

Writing Miracles and Denominational Establishment: On the Belief Narratives of Quanzhen Daoism



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Abstract

This article focuses on the image of the ancestor of Quanzhen Daoism from a narrative perspective and also evaluates the influence of this image on the development of Quanzhen Daoism in terms of belief, genealogy, and the compilation of sacred history. Quanzhen Daoism has a rich tradition of narrating and writing its history. In fact, narrating history is actually a form of constructing history. From the recounting of events such as the birth of the founder of the religion, Wang Chongyang (王重陽, 1112–1170), his conversion to Daoism, his practice and preaching, and his ‘ascent to immortality’ in Quanzhen historical hagiographies, readers can observe the recording of miracles as a narrative feature. The narratives of religious texts differ from ordinary historical narratives in that the former maintain the core concern of simultaneously promoting belief in miracles and strengthening the religious lineage of the respective tradition. Therefore, exploring the relationship between the narrative of the image of the ancestor and the development of the Quanzhen Sect, along with the establishment of beliefs, is the starting point of this article.

Keywords: Narratives; Quanzhen Daoism; Wang Chongyang; Miracles; Sect Development

Introduction

In the middle of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234), Wang Chongyang founded a new Daoist sect that differed from traditional Daoism, namely Quanzhen Daoism. The study of Quanzhen Daoism is a hotspot in contemporary Daoist scholarship and one of the focal points of international Sinology. Up to now, studies on early Quanzhen Daoism figures such as Wang Chongyang and the ‘Seven Realized Ones’ (七真, *Qizhen*) have mostly been approached from the following paths: history of thought; history of sects; and the bibliographic method. The following sections provide a concise review of the existing research from these three perspectives.

Writings on the history of thought as a research method focus mainly on the theoretical basis of Quanzhen Dao’s cultivation of immortality, including the ideological origin of such cultivation methods as life and soul cultivation, and explain the characteristics of the unity of the three religions of Quanzhen Daoism in comparison with those of Confucianism and Buddhism. This section includes works such as “Early Quanzhen Daoism Philosophy Thought Outline” coauthored by Ding Yuanming, Bai Ruxiang, and Li Yancang (Ding et al., 2011), *Early Quanzhen Daoism Thought Exploration* by Li Yancang (Li 2014), “Wang Chongyang’s Mindfulness Thought Outline” by Bai Ruxiang (Bai 2007, 55–58), *Jin Yuan Quanzhen Daoism Inner Alchemy Mindfulness* by Zhang Guangbao (Zhang 1995), *The History of Chinese Daoism Thought* edited by Qing Xitai (Qing 2009, 177–231), and Sun Yiping’s dissertation titled “On Quanzhen Dao’s Borrowing and Absorbing of Buddhism.” (Sun 2011, 37–67)

Writings that take the history of the sect as a clue are mainly concerned with the founding and development of Quanzhen Daoism and its interaction with local society, culture, and regime. In this category, Chen Yuan’s Examination of the New Daoism in Hebei at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty (Chen 1989), Zhao Weidong’s Historical Essay on Quanzhen Daoism in the Jin and Yuan Dynasties (Zhao 2010), Zhang Guangbao’s work on the Founding and Historical Inheritance of Quanzhen Daoism (Zhang Guangbao 2015), Volume III of the History of Daoism in China, edited by Qing Xitai (Qing 1988–1995, 30–91), and other such texts can be used as reference materials.

Bibliography as the main method of work can be referred to in Chen Yuan’s Taoist gold and stone (Chen 1988), Wang Zongyu’s Jin-Yuan Quanzhen religious stone carvings of a new compilation (Wang 2005), Wu Yakui’s Jiangnan Taoist monumental data collection (Wu 2007), Zhao Weidong and Chen Fayong’s Jin-Yuan Quanzhen Taoist monuments and inscriptions collection (Zhao and Chen 2020), etc.

