

“*Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Emperor of the North*” Through the Lens of Social Crisis

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Abstract

This article explores the Daoist scripture titled *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Deity of the Pole Star, Emperor of the North of the Supreme Ultimate, A Dongzhen Canon*), which was arguably composed during the Eastern Jin dynasty in Southeast China. The examination aims to illuminate portrayals of crisis and the presented solutions, and thus investigate reflections of and responses to the social crisis of the period. The study demonstrates how the messaging about the crisis is structured and how individual aspects inter-relate, while simultaneously exploring its correlations with historical circumstances, thus also revealing information on the movement from which the scripture originated, i.e. the author and the intended audience. In doing so, it shows how the author creates a proselytizing strategy which is particularly tailored to the audience in the social crisis of the time. The purpose of this study is also to highlight the significance of considering crisis-related content or message in the scripture as a whole, including correlations with specific historical circumstances.

Keywords: Daoist religion, Eastern Jin dynasty, social crisis, *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing*, *Yuanshi tianzun*

“*Sijajno sveto besedilo o božanskih zaklinjanjih Severnega cesarja*” skozi optiko družbene krize

Izvleček

Pričujoči članek raziskuje daoistično sveto besedilo z naslovom *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Sijajno sveto besedilo kanona Dongzhen o božanskih zaklinjanjih božanstva Severnice, Severnega cesarja Najvišje skrajnosti*), ki je bilo verjetno napisano v obdobju dinastije Vzhodni Jin na jugovzhodu Kitajske. Razprava želi osvetliti prikaze krize in predstavljene rešitve ter tako raziskati odseve družbene krize tega obdobja in odzive nanjo. Študija prikazuje, kako je sporočanje o krizi strukturirano in kako se posamezni vidiki medsebojno povezujejo, hkrati

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pa raziskuje korelacije z zgodovinskimi okoliščinami, s čimer razkriva tudi informacije o gibanju, iz katerega sveto besedilo izvira, tj. o avtorju in ciljnem občinstvu. Pri tem pokaže, kako avtor oblikuje prozelitsko strategijo, ki je posebej prilagojena občinstvu v tedanji družbeni krizi. Namen te študije je tudi poudariti pomembnost obravnavanja s krizo povezane vsebine oziroma sporočila v svetem besedilu kot celote, vključno s korelacijami s specifičnimi zgodovinskimi okoliščinami.

Ključne besede: daoistična religija, dinastija Vzhodni Jin, družbena kriza, *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaojing*, *Yuanshi tianzun*

Introduction

This study explores the Daoist scripture titled *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaojing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Deity of the Pole Star, Emperor of the North of the Supreme Ultimate, A Dongzhen Canon*). It attempts to ascertain which correlations can be drawn between its content and the social crisis of the period of its composition. The discussion focuses on the analysis of the scripture in its historical context by employing a systematic comprehensive and integral approach. The examination aims to illuminate aspects or parts of its crisis-related content, namely portrayals of the crisis (including depictions of the manifestations of the crisis and explanations of its causes) and proposed solutions. At the same time, it endeavours to shed light on the interrelatedness among such aspects and with the actual social crisis of the time.

Below, I will begin by discussing the origin of the scripture and its structure and explore the tumultuous world of the time during which it was composed. Next, I will identify where the scripture reflects on the social crisis by examining how it depicts the crisis by means of its manifestations and how it explains its causes. Lastly, I will identify which solutions it proposes as responses to the social crisis of the time. I will determine key groups of actors, analyse their roles, means, options, goals and mutual relationships, and so elaborate on the presented plan to solve the crisis. The discussion will thus also reveal information on the movement from which the text in question emerged.

The Scripture's Origin and Structure

Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaoqing is a scripture preserved in the Ming Daoist Canon (DZ¹ 49). It originated in the movement of a tradition, which later documents refer to as the tradition of Fengdu 酆都 or of the Emperor of the North (*Beidi* 北帝). It developed on the fringes of the Tianshi dao 天師道 (Way of Celestial Masters) organization in the southeast in the lower Yangzi region (Mollier 1997; 1990, 24; 2006, 84). The scripture under discussion is one of the earliest extant texts that emerged from this tradition, and seems unrelated to other major contemporary Daoist currents (ibid. 1997, 335–37). It is presented in the form of a calendar, which covers the last 10 years of a sexagesimal cycle,² namely from *jiayin* 甲寅 to *guihai* 癸亥. Internal and external evidence suggests that it was composed during the Eastern Jin dynasty (Dong Jin 東晉, 317–420).³ Thus, the time frame from *jiayin* to *guihai* corresponds to the final years of either the cycle that started in 304, i.e. from 354 to 363, or the one which began in 364, namely from 414 to 423. The latter time frame seems more likely since the scripture contains several similarities with certain Daoist scriptures of the time.⁴ Concerning the upper bound, we can observe that the Jin dynasty is mentioned in the description of the last year (possibly corresponding to 423), but the Liu-Song

- 1 The abbreviation “DZ” refers to the *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 (*Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Era*).
- 2 Based on its subtitle and content, Schipper (2004, 273) presumes the preserved text is but one *juan* of the original complete work constituted of six *juan*, which is supposed to have discussed the entire 60-year cycle.
- 3 In describing the last year (i.e. *guihai* year), the text mentions the age of the Great Jin (*Da Jin zhi shi* 大晉之世) (DZ 49, 9b), which is direct internal evidence of the time of its composition. Schipper (2004, 273) considers it to be the current period and dates the text to the Eastern Jin dynasty, while Mollier (1990, 24) sets a narrower time frame, namely from the end of the 4th to the beginning of the 5th century.
- 4 In the case of the former time span (i.e. from 354 to 363), this would signify that the text originated slightly before the revelation of the Shangqing scriptures (*Shangqing jing* 上清經; *Scriptures of the Highest Clarity*) between 364 and 370. However, there are several similarities to the early Lingbao scriptures (*Lingbao jing* 靈寶經; *Scriptures of the Numinous Treasure*) and the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經 (*Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Supreme Cavernous Abyss*) (DZ 335) in particular. It uses terminology which connects it to the Lingbao texts (Mollier 1990, 24), which started to emerge slightly before the end of the 4th century. One such example is *Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning), who appears in the role of speaker both here as well as in several Lingbao scriptures. There are also similarities in vocabulary and phraseology with the earlier part of the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* dated around 420. For instance, Schipper (2004, 273) noted that both texts referred to themselves using the alternative title *Sanmei jing* 三昧經 (*The Samādhi Scripture*) (DZ 49, 3a, 9a; DZ 335, 8.9a and passim). Furthermore, terms denoting various types of demons resemble or are identical with those found in the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* and the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaoqing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經 (*Most Excellent and Marvellous Scripture of the Numinous Treasure on the Limitless Salvation*) (DZ 1). (see below)

劉宋 (420–479) dynasty was established in 420. This indicates that the text was written before the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty, as the author⁵ seems to have no knowledge of the Liu-Song. Thus, we could roughly define the most likely time frame to fall somewhere from the late 4th century to the beginning of the 5th, which is in agreement with the dating suggested by Mollier (1990, 24).

The preserved text is arranged in 13 sections. The beginning of each is marked by an opening passage, i.e. “*Yuanshi tianzun shuo* 元始天尊說 (The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said)” that addresses the so-called “*xiayuan zhongsheng (shengren)* 下元眾生 (生人) (the living beings /humans/ of the latest cosmic era)”. The content of most sections seems to be related to specific years written in the *ganzhi* 干支 (stems and branches) binome. In sections 2 to 11, the years from *jiayin* to *guihai* appear in chronological order. In the remaining three sections, there are no references to specific years. The sections contain depictions of manifestations of crisis and its causes, which are then followed by some proposed solutions.

