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## A Brief Review of Taoist Blessings and Rituals Drawing from the Example of the Spring Festival

*Kratka predstavitev daoističnih blagoslovov in obredja na primeru praznovanja kitajskega novega leta (Praznovanje pomladi)*

**Abstract:** This article offers a brief introduction to Taoist rituals that are performed to seek blessings. The focus is especially on the Taoist blessing ceremonies that take place during the Spring Festival, which is now recognized as a United Nations floating holiday since 2024. The article explains that Taoist rituals for blessings have been performed since ancient times and can be divided into three categories: daily religious activities, festival rituals, and special religious activities. The article also briefly discusses other categorizing methods for Taoist rituals. The two major rites of Taoist rituals are Retreat (Zhai) and Offering (Jiao). Other important elements of Taoist rituals include the altar, scriptures, talismans, and more. As a religion that actively engages in social activities, Taoism is not only concerned with the self-cultivation and enlightenment of Taoists but also pays close attention to the demands and needs of the public. Serving the people has always been a fundamental principle of Taoism. It leads to a range of practices centred on individual wishes and blessings. The second and third categories of Taoist activities mentioned above are primarily oriented towards the purpose of blessing.

**Keywords:** Taoism, the Spring Festival, Blessings, Taoist Retreat and Offering, Quanzhen Taoism

**Izvleček:** Daoizem je prvobitna kitajska religija, ki je vsrkana v vse pore kitajske družbe že več kot 4700 let. Izhaja iz raznolikih oblik ljudskega verovanja, ki je vključevalo šamanske in zdravilne prakse ter uporabo talismanov in poudarjalo pomembnost odnosa med človekom in naravo. Zaradi raznovrstnih religioznih praks, iz katerih se je razvil, so mnenja o tem, kdaj in kako je nastal, še vedno deljena. Njegovo obredje bi lahko razvrstili v tri kategorije: usakodnevna religiozna praksa, praznični rituali in obredje za posebne priložnosti. Posebej pomembna sta rituala odmika (Zhai) in darovanja (Jiao), ki sta temeljna za krepitev vere in tudi za oblikovanje krepitve osebnosti, ki se zaveda pomena usklajenosti s potjo Neba, hvaležnosti do prednikov in okolja, v katerem biva, ter dobrobiti, ki jo s svojim ravnanjem priključuje v življenje. V prispevku je predstavljeno predussem obredje daoizma Quanzhen.

**Ključne besede:** daoizem, pomladni praznik, kitajsko novo leto, daoistični oltar, daoistični blagoslov, daoistični odmik (Zhai), daoistična daritev (Jiao), Quanzhen, Zhengyi

The Lunar New Year, also known as Spring Festival, has been officially listed as a floating holiday on the United Nations calendar of conferences and meetings starting in 2024 (Xinhua 2023).

In Chinese culture, the Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival or Chinese New Year, is the most significant holiday. Unlike Western countries where New Year's Day marks the start of the Gregorian calendar year, Chinese New Year marks the beginning of a new year on the traditional lunisolar Chinese calendar. Traditionally, celebrations start on Chinese New Year's Eve, which is the evening before the first day of the lunisolar Chinese calendar year and signifies the end of winter and the start of the spring season. The festivities continue until the Lantern Festival, which takes place on the 15th day of the lunisolar Chinese calendar year. This is because spring is a time of rejuvenation and signifies the start of a new year, especially in ancient China where agriculture was the dominant civilization feature. The Chinese proverb »Hundred festivals are headed with New Year, and four seasons are led by spring« highlights the importance of the Spring Festival in Chinese culture.

However, Taoists celebrate the Spring Festival even earlier, on the 23rd day of the last lunar month. On this day, they escort The Stove God to return to Heaven for debriefings. Taoists celebrate the Spring Festival by observing a series of significant events. On Chinese New Year's Eve, they welcome the Jade Emperor to descend to earth to inspect people's homes after receiving the Stove God's report. On the fifth day, they welcome the God of Wealth. On the seventh day, they express gratitude for the blessings of the stellar deity Taisui from the previous year. On the eighth day, they worship the stellar deity Taisui for blessings in the coming year. On the ninth day, they celebrate the Jade Emperor's birthday, and on the fifteenth day, they observe the Lantern Festival. The Taoist Spring Festival blessings end by the fifteenth day.

