

Daoist Rituals in Fictional Narratives: The Function of *Luotian dajiao* in *Shuihu Zhuan*

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Religion is a common element in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) texts that popularly circulated in the market, and it occupies an important place with different functions in many fictional narratives. Religious rituals, figures, and objects are all of great concern to literati and other writers who have a low social status in writing popular literature.¹ As Patricia Sieber, a specialist on Ming-Qing plays, argues, “Although the core texts of the curricular canon did not change during this time, a significant number of literati, including the key figure of the current essay, Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆,² entertained doubts as to whether the officially sanctioned genres and styles were the sole or most appropriate for the selection of worthy candidates” to be included in the canon.³ Therefore, these literati tended to use these popular texts to educate common people. In this process, many religious ideologies are incorporated in these texts to shed light on the moral norms to the readers and the most remarkable example is *baojuan* 寶卷 (the precious scrolls), which originally functioned as entertainment texts, but also include religious teachings. Daoism in its origins during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) was used for education and even indoctrination by the emperors in the later dynasties. At the same time, it also served a traditional religious function of comfort and guidance for the followers. As a native

¹ Popular literature, here, I refer to the ones mostly for entertainment instead of formal writing for political use or academic use.

² Jin is a very famous scholar during the Ming, and he wrote the commentary for *Shuihu zhuan*.

³ Sieber, “Religion and Canon Formation,” 51.

religion from China, Daoism played a critical role in politics and literature to help consolidate the rule in traditional China.⁴ In the Ming and Qing fictional narratives, Daoism not only serves the plot and helps to reveal the personalities of the characters, but also displays its educational function: a means for the rulers to influence the thinking of the people.

Daoism is a very common motif in novels during the Ming-Qing era, and the Ming novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*The Water Margin*) is one of them. *Shuihu zhuan* is a vernacular novel written around the fourteenth to sixteenth century and the author of this book is usually regarded as Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (1296-1370). It is a story about the peasant uprising during the Northern Song dynasty. There were 108 outlaws gathered at Mount Liang to rebel against the government because of the treacherous ministers who were in charge at court and the emperor was relying on these ministers. After being defeated by these outlaws, the emperor offered amnesty and enlistment to them. These outlaws accepted it and fought for the emperor to eliminate the uprisings. In the end, almost two-thirds of these outlaws died.

Shuihu zhuan includes many esoteric Daoist elements and many scholars have contributed thoughts about these elements including the religious objects and figures like the celestial script (*tianshu* 天書) and the Mysterious Woman (*jiutian xuannü* 九天玄女) in the story.⁵ There is also a Daoist ritual that is pivotal in the structure of *Shuihu zhuan* called, *Luotian dajiao* 羅天大醮 (Great Offering of All Heaven). This ritual is mentioned three times in the first, seventy-first, and ninety-ninth (in the 100-chapter edition) or 119th (in the 120-chapter edition) chapters. These are crucial scenes in *Shuihu zhuan* because these chapters are the beginning, the

⁴ Traditional China is the most commonly used word that refers to the time period before 1911. The reason I don't use premodern China is because it sometimes also means ancient China (pre-Qin Dynasty).

⁵ Mark Melenbeld in his paper "Vernacular 'Fiction' and Celestial Script", talked about the celestial script and talisman in *Shuihu zhuan*. Liu Peng in his paper "Conceal my Body so that I can Protect the State" wrote about the function and evolution of the Mysterious Woman.

climax (also seen as the ending in Jing Shengtan's 70-chapter edition), and the ending in the novel. In the first chapter, the Emperor Renzong of Song 宋仁宗 (1010-1063) invited the Heavenly Master Zhang (Zhang *tianshi* 張天師) from Dragon and Tiger Mountain (Longhu shan 龍虎山) and asked him to hold the *Luotian dajiao* to avert the plague in the capital.⁶ With the help of this ritual, the plague was fully eliminated. Then in Chapter seventy-one, all 108 outlaws gathered at Mount Liang. This important gathering gives Song Jiang, the leader of these outlaws, an excuse to hold a grand ceremony, *Luotian dajiao*, to celebrate. The last mention of *Luotian dajiao* comes after the civil wars in which the 108 heroes fought for the Song emperor. After these wars, most of the heroes had died so that Song Jiang wanted to liberate their souls by holding the ritual. *Luotian dajiao* marks the scenes of the demonic spirits' release, the climax of their power, and their decay. Also, many Song emperors deeply believed in Daoism and even held *Luotian dajiao* several times during their rule in the history. This ritual, with its functions and historical significance, punctuates key moments in the novel. Therefore, *Luotian dajiao* is not simply a random Daoist ritual that is used to increase the sanctity of big events, but rather integrated with political significance. The different sponsors of this ritual in the novel – the emperor and the leader of the bandits – also show its relationship to the status and purposes of the characters and how it shapes the plot.⁷

In this study, I attempt to reveal the political function of Daoist ritual by analyzing how *Luotian dajiao* is presented in *Shuihu zhuan* and reviewing how this fictional narrative reflects political reality by inheriting some narrative conventions. First, I will examine how *Luotian*

⁶ The reign date of Renzong of Song is from 1022 to 1063. Here the Song dynasty refers to the Northern Song (960-1127).