Monographs on early Quanzhen figures, this category of works focuses on the life narratives of the early Quanzhen figures, the interpretation of the ideology of indoctrination, and the collection of their literature and historical materials. Japanese scholar Hachiya Kunio wrote *Research on Daoism During the Jin Dynasty: Wang*

Chongyang and Ma Danyang (Hachiya Kunio 2007) and *Research on Daoism During the Jin and Yuan Dynasties: The Seven Realized Ones* (Hachiya Kunio 2014). Chinese scholars have also produced many results in their studies of early Quanzhen figures, and the Qilu Shushe (齊魯書社) has released a series of Quanzhen Xuean (The Case of Quanzhen Studies), such as *Wang Chongyang Xuean* by Guo Wu (Guo 2016), *Ma Danyang Xuean* by Lu Guolong (Lu 2010), and *Tan Duduan Xuean* by Zhao Weidong (Zhao 2010b).

However, there are not many studies that start with a narrative analysis of the history of beliefs and the formation of the image of the ancestors. It is not difficult to find that the narratives of the Quanzhen historical biographies of the early figures, such as Wang Chongyang, who entered into Daoist practice and even founded the sect, are of great significance to the faith identity and sect construction of Quanzhen Daoism. Considering these biographies, the following questions can be explored: How was Wang Chongyang's image as the master established? What are the characteristics of the writing of the ancestor image? And what are the implications of such a narrative for the development of the sect? In fact, the portrayal of the ancestor as an individual practitioner is closely related to the history of the sect's founding. In light of this, this article attempts to explore the narrative characteristics of Quanzhen's ancestor image by analyzing the historical materials of Wang Chongyang and to examine how the ancestor image important to Quanzhen's beliefs was constructed and its influence on the development of the sect in terms of the genealogy of beliefs and the codification of sacred history.

In the Song Dynasty, Wu Zhen (吳縝) in the *New Tangsbu Corrections* (新唐書糾謬, *Xintangsbu jiumiu*) mentioned the creation of historical biographies:

There are three key elements to writing a history book: first is factual accuracy; second is the use of praise or condemnation; and third is the literary style. Factual accuracy means being faithful to historical facts. Using praise or blame based on these facts constitutes the second element. The third and final element requires the use of literary style, which results in a history book.¹ (Wu 1966, 4)

The creation of a historical biography requires three elements: facts, the author's evaluative approach, and literary style. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for any historical biography to consist solely of objective records; the author's biographical reorganization and interpretation must be included in the formation of the biography. The same is true for Daoism's and other religions' narrative texts, which are distinguished by their focus on a transcendental goal. The historical narratives about religious figures, particularly ancestor types, also reflect the concept of faith and the biographer's attitude towards the subject, whether admiration, esteem, and so on. Therefore, the historical biography of religion should be an explanatory text that combines religion, history, and literature. This narrative character also determines various methods such as religion, history, and narratology should be used to break

through a single paradigm in the study of religious history and biographies. This is also where this article seeks to innovate via methodology.

Miraculousness: Narrative Characteristics of the Image of the Ancestor of Quanzhen Daoism

In *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China*, American scholar Robert Ford Campany examines immortal biographical narratives. Using the example of Han (漢) and Wei (魏) immortals, he demonstrates that inscriptions and texts are typical works of collective public memory. They preserve vital memories of immortal, true figures and events in cultural transmission while also shaping these memories in a compelling manner (Campany 2009, 223). When examining the literature on the predecessors of Quanzhen Daoism, the impact of textual construction on collective memory can be observed, as proposed by Campany. However, the distinguishing characteristic of Quanzhen's ancestral accounts compared to those of the Han and Wei Immortals is that Quanzhen Daoism is an organization, and it possesses a self-aware drive to establish its own history, resulting in a substantial tradition of writing the history of the organization in addition to the narratives outside the organization.

Zhang Guangbao believes that one of the reasons why Quanzhen Daoism can reopen the Daoist system from the Jin Dynasty and rise to prominence after nearly a thousand years of uninterrupted inheritance is that it has a strong tradition of religious history writing (Zhang 2018). During the Jin and Yuan periods, Quanzhen religious history writing experienced its most prosperous era. Within this time, eight major religious historians emerged from the Quanzhen Sect. In order of birth, they were Li Ding (李鼎, 1186?–1298?), Qin Zhi'an (秦志安 1187–1244), Li Zhiquan (李志全, 1191–1261), Ji Zhizhen (姬志真, 1192–1267), Shi Zhijing (史志經, 1202–1275), Li Daoqian (李道謙, 1219–1296), Zhao Daoyi (趙道一), and Zhu Xiangxian (朱象先). (Zhang 2018, 24) In terms of historical documents, particularly famous are *the Records of the Correct Lineage of the Golden Lotus* (金蓮正宗記, *Jinlian Zhengzong ji*) by Qin Zhi'an (秦志安), the *Records of the Origin of Immortals in Ganshui* (甘水仙源錄, *Ganshui xianyuan lu*), and the *Annals of the Seven Realized Ones* (七真人譜, *Qizhen nianpu*) by Li Daoqian (李道謙). The following briefly describes the background of these hagiographies:

1. The name of the book *Records of the Correct Lineage of the Golden Lotus* originates from the story of “Seven Golden Lotus Bearing Sons (七朵金蓮結子),” which refers to the Seven Realized Ones adopted by Wang Chongyang. Thus, the main content of the book is about the story of the founder of the sect, Wang Chongyang, who adopted the disciples, the Seven Realized Ones (Gao 2020, 3–5).

2. The name ‘Gan Shui Xian Yuan Lu’ is taken from the story of Wang Chongyang’s encounter with immortals in Ganhe (甘河) and his drinking of the sacred water (神水, *shenshui*) (Gao 2020, 10–12). Ganhe’s encounter with the immortals is a significant event in Wang Chongyang’s transition to Daoism.

3. The *Annals of the Seven Realized Ones* describes the major events that occurred between the birth of Wang Chongyang in the second year of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty (1112) and the death of Qiu Chuji in the twenty-second year of Genghis Khan (1227), marking the end of the 116-year period during which Wang Chongyang and his disciples, including Qiu Chuji and the other Seven Realized Ones, spread their teachings in the Quanzhen Daoism tradition. (Gao 2020, 9)

These stories are the sources for the history of the Quanzhen Daoist organization, and they constitute the sacred memory of the masters in the hearts of the followers and disciples of Quanzhen Daoism. The authors, Qin Zhian and Li Daoqian, as disciples of Quanzhen Daoism, naturally wrote from the position of honoring the ancestors. From a hermeneutical point of view, this kind of conscious writing of history is actually a conscious construction of the sacred history of Quanzhen Daoism.

The impact of the ancestor’s image on the development and spread of beliefs is apparent in the fact that Quanzhen Daoism boasts a cohort of historians who intentionally write religious history, as well as a wealth of other literature within the faith. The Quanzhen historical biographies depict the ancestor’s image in great detail. These narratives also showcase the great grandmasters’ images and provide real-life examples of the sect’s core concepts, illustrating their strong faith identities and convictions. In the following, taking Wang Chongyang, the actual founder of the Quanzhen sect, as the main object of investigation, the narrative characteristics of his deeds as a grandmaster will be examined, such as his miraculous birth, his conversion to the Dao, his cultivation and preaching, and his “ascension to immortality,” from the historical biographies of the Quanzhen sect.

The reason why Wang Chongyang, the early ancestor of Quanzhen Daoism, was taken as the object of study is that he is representative, authoritative, and exemplary. From a historical development perspective, Quanzhen Daoism is a newly emerged Daoist school in the Song and Yuan dynasties. It has incorporated concepts and classical elements from different traditions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In contrast to Daoist schools of the Middle Ages, such as Celestial Masters Daoism (天師道), Quanzhen Daoism differs in terms of belief concepts and forms of religious organization. In terms of standing, it also emerged as one of the two major sects alongside Zhengyi Daoism (正一道) in later periods. On the other hand, from the point of view of the life of the high Daoists and the formation of divine narratives, Wang Chongyang was the actual founder of Quanzhen Daoism. Although the genealogy of the ancestors within Quanzhen Daoism goes back to Emperor Donghua (東華帝君) and Zhonglv (鐘呂), these figures were farther away in time from the Song and Yuan

dynasties, and Wang Chongyang is the historical figure who started Quanzhen Daoism.

