This book is about an organized, institutionalized religion\textsuperscript{1} founded in western China around the middle of the second century of our era.\textsuperscript{2} At the time, followers of the religion called it the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshidao 天師道) and believed that it was founded upon a Covenant with the Powers (mengwei

1. “Religion” is one of the most contested terms in academia. Campany (2003) has an excellent review of the various emic terms used in China for what we would call “religion” and concludes that it is best understood as an etic term referring to a “repertoire of resources” for the discursive creation of an imagined community. Here I intend a self-identified group of people who employ such a repertoire.

盟威) that was both correct or orthodox (zheng 正) and unique in the world (yi 一), giving rise to another term for the religion still in use today, the Correct and Unitary (Zhengyi). Outsiders who noticed that each family was responsible for an annual tithe of five pecks of rice (roughly nine liters) referred to the movement as the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice; some seeking to deny its legitimacy referred to believers as “rice bandits” (mizei 米賊).3 It was not the only such movement at the time; history records other movements like the Way of Great Peace that erupted in revolt a few decades later in eastern China, and there were, no doubt, dozens if not hundreds of similar new religious movements centering on a charismatic founder with a religious message during the early medieval period that arose and disappeared without attracting the attention of Chinese historians.4

Over the ensuing centuries, the movement grew and transformed, absorbing a diverse body of practices and beliefs, many of which originated with other religious movements or esoteric traditions. From the beginning, adherents spoke of its tenets as the “teachings of the Dao” (Daojiao 道教), and eventually this became the accepted reference for the movement itself, whereas its religious officiants, initially called “libationers” (jijiu 祭酒), came to be called “gentlemen of the Dao” (Daoshi 道士). In English, the religion has most commonly been rendered as “Daoism,” and its religious professionals have been dubbed “Daoist priests.” I will use these terms throughout this book.

Unfortunately, in English we have a limited range of terms to use with regard to traditional China, and this use of “Daoism” has been contested.5 The term is also applied regularly to certain philosophers from the Warring States era (479–220 BCE), especially those who preserved their thoughts in books called the

3. For a translation and analysis of these early records, see chapter 1. Earlier studies of these events include Eichhorn 1955; Stein 1963; and Ōfuchi 1991: 39–76.
5. Siwin 1978 provides a clear assessment of the various uses of this term, which has no counterpart in Chinese. See Siwin 2010 for an application of these insights to some recent publications on Daoism.
Laozi 老子 or Master Lao and the Zhuangzi 莊子 or Master Zhuang, and which were grouped together in a bibliographic category called the “lineage of the Dao” (daojia 道家) around 100 BCE. The figure of Master Lao was revered by the Celestial Masters as a deity called Lord Lao, and the book Laozi was given a distinctively religious interpretation in the Celestial Master commentary, but the ideas animating the Celestial Master movement were for the most part quite at variance with the Warring States teachings of either book. The movement stressed explicit norms of moral conduct and the performance of sacred ritual, both of which the two books openly rejected. If one insisted on finding the true origins of the movement in Warring States thought, Confucianism and Mohism are better candidates.

A broader argument has also been advanced, claiming that any group or text that concerns itself with the Dao (“the way”) deserves the epithet “Daoist.” Since a wide variety of thinkers and groups referred to their preferred way to live or act as their “way,” this expands the term to the point where it loses much meaning or utility. Moreover, it puts the modern historian of religion in the position of lumping together groups that clearly saw themselves as distinct. Thirty-five years on, it is high time to agree with Michel Strickmann’s pronouncement that Daoism “came into social being with the Way of the Celestial Masters in the second half of the second century AD, and continues under the aegis of its successors and derivatives at the present day” (1977:2).