The Tumultuous World of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

The Eastern Jin dynasty was a tumultuous era of military conflicts, migrations, and power struggles. Throughout the period, there was a constant threat of invasion from the non-Han peoples, who were creating kingdoms in the North and sometimes invading China (Holcombe 2019b, 124–44). Towards the end of the 3rd century, civil wars and an attack by the Xiongnu 匈奴 state led to the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (Xi Jin 西晉; 266–316) (ZGS 1979, 199–211)⁶. The court fled to the southeast and founded the Eastern Jin dynasty, which ushered in an era of disunity. These events also triggered mass migrations to the South. Many independent farmers and most prominent Han families and their households went into exile. They arrived in several phases or waves, beginning in the following years: 307, 321, 349, 383, 416, 450 and 466. Approximately 900,000 people migrated between the Yongjia 永嘉 (307–313) to the Liu-Song dynasty periods. As a result, about one sixth of the population in the South were emigres⁷ (Wang 1979, 320–22, 343–46).

5 Since the authorship of the text is unknown, the term “author” in singular form is used to refer to one or possibly multiple individuals.

6 The abbreviation “ZGS” refers to the *Zhongguo gudaishi* 中國古代史 (*History of Ancient China*), edited by Nanjing daxue lishixi Zhongguo gudai shizu 南京大學歷史系中國古代史組.

7 Wang (1979, 346) also pointed out that these are approximate assessments, since the people included are only those who were registered.

The imperial family leaned on the support of the members of established Northern emigree families. They became increasingly powerful and wealthy, regained privileges, and occupied the highest government posts. However, only descendants of the early arrivals gained access to power. On the other hand, the old Southern aristocracy was almost entirely excluded from the court and political power (Holcombe 2019a, 98–103, 106–109). It is not surprising that these old Southerners felt discontented and resentful (*Jin shu*, 58: 1574). Moreover, they were also pressured by Northerners to convert to their Daoist religion, i.e. the Tianshi dao (Strickmann 1977, 6–7). The imperial line was relatively powerless, while large Northern and Southern families constantly struggled for power and prestige. In addition, members of newly empowered families holding military commands over the central Yangzi region were a threat to everyone. Military conflicts between central and local powers broke out and fighting took place between two macro-regions, namely the lower and central Yangzi regions. For instance, Huan Wen 桓溫 (312–373), an emigree from a military family, dominated the political and military spheres for a quarter of a century and weakened the influence of the eminent families. At the turn of the century Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), his son, took centre stage in terms of military domination and even established his own dynasty. Then in 404, Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422) successfully attacked him. Moreover, these military commanders and the court also sent expeditions to reconquer the North.⁸ During the period of Huan Wen's domination, a trend arose of demilitarization among the Southern elite (Lewis 2009, 62–69; Holcombe 2019a, 109–12, 116–17). It became more desirable for young people to choose the path of the literati rather than that of the soldier, a trend that was also due to the dangers of socio-political life (Mao 1990, 93–95).

On the other hand, commoners who fled to the South sought protection by becoming dependants of large Southern families, entered monasteries, or fled to the mountains to live as recluses, where they were thus able to escape tax and public service obligations (Crowell 1990, 175–77). Such individuals remained socially and economically disadvantaged. Heavy taxation burdened independent native farmers,⁹ pushing the smaller ones in particular into poverty. The public service or corvée labour (*yaoyi* 徭役) obligations were also highly exacting. As a result

8 After the move, the emigree families hoped to return to their homelands but gradually got accustomed to life in the South. The temporary tombs built even up to the early 5th century reveal that some still maintained the hope of a return throughout this period. Nevertheless, the court was distrustful of those generals who favoured trying to reconquer the North (Holcombe 2019a, 101–102).

9 A few attempts were made to correct the registers to improve the levying of taxes and conscription of manpower, but these impacted not only the commoners, but also the upper classes (Crowell 1990, 187–99).

of these challenges, the commoners often instigated or joined rebellions. In 399, these culminated in a bloody uprising on the eastern coast led by Sun En 孫恩 (?–402)¹⁰ and his successor Lu Xun 盧循 (?–411). They were joined by numerous discontented and poverty-stricken peasants and other commoners (ZGS 1979, 228–34), and later also by aboriginal people (Holcombe 2019a, 115–16).

However, the above events were arguably not the only ones to trigger a sense of crisis. The *Jin shu* 晉書 (*Book of Jin Dynasty*) (27: 807, 809, 818, passim) mentions natural disasters,¹¹ such as floods, fires, droughts, windstorms, and earthquakes, and also speaks of bad harvests and famine. By analysing extant data on floods and droughts, we can observe that the percentage occurring in the central region (including the lower Yangzi region and the capital in modern-day Jiangsu province) was much higher compared to earlier periods (Yao 1943, 367, 369, 371). In addition, during the Eastern Jin era their frequency and duration also increased (ibid. 1942, 275–76). Moreover, data on outbreaks of epidemic diseases in the South show a rapid rise in their number from the year 400, surpassing the number in the North around the mid-5th century (McNeill 1976, 259–69; Morabia 2009, 1364). While the data may be incomplete in both instances, natural disasters and epidemics arguably threatened members of all social strata. Thus, the death rate was high during this period due to wars, plagues, and poor harvests, and people even turned to cannibalism (Yang 1946, 114).

From the Eastern Jin period onward, the South also saw a loosening of ties among family members and a decrease in social closeness between large families and the local rural population. Various authors observe that loyalty and cooperation among family members in the South was no longer as emphasized as in the North, and some relatives even fought each other for power at court or engaged in military conflicts (Lewis 2009, 129–31; Mao 1990, 101–102).

Moreover, from the end of the Han period onwards, faith in the Confucian understanding of social and political order diminished. Both lower and upper classes increasingly began turning to the Daoist and Buddhist religions that promised salvation and immortality (Buckley Ebrey 1996, 86).

In summation, the period of the Eastern Jin dynasty was a time of many changes. I was able to identify several aspects of the crisis, i.e., political, military, social, religious, moral, health, economic, legal, and natural, which in some way affected members of various strata or social groups. As outlined above, the manifestations of crisis include power struggles, military conflicts, wars, loosened social ties, in-

10 For more on the rebellion and religious ideas behind Sun En's uprising, see the studies by Miyakawa Hisayuki (1971) and Eichhorn Werner (1954).

11 For more data on disasters from the official sources, see Satō Taketoshi (1993).

vasions of the non-Han peoples, rebellions, decline in morality, disunity of the Chinese realm, poor harvests, burdening public service obligations, mass migrations, epidemics, natural disasters, political instability, lack of reliable leadership, religious competition and pressures, poverty, a high mortality rate, and more. They all arguably contributed to a growing sense of fear, danger, unease, and threat, as well as to feelings of lack of peace, safety, cooperation, well-being, stability and order, and thereby to a general sense of crisis and loss of hope.

Portrayals of the Crisis as Reflections of the Social Crisis of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

Below, I examine how the crisis is described in the scripture and how its causes are explained, thus identifying reflections of the social crisis of the Eastern Jin dynasty.

Depictions of Crisis

Let us look at an example to illustrate how the scripture portrays the crisis.

