

Revelation Between Orality and Writing in Early Imperial China: The Epistemology of the *Taiping jing*

by

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For more than seven decades, the *Taiping jing* (Scripture of Great Peace)¹ impassioned and divided various specialists of China—Oriental scholars and Western orientalist—until present-day linguists, philologists and sinologists finally acknowledged that it conveys an ideology peculiar to the Han 漢 dynasty times (206 B.C.E.–A.D. 220).² The *Zhengtong daoze*, a collection of Taoist works edited during the Zhengtong 正統 era (1436–50) of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), has partly preserved this scripture.³ It is a text of problematic origins, somewhat tumultuous textual history and today fairly deteriorated content. Included in a scriptural collection

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¹ The first published Western study of the *Taiping jing* (TPJ) consisted of a 4-page footnote included in the translation into French by Paul Pelliot of a Buddhist text (see Paul Pelliot, “Meou-tseu ou les doutes levés: Traduit et annoté,” *T'oung Pao* 19 [1920]: 408–11); the first published Japanese study was Koyanagi Shigeta 小柳司氣太, “Go Kan jo ‘Jō Kai den’ no Taihei shōryō sho ni tsuite 《後漢書》「襄楷傳」の《太平清領書》について,” in *Tōyōshi ronsō* 東洋史論叢, ed. Kuwabara hakushi kanreki kinen kai 桑原博士還曆紀念會 (Kyōto: Kōbundō 弘文堂, 1930), 141–71; and the first published Chinese study was Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, “Du *Taiping jing* shu suo jian 讀《太平經》書所見,” *Guoxue jikan* 國學季刊 5.1 (1935): 7–38. The most complete published bibliography of 20th century TPJ studies is still the list appearing in Chen Ligui 陳麗桂, ed., *Liang Han zhuzi yanjiu lunzhu mulu* 兩漢諸子研究論著目錄: 1912–1996 (Taibei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin 漢學研究中心, 1998): 391–407 (references no. 5227–5431). On the historiography of TPJ studies, see n. 10 below.

² Burchard J. Mansvelt Beck, in “The Date of the *Taiping Jing*,” *T'oung Pao* 66.4–5 (1980): 149–82, has summed up and discussed theories (mostly Japanese) concerning the dating of the TPJ. I have suggested in my doctoral thesis that, since all first-hand material is lost—with the exception of the fragmentary MS from Dunhuang—one should clearly distinguish the historical dating of the material (edited in the Ming collection of Taoist scriptures) from the dating of the ideas expressed in it. As I tried to show, these ideas reflect an *episteme* common to early imperial China. See Grégoire Espeset, “Cosmologie et trifonctionnalité dans l'idéologie du *Livre de la Grande paix* (*Taiping jing* 太平經)” (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris 7-Denis Diderot, 2002), 359–89. So, in the end, I concur with Mansvelt Beck's conclusions, as well as with those of most modern Eastern and Western specialists of the TPJ.

³ The following abbreviations are used:

CTT	Kristofer Schipper, ed., <i>Concordance du Tao-tsang: titres des ouvrages</i> (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1975).
MS	manuscript
TPJ	<i>Taiping jing</i> 太平經 (ZD fasc. no. 748–55, CTT 1101, <i>juan</i> no. 35–119)
TPJC	<i>Taiping jing chao</i> 太平經鈔 (ZD fasc. no. 746–7, CTT 1101, <i>juan</i> no. 1–10)
ZD	<i>Zhengtong daoze</i> 正統道藏 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1923–26).

References to the chapters of the TPJ follow the protocol: <section/*juan*/chapter>. The TPJ in the Taoist Canon is not divided into “sections” (*bu* 部) but the table of contents of the Dunhuang 敦煌 MS Stein 4226 (entitled

related to a religion, this document was always considered a specifically religious text by Western research and therefore for a long time isolated from the study of the history of Chinese thought and relegated to missionaries.⁴ But some recent studies tend to prove that the TPJ foreshadowed “religious Taoism” (i.e. *daojiao* 道教) and indeed contributed to its formation rather than constituting its earliest known written manifestation.⁵ On this view, the TPJ and the entire scriptural tradition which the TPJ embodies is one of the keys to a better understanding of the changes in Chinese culture that accompanied the creation of a centralized imperial State, namely, the shift from a situation of remarkable intellectual profusion and liberty to a situation of submission to an orthodoxy and, to some extent, of literary standardization.⁶

“second *juan* of the Great Peace section 太平部卷第二”) shows that the TPJ in the *Zhengtong daoze* partly preserves five out of ten sections of the 7th century scripture: sections *bing* 丙部, *ding* 丁部, *wu* 戊部, *ji* 己部, and *geng* 庚部. On the MS Stein 4226, see Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, “Tonkô bon *Taiheikyô* ni tsuite 敦煌本《太平經》について,” *Tôyô bunka kenkyûjo kiyô* 東洋文化研究所紀要 22 (1961): 1–103, reedited in *Dôkyô to bukkyô* 道教と佛教, vol. 2 (Tôkyô: Kokusho kankôkai, 1970), 9–114; Wang Ming 王明, “*Taiping jing* mulu kao 《太平經》目錄考,” *Wenshi* 文史 4 (1965): 19–34; Kusuyama Haruki 楠山春樹, “*Taiheikyô* rui 《太平經》類,” in *Tonkô to Chûgoku dôkyô* 敦煌と中國道教, ed. Tsukamoto Zenryu 塚本善隆 (Tôkyô: Daitô shuppansha 大東出版社, 1983), 119–35; Tsukamoto Zenryu, “Tonkô isho ‘Taiheibu kan daini’ ni tsuite 敦煌遺書「太平部卷第二」について,” in *Dôka shisô to dôkyô* 道家思想と道教 (Tôkyô: Hirakawa shuppansha 平河出版社, 1992), 205–22; and Ôfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, “Tonkô shôhon S. 4226 ‘Taiheibu kan daini’ ni tsuite 敦煌鈔本S四二二六「太平部卷第二」について,” in *Dôkyô to sono kyôten: dôkyôshi no kenkyû: sono ni* 道教とその經典。道教史の研究。其の二 (Tôkyô: Sôbunsha 創文社, 1997), 507–56.

References to the TPJC follow the usual protocol: <*juan*.page>. The TPJC is an abstract of the TPJ, in ten *juan*, which may date back to the 10th century; see Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 and Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬, eds., *Daoze tiyao* 道藏提要 (2nd edition, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1995; 1st edition 1991): 843–46. Each *juan* of the TPJC corresponds to one section (*bu*) in the table of contents of the TPJ from Dunhuang MS S. 4226, with the exception of *juan* 1, for which a medley of Shangqing 上清 sources was later substituted; see Wang Ming, “Lun *Taiping jing* chao ‘jia bu’ zhi wei 論《太平經鈔》「甲部」之偽,” *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 18 (1948): 375–84; Li Gang 李剛, “Ye lun *Taiping jing* chao ‘jia bu’ ji qi yu daojiao Shangqing pai zhi guanxi 也論《太平經鈔》「甲部」及其與道教上清派之關係,” *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 4 (1994): 284–99. Thus the TPJC today preserves abstracts of four out of the five missing sections of the extant TPJ: sections *jia* 甲部 (*juan* 10), *yi* 乙部 (*juan* 2), *xin* 辛部 (*juan* 8), and *ren* 壬部 (*juan* 9); the last section of the TPJ (*gui* 癸部) and its TPJC abstract are both lost.

⁴ The earliest mention of the TPJ in a Western source seems to appear in the French Jesuit L. Wiegier’s catalogue of Taoist scriptures. Wiegier’s opinion on the TPJ deserves to be quoted *in extenso*: “T’ ai-p’ing-king [*Taiping jing*], primitivement 119 chapitres, dont 20 sont perdus. Sorte de somme, de valeur plus que médiocre, quoiqu’ on prétende qu’elle fut révélée par Lao-tzeu [Laozi 老子] en personne. Contient les sujets ordinaires, surtout des formules, pour vivre en paix, sans souffrances”; see Léon Wiegier, *Taoïsme*, vol. 1 (Hien-hien [Ho-kien-fou]: Imprimerie de la Mission, 1911), 175.

⁵ See, for instance, Chen Ligui 陳麗桂, “Cong *Taiping jing* kan daojiao dui Huang-Lao lilun de fuhui yu zhuanhua 從《太平經》看道教對黃老理論的附會與轉化,” *Zhongguo xueshu niankan* 中國學術年刊 16 (1995): 27–52.

⁶ The burning of books, however limited, decreed in 213 B.C.E. by Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, founder of the Chinese empire, was the first blow from the State to freedom of expression and criticism of the government in China; see Derk Bodde, “The state and empire of Ch’in,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69–72 (“Burning of books and execution of the literati”); Jens Østergård Petersen, “Which Books Did the First Emperor of Ch’in Burn? On the Meaning of *Pai Chia* in Early Chinese Sources,” *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995): 1–52; and Nicolas Zufferey, “Le Premier Empereur et les lettrés: L’exécution de 212 avant J.-C.,” *Études Chinoises* 16.1 (1997): 59–98. Under the Han, the emergence of an official orthodoxy appealing to the Confucian legacy and the proscription of apocryphal writings (*weishu* 緯書) from A.D. 217 onwards at the latest confirmed the political control of intellectual production in China. On the emergence of the Confucian orthodoxy, see Anne Cheng, “La trame et la chaîne: Aux origines de la constitution d’un corpus canonique au sein de la tradition confucéenne,” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 5 (1984): 13–26; *Étude sur le confucianisme Han: L’élaboration d’une tradition exégétique sur les classiques* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1985); Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 337–62. On the earliest proscription of *weishu*, see Jack L. Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (*Ch’an-wei*) Texts of the Han Dynasty” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1966): 404.

We are now aware of the part played by literacy, greatly expanded throughout the Han period, in the formation process of the imperial State in China:⁷ the authors of the Great Peace corpus raised the issues of the nature, origin, preservation, and transmission of knowledge at a decisive moment in the political and social history of China.

The social, moral, and cosmic decline which is dramatically deplored throughout the TPJ is described as the result of errors accumulated by men since the earliest ages,⁸ and it devolves upon men to remedy this disgrace by reverting to the state of original perfection referred to by the term *taiping* 太平, “Great Peace.”⁹ However, the conduct of men of today, like that of their ancestors, frequently ends in fault (*guo* 過), mostly because of ignorance (*yu* 愚): ignorance of the rules presiding over the universal/cosmic order, ignorance of the perpetrated faults, and ignorance of the gravity (*zhong* 重) of the faults—all often admitted in the text.

Much of the TPJ is structured as dialogues between a “Master” (*shi* 師), a fictitious orator through whom the authors of the TPJ speak, and his disciples. The disciples, first and foremost, embody ignorance. The master often calls them *yusheng* 愚生, “stupid students,” and the goal of the lessons which constitute the successive steps of his teaching is none other than to put an end to ignorance. Hence epistemology logically assumes a crucial role in the *Scripture of Great Peace*, yet it is one among the themes which have been underestimated since modern TPJ studies began in the early 1930s.¹⁰ Among the few scholars who took some interest in this aspect of the TPJ should be mentioned Max Kaltenmark, who first contributed his depiction of the content of the TPJ to an international conference in 1972;¹¹ Hachiya

⁷ See Poo Mu-chou, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998): 179–85; and Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 4–12.

⁸ This is the “inherited burden” (*chengfu* 承負), a concept peculiar to the TPJ; on which, see Barbara Hendrischke, “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the *Taiping Jing*,” *East Asian History* 2 (1991): 1–30; and Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 39–44. On the issue of the moralization of cosmology in Han times, see also Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), a valuable essay in which the TPJ is not mentioned.

⁹ For the various ideas conveyed by the term *taiping*, see Barbara Hendrischke, “The Daoist Utopia of Great Peace,” *Oriens Extremus* 35th year, 1–2 (1992): 61–91.

¹⁰ For historiographical surveys of 20th-century study of the TPJ, see Barbara Hendrischke, “Chinese Research into Daoism after the Cultural Revolution,” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 38.1 (1984): 32–36; Li Fengmao 李豐楙, “Dangqian *Taiping jing* yanjiu de chengguo ji zhanwang 當前《太平經》研究的成果及展望,” in Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, *Daojiao xinlun* 道教新論 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng 臺灣學生, 1991), 325–34; Lai Chi Tim 黎志添, “Shiping Zhongguo xuezheng guanyu *Taiping jing* de yanjiu 試評中國學者關於《太平經》的研究,” *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 5 (1996): 297–317; and Lin Fu-shih 林富士, “Shilun *Taiping jing* de zhuzhi yu xingzhi 試論《太平經》的主旨與性質,” *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 69.2 (1998): 208–11.

¹¹ See Max Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna K. Seidel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 24–29 (“*The Revelation and the Texts*”). Kaltenmark’s paper, translated into Japanese by Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅, was to be published first in 1977 in the Japanese volume derived from the conference (“*Taiheikyō no riron* 《太平經》の理論,” in *Dōkyō no sōgōteki kenkyū* 道教の総合的研究, ed. Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫 [Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai 國書刊行會, 1977], 220–51); and a Chinese translation by Tian Xingxiang 田杏香 was published later on in Taiwan (“*Taiping jing* de yishi xingtai 《太平經》的意識型態,” *Daojiao wenhua* 道教文化 53.5.5 [1992]: 3–17). These two translations in Asian languages bear witness to the lasting popularity of Kaltenmark’s paper which provides a good résumé of the theory of the gathering of texts with a view to their rectification, one of the key ideas of the TPJ, as we shall see.