The early Daoists saw their world as comprising two types of people: the Daoist or the profane (su 俗). In our earliest texts, like the Xiang’er commentary to the Laozi, we already see the Daoist (Daoren 道人), sometimes referred to optimistically as the transcendent gentleman (xianshi 仙士), contrasted with the “profane person” (suren 俗人). Both are mortal and fear death, for example, but the would-be transcendent gentleman “believes in the Dao

6. The Xiang’er 想爾, meaning (the personified Dao is) “thinking of you,” is discussed in chapter 2.
7. See Raz 2004:22, which cites the identifying criterion of these groups as “a view of the Dao as an overarching and effective force.”
and keeps the precepts” (xin Dao shou jie 信念道戒) and is thus able to “unite with life” (he yu sheng 合于生), whereas the profane are fated to “shed this mortal coil before their time” (wei yang tuisi 未央蛻死). Daoism offered salvation from an unsavory posthumous fate where the demonic agents of the Earth Office might seize the deceased and subject him or her to torture-filled interrogations followed by a variety of punishments, as we see in this third-century passage from a spirit revelation:8

The Daoist and the profane person are indeed distant from each other! Why do I say so? The Daoist is pure and correct, and his name belongs up in the Heavens. The profane person is impure and defiled; when he or she dies, they belong to the Earth Office. Is this not distant? When foolish people keep to the profane and give no thought to serving the Dao, they can be called greatly deluded.

道人與俗相去遠矣。何以言之。道人清正，名上屬天。俗人穢濁，死屬地官。豈不遠乎。愚人守俗，不念奉道，可謂大迷也。

The purity claimed by Daoists derived from their refusal to participate in the most central of traditional Chinese religious rites, the offering of blood sacrifice to deities no different in kind from dead humans, gods who depended on the sustenance of regular offerings of meat and wine, and repaid the sacrificer with divine blessings that assured health, wealth, and good fortune.9 Daoists worshipped the Dao as a personified yet abstract deity who could temporarily manifest as a supreme deity, first the Supreme Lord Lao and later a trio of Heavenly Worthies, the Three Pure Ones (sanzhong 三清). These manifestations of the Dao required nothing of humans and accepted no offerings. They evaluated human conduct, reported by a variety of spirits both within

8. From the Commands and Precepts for the Great Family of the Dao (Da Daojia lingjie 大道家令戒), dated 255. Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing 11a4–6.
9. For an analysis of the role of sacrifice in the Chinese common religion, see Kleeman 1994b. For a perceptive account of why Western scholarship has until recently failed to recognize the existence of this common sacrificial religion, see Barrett 2005.
the body of the Daoist and in an external bureaucratic network throughout the natural world, against a code of precepts that were tailored to the individual’s level of spiritual development as reflected in religious rank. Their judgments could be swayed only by meritorious action or the ritualized submission of appropriate official documents.

Each Daoist in the early Celestial Master movement held a specific rank within a universal priesthood of believers, conferred through an ordination ritual that transmitted a document called a register (lu 簿). The register installed a group of protective spirits in the believer’s body and imposed a code of precepts, both of which increased with rank. Children of either sex and any social class could be accepted as novices (lusheng 籍生), where they progressed through a number of stages, learning to read and compose official documents destined for the Heavens while gaining control of progressively larger cohorts of divine protectors and emissaries. Upon completion of the program, novices became libationers (jijiu 祭酒), who could gather their own followers and establish their own parishes (zhi 治). Each household contributed an annual grain tithe to the parish and made pledge offerings to demonstrate sincerity when requesting ritual services; both tithe and offerings were not offerings to the gods but contributions to the operating expenses incurred by the ritual activities of the religion. Each household was supposed to maintain a distinct ritual structure for daily devotional activities and to wear distinctive clothing when engaged in these activities. I follow earlier scholars like Anna Seidel in referring to this self-cognizant, organized, clearly delimited social group as a church.¹⁰

