

# Perception of Immortals in Popular and Elite Daoism: The Case of Lü Dongbin

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## *Abstract*

This article aims to describe the differences in perception and understanding of Daoist immortals in folk religion and by the elites on the example of Lü Dongbin. Such sources as short stories *biji* 筆記 and biographies composed within the framework of Daoist church show how during the 9<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries the image of the immortal trouble-maker, who's cult was popular among lower social strata and who even was ordered to be arrested, first was noticed and described by the literate class and then reinterpreted by the monks of the Quanzhen School 全真 (Perfect Realization) to become one of the finest examples of righteousness.

*Keywords:* Daoism, popular religion, Lü Dongbin

## *Introduction*

Lü Dongbin (呂洞賓) is a legendary Daoist immortal whose birth is identified, with some variants, as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the middle of the Tang dynasty (唐, 618–907). His cult emerged and started spreading during the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (五代十國, 907–960) which was the time of political disunity and upheaval, when states quickly succeeded each other against a background of constant warfare. Such unstable times are known to give birth to religious movements, as uncertainty and unsafety give rise to imagination and religion takes place helping to cope with the chaos of the outer world. Therefore, Lü Dongbin started to be worshipped in local cults, most probably by different types of tradesmen like ink-sellers and shop owners, and artisans.

At the same time, the Song (宋, 960–1127) dynasty presented conditions favorable for development of the cult. With the economic rise that followed the foundation of the dynasty, trade flourished and the cult started spreading along with trade routes. On the other hand, it also was the time of rise in popularity of Daoism. The ruling dynasty tried to legitimize itself through numerous myths about appearance of auspicious signs and support from different deities, during the reign of Zhenzong (真宗, 997–1022) the ruling family found an immortal in the Daoist pantheon, that had the same family name, and declared him to be their ancestor (Qing 2006: 159–61), another legend greatly supported was of famous daoist Chen

Tuan (陳搏, 871–989) to predict the foundation of the dynasty<sup>1</sup>. Such favoring of Daoism by the rulers raised interest in the religion including popular cults that had always been hard to separate from Daoism as the boundary between them is usually blurry. As a result, a large number of records that describe different legends of the cult sites were made by the literate class, and because of that the fame of Lü Dongbin started to spread even further.

Those records are the sources that can help in reconstructing the earliest beliefs connected with the immortal and how he was understood by the followers of the popular cult. Merchants and artisans who constituted the largest but one of the most discriminated-against social classes (Benn 2002: 36) created a cult of an immortal who could grant their wishes for longevity and prosperity. Starting from the Southern Song stories began to develop giving more detail on life of the immortal and his love for wine, women and sometimes quite extravagant behavior. Despite the desperate attempts of literati to edit those stories and exclude all the ‘inappropriate’ content, many such stories still survive (Ma Xiaohong 1988: 38).

When the cult gained popularity, it was noticed not only by those who made records about it, but also by the Daoist clergy, and great attention was paid to it by the members of a new school founded in 1167, the Perfect Realization School (*Quanzhen*, 全真). They were willing to incorporate the popular cult, but only on terms that fit their own teaching which adopted a lot of Buddhist ideas and had a lot of differences with popular religion on the understanding of acceptable behavior and what it took to be an immortal. As a result, Lü had also become an advocate of constant self-containment, selfless deeds and occult practices.

Thus, Lü Dongbin became somewhat of an empty symbol with a number of permanent attributes that were filled with different meanings and expectations by masses and religious elite. And even nowadays those two understandings still coexist and have not become homogeneous.

### *Lü Dongbin in the Song dynasty records*

One of the important factors that actually makes it possible to speak of his vulgar origin is the descriptions of his vocation in early short stories *biji* (筆記). Most frequently the immortal was connected to artisans and tradesmen: Lü Dongbin polished mirrors, repaired shoes, sold medicine and crafted incense (Baldrian Hussein 1986: 146) possessing an appearance that was neither noble nor goodly. *Yijian zhi* (夷堅志, The Record of the Listener and Recorder) presents us a story where he appears as a sickly beggar in rags.

It seems that he was most strongly connected with ink selling, although most descriptions of Lü as an ink-seller appear in biographies, not in *biji*. Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Later, in the standard history of the Song dynasty *Songshi* (宋史), Lü Dongbin appears in a biography of Chen Tuan as a fellow daoist.

starting from the Southern Song (1127–1279), biographies consistently point out that during his wanderings Lü Dongbin liked the most to appear at market places disguised as an ink-seller (Baldrian Hussein 1986: 145).

Lü Dongbin was also often connected to wine selling, but in this case it was not because of his profession, but as a result of the immortal's affliction for alcohol. Great variety of the Song *biji* describe stories of Lü drinking excessively or, avoiding any particular details, mention his love for wine. The immortal would eventually leave a calligraphic inscription, sometimes with a verse, like in *Qingyi lu* (清異錄, The Record of the Pure and the Anomalous) and *Huixian lu* (回仙錄, The Record of the Immortal Hui). The Song geographical monograph *Qi cheng* (齊乘) contains information on a shrine built on a place where Lü Dongbin once visited a wine shop and after having a drink left an inscription on a wall.