The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said: The humans of the latest cosmic era live unhurried lives. They do not know that in the age of the Great Jin, thirty thousand demon soldiers descend on the kingdom, disseminating severe infectious diseases and red *Qi*¹², and riding the Heavenly flood waves. The devil kings of the Six Caverns spread all under Heaven, chasing and suppressing myriads of people. Large armies slay one another. Those in official service are scattered. Since the demon soldiers starve all under Heaven, they devour living beings. The hundred surnames are forced to go into exile, fathers [go] to the south and sons to the north. Great bandits overpower all under Heaven, the homeland is disunited. There is no peace on the five roads, provinces and counties are cruel towards one another. High ranking officials impose punishments upon each other, and minor functionaries [re]move one another. Myriads of people lose their means of existence and roam all under Heaven in desolation. The humans are stricken by calamities. By *guihai* year, millions upon millions of savage demons walk around all under Heaven. They kill and injure the humans; they disrupt the world. Their brutal

12 The *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* explains that demons spread toxic *Qi* of various colours and kill stupid people. The effect of the red *Qi* is to cause swelling (DZ 335, 1.4b).

violence causes damage and loss of property; injuries to camels and horses are innumerable. Barbarians¹³ are spreading in more than one region. (DZ 49, 9b–10a)

From the passage above, we can already see that depictions of the crisis touch upon various problems, ranging from socio-political to natural. With regards to the latter, natural disasters, floods and fires in particular, are among the most frequently mentioned phenomena across the entire text (*ibid.*, 2b, 5b, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10b, 11a, 11b). There are also entries indicating bad harvests. For instance, the text states that grains are not ripening (*ibid.*, 5a), which suggests famine in a predominantly agricultural society. In addition to such natural catastrophes, epidemics (*ibid.*, 1b, 2b, 5b, 5a, 5b, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10b, 11a, 11b) and wars (*ibid.*, 2b, 3b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 11a, 11b) are also prevalent and presented as major issues. Demons (or demon armies) invade China (*ibid.*, 1b, 8a, 9b). Bandits (*ibid.*, 1b, 9a etc.) and non-Han peoples (*ibid.*, 10a) are widespread. Evil rebels form large states (*ibid.*, 1a). In other words, violence, rebellions, treason, attacks, battles, invasions, and defeat permeate the text. As a result, the mortality rate seems to be increasing, as numerous entries refer to people (including the ruler(s) and the officials) being killed or dying of disease (*ibid.*, 6b, 8b etc.). Cannibalism is also indicated (*ibid.*, 5b). People are burdened by public service or *corvée* labour (*ibid.*, 6a, 8a) and lose work (*ibid.*, 6a, 10a). Their property is lost or damaged (*ibid.*, 10a). Many flee their home(land) (*ibid.*, 1b, 8b, 9a). The country is disunited (*ibid.*, 10a), families are separated, and people scattered in different directions (*ibid.*, 5b, 6a, 8b, 9a, 10a, 11b). The land and households are empty (*ibid.*, 1b, 2b, 5a). Morals among the people have declined. There is disharmony in human relations, i.e., within family units (*ibid.*, 2b, 8b, 9a), between ruler(s) and subjects or ministers (*ibid.*, 8b, 9a), among officials (*ibid.*, 8b, 10a), and between counties and provinces (*ibid.*, 10a). Some entries indicate power struggles within the higher social strata (*ibid.*, 8b, 9a, 10a). People conspire in unlawful activities, turn traitorous, and impose punishments upon each other (*ibid.*, 1b, 8a). Laws and decrees are produced in an abrupt manner (*ibid.*, 5a).

It is pointed out several times that, in general, things, including official matters, are not going well, not having good results (*ibid.*, 1b, 5a, 5b, 6b, 10a), and that the populace is suffering, burdened by hardships and misfortune (*ibid.*, 1a–b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 11b). Ordinary people, military men, minor functionaries, high officials and

13 In ancient times, the term *yi* 夷 designated “barbarians (‘less cultivated’ peoples)” in general and/or the southern or eastern non-Han tribes in particular, while the term *rong* 戎 held a meaning of the northwestern or western ones. *Rong* also became a term for “war” (Theobald 2013a; 2013b). As it would be difficult to determine which specific tribes or wars the author had in mind, a more general term, i.e. “barbarians”, is used here.

ruler(s), men and women (ibid., 6b), adults and their descendants (ibid., 5b, 6b), and their kin (ibid., 6a, 6b), are all affected in some way. In other words, the crisis hit across the social strata and regardless of gender or age, and the world is in chaos due to various factors (ibid., 1a–b, 2b, 3b, 5a, 6a, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 10a, 11a–b). Unsurprisingly, the general lack of peace, feelings of unease, worries, and discontent are stressed throughout the text (ibid., 1b, 5a, 6b, 8b, 9a, 11b). The world is not in harmony (ibid., 6a). This is not the world of Great Peace (*taiping* 太平)¹⁴ (ibid., 5b), but rather its opposite. In short, both the socio-political and the natural environment are portrayed as heavily disrupted. The traditional Chinese or Daoist holistic worldview suggests a severe disharmony between Heaven and human beings, i.e. a cosmic disharmony. In addition, all these occurrences towards the end of the cycle, the so-called Great *Kalpa* (*dajie* 大劫) (ibid., 11a–b), indicate the world nearing a culmination of cosmic disharmony, i.e. an apex of crisis of cosmic proportions.

Although our text does not refer directly to any specific historical event, the reference to the present era of the Jin dynasty (ibid., 9b) suggests that the author intended to draw the audience's attention to the events of this historical period. We also see that certain events in the text bring to mind several of the above occurrences of the tumultuous world of the Eastern Jin. For instance, the text speaks of the disunity of the Chinese realm, wars, the spread of the non-Han peoples, and people being scattered and forced into exile. This seems to indicate mass migrations from the North due to the invasion of non-Han peoples, and reflect the frustration and stress of the people who had to move to the South. At the same time, these may be expressions of their sadness and hopes to return. It thus seems likely that the author and/or at least a part of the intended audience were emigres.

This movement clearly included one or more educated individuals, who wrote the text and were somewhat informed of events in the highest circles. The text addresses many aspects permeating the life of the upper strata in that period, such as political instability and power struggles. Moreover, several entries portray the loosening of social ties and moral decline. The text covers a wide range of problems also present at the time, and thus has the potential to attract members of both Northern emigree and old Southern elites. On the other hand, it also shows much concern for the problems of the common people, which suggests that the author may have also intended to attract people from the lower social strata, who were affected by these problems, such as bad harvests. Several depictions, e.g., those that speak of heavy burdens on the people, corvée labour, social chaos, and

14 See note 27.

rebellions, also bring to mind the circumstances of the commoners during the period of the Eastern Jin dynasty. Furthermore, the text also portrays manifestations of crisis that arguably presented a threat to members of all social strata, such as epidemics, warfare and natural disasters.