⁷ The emperor and the bandit, Song Jiang, cannot hold the ritual themselves. They asked Daoist priests like Celestial Master Zhang 張天師 and Gong Sunsheng 公孫勝 to hold the ritual. Therefore, I use the word "sponsor" here.

dajiao is narrated in Daoist canons and historical records, and how various Chinese rulers used religion as a tool to educate their people, which reflects the idea of educating by the method of mysticism (*Shen Dao She Jiao* 神道設教).⁸ Second, I will provide a close reading of the narrative of *Luotian dajiao* in the three chapters in *Shuihu zhuan* and analyze the political function of the ritual in this text. Finally, *Shuihu zhuan* shows a story that happened during the Northern Song (960-1127). During that time, most Song emperors and the royal family had strong faith in Daoism. To further consider the relationship of Daoism and politics, I will look at Emperor Zhenzong of Song 宋真宗 (Song Zhenzong) (968-1022) who also held a grand Daoist ceremony like that in Chapter 71 of the novel. In this sense, I will explore the interaction between real political events and fictional narrative. Through examinations of these issues, this paper seeks to demonstrate how Daoist rituals in fictional narratives both incorporate political significance and embody inherited narrative conventions.

***Luotian Dajiao* in History and Its Educational Functions**

Luotian dajiao is one of the grandest Daoist rituals in Daoist traditions. *Luotian* 羅天 means Canopy Heaven, and it is the highest heaven in two different cosmological systems.⁹ *Da* 大 is grand and *jiao* 醮 means sacrificial ritual. *Luotian dajiao* is a large ceremony in which Daoist priests make offerings to all heavens and aim to show gratitude and be blessed from heaven. This ritual was first held by many emperors in China from the Tang dynasty (618–907) onwards and was entrenched during the Song dynasty (960-1279) with the authorized scriptures by the emperor Zhenzong. Later, *Luotian dajiao* was held multiple times, as is documented in the

⁸ See page 70 for the translation of *Shen Dao She Jiao* in Xiaohu Cao's paper "Trustworthiness Education in Ancient Chinese Beliefs".

⁹ Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 382.

Daoist scriptures and history books, which made *Luotian dajiao* gradually known and popularized among the public. In these scriptures, the ritual accumulates more comprehensive functions like averting all kinds of personal catastrophes, and the usage of it becomes a convention in the scriptures and is adopted by the fictional narrative.¹⁰ Therefore, *Luotian dajiao* carries unique functions rather than its original indoctrination function which has been verified and amplified by *Shuihu zhuan*.

The earliest extant documentation of *Luotian dajiao* is in *Guangcheng ji* 廣成集 (*The Collection of Guangcheng*) by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933), dating to the late Tang and Five Dynasties (907-979). In this text, *Luotian dajiao* is mentioned in the form of *jiaoci* 醮詞 (declarations to heaven). These declarations address the same desire to bless the country and wish that the country forever avoid catastrophes. Without any regulations or rules of *Luotian dajiao* mentioned in this text, Wu Zhen, a scholar of Daoism at Renmin University of China infers that prior to the Song, there are not any differences of the scale between *Luotian dajiao* and other Daoist rituals like *Zhoutian dajiao* 週天大醮 (Great Offering of the Whole Heaven), and there were not any regulations about seats for the deities (*fenwei* 分位).¹¹ Although it is difficult to make this conclusion based on the limited Tang texts that recorded these rituals, at least from the extent texts we can infer that at this point *Luotian dajiao* had not yet thoroughly developed fixed official regulations. Therefore, this earliest text shows that while *Luotian dajiao* had not yet become a systematic and well-established ritual, it had already performed the function of realizing the ruler's wish to protect the country.

¹⁰ See volume 48 pages 11-12 of “Taishang dongxuan lingbao tianzun shuo luotian dajiao shangpin miaojing” 太上洞玄靈寶天尊說羅天大醮上品妙經 in *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏.

¹¹ Wu, “Cong Du Guangting liupian *luotian jiaoci* kan zaoqi *Luotian dajiao*,” 22.

