someone commanding the forces of wind and rain. These sources are dealt with in Capitanio, “Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods”, 57–58.

22. Reiter, “The Taoist Wang Wen-ch’ing”, 175.

23. Bokenkamp, Stephen R., “Sources of the Ling-Pao Scriptures”, in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), vol. 2: 434–486.

24. For an image of such a (Vajra-) Garuḍa, although from a much later (nineteenth-century) and Mongolian context, see, e.g., Meinert, Carmen, ed., *Buddha in the Yurt—Buddhist Art from Mongolia* (Munich: Hirmer, 2011), vol. 2, cat. no. 183: 363. At the time of writing this article I did not have access to similar visual materials from the Song Chinese context.

throughout the country.²⁵ Thus, it may be no coincidence that in the above-mentioned Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures, which enjoyed imperial patronage²⁶ the Kaśmīri monk Devaśāntika (Tianxizai 天息災, d. 1000), renamed by Emperor Taizong as Dharmabhadra (Faxian 法賢), translated the *Māyājāla-tantra*²⁷ during the years 989–99. This translation includes also instructions for rain rituals, namely one for making rain and one for stopping rain. The relevant passages read as follows:

Then there is the rite for rain making. The one who holds the recitation visualises before [himself] an eight-pedalled lotus with the eight great dragon kings on top. In the midst of the lotus flower is the great wrathful king of knowledge. The blazing light of his body transforms into Garuḍa who extinguishes all dragons/*nāgas*. Then the mantrika recites the syllables hum hum and the mantra of the dragon/*nāga* king. If one visualises and recites in this way, great rain will certainly fall.²⁸

Then there is the rite for stopping rain. The one who holds the recitation visualises his own body like samadhi-fire. From amidst the eye brows emanates the knowledge king Lord Acala. All around his body blazes light like the sun. The body of the universally shining tathāgata has six arms. The right hands hold a sword, a vajra mallet and an arrow. The left hands hold a wheel, a noose and a bow. Then visualize that all knowledge kings emanate and that their wheels and swords, their nooses, bows and arrows and their vajra mallets fill the space. When one recites the respective mantra and in this way relies on the yoga rite, the great rain will stop and demonic terror will be eliminated.²⁹

In comparing the information given about Wang Wenqing's Daoist Thunder Rite with these Esoteric Buddhist rituals translated by Dharmabhadra the following overlaps in the imagery are striking: a phoenix beak (Daoist) and a Garuḍa who generally holds a snake in his beak (Buddhist), wings glimmering with fire (Daoist) and a wrathful deity whose body blazes like the sun (Buddhist), an auger and a sword as hand attributes (Daoist) and a sword, vajra mallet, arrow, wheel, noose and bow as hand attributes (Buddhist), and finally a dragon winding around the body (Daoist) and the Garuḍa subduing a dragon/*nāga*.

25. According to the "Regulations for Praying for Rain", an altar should be built and a clay dragon made. The local official should lead his clerks and elderly villagers to make offerings at the shrine of the dragon. After enough rain has fallen, the dragon should be sent into the water; cf. *Song shi* 宋史 [The History of the Song Dynasty], reprint, by Tuo Tuo (1314–1355) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977), 102.2500. Moreover, the Song court issued more, similar regulations in the ensuing years, e.g. in 1006 a regulation for Daoists to paint dragons to be used in rainmaking; cf. Jing, Anning, *The Water God's Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery: Cosmic Function of Art, Ritual and Theater* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 71–73.

26. Cf. p. 40, above.

27. (*Foshuo yujia dajiao wangjing* 佛說瑜伽大教王經), T. 890.

28. T. 890, 18: 579b17.

29. T. 890, 18: 579b.21.

The relevant information from the different sources may be summarized in the following chart:

Daoist Thunder Rite rain ritual

—visualization of Lord Deng
infant growing bigger and transform-
ing into figure with blue body, *phoenix*
beak

wings *glimmering with fire*, two hands
holding fire auger and a *mallet*

fiery dragon winding around body
episode from *Record of Hearsay*
holding a *sword* in the hand
dancing the Steps of Yu

Esoteric Buddhist rain rituals

—summoning rain
Garuda subduing dragons/*nāgas*

—stopping rain
wrathful deity Acala, body *blazes light*
like the sun, six hands hold as at-
tributes *sword*, *vajra mallet*, arrow,
wheel, noose, bow

