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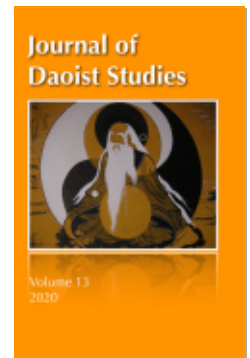
Named Figures in Frontispieces of Buddhist and Daoist
Scriptures

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Named Figures in Frontispieces of Buddhist and Daoist Scriptures

MAGGIE C. K. WAN

Abstract

Frontispieces preceding the texts of Buddhist and Daoist scriptures are often thought to resemble each other. They commonly share diagonal and symmetrical compositions that constitute the majority of scripture frontispieces in China since their initiation in the 9th century. However, did similar pictorial scenes develop from shared compositions and represent the same kind of religious scenario? Who were the religious figures chosen to star on the frontispieces? What were the major concerns behind this choice?

This paper examines different combinations of figures found in Buddhist and Daoist frontispieces from the 15th to 17th centuries, analyzes their different connotations, and examines the reasons behind the different development of scripture frontispieces in the two religions.¹

A scripture frontispiece is a rectangular picture placed after the title page and before the text of a religious scripture. Before the use of 20th-century printing technology, Chinese scriptures were often reproduced in accordion-binding, an ancient method that produced a book by the repeated counter-folding of a continuous sheet made from a number of glued sec-

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tions. Frontispieces found in scriptures of such binding might occupy a succession of two to seven folded pages. There is no standard size for accordion-bound scriptures. But if we take the dimensions of a typical medium size book (27cm x 12cm per folded page) as an example, the length of a frontispiece might vary from 24cm (12cm x 2 folded pages) to 84cm (12cm x 7 folded pages).

Frontispieces in these dimensions are much larger than most of illustrations found in printed books today, and the visual experience they offer is accordingly different. They allow viewers to inspect meticulously every single figure and other pictorial details, which are likely to be corrupted or even lost when the same frontispieces are reduced to the size of modern print. In particular, one can hardly experience the amount of effort a painter or a carver made on delineating a single deity.

The differences in visual experience lead to a shift in the viewers' attention from pictorial details on a large frontispiece to the overall composition in its smaller modern reproduction. This shift largely explains why frontispieces for Daoist and Buddhist scriptures are often considered as resembling each other. They do indeed commonly share the diagonal and symmetrical compositions that constitute the majority of scripture frontispieces, but still are at odds in a number of ways (Weng and Li 2014, 5:1; Song 2015, 22-23).

Historically, the imperial commission and printing of the Buddhist canon during the Hongwu (1368-1398) and Yongle (1403-1424) reigns and their wide dissemination made an important impact on Buddhist frontispieces in subsequent periods. In particular, the frontispieces of the three Ming Buddhist canons as well as numerous Buddhist woodblock sutras produced by the court adopted a symmetrical composition, leading to its predominant use in frontispieces throughout the dynasty. There is a tendency to increase the number of attendants at the Buddha's sermon and great emphasis on the grandiose nature of the scene. The combination and arrangement of attendants are largely patterned on principles set by Song and Yuan forerunners.

Unlike Buddhist frontispieces, Daoist comparative visuals have hardly any extant predecessors. This scarcity from before the Ming may well be the result of the massive destruction of all copies of the Daoist Canon and its print blocks under the imperial order of Khubilai Khan in 1281. Less bounded by their forerunners, extant Ming frontispieces show

flexibility in the use of pictorial space with particular attention given to figures that contributed to authenticating the sacred origin of the scripture while affirming its efficacy. The predominance of the diagonal over symmetrical composition also marks the development of Daoist scripture frontispieces significantly different from their Buddhist counterparts.

Similar Scenes, Different Scenarios

Extant frontispieces of Daoist and Buddhist scriptures developed from two basic types of compositions: symmetrical and diagonal. The first shows one or more main deities in frontal view, seated on a throne in the center, with minor deities arranged symmetrically on either side. Occasionally a figure may kneel before the main deity with his back turned to the viewer. The second presents a diagonal arrangement, in which the main deity appears in three-quarter view accompanied by his entourage on the right, while a figure in profile surrounded or followed by minor deities kneels before him on the left (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Frontispiece to the *Jingang bore boluomi jing*. Excavated from Khara Khoto site of Xi Xia (1032-1227). Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences. Eluosi 1997, 4:312.

The diagonal composition illustrates the narrative of the scripture with special reference to the relation between the kneeling figure and the Buddha in the introductory section, while the symmetrical composition shows less inclination to illustrate the narrative, but aims at engaging the viewer-worshiper in the assembly of key (prominent and high-ranking) deities of the world that the scripture concerns (Wan 2016a, 225). Although the majority of Daoist and Buddhist frontispieces share the two compositions, the scenarios they represented are different. The difference in nature of the scenarios significantly affects our reading of the scenes.

Since Buddhist sutras began to be reproduced in number by means of woodblock printing in the ninth and tenth centuries CE, the diagonal and the symmetrical compositions have almost invariably been used for representing a scene often known as the Picture of Preaching a Sermon (*shuofa tu* 說法圖). It depicts a buddha or bodhisattva preaching to the assembled beings. The preaching scene may occupy the whole frontispiece or only a part of it while the rest of the frontispiece may show pictorial episodes of the scripture. The choice of figures depicted (especially the one kneeling) in the preaching scene may vary in accordance with the requests of teaching made by different characters mentioned in the text.

Other figures accompanying the Buddha at the sermon include monks, bodhisattvas, Four Heavenly Kings, Eight Great Vajra Kings, or the Eight Groups of Beings such as *devas* and *nāgas*. Since the Buddha's teachings, especially the Mahāyāna scriptures, are meant to reach all gods and peoples including human beings who follow Buddhist precepts, laymen and laywomen might also be depicted in frontispieces. They are most often found in frontispieces for sutras that the Buddha preached in sacred sites of this world, such as the Jetavana-Anāthapiṇḍada Park (Qishu jigudu yuan 祇樹給孤獨園) near Śrāvastī and the Vulture Peak.

For example, the frontispiece to the *Jingang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Diamond Sutra*), dated to 868 and found in Mogao Cave 17 at Dunhuang, shows the Buddha seated with an assembly of attendants including two guardian figures, two bodhisattvas, nine of his ten disciples (except for Subhūti who kneels before him), and some lay figures.²

²I base my reading on Katherine Tsiang's study, which offers a detailed description of the picture and identification of the depicted figures (2010, 207).