Later in the Song during the ninth year of Emperor Zhenzong's Dazhong Xiangfu 大中祥符 reign period (1016), Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1025), the prime minister of Zhenzong, wrote *Yisheng baode zhuan* 翊聖保德傳 under the order of Zhenzong and for the first time specified the scale and rite of *Luotian dajiao* and its relevant rituals. This scripture tries to form a universal cluster of rituals in a systematic way to provide a paradigm to all classes of people from the emperor to the commoners to follow. Based on this text, the altars are built up in nine ranks, with the highest three altars being set up for the country, the middle three altars for the officials, and lowest three for the commoners.¹² *Luotian dajiao* is one of the highest three altars that includes 1200 seats for deities, and the other two are *Putian dajiao* 普天大醮 and *Zhoutian dajiao* 週天大醮, which involves 3600 and 2400 seats for deities respectively.¹³ If the officials and commoners are praying for the emperors, they should set up the altar of praying for grains and blessing the present, which is *Luotian dajiao*.¹⁴ Although there are rituals that are larger and of a higher standard than *Luotian dajiao*, this ritual is the only one that can be held by people from all social strata. This gives a reason why *Luotian dajiao* is chosen as the important Daoist ritual in *Shuihu zhuan* held by both the emperor and Song Jiang. The scripture also stipulates the scale and function of these Daoist rituals strictly and precisely and it shows the strict hierarchical system and stipulates the different people's roles in Daoist rituals. Therefore, in the name of the whole empire, Daoist rituals, including *Luotian dajiao*, for the first time became systematic and represented political functions.

Emperors in traditional China not only paid attention to the Daoist canons that documented *Luotian dajiao*, they also used *Luotian dajiao* to fulfill their political aspirations. In

¹² Wang, *Yisheng baode zhuan* 翊聖保德傳 in *Zhengtong Daozang*, 163-164.

¹³ Wang, 163-164.

¹⁴ Wang, 164.

a Song book titled *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (*Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau*), it records a Tang emperor who held *Luotian dajiao* and saw a dragon on his quilt during that night.¹⁵ The emperor, as the only witness, did not keep this anomaly secret, and instead revealed it to the ministers as an auspicious omen. This is not the only anomaly documented. In the Yuan (1271-1368) text *Maoshan zhi* 茅山志 (*Records of Mount Mao*) written by a Daoist priest Liu Dabin 劉大彬, it documents that Emperor Zhenzong asked Daoist priests to set up a *Luotian dajiao* for Empress Zhangxian Mingsu 章獻明肅 (969-1033).¹⁶ The Yuan text *Daoyuan xuegu lu* 道園學古錄 (*Daoyuan's record of study of antiquity*) and Ming text *Xuxian zhenlu* 徐仙真錄 (*True Records of the Xu Immortals*) also document the event of holding *Luotian dajiao* by Emperor Wenzong 文宗 of Yuan and Emperor Chengzu 成祖 of Ming for their own purposes respectively.¹⁷

These examples above share the same narrative idea. First, they all document the ruler or the royal family holding *Luotian dajiao*. Second, there are always some anomalies during or after holding the ritual, which is a sign of connecting with the heavens. Third, the narrators attribute the success of holding this ritual to the good morality of the emperors and the royal families. Therefore, the narration of *Luotian dajiao* is often tied to the rulers' political wish. These narrative conventions helped form a sense that *Luotian dajiao*, or more general Daoist rituals, are closely related to the rulers' behaviors and authority. Together with the regulations to the commoners made by the emperor, the common people were incorporated in this grand ritual and were secretly embedded the idea that *Luotian dajiao* is a carrier to show the authority of the

¹⁵ Wang, *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 in *Zhengtong Daozang*, 22.

¹⁶ Liu Dabin 劉大彬, *Maoshan zhi* 茅山志 in *Zhengtong Daozang*, vol. 9: 283.

¹⁷ Yu Ji 虞集, *Daoyuan xuegu lu* 道園學古錄, 31. Fang Wenzhao 方文照, *Xuxian zhenlu* 徐仙真錄, in *Zhengtong Daozang*, vol. 109: 33.

rulers. Thus, *Luotian dajiao* became interwoven with political claims and the authority of the rulers.

Generally speaking, *Luotian dajiao*, in these scriptures and historical contexts, usually relates to the ruler's political purpose, namely, to consolidate and legitimize their rule with the help of heaven. The rulers use this sacred religious ritual to make their people believe that their power is endowed from heaven and deities. This phenomenon of assigning mysticism to rule is a form of *Shen Dao She Jiao*.¹⁸ This idea originates from the *Yi Jing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), that says “When we contemplate the spirit-like way of Heaven, we see how the four seasons proceed without error. The sages, in accordance with (this) spirit-like way, laid down their instructions, and all under heaven yield submission to them.”¹⁹ In other words, the sages are following the rules of heaven to make their people submit to them. We can see that these rules are usually mysterious and rely on religious rituals or canons. The purpose of this practice is to indoctrinate and therefore make the common people easy to control.