Taoism is an ancient religion that has developed in China for over 4,700 years, intending to explore how humans and nature can coexist and thrive



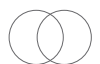
together.<sup>1</sup> Taoism emphasizes the study and practice of the objective laws of the universe. Since its inception, Taoism has been innately associated with the wishes of ancestors who pursued an ideal community characterized by peace, healthy competition, equality, freedom, and a shared future. In this community, everyone's beauty should be appreciated and shared with each other. The founding of the World Taoist Association in September 2023 marks a new medium to bless this ideal society.

The religious activities of Taoists can generally be classified into three categories. The first category is daily religious activities, which include the release of stillness in the morning, Taoist Morning Rites, Taoist meal rites, scripture study, hall religious rituals, Taoist evening rites, and stilling the stillness before falling asleep. The second category comprises festival activities on the holy days of deities and immortals, festival celebrations, and Chinese New Year celebrations. The third category includes special religious activities such as public ritual services, large-scale ceremonies, large-scale rites involved in transmitting registers, and group cultivation practices (Ma 2016, 6).

As a religion that actively engages in social activities, Taoism is not only concerned with the self-cultivation and consummation of Taoists but also pays close attention to the demands and needs of the public. Serving the people has always been a fundamental principle of Taoism. It leads to a range of practices centred on individual wishes and blessings. The second and third categories of Taoist activities mentioned above are primarily oriented towards the purpose of blessing.

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1 In China it is commonly believed that Taoism emerged when Yellow Emperor sought guidance from Guang Chengzi (lit. Person who knows All), so it has been present more than 4,700 years. However, some scholars believe that Taoism was not established until the discipline of Taoism had been developed and its origins can be traced back to Laozi's birth (571 BC) - which was more than 2,000 years ago. (Meulenbeld 2013, 113-184; Robinet 1997) Taoist community believes that the Yellow Emperor calendar, which started when he consulted Guang Chengzi, should be the beginning of the Tao calendar. This year, i.e. 2024 in the Gregorian calendar corresponds to the year 4,721 in the Tao Calendar.



## 1 What are Taoist blessings?

Taoist blessings are performed through rites to pray to deities for dispelling disasters and conferring happiness. These rites are an important embodiment and practice of Taoist thought, emphasizing harmony between humans and nature. The rites that Taoists simply pray for their wishes through activities such as confession, bowing in salute, burning incense, or placing fruits and other offerings on the credence in front of deities is commonly known as worshipping the deities in the temples (Baimiao), or offering incense (Jinxiang) or burning incense (Shaoxiang). Rituals, also known as Retreat and Offering, are specified and more formal rites that require clergies to perform. These rituals must follow strict procedures set up specifically for blessings and dispelling disasters. Taoist rituals, on the other hand, involve the collective participation of clergies or believers in rites aimed at resolving enmity, extracting from sins, blessing, dispelling disaster, extending one's life, and increasing one's longevity.

According to Taoism, natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and locust plagues occur when a country has undergone misfortune. Similarly, an individual with bad luck can suffer various difficulties, such as burglaries, lawsuits, imprisonment, marital problems, being in trouble at work, often offending petty persons, financial losses, family feuds, prolonged illnesses, bereavement, unsafe in-house, as well as revenge sought by adversaries. These issues can be resolved through rituals that bless to bring good fortune and welcoming auspiciousness, good luck and smooth wealth resources, disaster stars receding, lucky stars shining bright, and harmonized yin and yang. Rituals can also help lead to success in various areas such as career, education, wealth, and marriage. In a general sense, any religious activities that take place in Taoist locations are considered blessings. However, in a more specific context, only religious activities that are related to personal wishes and follow strict rules and procedures are referred to as Taoist blessings or Taoist rituals.

According to Min Zhiting's *Taoist Ritual Standards* (Min 2004, 121), Taoist rituals that involve blessings have been in practice since the founding of Taoism by the ancestral celestial master. One of the early Taoist ritual standards for Retreat and Offering is Tian Guan Zhang Ben. Taoism places great emphasis on Precepts as a crucial aspect of cultivation. The Taoist

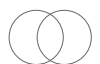


practice of Retreat is a form of Precepts that is often referred to as Precepts Retreat. Before any religious rituals, participants must follow Precepts such as vegetarianism, stillness, taking a bath, and avoiding conjugal life. To uphold the effectiveness of religious ceremonies like resolving enmity, extracting from sins, blessing, dispelling disaster, extending one's life, and increasing one's longevity, as per Taoist beliefs, certain Precepts should be followed during Retreat at specific times such as the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, deities' birthdays, and one's birth sign.