The Miracle of Wang Chongyang's Birth

The *Record of the Immortal Deeds of Grandmaster Chongyang in Zhongnan Mountain* (終南山重陽祖師仙跡記, *Zhongnanshan chongyang zushi xianjiji*) states that Wang Chongyang's mother carried him for 24 months before his birth.² (Li Daoqian 2020a, 168) This unusual length of gestation suggests that Wang Chongyang was unique even as a fetus. The *Tablet of the Ancestor of the Quanzhen Religion of Immortal Chongyang in Zhongnan Mountain*. (終南山神仙重陽真人全真教祖碑, *Zhongnanshan shenxian chongyang zhenren quanzhen jiaozu bei*) explains, The Immortal Mother (仙母, *xianmu*) gestated for twenty-four months and eighteen days, and the presence of twenty-four qi (二十四氣, *ershibi qi*) and the remaining earth qi (土氣, *tuqi*) transformed Wang Chongyang into a true man (真人, *zhenren*).³ (Li Daoqian 2020b, 161–162) Twenty-four months and eighteen days is the recorded duration of the Immortal Mother's pregnancy, and the record here adds eighteen days. This tablet explains that this unusual time is related to the twenty-four qi and the earth qi. The twenty-four months correspond to the twenty-four qi, and the eighteen days correspond to the earth qi. This stele was written by Li Daoqian, a Quanzhen disciple who composed several religious and historical documents during his lifetime. He aimed to add a mystical element to Ancestor Chongyang's birth, suggesting an inherent difference and indicating his attainment of the proper fruits of cultivation. Additionally, his purpose in writing this stele was to emphasize the reverence of future disciples for Ancestor Chongyang.

In addition, Zhao Daoyi of the Yuan Dynasty also recorded in his *Sequel to the Comprehensive Mirror of the Cultivation of the True Immortals of All Ages* (歷世真仙體道通鑒續編, *Lishi zhenxian tidao tingjian xubian*) that the mother experienced a strange dream, became pregnant, and was born on the 22nd day of the 12th month of the second year of the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty (1112). (DZ vol. 5, 414) His mother's strange dream is a supernatural narrative that is not uncommon in history. For instance, the *Records of the Historian* (史記, *Shiji*) document that Liu Bang (劉邦, 256 BC / 247 BC–195 BC)'s mother conceived in a dream where she met a god. (Sima 1982, 341) This supernatural dream might suggest that the fetus has a special origin and that its birth will have an extraordinary impact on the world at that time. Therefore, retelling the extraordinary birth of Grandmaster Wang Chongyang serves as the foundation for his subsequent noteworthy accomplishments and serves as a means of sanctifying the Grandmaster rather than simply providing subjective evaluations.

The Miraculous Event of Conversion and Initiation to Daoism

For practitioners, initiation and conversion are significant life events and symbolic occurrences that signify a believer's entrance into the world of faith. In the narrative of this event, the encounter with Wang Chongyang, the religion's founder, is remarkably miraculous. Wang Chongyang's "miraculous" performance began when he met immortals in Ganhe (甘河), who taught him the "recipe for cultivation of the true spirit", after which he "woke up as if he were drunk". (Qin 2020, 18) The Record of the Immortal Deeds of Grandmaster Chongyang in Zhongnan Mountain records Wang Chongyang's encounter with the immortal at Ganhe as follows:

In the sixth month (己卯, *jimao*) of Zhenglong (正隆, *zhenglong*, 1159), Wang Chongyang suddenly met the immortals at Ganhe. The immortals covertly gave Wang Chongyang the pithy formula (口訣, *koujue*) and allowed him to sip the divine water (神水, *shenshui*) because they believed he could be trained. From then on, Wang Chongyang cut off his ties with the secular world. His behavior was unpredictable, as he pretended to be a madman (for the sake of cultivation). (Li Daoqian 2020a, 169)

Thus, the encounter with the Immortal at Ganhe directly led to Wang Chongyang's transition from his secular identity to the world of believers, from his original identity as a martial artist to his abandonment of all earthly possessions. His wild behavior facilitated his entry into Daoism. From the perspective of the Quanzhen sect, it is apparent that Wang Chongyang, as its founder, made significant sacrifices after embracing Daoism. He abandoned his original official position and even left his family and children, and these extraordinary actions were taken in order to establish the Quanzhen Sect in the future and change the trend of the times. From the moment Wang Chongyang met the immortals at Ganhe and exchanged secret water with them, it was evident that his exceptional cultivation talent made him a potential candidate for selection by the immortals. Additionally, his acts of feigning madness to make Daoist cultivation easier are deserving of admiration and respect by his followers, which in turn foster a sense of belonging and identification with the sect. Obviously, this narrative strongly supports the characterization of Wang Chongyang as the "sect founder".