It is not a rare phenomenon for the rulers to use Daoism to educate the people, and then to declare the authority of their rule. During the Northern Zhou 北周 (Beizhou) (557-581), the Emperor Wudi 周武帝 (543-478) ordered the compilation of a Daoist reference book – *Wushang miyao* 無上秘要 (*Supreme Secret Essentials*). During this time, there was a political climate of unrest, and the rule of Northern Zhou faced many challenges. Therefore, Emperor Wudi intended to compile this Daoist canon to establish the orthodoxy of Daoism for the country.²⁰ In this way,

¹⁸ I use the term “mysticism” here to indicate that people regard the abnormal event or phenomenon (anomalies) as a signal of heaven noticing and reacting to their behavior.

¹⁹ Legge, translated *Book of Changes*, 95.

²⁰ See page 25-26 of Wang Chengwen's 王承文 analysis on *Wushang miyao* in *Lun Suitang daojing fenlei tixi de quelu jiqi yiyi*.

Wushang miyao helped him rule the country with Daoist ideologies and gave him divine authority.

Daoism only had a few hundred years of history in the Northern Zhou. It later became more systematic and more in line with the requirements of rule during the Song. Since the emperor Taizu of Song 宋太祖 (927-976) usurped power from the Later Zhou 後周 (951-960), the validity of the rule was always a concern to the Song emperors.²¹ At the same time, the invasion of the nomadic people from the north of China always haunted their thoughts. Therefore, the Song emperors tried to seek a solution from Daoism by elevating the Daoist deities who are the protection of the North like Zhenwu 真武 (Black Warrior). By compiling Daoist scriptures and creating or elevating Daoist deities, they declared their declaring divine status to subjects consolidate the rule of the empire.²²

Under this historical context of rulers using Daoism to teach their people and prove their theocracy, Daoism gradually incorporated the rulers' political aspirations with the ideology of *Shen Dao She Jiao* in the book *Yijing*. The mysterious nature of Daoist rituals, the descent of Daoist deities or objects from heaven, and Daoist ideologies become very popular motifs to educate people and thus fulfill the rulers' desires.

²¹ The validity of Emperor Taizu's rule, and every Song ruler thereafter.

²² In *Song shi* 宋史 and *Xu zizhitongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, there are several stories about how the Song emperor created the Daoist deity Zhao Xuanlang 趙玄朗 and elevated the status of Beiji sisheng 北極四聖 including the most famous one *Zhenwu* 真武 (the Black Warrior).

Luotian dajiao in *Shuihu zhuan*

Luotian dajiao is well structured in *Shuihu zhuan*. It is embedded in the plot to introduce the protagonists, open a new scene, or conclude the precious events. It helps to advance the plot in a dramatic way and reveals the protagonists' purpose. It also has a close connection with the narrative tradition in the in the aforementioned historical records, and it inherits the idea of using *Luotian dajiao* to show the desire of the sponsors and make this ritual closely interact with politics.

The first time *Luotian dajiao* is mentioned is at the beginning of the first chapter. The story starts with the plague during the period of reign of Emperor Renzong.²³ To save the people from this natural disaster, he first asked the temples in the capital to perform good actions to avert calamity.²⁴ However, this did not work and therefore *Luotian dajiao* was proposed by a fictionalized version of the official Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 to avert the plague. Here compared to other merit-making rituals, the author endows *Luotian dajiao* as a supreme method that has boundless power. In other words, whenever there are any problems, *Luotian dajiao*, with its exceptional power of averting catastrophes, could help to overcome difficulties. In this way, it is not surprising that holding *Luotian dajiao* can lead to amazing power in the later story.

Another very important element here is *Luotian dajiao*'s connection with heaven. In his memorial, Fan Zhongyan mentions that holding *Luotian dajiao* could make the gods know this situation and would avert the plague on earth.²⁵ As *Guangcheng ji* mentions, “[if you] prepare a *Luotian dajiao*, [you are able to pray] for the true deities from the three worlds.”²⁶ In other

²³ Although there was one plague during the Emperor Renzong reign period, it is hard to say the one in *Shuihu zhuan* refers to the one that happened in real life.

²⁴ Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, 1.

²⁵ Shi and Luo, 1.

²⁶ Du, *Guangcheng ji* 廣成集 in *Zhengtong Daozang*, 802.

words, this is a ritual that can bring the wish from the mortal world to heaven. Therefore, with its function of connecting heaven to deal with the issues on earth, *Luotian dajiao* not just introduces the plot of releasing the 108 spirits, but also creates an atmosphere of using Daoism to rule the country and solve the problems. This opens the whole novel with a theological tone and emphasizes the connection of the protagonists with heaven, and therefore connects with the author's purpose of deifying the protagonists.