Some scholars suggest that the lay figures are an emperor and an empress (Wood and Barnard 2010, 7).

In another frontispiece to the *Diamond Sutra* (TK247) produced under the rule of Xi Xia (1038-1227) and discovered in Khara Khoto, the specific label Great Minister and Ruler of State (*guowang dachen* 國王大臣) appears to mark the presence of several laymen in contemporary Han Chinese and Xi Xia official dressing in the sermon (see Fig. 1; Eluosi 1997, 4:312; Chen and Tang 2010, 135). Likewise, a frontispiece to the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (*Lotus Sutra*) dated 1475 and now in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, depicts several lay male and female disciples attending the Buddha's sermon at the Vulture Park (Song 2015, 22-23).

The Buddha's sermon as a gathering attracting all gods and people opens up a possibility for historical figures and donors to be included in the frontispiece. For example, a frontispiece to the *Bukong juansuo tuoluoni jing* 不空羂索陀羅尼經 (Scripture of Amoghapāśa Dhāraṇī, the Sovereign Lord of Spells) from the *Puningzang* 普寧藏 (Puning Canon), produced between 1277 and 1290, has an inscription labeling one of the attendant monks Grand Master of Pervasive Eternal Happiness (Zongtong Yongfu dashi 總統永福大師) (Fig. 2; Weng and Li 2014, 4:39; Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:91).

The Grand Master, also known as Yang Lian Zhenjia 楊璉真伽 lived in the late 13th century and was the leading imperial preceptor and highest official supervising Buddhism in Jiangnan (see Chen 1986). He appears on the frontispiece as a major patron of canonical printing. A Uighur frontispiece dated around the year 1400 similarly shows the donor and his parents (Huang 2014, 140).

Frontispieces of Daoist scriptures, in contrast, present a Daoist assembly in a sacred realm of the Daoist heavens. Their majority shows a major deity delivering his teaching or conveying a scripture to a minor deity at his heavenly court.³

³ The theme of "conveying a scripture" is discussed in detail in Wan 2016a. Thus far, the *Sanyuan jing* 三元經 (Scripture of the Three Officials) is the only Daoist scripture known to have presented the assembly of Daoist gods in the right while a pictorial episode of the scripture in the left part of the frontispiece. All the other Daoist frontispieces known devote the whole frontispiece to the Daoist assembly. *Sanyuan jing* will not be treated here.

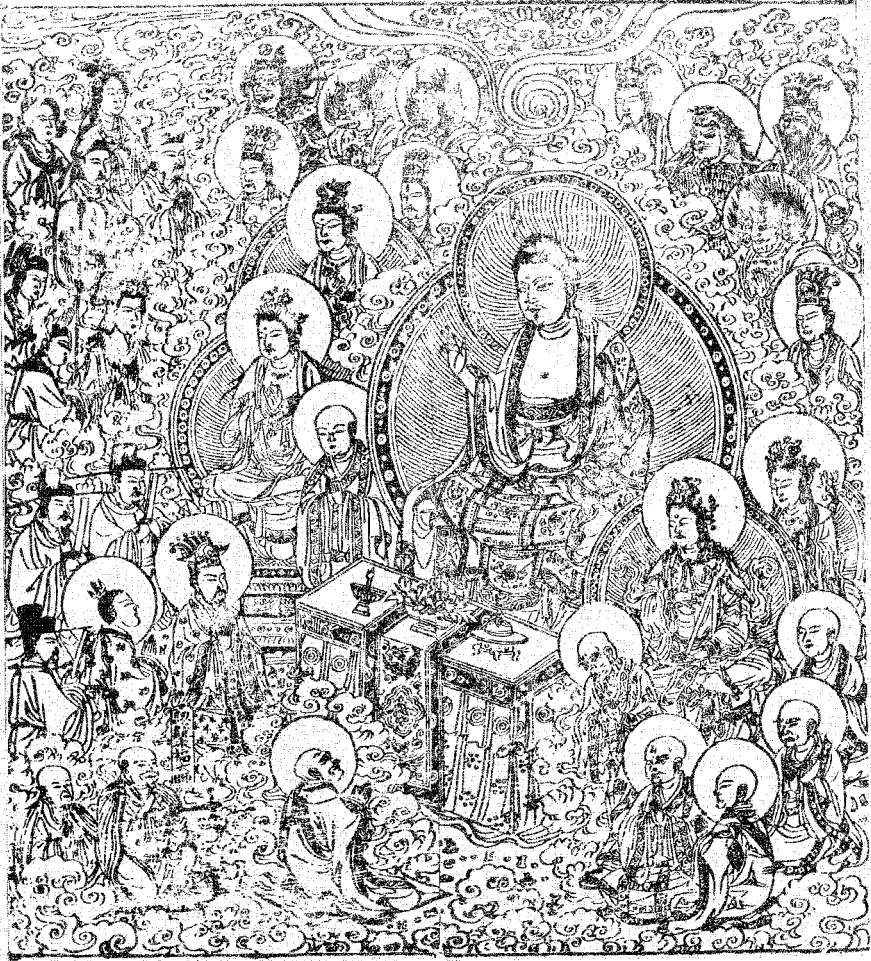


Fig. 2. Frontispiece to the *Bukong juansuo tuoluoni jing* from the *Puningzang*.1277-1290. National Library of China. Weng and Li 2014, 4:39.

The heavenly court as the venue of the scene is stressed with attendant deities portrayed as holding an official tablet (*hu* 笏), a rectangular object typically held before the breast by officials in audience with the emperor, or as joining their palms. Most often, the major figure is closely surrounded by three groups of deities, celestial officials dressed in Daoist gowns, jade maidens holding offerings or fans, and celestial guardi-

ans, usually Qinglong jun 青龍君 (Green Dragon Lord) on the left and Baihu jun 白虎君 (White Tiger Lord) on the right.