Kunio;¹² Jens Østergård Petersen;¹³ and Chen Lin.¹⁴ As a result, though it seems that most of the field has already been marked out, such investigations prove incomplete. Although the theme of writing attracted the attention of these four scholars, orality in the TPJ, on the other hand, remains undiscussed. Issues relating to the relationship between orality and writing have been thought to exclusively belong to ethnologists and anthropologists who investigate the specific field of cultures of oral tradition belatedly confronted with writing, as exemplified by Black Africa.¹⁵ As far as Chinese civilization is concerned, writing has now become one of the favorite topics of sinology worldwide but the study of orality has focused on songs, ballads, and poetry (including the *Shijing* 詩經), some categories of narratives (including Buddhist), and the still appealing category of myths—but such issues as the “function” of orality and writing in the earliest stages of the development of Chinese civilization remain debated.¹⁶ As for “religious studies,” this issue is closely linked to revealed knowledge—i.e. knowledge transmitted to men by supernatural instances—and texts and their transmission. In the case of Taoism, modern studies have shown that the transmission of texts from master to disciple came along with the transmis-

¹² See Hachiya Kunio 蜂屋邦夫, “*Taiheikyô* ni okeru genji bunsho: kyô, shû, tsû no shisô 《太平經》における言辭文書。共、集、通の思想,” *Tôyô bunka kenkyûjo kiyô* 92 (1983): 35–81. Hachiya Kunio’s study, which arises in a different sinological context and shows a much accurate understanding of the relevant material, is divided in three parts. The first part (ibid., 39–43) describes the origin of texts and the four stages of their transmission, from Heaven to master, disciple, prince and people—one of the possible syntheses of the models appearing more or less explicitly in the material (for instance, in chapter 6/102/166, the transmission of the master’s revelations obeys a ternary process which responds to the emblematic 天地人 triad: the master/Heaven, the disciples/Earth, and people/Man [462.2–4]). The second part (ibid., 44–53) characterizes two spheres corresponding to two kinds of writings: a heavenly sphere, whose writings are made obvious to men as astronomical phenomena (*tianwen* 天文), and a human sphere, whose writings divide in orthodox or correct (*zheng* 正) and heterodox or perverted (*xie* 邪) texts. Hachiya’s convincing thesis (ibid., 47–49, 52–53) assumes that both spheres meet around the three associated concepts of “community” (*gong* 共), “collection” (*ji* 集), and “pervasiveness” (*tong* 通). Ambivalence of writing in the human world is rightly stressed (ibid., 45) but, as in Kaltenmark’s paper, the specificity of the master’s text, merely ranked in the sphere of human writings, remains unclear. The third part (ibid., 54–55) does not deal with the main theme but depicts the thematic content of section *geng* 庚 (7th), which belongs to a secondary textual strata (see n. 61 below).

¹³ See Jens Østergård Petersen, “The Anti-Messianism of the *Taiping jing*,” *Studies in Central & East Asian Religions/ Journal of The Seminar for Buddhist Studies* 3 (1990): 20–27 (“*The Collation of a Supreme Scripture*”). Petersen rightly points out the opposition between knowledge gathered up collectively and theories from a single man, which, in his view, is one of the evidences of the “anti-messianism” of the early TPJ, then the passage ends up abruptly as Petersen amusingly remarks that the TPJ sees the Emperor as a mere “editor-in-chief” of the “Supreme Scripture” to be edited (ibid., 27).

¹⁴ See Chen Lin 陳林, “Zhengwen zhengci yi xing taiping: *Taiping jing* wen zhi taiping sixiang qianyi 正文正辭以興太平。《太平經》文治太平思想淺議,” *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 47.2 (2000): 16–21. Chen’s study, which focuses on the opposition between orthodox/correct and heterodox/perverted texts, shows how the former may lead the world toward the state of Great Peace and introduces the distinction between writings from common men and the text of the master, the only one among human writings which embodies and conveys universal laws (*tian di gefa* 天地格法). Orality and its dimension in religious context are briefly dealt with (ibid., 19–20), with a casual reference to the ideas of Jacques Derrida (“法國當代思想家德里達”) with regard to the language issue—“sound and sign,” “word and writing,” “presence and absence,” an obvious allusion to the French thinker’s *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

¹⁵ See, among others, Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). But, when turning to China, the same author excludes orality; see Jack Goody, “Religion and Writing in Southern China,” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan minzuxue yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院民族學研究所集刊 82 (1996): 1–18.

¹⁶ A point which emerges from Olivier Venture, “Étude d’un emploi rituel de l’écrit dans la Chine archaïque (XIIIe–VIIIe siècle avant notre ère): Réflexion sur les matériaux épigraphiques des Shang et des Zhou occidentaux” (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris 7, 2002), 325–32.

sion of oral material, essential to their understanding and which was gradually fixed in a written form,¹⁷ if not merely lost—and this is why so many texts in the Taoist Canon are bound to remain hermetic to us. Nevertheless, it is generally admitted that in Chinese religion, writing is given prevalence over orality.¹⁸ The TPJ seems to be no exception to the rule, but the question does not boil down to a mere binary alternative and we shall see that, in the TPJ, epistemology has to deal with both defective vehicles of information.

1. *Logos* and revealed knowledge

In the scriptural tradition of Great Peace as well as in religious Taoism as a whole, musical sounds (*yuesheng* 樂聲) are the expression par excellence of *logos*, i.e. the divine, cosmic Word.¹⁹ The TPJC (9.9a–b) states that “musical sounds rectify the language of Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth 樂聲正天地陰陽之語言也” [708.8–9],²⁰ hence, as the master text (chapter 3/50/77) tells us, the need for an adviser “specialized in music 長於聲音” [184.3] by the supreme ruler’s side, someone who will guarantee that his rule remains in perfect accordance with universal harmony and help him to lead the country to general welfare. Therefore, sounds have a powerful efficacy but their actual consequences may contrast strongly, as the TPJC (9.9b) explains:

Music, through resonance, attracts events [of a similar nature], just as, of the sounds emitted by men when opening their mouths, some are good, and some are bad; good ones lead to good fortune, and bad ones lead to misfortune. [708.7–8]
夫樂乃以音響召事，比若人開口出聲，有好有惡。善者致吉，惡者致凶。

But Heaven and Earth do not address Man by means of musical sounds or regular

¹⁷ See, for instance, Isabelle Robinet, “Nature et rôle du maître spirituel dans le taoïsme non liturgique,” in *Maître et disciples dans les traditions religieuses*, ed. Michel Meslin (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 37–50.

¹⁸ See John Lagerwey, “The Oral and the Written in Chinese and Western Religion,” in *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien: Festschrift für Hans Steininger zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans-Hermann Schmidt (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985), 308.

¹⁹ On the issue of music in the TPJ, see Li Yangzheng 李養正, “*Taiping jing* zhong de yinyue lilun 《太平經》中的音樂理論,” *Daoxie huikan* 道協會刊 17 (1985): 100–106; and Jan Yün-Hua 冉雲華, “The Bridge between Man and Cosmos: The philosophical foundation of music in the *T'ai P'ing ching*,” in *Studies of Taoist Rituals and Music of Today*, ed. Tsao Pen-Yeh and Daniel P. L. Law (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1989), 15–27.

²⁰ Textual references to the TPJ between brackets, following the protocol: [page.line], refer to Wang Ming’s colated edition, “*Taiping jing* hejiao 太平經合校, 2nd edition (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1979; 1st edition: 1960). Problems relating to punctuation in Wang’s edition were located and corrected in Takahashi Tadahiko 高橋忠彦, “*Taiheikyô gôkô* no hiôten ni tsuite 「太平經合校」の標點について,” *Tôkyô gakugei daigaku kiyô: jinbun kagaku* 東京學藝大學紀要：人文科學 36 (1985): 231–44; various other corrections were published in Chen Zengyue 陳增岳, “*Taiping jing hejiao* shiyi 《太平經合校》拾遺,” *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教 31.3 (1994): 25–28; and “*Taiping jing hejiao* buji 《太平經合校》補記,” *Wenxian* 文獻 62.4 (1994): 219–28. But the major flaw of Wang’s edition is that the full table of content of the Dunhuang MS Stein 4226 (see n. 1 above), unfortunately published in Japan by Yoshioka Yoshitoyo the year following the publication of the *Taiping jing hejiao* in China, is virtually ignored, even in the 1979 reissue. Yu Liming’s 俞理明 recently published edition, “*Taiping jing* zhengdu 《太平經》正讀 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe 巴蜀書社, 2001), should be consulted for all linguistic problems; it also includes the full content of MS S. 4226; unfortunately, Yu has omitted Wang’s marginal notes in his edition and does not distinguish between the master source (i.e. the TPJ itself) and the TPJC (a later, edited abstract version; see n. 3 above).

discourse: the task of informing Man of cosmic matters devolves on two embodiments of *logos*, Saints (*shengren* 聖人) and Sainly Masters (*shengshi* 聖師).²¹ The origin of their knowledge may then be identified with revelation, and thus revelation constitutes the primary condition of the entire epistemological theory of the TPJ. In the brief autobiographical account from chapter 3/39/50 where the master tells his disciples about his own apprenticeship and the way knowledge was transmitted to him, the revealed origin of what he hands down to them now is clearly explained:

When I began to study, I also asked questions of masters—not of a single man. (After) a long, long time, having achieved Tao and accomplished Virtue, above I could unite my will with Heaven. Afterwards I knew what Heaven wished to say. Heaven has essential spirits of the Great Yang come and instruct me, and makes me speak. Therefore, it is Heaven that I have for a master.²² [70.4–5]
吾始學之時，同問於師，非一人也。久久道成德就，迺得上與天合意，迺後知天所欲言。天使太陽之精神來告吾，使吾語。故吾者，迺以天為師。

The master states in several places that he has humbly received the Tao from Heaven.²³ All these passages point to what is best called a final (in the master's eyes) revelation. The master then claims to be in possession of essential, perfect, and unaltered, knowledge, in a word: Truth. Reverting to Heaven, the origin of all things, was the necessary condition for discovering and embracing again the "will of Heaven" which Man had wandered away from over the ages. This view partakes of the underlying ideology of the Great Peace tradition as a whole, which contrasts a logic of willful, conscious reversion to the Origin—an individual as well as collective process regarded as a cosmic panacea to any form of trouble and disorder—to a logic of the natural, historic propensity of all beings (and things) towards dispersion and decay.²⁴ However, the master also recognizes that human knowledge (whether it is of revealed origin or not is not made clear) has limits: "the heavenly Tao which governs Heaven is not totally knowable 天道治天，不可盡知也" [279.7] (chapter 5/70/106)—hence the impossibility to trust the words of a single man and the need

²¹ See TPJC, 7.31a: 天地不與人語也，故時時生聖人，生聖師，使傳其事。 [651.6–7]; 4.14b: 是故聖賢好天要文也。 [221.6]. Sages (*xianren* 賢人) deal specifically with written documents; see TPJ, chapter 3/42/56: 賢人職在理文書，皆授語。 [88.6–7]. Saints and Sages are ranked sixth and seventh in the ninefold human hierarchy (*jiuren* 九人) which is expounded in several passages from both the TPJ and TPJC. Chapter 3/42/56 lists the following degrees: 1: Incorporeal Divine Men who accumulated pneuma (*wuxing weiqi zhi shenren* 無形委氣之神人); 2: Divine Men (*shenren* 神人 or *da* 大 *shenren*); 3: Real Men (*zhenren*); 4: Immortals (*xianren* 仙人); 5: Men of the Tao (*daoren* 道人 or *da* 大 *daoren*); 6: Saints (*shengren*); 7: Sages (*xianren*); 8: common people (*fanmin* 凡民), called *shanren* 善人 ("benevolent men") or *liangmin* 良民 ("good people") in TPJC (4.14b); and 9: slaves (*nubi* 奴婢). In chapter 3/40/53, the same nine ranks are mentioned as successive stages of study (*xue* 學). A passage of the TPJC (4.15a–b) specifies that even a slave may reach the upper rank through assiduous study, i.e. revert to the sphere of pure pneuma—a belief consonant with the general ideology of Great Peace, as I have shown in "À vau-l'eau, à rebours ou l'ambivalence de la logique triadique dans l'idéologie du *Taiping jing* 太平經," in *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004): 61–95.

²² The expression *tian ming shi* 天命師 [716.4], "master commissioned by Heaven," appearing in the TPJC (9.19a), expresses in a like manner the heavenly—or, at least, claimed as such—origin and nature of the master's mission (in the religious sense of the term) here below. This is the way the alternative denomination of the master in the TPJ, *tianshi* 天師 ("Heavenly Master"), should be understood. The earliest occurrence of this syntagm seems to go back to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (24/69/7), a work which also contains the expression: "to have Heaven for a master 以天為師" (25/73/13); I quote the version edited by D.C. Lau, *A Concordance to the Zhuangzi/Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin* 莊子逐字索引 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2000).

²³ See, for instance, chapter 6/93/141: 是故吾敬受此道於天 [401.3].

²⁴ See my study of the ideology of the TPJ (2004).

to undertake a general process of revision of all written knowledge of all periods, as we shall see further on. The value of such revelations bestowed upon Man, “heavenly treasures [such as] mysterious charts and documents 天寶祕圖書,” is beyond compare and opposed by the authors of the TPJ to the earthly, material value of “precious objects, jades, and gold 珍物璧玉金錢” [129.5–6] (chapter 3/46/62). Their advent is not totally within the competence of Man but responds to human moral conduct; when heavenly or divine writings or books (*tianshu* 天書 or *shenshu* 神書)²⁵ “are willing to appear 欲出” and circulate among men, their way should not be blocked.²⁶

The function of revealed “texts” (*wen* 文) is best described in the following ternary process: “it is Heaven which makes them, the master who clarifies them, the sovereign who puts them into practice 造之者天，明之者師，行之者帝王” [704.12–3] (TPJC: 9.5a). In this process, the master plays a key role between the origin of revelation and its concrete finality, since the ruler, without the guidance from a master, is unable to use revealed knowledge (*ibid.*). Such an assertion shows the high opinion the authors of the *Taiping* corpus have of the epistemological role of the master and of the social and political position they expect him to occupy. Moreover, all documents (*tushu* 圖書) sent out by Heaven as an auspicious response (*ruiying* 瑞應) to the benevolence (*shan* 善) of the ruler’s thoughts express the cosmic sanction of power (TPJC: 2.14b): who is better qualified than a Heavenly Master to legitimate the reign of the ruler by authenticating such documents?²⁷

However, the content of revelation, spoken or written, as well as of the literary production of men, is generally referred to as “*yan* 言,” i.e. “word,” “speech,” “utterance” (TPJC: 8.10a–b). For example, the “versified rhymes of children” spreading among past and present people are “words” induced by the changes of Heaven,²⁸ and the master calls the content of his teachings “the words of all spirits in Heaven 天上諸神言” [350.12]. Such revealed words, because of their nature, should not be put to test (勿試神言 [578.13]), unlike material of human origin. Elsewhere, mundane men (俗間之人) are stigmatized for not acknowledging “the content of the writings of Heaven 天書言” [621.12] (chapter 7/114/202).