In this book, I treat the origins and development of this Daoist

¹⁰. See Girardot 1983:279; Seidel 1984:168. It is difficult to apply the oft-cited criteria of Ernst Troeltsch (1912) for the Christian church to Daoism, but, by the end of the second century, Daoism was clearly a mass movement drawing followers from all levels of society; it was a dominant force in West China to the point that all in the region felt obliged to belong; it generally enjoyed good relations with the state, sometimes even being favored as the state religion; and, except for rare periods of rapid expansion, most members at any given time had been born into it.
church from its establishment in the mid-second century through the Period of Disunion, ending the inquiry with the reunification of China at the beginning of the seventh century. By then, the Daoist message had been elaborated and transformed in many ways, with the revelation of new gods, scriptures, and liturgies, and a monastic institution was beginning to form. Daoist communities retaining the ancient social organization survived into the Tang dynasty (618–907) and perhaps far beyond; the modern Yao 瑶 ethnic minority of South China and northern Southeast Asia retains a communal Daoism remarkably reminiscent of these original groups.11 Throughout most of China, however, Daoism eventually evolved into a religion of priests without a lay congregation. They were and still are called on by communities to celebrate specific periodic festivals or by individuals to deal with specific needs on an ad hoc basis.12 They act as caretakers of the broader common religion, overseeing its sacrificial observances and confirming the official positions of its gods through esoteric Daoist rites that maintain a clear distinction between ritual activities directed toward popular gods and the pure rituals dedicated to the eternal deities of the Daoist pantheon. Even today, Daoist troupes across the breadth of China and in Chinese communities around the world maintain a ritual program that preserves theological concepts, liturgical forms, and divine appellations that originated in the period treated in this book.

This book is divided into two parts: one dedicated to the historical origins and development of the Daoist church, the other describing the ritual activities of its members. The historical section begins by examining in detail outsiders’ accounts of the founding and early years of the Celestial Master movement, when it was still largely confined to West China, including the theocratic state that existed briefly (ca. 191–215) in the Hanzhong region of modern southeastern Shaanxi and northeastern Sichuan provinces. Our primary sources are the dynastic histories of China, a uniquely detailed and continuous source, which, however,

12. On this transformation, see Kleeman 2005b.
is limited by its court-centered, elite nature and by generic conventions that limit its reporting of religious phenomena not controlled by the state. The second chapter looks at this same period from the viewpoint of Daoist sources, revealing the way members of the church conceived their founding and early history. A careful dating and sensitive reading of surviving materials reveals a narrative that in some ways confirms the testimony of conventional sources but also sheds new light on the significance of early church institutions and activities. The third chapter makes use of three early sources that can be confidently dated to the third century to trace the development of the church after the fall of the Hanzhong state and the subsequent great diaspora of 215, when church members were scattered across the breadth of North China, the central administration was disrupted in unknown ways, and many believers were left to their own devices. During this fecund period, huge numbers were converted to the faith at the same time that new practices and institutions evolved to cope with changed circumstances. The fourth chapter treats the fourth through sixth centuries. In West and North China we see a series of attempts to reconstruct the Daoist theocracy of the Hanzhong period. Meanwhile, as a result of the disruptions at the beginning of the fourth century, Northerners of all classes flood into South China, bringing with them Celestial Master Daoism. We can trace best the elite families who played significant roles in government, but rebellions like that of Sun En 孫恩 (?–402) demonstrate the prevalence of Daoism among peasants and tradesmen, as well.13

During this period several new scriptural revelations incorporated elements of southern occult traditions and Buddhism into Daoism. In both North and South China we see evidence of an increasing contestation between Daoism and Buddhism for government patronage.

The second half of the book looks at ritual life within the Daoist

13. Nickerson (2000) argues that the transmission must have been earlier to have become so widespread among all classes by the end of the fourth century. This is not impossible, but the migrations involved huge numbers of people of all classes, and religions can spread quickly over the course of almost a century.
church, drawing on a body of liturgical and normative sources that accreted throughout this period, mixing authentically early materials with later additions. Chapter 5 introduces Daoist architecture and apparel, describing the oratory and parish buildings that were the site of almost all Daoist ritual and the specialized ritual garb that people wore during ritual performances. Chapter 6 focuses on the Daoist citizen (daomin 道民), the most basic level of Celestial Master society. I describe the audience ritual that the head of household performed each morning and evening, bringing him or her directly into contact with potent Daoist deities. I also consider the kitchen-feast, Daoism’s answer to the traditional communal sacrificial banquet, which had the same function of exhibiting status distinctions while affirming one’s participation in the community. Chapter 7 focuses on the novice or register-student, who learned how to write formal documents to Daoist deities and how to perform the intricate rituals that presented them to the Heavenly Bureaus. There is a detailed description of the ordination as well as an examination of the role of women and those of mean birth within the church. Chapter 8 is about the libationer or parish priest. It introduces the various functions of the libationer as evangelist, director of spirit revelations, judge, and pastor. Here I also present a new interpretation of the development of the parish system, arguing that it transformed from a fixed number of geographically based administrative centers, staffed by a large number of male and female officers with diverse responsibilities, to a diffuse system of smaller units led by a single libationer that functioned as a ranking system. I also look closely at the procedures for composing and submitting ritual documents like the petition and for drawing talismans that assure ritual efficacy. Finally, I describe the understanding of and ritual responses to death in Daoist communities.

