

Exploring the Musical Aspects of Taoist Blessing Rituals within the Gexianshan Lingbao Sect of Taoism in Shangrao, Jiangxi

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Abstract: The melodic investigation into the 'Blessing Rituals' undoes a paramount facet of the Ge Xianshan Lingbao Sect, exemplifying its quintessential ritual music. This musical tradition encapsulates not only the tenets of national culture but also encapsulates modes of production, ways of life, and the heartfelt expressions of Shangrao, Jiangxi Province's local customs and sentiments. Beyond this, it mirrors the tapestry of local sociocultural evolution, illustrating the unceasing rejuvenation and propagation of Lingbao ritual music culture rooted in the foundation of 'human nature'. As such, it has evolved into a shared historical reservoir amongst the populace, epitomizing the regional reverberations of 'musical distinctiveness'. Central to this research is an exploration into the musical compositions of Lingbao Sect's 'Blessing Rituals', bolstered by an ethnomusicological framework and underpinned by the tenets of religious ritual musicology. By means of direct engagement with the custodians of Jiangxi's intangible cultural heritage, the study endeavors to trace the origins, forms, and historical trajectories of the ritual music performances. Through this meticulous analysis, the cultural paradigms and sociocultural phenomena encapsulated within the musical cadences of 'Blessing Rituals' are unveiled. Moreover, it lays bare the 'localized' attributes of Lingbao Sect's Taoist ideologies and philosophies, illuminating the collective ethos embedded in the cultural continuum of Gexianshan Mountain in Shangrao. The melodic tapestry reverberates not only with the spirit of this locale but also resonates with the profound ideological underpinnings of 'Lingbao Taoist' thought."

Keywords: Blessing Rituals, Lingbao Taoist Rituals, Lingbao Ritual Music

1. INTRODUCTION

The essence of Taoist music lies in its embodiment of Taoist belief systems through ceremonial expressions. To confine the exploration of

Taoist music solely to its melodic nuances would be an incomplete endeavor, overlooking the profound interplay of ritual environment and contextual backdrop that imbues it with depth (Cao & Liu, 1996). A comprehensive study of Taoist music demands a panoramic perspective, one that transcends the melodies themselves. B Norton et al. point out the pathways of ritual, the concept of ritual, and the undiminished use of ritual as analysis and interpretation in ethnomusicological and anthropological writing (Cao & Pu, 1993). The study of the Taoist ritual music of the Lingbao Sect requires not only mastery of the parts of the ritual music itself, but also a certain amount of knowledge and cultural reserves of the historical and cultural changes of the Taoist rituals, as well as multi-angle and multi-level observation, so as to better study the Taoist ritual music of the Lingbao Sect (Cao & Zhu, 1997).

This multidimensional ideology is manifest within the spatial confines of the dojo, where the teachings, mystical etiquettes, talismanic scriptures, and bespoke terminologies advocated by diverse Taoist sects converge. It is within this interweaving mosaic that the resonances of Taoist ritual music are most vividly experienced. It invites one to partake in an immersive journey, akin to a sensory banquet, brimming with the intricate hues of traditional Chinese folk music. Through this immersive exploration, the true essence of Taoist ritual music is revealed, going beyond mere auditory sensations to create an evocative blend of visual and sonic artistry. Exploring the Taoist Ritual Music of the Lingbao Sect requires a broader understanding that spans across various dimensions. This entails an astute comprehension of the historical and cultural metamorphoses that have shaped Taoist ritual practices over time (Chen et al., 1989b). A comprehensive inquiry demands a panoramic view, entailing multi-faceted angles of investigation and multi-layered observations. By embracing this comprehensive approach, researchers can unlock deeper insights into the intricacies of Lingbao Taoist ritual music, transcending the confines of mere melodies and delving into the tapestry of its rich historical, cultural, and spiritual tapestry (Ma, 2023)."

"Within the realm of inheriting Chinese Taoist ritual culture, ritual music assumes a pivotal role, often serving as the initiatory pathway for numerous Taoist sects (Tao, 1993). As aspiring Taoist priests' step over the threshold of Taoist temples, they invariably embark on their Taoist journey intertwined with the melodies of ritual music. In the context of Ge Xianshan's Lingbao Sect, ritual music emerges as a distinctive demarcation between accomplished Lingbao Taoist priests and 'laymen' adherents. This demarcation is underscored by the fact that, in most instances, Lingbao

Taoist 'laymen' seldom possess the comprehensive capability to execute the entirety of Lingbao ritual music (Chen et al., 1989a).

For a proficient practitioner within the Lingbao sect, the rendition of ritual music entails more than just sonic harmonies. It demands a harmonious convergence of body, sound, and spirit (Zhao, 2020). A professional Lingbao Taoist priest must not only orchestrate the melodic intricacies but also seamlessly synchronize the prescribed sequence of bodily movements and recitation of sacred scriptures that correspond to the ritual music. This embodiment of rhythm, motion, and utterance not only sets these priests apart but encapsulates the essence of their sacred practice, marking their holistic engagement with the profound spiritual tapestry of Lingbao Taoism." In the realm of preserving Chinese Taoist ritual culture, ritual music holds a pivotal role, frequently acting as the gateway for initiation into various Taoist sects. As aspiring Taoist priests step over the threshold of Taoist temples, they invariably embark on their Taoist journey intertwined with the melodies of ritual music. In the context of Ge Xianshan's Lingbao Sect, ritual music emerges as a distinctive demarcation between accomplished Lingbao Taoist priests and 'laymen' adherents. This demarcation is underscored by the fact that, in most instances, Lingbao Taoist 'laymen' seldom possess the comprehensive capability to execute the entirety of Lingbao ritual music. For a proficient practitioner within the Lingbao sect, the rendition of ritual music entails more than just sonic harmonies. It demands a harmonious convergence of body, sound, and spirit. A professional Lingbao Taoist priest must not only orchestrate the melodic intricacies but also seamlessly synchronize the prescribed sequence of bodily movements and recitation of sacred scriptures that correspond to the ritual music. This embodiment of rhythm, motion, and utterance not only sets these priests apart but encapsulates the essence of their sacred practice, marking their holistic engagement with the profound spiritual tapestry of Lingbao Taoism. This study focuses on investigating the "Blessing Rituals" within the context of Lingbao Taoist rituals. By delving into the musical elements intrinsic to the Lingbao Blessing Rituals and meticulously documenting the rituals themselves, a comprehensive comprehension of the historical trajectory and transformation of Lingbao Taoist rituals is attainable. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of the ritual culture's essence and allows for an in-depth analysis of the interconnected musical forms. In 2017, the Gexianshan Taoist music was honored by its inclusion in the fifth batch of provincial intangible cultural heritage in Jiangxi Province. This recognition has fueled ongoing scholarly interest in the exploration of "Lingbao Sect

Taoist Ritual Culture." This academic pursuit encompasses multifaceted investigations, embracing various dimensions:

Firstly, scholars have delved into seminal literature that traces the embryonic stages of Taoism's development. Noteworthy works include Wang Chengwen's (1999) "Early Lingbao Sutra and the Taoism of Heavenly Masters in the Han and Wei Dynasties: Centering on the Lingbao Sutra annotated in the Dunhuang Edition 'Lingbao Jingmu'" and the insightful exploration on Lu Xiujing and the proliferation of Lingbao Taoism during the Liu and Song Dynasties by Wu Chengguo and Cao Lin (2014).