The remaining deities might vary according to the content and ritual tradition of the scripture. A frontispiece to a woodblock book collecting the *Yushu jing* and sixteen other works, now in the library of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is a good example. It shows the main deity, Puhuan tianzun 普化天尊 (Heavenly Venerable of Wide Transformation) flanked by the three groups of deities concerned, while marshals or guardian deities of the respective ritual traditions occupy the outermost positions (Fig. 3; Wan 2015, 49-50). Contrary to Buddhist frontispieces, Daoist scripture frontispieces seldom show any sight of laymen



and laywomen.⁴ No donor is ever known to appear in the scene.

Fig. 3. Frontispiece to the *Yushu jing deng shiqi zhong*. Xuande period (1426-1435). The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

⁴ The *Sanyuan jing* might have been the only exception, with the picture of the Daoist gathering depicted side by side with a pictorial episode showing the spirit of the dead being interrogated by officials.

Buddhist Frontispieces: Following the Past

The Ming inherited the print culture of the Yuan dynasty and closely followed their artistic style and templates (Weng and Li 2014, 5:1; Song 2015, 22). However, an overall study of Ming sutra frontispieces and assessment of the persistence of Yuan impact have only become possible with the recent publication of several large collections of late Chinese Buddhist prints. They include the one-volume *Fojiao banhua* 佛教版畫 in the *Zhongguo banhua quanji* 中國版畫全集, the three-volume *Zhongguo gudai fojiao banhua ji* 中國古代佛教版畫集 and the 82-volume *Zhongguo fojiao banhua quanji* 中國佛教版畫全集 (Zhongguo 2008-2011; Zhou 1998; Weng and Li 2014). In particular, the last publication dedicated thirty-three volumes to Ming-dynasty Buddhist prints in comparison with four to those printed before the Ming.

Despite their significance, these publications also demonstrate the difficulty in conducting an in-depth study of Buddhist frontispieces of the Ming: while many examples are extant, they are mostly featured in auction catalogs and widely dispersed in private collections. Still, what religious figures are depicted in them and how are they organized in the composition?

One outstanding feature is the predominant use of the symmetrical composition, possibly the result of the intentional imitation of templates used in the three printed under the Yuan: *Puningzang*, *Qishazang* 磧砂藏 (Qisha Canon), and the Tangut-script canon, carved and printed in Hangzhou.⁵ One design appears in copies of all three (Fig. 4), showing a frontal face of a bird-like creature (Garuda) and a *vajra* decorating respectively the top and the base of the throne, two figures, one of whom is

⁵ The *Qishazang* was initiated in 1216 by the official Zhao Anguo 趙安國 and the abbot Fayin 法音 and organized by the Qisha Yansheng Monastery 磧砂延聖院 in Pingjiang Prefecture. It was completed in 1322. Its early blocks carved in the Song followed the *Yuanjuezan* 圓覺藏 (Yuanjue Canon), while those carved in the Yuan Dynasty followed *Puningzang*. The *Puningzang* was created from 1277 to 1290 by the Baiyunzong 白雲宗 (White Cloud Sect) centered at the Puning Monastery in Hangzhou. The Yuan Official Canon was produced by the Yuan government between 1332 and 1336 under the sponsorship of Great Empress Dowager Pu Da Shi Li 卜答失里. See Wu and Chia 2016, 313-14.

dressed as a Chinese emperor and while the other looks like an empress, standing on either side of the throne, a general three-quarter view of all side figures, horse-shoe shaped halos surrounding their heads, and wavy lines used for their eyes.⁶ Some of these features, as Susan Huang has aptly pointed out, are reminiscent of the Himalayan style appropriated in Xi Xia frontispiece art (2014, 161-162).

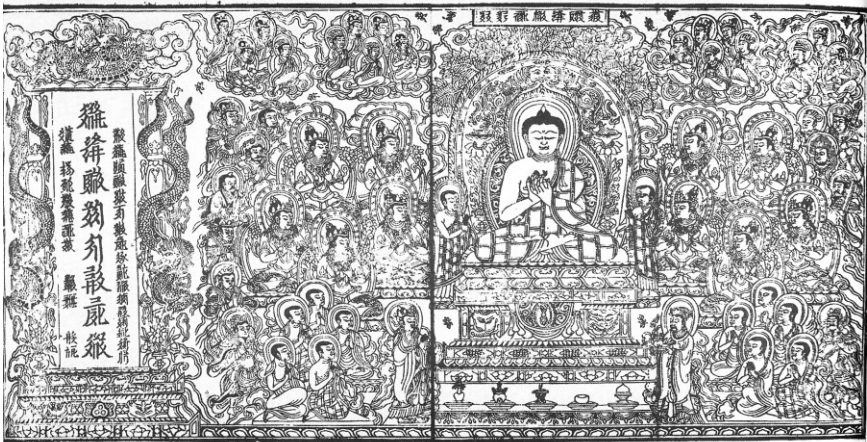


Fig. 4. Frontispiece to the *Beihua jing* from the Tangut-script canon. 1307. National Library of China. Weng and Li 2014, 4:77.

Almost all these features can also be found in a frontispiece produced in 1380 in Wujiang 吳江, Suzhou, during the reign of the first Emperor of the Ming (Fig. 5) (Weng and Li 2014, 5:10-11).⁷ The frontispiece attached to the *Dafang guangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (The Flower Ornament Sutra of Great Means and Expansive Enlightenment) depicts a

⁶ A similar design appears in the *Da ji piyu wang jing* 大集譬喻王經 (Mahāsannipâtāvadānarāga Sutra) from the *Puningzang*, the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* from the *Qishazang*, and the *Beihua jing* 悲華經 (Compassionate Flower Scripture) from the Tangut-script canon. Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1: 99-101.

⁷ The editors of the volume attribute this copy to be part of the *Hongwu nanzang* 洪武南藏 (Hongwu Southern Canon), the first Buddhist canon compiled under the imperial auspice during the Jianwen period (1399-1402). However, this attribution is problematic, as the printing of this copy predates the production of the *Hongwu nanzang*. Se Wu and Chia 2016, 314; He 2014.

total of eighty-four figures flanking the Buddha. The Buddha, shown in three-quarter view, is preaching to a kneeling bodhisattva to his left. Although this arrangement is typical in diagonal composition, this frontispiece is strictly symmetrical with forty-two figures (including the kneeling one) divided into four rows and lining up evenly on each side.



Fig. 5. Frontispiece to the *Dafang guangfo huayan jing* carved in Wujiang, Suzhou. 1380. Private Collection. Weng and Li 2014, 5:10-11.