Although the sections seem to be chronologically arranged, it is not clear where exactly the portrayals of the present or recent past flow into predictions.¹⁵ Regardless, similar portrayals of crisis appear throughout the text. However, there is a sense of a growing intensity of troubles, violence, dangers, and difficulties towards the end of the text, where the audience is warned of the imminence of the end of the Great *Kalpa* (ibid., 11a–b). In the early medieval Daoist eschatological system,¹⁶ the Great *Kalpa* represents a culmination of *Yin* (Earth) and an exhaustion of *Yang* (Heaven), or the so-called Yang-nine (*yangjiu* 陽九) of the *Yangjiu bailiu* 陽九百六 (Yang-nine and hundred six) theory.¹⁷ This is a time of calamities (*zai* 災), when the Six Heavens (*liutian* 六天)¹⁸ reach a climax. Pre-apocalyptic time is portrayed as a time of decadence, when the evil demonic *Qi* (*gui Qi* 鬼氣), also called the old *Qi* (*gu Qi* 故氣) or *Yin Qi* 陰氣, is growing and billions of demons are populating the Earth (Mollier 1990, 162–65). Analysing the Daoist eschatology including the *Yangjiu bailiu* theory in some scriptures, Li Fengmao (1996) argued that it was related to the (sense of) crisis towards the end of dynastic cycles, or rather, that a sense of crisis caused the formation of ideas of the end of the world. In addition, Stephen Bokenkamp (1994, 72) pointed out that portrayals of apocalypse “were based on both actual events and contemporary perceptions of disorder during the tumultuous days of the Period of Division” (ibid.). Because potential followers heard of, witnessed, or experienced such indications or heralds of a catastrophic future in their world, these portrayals could appear believable

15 It could be argued that most of the text can be regarded as predictions, which is similar to what Mollier stated, i.e. that the text *predicts* catastrophes in the following nine years of the sexagesimal cycle and beyond (Mollier 1997, 336).

16 For more details, see studies by Christine Mollier (1990, 162–65), Kobayashi Masayoshi (1990, 403–81), Li Fengmao (1996), Stephen Bokenkamp (1994) and Wu Yu (2014).

17 The terms *yangjiu* (Yang-nine) and *bailiu* 百六 (hundred and six) are not specifically mentioned in the text under discussion. However, we can find them in another early scripture from the Beidi tradition, which originated in the same milieu, namely the *Taishang dongyuan beidi tianpeng huming xiaozai shenzhou miaojing* 太上洞淵北帝天蓬護命消災神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Tianpeng Divine Incantation for Protecting Life and Eliminating Calamities by the Emperor of the North of the Supreme Cavernous Abyss*), which also portrays a decadent society (DZ 53). On this text, see the study by Christine Mollier (1997, 335–37).

18 The Six Heavens refer to the realms of evil, impure spirits of (sacrifices of) popular religion, while the Three Heavens are presented as the spheres of pure deities of *Dao*, representing pure forces of life. On these notions, see the studies by Wang Zongyu (1999), Stephen Bokenkamp (1997, 188–94), and Kobayashi Masayoshi (1990, 482–510).

and function as an effective attracting force. Thus, the above depictions can arguably be viewed as reflecting historical occurrences (at least to some extent) as well as a sense of crisis among members of various social groups or Jin society as a whole. In addition, we could also say that some of these aspects of the crisis were projected into the near future and possibly at least in part exaggerated.

Explanation of Causes of Crisis

The inclusion of the imminent end of the Great *Kalpa* indicates that these drastic changes are viewed as occurring due to the revolution of cosmic eras or cycles reaching a certain culmination point. We saw above that the main actors or agents of these changes are demons, which are depicted as creating a wide variety of misfortunes and catastrophes. Thus, they are not only presented as manifestations of the crisis, but at the same time also as one of its primary causes.

In our scripture, there are several depictions of demons arriving in China and various consequences, i.e., they are creating social disorder, disseminating diseases, devouring humans, causing natural disasters, engaging in warfare, bringing death, causing a decline in morality, destroying families, and the like.¹⁹ The passage “*gui lai/ru/ Zhongguo* 鬼來/入/中國 (demons are coming to /or entering/ China)” is repeated in slightly different variants (DZ 49, 1b, 7a, 8a, 8b, etc.). Daoists redefined the ancient Chinese concept of demons, which now included not only souls of the dead or animist energies but also living beings, specifically non-adherents or those not in line with the norms of a Daoist group. One example of the latter type are the non-Han peoples, the so-called “barbarians” (Mollier 2006, 94).²⁰ Thus, the above passage likely refers to the invasions by non-Han peoples reflecting a feeling of severe threat and revealing the hardships the people endured or perceived to endure as a result of their arrival. For instance, they may not only have been viewed as causing suffering and death through military attacks, but also as bringing diseases to which the Southerners were not accustomed. In addition to the non-Han peoples, the term demons can also refer to other living non-adherents, particularly since the South around the turn of the 5th century knew many spiritual or religious traditions, Daoist (Tianshi, Taiqing 太清 / Great Clarity /,

19 For more details on the concept of evil and on the impact demons have on the world in Daoist medieval scriptures, see the study by Christine Mollier (2006).

20 For instance, the *Nūqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (*Demon Statutes of Nūqing*) (DZ 790), an early Tianshi dao demonology text, which Terry Kleeman (2016, 146) dates to the (late) 3rd century, portrays the non-Han peoples as demons who are entering China, devouring human blood etc. (DZ 790, 5.1b–2a). In addition, the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* contains numerous demons of foreign origin, also called “the barbarians (yi)” (Mollier 1990, 169; 2006, 94).

Shangqing, Lingbao) and others (Buddhism, popular cults). The numerous references to demons thus also suggest that the author and/or at least a part of the intended audience were among those affected by non-Han peoples and/or other non-adherents, whom they blamed for various misfortunes.

Moreover, judgements are also directly cast on the people. The most problematic are characterized as "evil (*e* 惡)" (DZ 49, 1a), "stupid (*yu* 愚)" (ibid., 3a)²¹ or "the sinners (*zuiren* 罪人)" (ibid., 6a). The text makes it clear that many are evil (ibid., 1a) or turning evil (ibid., 1b, 5b). Their sins (*zui* 罪) include immorality (ibid., 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b etc.) and religious transgressions, such as not knowing, believing in, following, or practicing the (correct) *Dao* (*/zheng/ Dao* / 正/道) (ibid., 1a, 3a, 3b, 5a). Particular blame seems to be cast on members of the elites (ibid., 1b, 5a, 8a), which reflects a sense of lacking reliable and efficient leadership during the (Eastern) Jin dynasty. At the same time, the audience is informed, or rather, warned of the consequences of all these sins, this increase in evil, which is causing demons to spread, and it is these who are causing the many manifestations of crisis. The people are thus actually bringing misfortunes upon themselves (ibid., 2a, 2b–3a, 3b, 5b–6a).

You, worldlings, why do you not believe in the Great *Dao*? As a result, there are these demons that roam all under Heaven and create turmoil among humans. The members of one's family in the homeland perish between Heaven and Earth, harmed by severe diseases. By the *jiayin* year, flood waters and fires grow in strength, there are many demonic epidemics. Living beings get severe diseases and Heavenly disasters are prevalent. (Ibid., 2b)

The speaker, *Yuanshi tianzun*, presents the problems as far from being unrelated to human beliefs and behaviour, but rather as stemming from them. He, speaking as the personified and deified *Dao* (I will elaborate on this below), condemns evil and presents it as a destructive force. This signifies that those who are evil, i.e. those who are immoral, and those who do not believe in or practice the *Dao*, actually become misaligned with or distanced from the *Dao*. Hence, we can ascertain that the people and demons are presented as having contributed heavily to the above-discussed worsening of the cosmic crisis (the social crisis included) due to their misalignment or disharmony with the *Dao*.