The Miracles in the Practice and Preaching of Inner Alchemy

In addition to the strong divine narrative of the conversion to Daoism, the practice and preaching of Quanzhen Master also involved many events that deserve to be written about by historians of the religion. The practice of Quanzhen Daoism is dominated by the cultivation of internal alchemy. The process of cultivation and the landscape (內景,

neijing) of inner alchemy (內丹, *neidan*) are important parts of the manifestation of the divinity of the ancestor of Quanzhen Daoism, which is related to the construction of the image of the ancestor and even the sanctity of the system of internal elixir cultivation and the legitimacy of the transmission of the teachings of the Order.

The cultivation of the inner elixir is not only the main way of cultivation but also a way for Quanzhen to realize the “meditative communication”⁴ between masters and disciples. Qiu Chuji, a follower of Wang Chongyang, previously conveyed to his disciple Yin Zhiping (尹志平) details about his personal cultivation experiences in Panxi (磻溪), as described in the *Records of the Northern Journey of the Immortal Qingbe* (清和真人北遊語錄, *qingbe zhenren beiyou yulu*):

I have a strong connection with my ancestor, Wang Chongyang. During my time in Panxi, I abstained from salt, stayed up till midnight, and meticulously checked for errors in trivial matters. Then, one night, I witnessed a vision of a baby on my master’s lap, mere months old. This prompted the realization that my understanding of natural philosophy was still rudimentary. Half a year later, I had a similar encounter, but the baby had already grown to be two years old. I came to the realization that my nature was gradually growing. Subsequently, I noted that I did not harbor any malevolent thoughts. About a year later, I encountered the same child, who was now three or four years old and able to walk and stand alone. After that encounter, I did not see the child again. It then dawned on me that my master had continued to cultivate me until I could depend on myself.⁵

The inner realm of Qiu’s practice in this passage is so rich that it can even change dynamically over time and contains a full content of internal alchemy practice. According to scholar Guo Wu (2011), Qiu’s “baby” represents his own “Dao Nature” (道性) or “Dharma Body” (法身). The “baby” is a symbolic representation of Qiu’s level of cultivation, progressing from “a hundred days” to “three or four years old”, indicating his rise to “self-competence”, where he is able to stand and walk on his own. At this time, Wang Chongyang, who has long since died, was reportedly able to “manifest” himself to Qiu Chuji and educate him, adding to the mystery of the “Dharma Body” of the Quanzhen religion. (Guo 2011, 18–19) In my opinion, “meditative communication” in the inner realm of cultivation is one of the most palpable and religiously rich ways of transmission from master to disciple, and its peculiarity lies in the fact that it requires the support of cultivation power. This inner realm, which can only be felt by the practitioner, undoubtedly strengthens the sense of identity of the disciples of the sect with the grandmaster, the Quanzhen internal alchemy practice system, and the whole religious order. From the point of view of succession, the practitioner’s being “enlightened in the realm” by the deceased ancestor is equivalent to borrowing the power of cultivation from the ancestor, and the ancestor himself has thus become a special source of faith. This belief, based on a specific ancestor, may be called “ancestor belief”.

The Miracles of the Ascension to Immortality

As mentioned above, the Quanzhen historical biographies describe the various auspicious appearances of the ancestor at birth with a certain amount of divine brushstroke. Similarly, death is also an important part of portraying the Quanzhen ancestor as different from ordinary people. The theme of life and death has always been important. For believers, the miraculous aspects of life and death are even more valid for the practice of faith and cultivation. For the believers, the masters' deaths and the visions they leave behind will also teach them about the transcendence of life. At the same time, the sacred image of the ancestor is constantly being formed, and the sacred history of the order is being constructed in the process of writing down these deeds and passing them on to future generations.