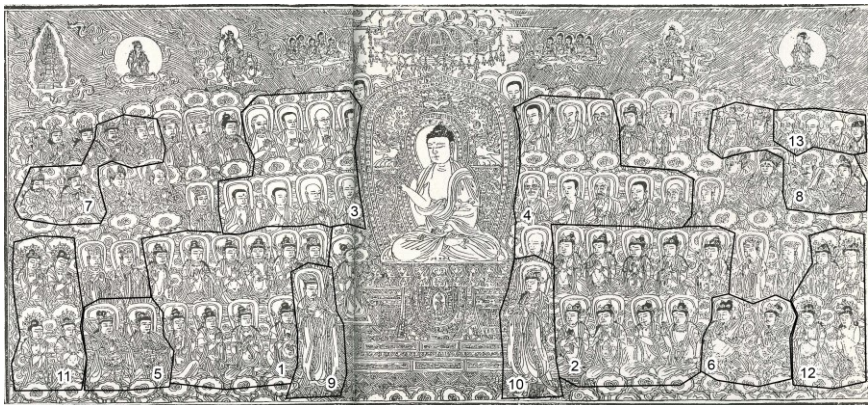


Fig. 5a. Details, with the author's markings of thirteen groups of deities: G 1-2, bodhisattvas; G 3-4, disciples; G 5-6, Four Heavenly Kings; G 7-8, Eight Groups of Beings such as *devas* and *nāgas*; G 9-10, *devas* as emperor and empress; G 11-12, *nāgīnīs*; G 13, monks and laymen.

This frontispiece, though copying most of visual features shown in those of the three Yuan canons, is remarkable for its inclusion of more figures. With a slight increase in size, it depicts a larger assembly of beings (Fig. 5a). Typical groups include bodhisattvas and disciples, placed closest to the Buddha, while the Four Heavenly Kings stand in the front row and the Eight Groups of Beings are toward the end of the upper two rows. Further *devas* dressed as emperor and empress, *nāgiṇīs*, monks, and lay believers in Han Chinese clothing are standing behind disciples and bodhisattvas. The portrayal of Han Chinese clothing and *ruyi*-shaped clouds distinguish this frontispiece from those of Yuan canons, although traits of the Himalayan style are still present.

A frontispiece used of the *Yongle nanzang* 永樂南藏 (Yongle Southern Canon), compiled based on the *Hongwu nanzang* between 1413 and 1420, shares this design. Since its blocks were available for commercial printing in Nanjing, it is considered the most widely distributed edition among all Ming Buddhist canons (Wu and Chia 2016, 314-15). The frontispiece to the *Apidamo shishenzu lun* 阿毘達磨識身足論 (Abhidharma's Discourse on Consciousness Body), now in the National Museum of China, was printed in a Nanjing workshop (Fig. 6; Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:118).⁸

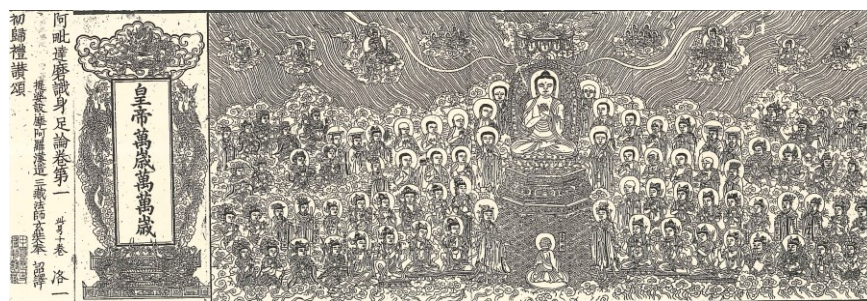


Fig. 6. Frontispiece to the *Apidamo shishenzu lun* from the *Yongle nanzang*. 1413-1420. National Museum of China. Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:118.

⁸ This copy bears the inscription, *Jubaomen laibinlou Jiangjia yinxing* 聚寶門來賓樓姜家印行 (Printed by the Jiang Family in the Laibin Building at the Jubao Gate), referring to a print workshop in southern Nanjing as its place of production (Chia 2016, 201).

The assembled beings it shows are basically identical to those in the frontispiece of 1380, except that the kneeling bodhisattva is here replaced by Śāriputra, kneeling before the frontal Buddha with his back turned to the viewer. In comparison with the earlier work, the arrangement of the assembled beings in the Yongle frontispiece is less regular, with the Eight Groups and other lesser beings scattered toward either end of the upper two rows. Moreover, the frontal bird face and the *vajra* on the throne are no longer there, horseshoe-shaped halos are replaced by circular ones, and some figures' faces are painted in Chinese style. The assembled beings are positioned comfortably on a tiled ground. They are set among mist and clouds against numerous wavy lines symbolizing radiant light. This frontispiece shows the Ming appropriation of the Yuan-dynasty frontispiece design and marks the birth of the mature form of the Ming Buddhist sutra frontispiece.

Other extant examples from the *Yongle nanzang* share the symmetrical composition. An example is the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra*), now in the Capital Library of China (Fig. 7; Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:119).



Fig. 7. Frontispiece to the *Da bore boluomeiduo jing* from the *Yongle nanzang*. 1413 and 1420. Capital Library of China. Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:119.

It depicts the frontal Buddha seated between his chief disciples, Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda, and an emperor and an empress. Behind them are four bodhisattvas, Four Heavenly Kings, and Eight Groups of Beings and exhibits a distinctive style by incorporating open space and

separating individual figures or groups with clouds, a mode that can be traced back to the Yuan period.⁹ However, it only became prominent and widely used in Buddhist frontispieces from the Yongle reign onward.

In particular, this artistic style was most often adopted by sutra frontispieces produced by imperial print workshops, indicating that it was a prominent style of the Yongle and subsequent reigns. Despite being simplified and painted in a different style, the basic combination and arrangement of the assembled beings in the frontispiece to the *Da bore boluomiduo jing*, especially the portrayal of the two devas in the form of an emperor and an empress (or occasionally two emperors or two empresses) flanking the Buddha, are similar to the Yongle frontispiece to the *Apidamo shishenzu lun* mentioned above (see Fig. 6).