Secondly, scholarly attention has converged upon the evolution of Taoist culture in Jiangxi, particularly focusing on Lingbao Taoism within the region. Fu Limin's (2002) "The Spiritual Harmony of the Heavenly Preceptor's Fasting Rituals and Ceremonies - "Longhu Mountain Heavenly Preceptor Taoist Rituals and Music Research" stands as a notable contribution in this sphere (Chen & Wan, 2012).

Thirdly, research extends to the dissemination of Lingbao Sect Rituals across geographical boundaries, encompassing areas like Fujian and Taiwan. Zou Min and Lu Yanrong (2018) delve into the inheritance and evolution of the Lingbao Sect of Taoism in Taiwan through their work "A Brief Introduction to the Inheritance and Development of the Lingbao Sect of Taoism in Taiwan." Similarly, Zheng Yazhong (2012) meticulously examines the Taoist Lingbao Sect Purdue Ceremony and Music within the context of Taiwan.

It is evident that existing records documenting the Taoist culture of Jiangxi's Lingbao Sect remain relatively scarce, with notably limited documentation concerning the specific content of the "blessing rituals" of Gexianshan Lingbao Sect in Jiangxi (Chen, 2016). Building upon existing research findings, this study has undertaken extensive and profound investigations centered around the Yuxu Temple situated in Gexian Mountain, Shangrao, Jiangxi Province. It has engaged in comprehensive interviews with practitioners of Lingbao Sect Taoist rituals, thereby enriching the research landscape. By drawing from the essence of the ritual music itself and integrating it with the framework of traditional Chinese musicology, this study aims to unravel the intricate layers of meaning embedded in the expression of 'Blessing Rituals. By transcribing the insights shared by inheritors of the intangible cultural heritage within the Lingbao Sect and the adept priests of Gexianshan Lingbao, a nuanced comprehension of these rituals' significance is attained. Through an in-depth analysis, this study embarks on a journey across the diachronic facets

of Lingbao rituals, illuminating the dynamic interplay between historical continuity and the imaginative ingenuity of laboring individuals. The study not only unravels musical scores and delves into the structure of the music but also offers glimpses of select recordings encapsulating the essence of Lingbao Taoist blessing rituals within the Lingbao sect.

TianQing (1994) mentioned that the compilation of Chinese Buddhist music was hindered during the period due to internal turmoil and wars in China, as well as the lack of recording equipment in the 1940s. This resulted in obstacles to field investigations, similar to the reasons for relying solely on documentary records.

The culmination of this research unveils profound insights that carry guiding implications for the contemporary rendition of Taoist ritual music within the Gexianshan Lingbao Sect of Shangrao, Jiangxi Province. By shedding light on the intrinsic value of these prayer rituals, this study serves as a beacon for the enhancement and evolution of Taoist ritual music performance practices within this esteemed tradition (Min, 1995).

2. OVERVIEW OF LINGBAO SECT'S "BLESSING RITUALS" CEREMONY

2.1 Tracing the Origin of Lingbao Sect's "Blessing Ritual" Ceremony

Gexianshan Lingbao Taoist music originated from the Lingbao Taoist Ritual Rituals of Zhaijiao ceremony. It is difficult to determine the specific time when the prayer ceremony was formed, but it can be judged from the Lingbao-Sutra, Yuanshi-Sutra and other scriptures collected in the "Daocang" sung and recited by the Taoists of Yuxu Temple. Most of the scriptures come from the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and it is known as the representative of the early Taoist scriptures. "

One of the Four Annotations of Yuanshi Wuliangren Top Grade Miaoqing" mentions: "In ancient times, within the expanse of the original azure heavens, there resonated a grand and melodious song that echoed through the vast lands. This celestial chorus was a gift from the Infinite Supreme, meant for humanity to revel in its transcendence. As the sky embraced its cerulean hue and the harmonious notes mingled with the verdant realm, the radiant clouds cascaded, thus named 'Azure Falls.' The ethereal phoenix and the resplendent jade trees adorned the celestial realm, while resounding melodies reverberated through the emptiness above, hence christened 'Celestial Chant.'

Little did we know, this was known as 'Azure Heaven's Origin.' It resided

in the northeastern celestial domain, the domain where the celestial dragon soars. The azure clouds gracefully adorned this realm, where the melodies played by spiritual beings embraced the divine winds. The letters in purple hues resounded through the forest, crafting a song of its own accord." Upon delving into early Taoist scriptures, it becomes evident that Taoist music was documented and characterized as a celestial and earthly source of joy in ancient China. The harmonious and tranquil melodies reverberated through the air, serving as a protective veil for the populace. The role of ritual music is intrinsically intertwined with Taoist ceremonial activities, with the emergence of these rituals assuming profound societal and cultural significance. This significance extends beyond the realms of Lingbao Sect Taoist priests enhancing their own capabilities, refining their incantations, and deepening their understanding of Taoist scriptures. It also extends to the faithful and common folk who seek solace in Taoist music, employing it as a conduit to beseech for the blessings of progeny and familial harmony, to ward off calamities and find refuge. Taoism has thus evolved into a means of communication that bridges the earthly and transcendent realms, serving as a conduit to commune with the broader world. Since the eras of the Song and Yuan Dynasties in China, a plethora of Taoist fasting methods have been employed within diverse prayer ceremonies. Delving into Taoist musical archives entails the meticulous extraction and arrangement of materials from the extensive and boundless expanse of Taoist classics. Ascertaining a compilation of these timeless documents stands as a pivotal juncture in unraveling the origins and historical trajectory of Lingbao Taoist blessing ritual music. "The Golden Book for Receiving Teaching and Delivering People" stands as a Yuan Dynasty Taoist masterpiece, often referred to as the "Golden Book" by subsequent generations. This opulent repository of Taoist literature flourished during the Yuan Dynasty, comprising an extensive collection spanning 320 volumes. Encompassing a diverse array of topics within Taoist Rituals, the compendium encompasses practices for dispelling malevolent entities and healing ailments, beseeching for favorable elements such as sunshine and rain, as well as seeking longevity. During the Yuan Dynasty, the prominent current of Taoist ritual music found its embodiment in the Lingbao Sect of ritual music. Following a trajectory of maturation and development, it came to be embraced by various sects within Taoism. Within the "Golden Book," a compendium comprising 20 distinct pieces, the seventh volume of the Daocang section serves as the inaugural entry, encapsulating the facets of supplication rituals and more. This volume, entitled "Applications for the Altar System," contains the

initial tome titled "General Application for Communing with Deities and Delivering People." Herein, one encounters meticulous blueprints of the contemporary ritual altar configurations, site planning for sanctuaries, and associated textual records. These encompass comprehensive specifications detailing the precise arrangement of altars, meditation halls, and arrangement of ceremonial paraphernalia. The compendium expounds upon ritual conventions, forms, and visual representations. Volumes 10 to 11, referred to as "Applications for Praise," house a trove of pertinent Taoist ritual music classics. Among them lie over 20 varieties of songs and rhymes replete with verses. These compositions can be categorized as "songs," "praises," "curses," and "benedictions," forming a rich tapestry of content. A rudimentary classification is presented in Table 1 for reference:

Table 1: "Praise and Application Collection" Classification of Ritual Music, Classic Scriptures, and Melodic Repertoire for Ceremonial Practices.