The second time *Luotian dajiao* is mentioned in the novel is in Chapter 71. This is also the last chapter of Jin Shengtan's 70-chapter (a prologue with 70 chapters) *Shuihu zhuan* edition. It is the climax of the story when all the 108 heroes are gathered together and are about to begin their bandit life together. At this point, Song Jiang decided to set up a *Luotian dajiao* to repay the favor and assistance of the deities from heaven and earth (報答天地神明眷佑之恩) for three reasons: praying for health, being forgiven by the court, and releasing souls from purgatory.²⁷ Here the first sentence points out the original function of *jiao* – showing the gratitude to deities. When it comes into details, however, these reasons are like a mirror that reflects Song Jiang's desires hidden deeper. The first and third reasons are common functions of *Luotian dajiao* that are shown in scriptures. However, the second reason is different. Song Jiang as a commoner at that time is qualified to hold *Luotian dajiao* according to the regulations documented in *Yisheng baode zhuan*, but he can only hold this ritual when praying for the emperor with the altar of praying for grains and blessing the present 祈穀福時壇.²⁸ Song Jiang's emphasis here is hoping the court acknowledges his regime and forgives his sin. In this light, he is using *Luotian dajiao* to pray for a higher position at court. In this way, this Daoist ritual is completely misused by

²⁷ Shi and Luo, 882.

²⁸ Wang, *Yisheng baode zhuan* in *Zhengtong Daozang*, 164.

Song Jiang for getting a better job instead of praying for the emperor, although he claims that he is craving for serving at court. This using of Daoism and Daoist rituals to satisfy personal desires or political power and wealth and the contradiction between Song Jiang's proclamation to the emperor and his actual misuse of the ritual are very satiric.

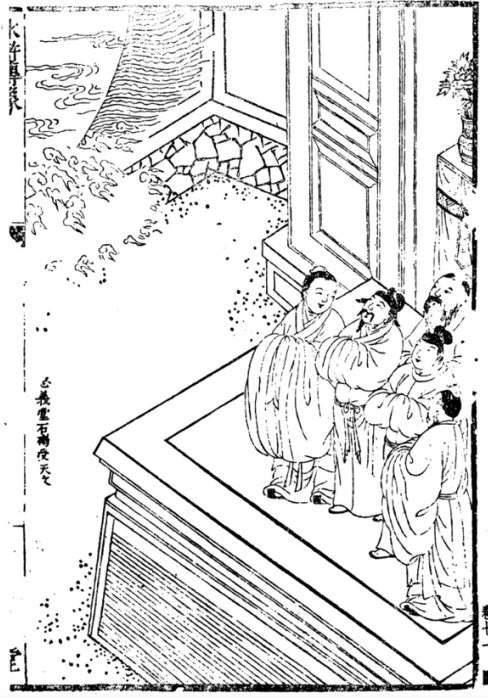


Figure 1: *Shuihu zhuan*, 884.

Luotian dajiao then was held for seven days with a magnificent scenario depicted by the author. At midnight on the seventh day when all the people were praying to heaven, there was a sudden noise from the sky and a stone tablet fell to the ground. This tablet involves a celestial script (*tianshu* 天書) that has written upon it the ranks of all the 108 heroes. This supernatural phenomenon allows a large space for interpretation. On the one hand, *Luotian dajiao* carries a function of connecting this regime to heaven and giving this newly established regime an authority from a religious aspect. This motivates Song Jiang's ambition of leading his regime to prosperity in a sacred way. To evaluate this script, Mark Meulenbeld, a scholar of Daoism at the University of Hong Kong asserts:

As a category of revealed writing, moreover, the celestial script is permeated with an aura of frightening power. The fact that these graphs were directly revealed by gods to humans and that they did not require mediation by official authorities, thus made them not only the common stock in trade of Daoist priests (whose standard repertoire consists of many revealed texts, talismans, sacred charts and diagrams to begin with), but also for seekers of extraordinary powers, including warlords, rebels and other aspiring leaders. It should come as no surprise to learn that several of the rebellions during the late Ming dynasty were led by figures who claimed to own celestial script.²⁹

Therefore, *Luotian dajiao* is what triggered the bestowal of the celestial script, and the celestial script is a result of holding this ritual that truly moved heaven. Since Song Jiang, as the leader of Liangshan, was seeking extraordinary power by sponsoring *Luotian dajiao*, the celestial script as an outcome of *Luotian dajiao* is an embodiment of his political ambition.



Figure 2: *Pingzhu tuxiang Shuihu zhuan* 評註圖像水滸傳.³⁰

²⁹ Meulenbeld, “Vernacular ‘Fiction’ and Celestial Script,” 10.

³⁰ Chapter 69, 5a. The University of Iowa Libraries.

On the other hand, *Luotian dajiao* sets up a hierarchical order among the 108 heroes. It is difficult to rule a newly established regime. Confirming a dominant status and establishing a hierarchical order is a pressing and crucial issue for every ruler. Therefore, as soon as the celestial script was interpreted by the Daoist priest, Song Jiang could not wait to declare that “The stars of Celestial Rectifier and Terrestrial Killers have been categorized by the heavens in a certain order, and all the chiefs have to keep their positions and refrain from arguing.³¹ Do not go against the words of the heavens.”³² In this way, Song Jiang obtained authority from heaven and made sure no one would disagree with his status, as the head of this community. It also helped him arrange other heroes and optimize his ruling system. Therefore, *Luotian dajiao* and the celestial script together completed his political appeal of setting up hierarchical positions for everyone and receiving the power of leading a regime-like organization from heaven.