The frontispiece to the *Yongle beizang* 永樂北藏 (Yongle Northern Canon) is another model example set by the Ming court. Initiated by the Yongle Emperor in 1419 shortly after the capital was moved to Beijing, the canon was completed in 1440 under the Zhengtong reign. Its frontispiece to the *Da bore boluomiduo jing*, now in the Palace Museum, Beijing (Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:142), is identical to that to the *Da yunlun qingyu jing* 大雲輪請雨經 (Sutra of Praying for Rain through the Great Cloud-Wheel) (Fig. 8), now in the National Library of China (National 1961, 5:pl. 363).

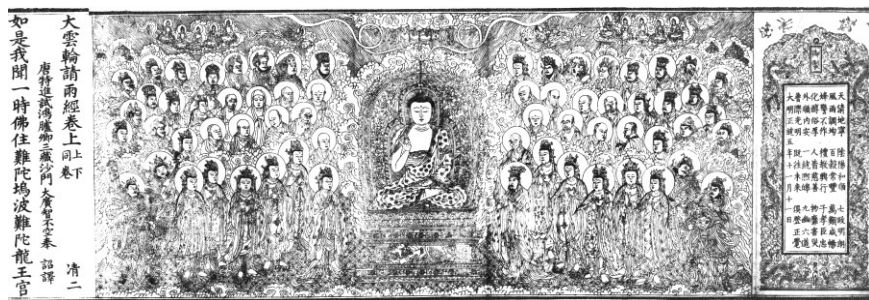


Fig. 8. Frontispiece to *Da yunlun qingyu jing*. 1440. National Library of China. National 1961, 5:pl. 363.

⁹ A frontispiece to the *Dafang guangfo huayan jing*, dated to the Yuan, shows the early use of clouds to separate figure groups (Zhongguo 2008, 107).



Fig. 8a. Details, with author's markings of groups: G 1-2, Ten Bodhisattvas; G 3-4, Four Heavenly Kings; G, 5-6, Sixteen Arhats; G 7-8, Eight Groups of Beings.

This shows a frontal-view Buddha in the center, seated between his chief disciples, Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda, and an emperor and an empress. A total of ten bodhisattvas (Fig. 8a) stand in the front row with Four Heavenly Kings positioned toward either end of the row. The eight positions closed to the Buddha in the second and third rows on either side are occupied by Sixteen Arhats, while the four positions in the fourth row are taken by Eight Groups of Beings. The remaining positions toward either end of the second, third, and fourth rows are taken by several *devas* dressed as emperors and empresses and dharma protectors.

This arrangement is standard in the Ming. It has the two chief disciples and/or a pair of emperor and empress closest to the Buddha, bodhisattvas, *arhats*, and *devas* in the middle of the assembly, the Four Heavenly Kings toward either end of the front or back row, and dharma protectors in the back, furthest away from the enlightened being. Featured in a sutra frontispiece of the last Buddhist canon compiled under the imperial auspice of the Ming court, it became a paradigm and was widely copied, with or without modification, onto others commissioned by the court and individuals. It often shows no relation to the content of the sutra attached but, based on the technology of woodblock printing, tended to be widely copied, the same blocks used repeatedly for illustrating different works.

In contrast, some frontispieces depicted figures closely associated with the text's content. A good example is the frontispiece to the *Fomu*

dakongque mingwang jing 佛母大孔雀明王經 (Sutra of the Mother of Buddhas, the Great Peahen Queen of Mantras), dated to 1463 (Zhou 1998, 2:47-49; Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:148). It shows Ānanda requesting instruction from the Great Peahen, shown in the center, with the bodhisattva Maitreya on its right.

On the two sides are discreet figure groups featuring the Four Heavenly Kings together with other dharma protectors mentioned in the sutra, such as Yakṣa (*yaocha* 藥叉), kings of Rākṣasas (*luocha wang zhong* 羅刹王眾), Rākṣasas (*luochasuo zhong* 羅叉娑眾), Rākṣasīs (*luocha nüfu zhong* 羅刹女婦眾), Nāgas (*zhulong juanshu* 諸龍眷屬), heroes who attained supernatural powers, star gods including the twenty-eight lunar mansions, the eleven luminaries, as well as various demon-spirits. Most figures wear Han Chinese costumes and show few iconographic features. Nonetheless, each group is inscribed with names showing their identities based on the content of the sutra.

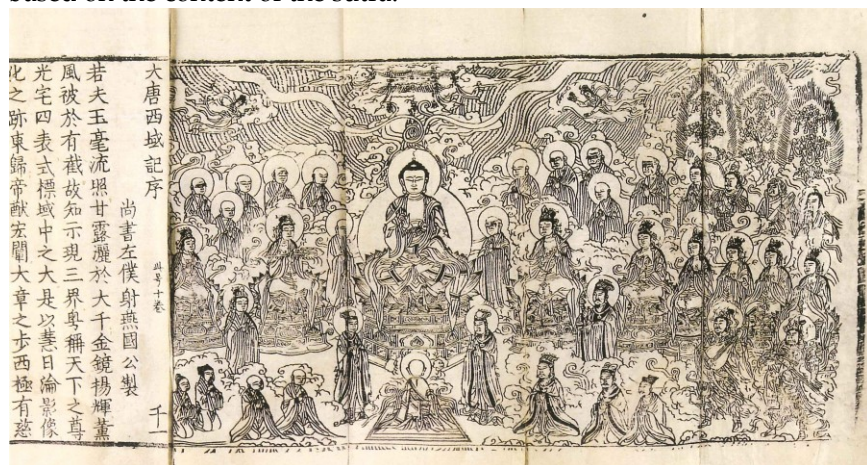


Fig. 9. Frontispiece to the *Da Tang xiyu ji* from the *Yongle nanzang*. 1413 and 1420. Collection unknown. Zhou 1998, 1:61, pl. 179.

In addition, scholars occasionally identify some figures as donors of the printing, which tends to be hard to verify. For example, the frontispiece to the *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (Great Tang Record of the Western Lands) from the *Yongle nanzang* is said to show Zhang Yue 張說 and his seven followers, including both monks and laymen (Fig. 9; Zhou 1998, 1:61, pl. 179).