The *Tablet of the Ancestor of the Quanzhen Religion of Immortal Chongyang in Zhongnan Mountain* (終南山神仙重陽真人全真教祖碑, *Zhongnanshan shenxian chongyang zhenren quanzhen jiaozu bei*) states that Wang Chongyang predicted his return date (歸期, *guiqi*) and instructed his followers on his passing:

One day, Immortal (Wang Chongyang) said, "The time will come. Tomorrow, I will travel west." He advised his disciples to recite the Prajna Heart Sutra (Xijing, 《心經》), the Tao Te Ching (Daodejing, 《道德經》), the Sutra of Purity (Qingjing, 《清靜經》), and the Sutra of Filial Piety (Xiaojing, 《孝經》), believing that by relying on them they could cultivate their eternal life. (Li Daoqian 2020b, 166)

In the process, Wang Chongyang also demonstrates the miraculous event of coming back from the dead (起死回生, *qisihuisheng*). The details of the incident are recorded in the *Records of the Correct Lineage of the Golden Lotus* (《金蓮正宗記》):

Wang Chongyang said, "You should not grieve after I ascend to heaven." After he finished speaking, he returned to the west. Ma Yu couldn't help but cry with grief. The others advised him: "Don't go against our master's words." Ma Yu said, "I have not yet achieved anything since I entered the Way. What should I do now that my master has forsaken me?" Before Ma Yu could finish, Wang Chongyang suddenly opened his eyes and said, "Why are you so depressed? In the past, I met the Immortals in the GanHe and got these five secret words (五篇秘語, *wupian miyu*), all of which are bestowed on you today." Ma Yu worshipped them and knelt down to accept them. Wang Chongyang then said to Tan Chudian, "The methods of your immortal cultivation are all in Ma Yu's hands." (Qin 2020, 21)

The "Five Secret Words" (五篇秘語, *wupian miyu*) are given sanctified status by this narrative technique, which also successfully reflects the two events of Wang Chongyang's conversion to Daoism and his death, or so-called "ascent to immortality".

In other words, among the cultivation and refining secrets received from the early masters of the Quanzhen sect are the “Five Secret Words,” which have been passed down from generation to generation. Thus, just as with the Heart Seal Dharma lineage of the Buddhist Zen Sect, which is connected to the formation of the key concerns of the sect’s legacy, the holy status of the “Five Secret Words” in the sect becomes self-evident. This shows that the divine narrative technique not only plays an important role in shaping the image of the master but also has profound significance for the establishment and transmission of the religion.

In fact, there are many places in Quanzhen’s hagiographies describing the miraculous deeds of the ancestor Wang Chongyang, far more than those listed above. What is clear is that writing about the miraculous deeds of ancestors is a commonality of Quanzhen’s historical hagiographies as well as a narrative strategy for constructing the sect’s sacred history.

Establishing the Order: The Role of the Master's Image in Sect Development and Faith Identity

As seen through the combination of documents such as inscriptions, comprehensive mirror (通鑒, *tongjian*), and literature, the depiction of the ancestor Wang Chongyang in the Quanzhen historical tradition is characterized by a supernatural narrative. How can the relationship between the supernatural narrative and the development of the sect best be understood? This is an important level of consideration in this article. Here, the concept of “dharma lineage” (法緣宗族, *fayuanzongzu*) proposed by scholar Zhang Xuesong (2015) can be drawn upon to discuss the impact of the image of the ancestor on the genealogy and religious identity of Quanzhen Daoism.

Zhang Xuesong suggests in *The Dharma Lineage of Chinese Buddhism: An Analysis of Chinese Religious Organizational Patterns* that traditional Chinese religions have the concept of “dharma lineage” in addition to blood lineage and geographic lineage. (Zhang Xuesong 2015) Because of the organizational structure of religion, joining a sect means joining a “clan organization.” For instance, monks achieve the rank of monk by shaving their heads, taking vows, and preaching the dharma (attaining enlightenment). This entails leaving their own blood family and becoming a part of a dharma-preaching family (sect) and establishing their association with the “dharma lineage”, which results in numerous socio-economic and sectarian organizational functions. The construction of this “dharma lineage” relationship mainly comes in two ways: one is the worship of the ancestors of the past generations, and the other is the shaving of the head and the establishment of the Dharma transmission sect’s generation poem in order to form a genealogy. (Zhang Xuesong 2015, 141) From the beginning, Quanzhen Daoism had an impulse to create a religion; as early as the preaching in Shandong, Wang Chongyang founded the “three states and five associations (三州五會, *sanzhouwuhui*)”. By the time Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji, and others took charge of the religion,