To conclude, we saw that the scripture touches upon various aspects or factors of the social crisis present at the time, including socio-political, military, health,

21 It was believed that people became stupid due to a gradual loss of pure simplicity of the world occurring since high antiquity (Kamitsuka 1999, 222).

moral, economic, and natural, and reflects the severity of the feelings of crisis among the people. In other words, the social crisis is presented as an aspect of a cosmic one, and its various manifestations reflect the many problems of the Eastern Jin dynasty, such as epidemics, invasions of non-Han peoples, power struggles, political instability, lack of reliable and capable leadership, loosened social ties, warfare, migrations, high mortality rate, natural disasters, bad harvests, rebellions, disunity of the Chinese realm, the burden of corvée labour, cannibalism, and more. Particular emphasis is placed on the hordes of demons entering China, which likely reflects the foreign invasions of the Jin dynasty. The author employs a proselytizing strategy by including and often repeating such problems witnessed or experienced by the people of the time, while also explaining why they occur. With this, the author creates a specific perception of crisis, wherein contemporaneous members of the audience can identify their own difficulties. In addition, such portrayals also acknowledge and intensify such feelings of crisis as a sense of threat, danger, helplessness and loss, and a lack of cooperation, peace, harmony, well-being, safety and stability. This indicates that the author intends to attract a specific though relatively broad audience: members of various classes and social groups discontented and affected by a wide range of problems, as well as those who may blame such problems on the morals of the elites and non-adherents (non-Han peoples in particular). The author places these depictions into the mouth of a supreme deity, which adds credibility to his words and invokes trust and respect. The audience is thus given a sense of confirmation, clarity, and acknowledgement of their own experiences and feelings.

Solutions to the Crisis as Responses to the Social Crisis of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

The apex of cosmic crisis is expected to be imminent, but the text does not convey that all is hopeless. On the contrary, its subtitle, the *Shenbing hu guo an jia qu gui xiao zai feng chi zhou pin* 神兵護國安家驅鬼消災奉勅呪品 (*The Article on Revering Orders Issued on the Incantations for Divine Soldiers to Protect the State, Bring Peace to the Families, Expel Demons and Eliminate Calamities*) (DZ 49, 1a), reveals that it aims to provide a remedy. The audience can find the proposed solutions in the second parts of sections in the scripture. Regarding handling the crisis, the actors featuring in the scripture could roughly be divided into three key groups, namely divine and immortal forces, human beings, and demonic forces.

22 Regarding which state or kingdom (*guo* 國) is to be protected, we may assume that it refers to China or the Jin dynasty, since it is depicted in the text as being attacked.

Below, I will analyse their roles, means, goals, options, and mutual relationships and so elaborate on the proposed plan to solve the crisis as a response to the social crisis of the time.

Divine and Immortal Forces

I will begin by discussing the divine and immortal forces as part of the presented solutions.

Supreme Divine Force

The highest deities featuring in the scripture are *Yuanshi tianzun*, the speaker, and *Taishang daojun* 太上道君 (Most High Lord of the *Dao*). They are known as two gods of the *Sanqing* 三清 (Three Pure Ones) trinity, symbolizing the *Dao*.²³ The text also refers to the cult of the *Sanzun* 三尊 (Three Heavenly Worthies) (DZ 49, 6b; cf. Schipper 2004, 273), but the third deity does not appear in it. In the Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures,²⁴ *Yuanshi tianzun* represents the cosmic and creative aspect, the *Dao* at the origin of everything. He is regarded as the number one deity, an underlying power of the cosmos and creator of the world, who also revealed some of the earliest and crucial scriptures. He manifests in various *kalpas* to lead humanity to the right path, reminding us of *Laozi*'s transformations (Kohn 1998, 124–26).

Throughout the text, we can observe *Yuanshi tianzun*'s continuous proselytizing, which includes assurances, warnings, threats, promises, and more. The pronoun *wu* 吾 (I, my) in the text thus refers to this deity in particular. He is the leading force that creates everything and reveals the scripture or the teachings. In addition, the importance of (his words in) the scripture and the doctrine is also stressed repeatedly as "great (da 大)", "true (zhen 真)" or "orthodox or correct (zheng 正)" (DZ 49, 2a, 3a, 9b, 10a, 10b, 12a, etc.).

23 During the 5th and 6th centuries, the leading Daoist schools endeavoured to form a unified teaching and organizational structure. This process also resulted in the reorganization of the pantheon with the *Sanqing* trinity at the top. These three deities are associated with the *sandong* 三洞 (Three Caverns) and the Three Heavens. They are to stand for the teachings of the major schools, i.e. *Yuanshi tianzun* represented the Shangqing, *Taishang daojun*, the Lingbao, and *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 (Most High Lord Lao) or *Daode tianzun* 道德天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of the Dao and Its Virtue) the Sanhuang 三皇 (Three Sovereigns) and Tianshi traditions. Together, they are identified as one, i.e. they symbolize the *Dao*. Thus, it is not surprising that their attributes and roles in the texts are similar or the same (Kohn 1998, 121–27; 2011, 840–44).

24 In the Shangqing scriptures, he still holds an appellation of *Yuanshi tianwang* 元始天王 (Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning), whereas the Lingbao tradition transformed this title into *Yuanshi tianzun* (Kohn 1998, 124).

His main role and purpose are to persuade other forces to follow and join him, i.e. the *Dao*. “Returning to the *Dao* (*gui dao* 歸道)”, which is also expressed with phrases such as “revering the *Dao* (*feng dao* 奉道)”, “believing in the *Dao* (*xin dao* 信道)”, “practicing the *Dao* (*xing dao* 行道)”, “entering into the Dao(ist movement) (*ru dao* 入道)” (ibid., 1b, 6a, 8a, 9b, 10b, 12a etc.) is presented as crucial. The importance of (re)aligning with the *Dao* is not surprising, since misalignment of the people and demons with the *Dao* is presented as the key reason for the cosmic crisis.

He provides various means, such as his teachings revealed in the form of a scripture (ibid., 10b, 12a etc.), and specifically the orders (*ling* 令) (ibid., 1b, 10b)²⁵, the law or method (*fa* 法) (ibid., 10b, 12a etc.), the incantations (*shenzhou* 神呪) (ibid., 3b, 12a), and so on. He also explains that the crisis necessitates his teaching.

The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said: The living beings of the latest cosmic era confront epidemics [caused] by large armies, difficulties due to floods and fires, and all demon-caused calamities. Therefore, I now issue orders to 36 deities of the *Marvellous Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Orthodox Doctrine of the Samādhi*²⁶ of the Emperor of the North to disseminate the scripture [throughout] the kingdom, to educate and enlighten the living beings, to let them know the Great Law. Therefore, the Masters of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North descended to discuss and teach the emperor, ministers, high and local officials, and governors, to let them return to the Great *Dao*, [so that] everything will be harmonious. (Ibid., 10b–11a)

In addition, he assures that he sent or will send help through several figures not only to educate but also protect and save the people and the state (ibid., 3a, 3b, 4a, 6a, 7a, 10b, 11b, 12a). These portrayals bring to mind an image of a movement leader endeavouring to attract followers and thus organizing missionary activity, where educating the elites seems to be of key importance.