Type	Quantity (Piece)	Name
Songs	39	Initiate altar, Dispel altar, Invite the Profound Master, Call upon the Celestial Masters, Invite the Fasting Supervisor, Invite the Heavenly Official, Invite the Earthly Official, Invite the Water Official, Invite the Five Emperors, Invite the Sutra and Poetry Master, Invite the Record Master, Invite the Teacher of Salvation, and so on. ;
Praises	3	Studying the Dao, Seven Perfected Beings, and Huaxia.
"Lyrics"/"Melody"	10	Grand Virtual Step, Virtual Step, Jade Clear Music, Upper Clear Music, Supreme Clear Music, Seven-Word Scattered Flowers, Five-Word Scattered Flowers, etc.
Curses	6	Guardians of the Five Directions, Guardians of the Spirit for Three Days and Nine Mornings, Guardians of the Spirit for One Day and Three Mornings; Guardians of the Five Directions Together, Guardians of the Five Stars, Guardians of the Xuanji Altar.
Benedictions	4	Morning Devotion with Ten Recitations, Midday Devotion with Twelve Vows, Evening Devotion with Ten Vows, Minor Twelve Vows.
Chapters of Spiritualism	4	Yang Dipper, Yin Dipper, Another Dipper, Summoning the Six Paths.
Buddhist Hymn	8	Birth of Deities, Sacred Treasure Sutra, Opening Pathways, Morning Ritual, Transmitting the 'Triple Treasures' Precepts, Three Pure Melodies, Worthy of Admiration Three, Five Directional Youths.

The “Golden Book” contains a comprehensive set of essential guidelines covering fasting rituals, sacrificial offerings, mandala arrangement, ceremonial progression, and other vital aspects. The Lingbao Taoist priests of Gexianshan Yuxu Temple, nestled within the mountain's embrace, continue to faithfully follow these time-honored traditions. Their days commence with the resonance of morning bells and draw to a close to the rhythm of evening drums, a steadfast embodiment of the Taoist lifestyle. This unswerving dedication persists in the practice of morning and evening devotions, forging an unbroken thread of observance. Through these customs, they have cultivated their own distinct school of thought, thereby crafting a singular cultural identity—Jiangxi Gexianshan Lingbao Taoist ritual music.

Embedded within the enclave of their religious observances and musical heritage, these Lingbao Taoist priests carry forth a legacy that can aptly be likened to living relics of ancient Chinese traditional music culture. In the tapestry of the present era, they stand as vibrant testimonials to a bygone epoch, steadfastly upholding and embodying the essence of this time-honored heritage. Within Taoist culture, the Prayer ceremony holds the belief of harmonizing the mind, ushering in smoothness, averting maladies, and extending life's span. The Tang Dynasty bore witness to a significant expansion of the entire Lingbao Sect, resulting in a surge of voluntary adherents. This surge not only swelled the ranks of the Taoist Sect but also imbued it with a remarkable wealth of content. In response to the wishes and aspirations of its followers, the principal facets of the blessing ceremony encompass the following dimensions: entreating for blessings, seeking longevity, and warding off calamities through the agency of incantations. Notably, this arena boasts a burgeoning array of scholarly appellations, mirroring the gradual proliferation of its components. The Prayer ceremony within the Lingbao Sect primarily serves to notify the deities, enlisting their benevolent intervention to bestow blessings and dispel misfortunes and ailments. This interplay of supplication and divine intervention underscores the core tenets of the Lingbao Sect's spiritual practice.

Blessing rituals typically encompass four primary categories of focus. The initial category pertains to the stabilization of the land and abode. In the context of groundbreaking activities, such actions were deemed as potentially disrespectful to the guardian deity of the land during that era. Consequently, the rituals conducted within the township or village played a vital role in appeasing these deities and safeguarding against malevolent

forces.

The second category centers on the healing of ailments and the dispelling of malevolent spirits. Within the framework of township rituals, Taoist priests employ various techniques to implore deities, enter the mandala, and fulfill the aspirations of the faithful. This, in turn, bestows blessings and averts calamities. For the purpose of exorcism and healing, the ceremony employs talismans, mantras, incantations, and more, accompanied by the use of cinnabar—a substance acclaimed for its healing properties in Chinese medicine. This dimension encompasses an array of town rituals, addressing concerns such as disaster alleviation, life preservation, pest control, miscarriage prevention, and rain invocation, among others.

The prayer ceremony employs a myriad of incantations, with "curses" and "tactics" being commonly utilized. Accompanied by specific gestures, practitioners execute precise actions, all aimed at rousing the attention of spirits and deities. Taoist priests intricately choreograph movements with their palms, a practice pivotal to realizing their objectives. Notably, tactics play an indispensable role in facilitating the seamless execution of ritual procedures and ensuring the successful invocation of divine entities. The third category involves the pursuit of blessings and the extension of life. The prayer ceremony constitutes a crucial facet within the Lingbao Sect. Given its intrinsic connection to divine entities, the ceremony serves as a conspicuous means of establishing a rapport with the immortals (Chen & Liu, 1992). Its essential function revolves around facilitating direct communication with the divine realm. This communication is fundamentally propelled by the genuine sincerity of the participants, effectively engaging the attention and benevolence of the immortals. The ultimate aim of the prayer ceremony is to evoke a response from the immortals, compelling them to bestow blessings and mitigate misfortunes. This interplay between humanity and the divine, facilitated by adept communication, serves as the conduit through which divine blessings are earnestly conferred.

The fourth category pertains to spiritual solace. The role of enlightenment can indeed be considered the foundational purpose of the prayer ceremony. For adherents, it holds the potential to provide a source of comfort and tranquility. This is attributable to the universal existence of various troubles and aspirations among individuals. Through the medium of the prayer ceremony, people aspire to realize their desires, and in some instances, pilgrims return to Taoist temples to fulfill their promises once

their wishes have materialized (Chen, 2019).

Within the context of the prayer ceremony, believers find a means of sustenance. This platform facilitates a channel for emotional release, allowing believers to find solace by unburdening their feelings. Consequently, this process offers a form of spiritual nourishment, allowing individuals to articulate their wishes and derive a sense of respite.

The traditional Taoist culture of the Lingbao Sect places significant emphasis on the instructional method of the rituals ceremony, a form of ritualistic sacrifice. Many enduring Taoist rituals and musical programs that persist to this day find their origins in the practices of the Lingbao Sect. The Taoist teachings of this sect have deeply ingrained themselves in the collective consciousness, prioritizing the salvation and purification of the soul while urging individuals to perform virtuous deeds and offer solace to the departed.

Especially prominent from the Song to the Qing Dynasties, the convergence of various folk beliefs with Taoism has remarkably diversified the array of Jiao ceremonies. Notable examples include the Dongyue rituals ceremony and the Lingguan rituals ceremony. During the Song Dynasty onward, Taoism assimilated a broad spectrum of folk elements, significantly broadening its scope. This expansion granted Taoism ample room for development, particularly among the populace, thus propelling its advancement.

The increased popularity of Taoism among the common people has endowed it with distinct secular characteristics. Rituals for blessings encompass a wide spectrum, encompassing pleas for favorable weather, fertility, domestic harmony, and more. These rituals engage with various aspects of daily life, aiming to address an array of concerns through the conduit of blessings. Notably during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, governmental focus turned toward Taoism, leading to its wider influence and accentuating its folk and secular traits.

2.2 The layout of the mandala of the "Blessing Rituals" ceremony of the Lingbao Sect

The blessing ceremony at Gexianshan typically takes place within the Tai Chi Palace located in the Yuxu Temple. Comprising elements of stone, wood, and later cement structures, the Tai Chi Palace features a gate adorned with carved stone depictions in the shape of the gossip symbol, forming an arch. Symmetrically carved stone couplets, bearing the inscription "The ancient path of the Three Pure Ones has inherited the

legacy of a thousand generations, while the profound mysteries of the Four Essentials have realized an eternal mentor," embellish the arch. This conveys a sense of grandeur and solemnity befitting the entirety of the Taoist temple (Wang & Li, 1989).