I have adopted this dual structure, in part, because the nature of the sources dictated it. The first half of the book relies on datable sources and puts events in a clear chronological framework.

Evidence from the standard histories is written by and for elites from a perspective close to that of the state, but even the Daoist sources exploited in this section were produced by church leaders, sanctioned and promulgated by the central administration of the religion. By combining these two types of sources, I hope to produce a much fuller historical account that preserves multiple voices and relates events as both the profane world and members of the church perceived them. Still, this material alone falls short of the sort of thick description that is the standard for studies of religion and society in a post-Geertzian world.15

The materials informing the description of ritual life in the second section were used, to be sure, by church leaders and elite Daoists, but they were equally the property of village priests and peasant Daoist citizens. Before being edited into their final form, they went through a long process of manuscript transmission, handed down by generation after generation of local practitioners who added or deleted items according to need. A similar process has generated the handwritten scriptures (shouchao ben 手抄本) that Daoist priests across today’s China use. Each surviving liturgical manual or precept list is thus the product of a specific lineage of practitioners. The identity and geographical location of these transmitters is lost to history. This rules out a comprehensive overview of the ritual practice of any specific region of China. Nor can we limit our description to a specific period within the five centuries under examination. We can only claim that the social structures, ritual practices, and modes of interaction with the divine described here were broadly typical of the Daoist church during its formative period. But it is only these sources that can give us a sense of Daoism as a dynamic, vital lived religion,16 to which millions of Chinese over these centuries devoted their lives and pinned their hopes of divine aid and ultimate

16. For the concept of lived religion as a model for religious enquiry, see Orsi 2003, 2005; McGuire 2008. For the broader question of the use of social science methodology in the study of religious history, see Beyer 2011. Unfortunately, the texts that survive from this early period of Daoism, with their problems of provenance, date, and point of view, can only reveal a partial and
salvation in a time of near constant political and military strife, foreign invasion, natural disaster, and epidemic disease.

Religion in the Eastern Han

Since the first chapter opens with historical accounts of the early Celestial Master movement, I offer here some background to the religious milieu of the second century CE. The Eastern Han (23–220) was a particularly fecund period in Chinese religious history, when the religious world of imperial China began to take form. There were changes to every aspect of religious life, and some of these were directly involved in the birth of Daoism as an organized religion.

Two developments are closely tied to the interregnum between the Western and Eastern Han (6 BCE–23 CE). The first is the rise of the oracular literature most commonly referred to in English as the Aprocrypha (in Chinese, chenwei 諧緯, or prognostications and weft texts). Although these texts are best known for their use as political propaganda by the usurper Wang Mang (45 BCE–23 CE) and later claimants for the Han throne, they are rich in religious imagery and metaphor. Many of the deities and icons that would be prominent in Daoism are first mentioned in these texts, and their continuing revelation over a number of decades accustomed the populace to the idea of spirit revelation as an important source of religious truth.

The other development at this time is the first recorded popular religious movements. In 3 BCE, near the end of the Western Han, a prophecy appeared in northeast China, claiming that the Grandmother of the West, a goddess connected with death and somewhat tenuous reconstruction of early Daoism that pales in comparison to the vibrant living religions depicted by these modern scholars.