Conclusion

The striking similarities presented here exemplify that Buddho-Daoist interactions in the Song Dynasty developed in close interdependence with each other. Both traditions, Daoist Thunder Rites as well as Esoteric Buddhism, shared similar interests: (1) as a theme both employed apotropaeic rites, (2) as a method both used visualization techniques of spiritual beings including the self-identification with it, and (3) as for the agents both traditions concentrate on wrathful or warrior-like figures to attain the ritual goals. Therefore, I suggest this understanding of the ritual construction of Lord Deng in the Thunder Rites as a blending process including elements from two Esoteric Buddhist wrathful deities: on the one hand, the Indian mythological figure of the Garuḍa seems to have been replaced by a Chinese historical hero, the Han dynastic general Deng Bowen; and on the other, certain hand attributes of the hero Lord Deng appear to have been appropriated from the imagery of the Buddhist wrathful deity Acala.³⁰ Moreover, when crossing the cultural and religious boundaries, a certain tuning to Chinese cultural sensitivities took place which is here visible in the figure of the dragon: whereas the dragon/*nāga* is subdued in the Indian context it becomes a good companion of the heroic figure in the

30. In fact, Michel Strickmann had already noticed in his masterpiece published in 1996 that elements of the Buddhist deity Acala were also appropriated into another Thunder Rite deity, Lord or General Ma (Ma Yuanshuai); cf. Strickmann, Michel, *Mantras et mandarins: Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 464, footnote 48.

Chinese Thunder Rite context and winds around the latter's body.³¹ It therefore appears that the iconography of the central figure Lord Deng in the Daoist Thunder Rite context is seemingly not as determined yet by either doctrinal, political or other conditions, so that there appears to be a certain degree of freedom in constructing this figure on the basis of Esoteric Buddhist templates.

When looking at the broader picture, I further suggest a fine tuning of how to evaluate the impact of Esoteric Buddhism in the Song Dynasty. Some scholars of Buddhism have argued that the Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures, instituted by the early Song emperors, was a failure since it did not have lasting influence on Chinese Buddhist communities³²—may also be due to strong imperial censorship that prevented the necessary precision in the translation work.³³ On the contrary, Charles Orzech has recently shown that “texts translated and reported out of the Institute certainly circulated and that some of them apparently gained popular status”, and for example found their way into the Esoteric imagery in the Baoding Shan grottos in Sichuan, which date from the Song Dynasty.³⁴ Furthermore, Edward Davis has argued that Esoteric Buddhist knowledge did indeed spread within the Song Empire and went, so to speak, from “court to country” finding its way into exorcism that came to reflect exuberance, unpredictability and variations of village culture.³⁵ On the basis of the textual evidence presented in this paper I would go even one step further and argue: Buddhist Esoteric knowledge in the Song Dynasty was so wide-spread that it did not only find its way from “court to country”, but even back to court again—namely through Thunder Rite ritual masters like Wang Wenqing, who acted as the imperial preceptor of Emperor Huizong and in whose hybrid Buddhο-Daoist productions of ritual texts the Buddhist traces had become almost invisible.

31. Although many celestial beings are able to create rain, the most powerful is certainly the dragon or *nāga*. The veneration of dragons was already ubiquitous in ancient Chinese rainmaking traditions, so this part of Indian Buddhism resonated particularly well with Chinese culture. As early as the Han Dynasty a conflation of the Chinese dragon and the Indian *nāga* is visible. For a comprehensive discussion of this topic see Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, particularly 69–70.

32. Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 133; see also p. 40 of this article.

33. I have discussed textual examples of neglecting translations in the following article: Meinert, Carmen, “Assimilation and Transformation of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet and China: Case Study of the Adaptation Processes of Violence in a Ritual Context”, in *Between Empire and phyi dar: The Fragmentation and Reconstruction of Society and Religion in Post-Imperial Tibet. Proceedings of the Seminar Held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2010*, ed. Michael Walter and Robert Mayer (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, forthcoming).

34. Orzech, Charles D., “Looking for Bhairava: Exploring the Circulation of Esoteric Texts Produced by the Song Institute for Canonical Translation”, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3.8 (2006): 155–156.

35. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, 122.

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