The thousand-year-old temple, bequeathed by the Patriarch of Sanqing, stands as a solemn edifice of Taoist reverence. The enshrined statues of deities exude an air of nobility within the temple's majestic, south-facing expanse. Brilliant vermilion walls encircle the exterior of the hall, where the inscription "Virtue aligns with heaven and earth, and the way of Dao is simply nature" is boldly scripted. Within the hall, 24 columns lend structural support, creating a three-entry configuration at the front and rear. Each column stands on an octagonal stone base. The hall's roof, constructed from bricks and tiles, exhibits a distinctive style highlighted by cast iron tiles bearing the motif of a peony pattern surrounding the character "mountain." At the heart of the temple, a central stone altar reverently houses the statue of the revered Gexian, accompanied by an adjacent shrine adorned with inscriptions. Also referred to as the Hall of the Holy Gexian, the Tai Chi Palace serves as the ancestral abode of the Sanqing Patriarch. The entirety of the prayer ceremony unfolds in the northern section of the Tai Chi Hall.



Figure 1: Four statues of immortals are enshrined on the west side of Tai Chi Palace of Yuxu temple (photographed by researchers)



Figure 2: Four statues of immortals are enshrined on the east side of Tai Chi Palace of Yuxu temple (photographed by the researcher)

As depicted in the image above, the western side of Tai Chi Palace houses a sequence of four enshrined statues: Marshal Zhao, Marshal Yue, Rain Master, and Mother of Lightning. (Image 1) Conversely, on the eastern side, a sequence of four statues finds their place within Tai Chi Palace: Marshal Wen, Marshal Ma, Uncle Wing, and the Lord of Thunder. (Image 2)

Marshal Zhao stands as a significant embodiment of classic mythological personas within ancient Chinese traditional culture. Among common folks, he's also recognized as the "God of Wealth." People engage in practices like welcoming the God of Wealth or conducting sacrificial rites as part of customary and ritualistic activities. This practice further underscores how Taoist wealth principles are rooted in notions of equity and morality, even exerting a degree of influence over the ethical and moral conduct of adherents and pilgrims. Marshal Zhao's secret method in the wonder temple · Marshal Zhao's record (Late Yuan and early Ming Dynasty) pointed out "However, should you seek things that are truly just and righteous, turning to the oracle in prayer could lead to your contentment (Zhao, 2021). Conversely, if your prayers are aimed at improper desires, divine retribution might be incurred. This warning should not be disregarded." In the social development of all dynasties and generations, the image of Marshal Zhao in Taoist culture can be said to have played the role of maintaining social order and economic development to varying

degrees. In Liu Zhongyu's work (2008) titled "Taoist Economic Ethics: A Study Focused on the God of Wealth Belief," it is highlighted that "the God of Wealth emerges within the fundamental principle that underpins commercial exchange: fairness." In the annals of Chinese literature, numerous instances appear depicting Marshal Zhao Gongming within literary myths and legends. These include renowned classics like "Book of King Wu's Conquest against Zhou" and "Romance of the Gods." Such portrayals further intertwine Taoist culture with Chinese traditional literature, theology, religion, anthropology, folklore, and related disciplines (Liu, 1999). Simultaneously, Marshal Zhao's positioning in this context aligns with the traditional mandala orientation, affirming the general consistency of Zhao Gongming's traditional Chinese theological orientation. This orientation predominantly resides in the west, north, or northwest—resembling the "Qian Gua" position as depicted in the Book of Changes. The juxtaposition of the "gold" and "water" elements within the Five Elements complements one another, thereby giving rise to the notion of "wealth."

In the "Thus Speak: Taishang. The Wonder Sutra and Mantra of the Great Sage Chenwu in the Wonder Heaven," it is mentioned: "Huashan, located in the Hua Prefecture as the Western Peak Master, falls under the jurisdiction of the Golden Heaven and Virtuous Saint Emperor. It is also tasked with addressing remedies for dysentery, overseen by Marshal Zhao Gongming." Additionally, "Daocang" (1995) noted that "The marshal's family name is Zhao, his given name is Chang, and his courtesy name is Gongming. Originating from Zhongnan Mountain, he took up residence amidst its peaks during the Qin Dynasty, committing himself to rigorous Taoist practice and attaining excellence in virtuous conduct. Summoned by the Jade Emperor, he assumed the role of Deputy Commander of Shenxiao. According to the marshal, the Manifestation of the Brahma Qi occurred in the heavens of Haoting-Xiaodu within the celestial realm. This phenomenon's position aligns with the 'Qian' orientation, symbolized by gold and water." Towards the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the dawn of the Ming Dynasty, "The Unified Way of Tao" and the "Record of Marshal Zhao" contained within underscored the significance of this alignment. Marshal Yue holds the second position in the western section of enshrinement. The earliest documentation of his "immortal" status can be traced back to the Xuande period of the Ming Dynasty. Zhou Side's account in the "Golden Book of the Collection of Ultimate Calm of Lingbao for Saving the People" narrates Yue Fei's narrative, "Having imbibed the teachings of the Chengyi Sect of Taoism, he adeptly grasped

the essence of Lingbao, delving into its capacity for salvation. He diligently honed the technique of wielding the five thunder and fire talismans (Lei, 1970b)." Yue Fei emerged as a renowned anti-golden hero during China's Southern Song Dynasty. He garnered admiration from successive generations, leading to the construction of numerous Yue Fei temples throughout the country. He is often acclaimed in later times with titles such as "Devil Suppression General Yue" and "Heavenly Trace Admiral Yue." Regarding the Lord of Thunder and Lightning Goddess, their depictions can be found in various sources, including the "Shan Hai Jing Hai Nei Dong Jing." Descriptions of the Lord of Thunder have been passed down through historical accounts, such as the one documented by Changsha Ma in the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (1974). The report on the excavation of Wangdui No. 2 and No. 3 Han Tombs revealed a silk painting from the Mawangdui Han Tomb in Changsha, Hunan. This painting featured an image of a bear-shaped Lord of Thunder. In the early Eastern Han Dynasty of China, the Lord of Thunder held a position of high reverence. This belief, combined with the people's interpretations, led to the expansion of the Lord of Thunder's societal roles. Consequently, the Lord of Thunder became associated with executing celestial punishments and dispensing justice, gaining a representative status in this regard. During the early stages of Taoism, the Mother of Lightning was depicted as the consort of the Lord of Thunder. Notably, in a stone relief from the Han Dynasty situated in the Wushi Temple in Shandong, crafted by Zhu Xilu (1986), the Lord of Thunder and the Mother of Lightning were portrayed. The goddess, depicted holding a whip, represented the Mother of Lightning (Lei, 1970c). As a consequence of abnormal weather patterns, prolonged periods of drought adversely impact crop growth. This has historically led to the practice of offering sacrifices to the God of Rain. An account from the Jin Dynasty, known as "Looking for God," identifies this deity as "Red-pine-nuts," who also assumes the role of rain master within the domain of Shennong. In a study by Du Wen (2009) on textual research related to Yaowang · Daotong · Yushi, it's revealed that Red-pine-nuts are revered as the Primitive Heaven Majesty in Taoism, designated as a sealed rain master, entrusted with overseeing rainfall. Wind Fairy and Rain Fairy have both long been incorporated into the hierarchy of Taoist deities. These figures, including Wind Fairy, Rain Fairy, the Lord of Thunder, Mother of Lightning, and others, constitute the sixth level of nature immortals, considered beyond human comprehension (Singer, 1959). Ma Lingyao (also known as Marshal Ma or Emperor Huaguang) is among the four guardians of Taoism. In Yao Fuzhuang's (1994) account within the

"Secret of Five 'Thunders," Marshal Ma is described as having a white face, three eyes, and holding a gold brick in the left hand and a golden gun in the right, adorned with a soaped appearance. Marshal Wen Qiong, according to historical sources, originates from Pingyang County, Wenzhou. Transforming into a deity with a blue face and red hair, Wen Qiong serves as a prominent guardian within Taoism (Storey, 2006). The arrangement of the ritual mandala within the Tai Chi Hall is illustrated in Figure 3. The band finds its place in the lower-left section of the entire Blessing Ritual Mandala layout. The ensemble of instruments comprising the Ritual Band encompasses the dulcimer, bamboo flute, erhu, pipa, wooden fish, drums, gongs, and other percussion instruments.