The offering is an extension of Retreat, which involved sacrificing to pray to deities in ancient times. Over time, the communication between the payer and the divine during blessing rituals has evolved into two parts. The first part involves confessing and praying for the living, while the second part involves pursuing the departed with benediction and salvation. All these practices serve a multipurpose in Retreat and Offering rituals. These include major activities such as wishing good luck to the country, dispelling disasters and plagues, and praying for sunshine and rain, as well as minor activities such as settling the dwelling, guarding the earth, dispelling disasters and eliminating dangers, praying for fortune to increase one's longevity, salvation, etc. The Taoist rituals in Zhengyi Taoism vary by region while Quanzhen Taoism has uniform rituals across temples.

A complete Retreat and Offering ritual for blessings comprises three aspects:

1) *Religious ritual*. It is a religious ceremony performed on an altar at a Taoist temple to sacrifice to deities and ancestors for blessings, dispelling disasters, and salvation for believers. Taoist priests, masters, and believers believe that religious rituals possess mystical powers capable of invisibly altering one's fate. The major aspects of religious rituals involve blessing the country with good wishes, dispelling disasters and plagues, and praying for sunshine and rain, as well as minor aspects such as settling the dwelling, guarding the earth, praying for fortune to increase one's longevity, warding off illness and dispelling disasters, etc. Taoist religious rituals encompass practical, spiritual, and mystical significance, as well as religious, ritual, and numerology culture.



2) *Procedure*. This involves setting up an altar, offering supplies, beating drums, burning incense, lighting the furnace, playing music, and activating the altar. A high priest will conduct the ceremony according to disciplines, which includes steps like pacing the void, praising, blessing, chanting protective spells, summoning deities, proclaiming sacred orders, reciting prayer texts, burning written petitions, offering tea and flowers, sending off deities, and burning paper money for the gods. During the event, a variety of ritual instruments such as bells, drums, chime stones, big cymbals, clangs, and cymbals are used. Along with these, musical instruments like flutes, shengs, erhus, lutes, and dulcimers are played to produce music that varies in rhythm and melody according to the progress of the ritual. To maintain order and balance, there are specific rules governing the number of participating Taoists and musicians, as well as the quantity of offerings.

3) *Method*. Taoist rituals involve high priests and scripture masters chanting scriptures, making finger gestures, walking along a guideline, and visualization of spirit. These rituals are meant to convey the devotees' wishes to the deities and pray for their blessings. Taoist believers can pray for any wishes they desire through these rituals. According to Taoist scriptures, praying for blessings brings good fortune, while offering sacrifices can avert calamity.

## 2 Taoist altar for blessings

In Taoism, it is essential to set up an altar, a ritual platform for blessing ceremonies. This practice has its origins in ancient Chinese culture and is known as »sealing the earth to set up an altar«. It was prevalent during the pre-Qin period and involved the construction of a raised platform on flat ground. An altar typically consists of three levels: the inner altar, the middle altar, and the outer altar. The inner altar is dedicated to the principal deities, the middle altar to auxiliary deities, and the outer altar to lesser deities.

Great care is taken when choosing the location to set up an altar. Ideal sites include famous mountains and caves, blessed spots, temples, or Scenic spots of immortals. A site should be clean and serene at least. However,



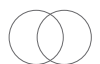
places associated with negative energy, such as battlefields, execution grounds, breweries, and slaughterhouses, should be strictly avoided. An altar can be set up either outdoors or indoors.