The *Da Tang xiyu ji* was a travel account written by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) in 646, of his seventeen-year trip to India. The extant edition has a preface by Zhang Yue, called by his official title Left Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs and Duke of Yan (*Shangshu zuopushe Yan guogong* 尚書左僕射燕國公). Although the frontispiece shows a man in an official gown and cap kneeling before the Buddha with seven others, there is no inscription indicating their particular identity. Thus, there is no proof to support the suggestion that these figures are Zhang Yue and his followers. They may simply represent monks and laymen of different social classes, gathered to attend the Buddha's sermon. Ming sutra frontispieces with images of identifiable donors are yet to be found.

Some new designs incorporate other kinds of figures into the composition. For example, one of the extant frontispieces for the *Hongwu nanzang* depicts Xuanzang and two monks, Shamen Yizhong 沙門義忠, the abbot of the Ci'en si 慈恩寺 in Chang'an, and Huizhao 惠昭, Xuanzang's assistant translator (Weng and Li 2014, 5:14-15; Zhou 1998, 1:pl. 176). The three monks, each positioned before a screen of landscape painting, are seated behind a desk with a pile of paper and rolls of scriptures. Xuanzang, seated frontally in the center, is flanked by the two monks who are facing each other. The frontispiece is attached to Shamen Yizhong's commentary on the *Dacheng baifa mingmen lun* 大乘百法明門論 (Treatise on the Gateway to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas) and the *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 (Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice), translated by Xuanzang. The frontispiece shows that translators and commentators of a Buddhist text were included in Ming visuals. Since the text that follows does not contain the Buddha's teaching, but is a monk's commentary, the scene of the sermon is not included.

Another example is the frontispiece to the *Chuxiang Jingang bore boluomi jing* 出相金剛般若波羅蜜經 (Illustrated Diamond Sutra), printed in 1470. Here the Buddha's sermon is placed together with a scene showing a procession of monks and attendants moving toward the assembly carrying a box (of sutras?) with radiant light (Ma and Chen 2003, 1:25-28; Zhongguo 2008-2011, 1:150). The two scenes, though placed side by side, have no pictorial connection. The demarcation between the Buddha's sermon and non-scriptural narrative scenes was thus maintained through the Ming.

Daoist Frontispieces: Seeking Divine Authority

Daoist frontispieces of the same period are quite different. The symmetrical composition, commonly adopted in Buddhism, is only found in a few examples, while the majority shows diagonal composition. In addition, deities contributing to the scripture, who may or may not be mentioned in the actual text, are depicted together with the standard combination of gods, that is, celestial officials, jade maidens, and guardians such as the Green Dragon and White Tiger.

The frontispieces of the *Yuhuang jing* 玉皇經 (Scripture of the Jade Emperor) furnishes a good example. One of the most widely circulated Daoist texts in late imperial China, it was received by the successors of Liu Ansheng's 劉安勝 Daoist altar in Pengxi 蓬溪 (Sichuan) through spirit-writing in a process called "flying phoenix" (*feilan* 飛鸞). The method involves a deity descending to deliver heavenly messages through a medium who holds a stick or brush and draws characters on sand spread in a tray known as the planchette, which another person interprets and transcribes on paper.

The *Yuhuang jing* was created around 1218, when the Divine Lord Zitong (Zitong dijun 梓潼帝君) descended, a time when Sichuan was in turmoil due to wars and natural disasters (Hsieh 2009, 58). Its earliest known illustrated copy contains a set of three frontispieces dated 1424. The set adopts the diagonal composition. The first two show two major deities, the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊) in Daoist attire in frontal view and the Jade Emperor on the throne in a three-quarter view, surrounded by lesser deities (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Frontispiece to the first volume of the *Gaoshang yuhuang banxing jijing*. Edition of 1424. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of Tsung-hui Hsieh.

In the third frontispiece, only the Jade Emperor remains. In all three, the far left corner shows kneeling figures, showing personages closely related to the texts (Wan 2016a, 213-219). Rather than portraying the preaching of a sermon as most Buddhist frontispieces do, the images show the conferring of a scripture" (*chuanjing tu* 傳經圖). Lord Zitong in particular appears standing alongside the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling 張道陵 on the far left of the first and third frontispieces (Fig. 10a).



Fig. 10a. Detail: Zhang Daoling and Divine Lord Zitong

The deity revealed himself in human form in the 12th century and came to be widely worshiped as the god of literature (Kleeman 1993, 48-49; 1994). In the frontispieces, he is dressed as a scholar-official, wearing a specific hood with two hanging ribbons called *ruanjiao futou* 軟腳襖頭, a feature also common in Daoist paintings and other frontispieces of the time (Little 2000, 267; Hong Kong 2008, 207; see Fig. 11). In the first fron-

tispiece he witnesses the conferral of a box of scriptures by the celestial official to the Heavenly Lord of Pure Brightness and Exalted Void (Gaoxu qingming tianzhu 高虛清明天主) (Fig. 10a). The presence of Lord Zitong, who is not mentioned in the scripture, reminds viewers of the specific process by which the *Yuhuang jing* was created, reasserting the sacred origin of the scripture and the legitimacy of its transmission. Frontispieces in subsequent periods are often simplified with only one image attached to the entire scripture. Nonetheless, the presence of Lord Zitong as a witness remained indispensable and is found in most extant examples.¹⁰

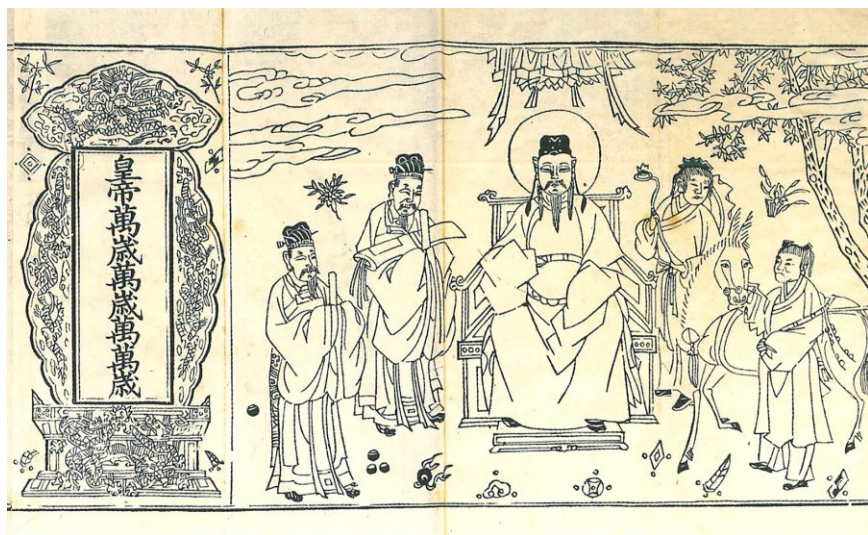


Fig. 11. Frontispiece to the *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Zitong dijun yingyan jing benyuan jing*. 1615. White Cloud Monastery. Hong Kong 2008, 207.