The last time *Luotian dajiao* is mentioned is in Chapter 99 (or 119 in the 120-chapter edition). It is the second-to-last chapter of the novel, and most of the heroes have died or were injured during the civil wars. With most of his generals injured or dead, Song Jiang wanted to set up a *Luotian dajiao* before going back to the capital to soothe the dead. This time, his *Luotian dajiao* only had 360 seats for the gods, one-tenth the size of the first time. Compared to the detailed depiction of the scenario of the second *Luotian dajiao*, this one has neither the setting description, nor the aftermath anomalies like the descent of celestial script records. The status and importance of the third *Luotian dajiao* were inferior to those of the first two. However, this delineation still tells us something. With Song Jiang’s regime decline, they no longer have the wealth or, further, the power, to hold any grand rituals to prove their strength. When this regime

³¹ Meulenbeld, “Vernacular ‘Fiction’ and Celestial Script,” 5. Meulenbeld translated 天罡 and 地煞 as Celestial Rectifier and Terrestrial Killers.

³² Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, 887.

is absorbed by a larger, more powerful and more authoritative regime, the Song court, it no longer has the ability to connect with heaven and thus loses the authorization from the religious world. Therefore, in this sorrowful moment with a shrunken group of only 36 living heroes documented on the memorial, the extraordinary power of *Luotian dajiao* disappeared and could henceforth only be used to liberate the souls of the dead.

From the analysis above, *Luotian dajiao* is ingeniously incorporated into *Shuihu zhuan* as the narrative turns to it during three significant moments – the beginning, the climax, and the end. This Daoist ritual is an embodiment of desire, no matter the sponsor is Song Jiang, a commoner, or the emperor. With this ritual, Song Jiang's hidden political appeal is revealed. To consolidate his rule, Song Jiang uses this Daoist ritual that incorporates mysterious elements to prove his orthodoxy. This shows the idea of *Shen Dao She Jiao* and it is also a reflection of the use of *Shen Dao She Jiao* in real political events. The example that I give in the next section will show this interaction of real political events and fictional narrative.

The Story of Emperor Zhenzong of Song and *Shuihu Zhuan* Chapter 71

Although *Shuihu zhuan* is a fictional narrative, it reflects what happened in real life, provides parallel stories, and draws similar images. There is a story documented in *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 续资治通鉴长编 (*Long Draft of the Continued Mirror in Government*) that is about emperor Zhenzong holding a Daoist ritual and the related anomalies. Besides asking his prime minister to document the function and scales of the Daoist rituals, emperor Zhenzong also holds these rituals himself as in the historical records. The historical event documented in *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* has many similarities in its purpose, apocalyptic content, and outcome with the *Luotian dajiao* event held by Song Jiang in Chapter 71 of *Shuihu zhuan*. My inclusion

of this event here is not proving these two narratives are directly connected with each other. In other words, it is hard to prove that the narrator of *Shuihu zhuan* drew on the narrative in *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*. My approach is tying *Luotian dajiao* to a Daoist ritual that is used in real life, thus revealing the political function of *Luotian dajiao*.

Zhenzong's story starts with his dream-like sacred experience. He claims that he saw a Daoist deity one night and says, "It is good to build a *Yellow Register Retreat* in the main hall for a whole month. There will be three volumes of celestial script *Dazhong Xiangfu* descended. Do not leak the celestial secret."³³ The apocalyptic experience is often very personal. This shows the uniqueness of the chosen person, but on the other hand, it leaves the reader uncertain about whether the story is fabricated. In *Shuihu zhuan*, Song Jiang also has this dream-like experience where the Mysterious Woman gives him the celestial script when he is alone in the temple. The protagonists in both cases do not care whether people really believe the story. What they want is to make their experience become mysterious to rationalize their later actions.

Then, by fulfilling the requirement of the deity that he dreamed of, Zhenzong holds a Daoist ritual with a grand and long-lasting scale. This ritual has nine ranks of colorful altars. Based on *Yisheng baode zhuan*, nine ranks of altars are the scale of *putian dajiao*, the grandest ritual among the three that can be held by the empire. Zhenzong started to fast during the first day of December (the ritual was held in January). Except for the nine ranks of colorful altars, there were also carts carved from wood and decorated with gold and jewels placed there for more than a month.³⁴ Along with the decorations and the time span, it is clear to see that Zhenzong thinks this event is very important. In Chapter 71 of *Shuihu zhuan*, Song Jiang also chooses to hold the grandest ritual that he was eligible to hold, which was *Luotian dajiao*. This emphasis on

³³ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 1.