²⁵ The TPJ explicitly states that “Heaven transmits Its talk 天傳其談” by means of *shenshu* [174.8] while *tianshu* sometimes refers to *tianwen ji* 天文記, i.e. “astronomical records” in which should be registered all cosmic phenomena and cycles (see, for instance, chapter 3/50/73). But *shenshu* (14 occurrences in the extant material) may also be interpreted as an echo of the account of the revelation of one of the earliest *Taiping* texts, the *Taiping qingling shu* 太平清領書 (Book of pure instructions of Great Peace), under the reign of Emperor Shun 順 (A.D. 125–144) of the Eastern Han; see *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), 30B.1084. This *Taiping qingling shu* was submitted to the throne but first rejected on pretext of not being in conformity with the Classics (*jing* 經), then submitted again by Xiang Kai 襄楷 under Emperor Huan’s 桓 reign (146–167) and approved; but Xiang Kai was sacked by the faction of eunuchs (A.D. 166). See Rafe De Crespigny, *Portents of Protest in the Later Han Dynasty: The Memorials of Hsiang K’ai to Emperor Huan* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), and “Politics and Philosophy under the Government of Emperor Huan 159–168 A.D.,” *T’oung Pao* 66.1–3 (1980): 41–83.

²⁶ See chapter 4/55/83: 神書欲出，亦不可閉藏。 [211.4].

²⁷ On the part played by religion in the legitimization of political power in China, see John Lagerwey, “Taoist Ritual Space and Dynastic Legitimacy,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 87–94, and “Rituel taoïste et légitimité dynastique,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 84 (1997): 99–109.

²⁸ See chapter 3/50/71: 夫古今百姓行兒歌詩者，天變動使其有言 [174.8]. These “rhymes” were believed to foretell, in sibylline terms, such political events as the rise and fall of emperors and dynasties.

But the *Taiping* corpus nonetheless states repeatedly that what Heaven bestows upon Man is “written documents 文書” (TPJC: 6.19b), such as the *Hetu* 河圖 (River Chart) and the *Luoshu* 洛書 (Writ of the Luo) conveyed to men in an already fixed, graphic form, by two supernatural animals.²⁹ Thus written signs or glyphs are considered the ideal condensation of *logos*. So what part is left to orality if transcendent knowledge descends from Heaven as glyphs?

2. Orality between performativity and apophasis

The chapter 3/50/75, entitled “Text of divine invocations” (“Shenzhu wen 神祝文”), gives the reader a clue to the peculiarity of orality in the TPJ:

Essential utterances of divine Saints permanently in Heaven are at times transmitted to men. Spoken, they are used to make divine officials come and go in response to pneuma (*qi* 氣). People who get them call them “divine invocations.” Invocations which hit the mark one hundred times out of one hundred and ten times out of ten are the original texts of spirits in Heaven transmitted as canonical phrases. These invocations have the ability to make spirits mysteriously expel illness. Gather all [invocations] which hit the mark ten times out of ten, use them, and none towards whom they are directed will not be cured; simply spoken, they cure disease. These are the “prophetic utterances of spirits in Heaven” which good masters and sovereigns should use, collected in a volume entitled *Zhuchen shu* 祝讖書 (Book of invocations and prophecies). It is by summoning and employing a multitude of spirits that these [invocations] cure ten times [out of ten]. With those which hit the mark nine times out of ten, true spirits do not come [but] middle spirits; high ministers have them. With those which hit the mark eight times out of ten, it is human spirits which come; the well-ruled people has them. These are the utterances of spirits in Heaven used to summon spirits by name. At times they leak down to Earth; men of the Tao get to know them, transmit them orally to each other, and thus are capable of curing disease. If they were to use words of Man, they would not be able to cure disease. [181.3–9]

天上有常神聖要語，時下授人。以言用使神吏應氣而往來也。人民得之謂為神祝也。祝也，祝百中百，祝十中十，祝是天上神本文傳經辭也。其祝有可使神佐為除疾。皆聚十中者，用之，所向無不愈者也。但以言愈病，此天上神讖語也，良師帝王所宜用也，集以為卷，因名為祝讖書也。是乃所以召群神使之，故十愈也。十九中者，真神不到，中神到，大臣有也。十八中者，人神至，治民有也。此者，天上神語也，本以召呼神也，相名字時，時下泄地，道人得知之，傳以相語，故能以治病。如使行人之言，不能治愈病也。

So if cosmic writing is the very embodiment of the *logos*, divine speech is nothing less than its performative medium, in other words the efficacy of *logos*, as opposed to ordinary, inefficient and, as we shall see, corrupting human speech. But some kinds of divine speeches are delusive and men should beware particularly of the ill-omened words and vain discourses (*yaoyan wangyu* 妖言妄語) uttered by “perverse, heterodox spirits, *xieshen* 邪神” [440.5–6] (chapter 6/98/156).

²⁹ A horse (or dragon-horse) and a tortoise springing out from the waters of the Yellow River and River Luo; see John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 82–87. Both documents are mentioned, in varying expressions (*heluo* 河洛, *heluo* 河維 or *hetu luoshu* 河圖洛書), in the TPJ (41.3a, 4a; 43.2b; 47.11a; 48.7a; 88.1b; 91.1a; 102.3a; 112.4b) and TPJC (3.27a; 6.11b). On their relationship with the theme of “Great Peace” during the Han era, see Mashima Jun’ichi 間島潤一, “Taihei to Kato, *Rakusho*: Zen Kan Butei ki no taihei kokka no kôsô 太平と《河圖》、《洛書》。前漢武帝期の太平國家の構想,” *Tôhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 80 (1992): 1–14.

From the symbolico-historical point of view of the TPJ, orality is believed to have filled the epistemological sphere in the Golden Age of Antiquity, as we shall see, before writing whose advent coincided with the final loss of the Tao by Man (TPJC: 9.14b). In the TPJ we are told that men of High Antiquity (chapter 7/110/179) and Middle Antiquity³⁰ (chapter 3/48/65) lived, and governed, without texts (*wu wen* 無文) but that words circulated without loss thanks to their sincerity (*cheng* 誠) and trustworthiness (*xin* 信). But such perfect orality demands, as chapter 5/69/105 states with regard to prophecies (*chen* 讖), that not a single word should ever be modified during ten thousand successive generations,³¹ because a gradual corruption of words is to be feared when they circulate in a single spoken form.

In chapter 3/37/48, the master shows how the loss of truth partakes of the accumulation of “inherited burden” (*chengfu* 承負), as falsehood (*wei* 偽) spreads from incorrect (邪不實) words told by a single master to ten disciples who, in turn, will mislead one hundred people, and so on exponentially until the whole of manhood falls into what European *Sancta Inquisitio* would have called “heresy” (*xieshuo* 邪說 [58.4–6]).³² So, the master goes on to say, the cosmic consequences of the utterances of a single individual will be “disorder in the orthodox signs of Heaven 亂天正文” (i.e. astronomical anomalies) and “a great illness” here below (天下以為大病) [58.7–8]. In the same way, “empty words 空虛言” spread by a single man on the marketplace of the capital and repeated all around by people will finally overwhelm manhood with deception (*qi* 欺) [58.10–3]. Elsewhere, the audience is warned against people who like eloquence or emphatic speech (大言), for they are useless to the ruler, just like the vain discourses of sycophants (佞人) who know “numerous words 數言” but achieve no actual results and trouble the Tao [299.4–6]³³ (chapter 5/72/110). Uncontrolled, deviant, and inaccurate orality thus proves detrimental to the entire universe.³⁴

As we can see, verbal inflation proves hazardous to the transmission of revealed knowledge. Chapter 3/40/53 deplors the verbal excesses of men (人言太多) and prompts them to revert to the original essentials of Tao (當還反其本要) [76.1–2]. An illustration of this theory is provided by the description of a ten-phase process of the perversion of knowledge through repeated transmissions (“uttered once 一言,”

³⁰ The first and second of three successive ages (*sangu* 三古) in the TPJ, namely a Golden Age of High Antiquity (*shanggu* 上古), then an age of decline, Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu* 中古), and then the period contemporaneous with the master/orator, known as Low Antiquity (*xiagu* 下古). But the text also admits of four successive series of reigns: the ideal epoch of the Three Augusts (*sanhuang* 三皇) and the Five Emperors (*wudi* 五帝), the age of decline of the Three Kings (*sanwang* 三王), and the decadent age of the Five Hegemons (*wuba* 五霸). The correspondence between the Three Ages and the four series of reigns is subject to variations and never clearly expounded. One of the possible reasons for this is that these classifications here serve the text’s ideology of inexorable decline rather than they referring to “historiographical” models.

³¹ Chapter 5/69/105: 一言迺萬世不可易也。 [261.10].

³² For a similar theme in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, see Martin Svensson Ekström’s paper in the present volume, p. 129.

³³ In this passage, Wang Ming’s punctuation should be modified in accordance with Yu Liming, ed., “*Taiping jing*” *zhengdu*, 244.

³⁴ Even if two quotations of the TPJ in an early eleventh century anthology of Taoist works, Zhang Junfang’s 張君房 (ca. 961–1042) *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (CTT 1032), state that the speech of fools gives rise to calamities and harm which only affect fools themselves: 愚者出言為身災害·還以自傷 [735.9] (CTT 1032: 89.7a–b; 92.10b–11a). These two quotations are not found in the extant TPJ but may correspond to the title (probably incomplete) of chapter 10/159/339 in the Dunhuang MS S. 4226: “多言少決三百卅九” (l. 565). See also n. 43 below.

then “uttered and transmitted again 再轉言,” and so on until “uttered ten times 十言”) with its disastrous consequences [76.2–6]:

<i>phase no.:</i>	<i>textual condition:</i>	<i>epistemological (or other) correlation:</i>
1, 一言	original text 本文 ³⁵	–
2, 再轉言	philological glosses 章句	–
3, 三言	explanations 解難	wandering from truth 遠真
4, 四言	literary essays 文辭	–
5, 五言	–	falsehood 偽
6, 六言	–	deception 欺
7, 七言	–	squander 破
8, 八言	–	dispersal, wandering from the Tao 離散遠道
9, 九言	–	(great disorder 大亂)
10, 十言	transformation 改	(destruction 滅毀)

The final two phases overstep the bounds of epistemology and affect the social and political spheres. Orality proves a double-faced, dangerous medium when transferred from the heavenly sphere to the human world and its power is not peculiar to the revealed *logos* or the learned discourse of the withholders of knowledge but applies to orality as a whole. Henceforth the syntagm “Keeping the One” (*shouyi* 守一), which is already known to overlap Taoist as well as Buddhist meditation practices,³⁶ should also be understood in an epistemological context as “keeping *the word* one.”

Confronted with the dangers of orality regarded as an unavoidable cause of decay, apophysis may appear as a radical but safe way out. The TPJC (2.15a–b) condemns oral excesses³⁷ (which, besides, are said to exhaust the vital, physiologic principle of “essence,” 夫用口多者竭其精 [26.6]) as opposed to the quietness (*qingjing* 清靜) and silence (*wusheng* 無聲) of divinities (*shenling* 神靈). In chapter 6/98/157, the master logically advises his disciples:

Henceforth, to follow the Tao, concentrate your mind, keep your mouth closed,³⁸
and do not speak in vain. [443.9–444.1]
是故夫為道者，專汝心，閉汝口，毋妄言也。

³⁵ In late Six Dynasties or early Tang (Shangqing) Taoist historiography of the *Taiping* texts (see the preface attached to the ZD edition of the TPJ, the *Taiping jing fuwen xu* 太平經複文序, 1a–2a), this term was used to designate the divine, scriptural *materia prima* ultimately transmitted to Gan Ji 干吉 (also known as Yu Ji 于吉) and out of which the mundane TPJ “in 170 *juan* and 360 chapters” came into existence; in this special occurrence, it seems to refer to the (so far) indecipherable content of the four chapters 7/104/169 to 7/107/172 (see n. 82 below).

³⁶ See Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, “Bukkyō no zenpō to dōkyō no ‘shu’itsu’ 佛教の禪法と道教の「守一」,” in *Dōkyō to bukkyō*, vol. 3 (Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai, 1976), 287–314; Ding Yizhuang 丁貽莊 and Liu Dongmei 劉冬梅, “*Taiping jing zhong* ‘shouyi’ qianshi 《太平經》中「守一」淺釋,” *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 2 (1986): 67–73; Livia Kohn, “Guarding the One: Concentrative Meditation in Taoism,” in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, eds. Livia Kohn and Sakade Yoshinobu 坂出祥伸 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 125–58; and Yamada Toshiaki 山田利明, “*Taiheikyō ni okeru shu’itsu to sonshi* 《太平經》における守一と存思,” in *Rikuchō dōkyō girei no kenkyū* 六朝道教儀禮の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōhō shoten 東方書店, 1999), 27–48.

³⁷ Together with strength and martial excesses which are said respectively to “strain the body” and “harm the person”: 用力多者苦其形，用武者賊其身 [26.6–7].

³⁸ In chapter 5/71/108, which belongs to the third textual layer (see n. 61 below), obtaining longevity (*shou* 壽) is connected with the observance of the “precepts of the Tao” (*daojie* 道戒), and the Divine Man (*shenren*) advises the Real Man (*zhenren*) to “keep his mouth closed 閉口” so as not to let “transpire 泄” his essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神). Physiology and epistemology naturally meet around the idea of preserving the fundamental principles, which is nothing else than “keeping of the one” (*shouyi*) in terms of meditation.

