

= The Northern Celestial Masters =

The Northern Celestial Masters type of the Way of the Celestial Master ( simplified Chinese : 天师道 ; traditional Chinese : 天師道 ; pinyin : Tiān Shī Dào ) Daoist movement existed in the north of China during the Southern and Northern Dynasties . The Northern Celestial Masters were a continuation of the Way of the Celestial Masters as it had been practiced in Sichuan province by Zhang Lu and his followers . After the community was forced to relocate in 215 CE , a group of Celestial Masters established themselves in Northern China . Kou Qianzhi , from a family who followed the Celestial Master , brought a new version of Celestial Master Daoism to the Northern Wei . The Northern Wei government embraced his form of Daoism and established it as the state religion , thereby creating a new Daoist theocracy that lasted until 450 CE . The arrival of Buddhism had great influence on the Northern Celestial Masters , bringing monasticism and influencing the diet of practitioners . Art produced in areas dominated by the Northern Celestial Masters also began to show Buddhist influence . When the theocracy collapsed , many Daoists fled to Louguan , which quickly became an important religious center . The Northern Celestial Masters survived as a distinct school at Louguan until the late 7th century CE , when they became integrated into the wider Daoist movement .

= = History = =

= = = Northern Wei ( 424 @-@ 450 ) = = =

Kou Qianzhi was a member of Celestial Master family that came from an area near Chang 'an . Inspired by the burgeoning Daoist movement in Southern China , Kou retreated to Mount Song in Henan to receive inspiration . On the mountain , as described by the text The History of the Wei Dynasty , he was visited twice by Laozi . In his first visit in 415 , Laozi revealed to Kou a text known as the Laojun Yinsong Jiejing ( New Code ) . This text contained precepts designed for a new religious community . In 423 , a messenger of Laozi came and offered Kou a new text called the Lutu Zhenjing ( Perfect Scripture of Registers and Charts ) , which is now lost , and appointed him as the new Celestial Master .

In 424 , Kou took these texts with him to the Wei court . There , he was welcomed by Emperor Taiwu and garnered the support of Cui Hao , the prime minister . Even though Cui Hao was a Confucianist , he greatly admired Kou and was immediately drawn to him . Cui also appreciated Kou 's mathematical skills and hoped that he might help him improve his own longevity techniques . They also shared a dream of a ' purified society , ' a land where peace and justice prevailed . Kou 's ' New Code ' was promulgated throughout the realm , and a large altar was built near the capital where 120 Daoist practitioners performed rites and prayers daily . Cui gained a great deal of power in the court , and in 444 began to purge the Buddhist clergy . This led to a major persecution against Buddhists in 446 . In 448 , Kou Qianzhi was ' released ' from his body , and Cui lost his greatest supporter at the court . Shortly after Kou 's death , Cui had a national history of Wei dynasty containing unflattering portraits of its rulers carved in stone . This so enraged the emperor , that he had Cui executed in 450 . After Cui 's execution , the Daoist community was forced to flee , with many of them settling at the Daoist center of Louguan .

= = = Louguan ( 450 @-@ 688 ) = = =

By the late 470s , Daoists fleeing from the Northern Wei court had transformed Louguan into an important religious center . According to legend , Louguan used to be the home of Yin Xi , the first recipient of the Dao de jing . At this time , the center 's buildings were greatly expanded , and many Daoist scriptures were collected , including materials from the Lingbao and Shangqing schools . During the 7th century , the school had a prominent role in a series of debates that examined whether Buddhism or Daoism would be better suited to bring stability to the realm . The first debate surrounded Fuyi , a scholar and Daoist who proposed that Buddhism be abolished in China .

Naturally , the Buddhists were not happy with his suggestions and countered his arguments in several treatises . The second debate concerned Lu Zhongqing , a friend of Fu Yi , who wrote about Buddhism 's inferiority to Daoism . The Tang emperors were in support of the Daoists , and in 637 issued an edict that secured the precedence of Daoism over Buddhism . This edict remained in place until 674 , when Empress Wu Zetian came to power . At the same time , Louguan also served as a refuge for Daoists fleeing the persecution of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty to the south . The final Northern Celestial Master , Yin Wencao arrived at Louguan in 636 and later achieved the favor of the Gaozong Emperor . After Yin 's death in 688 , Louguan remained an important place of Daoist learning , but ceased to be considered part of a distinct school .