17. For a more detailed account of these events, see Kleeman 1998:63–66.
18. On the Apocrypha, see Seidel 1983; Yasui 1984; Lippiello 2001. “Weft” is a fabric metaphor based on the fact that they supplement and complete the classics, which are called “warp” texts (jing 经).
immortality, would manifest in this mortal world.\textsuperscript{20} Thousands left their homes to make a pilgrimage to the capital, singing and dancing in a carnivalesque celebration of the coming divine epiphany. They transmitted plaques that they claimed were imperial commands (\textit{zhao 詔}) guaranteeing salvation. Some two decades later, in 18 CE, we hear the first reports of the Red Eyebrows, members of a communal religion worshipping Prince Jing of Chongyang Liu Zhang 城陽景王劉章 (d. 177), who had suppressed the rebellion of Empress Lü 呂后 and hence represented the restoration of the Han royal house.\textsuperscript{21} Interpretations of the their distinctive eyebrows differ, with some claiming that coloring them with cinnabar represented long life, whereas others thought they were red for the fire element that was thought to rule the Han royal house.\textsuperscript{22} Members of this uprising traveled with their families in communities and took the titles of their leaders from those of village leaders, much like the later Celestial Master libationers. They were guided by a local spirit medium who conveyed commands from Prince Jing and were able to briefly install a direct descendant of Prince Jing as emperor.

There were also more prolonged manifestations or epiphanies of a deity. The primary figure associated with such beliefs is the divinized Laozi. The \textit{Scripture of the Transformations of Laozi} (\textit{Laozi bianhua jing 老子變化經}), studied by Anna Seidel (1969), traces the appearance of avatars of Laozi under a variety of names and guises up through the middle of the second century CE. The last recorded incarnation is in the Sichuan region, close to the founding revelation of the Celestial Masters both geographically and temporally. The text suggests that Laozi might return in the future, and, indeed, the appearance of these messianic manifestations continued for many centuries, sparking numerous popular rebellions.\textsuperscript{23} A parallel development was the appearance of popular

\textsuperscript{20} See Dubs 1942; Cahill 1993:21–23.
\textsuperscript{22} See Zhang Xiangwen 1996.
\textsuperscript{23} Seidel 1969–70, 1984. For an overview of these many manifestations, see Hendrischke 2000.
temple structures (fangsi 房祀, fangmiao 房廟) dedicated to dead humans. Although periodically suppressed by the government and attacked by Daoists, such popular cults to local heroes or those suffering an abnormal death became the norm and allowed the masses to access divine powers once restricted to elites.24

There is a significant change in burial practices during the Eastern Han. We find in tombs from that period land contracts (maidiquan 購地券) as well as grave-quelling texts (zhennmuwen 鎮墓文) that tell us much about popular understandings of death.25 The land contracts record the purchase of the subterranean space occupied by the tomb, which is often described in religious terms (“to the limits of the four directions” and so on), and secure the soul of the deceased in that space, often with the stipulation that the dead will remain separate from the living. Grave-quelling texts (also called “infusion-releasing texts,” or jiezhuwen 解注文) invoke a powerful deity like the Heavenly Thearch 天帝 or the Yellow God 黃神 to absolve the deceased from any blame incurred through the construction of the tomb. Both reveal a highly bureaucratized world of the dead and a fear of otherworldly curses on the living by or through their deceased relatives. Although the specific methods and deities were not prominent among early Daoists, worry about such matters led many to seek the protection of the Daoist church.

The concept of a utopian world of Great Peace (taiping 太平)

24. See Hou Han shu 7/314, 57/1841, 76/2470. The use of fang 房, “building,” in these terms indicates that permanent structures for the worship of divine beings was new in the Han; Six Dynasties texts simply refer to miao and ci 祠, “shrines.” For Daoist officers and gods assigned to battle these demonic figures, see the entry for the Great Director of Attacks in the list of parish offices in chapter 8 and DZ 421 Dengzhen yinjue 3/21b. Disrespect for these cults was not limited to the Celestial Masters; Ge Hong remarks that he consistently ignores such shrines yet has never suffered misfortune as a result. See Wang Ming 1985:9/158.