In the same chapter, the master says that Heaven, Earth, the Four Seasons, Three Luminaries, and Five Agents—everything in the whole universe, including the world here below—“practice the Tao without speaking 行道而不言” [444.2–5]. And, a bit further on, he states anew that “[if one’s] mouth does not speak recklessly, [one] will be able to obtain the Tao 口不妄言則道可得也” [444.6]. Chapter 6/97/155 expresses an analogous warning:

Words should constitute models. Better to keep silent than to utter words which do not constitute canonical behavior. To make inaccurate statements is a grievous fault which cannot be removed.³⁹ [437.2–3]
 言當成法。言不成經，不若默也。舉言不中，罪深不除。

But how is teaching conceivable without the oral medium, especially in the case of a master whose spoken lessons and dialogues with disciples cover several hundred pages? As I have already suggested in the introduction, one of the basic functions of orality in the context of traditional Chinese religious education was to complement the transmission of scriptures by means of secret, spoken, supplementary material. In this regard, chapter 5/70/106, entitled “Xuezhe deshi 學者得失” (“What is appropriate to study and what is not”), values the “oral instructions of masters,” which disciples should not disobey (學於師口訣者，勿違其師言 [277.2]), since reading written documents oneself without the instructions of a master might lead to a separation from the guidance of the Tao.⁴⁰ But, beyond those “oral instructions,” what is the tenor of the master’s teaching? The answer is dialogue,⁴¹ or, more precisely, questions and answers: questions from the disciples tackling a new issue and answers from the master throwing light on the subject; or questions of the master about themes formerly lectured on, designed to check the improvement of his audience; or hesitating, frequently erroneous answers of the disciples calling for extra explanations from the master. In many instances, the master simply returns the questions of the disciples to them in order to have them speak erroneously before showing them the right way, or inversely to have them conceive correct knowledge themselves—one thinks of Socrates assisting one of the slaves of his pupil Meno to execute a basic geometrical

³⁹ That is, erased from the registers of moral conduct kept up to date by divine officials of the heavenly bureaucracy and on which depend the individual life allotment and afterlife status of men, as variously alluded to throughout *juan* no. 110–2 and no. 114 of the TPJ. See my paper “Criminalized abnormality, moral etiology, and redemptive suffering in the secondary strata of the *Taiping jing*.”

⁴⁰ 讀書見其意而守師求見訣示解者，是也。讀書不師訣反自言深獨知之者，非也，內失大道指意也。 [278.7–8].

⁴¹ The dialogue form is undoubtedly connected with the hermetic tradition of the Yellow Emperor as exemplified in the *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 but a thorough study of the issue has yet to be done. The dialogue parts of the TPJ have been tentatively discussed by Barbara Hendrischke in papers contributed to two conferences: “*Taiping jing* zhong tianshi yu dizi de duihua 《太平經》中天師與弟子的對話” (paper presented at the Second International Academic Conference on Taoist Culture 第二屆道家文化國際學術研討會, Luofu shan 羅浮山 [Guangdong], 28–31 December 1998), and “The Place of the *Scripture on Great Peace* in the Formation of Daoism” (paper presented at the International Conference on Religion and Chinese Society: The Transformation of a Field and Its Implication for the Study of Chinese Culture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 29 May–2 June 2000). An English translation of the former, entitled “The Dialogues between Master and Disciples in the *Scripture on Great Peace (Taiping Jing)*,” appears in *Daoyuan binfen lu* 道苑繽紛錄: *A Daoist Florilegium*, ed. Lee Cheuk Yin 李焯然 and Chan Man Sing 陳萬成 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2002), 185–234.

experiment step by step until the young man finally “remembers again” forgotten knowledge and gives birth to the correct rule himself.⁴²

In this fashion the TPJC shows how the efficacy of “conversion” (*hua* 化) and “education” (*jiaohua* 教化) depends on orality. “Benevolent masters,” said to appear on Earth at cosmically propitious times, “convert (their audience) to benevolence by means of benevolent speech 善師使善言善化” [651.7] (7.32a). But teachings which are morally condemnable are nevertheless loaded with power, for under unpropitious circumstances, when the Tao of Heaven is confused, “malevolent masters” appear and, in the same way, convert people to malevolence by means of malevolent speech (惡師使教化惡也 [651.7–8]; *ibid.*).⁴³ So orality proves double-faced in an educational context. It should be remembered, however, that the basic tool of the master’s teachings is only a stage in the epistemological program of the TPJ, for it is stated elsewhere that “learning benevolent speech does not compare with learning to put (it) into practice on oneself 習善言不若習行于身” (TPJC: 2.13b),⁴⁴ as we shall see further on.

After stating that “the heavenly Tao . . . is not totally knowable” (as quoted above), the master continues by saying that “it is not allowed to believe in the utterances of a single individual 不可聽信一人之言” [279.7] (chapter 5/70/106). For, as he explains elsewhere, the knowledge of a single individual, even a Sage, encompasses only one aspect (一面) of the meaning of the Heavenly Tao, and the words of such a man are consequently “biased” (*pian* 偏): following them would unavoidably lead to “shallowness” (*fuhua* 浮華) and ultimately provoke the usual set of general, cosmic disasters (chapter 3/50/72). Considering that the master seems hardly to tolerate any rival teacher other than his own (Heaven), such peremptory assertions may sound paradoxical; but they can also be interpreted as a rejection of the spontaneous, “prophetic” (in Max Weber’s words)⁴⁵ stage of religion as opposed to a stage of canonical and institutionalized religion. Not surprisingly, one of the features

⁴² Plato, *Meno*, 82a–85c; references are to W.R.M. Lamb, trans., *Plato*, vol. 2 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990). In this famous anecdote, here used by Plato to support his theory of *anamnēsis* or “remembrance” (*Meno*, 81c–d), Socrates—who reportedly compared himself to a midwife—uses “maieutics” to have Meno’s young slave solve the mathematical problem and to convince Meno of the validity of his own epistemological theory at the same time; see Michel Narcy, “Enseignement et dialectique dans le *Ménon*,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 90.4 (1969): 474–94; and Alexander Nehamas, “Meno’s Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985): 1–30. But rhetoric in the TPJ never goes this far, and the truth of the master is generally spoken in contrast with the (erring) common sense of the disciples.

⁴³ Though the second textual element I quote here does not contain the character *yan* 言, the symmetry and the theme of the passage both suggest that the tool of malevolent masters is “malevolent speech,” hence my translation. The syntagm *eyan* 惡言 is attested to in the TPJ, especially in chapters belonging to the third textual layer (see n. 61 below). Two quotations of the TPJ in the *Yunji qiqian* (see n. 34 above) deplore the scarcity of benevolent speech and the opposing abundance of malevolent speech: 善言無多·惡言無少 [735.5–9].

⁴⁴ In like manner, the TPJ (chapter 6/93/141) symmetrically opposes the unfruitfulness of speech to practice (人多效言乃不效行 [401.2]) and empty words to concrete realization (乃效信實·不效虛言也 [401.3]). Elsewhere (chapter 6/96/152), the master says: “My method does not consist in verifying words but in striving to verify practice; (for) how may one know that my Tao responds to Heaven and have faith in it (if) it is not practiced? 吾為道不試言也·乃求試行。不行之·安知吾道與天相應而信哉?” [421.10–1]. See also § 4. and 5. below.

⁴⁵ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, 4th edition, vol. 1, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1956 [1st edition 1922]), 268–75.

of subsequent elite religious Taoism will precisely be firm opposition to such uncontrolled forms of religiosity.⁴⁶

3. Writing: the ideal vehicle of revealed knowledge?

In chapter 4/54/81, the title of which is “No quarreling” (“Wu zhengsong 無爭訟”), the master says that for all beings in the universe to coexist harmoniously, they are required to stand at the place which befits them and they should be employed according to their actual abilities. Again we meet the idea of a specific language of the universe, for it is also required that the intentions of Heaven and Earth are clearly perceived by the sovereign. Thus is the master led to expound the respective “languages” of the four major ontological kingdoms—Heaven, Earth, Man, and the Ten thousand beings:

The written records of Heaven are the Three Luminaries, which rise and decline alternately so as to influence the sovereign of men. The graphic principles of Earth are mountains, rivers and roads; mountains spew vapor, water circulates in the veins [of Earth; all] decline and blossom, move, collapse and reform so as to influence differently the ministers of men. The speeches of Man are transmitted orally and written records are passed on. The Ten thousand beings, by speaking through [their cycles of] decline and blossoming, make men think and know them. [205.4–6]

天者，以三光為書文記，則一興一衰，以風為人君。地者，以山川阡陌為文理，山者吐氣，水通經脈，衰盛動移崩合，以風異為人臣。人者，以音言語相傳，書記文相推移。萬物者，以衰盛而談語，使人想而知之。

The master explains that all these “words” (*yan*) must circulate (*tong* 通) in order to avoid disasters. A disciple then remarks that, “in Antiquity, there was no literacy; how could [words] circulate? 古者無文，以何通之” [205.11]. The master replies by describing the appearing and disappearing of writing through the Three Ages⁴⁷ in response to the vicissitudes of cosmic pneuma and mankind: as men of Low Antiquity 下古 (i.e. today) suffer life span reductions because of their ignorance (*yu*) and are unable to remember things, writing becomes necessary, for “without writing, [men] would argue with each other, be unable to set each other right, and everyone would voice his own truth 無文且相辯訟，不能相正，各自言是” [206.4]. So, when orality meets its natural limits and allows the multiplication of competing truths, writing is called on to replace it as a vehicle of knowledge. Thus writing seems to be above all the fruit of necessity.

The transmitted material reflects the importance of this informational vehicle in the eyes of the propagators of the TPJ. Chapter 7/108/173 of the text enumerates “nineteen essential instructions 要訣十九條” which are actual “directions for use”

⁴⁶ Notably exemplified by “shamanistic” practices of spirit or demonic possession such as those dealt with extensively in Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 194–227. On the relationship between early institutionalized Taoism and popular forms of religion, see Rolf A. Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries,” in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna K. Seidel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 53–81.

⁴⁷ *Sangu* 三古; on which, see n. 30 above.

intended for the TPJ reader; ten of these instructions relate directly to writing.⁴⁸ The superior value of writing also appears in chapters 4/65/100 and 4/65/101, where it is stated that the favors of the sovereign should consist of texts for the Sages, food for the starving, and clothing for those who suffer from the cold: 見賢者賜以文，見飢者賜以食，見寒者賜以衣 [228.10]. “What kind of texts?,” a disciple asks. “Just assemble all written documents of the true Tao of all Three Ages,” the master replies, “take the best parts of their content and collect them to form a ‘Heavenly Scripture’ 但拘上古中古下古之真道文文書，取其中大善者，集之以為天經” [229.5]. The master adds that each and every Sage should be granted a copy of this book and recite it aloud (*songdu* 誦讀). But both chapters state explicitly that, in return, people who get “remarkable and extraordinary recipes 殊方異方” [230.3] (chapter 4/65/100) or “marvelous, extraordinary, and remarkable recipes, and texts (expounding) benevolent means 奇異殊方善道文” [231.1] (chapter 4/65/101) should not conceal (*ni* 匿) them for their own benefit but hand them over to the sovereign so as to help him to achieve longevity (*laoshou* 老壽).

However, a fundamental limit must be marked out between admissible texts and other ones, as the master says in an answer to a question from a disciple (chapter 4/65/100):

Other documents, which are not texts of the “orthodox Tao,” make eminent scholars become confused, are unprofitable to governmental affairs and are not [a way to] nourish one’s vital principle. Canonical writings, which eminent scholars recite daily, entail shallowness; this is why they are not acceptable.⁴⁹ [230.6–7] 他書非正道文，使賢儒迷迷，無益政事，非養其性。經書則浮淺，賢儒日誦之，故不可與之也。

Yet the master adds that the best parts of the “Sainly Canons 聖經” of the Three Ages may be collected and bestowed upon people in order to convert them to benevolence (*shan* 善), even if these texts do not deal with “the way to nourish [one’s] vital principle 養性之道.” The TPJC (8.5b–6a) states that households which accumulate “true texts and true Tao 真文真道” will subsequently survive through generations (*dushi* 度世), i.e. transcend the regular categories of life span (as expounded in

⁴⁸ Essential instruction no. 2 deals with a category of texts called “*sandao xingshu* 三道行書”; no. 4, with the rectification of ordinary texts; no. 5, with the reliability (*xin* 信) of the master’s writings and their practice; no. 9, with their complete understanding; no. 10, with the checking of their effectiveness; no. 14 and 15, with “collecting and collating” (*jujiao* 拘校; on which, see text and n. 62 below) various kinds of documents; no. 16, with the appearance of “real texts 真文” and the elimination of “heterodox, false texts 邪偽文”; no. 18, with talismanic characters to be ingested; and no. 19, again with writings in practice. See my tentative translation and analysis of this chapter in “Cosmologie et trifonctionnalité,” 342–53. The single published investigation of the purpose of this short chapter appears in Lin Fu-shih, “Shilun *Taiping jing* de zhuzhi yu xingzhi,” 216–26.

⁴⁹ According to Lian Denggang 連登崗, “Shi *Taiping jing* zhi ‘xianru,’ ‘shanru,’ ‘yimi’ 釋《太平經》之「賢儒」、「善儒」、「乙密」,” *Zhongguo yuwen* 中國語文 264.3 (1998): 222–23, *xianru* 賢儒 (“eminent scholars” in my translation) does not refer to Confucian scholars nor the educated here, but to learned individuals among Taoist followers themselves. According to Petersen (“Which Books Did the First Emperor of Ch’in Burn? . . .,” 34), the earliest uses of *ru* 儒 with special reference to Confucianism appear in the *Hou Han shu*, completed in 445 (for the evolution of the meaning of *ru* in pre-imperial and early imperial sources, see also Zufferey, “Le Premier Empereur et les lettrés . . .,” 80–95). Then does *jingshu* 經書 (“canonical writings” in my translation) explicitly allude to the Confucian classics?

the TPJC).⁵⁰ Inversely, households which accumulate perversions (*xie* 邪, also “heterodoxy”) will surely incur disaster.

In chapter 5/70/106, the master introduces another antithetic couple, “exoteric texts 外文” and “esoteric texts 內文,” which are opposite but complementary categories: we learn that esoteric texts allow one to shed light on exoteric texts while exoteric texts, which are connected with esoteric texts, allow one to check them in turn.⁵¹ The master neglects to deal any further with “exoteric texts,” a term which we may safely assume refers to material available to the profane regardless of any religious membership, but he warns the disciples not to associate “esoteric texts” with “prophecies 圖讖,” otherwise they would fail to understand their essential import (revelation) and end up in delusion [277.3–4].