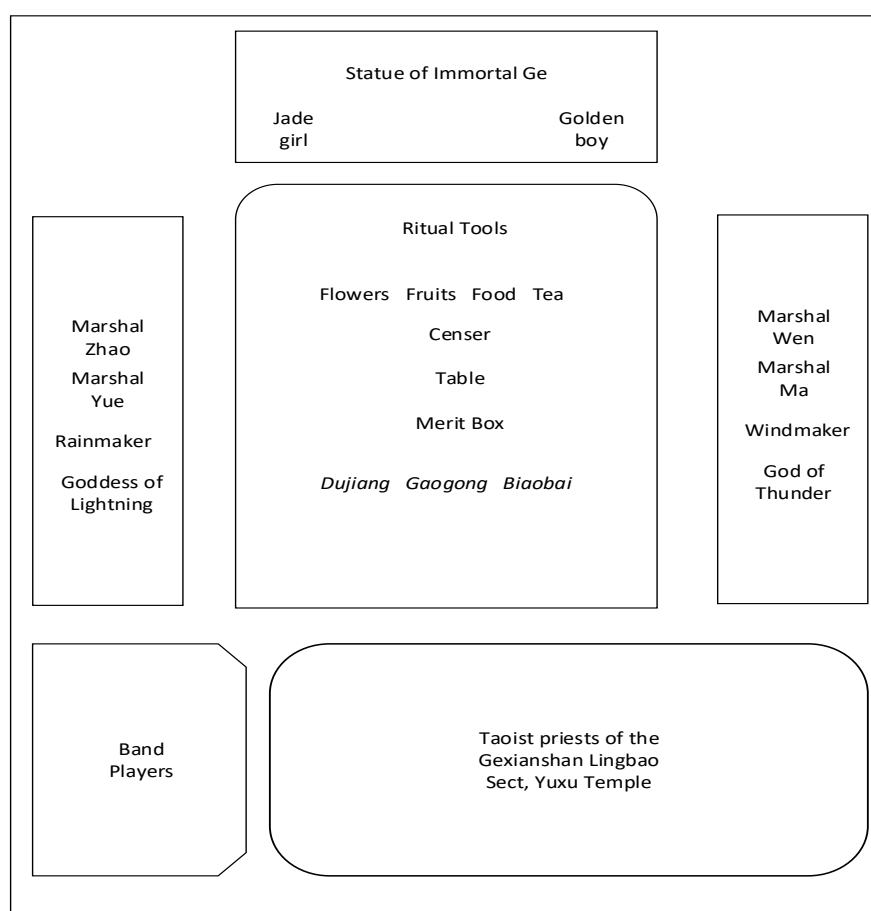


Figure 3: Arrangement of the ritual mandala within the Tai Chi Hall

The Taoist blessing ceremony music exhibits the qualities of a meticulously crafted art performance. It encompasses not only meticulous staging and intricate costumes, but also incorporates music, dance, and other performing arts. This close connection between religion and art is evident, giving rise to the distinctive attributes of Chinese Taoist art. Taoist art is interwoven with Taoist practices and, throughout the course of Taoist rituals, an aura of sanctity prevails. Moreover, art itself wields a certain

potency capable of harmonizing the elements of the world.

The process of conducting these elaborate rituals can be bifurcated into two components: a static facet and a dynamic facet. The static factors include aspects such as the design of the mandala and other elements that remain fixed. In contrast, dynamic elements incorporate personal conduct, music, collective actions, and more. Delving into the static factors of Taoism, one finds the employment of art and installations to construct fasting and praying chambers. This approach not only conveys the essence of Taoist culture to the general public in a palpable manner but also furnishes a dynamic space within the chamber. This synthesis of individual and collective experiences propels participants into a sense of spiritual communion with the divine.

The role of music in the dynamic elements is pivotal. It influences not only individual behavior but also collective actions. The presence of music significantly amplifies the sense of sanctity within the entire sanctuary. Music, in the context of Taoist fasting and prayer, fortifies its impact, accentuating the connection between religion and art. This is accomplished through the medium of music, which effectively elevates spiritual experiences.

No matter what kind of scientific ritual it is, music is a part that cannot be ignored during the process. The ritual instrument and musical instruments used during the ceremony cannot stop. The vocals in the praying ceremony are mainly rhyme and chant and oral chanting, among which rhyme and chant are the most essential part, not only can fully reflect the style of Taoist music but rhyme and chant have complex and changeable melody types and Hierarchical structure, able to sing verses of different content.

During Lingbao Sect ceremonies, a diverse array of magical instruments comes into play, including wooden fish, drums, cymbals, copper bells, and more. Prior to the commencement of the ceremony, gongs and drums are utilized to establish a reverent and solemn ambiance within the entire space. These gongs and drums harmoniously intermingle with instrumental music, setting the stage for Taoist priests to perform. The sequence of gongs and drums, accompanied by instrumental melodies, serves as a catalyst for Taoist priests to modulate their emotions and align their mental and physical states.

Within the ceremony, the coordination of ritual instruments remains an integral aspect. The absence of musical synchronization could potentially impact not only the disposition of Taoist priests but also the overarching ambiance of the sanctuary. The resonances produced by the ritual

instruments within the dojo possess a distinct sense of directionality. From the perspective of Lingbao Sect Taoist priests, these sounds are held in utmost sanctity. Such sounds may signify the arrival of deities to the mandala, function as harmonious offerings to appease the immortals, or even manifest as protective exorcism. Throughout the entirety of the ceremony, these sounds serve not only to enhance the ceremonial atmosphere but also to imbue believers with a profound sense of the ceremony's solemnity, efficacy, and reliability within the sanctified surroundings (Lei, 1970a).

Taoist music encompasses both a sacred significance and an element of entertainment. When performed within an empty space, ritual music showcases the more enjoyable aspect of Taoist musical expressions. Ceremonial music serves the purpose of not only pleasing the deities being invoked but also engaging the present believers. This is achieved through the amalgamation of various musical elements intrinsic to Taoist ceremonial music.