25. For land contracts, see Kleeman 1984; Seidel 1987. On grave-quelling texts, see Wu Rongceng 1981; Zhang Xunliao 1996; Bai Bin 2010. I do not share Zhang and Bai’s view that these grave-quelling texts are Daoist or even a direct antecedent to Daoism. For a fuller treatment of Daoist views of death, see chapter 8.
was an important inspiration for the early Daoists. A text with this term in the title was presented to the Han throne twice in the late first century BCE and again in the mid-second century. Questions concerning the dating, stratification, and filiation of the transmitted text(s) are also complex, but large portions seem early, likely of Han date, and as closely related to Eastern Han philosophical works as to anything found in early Daoist texts. It is equally uncertain if the text reflects the beliefs and practices of a distinct religious community or just personal revelations to one or more inspired individuals. It does seem that some version of this text was known to and used by Zhang Jue 張角, who led a religious rebellion in late-second-century East China known as the Yellow Turbans (huangjin 黃巾) for their distinctive headgear. The Yellow Turbans shared with the Celestial Masters a belief in the origin of illness in misconduct, the efficacy of confession of sins, and the use of talismans. It is likely that they shared an aspiration for the advent of an age of Great Peace, when social conflicts would be lessened and all peoples would be dealt with equitably, and they may well have thought this would only be attained after an apocalyptic period of social upheaval. There is no evidence, however, that they thought of themselves as “seed people” who would repopulate the world, or that they practiced a sexual ritual like the Merging the Pneumas rite as a prerequisite to such salvation. The Commands and Precepts for the Great Family of the Dao of 255 makes clear that Zhang Jue was not considered favorably by the Celestial Masters.

The most far-reaching development during the Eastern Han
was the entry of Buddhism, but the extent of its immediate influence is uncertain. In 65 CE, an imperial prince in modern Jiangsu was already hosting public Buddhist rituals with thousands of participants; in 165, the emperor offered official sacrifice to the Buddha. In both cases, the Buddha was associated with Laozi and the pursuit of immortality. By the late second century, we know of several teams of Buddhist monks and laymen in Chang’an translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Although these translators sometimes turned to Daoist terminology to express unfamiliar Buddhist concepts, no one reading these translations would have failed to notice their alien character. Distinctively Buddhist terminology in a Daoist source is a reliable indication of later composition. Still, several features of the new religious movements of the second century are shared with Buddhism, especially the practice of the confession of sins. Moreover, Buddhists, like the Celestial Masters, rejected blood sacrifice, though their rationales for doing so were different. Buddhism may well have stimulated the rise of Daoism. By the mid-second century, Daoists were claiming that Buddhism was a degraded form of Daoism and the Buddha himself just another avatar of a divine Laozi. By the late fourth century, Buddhism had exerted an undeniable influence on Daoist ritual practice and theological conceptions, and was competing with Daoism for official patronage.

All of these changes came together in the rise of Daoism. The fall of the Western Han and the lengthy, strife-torn interregnum had awakened all to the fragility of the Chinese imperial state. Political instability brought warfare, famine, and epidemic disease, leading to large-scale movements of population. Among these frightened and dislocated individuals, a variety of new forms of religious expression arose. The Celestial Masters were one such group. Driven by a revelation from Lord Lao that established a new covenant and guided by ongoing revelations from his

30. The best account of Buddhism’s entry into China remains Zürcher 1959.
31. Only in the Demon Statutes of Lady Blue, dated to the second half of the third century, do we find a few Buddhist terms, and then only ones with a special resonance for Chinese society. See chapter 3.
representatives as well as deceased leaders of the movement, their teachings on sin as the origin of illness and misfortune, disaster as an apocalyptic punishment for an immoral age, ritualized confession and penance as an effective response to such dangers, and the promise of a utopian age of Great Peace resonated with the masses. Like the new foreign faith of Buddhism, the Daoism they fashioned in Sichuan had a broad appeal, winning converts across China until it was a truly national religion that provided a satisfying answer to the questions of its day. Daoism proved adaptable to changing circumstance, developing new rituals for the salvation of all the living and all the dead, and remains to this day a vital part of the Chinese religious landscape.

Conventions

It remains to guide readers through a few pertinent conventions used in referring to and translating materials from medieval China. Located at the far eastern end of the Eurasian continent, China had traded with the West since Neolithic times but was not significantly influenced by the currents of history that prevailed in the Mediterranean world and later Western Europe. It developed unique ways to understand and describe the natural world and the imagined other world, populated by the dead and the divine, that its East Asian neighbors came to share but were seldom communicated to the Indian subcontinent, the Near East, or Europe. For this reason, translating the vocabulary of early Daoism into a Western language poses certain challenges. In the interests of making this book accessible to scholars of religion and history with no background in Sinology, I have sought approximations in English for every Daoist technical term and conception. Lest these be misunderstood as true equivalents, I note here some of the key problems.