Chapter 4/65/101 states that Saints and Sages of Antiquity valued “texts of Tao and Virtue 道德文” and used to set them in a high place while weapons and preparations for war (兵革戰備) were kept within reach but in a low place; so “if each individual who dwells alone sets texts on his bed while weapons are kept underneath, then barbarians will spontaneously submit themselves and brigands will vanish from day to day 一人獨居則投文於床上而兵居床下，如是則夷狄自降，盜賊日消滅矣” [231.11–2]. Such is the beneficent power of the written/the non-military (*wen* 文), as opposed—classically—to armament and the martial (*wu* 武), purveyors of social disorders, various abnormal phenomena, and general cosmic turmoil (chapter 4/65/99). So, in addition to its basically epistemological function, writing takes a remarkable part in the social sphere. Another example is given in chapter 6/93/137 where the master, in order to show how the smallest being in the universe has the power to “move” (*gandong* 感動) Heaven, says analogically that even the humblest victims of robbery are entitled to submit a memorial (*shang shu* 上書) to the Emperor, who will then decide on the proper action to be taken locally in response to this threat [385.4–7].⁵² Epistemological and social functions alike share a belief in the general circulation of information, goods, wealth, pneuma, etc., expressed repeatedly throughout the text.⁵³

The status of *wen*, however, is far from unambiguous in the various classifications provided throughout the TPJ. In chapter 4/65/101, for instance, *wen* is associated to a relative, if not clearly consummate state of decay, while Tao, on the upper level, is associated to High Antiquity and Virtue (*de* 德), to Middle Antiquity. As for the successive series of reigns (see n. 30 above), the Three Augusts are said to have ruled through Tao, the Five Emperors through Virtue, the Three Kings through *wen*, and the Five Hegemons through *wu* (chapter 7/115/205). Chapter 4/67/103

⁵⁰ I.e. 120, 80 and 60 years (TPJC: 2.11b–12a, 10.5a–b), or 120, 100, 80, 60, and 50 years (TPJC: 6.7a). The text (2.12a) adds that what is called “surviving through generations” (*dushi*) is “to transcend these [categories of] longevity,” notably as a result of “unceasing benevolent conduct”: 如行善不止，過此壽謂之度世 [23.4].

⁵¹ 以內文者，明其外文，以外文者，還考繫其內文也。 [279.11–12]. Exoteric and esoteric texts are in turn correlated with *waixue* 外學, “outer studies” (i.e. “Court studies 朝廷之學”) and *neixue* 內學, “inner studies” (to be undertaken “in retreat 入室”). Interestingly, the authors of the TPJ refrain from giving to one kind of study preeminence over the other as both are said to have their own achievements as well as their own limits; for instance, uncontrolled “outer studies” may entail shallowness (*fuhua*) and license with regard to proscriptions (不能自禁) while uncontrolled “inner studies” may divert from the orthodox way (不應正路) and lead to “great heterodoxy or perversion 大邪” [276.7–8].

⁵² But, not surprisingly indeed, memorials should never be submitted by a single individual, as we shall see further on (see § 4. below).

⁵³ As already pointed out by Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 35.

enumerates “ten methods 十法” to assist the rule of the sovereign; strikingly, *wen* only appears as model no. 8 and so ranks among the five lesser models against which the disciples and the reader are advised.⁵⁴

In the epistemological views of the TPJ, writing, just like orality, fails to serve perfectly as a vehicle of knowledge. Written documents are said to give birth to commentators who argue about the meaning of their content but fail to understand it (chapter 3/50/72). In two quotations of the TPJ in the *Yunji qiqian*, the abundance of “compositions produced by past and present Saints and Sages,” which are said “to fill up the space between Heaven and Earth” (古今聖賢也，出文辭滿天地之間 [735.6]), is criticized in the same way as verbal excesses, “*duo yan* 多言” (see § 2. above). The multiplicity of written documents—as well as deceiving (*qi* 欺) texts—entail shallowness (*fuhua*), confuse eminent scholars (*xianru* 賢儒; see n. 49 above), and causes wandering from the intentions of Tao; this is why “once Heaven has produced texts, words should not flow any more 天既生文，不可復流言也” [155.7] (chapter 3/48/65). Shallowness (*fuhua*) is clearly and repeatedly associated with “forged texts 偽文” (chapters 3/49/66 and 6/97/154), and deceiving texts are accused of depriving men of descent (chapter 3/50/68). The multiplicity of written documents is said to “dazzle 眩冥” men (chapter 6/98/158); and it is useless to accumulate books which prove useless to the sovereign (TPJC: 5.14b).

As we have seen before in the case of words (*yan*), the Tao similarly suffers a temporal process of perversion through the transmission of written documents (chapter 3/51/78). The master first states that “correct or orthodox texts originate in the designs of Heaven and Earth, and comply with primordial pneuma (*yuanqi* 元氣)”; he adds: “in Antiquity, when saintly writings appeared, [their] origin and the correctness of [their] characters were checked,”⁵⁵ but then repeated transmissions defaced them:

<i>phase:</i>	<i>textual condition:</i>	<i>epistemological (or cosmological) correlation:</i>
1, 轉,	subtle explanations 微言解	(primordial pneuma essentials 元氣要)
2, 再轉	abstruse phrases 密辭	—
3, 三轉	philological glosses 章句	—
4, 四轉	—	shallowness 浮華 appears (great disease 大病)
5, 五轉	—	different meanings 異意 and mistakes 忤 (great disease)
6, 六轉	deceiving texts 欺文	(great disease)

Whether transmitted orally or under a written form, knowledge, which is assimilated to the Tao and was formerly revealed unaltered to the Sages of Antiquity, seems to be incurably doomed to perversion when falling into the hands of Man.⁵⁶ All the masters who, following the Sages of Antiquity, have been instructing men through the ages, are responsible for having “interrupted [the transmission of] and concealed such texts of the true, essential Tao, for having taught with shallowness, and trans-

⁵⁴ The other nine methods are the “government of primordial pneuma 元氣治” (no. 1), “natural government 自然治” (no. 2), “government of the Tao 道治” (no. 3), “virtuous government 德治” (no. 4), “humane government 仁治” (no. 5), “righteous government 義治” (no. 6), “ritual government 禮治” (no. 8), “government by the Law 法治” (no. 9), and “martial government 武治” (no. 10) [254.1–2].

⁵⁵ Chapter 3/51/78: 正文者，迺本天地心，守理元氣。古者，聖書時出，考元正字 [190.8].

⁵⁶ Compare this six-phase process of perversion of perfect texts with the ten-phase process of perversion of knowledge from chapter 3/40/53 (as pictured above).

gressed the essential intent of the heavenly Tao 絕匿其真要道之文，以浮華傳學，違失天道之要意” [55.3–4] (chapter 3/37/47). Therefore, in spite of their numbers, the extant texts of men are unable to prevent brigands and disasters from appearing, and this is precisely why Heaven sends the master to rectify the situation (TPJC: 9.18b–19a)—or, in another instance, Saints to correct, or rectify (*zheng* 正), “*tianwen* 天文,” i.e. “Heavenly texts” as well as astronomical phenomena (TPJC: 9.11a). For, when “the texts of the Saints 聖人文” are in disorder (*luan* 亂), it is the same with the Tao; and when they fall into disuse (廢而不用), so does the Tao (TPJC: 9.14a–b). Consequently, a general collecting and a thorough recasting of all the documents of all ages prove to be indispensable to revert to a state of perfect Tao as much as to restore unaltered Truth.

4. The universal book to be edited: encyclopedia or chrestomathy?

Although the general theory of the epistemological program of the TPJ is mainly expounded in two chapters of the master text (no. 3/51/78 and 6/96/152), the theoretical implications of this program are actually disseminated throughout the material and are subject to variations from one place to the next. Beginning with the issue of collection of extant material, we find that the prevailing principle is the idea of a general collection of all extant written documents. For example, we are told in chapter 3/41/55 that, in order to relieve the world from harm, the purpose of the schooling of disciples is to transmit to the sovereign a compendium (still to be edited) entitled *Da dongji tian zhi zhengshi* 大洞極天之政事 (All-pervading governmental affairs) which would gather in one single place all useful knowledge to put an end to the “inherited burden” (*chengfu*) and substitute for all other books which deal only with one matter or topic (一事). To this end, the TPJC (8.4a–b) mentions resorting to sealed cases (*feng* 封)⁵⁷ placed in each administrative district so as to collect writings which should be freely submitted by the masses; civil officers would then gather these cases and deliver their content to the Emperor.⁵⁸

The material thus collected has then to be classified before its selective treatment may be undertaken. Yet no fixed taxonomic principles seem to prevail, and various sets of documents are sometimes dealt with in a single chapter: e.g. the four categories of “heavenly, earthly, human, and divine texts 天文地文人文神文” [87.9] (chapter 3/41/55); or the three declining categories of “writings of the divine Tao 神道書,” “texts examining facts 核事文,” and “shallow records 浮華記” [718.3] (TPJC: 10.1a; MS S. 4226: l. 10–1; CTT 1032.6.15a–b);⁵⁹ or the three categories of “heavenly scriptures 天經,” “earthly scriptures 地經,” and “human scriptures 人經” [307.11–12] (TPJC: 5.12b–13a). The most synthetic classification, expounded by the master on a disciple’s request, is to be found in a TPJ quotation from Zhu Faman’s 朱法滿 *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* 要修科儀戒律鈔 (CTT 463.1.2a–b) [308.8–14]:

⁵⁷ *Feng* 封 is glossed as *guihan* 匱函 in what is probably an interpolated commentary [687.7].

⁵⁸ But the text specifies that these arrangements are specifically designed to enable the Emperor to hear about the moral inclination of his subjects through their remonstrances, not to have a sum of orthodox knowledge edited.

⁵⁹ CTT 1032, which quotes the TPJ, has the second category spelled “覈事文,” a graphic variant which does not alter the meaning. Yang Jilin 楊寄林, “*Taiping jing* ‘shu you san deng’ xiyi 《太平經》「書有三等」析義,” *Zhongguo daojiao* 74.2 (2003): 30–33, has argued, rather unconvincingly, that these three categories refer to the content of the TPJ itself.

<i>no.:</i> scripturary denomination:	<i>correlation (or definition):</i>
1 heavenly scriptures 天經	true Tao 真道, generation 生
2 earthly scriptures 地經	virtue 德, nutrition 養
3 human scriptures 人經	harmony 和, pervasiveness 相通, deployment 施
4 scriptures of the Tao 道經	(collected essays 辭 of the Tao of the Three Ages)
5 scriptures of the Saints 聖經	(collected texts 文 of the Saints of the Three Ages)
6 scriptures of the Sages 賢經	(collected essays 辭 of Sages of the Three Ages)
7 auspicious scriptures 吉經	auspicious masters 其師吉者
8 pernicious scriptures 凶經	pernicious masters 其師凶者
9 scriptures of life 生經	masters who bring life 其師生者
10 scriptures of death 死經	masters who bring death 其師死者

These ten scripturary categories are based on a triad (Heaven-Earth-Man),⁶⁰ on a median section of the TPJ's ninefold human hierarchy (in which "men of the Tao," "Saints," and "Sages" are ranked fifth, sixth and seventh; see n. 21 above), and on two classical Chinese antithetic couples (the auspicious and the pernicious 吉凶, life and death 生死). This scripturary taxonomy should be read in the light of chapter 3/41/55 ("*Jian guwen mingshu* 件古文名書"), where the master explains at length the meaning of the master-concept *jujiao* 拘校, literally "to collect and collate [documents]," a term which pervades all the "textual strata"⁶¹ of the extant material.⁶² The idea of *jujiao*, as we learn from chapter 6/91/132 (entitled "*Jujiao sangu wen* 拘校三古文"), was revealed to the master by Heaven Itself (故敕使其拘校之者，迺天使吾下言也 [349.1]). The following three out of nineteen "essential instructions" (*yao jue* 要訣) from chapter 7/108/173 (see above) are concerned with *jujiao* (no. 4, 14, and 15):

For those who want to rectify ordinary texts: get the instructions relating to "collecting and collating," as a token of faith from Heaven. [510.8]
其凡文欲正之者，取訣於拘校，以為天信。

⁶⁰ On which, see Anne Cheng, "De la place de l'homme dans l'univers: La conception de la triade Ciel-Terre-Homme à la fin de l'antiquité chinoise," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 3 (1983): 11–22; Grégoire Espeset, "À vau-l'eau, à rebours . . .", 82 sq.

⁶¹ Modern sinology assumes the canonical TPJ to be made out of distinct textual "strata" or "layers" that scholars have been trying to distinguish since Xiong Deji's paper published in the early 1960s; see Xiong Deji 熊德基, "*Taiping jing* de zuozhe he sixiang ji qi yu Huangjin he 'Tianshi dao' de guanxi 《太平經》的作者和思想及其與黃巾和「天師道」的關係," *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 (1962): 8–15. All subsequent attempts at distinguishing strata or layers in the extant material are dependent upon Xiong's system; see Takahashi Tadahiko, "*Taiheikyō* no shisō kōzō 《太平經》の思想構造," *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 95 (1984): 296–97; Jens Østergård Petersen, "The early traditions relating to the Han Dynasty transmission of the *Taiping Jing*: Part 2," *Acta Orientalia* 51 (1990): 198, 212–13; Hendrischke, "The Concept of Inherited Evil . . ." 3–5; Wang Ping 王平, "*Taiping jing* yanjiu 《太平經》研究 (Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe 文津出版社, 1995), 13–15; and Duan Zhicheng 段致成, "*Taiping jing* wenxian kaobian: dui *Taiping jing* chengshu qingxing de yixie kanfa (xia) 《太平經》文獻考辨. 對《太平經》成書情形的一些看法 (下)," *Kong Meng yuekan* 孔孟月刊 37.7, 439 (1999): 26. Distinguishing such strata or layers does not solve the numerous problems of the textual history of the TPJ but, at least, underlines the obvious stylistic variations occurring in it. In short, the three prevailing styles which were isolated are: 1) questions and answers (or "dialogue form"), the style which covers the majority of the material by staging a Master (*shi* 師) or Heavenly Master (*tianshi* 天師) and Real Men (*zhenren* 真人) who are his disciples (*di* 弟); 2) a strictly discursive style (or "prose"); 3) monologues and dialogues alternating, a style also characterized by the presence of two protagonists absent from the rest of the text: a Heavenly Lord (*tianjun* 天君) and a Great Spirit (*dashen* 大神).