Altars are often set up in historically significant and influential locations. These sites are typically ancestral Taoist sites. For example, Mount Longhu, which is a sacred site of the Zhengyi Taoism, has an altar that primarily transmits the Zhengyi registers. Its Ritual seal was engraved with Yang Ping Zhi Du Gong Yin. Similarly, Mount Maoshan, the ancestral site of the Shangqing Taoism, focuses on transmitting the Shangqing registers. Its Ritual seal was engraved with Jiu Lao Xian Du Yin. Mount Gezaio, the ancestral site of the Yuanshi ritual altar, specializes in transmitting the Lingbao registers. Its ritual seal was engraved with Yuan Shi Zong Tan Yin. During the Yuan Dynasty, Mount Longhu led the other three ritual altars and renamed its ritual altar the Altar of Myriad Laws. For Quanzhen Taoism, the ritual altar for blessings, known as the Virtual Emperor Altar or Hun Yuan Zong Tan, was established at Baiyun Temple during the Yuan Dynasty by the Taoist master Qiu Chuji. Its ritual seal was engraved with Daojing Shi Bao.

Quanzhen Taoism has a unique feature called the Mysterious Metropolis at Precept Altar, which indicates ritual altars for transmitting precepts and preaching within the sect. In a large-scale blessing ceremony, multiple altars can be set up, and they follow principles such as the law of heaven and earth, the arrangement of stars, the Five Elements and the Eight trigrams, and the balance of Yin and Yang. The altars are arranged in a hierarchy, with the most important one known as the Main altar or Collective altar, and the rest called branch altars. Each altar has its own specific practices, which will not be elaborated upon in this article.

### **3 The classification of Taoist Retreat and Offering Rituals**

Throughout the history of the development of Taoist Retreat and Offering rituals, the complexity of texts for blessings evolved from simple in the Han-Wei period to complex in the Song dynasty, and then back to simplicity since the Yuan and Ming dynasties. Quanzhen Taoism emerged during the Song and Yuan periods, primarily focusing on cultivating internal



alchemy, and performing Taoist Retreat and Offering rituals for blessings, the procedures remain consistent with traditional Taoist practices, which have been passed down over generations. They integrate various external forms into their bodies and prioritize inner cultivation. The tradition has been passed down for thousands of years, characterized by simplicity, tranquillity, elegance, and solemnity, aligning with the principle of quiet and inaction of Quanzhen Taoism.

The Taoist Retreat (Zhai) and Offering (Jiao) rituals, collectively called »Zhaijiao«, performed by the Quanzhen Taoism come in two kinds: the Peace Offering (Qing Jiao) rituals or Yang things rituals, which involve praying for blessings and gratitude, warding off illness and prolonging life, wishing good luck to the country, praying for sunshine and rain, eliminating dangers and dispelling disasters, celebrating birthdays, etc. The other kind are Sin Offering (You Jiao) rituals or Yin things rituals that include summoning the souls of the dead, bathing and passing through bridges, breaking prisons and lakes, refining souls and offering food, etc.<sup>2</sup> Daily rituals for blessings in Taoist temples can be categorized into two types: regular temple rituals and Taoist sacred arena (Daochang) rites. Twelve different types of regular temple rituals are performed for blessings. These include the morning rite chant including heaven and earth rituals, the Zhujang ritual to Welcome Deities and Immortals, and turning Heaven Veneration. There is also evening rite chant including the Jigu ritual to Sacrifice Alone Soul, the Zhushou ritual to Celebrate the Birthday, the Qinghe ritual of Congratulation, the Jade Emperor ritual, the Sanqing ritual, the San Yuan ritual, the Nine Emperors ritual, the Jiejia ritual of Grand Ceremony to Meet the Jade Emperor, the True Martial God ritual, the Rite of Hat and Kerchief, and the deities ritual various Taoist deities (Ma 2016, 5).<sup>3</sup> There are twelve Taoist sacred arena (Daochang) rites that include

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2 »Breaking the Lake« is a colloquial term for opening the »Blood Lake Hell«. Blood Lake Hell is a highly significant concept within Taoism. It is believed to be a hell formed by the accumulation of impure blood, situated to the south of the Great Iron Wall Mountain, at the depths of the Northern Yin Sea and is a part of the (無間地獄) uninterrupted hell.

3 Rite of Hat Kerchief (the Guanjin ritual) and the deities ritual of various Taoist deities (the Zhuzhen ritual). The Taoist »Guan Jin ritual« refers to the formal blessing ceremony conducted for a Quanzhen Taoist priest to officially join the religion, marking one of the significant rites in a Taoist's spiritual journey. »Zhu Zhen ritual« is a ritual ceremony that invokes all the deities of Taoism for blessings.