25 Most sections close with a phrase “*ji chi lüling* 急勅律令 (Quickly, [according to] issued statutes and orders!)”, which resembles one often used in early medieval Daoist scriptures, namely “(*jiji*) *ru lüling* (急急)如律令 (/Quickly, quickly,/ in accordance with the statutes and orders!)” and seems to be its variant. The latter was adopted from Han dynasty texts, i.e. it was a standard formula used at the end of official documents as well as funerary texts, which also functioned as orders to the dead to not harm the living. It can already be found in the earliest Daoist codebooks, such as the *Nüqing guilü*, as well as in Daoist ritual petitions and incantations (Seidel 1987, 39–42). Another similar phrase is “*jiji ru santian dafa zhi ling* 急急如三天大法之令 (Quickly, quickly, in accordance with the orders of the Great Law of the Three Heavens!)” (DZ 49, 3b), which specifies orders as the “*santian dafa zhi ling* 三天大法之令 (orders of the Great Law of the Three Heavens)”.

26 *Samādhi* (Ch. *Sanmei* 三昧) is a Sanskrit term, which in Indian traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, refers to a high state of consciousness invoked by meditation.

Moreover, he also explains the effectiveness of honouring and following his solutions, i.e. the desirable consequences of aligning with the *Dao*. He promises that returning to the *Dao*, honouring the teachings, the scripture itself, and the ritual masters will result in solving specific problems of the world in crisis (see Chapters on human and demonic forces). Thus, we can ascertain that he shows much concern for the people and the world at large.

As we saw above, the speaker condemns evil, which is also presented as a cause of the crisis. Thus, it comes as no surprise that he not only threatens the wicked and requires the elimination of evil, but also directly or indirectly demands goodness and promises salvation to the good (see Chapter on human forces). In other words, doing good or ceasing to do evil, i.e. converting to good, signifies alignment with the *Dao*. A reader can also find warnings of undesirable consequences if one (a human being or a demon) does not follow the *Dao* and remains wicked, such as being sent to the underworld, i.e. the earth prisons (*diyu* 地獄) (DZ 49, 3b) and being left to perish without hope of rescue (*ibid.*, 5a, 6a, 6b).

Thus, the apparent primary goal of the above-discussed strategies is to help the good people in particular so that they may survive catastrophic times (see Chapter on human forces). But the promises of the *Dao* go beyond this, as they imply that peace and order in society are to be restored (*ibid.*, 2a, 10a), and that all things will be improved and turned into a state of harmony (*ibid.*, 2a, 11a). Moreover, it also speaks of harmonizing natural phenomena, i.e. the weather will be smooth (*ibid.*, 2a). Thus, although it does not directly mention the term *taiping* 太平 (Great Peace)²⁷ as a part of a promise, these phenomena indicate just that this will be achieved. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the supreme divine force is to achieve social and cosmic harmony.

The means *Yuanshi tianzun* has at his disposal are his supreme divine powers, which he uses to make decisions with regard to the crisis, including creating the perception of it and developing a plan to solve it. This portrayal of *Yuanshi tianzun* can remind us of an image of a movement leader who endeavours to attract followers affected in times of crisis by revealing manifestations of the crisis the people were aware of and making it clear that the situation will only get worse, thus making his remedies even more urgently needed and desired. He also points out what and who is to blame and then offers guidance, tools, helpers, and a promise

27 On the development of the idea of Great Peace in premodern Chinese philosophies of history, see the study by Dawid Rogacz (2022). On this utopian vision in the early Daoist scripture with the term Great Peace in its title, namely the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (*Scripture on Great Peace*), see the study by Barbara Hendrichske (1992). This ideal of a world of social and cosmic harmony also appears in several other early medieval Daoist scriptures, such as the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (DZ 335, 1.11a).

that these problems can be solved. Imbued with the authority and power of the supreme cosmic force, he gives the impression of a figure whose proposed solutions should be followed and whose promises should be believed. In other words, he demonstrates his intentions to lead the process of dealing with the crisis but does not go about executing his plan on his own.

Taishang daojun, who is the second god of the trinity of the *Dao*, appears in the text with an alternative appellation, i.e. *Taishang* 太上 (Most High Lord). He is also the revealer of scriptures and serves as a mouthpiece of *Yuanshi tianzun*. In the Lingbao texts, he is learning from *Yuanshi tianzun*, i.e. receiving scriptures and precepts to help humanity in distress find salvation. He is portrayed as a disciple and a messenger of the supreme god of the trinity (Kohn 1998, 124–26). In our text he only appears in a few instances, either ordering demons not to create distress for the people and the country (DZ 49, 8a, 9b) or sending helpers to deal with evil people (ibid., 5a). His role is to mitigate the impact and scope of evil with his divine powers. It is evident that he is working in agreement with *Yuanshi tianzun* on the mission to protect people and the country, eradicate evil and recreate cosmic harmony. In addition, the reference to the Three Heavenly Worthies, from whom the people may receive the scripture (ibid., 6b), further confirms that these deities symbolize the highest cosmic force, the *Dao*, and that they are acting in accordance with each other.

Other Divine and Immortal Forces

A titular deity called *Beidi*, a central figure of a tradition of Fengdu or of the Emperor of the North, is the supreme sovereign of the world of the dead. He resides on the Fengdu shan 酆都山 (Mount Fengdu)²⁸ and governs the *Liu gong* 六宮 (Six Palaces), i.e. a large infernal bureaucracy of repentant spirits. In the *Beidi* tradition he appears in various roles (Mollier 1997, 329, 337–50). The daily individual practices of this tradition, which fall under the generic term *Beidi sha gui zhi fa* 北帝殺鬼之法 (the method of the Emperor of the North for killing demons), were a part of exorcistic and longevity practices and already popular during the Six Dynasties. They were known to be used in meditation and prescribe reciting incantations²⁹ and invoking the names of the Six Palaces of Mt Fengdu³⁰. They

28 Mount Fengdu refers to a mythic mountain in the northern quarter of the universe, a purgatory, a realm of the dead, where sinners and all the dead are judged (Mollier 1997, 337–45).

29 The above-mentioned early text of the *Beidi* tradition, namely the *Taishang dongyuan beidi tianpeng huming xiaozai shenzhou miaojing*, focuses on the so-called *Tianpeng* 天蓬 incantations. As the title suggests, its purpose is to protect life and eliminate calamities (DZ 53).

30 These methods also appear in the Shangqing scriptures. For instance, the *Shangqing tianguan santu jing* 上清天關三圖經 (*Highest Clarity Scripture of the Three Diagrams of the Heavenly Passes*) (DZ

were also accompanied by visualization practices (ibid., 355–65). In our text, this deity holds the appellation of *Beidi dasheng* 北帝大聖 (Great Saint Emperor of the North) (DZ 49, 11a). As the title, its alternative versions (ibid., 10a, 10b), and the subtitle suggest, our text focuses on incantations. When the Emperor utters them, various assistants, i.e. divinities, immortals and devil kings, assemble to listen and aid the world in distress (ibid., 11a).

In addition, the *Sanguan* 三官 (Three Office/r/s)³¹ also feature in the scripture. It is their duty to inspect and keep records of human actions in the registers of life or jade register (*yuli* 玉曆) and registers of death (*sishu* 死書). Evil actions incur punishment, while good deeds bring favourable fortune to the living, their ancestors and descendants, as well as the dead. The Three Offices have also been regarded as the Daoist Hell of Fengdu and a place of interrogation³² (Kleeman 2011a, 833–34; Ma 1998, 60–66). Our text states that during the “cycle of the Three Office(r)s (*sanguan zhi yun* 三官之運)”, when the world suffers from diseases, death, social disorder, and demonic invasions, the Three Offices inspect the oaths (DZ 49, 6b) and their troops punish demons by executing them (ibid., 7a). Another deity appearing in the text is *Wenchang* 文昌. As a deity he seems to have played a role in the administration of destiny during the Han and Six Dynasties. (Kleeman 2011b, 1033; Ma 1998, 111) Our text contains an example, where *Wenchang* is sent by *Yuanshi tianzun* to eliminate those that do not submit (DZ 49, 6b). We can see that the particular role of these deities is to manage evil.