In the context of an empty performance, Taoist priests who chant sutras shed their robes, engaging with drum hammers or small cymbals using both hands. This transforms the entire sanctum into a realm of merriment. The resonating beats of the drums and the melodious suona notes create a cheerful and joyous ambiance. Such an atmosphere not only delights the musicians but also allows all those in attendance to experience the enchantment of Taoist music. Interestingly, the practice of Taoist priests removing their voluminous robes during empty performances holds significance beyond mere symbolism. It signifies a shift in roles during the ceremony. This transition into the realm of empty performance indicates the conclusion of a specific religious rite. A noticeable contrast emerges between the lively and spirited secular melodies frequently played during such performances and the earlier chanted classical hymns. Throughout the ceremony, the music unveils both its sacred and secular facets. The sacred dimension caters not only to the pedagogy of scriptural teachings but also aids in upholding Taoist beliefs. On the other hand, the display of the secular aspect of Taoist music provides attendees with an avenue to momentarily escape the intricacies of the traditional ceremonial procedures. It also acts as a magnet for attracting believers. Utilizing music as a conduit, the latent potential of the human body can be harnessed to facilitate a journey into the domains of transcendence and sanctity. This is particularly pertinent for Taoist priests dwelling within temples. After completing tasks such as cleaning, fasting, bathing, and arranging attire,

they engage in their duties. Within the scope of Taoism, music also serves an educational purpose, fostering emotional refinement and social cohesion through its harmonious tones. Additionally, the omnipotent influence of music bolsters the attainment of the union between individuals and Tao. Taoist ritual music is proficient in bestowing a form of spiritual delight that transcends the material realm. Imbued with the essence of such music, individuals can transcend the constraints of material attachments. This ritualistic music aids in nurturing the religious intuition of ascetics and plays a vital role in arousing their compassionate sentiments towards salvation. The medium of Taoist ceremony music serves as a channel for divine communication. This music methodically cultivates Taoism within the larger tapestry of Taoist culture, achieving such cultivation through its melodious guidance. By harmonizing the exercise of the body, spirit, temperament, and comportment, individuals can emancipate their physical and mental states from external limitations. This process further facilitates the realization of unity between the physical realm and one's inner self. Believers, through the means of ceremonies, can employ this platform to articulate their hearts, express aspirations, or manifest their reverence for deities. Thus, these ceremonies serve as a conduit for believers to convey their entrustment, offering a means for their wishes to be nurtured within a designated space or form. The harmonious fusion of music and Taoist ceremonies not only enriches the substance of the ceremonies but also provides ascetics with profound spiritual contentment.

3. THE PROGRAM AND CONTENT OF THE LINGBAO SECT BLESSING CEREMONY

The Lingbao Sect Blessing Ceremony encompasses a diverse array of rituals. This article employs the ritual practices of Ping'an Taoist Temple as an illustrative example. Referred to by local Taoist elders as the "Peace Dojo" ceremony, the Lingbao Blessing Ceremony assumes a central role. It serves as a platform for the world to converge upon Lingbao, offering prayers and seeking blessings. One of the numerous ceremonies conducted within Lingbao, the prayer ceremony holds a prominent position. Each time pilgrims or devout Lingbao followers ascend the mountain seeking blessings, celebrating weddings, or petitioning for harmony and success, they present offerings such as flowers and fruits within the Tai Chi Hall. With candles in hand, incense burning, and palms joined, they strike three chimes or a wooden fish to signal the initiation of the official ritual

sequence.

Table 2: The basic program of blessing rituals

Peaceful Taoist Ritual Venue Ritual Procedures			
	Item	Ritual Form	Program
(1)	Opening the Altar	Dharma Instruments	Strike the wooden fish three times.
	Inviting the Master into the Altar	Musical Instruments	Perform "Opening the Small Gate" melody.
(2)	Master's Procedures	Three Great High Accomplishments, Four Great Guardians	Kneel and bow three times, nine prostrations.
	Purifying the Altar	Reciting Sutras with High Accomplishments	"Nine True Fragrances" ritual.
	Reciting Verses	Musical Instruments	"Sprinkling Water to Capture the Demon Palace" ritual.
(3)	Invoking Deities	Dharma Instrument	Open the Qian trigram, break the Xun trigram.
	Offering Tea and Wine	"Five Thunders" Vocal Verses	Perform the "Virtual Step" practice.
(4)	Imperial Decree from the Jade Emperor	High Accomplishments	Purify the altar and dispel impurities.
		Musical Instruments	Perform "Nine Phoenixes Dispelling Impurities" ritual.
(5)	Opening the Altar	Recitation in Vernacular Language	No music.
	Inviting the Master into the Altar	Musical Instruments	Recite verses.
(6)	Master's Procedures	Recitation in Vernacular Language	Chant style: Yiyang style combined with Mandarin Chinese, formerly referred to as the official language.
(7)	Purifying the Altar	Musical Instruments	Collective recitation, morning ritual, and reading of documents.
(8)	Reciting Verses	Vocal Verses	Recite the names of Heavenly Honored Ones, etc.
	Invoking Deities		Strike Dharma instruments, such as the wooden fish.
(9)	Offering Tea and Wine	Content includes Divine Mantras, Scriptures, etc.	
(10)	Thank Immortal	Chanting	vernacular
		instrumental music	Nine Heavens
(11)	Closing the Altar	instrumental music	small cutscene

Taking the Peace Dojo ceremony as a case in point, the commencement involves the recitation of a segment titled "Opening," a reverent invocation to Heaven Majesty seeking relief from calamities and blessings. Accompanied by the musical rendition of "Small Opening," Taoist elders engage in reciting the scriptures. It's worth noting that this differs across various Taoist sects. Given that each Taoist sect reveres and pays homage to distinct Heaven Majesty deities at the Jingtian (sacred altar), and due to the variance in geographical locations, the local cultural influences and the prevailing ritual traditions passed down through teachings within each traditional Taoist sect vary.

This particular scripture is exclusive to the Taoist ceremonies of the Lingbao Sect in Gexianshan, Jiangxi, constituting an integral part of the rituals within the Lingbao Ping'an Taoist Temple. It is a compulsory procedure each time the altar is opened, and its content cannot be arbitrarily altered or omitted. The content is as follows: "The radiance of the great sage illuminates Heaven Majesty, while the sanctified virtues linger within the ceremony. The longevity is celebrated with jade adornments, adhering to decrees bestowed with golden insignia. Born in Nanchang, except for Jell, all beings receive blessings, dispelling disasters and inviting auspiciousness. May serenity and tranquility persist, Heaven Majesty." (Table 4)

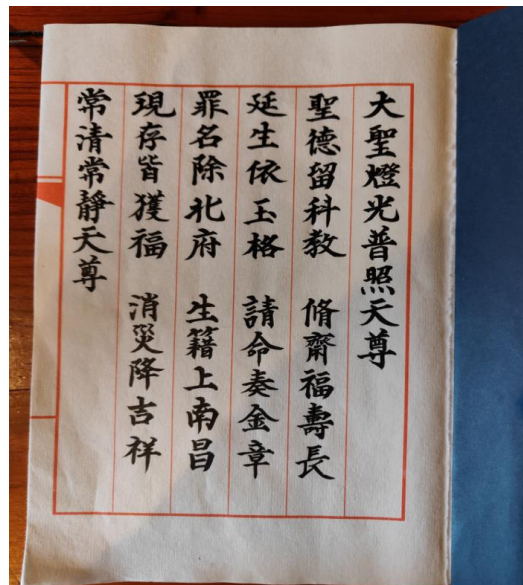


Figure 4: Gexianshan Yuxu Temple Lingbao Peace Dojo Ceremony Records
(Source: Photographed by the researcher in the observation hall. Date of recording: October 18, 2019. Location: Tai Chi Hall, Yuxu Temple, Gexian Mountain)

The score examples provided in the subsequent sections have been compiled by researchers, drawing upon actual live performance records as a point of reference.