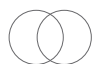


the ritual of Opening the altar, the Noon Audience ritual of San Yuan (Chen 2003, 89–138).

There are various classifications of Taoist blessings, which can be attributed to different perspectives. In his book »Taoist Rituals« (Chen 2003, 89–138), scholar Chen Yaoting proposed a classification system for Taoist Precepts Retreat based on the traditional Taoist Three Registers and Seven Sections. There are three retreats called the Golden Register Retreat, the Jade Register Retreat, and the Yellow Register Retreat, as well as seven sections which include the Retreat of the Three Emperors, the Retreat of Spontaneity, the Retreat of Shangqing, the Retreat of Teaching, the Retreat of Mud and Charcoal, the Retreat of Luminous Perfection, and the Retreat of the Three Primes. Chen also classified temple rituals into seven types, namely, the Jinbiao ritual to Submit Prayer Statement to the Heaven, the lamp ritual, the Liand ritual to Cultivate and Release Soul, the ritual of the Oblation, the FuZhao ritual to use talismans to summon generals, bridge crossing ritual, etc.

Each ritual has a specific function. For example, the Golden Register Retreat is for blessing the emperor and eliminating natural disasters, the Jade Register Retreat is for bringing salvation to people and protecting emperor, the Yellow Register Retreat is for rescuing the souls from hell, the Retreat of Spontaneity for petitioning the gods for bestowing blessings on mankind, the retreat of Shangqing for seeking immortality and true thoughts, refining the form and hiding the scenery, and the Retreat of Luminous Perfection for removing illness and sweeping away evil. But the major effectiveness of Taoist Retreat and Offering focus on blessings.

Taoist rituals can be classified according to the Yin-Yang principle into two categories: Yang Shi rituals and Yin Shi rituals. Yang Shi rituals are focused on blessings for the living or physical life, while Yin Shi rituals serve both the living and the deceased and include soul elevation and food offerings. In Taoist practice, there are two forms of ritual: communal food offering and setting up a »Yan Kou«. The latter is a longer ritual that often lasts several hours and aims to bless living relatives and elevate ancestral spirits, benefiting both the underworld and the living world.



There are three main types of large-scale Taoist rituals which can be identified based on their scale and magnitude. These are Zhou Tian (Complete Heaven), Pu Tian (Universal Heaven), and Luo Tian (Encompassing Heaven) Offering. These rituals typically involve many participants, significant financial and material resources, and are large-scale in their scale and presentation. Successful execution of these rituals often requires collaborative effort and teamwork.

For example, the Luo Tian Offering involves the worship of 1,200 deities. Different altars are set up, such as the Metropolitan Altar, Imperial Altar, Salvation Altar, Three Officials (SanGuan) Altar, Gratitude Altar, Suffering Relief Altar, Underworld Relief Altar, Qingxuan Altar, etc. Scriptures are recited, and incense and lamps are offered day and night. These blessing ceremonies typically last from three to forty-nine days.

In terms of the rites of the offerings, there are two types of offerings: specific offerings and offerings after Zhai. Specific offerings involve specific rites such as sending up a petition, while offerings after Retreat occur when rites of offerings are not set up, and instead, after dispersing the altar, Spirit tablets of Taoist Gods are set up, and offerings of food and drink varying in number are placed in the centre of the blessing altar to thank the gods for their blessings. These rites are similar to the »offering incense« and »temple worship« blessing rites mentioned above.

## 4 Taoist New Year blessing rituals

### 4.1 Welcoming the Jade Emperor for blessings

Taoism celebrates a festival on the 25th day of the twelfth lunar month known as »the day when the Supreme Deity inspects the heavens«. It is believed that on this day, the Jade Emperor, who is considered the supreme god of heaven, assesses the human realm to reward virtue and punish wrongdoing. As a result, households set up altars with offerings of incense and vegetarian dishes to welcome the Jade Emperor's arrival. This ritual called »Welcoming the Jade Emperor« (Baidu encyclopedia 2023), requires for people to be mindful of their actions and words to gain favour and blessings for the coming year. In Taoist temples, the ritual is conducted



with utmost respect and grandeur, with elaborate preparations made to welcome the Jade Emperor. This includes prayers, confessing past mistakes, and requesting forgiveness and blessings.