it was expanding the size of its own sect, forming a sect with a large number of followers. Until the Yuan Dynasty, Quanzhen Daoism formed its own network of palaces and temples throughout the country. During the middle and late Ming Dynasties, Quanzhen Daoism, which was established as a sect, further manifested its nature, leading to an active period that was closely tied to the rise of clans in various parts of China's history during that time. (Zhang Xuesong 2013, 125–136) From the history of the development of Quanzhen Daoism, it is evident that the “dharma lineage” concept applies to Quanzhen Daoism as well.

From the perspective of the dharma lineage, the ancestor, a figure from the early teachings, is considered the founder of the clan and the origin of its genealogy. Therefore, the writing and narrative of the history of the dharma lineage are actually closely related to the history, present, and even future of the entire dharma lineage. This is also a fundamental starting point for this article to investigate the shaping of the master's image from a narratological perspective.

According to Zhang Xuesong, the ability of a religion to attract adherents often depends on its sacred presence, which differs from that of the average secular society. Religious organizations often require sanctification processes too. In traditional religions, the divine presence is often found in the ancestor of the religion or in the first or second generation of disciples. Subsequently, a holy tradition is necessary to preserve this “sacredness”. (Zhang Xuesong 2015, 68) In Quanzhen Daoism, the ancestor Wang Chongyang is such a “divine being”. The Quanzhen religion's “holy biography” of the ancestor, which recounts the ancestor's life through miraculous events, is a way of constructing and maintaining the “divine presence”. For the dissemination of the religious organization as a whole, and especially for Quanzhen Daoism as a new religion at the time of the Jin and Yuan dynasties, it is more important to rely on the personal charisma of the founder or the ancestor to increase the attractiveness of the religious group. The writing of the “divine” narratives was a means of demonstrating the charisma of the ancestor. Such charisma is manifested in many ways, including the birth of the ancestor, his conversion to the Way, the inner realm of cultivation, the process of preaching, and his death. Not only is the ancestor himself exceptionally gifted, but the teachings he gives and passes on are all of great “origin”. During the cultivation process, the portrayal of the ancestor's image is not complete without the narration of miraculous inner experiences, the ancestor's performance, and transformative actions leading up to the “ascension to immortality”. In other words, constructing the genealogy of the dharma system and developing supernatural narratives of the ancestors around Quanzhen's beliefs and technical practices is the process of sacralizing one's own religious order.

What distinguishes the narratives of religious texts such as Quanzhen historical biographies from ordinary historical narratives is the way in which they are divinely crafted to create qualitative differences from everyday experience and general historical events while maintaining a central concern with faith, that is, presenting, arguing for,

and defending it. Thus, it is imperative that attention is paid to the complex relationship between the portrayal of the ancestors and the construction and dissemination of faith.

Examining the religious characteristics of Quanzhen Daoism, a tendency towards sectarianism can be observed. From the outset of the formation of the religion, Wang Chongyang promoted monkhood through his *Fifteen Theses on the Establishment of the Religion* (立教十五論, *lijiao shiwu lun*), which stated that “anyone seeking to become a monk must firstly join a nunnery”. (DZ vol. 32, 153) He modeled this system on the practices of Zen jungle temples and monasteries, creating a system where the Taoist monks in this school left their homes, journeyed to the clouds (雲遊, *yunyou*), and resided in monasteries. (Qing and Zhan 2019, 89–90) This tendency toward sectarianization was present at the time of Quanzhen’s founding, and with the support of the Yuan government, Quanzhen Daoism was able to expand rapidly. As the sect expanded, the Ancestor’s supernatural narratives shaped the image of the Ancestor’s magnificence and also triggered the worship of the Ancestor’s beliefs among the followers, which served to unite people’s hearts and minds. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the relationship between sect and state changed, and the support for Taoist sects such as Quanzhen Daoism from the regime became weaker and weaker. The time changed, but in terms of the Order, the worship of the ancestors recognized in this external environmental turbulence cannot be changed. From the point of view of the organization’s management, the need to rely on the ancestor’s beliefs for the organization to establish a theological foundation makes Quanzhen’s “dharma lineage” in the ancestor play a certain spiritual leader or link-like role.