⁶² See chapter 3/41/55: 拘校上古中古下古聖人之辭以為聖經也；拘校上古中古下古大德之辭以為德經也；拘校上古中古下古賢明之辭以為賢經也。 [83.6–7]. Altogether 47 occurrences of the disyllabic *jujiao* in the single TPJ, spread over no less than fourteen chapters from three out of the five extant sections: chapters 3/41/55, 3/51/78, 6/88/129, 6/91/132, 6/93/137, 6/96/152, 6/98/156, 6/98/158, 7/108/173, 7/110/179, 7/112/188, 7/114/202, 7/116/206, and 7/118/211.

For those who want to obtain a method which produces a great rise of the heavenly Tao: get the instructions relating to “collecting and collating” the numerous texts and formulas and essays of ordinary men. [511.10]
欲得天道大興法者，取訣於拘校眾文與凡人訣辭也。

For those who want to obtain fine medicine: get the instructions relating to “collecting and collating” ordinary methods and texts so as to make use of them. [512.1]
欲得良藥者，取訣於拘校凡方文而效之也。

Still in chapter 3/41/55 of the TPJ, as one of the disciples remarks that he is (or all of them are) “unable to deeply understand the meaning of this [word], *jujiao* 不能深知其拘校之意” [83.7–8], the master explains:

What is meant by “collecting and collating writings of the Tao of Upper, Middle and Lower antiquity” is [the following]: let us suppose that numerous Sages together read carefully all past and present texts of the Tao; if in one volume they get one good word or one good formula, then they record it in writing; to get one good [word or formula] in one volume [is to get] ten in ten volumes, one hundred in one hundred volumes, one thousand in one thousand volumes, ten thousand in ten thousand volumes, and one hundred thousand in one hundred thousand volumes; [but if] in one volume they get ten good words or formulas, in this way [they may get up to] one million good words [or formulas; and if] in one volume they get one hundred good [words or formulas], in this way [they may get up to] ten million good words [or formulas]. Having them recorded in writing and gathered in a single place, the numerous Sages together examine [these] past and present writings, transcribe them, gather them into categories according to their respective specialties, delete the repetitions, compile their essential parts, thoroughly analyze [their content], and thus understand deeply the quintessence of Heaven, Earth, Man, and the ten thousand beings in past and present. The text produced in this manner is the “Heavenly Scripture.”⁶³ [84.2–8]

所言拘校上古中古下古道書者，假令眾賢共讀視古今諸道文也。如一卷得一善字，如得一善訣事，便記書出之。一卷得一善，十卷得十善，百卷得百善，千卷得千善，萬卷得萬善，億卷得億善。善字善訣事，卷得十善也，此十億善字。如卷得百善也，此百億善字矣。書而記之，聚於一間處，眾賢共視古今文章，竟都錄出之，以類聚之，各從其家，去中復重，因次其要文字而編之，即已究竟，深知古今天地人萬物之精意矣。因以為文，成天經矣。

As we can see, *jujiao* refers to a meticulous process of selection and compiling. After this “Heavenly Scripture” (no. 1 in the previous tenfold nomenclature), a “Scripture of Saints” 聖經 (no. 5) and a “Scripture of Sages” 賢經 (no. 6) should be similarly edited [84.9–85.1]. All three books would be gathered into a “Scripture encompassing all Heaven and Earth, and Yin and Yang,” i.e. a “universal scripture” whose ultimate condition should be carefully preserved through “myriad generations” (此道書者，名為洞極天地陰陽之經，萬萬世不可復易也。 [85.5]).⁶⁴ Such a process suggests that the basic principle of selection can be defined as extracting from all collected material the very best of its content. This task should be carried out with

⁶³ We have already met a summary of this process in chapter 4/65/100 (see above, §.3).

⁶⁴ This “universal scripture” and its variants are mentioned in 5 chapters of the TPJ (no. 3/41/55, 6/88/129, 6/91/132, 6/96/152, and 7/112/188) and 3 *juan* of the TPJC (6.11a, 11b, 12b, 7.22b, and 8.3b) as “洞極之經” (8 occurrences), “洞極經” (3 occurrences), “大洞極之政事” (3 occurrences), “皇天洞極政事之文,” “天洞極政事,” and “洞極之吉文” (one occurrence each). See also Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 25; and Hachiya, “*Taiheikyô* ni okeru genji bunsho . . .,” 50–52.

caution as each “perverse (or heterodox) text 邪文” left over in the collected material will induce one extra cosmic disease and, as cosmic diseases pile up, men would be stricken by illness themselves.⁶⁵ All things considered, this editing process described at greater length comes down to the sorting out of documents so as “to reject perverse (or heterodox) text 去邪文,” a theme central to the title and content of chapter 3/50/67, “To reject perverse/heterodox text and to observe celestial bodies” (*Qu xiewen feiming zhan* 去邪文飛明古〔占〕),⁶⁶ but recurrent in the entire book. What we are witnessing here indeed is nothing else than the birth of orthodoxy, for “perverse (or heterodox) words, texts and phrases 邪言邪文邪辭,” which are correlated with turmoil (*luan* 亂), are classically opposed to “correct (or orthodox) words, texts, and phrases 正言正文正辭,” which correspond to Heaven (chapters 6/91/132 and 6/98/158). “Other texts and canonical writings 他文經書” (possibly an allusion to the Confucian classics) are not “texts of the orthodox Tao 正道文” and, once again, are said to lead people to “confusion 迷迷” (chapter 4/65/100).

Pragmatism plays an important part in this editing process. According to the TPJ, the best way to deal with the numberless “texts of Antiquity 古文” is to put them to a practical test implemented throughout the eleven chapters of *juan* no. 50 of the TPJ and designed to sort out things according to their measured efficiency (chapter 3/50/77). This test consists in verifying if the texts do “respond to harmony 相應和,”⁶⁷ that is if they successfully produce the intended result, for instance: expelling disasters and having corporeal spirits return to the body; or making people benevolent so that all penal laws and punishments become useless [185.7]. The texts which “respond ten times out of ten 十十相應” constitute the highest of the following ten categories, the lowest corresponding to those which only “hit the mark one time out of ten 十一中者”:⁶⁸

<i>success rate:</i>	<i>category:</i>	<i>usable?</i>
10/10 (十十相應)	texts of the Great Yang 太陽文	yes ⁶⁹
9/10 (十九相應)	texts of the Great Yin 太陰文	yes
8/10 (十八相應)	texts of the Central Harmony 中和文	yes
7/10 (十七相應)	texts of squander and disorder 破亂文	no
6/10 (十六相應)	writings which by chance hit the mark 遇中書	no
5/10 (十五相應)	writings without knowledge 無知書 ⁷⁰	no
4/10 (十四中者)	perverse/heterodox texts 邪文	no
3/10 (十三中者)	texts of great disorder 大亂文	no
2/10 (十二中者)	texts to be rejected 棄文	no
1/10 (十一中者)	texts which miss the mark 迭中文	no

⁶⁵ See chapter 6/91/132: 有餘一邪言輒餘一病，餘一邪說誤文輒有餘一病，餘十病，餘百病，餘千病，餘萬病，隨此餘邪言邪文誤辭為病。天地病之，故使人亦病之。 [355.6–7].

⁶⁶ This emendation, suggested by the variant from Dunhuang MS S. 4226 (l. 180), matches the actual content of the extant chapter.

⁶⁷ By analogy with men and ghosts who will respond to the call of their name [184.9–10].

⁶⁸ We may recall that “divine invocations 神祝” were to be tested in the same way, according to chapter 3/50/75.

⁶⁹ The TPJ states that from the first category downwards, the texts mislead people and cannot be used: 十十中者以下不可用，誤人文也 [186.1], an obvious textual corruption absent from the TPJC which has: 十七中者已下不可用，誤人文也 (TPJC: 3.17b–18a). The acceptability of the first three categories as opposed to the subsequent seven ones is consistent with the general logic of the tenfold taxonomical principles of the TPJ (see chapter 6/96/152, etc.).

⁷⁰ This category is also called “half auspicious, half pernicious texts 半吉半凶文” [185.10]. It is to be noted that the subsequent four categories are not said to “respond” (*xiangying*) but only to “hit the mark” (*zhong*).

The first three categories obviously respond to Heaven (Great Yang), Earth (Great Yin), and Man (Central Harmony) respectively, like categories no. 1, 2, and 3 from the classification expounded in the *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* (CTT 463, as quoted above). But the general logic of descent, which implacably presides over the present classification from the first down to the tenth category, is not fully operating in the former classification, the logic structure of which (based on two successive triads, then two successive couples of scriptures, as noted above) boils down to a mere enumeration.

Pragmatism also shows through in the fact that not only doxographical sources should be collected, but also practical documents, i.e. what the TPJ variously calls “methods 方” or “schemes 策.”⁷¹ Such practical documents are said to appear spontaneously under propitious circumstances and, just like regular writings, should not be concealed or put to use privately but handed over to the sovereign for the general benefit of the Empire (chapter 4/55/83 etc.). Some of them are bestowed upon men by supernatural beings invoked by specific musical notes.⁷²

Chapter 6/88/129 describes the best way to collect locally all such practical material in buildings (*zhai* 宅) established on the main roads in each administrative district of the Empire, including distant regions in all four directions. Such buildings, especially designed for the purpose of collecting written material, should have notices hung on the outer walls inviting benevolent people to deposit any texts they are in possession of through openings made on their four sides at man’s face level. The name of the contributor should always be mentioned so that those of great merit would be granted official appointments or rewards by local civil servants [332.5–13].⁷³ Then all the collected material should be submitted to an editing process similar to the one mentioned above, and finally incorporated into the forthcoming “universal book” (*dongji zhi jing*) [333.4–9].

The TPJ occasionally deals with documents of the Three Ways (三 道), whose “titles” have been described by Kaltenmark as “actually the same kind of qualifying terms as *tung-chi ching* [*dongji jing* 洞極經].”⁷⁴ The informed reader will soon correlate these texts with the general triadic ideology of the TPJ,⁷⁵ according to which (chapter 4/53/79) the Three Ways are connected with the Three Luminaries 三 明

⁷¹ These two characters, combined with five qualifiers (“marvelous 奇,” “remarkable 殊,” “extraordinary 異,” “divine 神” and “beneficent 善”), form quasi-synonymous syntagms to be found throughout the extant material. The distribution of these syntagms is as follows: 奇方 (20 occurrences), 殊方 (18), 異策 (5), 神方 (5), 奇策 (4), 殊策 (4), 異方 (3), 善方 (2), 神策 (1), and 善策 (1). It is worth noting that *wen* 文 also admits these five qualifiers (among several others): 神文 (24 occurrences), 奇文 (12), 善文 (6), 異文 (3), and 殊文 (2).

⁷² The two Yang notes of the pentatonic scale: “jade maidens clad in green 青衣玉女” are invoked by the note *jue* 角, responding to the East, and “jade maidens clad in scarlet 赤衣玉女,” by the note *zhi* 徵, responding to the South (see chapter 7/113/191). See also Jan, “The Bridge between Man and Cosmos . . .,” 18–19.

⁷³ See also Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 28. Kaltenmark does not specify that this particular operation is obviously intended to collect what I call “practical documents” here rather than other kinds of discursive or doxographical documents—the latter being probably best qualified in the TPJ as *jing* 經, “scriptures.”

⁷⁴ Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 26; see also Hachiya, “*Taiheikyō* ni okeru genji bunsho . . .,” 50. These documents are variously referred to in nine chapters of the TPJ (no. 3/48/65, 4/53/79, 4/54/81, 6/86/127, 6/91/132, 6/92/136, 6/96/152, 7/108/173, and 7/118/211) and two *juan* of the TPJC (6.10b, 20a, and 7.42a, 2b) as 三道行書 (11 occurrences) and 三道行文書 (5 occurrences), plus 三道行書文, 三道集行文書, 三道文書, 三道文, 三道書, 三道通文, and 三道通行八方之書 (1 occurrence each).

⁷⁵ See Espeset, “À vau-l'eau, à rebours . . .”.

(i.e. sun, moon, and stars).⁷⁶ But the foremost sense of the name of these scriptures is best explained in chapter 6/91/132, which speaks of “memorials compiled and submitted collectively by the Three Ways of low-ranking officers and people 下吏民三道所共集上書文” [360.1].⁷⁷ A more detailed definition of these Three Ways is given in chapter 6/86/127: they refer to local officers (縣官長吏), local residents (居民), and travellers (行者), who are required to “assemble and debate 集議” (another key word in the epistemological program of the TPJ)⁷⁸ at the local building formerly described⁷⁹ with the aim of submitting memorials (上書) collectively (for, as we have seen earlier, the words of a single individual should never be trusted nor used).⁸⁰ Furthermore, the TPJC (6.10a–b) draws a parallel between social and astronomical spheres by stating that the uninterrupted submitting of memorials by these three social groups perpetuates the communication (*tong* 通) between the people and the Emperor and also ensures the constant circulation (*tong*) of pneuma necessary to the regular rotation of heavenly bodies around the Pole Star [466.13–467.2].⁸¹ As we already know that the Chinese of Han times commonly admitted that the political affairs of men were being mirrored in astronomical phenomena, we can easily understand why the TPJC adds that all unnatural phenomena (*zaibian* 災變) observed from towns, roads, and the country, should be recorded in these “documents of the Three Ways” [467.3–4] (TPJC: 6.10b), and why the mistakes (*guo* 過) of men should also be recorded in them just like spirits in Heaven record men’s mistakes in their own “documents of the Three Ways” (chapter 7/118/211):

So now in Heaven are compiled “documents on the [moral] conduct of the Three Ways” [in which] all the spirits collectively record the mistakes [of men so as] to promote happiness by interrupting the fondness for killing and harming, penal laws, and punishments. It is the same on Earth. [672.9]
故今天上集三道行文書，群神共記過，斷好殺傷刑罰也而興樂。地上亦然。

Pragmatically, all edited documents are required by the TPJ to be disseminated widely for the benefit of everyone under Heaven. The ideal diffusion of this quintessence of knowledge should be vertical (hierarchical), from the sovereign down to the lower strata of society, as well as horizontal (spatial) so as to reach every district of the Empire and even to convert barbarians (*yidi* 夷狄) in remote areas. It is also

⁷⁶ 天有三文，明為三明，謂日、月、列星也。日以察陽，月以察陰，星以察中央，故當三道行書。[198.5–6].

⁷⁷ Obviously, *sandao xingshu* 三道行書 and its variants (see n. 74 above) are no other than convenient contractions of this phrase.