In addition, the text also mentions various deities and immortals whom *Yuanshi tianzun* sends to help and save the living as well as to protect the country, such as *yunü* 玉女 (jade maidens) and *miaotong* 妙童 (mysterious lads) (ibid., 3a), or the 36 deities of the scripture, whose role is to transmit the scripture and instruct.

Therefore, with regard to the crisis, other prominent deities and immortals play the role of assistants of the supreme cosmic force. They are aligned with its intentions and act in support of its plan, in the course of which they employ means, such as their divine and immortal powers, and ritual tools.

1366) promotes the individual practices of the *Beidi* method, i.e. the *Tianpeng* incantations combined with invoking the names of the Six Palaces of Mt. Fengdu. They were designed to evade danger and death caused by demons and calamities (Mollier 1997, 355f, 359).

31 The belief in the *Tiandishui Sanguan* 天地水三官 (Three Office/r/s of Heaven, Earth and Water) had already developed during the Han dynasty and was absorbed into later traditions (Lai 2002).

32 See also Wang Zongyu (1999, 38–41, 44–46).

Human Forces

Below, I will discuss the group of human forces as a part of the proposed plan to solve the crisis.

Masters of the Law

Our text provides us with one of the earliest titles of ritual masters of the *Beidi* tradition,³³ namely the *Beidi sanmei fashi* 北帝三昧法師 (Master of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North) or *Sanmei fashi* 三昧法師 (Master of the Law of the *Samādhi*) (Mollier 1997, 350–54). These ritual masters are presented as being sent by *Yuanshi tianzun* as his helpers and play various roles. They are shown to spread teachings, bringing people, particularly members of the social elites, back to the *Dao*. They also disseminate the scripture and perform Daoist practices (DZ 49, 3a). It is evident that they are supposed to be respected. In fact, those who revere them are promised that their various problems will be solved, they will receive additional help, they will be saved, the country will receive protection and so on (Ibid., 3a, 4a–b, 7b, 10a–b, etc.).

If a person reveres the Law, receives the scripture, and makes offerings to the Masters of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North, the sick will immediately recover, and everything will be well. (Ibid., 7b)

The ritual masters are thus those human actors³⁴ who are portrayed as most in harmony with the *Dao*, and who act in support of its plan, in which they are included as assistants. Their primary means in dealing with the crisis are the scripture and Daoist practices.

Other Human Beings

Since living human beings are included among those actors responsible for the aggravation of the crisis, it would make sense to expect that they should also contribute to remedying it. The members of the elites seem particularly misaligned, therefore their alignment with the *Dao* is crucial. Thus, the ruler(s), ministers, and other people of high rank and importance are pointed out as key object of the masters' teaching endeavours (DZ 49, 10b–11a). However, the text also shows concern for and targets the (Chinese or the Jin) people at large. Terms such as

33 During the Six Dynasties the ritual masters of this tradition were travelling masters, exorcists, therapists and preachers. They performed community rituals and were active in private homes (Mollier 1997, 350–54).

34 These masters are said to have descended, which could mean they were considered to be immortal (DZ 49, 10b), but the text is unclear in this regard.

wanmin 萬民 (myriads of people, populace), *baixing* 百姓 (hundred surnames, common people) and *guomin* 國民 (citizens) are used frequently. The speaker evaluates their beliefs and behaviour as mentioned above and instructs them on how to cope with the crisis and be saved. This indicates that the *Dao* targets all social strata as its audience. Moreover, it is evident that the scripture is meant for both men and women (ibid., 2a, 11b–12a).

People have several means at their disposal to align with the *Dao* (see above), and their roles include receiving and revering the scripture and the *Dao*'s teachings (DZ 49, 2a, 3a, 7b, 8a, 9a, 10a, 12a), also expressed as "the true words of the Three Heavens (*santian zhen yan* 三天真言)" (ibid., 8a), disseminating the scripture (ibid., 12a), reciting the scripture (ibid., 6a), venerating the incantations (ibid., 3b, 11b), revering the Law (ibid., 7b, 10b) and respecting the orders (ibid., 1b), the ritual masters and so on. They also know the demons' names (*gui ming zi* 鬼名字), and so can use a technique by which the demons can be driven away (ibid., 9a).³⁵ In addition, a chief method of turning misalignment into alignment is moral behaviour.

If a person reveres the *Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Samādhi of the Emperor of the North*, myriads of people will be at peace, diseases will be cured immediately, and all the heart's desires will be fulfilled. Large armies will disperse on their own, demon bandits will perish, and official disputes will be resolved. (Ibid., 10a)

Thus, provided they follow the guidance of the *Dao*, their problems are promised to be solved. The dangers and calamities will simply dissolve (ibid., 1b, 2a, 9a), they will recover from diseases (ibid., 1b, 4a, 6a, 7b, 8a, 10a), demons will perish or leave (ibid., 1b–2a, 4b, 6a, 10a, 10b), armies will disperse (ibid., 10a), official affairs will be resolved (ibid., 6a, 8a, 10b), helpers will come to aid, protect, and save them (ibid., 4a, 6a, 10a–b, 12a), their wishes will be fulfilled (ibid., 10a), and all will be well (ibid., 2a, 4a, 7b, 11a). There will be harmony in society and nature, as discussed above. We can see that several concrete problems are repeatedly pointed out to reach desirable outcomes.

Moreover, those aligning with the *Dao* will be transformed and cross over (*hua du* 化度) (ibid., 11b), ascend to (become) immortals (*sheng xian* 昇仙) (ibid., 4a), and their names will be entered into the records of names of immortals, i.e. the jade calendar (ibid., 12a). The promise of immortality seems to also extend to

³⁵ Whether the text refers to the names of the Six Palaces of Mt Fengdu is not clear, as the Six Palaces are not directly mentioned in relation to these demons' names. However, we can find an example of the name of demon(s) in the text, i.e. the Demon(s) of Heaven (*Tian zhi gui* 天之鬼) (DZ 49, 2b).

their descendants and later generations (ibid., 4a). The alternative option, i.e. not following the *Dao*'s intentions and strategies, does not seem very attractive, as we saw earlier.

From all of the above, we can ascertain the roles of other human beings—they should first accept the views and strategies on the crisis presented by the supreme divine force, and then cooperate with it and its helpers, i.e., follow the instructions, use the means provided, and accept their help. As a result, they can be saved and contribute to eliminating evil, and to restoring social and cosmic harmony.

Demonic Forces

Since demons are regarded as a critical cause and manifestation of the crisis, it is not surprising that they, too, are tasked with doing their part in the process of remedying it. Some high-ranking demons, usually referred to as *mowang* 魔王 (devil kings), *shenwang* 神王 (spirit kings) and *guiwang* 鬼王 (demon kings),³⁶ receive orders from the *Dao* to command and control subordinate demons (DZ 49, 7b, 9b). In other words, they should reform themselves and act in service of the *Dao*.³⁷

You, demon kings, quickly issue orders to your demons to let the sick rapidly recover, official affairs be promptly resolved, and all matters to become harmonious and good. If a demon does not submit, demon kings must not give it much thought but swiftly chop its head off. (Ibid., 7b)

We can see that not only high-ranking demons but demons in general are required to change their ways. They should cease their harmful impacts on the people, use their powers to do good, and strive to restore harmony and peace in all matters (ibid., 7b, 8a, 9b). If they do not comply or succeed, they get slaughtered instantly by superior demons (ibid., 6a, 7b, 9b). These demons may also include the living.