³⁴ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 1. "又雕木为舆，饰以金宝，恭伫神贶。虽越月，未敢罢去。"

ritual gives readers the impression that the rulers are pious and thus their wish will be known by heaven with a high probability. Therefore, the readers are not surprised when something unusual happens later since it is the sign from heaven. The consequence of holding the grandest rituals is connecting to heaven and receiving responses. Zhenzong receives the celestial scripts after the ritual:

At that time, I just saw the memorial from the Security Office, saying that on the south of the left of the House of Chengtian Gate, there was a yellow silk swaying on the ornament on the roof ridge. I asked a low-level official to go and inspect that. He came back and said, “That silk is more than six meters, binds a stuff like a volume, twined with green thread for three rounds, and there are characters indistinctly at the seal place.” I think about it elaboratively and realize that it is the book descended from the heaven, mentioned by the deity.³⁵

The direction of the celestial scripts’ descent is very interesting. The words “Chengtian Gate” means “accepting the heaven,” and the celestial scripts descend just to the south of this gate. Coincidentally, the tablet that has the celestial scripts came from the northwest part of the sky and descended to the south ground.³⁶ Here, the connection of Daoist ritual with the celestial script and the orientation of the arrival of the celestial script are very remarkable. In Daoism, south means *yang* 陽 and is usually associated with auspicious signs. According to Zhu Xi 朱熹,

What filled between heaven and earth, and became nature, is the ending and beginning, the prosperity and decline of the two pneuma of *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yang* is born in the north, grows in the east, and flourishes in the south. *Yin* begins in the south, becomes half in the west, and ends in the north. Therefore, the *Yang* is usually on the left side, and functions as giving birth, and growing up. Its type is firm, bright, fair, and righteous, and all the things in the category of noblemen’s way.³⁷

Therefore, *yang* is flourishing in the south where the virtuous people deserve this auspicious gift. The arrival of the celestial scripts with auspicious meanings should be in the south, and this is another sign of compliance with heavenly rule. Also, south is the direction of the vermilion bird

³⁵ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 1.

³⁶ Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, 883.

³⁷ Zhu, *Zhu Wengong wenji*, 1396.

(zhuque 朱雀). The chapter of *Xiangruibu xia* 祥瑞部下 in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 quotes the book *Ruiying tu* 瑞應圖, “The vermilion bird is holding the book in its mouth when the ruler’s behaviors are conforming to the order of nature.”³⁸ It also quotes the book *Dunjia* 遁甲, “If there is no vermilion bird, then the country does not have virtuous men. If there is no white bird, then the emperor does not have the descendants.”³⁹ Therefore, the vermilion bird usually brings the celestial scripts to the virtuous emperor. The celestial scripts in the two examples above appeared in the south which means the protagonists are sagacious emperors or leaders who are related to the power brought by the vermilion bird.

After receiving these sacred celestial scripts, Zhenzong commanded his subordinates to reveal what was written on the script to the people present even though his subordinates suggested he not do this. Zhenzong explained, “If heaven wants to show my flaws in the policies, it is better for me to be respectful and repent and mend the ways with you guys. If heaven wants to admonish me personally, how can I hide it and make everyone not know it.”⁴⁰ Also, in *Shuihu zhuan*, Song Jiang had a similar explanation when he wanted the script to be revealed to everyone: “I am afraid this is the blame from heaven. Please do not hide anything. I hope that you can reveal it all and do not leave a single word out”.⁴¹ In both cases, they see the script as a medium through which heaven speaks directly to them. It must be shown to everyone since it is a token of their heavenly endowed power. When they mentioned that there might be some rebuke of heaven in the script, the rebuke is only an excuse for the content they already know – declaring the legitimacy of their regime. Therefore, the celestial scripts here go even further than

³⁸ Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, vol 99:11.

³⁹ Ouyang, vol 99:11.

⁴⁰ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 1.

⁴¹ Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, 885.

the mere dream-like and unverified story of encountering the deity to develop the ambitions of the protagonists. The written form of the celestial script is a materialization of heaven's wishes, and thus a substantial form that can be passed on and thus more convincing than the unwitnessed encounter with the deities. It serves to certify their experiences to their subordinates and the commoners.

Moreover, the words in the celestial scripts in both texts were related to the establishment of the orthodoxy of the leadership of the protagonists. On the silk of Zhenzong's celestial script, it writes that "Family Zhao received instructions. [The country] rose at Song and gave it to Heng.⁴² He is holding the post by his capacity and sticking to the honesty. The dynasty would be 700 years and will be stable after nine times nine".⁴³ Then after removing the silk and opening the letter, Zhenzong asked his minister to read it to everyone. There were three yellow texts and the content of each is like the *Hongfan* chapter in *Shangshu* and *Daode jing* by Laozi.⁴⁴ The *Hongfan* chapter is about how the ruler follows the way of heaven to govern the country and *Daode jing* is usually seen as the classic of the religion Daoism. The mention of these two books provides both political and religious text basis to emperor Zhenzong. The script also mentions that the emperor could inherit the lineage with the best filial piety and the best way instructed the emperor to be pure, simple, and frugal, and blessed the empire to have a long-lasting future.⁴⁵

Both celestial scripts in Zhenzong and Song Jiang's story contain two parts. The first part is the name of the protagonists, showing that they are the right persons who were selected by heaven, thus showing their noble status and extraordinary fate. In this way, their identity has

⁴² Since Zhenzong's name is Zhaoheng 趙恒, Heng is his first name and should be avoided as taboo. Therefore, this sentence should be 付于恒 if it does not need to avoid the taboo. My translation is based on the meaning.