= = Texts = =

The most important text from the Northern Wei period of the Northern Celestial Masters is the Laojun Yinsong Jiejing ( New Code ) . This text was revealed to Kou Qianzhi in 415 , and is now mostly lost apart from a few fragments . The surviving text contains thirty @-@ six precepts that outline rules which a Daoist had to abide by . The behavioral rules outlined proper public conduct and what to do in case of sickness . There were also guidelines describing how banquets were to be set up , as well ritual instructions concerning funeral rites , immortality practice and petitions .

One of the most important text 's from the school 's Louguan period is called the Xishengjing ( The Scripture of Western Ascension ) . This text describes Laozi 's emigration to India and the transmission of the Daode Jing to Yin Xi . However , the text is not really a narrative , but uses the stories as a framework to describe how an adept should live his life . The text describes how an adept can make use of the Dao that is inherent in the world , outlines meditation techniques , and discusses the results of living a sagely life and what happens after death .

= = Beliefs = =

The Northern Celestial Master variety of Daoism was both similar and different from Zhang Lu 's earlier form . Unlike prior incarnations of the Celestial Masters , which supported sexual practices as a means of achieving immortality , Kou 's text urged that the sexual arts be purged from the religion . In addition , he also states that religion must be purged of the imposition of religious taxes on the faithful and the inheritance of religious titles . In the Northern Celestial Masters , Laozi became closely linked with the Buddha , who was claimed to be a student of Laozi . There were also very specific dietary requirements that had to be followed , as well as other rules , many of which were influenced by Buddhism . The Northern Celestial Masters were also the first Daoists to practice a form of monasticism , another idea that came from Buddhism . Kou also condemned messianic movements and called for texts such as the Daodejing to be copied and recited . Those people who were good in life would gain immortality in a new age , whereas those who were bad would be reborn as insects or animals .

Some similarities between earlier Celestial Master Daoism include the role of Laozi . Laozi was viewed as the personification of the Dao , who existed for eternity and created the world . He was believed to be the creator of the universe and came to earth intermittently to bring forth sacred scriptures , including the Daode Jing and Xisheng Jing . Moreover , Laozi continued to appear periodically and bring forth new scriptures to both Kou Qianzhi and adherents at Louguan , surrounded by a celestial entourage and announced by a celestial envoy . Laozi was also extremely closely linked with the Buddha , and in certain sources , even became the Buddha or announced Yinxi as the Buddha .

= = Practices = =

The Northern Celestial Masters followed certain regular , communal rites . One of these communal rites involved formal banquets . These feasts could last as long as seven days . In order to purify themselves for feasts , members had to abstain from eating meat , garlic , green onions , ginger ,

leeks and onions . A banquet consisted of three courses ? wine , rice and a vegetarian meal . Ritual activity during feasts and other activities usually involved a series of bows and prostrations as well as the burning of incense . Banquets were also held when someone died . During these banquets , attendees would perform rituals aimed at remitting the sins of the deceased .

While monasticism had existed in Chinese Buddhism , the Northern Celestial Masters were one of the first Daoist groups to practice it . Kou lived a monastic lifestyle on Songshan , known today for being the location of the Shaolin Monastery . Monasticism developed further during the Louguan phase of the Northern Celestial Masters due to this influence of Buddhism . During this period , a clear distinction developed between lay and monastic followers in Daoism . The ordination , precepts and way in which monks sought salvation were all influenced by Buddhism .

= = Art = =

Many art objects were produced in Northern China during the time of the Northern Celestial Masters . These objects were closely modeled on Buddhist designs . The image of the god ( usually Laozi ) , would be carved on the front side of a stone stele , with inscriptions on the back or side of the carving . The inscriptions were usually prayers to the dead , a wish for the happiness of family members or wishes for political peace . The iconography and contents of the inscriptions show that a close relationship between Daoism and Buddhism existed in the Northern Wei state . This relationship is especially evident in some four @-@ sided stelae that had carvings of both Laozi on two sides and the Buddha on the other two .

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