Quantification and Prioritization in Chinese Moral Culture
ASIANetwork/Freeman Foundation Student-Faculty Fellows
Images of the Study
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You should know. There is a net in the sky.
No one can slip away.
Do you know that you are a criminal?
Caption from Ghost Soldier, central hall of Chenghuang Miao, Chengde

This is a research study done into the ways moral good and evil are quantified and prioritized in Daoist philosophy.

Abacus for quantifying moral deeds, Dongyue Guan, Jiangkou

The research is based upon a study of the administration of moral order by the god Taishan in Daoist tradition.

The central altar to the god Taishan at Dongyue Guan, Jiangkou

We used as sources scrolls that documented moral wrongs and their punishments in the Daoist courts of hell at many sacred sites in China

Approach to Longfeng Dong, Hebei Province

Court One: Qin Guang Wang (surname: Jiang; (birthday: Feb. 1) from the court of the ten gods of hell, Dongyue Guan, Jiangkou

We paid attention to texts on the scrolls that explained the moral wrong done and its punishment.

A sample of scroll text source material from the scroll of Court Five at Longfeng Dong, Hebei Province.

We also studied caption boards interpreting the scrolls and captions added to the bottoms of the scrolls themselves.

Chaorang Dong, Scroll for Hell Court Two with caption at bottom

The seventh court of hell as portrayed at Putuozongsheng, Chengde. Captions on boards to the side.

We interviewed Daoist scholars, teachers and practioners.

Huang Zhipeng, Daoist priest of Dongyue Guan, Jiangkou

Ms. Cline, Dr. Littlejohn, Zhao Jing (translator), and Li Yuhang (Retired Director of the Chinese Taoist Association) and his wife at his apartment near Baiyun Guan, Beijing.

Ms. Cline and Dr. Littlejohn with Wang Ying Feng, Xu Chang Feng, and Lin Gui Po of the Fujian Daoist Association in Quanzhou.

We consulted important Daoist morality books for their teachings.

Morality books such as T'ai-Shang Ganying P'ien being distributed at Yuan Miao Guan, Quanzhou

Block print of a hell court taken from Yu Li Zhi Bao Chao Quan Shi's description of the Daoist Hells and the moral justifications for the punishments.

We documented temple iconography and worship practices relevant to our research subject.

The Punishment Department, one of the 76 Daoist Departments under the administration of the god Taishan at Dongyue Miao, Beijing

Worshippers burning hell money on the top of Mt. Tai, outside the temple of the Princess of Azure Clouds

Close-up of the six types of life forms available for reincarnation based on one's moral life as shown from the scroll of Court Ten, Chenghuang Miao, Chengde

Taishan's Warning Speech over the entrance to Dongyue Miao, Beijing.

Translation:

If you do a good thing, though you may not see the good result at the time, later it will be calculated with your rights and wrongs. Good deeds are like grass in the spring, though you can't see it today, it is growing. Bad deeds are like the stone which sharpens the knife, it will be destroyed little by little.