⁷⁸ The second “essential instruction” from chapter 7/108/173 (see n. 48 above) tallies with this passage: “Concerning the documents of the Three Ways: get the instructions relating to assembling and debating 其三道行書者，取訣於集議” [510.6].

⁷⁹ Called here a “house of Great Peace attracting benevolence 太平來善之宅” [328.14].

⁸⁰ A similar statement appears in the same chapter (共上書言事也，勿得獨有孤一人言也，皆令集議 [318.9–10]), which employs a tenfold classification ranking from “memorials submitted by a single man 一人獨上書” (correlated to “great deception 大欺”) to memorials submitted by “ten men 十人,” where the text is unfortunately incomplete—but memorials submitted by “nine men” are said to be “close to reality” (九人近實) [326.10–327.3].

⁸¹ Here the TPJC admits the two variants *yimin* 邑民 (“urban people”) and *xingren* 行人 (“itinerants”). The various “documents of the Three Ways” are frequently associated with the idea of general circulation (*tong*) as the following quotations suggest: 書者，但通文書，三道行書也 [152.2] (chapter 3/48/65); 三道通文 [198.5] (chapter 4/53/79); 如是則三道行書已通，無敢閉絕者也 [319.7] (chapter 6/86/127); 三道行書文何但使一通集行書而上 [381.10–11] (chapter 6/92/136)—etc.

of utmost importance that this quintessential knowledge be perpetuated: “transmission” (*chuan* 傳) is thus another key word of the TPJ, and the presence of disciples by the side of the speaker, as I emphasized earlier, is more than a mere stylistic device. The diffusion of quintessential knowledge ultimately entails its “being put into practice” (*xing* 行, *yong* 用, or *an yong* 案用), otherwise knowledge would remain as useless and inefficient as before. The general rule, repeated restlessly throughout the TPJ, is that all documents, whether revealed by supernatural instances or produced by men of worth—“writings issued by Heaven, symbolic glyphs⁸² carved by spirits, texts of divine Saints, texts and scriptures authored by Saints, and essays of superior Sages 天之出書，神之出策符，神聖之文，聖人造文造經，上賢之辭” [692.3] (TPJC: 8.10a–b)—must be submitted to the sovereign, who alone will have the power to guarantee that their import will actually be put to practice at all levels of society. No wonder that the master blames “ignoramuses [who, because they] write their own books and do not put his words into practice, only cause nuisance to themselves 愚者自己寫書，不用其言，但自苦耳” [573.8–9] (chapter 7/112/187). In the views of the authors of the TPJ, ignorance has mostly to do with inefficient theory cut off from the concrete reality.

5. The master’s text or writing as a token of faith

Under the auspices of Heaven itself, writing becomes a token of faith (*xin* 信), here in an epistemological context: writing as a medium for knowledge revealed, then transmitted under special conditions and spread. But epigraphical evidence also shows that the same can be said of ritual communication with supernatural instances (writing as “agreement concluded with deities”)⁸³ and of everyday life’s social intercourse (writing as “contractual document”).⁸⁴ Chapter 3/39/50 glosses “transmission,” one of the keys of the TPJ, as *xin* (“reliability,” “trustworthiness”): 傳者，信也 [68.13], and chapter 7/112/185 laments the facts that, because of lack of “faith” (*xin*) in the texts of Heaven, only very few people get to know the truth of the Heavenly Tao and many people neglect revealed documents such as the Hetu and Luoshu. According to chapter 6/96/152, collecting and collating “past and present texts of the Tao” will even make “ignoramuses” become enlightened and “have faith

⁸² On the nature and function of *fu* 符 (“symbolic glyphs”) in the context of religious Taoism, see Monika Drexler, *Daoistische Schriftmagie: Interpretationen zu den Schriftamuletten Fu im “Daozang”* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994): 5–14 (“Teil I: Einführung”); and Catherine Despeux, “Talismans and Sacred Diagrams,” in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden, Boston, and London: E. J. Brill, 2000), 498–540. The extant TPJ still contains four *juan* of “doubled characters,” *fuwen* 複文 or *chongfu zhi zi* 重複之字 (chapters 7/104/169 to 7/107/172), of which the second half of chapter 6/92/136 explains that such glyphs must be written with ink the color of cinnabar (*dan* 丹) and ingested (*tun* 吞) in order to expel disease and demons, etc. A fragment of the TPJC (6.2b–3a) also states that therapeutic “heavenly symbolic glyphs 天符” written in cinnabar are to be ingested and visualized in the stomach. The Dunhuang MS S. 4226 has preserved the following title (which may correspond to this TPJC fragment): “(Chapter) 128: Patterns of the symbolic glyphs of longevity 長存符圖百廿八” (l. 281). See also n. 84 and n. 96 below.

⁸³ See Valerie Hansen, *Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China: How Ordinary People Used Contracts: 600–1400* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 147–229 (“Part II: Contracting with the Gods”).

⁸⁴ On the association of *xin* 信 (“faithfulness, trustworthiness, or credibility”) with *yue* 約 (“agreement,” “contract”) and *fu* 符 (“tally”) which is attested to in both transmitted early imperial sources and Han epigraphic material, see Hugh T. Scogin, Jr., “Between Heaven and Man: Contract and the State in Han Dynasty China,” *Southern California Law Review* 63.5 (1990): 1378–80 (I quote Scogin’s translations here).

in the Tao” (*xin dao*).⁸⁵ From all this we clearly see that the epistemological issue in the TPJ goes far beyond the single sphere of knowledge. It conditions, within the sphere of religion, the very heart of its psychological basis: belief. Faith, together with filial piety (*xiao* 孝), uprightness (*zhong* 忠), sincerity (*cheng*), and humaneness (*ren*), becomes one of the moral requisites for social welfare (chapters 7/110/179, 7/111/183, and 7/112/188).

Significantly, in the extant Taiping material, the character *xin* occurs frequently with the character *dao* 道 and mostly in association with such expressions as “my writings 吾書,” “my text(s) 吾文,” and “my words 吾言”: for instance, chapter 7/114/197 states that “these writings have no faith in malevolent people, nor do malevolent people have faith in these writings 此書亦不信惡人，惡人亦不信此書” [609.7–8]. The reader wonders, as Kaltenmark wrote, “what is the exact status of the book that the Celestial Master brought to the *chen-jen* [*zhenren* 真人],⁸⁶ so that they might deliver it to a virtuous prince.”⁸⁷ One may be tempted to consider that it is none other than the *Scripture of Great Peace* itself,⁸⁸ but to prove rather than guess, textual evidence is required. Unfortunately, although the text gives several clues to many facets of the master’s writings, it fails to specify clearly what makes them different from other documents set forth throughout the surviving chapters.

In chapter 6/98/159, a question from one of the disciples opens with these words:

In the “original text” of the writings formerly bestowed upon [us], stupid students, by [you], Heavenly Master . . . [448.13]
天師前所賜予愚生書本文…

The idea of a primal literary material (*ben wen* 本文)⁸⁹ is here correlated to a document handed down to the disciples by the master. Having frequently warned his disciples against the utterances of individual men, the epistemological program which he expounds throughout his lessons—especially the editing process of quintessential knowledge—enables the master to legitimate his own teaching as a single man: by calling up the talents of all men and the content of all documents of all times to obtain such a total and orthodox knowledge, he may simultaneously, without risking his credibility, promote his own writings. He does so in chapter 3/37/47, entitled “Verifying documents [to achieve] absolute faith” (“Shi wenshu daxin 試文書大信”), where he responds to challenges from his disciples concerning the trustfulness of his writings in order to verify that their content is no different from the content of all documents practiced by men of the Three Ages to meet the designs of Heaven. In

⁸⁵ 亦皆當拘校古今道文以自相證明，乃愚者一明，悉解信道也。[412.14–413.1].

⁸⁶ The disciples of the master (see n. 61 above).

⁸⁷ Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 25. Kaltenmark added: “I admit that I have not yet been able to solve that question.” (ibid.).

⁸⁸ As commonly admitted by modern Chinese scholars. But none of the associations of writing with the idea of Great Peace in CTT 1101 is clearly connected with the master’s own work, whether in the TPJ proper—“real scripture(s) of Great Peace 太平之真經” [34.7] (chapter 3/35/41), “writings to achieve Great Peace 致太平之書” [41.10] (chapter 3/35/43), “writings of Great Peace 太平之書” [583.1] (chapter 7/112/190) and [624.3] (chapter 7/114/202), and “text(s) of Great Peace 太平文” [683.11] (chapter 7/119/213)—or in the later TPJC—“text(s) (of) the Tao of Great Peace 太平道其文” [697.10] (8.17a), and “*Scripture of Great Peace* 太平經” [708.12] (9.10a) and [709.5] (9.10b).

⁸⁹ On this term, see also n. 35 above.

this manner the unbeliever shall be freed from ignorance and have an absolute faith in the master's writings.⁹⁰

We have already seen that the master claims to have been instructed by Heaven; so his writings reveal the “designs of Heaven 天心,” and everyone willing to be acquainted with Heaven is advised to read them thoroughly and meditate on them (see chapters 3/46/62, 4/53/79 etc.). The master also equates his writings with “the language of Heaven and Earth” and claims that they “respond intimately and solely to spirits both heavenly and chthonian like the inside of a garment [corresponds] to the outside” (吾之書即天談地語，與神祇深獨相應若表裡也。[423.8–9]; chapter 6/96/153). Their value is thus beyond measure: according to chapter 3/46/62, one thousand (pieces of) gold given to the state do not compare to one essential word from them (故賜國家千金不若與其一要言可以治者也 [112.17–8]). We are even told of their material appearance: they cover (at least) one *juan*⁹¹ (chapter 3/44/60) and their colors are green (*qing* 青), the color of humaneness (*ren* 仁), and red (the text first has *dan* 丹, “cinnabar,” then *chi* 赤, “scarlet”), the color of Great Yang,⁹² as well as the “orthodox color of Heaven 天之正色” (TPJC: 4.12a).⁹³ According to the master, the following simple test of efficiency will prove them to be an “authentic contract 真券”:⁹⁴ texts, just like any worldly activity (天下事), should have concrete effects⁹⁵ and expel disease in order to be acceptable (see chapter 3/39/51). The master glosses this close correspondence between his writings and universal harmony as “the tally⁹⁶ which provokes faith 召信之符” (ibid.). Another practical test,

⁹⁰ Chapter 3/37/47: 子以為吾書不可信也，試取上古人所案行得天心而長吉者書文，復取中古人所案行得天心者書策文，復取下古人所思務行得天意而長自全者書文，宜皆上下流視考之，必與重規合矩無殊也，迺子蒙且大解，迺後且大信吾書言也。 [56.5–8].

⁹¹ The expressions *wu shu* 吾書 (“my writings”) and *ci shu yi juan* 此書一卷 (“a single *juan* of these writings,” or “these writings in one *juan*”) occur in the same sentence [109.13–110.2].

⁹² Further (classical) correspondences for Red/Great Yang are provided in chapter 5/69/105: the quadrate (South), the heavenly body (Sun), the agent (Fire), the season (the midst of summer: 盛夏), the domestic cult (to the spirit of the stove), and the organ (heart) [262.7–9]. The passage adds that the sovereign should be clad in red (衣赤) and that the changing phenomena which affect him “always respond to Yang (i.e. Fire), never to other agents 是故君有變怪，常與陽相應，非得與他行相應也” [262.9–10]. Of course, such passages are clues to the Han ideology (if not date) of the text.

⁹³ According to chapter 5/69/105, Heaven is externally *cang* 蒼 (“azure”), the color of agent Wood, but internally scarlet, the color of agent Fire [264.14], and Earth is externally *huang bai* 黃白 (“yellow and white”), the colors of agents Earth and Metal, but internally *hei* 黑 (“black”), color of agent Water [265.3–4]. Zhang Jue 張角, leader of the Yellow turbans 黃巾, who is sometimes believed to have had some of the earliest *taiping* texts after a dubious statement in a commentary to the *Hou Han shu*, reportedly prophesied the end of the “azure Heaven 蒼天” and the advent of a “yellow Heaven 黃天”—not red (see *Hou Han shu*, 71.2299).

⁹⁴ *Quan* 券 was used to designate “written contractual documents” until the imperial reunification at the end of the 6th century. See Scogin, “Between Heaven and Man . . .,” 1357–58; and Éric Trombert, *Le crédit à Dunhuang: Vie matérielle et société en Chine médiévale* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1995), 12–16.

⁹⁵ 事有成功。We find a similar passage in the TPJC (8.10a): the book of the master conforms to the natural law and, as such, “does not results in fallacious words but produces achievements and concrete effects 不效巧言，乃效成功成事” [691.11].

⁹⁶ *Fu* 符. When not in the context of symbolic/magical writing or glyphs (see n. 82 above), *fu* designates “tesserae,” i.e. contractual documents divided in two halves and authenticated by adjusting the two halves; see Robert des Rotours, “Les insignes en deux parties (*fou* 符) sous la dynastie T’ang (618–907),” *T’oung Pao* 41.1–3 (1952): 1–148; and Scogin, “Between Heaven and Man . . .,” 1379–80. According to chapter 5/72/111, where three similar expressions are to be found (實信之符節 [300.5], 實信符 [300.6], and 信符節 [300.7]), the spirits of the five directions hold distinctive insignia (*jie* 節)—mostly weapons—which are authenticated by “adjusting” (*dui* 對) them to the adept’s (or the emperor’s?—the text does not state clearly) own insignia and prevent undesirable spirits from appearing and spreading disorder.

suggested in the TPJC (8.10a), consists in verifying whether the master's writings, when put to the test of practice, enable one to expel all disasters; if they do, it will prove, in the master's view, that they are "authentic" (試使用之，災害悉除，即是吾之真文也 [691.9]). Thus pragmatism again demands that the master's writings be ultimately put into practice—the final purpose of all valuable knowledge and documents alike. According to the TPJ (chapters 3/50/71, 4/55/83, 4/68/104 etc.), such practice involves carefully reading (*jingdu* 精讀, *xiangdu* 詳讀) or reciting (*song* 誦), and carefully meditating (*xiang si* 詳思) in an isolated location (chapter 4/65/101; see also TPJC: 5.11b). Elsewhere we read that the master's writings go back to the very origin (*ben yuan* 本元) of all things (chapter 3/49/66), hence their unlimited effectiveness to put an end to *chengfu*, "inherited burden" (chapters 3/40/52 and 3/42/58), to rectify men as well as documents and bring them back to the true Tao (chapter 3/42/57), to summon Saints, Sages, and Immortals (chapter 3/46/62), to amend all social relationships (chapter 6/96/151), to fully display one's potential and fulfill one's mandate here below (TPJC: 5.13b–14b), to restore unaltered longevity, and to dispel the Emperor's affliction (8.15a), etc.