In Taoist temples, on the midnight of the twenty-fifth day, a large-scale ceremony is held to welcome the Jade Emperor's chariot. This ceremony is performed in a solemn and large-scale atmosphere to pray to Heaven and welcome the Jade Emperor's descent to inspect the mortal world. During this event, people pray to the Jade Emperor, repent for their past mistakes, ask for forgiveness, and express their wishes.

#### **4.2 Praying to the stellar deity Taisui for blessings**

The stellar deity Taisui is a unique deity in Taoism originating from ancient Chinese astrology. It represents sixty celestial gods that change annually. The stellar deity Taisui of the year holds significant influence over the fortunes and misfortunes of that year.

Praying to the stellar deity Taisui is an important Spring Festival ritual in Taoism. It involves worshipping the stellar deity Taisui of the year as each person is believed to be governed by a »Lifetime the stellar deity Taisui«. Offending the stellar deity Taisui can lead to a year of misfortune. Hence, people traditionally visit temples early in the year to worship the stellar deity Taisui and participate in Taoist blessing ceremonies to communicate with the stellar deity Taisui and seek blessings (Li 2017, 73).

In Taoist temples, the worship of the stellar deity Taisui generally starts from the minor New Year in the twelfth lunar month, or on the first day of the first lunar month (Spring Festival), the seventh, eighth, or fifteenth day (Lantern Festival). During these times, ceremonies such as thanking the stellar deity Taisui, worshipping the stellar deity Taisui, welcoming the celestial phoenix, honouring the deities, praying for blessings and dispelling disasters, aligning with the stars, and resolving bad luck are conducted.

These rituals are performed to bless the devotees or their family members. Petitions and reports are presented to the stellar deity Taisui for protection and blessings.



### 4.3 Welcoming the God of Wealth for blessings

In Taoism, the God of Wealth is considered the ruler of all wealth and fortunes. It is believed that worshipping or offering to the God of Wealth can bring wealth and prosperity. This custom of welcoming the God of Wealth on the fifth day of the first lunar month is a long-standing tradition among Chinese people. The God of Wealth is one of the most popular deities and is welcomed with great enthusiasm.

In Taoism, people worship multiple Gods of Wealth. They are Zhao Gongming who governs the celestial beings responsible for wealth, the Five-Road God of Wealth, the Three Stars of Wealth (happiness, wealth and longevity), Guan Yu (Martial God of Wealth), Caibo Xingjun (Heavenly Official God of Wealth), Fan Li (Business God of Wealth), Bi Gan (Official God of Wealth), and Cai Jing (Rich God of Wealth).

The fifth day of the first lunar month is also known as the God of Wealth Day. Taoist temples have a tradition of welcoming the God of Wealth on this day. Ceremonies such as welcoming the God of Wealth and replenishing the wealth repository are usually held. On this auspicious day, early in the morning, the incense officer leads a group of high priests, scripture masters, and devotees. They use a royal carriage to invite the God of Wealth to the temple of the God of Wealth. The high priests burn incense, perform rituals, walk in a sacred pattern, and summon the divine presence, praying for blessings and prosperity for all Taoist believers and ensuring good fortune in financial matters for the year.

### 4.4 Celebrating the Jade Emperor's Birthday for blessings

The Jade Emperor Worship, which celebrates the birthday of the Jade Emperor, takes place on the ninth day of the first lunar month. The Jade Emperor, who resides in Taiwei Jade Qing Palace, commands all deities of the ten directions in three worlds and governs all living things of the four births and six realms. He is responsible for weighing the rise and fall, the weal and woe, and the fortune and misfortune of the world. In Taoism, he is considered the supreme ruler of the three worlds and has a significant influence on common people. As a result, the Jade Emperor's birthday is celebrated with great pomp and show. On this day, Taoist temples



conduct elaborate ceremonies to worship the Jade Emperor and pray for blessings, prosperity, health, and success in the new year.