36 Demons of various types or ranks, such as *guizhu* 鬼主 (demon lords), *guibing* 鬼兵 (demon soldiers or armies), *guiwang*, *shenwang* and *mowang*, also appear to populate the hierarchically organized eschatological pantheon of contemporary texts, such as the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (Mollier 1990, 165–70). *Guiwang* and Buddhism-inspired *mowang* are typically viewed as leaders of demon hordes. The former holds the same or higher position as the latter. *Shenwang* is another similar character that leads low-ranking demons. Kamitsuka (1999, 223–28) considers it to be almost the same as *mowang*. The *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* explains that although both share the same *Qi* with the ruler of multitudes of spirits, the *Dao*, they became distanced from it due to their evil hearts and actions, and thus remained in the realm or the cycles of birth and death (ibid.).

37 These high-ranking demons similarly reform themselves in the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* and *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* (ibid., 221–34).

Moreover, our text makes it clear that high-ranking demons have the authority to try people and send the evil to earth prisons (ibid., 3b). Moreover, some demons sent by Heaven can even kill wicked people or let them die in catastrophes or warfare (ibid., 2b). Thus, high-ranking demons function as helpers of the supreme divine force in eradicating evil and protecting the country and its good people (ibid., 2b, 7b, 8a, 9b, 10b). We can ascertain that demons have two options: to reform themselves or perish. In addition, it seems our text may be indicating that salvation is not only attainable by people, but also by demons (ibid., 5a).³⁸

To sum up, the role of demons is to accept the perception of crisis put forth by the supreme divine force, including their role in bringing it about. Next, they should align with the *Dao's* plan, namely, they should follow the directives or orders of the divine forces to deal with evil on the one hand, and to protect the good on the other. The above account implies that the author or the movement's leader, who speaks through *Yuanshi tianzun*, may require higher-ranking converts to make non-adherents (non-Han peoples included) change their ways according to his teachings. Moreover, it also seems to justify punishing or killing those who do not submit to his will.

Strategic Plan of Cooperation for Cosmic Harmony

The grand plan for handling the crisis involves three major groups, i.e., humans, demons, and the divine and immortals. The lines between them are porous or somewhat blurry, and some entities could be understood as belonging to one or more groups. In addition, these categories are not static as, in some cases, mobility between them is possible. The relationship among them is hierarchical, i.e. the categories of the living mortal human forces and demonic forces are subordinate to that of the divine and immortal. The former two are lower in rank than the latter as regards their (decision-making) powers and resulting ability to handle and impact the social and cosmic crisis. The entities within each group are also hierarchically arranged. The relationship between humans and demons is more complex and mostly depends on the level of alignment of entities with the *Dao*. Thus, the highest cosmic force, the *Dao*, leads the process of dealing with the crisis, other divine and immortal forces support it, while everyone else must either follow or fail to be saved. The misalignment of the two groups with the *Dao* has been explained to have heavily contributed to the crisis, and their (re)alignment in terms of beliefs and behaviours is presented as necessary to turn disharmony with the *Dao* into harmony. The relationship among the

38 In comparison, the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* elaborates on this topic (ibid., 228–34).

three groups is also presented as one of cooperation, which is not voluntary but obligatory for everyone subordinate to the *Dao*. Thus, the plan is designed to deal with the key cause(s) of crisis, i.e. to remove or reform those who are blamed for causing it. The presented strategies, though religious in nature and wrapped up in religious language, still suggest that the author is first and foremost attempting to instruct the extant ruling elites, seemingly particularly with regard to dealing with demons, i.e. which include non-Han peoples, in order to protect the state, bring peace and save the people. Moreover, the strategies are also clearly explained as designed to successfully deal with various concrete socio-political, moral, health, military, natural and other problems, such as epidemics, natural disasters or bad weather, warfare and invasions of demons (i.e. non-Han peoples), troubles in official affairs, and social chaos. However, they aim beyond that, namely at achieving immortality and social and cosmic harmony, where such occurrences and discontent will be absent. The text thus presents solutions which members of the audience of varied social backgrounds may recognize as addressing issues they have been witnessing or experiencing in their own time. They may provide comfort and relief to the sense of crisis, and a conviction that the supreme divine force is watching out for them. As such, this plan represents a carefully formed response indicating an urgent need for solutions. By rendering all this in the voice of a divine narrator who is *Dao* personified, it would not be a far cry to view the author at the head of a movement the scripture originated from.

Conclusion

The author is conveying a clear message regarding the crisis to the audience through the words of *Yuanshi tianzun*. Neatly incorporated aspects or factors of the social crisis that were observed or faced by people of various classes during the Eastern Jin dynasty are presented as manifestations and causes of an aggravating cosmic crisis. They include epidemics, non-Han peoples' invasions, loosened social ties, warfare, migrations, power struggles, political instability, high mortality rate, rebellions, disunity of the Chinese realm, natural disasters, bad harvests, the burden of corvée labour, and more. And a cosmic crisis requires a cosmic response. Thus, the supreme cosmic force, the deified and personified *Dao*, presents an overarching strategic plan for saving people and restoring social and cosmic harmony, which includes other forces and requires their cooperation. In other words, as a response to the sense of lack of reliable and efficient leadership of the Jin dynasty the text presents a powerful cosmic leadership with an actionable plan, one that involves everyone. Their means,

roles, options, and mutual relationships are clarified, and, if they participate, their desired outcomes are assured. It addresses the social crisis as part of a cosmic one by providing religious strategies intended to successfully solve the above-discussed concrete issues, which offer a broad audience the solutions to their difficulties and relief to their sense of crisis. If the plan is implemented, their problems will all cease to exist. As the text is greatly concerned with demons (referring to non-Han peoples in particular) and various consequences of their arrival in China, it naturally also focuses on solving this issue to protect the state and its people and bring peace, which includes instructing the ruling elites. This suggests that the author and/or at least a part of the audience were the Northern emigres, i.e. including most of the members of ruling elites. In the uncertain, changing world of the Eastern Jin dynasty, this plan seems to attempt to address confusion and disorder with clarity and order, tackle disunity, loosened social ties, and separation with cooperation and unity with a powerful cosmic authority, face down hopelessness and helplessness with hope and help, provide protection from threat and danger, tackle death with immortality, and in short turn disharmony into harmony. Thus, through repetitive inclusion of the above-discussed problems and repetitive assurance of the effectiveness of the presented solutions the author creates a proselytizing strategy that is particularly tailored to those living through the social crisis of the Eastern Jin dynasty. We can conclude that the entire scripture under discussion and its well-thought-out message revolves around such a crisis, and that considerable effort was invested in its creation. As such, it reflects the severity of the (sense of) crisis, but first and foremost, it represents a response to it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr Barbara Hendrischke and prof. Dr Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik for their valuable comments and suggestions. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for the Library travel grant, which enabled me to visit the SOAS Library (University of London) in 2018 and acquire much needed materials.

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