⁴³ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 1.

⁴⁴ Li, vol 68: 1. "其书黄字三幅, 辞类尚书洪范、老子道德经。"

⁴⁵ Li, vol 68: 1. "始言上能以至孝至道绍世, 次谕以清净简俭, 终述世祚延永之意。"

been acknowledged by heaven and transmitted by the Daoist ritual. The second part is the demands from heaven. In *Shuihu zhuan*, the demand is carrying out justice on behalf of heaven (替天行道 *titian xingdao*) and to be able to combine loyalty and morality (忠義雙全 *zhongyi shuangquan*).⁴⁶ In Zhenzong's story, the demand becomes to read the *Hongfan* chapter of *Shangshu* and *Daode jing*, to become filial and follow the right way, to be frugal, and to make the state have a long-lasting future. These are not just what heaven wants them to do, it is also what the protagonists want to emphasize. Song Jiang always wants to be loyal to the emperor and be pardoned by the court, so this celestial script reflects his own will. The celestial script received by Zhenzong also tells us about his political aspirations. He wanted to use the *Hongfan* chapter of *Shangshu* to rule the country and emphasized *Laozi* because of his religious belief. Furthermore, making the dynasty last longer is always the goal of the ruler of the country, and these auspicious wishes are always attached. Therefore, Song Jiang and Zhenzong's wishes are shown in the celestial scripts respectively. The celestial scripts are not just the will of heaven, they represent the will of the protagonists as well. Also, according to Mark Meulenbeld, celestial writings are often used as tokens of power obtained from heaven.⁴⁷ The celestial scripts in both stories are great certificates to show the protagonists' power that is recognized by heaven. Therefore, the celestial scripts emphasize the protagonists' supreme power from heaven and help convince the readers to believe in it firmly.

Lastly, after the whole process of ritual, the result of the religious event is to start a new era. After this event, Zhenzong changed his reign name to *Dazhong Xiangfu* (the title of the celestial scripts that the Daoist deity gives him) in memory of the arrival of the celestial script,

⁴⁶ Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, 885.

⁴⁷ Meulenbeld, "Vernacular 'Fiction' and Celestial Script," 5.

and the civil and military officials were all given additional titles.⁴⁸ Song Jiang also set up new orders for the event. He firstly changed the plaque on the hall with the words from the celestial script, Hall of Loyal and Righteous (忠義堂 *zhongyi tang*). Then, they set up the checkpoint and arranged the house for the 108 heroes. Later, they also set up the new flags and one of them wrote that “carrying out the justice on behalf of heaven,” which is also adopted from the celestial script they just received. Setting up new flags means establishing a new regime. Lastly, Song Jiang gave all the heroes a military rank, which helped form a more systematic regime. Therefore, the new era, new regulations, and new hierarchical ranks are established as a result of the successful holding of the Daoist rituals. These rituals are undertaking the responsibility of eliminating the old memories and reconstructing a new system. This so-called new system is actually still the old system in the name of religion.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed *Luotian dajiao* in the Daoist scriptures, in the fictional narrative *Shuihu zhuan*, and compared it in *Shuihu zhuan* with another historical record which happened in the Song to reveal its political function that was inflicted by the narrator or the ritual sponsor. When talking about religion, it is inevitably interwoven with politics, and religion thus plays its function of *Shen Dao She Jiao*, which means the rulers use mysteriousness events to educate their people the authority and orthodoxy of their rule. In *Shuihu zhuan* and emperor Zhenzong’s story, more specifically, religion, especially Daoism, is moved from moral education to realizing political goals, no matter if it is consciously or not. China is a “religious state” in traditional China claimed by John Lagerwey, a scholar at Stanford, and all space in it is conceived of as

⁴⁸ Li, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, vol 68: 2.

sacred, that is, inhabited by divine energies which, because they sustain us, must receive in return our sacrificial recognition.⁴⁹ In other words, there is a huge space for politicians to educate and influence Chinese people through religions because of the prevalent religious ideologies. Therefore, not just *Luotian dajiao* but all Daoist rituals can be and were often used to manipulate people by exploiting people's reverence for religions in order to achieve their political ends, which is a common thing in realpolitik activities. This is also revealed and even borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, in fictional narratives when shaping the characters and developing the plots.

⁴⁹ Lagerwey, *China: A Religious State*, 17.

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