#### 4.5 The Lantern Festival (Shangyuan Festival)

The Lantern Festival, also known as the Yuanxiao Festival, is a traditional celebration that takes place on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, or the first full moon night of the new lunar year. Ancestors referred to night as »xiao«. During this festival, people enjoy the sight of the lantern display and eat sweet rice balls called tangyuan or yuanxiao or sweet dumplings. Taoism enshrines the Sanyuan which refers to the three offices of Heaven, Earth, and Water. Each office has different duties. The Heaven Office confers happiness, the Earth Office liberates from faults, and the Water Office eliminates dangers and dispels disasters. The fifteenth day of the first lunar month is also the birthday of Emperor Tianguan. The Lantern Festival is also referred to as Shangyuan Festival and all Taoist temples hold blessing rituals on that day. Taoists will go to the Hall of Three Officials to offer incense.

According to »Yinyuan Jing« and other texts from the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Emperor Tianguan, whose full name is Shangyuan Yipin Jiuqi Blessing Tianguan Ziwei Emperor, will come down to the world to correct the sins and blessings of the people on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Emperor Tianguan will do that on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month every year, it is the so-called Blessing of Heavenly Officials. Taoist believers will light lanterns on the day to pray for a peaceful and healthy year.

### 5 The significance of Taoist blessings

Regarding the author's view, Taoist blessings have practical relevance beyond specific purposes:

1) *Be in awe*. The philosophy of Taoism venerates the Dao and emphasizes the unity of heaven and the Dao. It promotes moral edification through blessing rituals, encouraging adherents to hold a sense of awe and reverence. By aligning their actions with the way of heaven, they are believed



to receive divine protection which aids in dispelling misfortunes, curing illnesses, prolonging life, and fulfilling wishes.

2) *Be beneficial to the present.* Taoism places a great emphasis on increasing the happiness index in the present. Its blessing rituals primarily aim at praying for good fortune and warding off evil, thereby raising one's level. By seeking blessings and protection from deities, Taoists aim to dispel misfortune and negative energies, which leads to greater auspiciousness, health, and positive energy. This practice is believed to result in a peaceful, healthy, joyful, and happy life for its followers.

3) *Be grateful to others.* Taoism places great importance on moral education and the significance of being virtuous. This is especially crucial during rituals for blessings, where showing gratitude towards ancestors and others is an essential aspect. The rituals often involve commemorating ancestors, expressing gratitude for their kindness, and emulating their virtuous traits. This sense of gratitude extends beyond just ancestors to include the country, society, and others, creating a harmonious community of fate among humans, deities, and the deceased.

4) *Strengthening the faith.* Taoist believers engage in unique rituals that involve retreat and offering rituals to intensify their communication with the spiritual world. These practices help individuals deepen their connection with the religious world and increase their confidence and devotion to Taoist beliefs. Taoist believers can gain a profound insight into Taoism by spiritually conversing with their deities, praying, and participating in rituals.

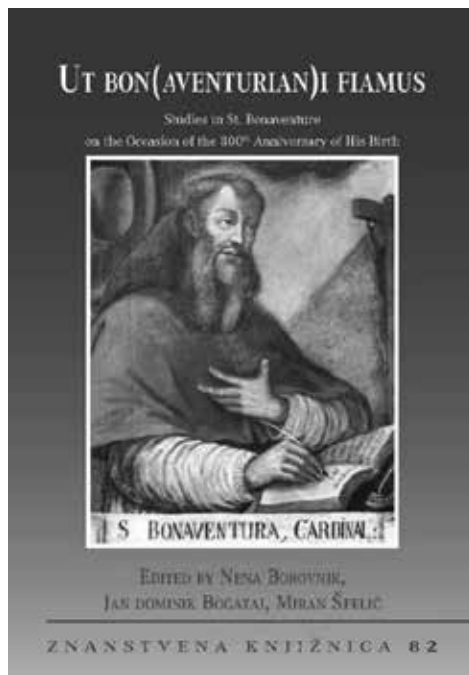
This article only provides a partial discussion of Taoist blessings. To truly comprehend their spiritual essence, one must engage in prolonged and immersive practice and life. The author hopes for a world that becomes increasingly peaceful, with more active interactive learning among civilizations and diverse cultural dialogues. These factors will contribute to uncovering what will benefit human society.



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*Znanstvena knjižnica 82*

Nena Bobovnik, Jan Dominik Bogataj in Miran Špelič (ur.)

**UT BON(AVENTURIAN)I FIAMUS:**

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doc. dr. Simon Malmenvall, recenzija zbornika

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