3.1 Opening the Altar.



Figure 5: Music example 1 "Small Opening"

The procedure of Opening the Altar commences with the ceremonial instrument striking the wooden fish thrice, signifying reverence and awe. Following this, the Gexian Lingbao Chinese Orchestra employs the composition "Small Opening" as the initial musical piece for the regular prayer ceremony.

3.2 Invite a teacher into the altar

The rite known as "Inviting a Teacher to Enter the Altar" is commonly referred to as "Inviting immortals" or the "[Inviting immortals] Ceremony" of the Peace Dojo. Further elaboration is provided below. It becomes evident that within the scope of the "Inviting immortals" ceremony, the rituals conducted at the Ping An Taoist Temple essentially extend invitations to numerous deities from diverse corners of the world. The objective is to bestow blessings upon the altar's potency and the religious energy sphere, providing solace to people's hearts. This practice holds significance as a pivotal wellspring of energy within the realm of religious indoctrination. Following the deliberate entrance of the three High Meritorious Persons and the four Guardians into the hall, the initial sequence entailed the observance of the Three Koutous and Nine Bows etiquette rituals. Subsequently, the High Meritorious Person proceeded to recite the "Nine True Incents," culminating with the performance of "Caught by Water Demon Palace" by the Ge Xianshan Lingbao Chinese

Orchestra.



Figure 6: Caught by Water Demon Palace

3.2.1 Rhyme narration:

The Saint virtue Sect practices fasting for longevity, extending life through the Jade Script. Requesting blessings and presenting a golden decree, offenses are pardoned in the Northern Palace, and one's birth records are updated in Nanchang. Presently, true achievements are all rewarded with blessings, dispelling calamities and bringing auspiciousness.

voice recitation :

“Forever Clean and Calm of the Heavern Majesty”。

3.3 The mage opened the altar

Carry out the "Open Qian and break Xun" ritual, the step-by-step link

3.4 clean altar

Scenor completed the ritual of cleansing the altar, and the folk orchestra played the piece "Nine Phoenixes Break the Poor".

Rhyme narration: Heaven and earth follow their course. Foul odors dissipate. The cave holds its enigma. Taiyuan shines pure and bright. The grandeur of the eight directions harmonizes with my natural state. Lingbao talisman. Proclamation for nine days. Dry Radana. Donggang remains veiled in mystique. Vanquishing demons, binding malevolence, rescuing countless souls. Zhongshan Immortal Mantra. Yuanshi's exquisite scripture. Recite once more. Yet, illness lingers to extend life. Guided by

the wisdom of the five mountains and the vast seas. 'The devil's grasp is loosened. Safeguarding my dwelling. Impurities scatter. The essence of Tao Qi endures eternally. And recite the Hornor Heaven name repeatedly:

Ever serene, ever tranquil, paying respects to Heaven. The radiance of the Great Sage illuminates the corresponding realm of Heaven.

3.5 Hymn

Chanting in spoken language

The lights are segregated into five hues, illuminating radiance. Kindling splendor and echoing verity. Lights are ignited, unveiling the path in five directions. Radiance graces the world, bidding the God of Fortune welcome. The sole celestial light, the sun, stands unmatched. No lamp compares in amassing blessings in the world. Paying homage to Heaven has remained sincere throughout the ages. A profoundly meritorious act.



Figure 7: Spectrum example 3 "Hymn"

3.6 Please Immortals

It is mainly recited in vernacular Chinese, and the recited part comes from the combination of Jiangxi Yiyang accent and Mandarin. In ancient times, this kind of accent was also called "official accent" locally.

3.6.1 Rhyme narration:

Numerous blossoms joyfully contribute. A forest of scattered flowers. They flutter down in a natural dance. Adorning the Dojo with scattered beauty. Offerings are made before approaching the Higher Immortals. The minister and others offer devoutly. With wholehearted devotion, we submit. A reverent morning tributes. In the vast expanse of the heavenly realm. In the majestic Golden Palace. We bow in reverence to emptiness and nature.

3.6.2 Yuqing Sacred Realm.

Grand Primordial Yuanshi, the honored Heavenly Deity. Enter the Pure Land Realm. Yuchen Lingbao, the honored Heavenly Deity. Celestial Purity Wonderland. Laozi's moral teachings, the honored Heavenly Deity. Supreme Great Heaven, Supreme. Jinque Jade Emperor, the Divine Entity. Convey to the Emperor of Antarctica. The Emperor of Longevity. The central star governs the North Star. Emperor Ziwei. The elegant palace of Daning. Cheng Tian emulates the queen, Saturn. Three Heavens beneath the Golden Gate. The great compassion of the Seven Treasures. May divine radiance descend.

3.7 Offering wine and tea

Rhyme narration: Incense lamps, tea, and wine are presented as offerings to the mighty deities. Shanxinqian presents incense lamps, tea, and wine. Believers performs the melody of Daluo Heaven. May boundless blessings and longevity prevail.

3.7.1 In unison, all the priests chant:

"With heartfelt sincerity, may Gao Zhenhai graciously receive and embrace. May the sanctuary open to lead us away from obscurity and turmoil. In genuine conversion, within courtly ceremonies and beyond."

3.7.2 Read the form:

The Southern Dipper's Fire Palace purges malevolence, while the Northern Dipper's Seven Stars lessen calamities. All desires are fulfilled without obstruction, and all stagnation is cleared. By adhering to the scriptures with a focused heart during solemn rites, one should follow the spiritual path in accordance with destiny. Constant reverence is paid to all sentient beings; misfortunes have no avenue to arise. Offering prayers to the Heavenly Venerable with sincere devotion, a true incense is burnt in

the censer. All heavens and earth resonate from afar. We sincerely implore entry beneath the gates of the said palace and request the auspicious light to bear witness. At the present altar ritual, this document conveys profound words, respectfully presenting them to celestial officials. Expecting the profound and genuine path to be bestowed, we anticipate a perusal of this supplication. May all the wishes expressed herein be granted.



Figure 8: Spectrum Example 4 "Presenting Wine and Tea"

3.8 Jade Emperor's precious letter

Rhyme narration: All Imperial Edicts of the Jade Emperor should be proclaimed with care. Supreme Heaven above the Supreme Maitreya. Marvelous existence in the Profound True Realm. Vast and endless Purple Gold Gate. Supreme Microcosmic Jade Clear Palace. Boundless and supreme sainthood. Radiating brilliance in vast emptiness. Profound and serene, the unfathomable source. Profound patterns encompass the ten directions. Profound and quiet, the Eternal Way. Expansive and profound, great divine powers.

Chanting : Great Compassionate Longevity Heavenly Venerable, Eternal Life and Lifesaving Heavenly Venerable. It is accompanied by instrumental accompaniment such as ritual instruments and wooden fish.

3.9 Chanting a mantra

Recite the mantra of peace and wealth. Percussion wooden fish accompaniment.

3.9.1 peace mantra

From the five directions descends true Qi, and countless blessings naturally align. Achieving longevity and transcending the ordinary is difficult; all due to the reverence for the Seven Stars. Life after life, the body remains free. Throughout generations, the spirit remains pure. Virtuous deeds akin to shadows within light. Resonating like echoes in a valley, the Triple-Origin Spirits stand guard. The gaze of myriad saints shines with the same brilliance. No calamities, no obstructions. Eternal preservation of a tranquil Taoist heart.

3.9.2 curse of fortune

Transforming into auspiciousness. Refined through fire. Changing into money. The grand path. A signal for peace to come.