Furthermore, while the organizational model of the “dharma lineage” is universal, in the case of Quanzhen Daoism, there is a certain specificity, namely, the secretive transmission and individuality of the inner alchemy practices. In other words, the truth of Daoism is transmitted in a unique and secretive way between masters and disciples who have a covenant. (Cheng 2017, 16) The cultivation system of Quanzhen Daoism is centered on internal alchemy. In the process of cultivation, there is the object of transmitting and receiving the dharma. Given the technical and practical nature of inner alchemy, the relationship between disciple and grandmaster is not only intergenerational in terms of organizational management but also involves covert technical practice inheritance. Masters can teach their disciples directly during their lifetime, and even after they have “ascended to immortality”, they can also reveal to their disciples the inner realm of their cultivation in a manifested way. The disciple’s inner alchemy level is enhanced through “meditative communication” between master and disciple. This unique method of secret transmission enables Quanzhen disciples to establish an intuitive and personal connection with the Master. Consequently, this process reinforces their faith in the master while passing down the dharma lineage through generations. In essence, the acknowledgement and acceptance of the Master are crucial for the order’s organization, management, and transmission of the dharma lineage.

To summarize, the legends of the ancestors serve as tangible examples of faithful identity and conceptual certainty, maintaining the cohesion of the “Dharma lineage”. From a genealogical perspective, the divine narratives of the ancestors are fundamentally valuable in establishing a sacred history within the sect and legitimizing the “dharma lineage”. The ancestors are the foundation of the sect’s history and sacredness. Subsequently, the establishment and growth of the sect are the carriers and extensions of the ancestral sanctity. Miracles serve as an underlying characteristic in the Quanzhen historical recounting, with faith identity as the ultimate outcome.

Conclusion

The depiction of Wang Chongyang in Quanzhen’s historical biographies focuses on significant events throughout his life, including his birth, conversion to Daoism, cultivation, teaching, and death. These biographies present a consistent narrative style, featuring divine elements. As a result, many of Quanzhen’s biographies showcase Wang Chongyang’s miraculous abilities, which set him apart from ordinary individuals. In fact, writing and recording the births and deaths of early religious figures, their conversion experiences, the process of cultivation, and even the legends of the supernatural is a way of establishing and transmitting the concepts of religious beliefs. The establishment, preaching, and genealogical development of Quanzhen Daoism heavily relied on the faith narrative of its ancestor figure.

The article’s key research question concerns the connection between the sacred narratives of Quanzhen’s ancestor figures, the establishment of the order’s beliefs, and the growth of the sect. Writing about the miracles of the ancestors is a technique of historical narrative. As the ancestor serves as the founder of the religion and the bedrock of the faith of its community, the narrative of the ancestor is intertwined with the identity and development of the religious community as a whole. It is hoped that this article’s examination of the narratives of Quanzhen’s master can offer novel perspectives for the analysis of early Quanzhen’s figures and their association with the sect’s identity, with the ultimate goal of enabling the academic community to achieve a greater depth of understanding.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

¹夫為史之要有三：一曰事實，二曰褒貶，三曰文采。有是事而如是書，斯謂事實。因事實而寓懲勸，斯謂褒貶。事實、褒貶既得矣，必資文采以行之，夫然後成史。

² 母孕二十四月而生。

³ 仙母孕二十四月又十八日，按二十四氣余土氣而成真人也。

⁴ The term "meditative communication" refers to a process within the inner landscape of inner alchemy practice in which masters and disciples can communicate with each other in a specific way. However, this process requires the practitioner to possess a certain level of proficiency. Many references to these extraordinary events can be found in the Quanzhen historical biographies.

⁵ 俺惟與祖師結緣素深。昔在礪溪日，至於不令食鹽，未至夜半不令睡，比細事亦蒙一點檢。忽一夕，境中見祖師膝上坐一嬰兒，約百日許。覺則有悟於心，知吾之道性尚淺也。半年，複見如前境，其兒已及二歲許。覺則悟吾道性漸長。在後，自覺無惡念。一年，又如前境，其兒三四歲許，自能行立。後不復見。乃知提挈直至自有所立而後已。(DZ vol. 33, 174)

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