The TPJC (8.11a–13a) applies to twenty-two categories of cosmic entities (astral bodies, human beings, animals, plants, gods), atmospheric phenomena (clouds, thunder and lightning, wind and rain), cosmological concepts (the Five Agents, Four Seasons, ten stems and twelve branches), and cosmographic features (mountains and hills, water courses and expanses, the underground, etc.) the following sentence: "each [element in a given category, though] different [from its own kind],⁹⁷ is endowed with the spontaneous primordial pneuma (*yuanqi* 元氣) and Yin and Yang, just like my text; [when] each [element] follows its ways, keeps in mind the content of my writings and puts it into practice, then Great Peace [is achieved] 各異，自有自然元氣陰陽，與吾文相似；各從其俗，記吾書辭而行之，即太平矣。" [692.8–694.3]. This passage suggests that the master's writings, when properly practiced, hold a universal, therapeutic power to expel any dysfunction from the entire universe and revert to a state of natural equilibrium. So, once successfully tested, the master's writings should not remain hidden (chapter 6/98/157). Should one of the disciples keep them secret for his private use and fail to produce them on time, Heaven would send him illness and disasters.⁹⁸ Disasters and illness also give evidence that the time has come to publish the master's writings: "If [their] appearing makes people sick, then Heaven wants [them] to be concealed, [but] if hiding⁹⁹ [them] makes people sick, then Heaven wants [them] to appear and be circulated 出

⁹⁷ For instance, each one of the Five Agents (*wuxing* 五行) is different from the other four, though they all belong to the same category (category no. 16).

⁹⁸ Chapter 6/102/166: 子為不然，今私匿閉絕吾文而不以時出之，天即且病子災子 [462.8–9]. But, in the TPJC (6.18a), the master also urges the disciples "not to transmit rashly 無妄傳" his "documents (?) 吾圖書" but to bury them very deeply in a dark, secluded place (藏之深淵、幽冥之間) and not to talk any more about "essential texts": 無語要文，外內已悉，無可復言 [403.10–404.2]. Until the proper time for their appearing has come?

⁹⁹ *Tao* 逃, literally: "to run away, to escape," here a synonym for *cang* 藏: "to bury, to conceal" (both characters are associated as a compound verb in the subsequent sentences of the passage).

而病人即天欲藏也，逃而病人即天欲出行也” [514.13] (chapter 7/108/176).¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, according to chapter 6/102/165, “these writings to put an end to vice and falsehood and raise the Tao of Heaven and Earth 此止姦偽興天地道之書，” (the master’s writings?) should “be produced on a *yisi* (no. 42 of the sexagesimal cycle) [day or year?] and be given to messengers who will circulate them 乙巳而出，以付郵客而往通之者也” [459.9]. Subsequent generations should then produce again these writings at the beginning of each year and submit them to the Emperor in order to have the concretions of *chengfu* accumulated since the origin dispelled.¹⁰¹ It seems uneasy to conform simultaneously to both rules governing the appearance of writings (what if illness spreads when the master’s writings are produced on a *yisi* day or year?) and, moreover, we are not even sure that both passages actually refer to the same, single work.

The ideal transmission of the master’s writings—from Heaven to the master, then from the master to the disciples—should lead to their passing on by the disciples to “circumspect people 謹民” who will submit them to a “prince of Tao and Virtue, and of the essence of [agent] Fire¹⁰² 火精道德之君，” who will in turn communicate them to the people (quoting chapter 7/117/207; see also chapters 3/35/41, 5/69/105, 5/70/106, 5/80/121 etc.). Spread and put into practice in the whole empire, the master’s writings should also be brought to neighboring countries so that all the states of the world gradually turn good and come to be free from all disasters (chapter 6/93/139).

All the above information suggests that the unnamed master’s writings themselves show most of (if not all) the characteristics of the various synthetic documents to be edited (the Heavenly scripture, etc.) and thus should be regarded as one of them. However, the following excerpt from chapter 6/96/152 proves that one of the purposes of the master’s writings is to check and correct all the scattered documents in order to extract their quintessential knowledge and have a “universal

¹⁰⁰ The striking thematic connection between this passage and a late 6th-century story of the “rediscovery” of the TPJ which stages Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) and one of his disciples could support the thesis of the identification of the master’s writings with the TPJ itself. This story, which appears in a fragment of Ma Shu’s 馬樞 (522–581) *Daoxue zhuan* 道學傳 quoted in the late 7th-century *Sandong zhunang* 三洞珠囊 (CTT 1139.1.17a) and the late 10th-century *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, 666.4b), tells of an attempt at recovering three lost sections of the TPJ at the beginning of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557) by a disciple of Tao Hongjing named Huan Kai 桓闔 (or Huan Fakai 桓法闔; dates unknown), in a desert area close to the Kunlun mountains 崑崙山. The attempt proved unsuccessful due to a sudden disease suffered by Huan Kai after he took possession of the precious scrolls. Tao Hongjing, who authenticated the document, urged Huan Kai to return it to its original location. Huan Kai followed the advice and quickly recovered. Both quotations are translated in Mansvelt Beck, “The Date of the *Taiping Jing*,” 162–63; and Stephan P. Bumbacher, *The Fragments of the “Daoxue zhuan”: Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of a Medieval Collection of Daoist Biographies* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 270–72 (fragments no. 156 and 157). This story, unattested to in other sources (including hagiographical accounts relating to both Tao and Huan), is in line with the undertaking by the Shangqing school of the reintegration of the TPJ into the corpus of Taoist scriptures—reintegration which also shows through in the preface (*xu*) to the extant TPJ (see n. 35 above).

¹⁰¹ The TPJC: 8.3b states that the compilation of a *dongji jing* should coincide with the imminent beginning of a new cosmic “major cycle”: 今天地大周更始，災害比（皆）當消亡…故教人拘校古今文集善者，以為洞極之經，定善不可復變易也。 [686.8–9] (I follow the correction suggested by Yu Liming, ed., “*Taiping jing*” *zhengdu*, 506). On the identification of the master’s writings with the *dongji jing*, see below.

¹⁰² One more noteworthy clue to the Han ideology of the text.

book” edited—and, if so, the master’s writings can hardly be such a work still to be produced and, at the same time, the tool necessary for the very production of this upcoming work:

So, my writings dare not accept “isolated words and orphan phrases.”¹⁰³ This is why I taught [you] Real Men to collect and collate the texts of Upper, Middle and Lower antiquity so that they throw light on each other, and to collect and collate the essays of men here below so that they authenticate each other, after which orthodoxy may be [restored] in the space between Heaven and Earth, and the space between Yin and Yang may be without disease.¹⁰⁴ When [all] past and present “texts of Heaven, divine writings of Earth, and essays of Man”¹⁰⁵ are examined by means of my writings, they will necessarily respond to each other and not be different from spirits, and then one may have faith in my Tao. [421.8–10]¹⁰⁶

故吾書不敢容單言孤辭也。故教真人拘校上古中古下古文以相明，拘校天下凡人之辭以相證盟，然後天地之間可正，陰陽之間無病也。以吾書往考古今之天文地神書與人辭，必且與響相應、與神無異也，乃吾道且可信也。

So the master’s writings encompass the scriptural, epistemological sphere in its entirety: vertically, from Heaven down to Earth through the realm of Man; horizontally, right to the farthest marches of the Empire; and temporally, back to the most distant periods of human History—“Akasic records of all that ever anywhere wherever was.”¹⁰⁷

Concluding remarks

What are these puzzling “master’s writings”? One thinks of the *Daode jing* 道德經, a work known to have played a central role in religious propagation in the context of early Taoist organizations,¹⁰⁸ or the so-called Apocrypha (*weishu*), whose relationship with the TPJ has been suggested.¹⁰⁹ But any connection is doomed to remain hypothetical, due to the lack of uniformity among the textual layers of the extant material, the absence of textual evidence (such as corroborating mentions or quotations of a named text clearly referred to by an occurrence of “my text” or “my writings”), and the multiplicity of vague deictic syntagms such as *ci wen* 此文 and *ci shu* 此書. At least, it seems unquestionable that the document advertised and bestowed upon his disciples by the master cannot be the scripture itself which stages the same

¹⁰³ 單言孤辭. This 4-character expression also appears in the table of contents of MS S. 4226, in the title of chapter 6/95/147 (l. 308) which is missing in the ZD edition of the TPJ. It designates the utterances from a single individual as opposed to the collective production of several individuals.

¹⁰⁴ Both 天地之間 and 陰陽之間 refer to the world of Man.

¹⁰⁵ 天文地神書與人辭 or the general triadic logic of the TPJ applied here to written documents. As previously noted, the syntagm *tianwen* (“texts of Heaven” in the present translation) also designates astronomical phenomena.

¹⁰⁶ Again, the master’s book is said to be associated (*he* 合) with past and present texts in chapter 6/96/152, but not to be the result of their “collecting and collating” (i.e. editing) process.

¹⁰⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Co., 1922), 138. Akasa: in theosophy, the eternal memory of Nature.

¹⁰⁸ See Anna Seidel, “Das neue Testament des Tao: Lao tzu und die Entstehung des taoistischen Religion am Ende der Han-Zeit,” *Saeculum* 29.2 (1978): 147–72.

¹⁰⁹ See Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (*Ch’an-wei*) Texts . . .,” 117–21; and Li Yangzheng 李養正, “*Taiping jing* yu yinyang wuxing shuo, daoia ji chenwei zhi guanxi 《太平經》與陰陽五行說、道家及讖緯之關係,” *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 16 (1999): 98–106. Li sees the TPJ as an apocryphal commentary to the *Daode jing* (ibid., 95).

master and disciples. Perhaps an earlier or original *taiping* text such as the unexplained “*ben wen*,” whether purely mythical or now lost, but at least anterior to the scripture of which the Ming Taoist Canon has preserved about one-third?

The extant Taiping material is rich in information relating to the specificity of Chinese epistemology and provides us with a more accurate picture of how religion and politics interacted in early imperial China. The reader witnesses the setting-up by a religious authority of the ideological bases of its future cooperation with imperial power as a candidate for the highly privileged status of official state religion—the Throne giving the Church official sponsorship in response to the Church sanctioning the transcendent legitimacy of the Throne. This prefigures the political successes won by successive Taoist groups soon after the collapse of the Han, despite the contemporary unstoppable progress of the rival religion from India, with which they increasingly had to share the influence on the Throne.

The TPJ suggests that, unlike the many divine documents formerly revealed through supernatural animals coming out of the Yellow and Luo rivers (an obvious allusion to the *Hetu* and *Luoshu*, though the master never explicitly questions their revealed nature), the revelation of Great Peace was directly conveyed by Heaven through Man—an entrusted master who speaks in the name of Heaven, and disciples whose questions to the master are also inspired by Heaven (chapter 6/102/165), so that the disciples actually concur with the master in transmitting the Heavenly Word.

From the epistemological point of view, Great Peace can be defined as the diffusion of a “universal book” (*dongji jing*) of total knowledge consonant with the cosmic principles, to be edited by the intellectual elite of the Empire and approved by the Emperor himself, as expounded by the master under the auspices of Heaven.¹¹⁰ It is no wonder that knowledge, its nature, and the material condition of its diffusion are among the most obsessive themes of the TPJ.

It is also worth emphasizing that the TPJ marks a decisive turning point in the evolution of the sociopolitical and epistemological functions of the master. The kings of Antiquity, surrounded by various technicians and specialists of more or less esoteric arts, would occasionally seek out retired Sages for their advice.¹¹¹ But now, the Emperor is in constant need of a heavenly-inspired master, a cosmic tutor who will guarantee an orthodox interpretation of the instructions from above and the conformity of their practice here below. Just as all under Heaven needs a single political ruler, an Emperor of cosmic right, to rule men through a far-reaching bureaucratic apparatus, human knowledge needs an officially sanctioned keeper of the orthodoxy to rule the minds through the apostleship of properly educated disciples. The teaching of the master is acceptable and his writings trustworthy only because both are

¹¹⁰ Chapter 7/112/188: 故施洞極之經，名曰太平。[576.3–4]. Kaltenmark, who chose to ignore the character *shi* 施 and to add a word between brackets in his translation in order to make identical the “universal book” (*dongji jing*) and the TPJ itself, misunderstood the meaning of this sentence. His translation of this sentence occurs in the following context: “One passage, where it is said that ‘the *Book of Tung-chi* [*Dongji* 洞極] is called *T'ai-p'ing ching*’ 洞極之經名曰太平, suggests that the true title is *T'ai-p'ing ching* [*Taiping jing*] and not *Tung-chi ching* [*Dongji jing* 洞極經]” (Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*,” 25).

¹¹¹ See Anna Seidel, “Der Kaiser und sein Ratgeber: Lao tzu und der Taoismus der Han-Zeit,” *Saeculum* 29.1 (1978): 18–50; Michel Strickmann, “Saintly Fools and Chinese Masters (Holy Fools),” *Asia Major* 7.1 (1994): 35–57.

inspired by Heaven and certified to respond to cosmic principles through the ultimate test of practice. Faith in the Tao pragmatically comes from true knowledge, and true knowledge comes directly from Heaven. Its diffusion throughout society and widespread enactment in practice contribute to universal harmony as reflected in the regular movements of heavenly bodies. Epistemological issues then are inseparable from the heavenly/religious sphere in the TPJ, and what the master lays the foundations of by means of his writings is a new theology—for, as Foucault wrote, “ce que Dieu a déposé dans le monde, ce sont des mots écrits; Adam, lorsqu’il a imposé leurs premiers noms aux bêtes, n’a fait que lire ces marques visibles et silencieuses; la Loi a été confiée à des Tables, non pas à la mémoire des hommes; et *la vraie Parole, c’est dans un livre qu’il faut la retrouver.*”¹¹²

¹¹² Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 53 (my italics).

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