3.10 Thank Immortal and "Nine Heavens"

We offer wealth like an overflowing lamp, completing the cycle. Presenting this true heart to the holy one.

Offering to the highest true heart with joy, wishing for boundless happiness. May happiness be maintained and bring peace.

Blessing all beings with longevity and blessings, enjoying prosperity and long life to ensure peace.

Protecting and preserving life, great heavenly honored one. Inconceivable great virtues.

Taking refuge in the ultimate path, honoring the highest truth. Praying for virtuous causes, leaving behind blessings for the faithful.

Warm regards,

Instrumental performance "Nine Heavens"

While the Lingbao Sect band was playing "Nine Heavens", the priests adjusted the time of the repertoire according to the melody and the duration of the ceremony at that time.

The wealth and abundant lights have been readied, and this truth is offered to the Sacred. The Supreme Truth is elevated in joy. May happiness thrive and secure tranquility. Blessing all beings with joyful longevity, enjoying blessings and embracing peace, safeguarding life and well-being, O mighty celestial being, inconceivable and magnificent virtuous deeds.

九重天



Figure 9: Spectrum Example 5 "Nine Heavens"

3.11 stop forum



Figure 10 : Spectrum example 6 "Little Cutscene"

After the performance of "Tiny opening", it is necessary to recite:

Taking Refuge in the Ultimate Path, Embracing the Transcendent Truth,
Praying for Auspicious Causes, Flowing with Good Fortune and Virtuous
Belief. So far, the entire "Lingbao peaceful Taoist Ritual" is over.

4. FUNCTION AND CULTURAL SYMBOLISM OF BLESSING RITUALS

In the work titled "Safeguarding Humanity through the Profound Wisdom of the Lingbao High Sutra," the passage "All supplications for divine intervention are in the upper palace, all practices of refining qi are in

the lower palace, and all dealings with departed souls are in the middle palace" conveys that reciting sutras during the Upper Yuan period serves the purpose of invoking blessings, reciting sutras during the Lower Yuan period is meant for refining Qi, and reciting sutras during the Middle Yuan period is intended to pray for the spirits of the deceased (Ruskin & Rice, 2012). The aesthetic philosophy mirrored in the ritual music of Gexianshan's Lingbao Sect signifies not only a mastery of musical expression but also a deep integration of Taoist beliefs. Within Taoism, music is regarded as a distinct and profound presence, endowed with unique significance. This approach imbues scientific ritual music with a distinctive essence. Through the medium of music, Taoist adherents gain insights into Taoist principles. Different rituals are harmonized with diverse musical compositions, ensuring both the coherence of the ceremony and the optimization of its effects through musical accompaniment. Taoist ritual music encompasses a plethora of elements, including elements drawn from folk traditions. This musical expression takes on various forms, each tailored to resonate with the specific essence of distinct ritual contexts (Granet, 1919). The Lingbao sect upholds the belief that all ailments and catastrophes stem from malevolent spirits. By enlisting the aid of deities, these disasters can be alleviated and surmounted. This perspective led rulers from the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties to place considerable faith in these beliefs. On significant occasions such as weddings, funerals, and natural calamities, they would summon celestial masters to the imperial court. Much of the blessing ritual music of the Lingbao Sect is intended to foster peace and prosperity throughout the nation, distinguished by a highly recognizable national character (Liu, 1996). The Taoist aesthetics embraced by the Lingbao sect intricately intertwines with the musical style of the sect. In the realm of traditional Chinese culture, the works of Zhuangzi and Laozi hold paramount importance in shaping Taoist musical aesthetics. Within Laozi's teachings, a profound comprehension of the "Tao" becomes evident. His emphasis on a naturalistic Tao aligns with his aesthetic approach to music—a pursuit of harmony with nature through musical expression (Lu, 1996). Indeed, this resonance bears a certain similarity to traditional Chinese musical styles. Upon a comprehensive analysis of traditional Chinese music, an inherent connection with nature becomes apparent through the lens of Chinese philosophy. Throughout its evolutionary trajectory, Lingbao Sect scientific ritual music has engaged with and been influenced by diverse elements and cultural modalities. However, at its core, it reveals a reverence for nature, which aligns seamlessly with the

fundamental essence of traditional music. A sense of tranquility permeates, underscoring the enduring principle that music should harmonize with nature and seek ultimate truths (Xu, 2015). The blessing rituals of the Gexianshan Lingbao Sect are intimately intertwined with music. Within the activities conducted by Taoist priests of the Gexianshan Lingbao Sect, music holds an indispensable role in various ceremonies. This interplay fosters a more profound and distinct comprehension of Lingbao Sect music among the Taoist clergy. In the Taoist perspective, the primary function of Lingbao Sect music is to facilitate a deeper realization and understanding of the "Tao," utilizing music as a conduit for achieving harmony between man and divinity. This alignment aims to nurture the practice of Taoism and attain immortality (Liu, 2017). This distinctive perspective has led the Taoist priests of the Ge Xianshan Lingbao Sect to cultivate a unique appreciation for music. The value of music to Taoist priests transcends mere auditory aesthetics; it extends to the purification of the soul and the elevation of the spirit. According to the beliefs of the Gexianshan Lingbao Sect, music enables individuals to truly fathom the essence of the "Tao," fostering a pure-hearted communion with deities and the transmission of benevolent wishes to the divine realm. When one listens to the blessing ritual music of the Lingbao Sect, its distinct musical style possesses the capacity to instill tranquility and offer a novel experience. This, in essence, reflects the Taoist priests of the Lingbao Sect adhering to principles of musical aesthetics. For a comprehensive and profound grasp of Gexianshan Lingbao music, an exploration of its underlying aesthetic philosophy becomes imperative. As a sect within Taoism, the Lingbao Sect maintains a close-knit relationship between the two entities. Despite the divergences evident in the present state of Lingbao sect and broader Taoism, delving into their origins reveals an underlying congruence in their philosophical tenets.

In the article "Aesthetic Considerations in Understanding Chinese Literati Musical Behaviour" published by Edward Ho in Volume 6, 1997 - Issue 1 of the British Journal of Ethnomusicology, it is mentioned that three fundamental aesthetic theories from Chinese culture have been widely applied in the practice and creation of literati music in China. However, as time has passed and due to the dissemination and influence of Western music, the aesthetic preferences in Chinese music have undergone continuous changes. Presently, the number of musicians who adhere to Confucian, Taoist, or Zen philosophical ideas in their music composition has been gradually decreasing. The aesthetic ideology underlying Lingbao Sect music serves as the foundation for its distinct artistic style. This

aesthetic philosophy is substantially shaped by the principles of Taoism, exerting a pronounced influence on the perspectives of Lingbao Taoist priests. The school's nihilistic interpretation of the universe has contributed to the formulation of its unique musical style. Additionally, it accentuates artistic conception within musical aesthetics, aspiring towards a state of emptiness and serenity. As a result, Taoists emphasize musical expression over external form, aligning with their aversion to overly contrived compositions. From this perspective, the aspiration of Taoist priests toward music becomes evident; they envision music as a natural embodiment, disapproving of overly artificial compositions. Their objective is to attain a realm of music characterized by simplicity. In their pursuit of the pinnacle of Taoism, Taoist priests hold music in high regard. With the assistance of music, they seek to transcend distractions and foster a reconnection with their inner selves. Through music's aid, Taoist priests strive to dispel myriad intrusive thoughts and facilitate a harmonious return to their core essence. This underscores the integral role of music in their spiritual journey toward the highest echelons of Taoist practice.

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