While the depiction of the divine medium serves to affirm the sacred origin of the text, the portrayal of commentators may indicate the eagerness for divine approval of their reading and interpretation. A good

¹⁰ They include the woodblock frontispiece dated 1561, in the National Palace Museum Library (故佛 000072-000074), and one dated 1657, in the National Central Library (312.2 26171), Taipei.

example is the frontispiece to the commentary version of the *Yushu jing* 玉樞經 (Scripture of the Jade Pivot). Compiled anonymously around the 12th century (Andersen 2019),¹¹ the text itself was the core scripture of the supreme deity Puhua tianzun and has been an essential treatise on thunder rites ever since (Schipper and Verellen 2004, 3:1081-83, 1092-93). Xu Daoling 徐道齡, a government official in Suzhou created an annotated version in 1333, including four commentaries ascribed to the internal alchemist Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (fl. 1194-1230), the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling (2nd c.), the Commissioner of Five Thunders, Celestial Lord Zhang (Zhang tianjun 張天君), and the immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓—the latter three received through spirit-writing. One frontispiece, collected in the British Library, dates from the 15th or 16th century (Fig. 12).¹²



Fig. 12. Frontispiece to the annotated *Yushu jing*, 15th to 16th Century. British Library, London (RB.99/161). After Little 2000, 238-39.

Here, the right part shows Puhua tianzun flanked by his civil and military officials, while the left shows a total of eighty-two deities lining up in two rows. A group of seven gods occupies the central position. They closely follow Haoweng 皓翁 who kneels before Puhua tianzun, accompanied by two standing celestial officials, requesting instruction.

¹¹ I have benefited greatly from Poul Andersen's talks on the *Yushu jing* over the past years. See also Yin 2014; Li 2003.

¹² It is also held by the Tenri Central Library (126-i3). This part of the paper is a summary of Wan 2010; 2015, 52-55.

Comparing the seven figures with portraits of the next forty-five deities shown in the same scripture, five can be identified. They include first, Zhang Daoling, here called Celestial Master of Great Rites (Dafa tianshi 大法天師), shown with a bushy beard and Daoist robe, and next, the Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven (Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝), here called Founder of the Myriad Rites (Wanfa jiaozhu 萬法教主) and dressed as an emperor with a tortoise entwined with a snake. Third is the immortal Xu Xun 許遜, wearing a Daoist robe and cap, followed by Lü Dongbin and his teacher Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, described as the Perfected Immortals Zhong and Lü Who Preach the Teaching of the Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao chuanjiao Zhong Lü zhenxian 神霄傳教鍾呂真仙); Lü is shown with a sword over his shoulder while Zhongli has two buns on his head.

The deity standing between the Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven and Lü Dongbin, moreover, can be identified as the Celestial Lord Zhang Yuanbo 張元伯, shown with a bird-face and holding a flag. The last figure, standing behind Zhongli Quan, is less easy to identify but most likely Bai Yuchan, patriarch of the Southern School, also wearing two buns (Wan 2015, 52-53; see also Berling 1993; Yokote 1996). If the above identification is valid, the theme of the frontispiece becomes obvious. It shows the four commentators having an audience with Puhua tianzun; seeing them lead the procession, reassured viewers that their words are authoritative and approved by the main deity.

The serious concern for divine authority and the sacredness of the scripture may have led to the depiction not only of the divine medium of transmission and human commentators, but also of patron gods. An example for the latter is the frontispieces to the Ming *Daozang* (Daoist Canon), initiated by the Yongle Emperor in 1419 and completed in the 12th year of Zhengtong (1447) after nearly thirty years of editorial work. Extant copies are mostly reprints under the auspices of the Wanli Emperor in 1598.¹³ Given the consistency in pictorial details as shown in extant

¹³ There is a fragmented set printed in the Wanli reign by using a frontispiece woodblock with an inscription dated to 1524. It is now preserved in the library of Shaanxi Normal University. Some scholars (e.g., Cai 2001) claim that there is another copy in the Institute of Oriental Culture at Tokyo University, however, upon inquiry this is not the case.

Ming versions, it is likely that they all closely follow the original design of 1447.¹⁴

They typically show a symmetrical composition. For instance, the reprint of 1598, collected in the Qingdao 青島 Museum, has a frontispiece composed of seven folded pages showing the central deities of Daoism, the Three Purities (Sanqing 三清) in the center (Fig. 13; Wan 2017, 104).



Fig. 13. Frontispiece to the *Daozang*, with the author's markings of 32 groups of Daoist deities. Reprint of 1598. Qingdao Museum. After Wan 2017, 104.

Next to four jade maidens flanking them, there are thirty-two groups of deities, divided by clouds. Besides the kneeling figure in the center, two groups of marshals stand in the foreground and occupy the most prominent position. The first set closer to the center consists of the Green Dragon and White Tiger lords (G15, 30), reflecting the standard combination of Daoist deities, as well as the Four Saints (Sisheng 四聖) (Davis 2001, 74-79; Chao 2011, 25-27) (G 16, 29).

The second level positioned toward either end of the front row consists of the Twelve Marshals: Xin 辛, Tao 陶, Zhao 趙, Guan 關, Bi 畢, and Yin 殷 on the left (G 13), as well as Wen 溫, Ma 馬, Zhang 張, Deng 鄧, Wang 王, and Gou 苟 on the right (G 32). The two sets are clearly separated by celestial deities resting on floating clouds (G 14, 31), which indicates their higher status in the pantheon. Still, the Marshals are larger in size than other groups, plus they stand on the tiled floor on the same plane as the Three Purities and the kneeling figure. This is different from

¹⁴ For reports on different extant editions of the *Daozang*, see Kim 2014, 151-54; Wan 2017, 6-13; 2019.

the position of the Marshals in the frontispiece of the *Yongle beizang*, carved and printed by the court five years earlier, where they tend to occupy the back rows (see Fig. 8).