I have followed Bokenkamp (1997) in translating as “pneuma” the word qi 氣/气, which seems etymologically to have referred to the steam of cooking grain but came to mean everything from essence to energy, scent, air, feeling, and spirit. In the Daoist
context, it sometimes means a force within the body that can be manipulated, but it often refers to noncorporeal beings, and sometimes these usages are difficult to distinguish. The goal of much Daoist endeavor was the status of xian 仙, which originally referred to nonhuman winged beings who could be found only in mountain fastnesses or divine realms but came to refer to humans who had attained some form of physical longevity or immortality.\(^{32}\) I translate this as “transcendent” because the word is etymologically related to words meaning “to ascend” and because many xian were not truly “immortal,” the other common translation. For the early Daoists, this status was awarded by heavenly bureaucrats in return for exemplary moral conduct and proper ritual actions. Later, internal and external alchemy as well as various physical regimens were also employed. Another key term is zhen 真, which later came to mean simply “real, true” but originally designated a class of divine beings untouched by vulgar desire or impurity. I follow many others in rendering this as “perfected” in both nominal and adjectival usage, a nod to the austere Perfecti of the Cathar tradition, who eschewed both meat and sex. In Daoism, the perfected are the class of beings above the transcendents and just below the Daoist gods (shen 神).\(^{33}\)

Words for deity in Chinese are vexing. It is standard to render shen as “god” and gui 鬼 as “demon” or “ghost” depending on the context, but guishen was a common locution for divine beings in general. We will see in chapter 2 that even the high god of the Daoists was sometimes called a gui. I have tried to sort these out, translating appropriately for context, but have sometimes resorted to the ambiguous “spirit” for either term. The high god during the

\(^{32}\) Campany 2009 has shown that the term often referred to real-world ascetics and renunciants who were credited with wonder-working and divine healing.

\(^{33}\) These gods are primordial transformations of the pneumas of the Dao who have never taken human form. They are to be distinguished from the many lower-level, quasi-demonic spirits worshipped by the common people as well as the various body gods populating key spots in the physical form and the register spirits employed in Daoist ritual.
Shang dynasty (ca. 1500–1045 BCE) was called simply *di* 帝\(^{34}\) and this remained a popular term for exalted deities, sometimes singular but often plural, throughout Chinese history. Beginning in the third century BCE, it was appropriated by temporal rulers, giving rise to the unfortunate translation “emperor.” In an attempt to recapture the sense of a divine ruler, I regularly translate this term as “thearch.” Other translation problems are noted as the terms come up.

Although there have been a number of Daoist canons, beginning in the fifth century, the only one to have survived is from the fifteenth.\(^{35}\) Transmission of these scriptures has been less than ideal, resulting in numerous textual variants. Moreover, up until recently, all Daoist texts were transmitted without punctuation, and only a minuscule number of texts have been published in modern critical, collated editions. For all these reasons and to aid readers interested in the source behind my translations, I have included a punctuated, corrected Chinese text in traditional characters for all of them. Citation is to the 1923–26 Hanfenlou photo reprint of the original Ming edition, cited by chapter, page, recto (a = front) or verso (b = back), and then line number if necessary.\(^{36}\) Citations of Buddhist works include the serial number of the scripture in the Taishō edition preceded by the letter “T,” followed by the volume, page, and register (a, b, or c) on the page. Citations of the classics are to the 1815 *Shisanjing zhushu* edition reprinted by Yiwen Publishing in 1974. Citations of the dynastic histories are to the Zhonghua shuju punctuated editions, and other works are as noted in the bibliography.

34. The etymological meaning of this character is obscure, but, because the graph in oracle bone script looks like a rope tying a bundle of sticks or reeds together, it has been related to the character *di* 帝, “to bind,” suggesting that it might originally have referred to a sort of super-ancestor who “bound” all the branches of the royal family together.

35. On Daoist canons, see Ōfuchi 1979; the article by Judith Boltz in the *Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Pregadio 2008:1, 28–33); and the introduction to Schipper and Verellen 2004.

36. The bibliography also gives the serial number (beginning with DZ) of the scripture according to the enumeration in Schipper 1975b.