The Twelve Marshals are spiritual guardians as much as the Four Saints who head the military bureaucracy of the pantheon: Tianpeng 天蓬, Tianyou 天猷, Yisheng 翊聖, and Zhenwu 真武. They all played an important role as ritual agents responsible for subjugating demonic entities in the thunder rites and rose to prominence in the Song. Under the Ming, the Marshals were recognized as special troops of Zhenwu and protectors of the dynasty (see Wan 2016b). The shift in their position, in other words, reflects the pivotal position of these thunder gods in the imperially endorsed Daoist pantheon.

The *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (A Corpus of Daoist Rituals) is the largest work collected in the Ming *Daozang* (Schipper 1987, 16; Schipper and Verellen 2004, 32-33). Containing a Pure Tenuity (*Qingwei* 清微) genealogy of patriarchs that ends with the thunder master Zhao Yizhen 趙宜真 (d. 1382), the text must have been compiled close to the beginning of the 15th century. A great liturgical compendium, it contains 268 scrolls of ritual manuals dedicated to thunder rites from different localities. They venerate the Twelve Marshals, the Four Saints, and many other related gods, detailing various methods of tapping into their power.

As scholars have suggested, the compiler was either Liu Yuanren 劉淵然 (1351-1432), a disciple of Zhao Yizhen, or Liu's disciple Zhao Yizheng 邵以正 (1368-1463), who also served as the chief editor of the *Daozang*. Indeed, Zhao was known as a legitimate master of thunder rites of Pure Tenuity (Wan 2017, 43). The depiction of the Four Saints and the Twelve Marshals in the frontispiece to the *Daozang* thus points to their significance as part of the imperially endorsed pantheon, the patron gods of the Ming empire, and Zhao Yizheng, and also serves as witness of the completion of the compilation.

Thus far, no donors or historical figures have ever been found in Daoist frontispieces of the Ming. The sacred gathering of celestial beings in the Daoist heaven seems to leave no room for such mundane figures.

Explanation and Evaluation

There are distinct differences in combinations and arrangement of figures in Buddhist and Daoist scripture frontispieces of the Ming dynasty. The predominance of the symmetrical composition in Buddhist sutra frontispieces contrasts sharply with Daoist diagonal composition. This difference shows that they patterned themselves on different models and developed into different traditions. Under the strong influence of the Mongol Yuan, the Buddhist frontispieces of the early Ming closely followed the pictorial design and artistic style of the previous period. The combination of figures accompanying the Buddha remained highly stable, consisting of two *devas* dressed as emperor and empress, followed by monks, bodhisattvas, the Four Heavenly Kings, Eight Great Vajra Kings or the Eight Groups of Beings, with the occasional portrayal of donors and historical figures.

The increase in frontispiece size, from a succession of three-to-four folded pages in the Yuan to five-or-more in the Ming resulted in a rise of the number of figures being included, which in turn enhanced the grandeur of the scene of the Buddha's sermon. Nonetheless, the majority of Buddhist frontispieces remained rather conventional, with only few exceptions—largely pictorial representation of the sutra texts. Hence, the content of a sutra remained the main sources of reference for Ming frontispieces.

The pictorial design of Buddhist sutras printed in the Ming also showed creativity. However, this is less obvious in the frontispieces and appears more in in-text illustrations, which can amount to forty or more in a single text. Representative examples include the *Chuxiang fodingxin datuoluoni jing* 出相佛頂心大陀羅尼經 (Illustrated Sutra of Great Dhāraṇī of the Uṣṇīṣa-cittā; Zhou 1998, 2:40-42) and *Guanshiyin pusu pumenpin jing* 觀世音菩薩普門品經 (Universal Gate Chapter on Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva), printed in 1432 (Zhou 1998, 2: 43-45),¹⁵ as well as the *Chuxiang Jingang bore boluomi jing* 出相金剛般若波羅蜜經 (Illustrated Diamond Sutra) of 1470 (Ma and Chen 2003, vol. 1). It seems that the Picture of Preaching a Sermon had become such a well-developed genre that little

¹⁵ Scholars have noted that at least 11 different illustrated editions of the *Guanyin Sutra* were published. Weidner 1994, 309.

room was left for innovative design. Instead, in-text illustrations became a new means of expressing particular ways of dedication to Buddhism and accruing extra merits.

The adoption of different figures in Daoist frontispieces, on the other hand, reflects a different set of challenges. Daoist scriptures had diverse origins, including local deity cults and revelations through spirit-writing, as the *Yuhuang jing* and the commentary edition of the *Yushu jing* demonstrate. The transmission of a scripture from a deity through a medium to humanity often happened during the formation of local cults, expressing a different dimension of the traditional doctrine that Daoist scriptures formed from primordial *qi* present at the formation of the cosmos and were first revealed in celestial script to celestial beings, who then transcribed and translated them into human languages. Only in this form could they turn into material shape and be passed on to humankind.¹⁶

Many new Daoist texts came into being through the revelations of celestial beings and spirit-writing in the Song and subsequent periods. Indeed, as Lowell Skar points out, over half of the *Daozang* texts derive from local deity cults and ritual movements and were compiled between the mid-12th century and its 1447 printing (Skar 2000, 413). The surge of new texts and their diverse origins may have prompted some designers of frontispieces to assert the divine authority and authenticity of a given scripture by incorporating the divine medium of transmission or its commentators into the sacred gathering of Daoist gods. Moreover, apart from the standard combination of deities including the Green Dragon and White Tiger lords as well as jade maidens and celestial officials, certain ritual agents and specific patron deities related to the scripture were also chosen to be featured in the frontispiece as divine witnesses of transmission. The emphasis on the sacredness of the celestial gathering further ruled out the possibility of having donors, historical figures, or other mundane beings depicted in Daoist frontispieces.

However much Buddhist and Daoist frontispieces of the Ming period followed different visual traditions and expressed different religious

¹⁶ For the sacred origin of Daoist scriptures, see Robinet 1993, 19-53. For translation and transmission, see Bumbacher 2013; Hsieh 2010, 63-124; Bokenkamp 1985, 434-86.

connotations, they still shared a fundamental artistic style and pursued similar interests, being part of the greater visual and religious culture of the Ming.

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