Apart from vocations of the immortal, there is one more thing in early sources that makes him closer to the common people, that is him being an outsider in bureaucratic systems both in the worldly and heavenly realms. Many of the sources from early Song simply do not mention Lü's background, thus, fully corresponding to the tradition of the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries hagiographies that paid little attention to social status of saints and therefore usually omitted such details (Poo 1995: 177). But those *biji* which do speak of his background, especially the early ones, describe Lü Dongbin as a literati who had never passed the imperial exams which were an important step in one's civil career. Those include *Yueyang fengtu ji* (岳陽風土記, The Record of Local Customs in Yueyang) and *Nenggai zhai manlu* (能改齋漫錄, The Vast Record of the Changeable Studio). At the same time he was started to be connected with the family of the Tang dynasty bureaucrat Lü Wei (呂渭).

However, there is no evidence that there was such a connection: standard histories of Tang, both *Jiu Tangshu* (舊唐書, The Old Book of Tang) and *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書, The New Book of Tang), have record of Lü Wei and some of his descendants, but not Lü Dongbin. The latter appears only in the Song dynasty history which was compiled during the Yuan dynasty (元, 1271–1368), that was at the period when Lü had already become a popular saint.

Heavenly status of Lü Dongbin was not very high either. According to one of the popular and most basic classification systems of immortals introduced by Ge Hong (葛洪) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there were three major types: the heavenly (*tianxian*, 天仙) who lived amongst the deities, the earthly (*dixian*, 地仙) who lived in mountains, and those who achieved immortality through 'abandoning their corpse' (*shijiexian*, 屍解仙). The highest standing had the heavenly immortals, as not only they were to live in the celestial world, but also were appointed to official posts in the heavenly bureaucratic system, which to a certain extent copied the worldly one. As a result, they had more power over people's lives, just like the bureaucrats in our world.

Lü Dongbin belonged to the second type, the earthly immortals. They did not have much of official power to control different aspects of people's lives: having

obtained wisdom and manifold, often magical, abilities in the course of self-perfection, they preferred to lead a secluded life in the worldly realm, in places unreachable for ordinary people, like grotto heavens (*dongtian*, 洞天). Thus, according to the early sources, he was not a representative of the official power in either of the worlds.

Apart from that, he spent a lot of time amongst the mortals, seemingly much more than it is usually supposed for an earthly immortal, 'living a reclusive life in mountains': as in *Yang Wengong tanyuan* (楊文公談苑, Garden of Yang Wengong Discourse) notes, 'Lü Dongbin often journeyed throughout the world and was seen by numerous individuals'. The Northern Song *biji* contain diverse stories on different people meeting the immortal. Sometimes he visited outstanding or in some way famous persons: *Yang Wengong tanyuan* goes on narrating a story of Lü Dongbin visiting two ministers of the Northern Song.

'One day Lü went to see Ding Wei (966–1037?) who was then serving as a vice-prefect (*tongpan*) of Raozhou [in Jiangxi]. Lü told Wei: 'Sir, you resemble Li Deyu (787–849)<sup>2</sup>. Someday your wealth and honor will also equal his.'

'When Zhang Ji (933–996) resided at home, a hermit (*yinshi*) suddenly appeared outside and asked to be let in. His name was Dongbin. Ji hurried out to see him [...] Dongbin took a piece of paper and a brush, and thereupon composed a *ci* poem in heptameter with four rhyming lines, doing so in the *bafen* calligraphic style [of the Han dynasty]. He left his poem with Ji, [who saw] that it predicted he [Ji] would serve the throne.' (Katz 1999: 56)

Those encounters were not always very pleasant as Lü sometimes met those who had ill fame. *Houshan tancong* (後山談叢, The Collected Conversations from Houshan) has a record on Lü Dongbin meeting Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021–1086), a Song statesman and the author of controversial reforms opposed by many conservative intellectuals of that time. The latter asked for immortal's instruction, but Lü refused on the ground of Wang's karmic burden being too heavy. And, although, Wang Anshi showed determination to improve, the immortal left (*Houshan tancong*: 1603).

Nothing stopped Lü Dongbin from mocking even Daoist priests on somehow unexpected grounds. Lin Linsu (林靈素, 1075–1119) was a famous Song daoist, who actively promulgated the religion and after proclaiming the emperor Huizong (徽宗, 1100–1126) to be a son of the Jade emperor, one of the supreme gods, had such a great influence on Huizong that he started reforming the Daoist liturgy and composing religious hymns. The reason, why Lin Linsu was so unpopular, was the persecution of Buddhism initiated by him. Essentially, it was an attempt to reform Buddhism to be a lesser sect of Daoism: monasteries were reformed, monks were forced to wear Daoist robes and to perform rites that would be similar to Daoist ones. Fortunately for Buddhism, Lin fell out of favor quite

<sup>2</sup> Li Deyu (李德裕, 787–849) was a high-ranking minister of the Tang dynasty.

soon after the reform had begun, but still, he was a notorious person among Buddhists and intellectuals that thought Lin's influence on the emperor to be one of the reasons of the dynasty's fall in 1125 (Titarenko 2007: 235-6).

*Bintui lu* (賓退錄, The Record of the Departing Guest), a text, written by scholar Zhao Yushi (趙與時, 1175–1231) collects the biography of Lin, originally written by a Hanlin academician Geng Yanxi (耿延禧), which describes a rumor concerning how after visiting Lin Linsu Lü Dongbin made incense out of a lump of earth. The scent reached the emperor's quarters, and subsequently a verse written on a wall of one of the imperial palaces was found proclaiming that false things in this world are valued higher than the true ones (clearly referencing to Lin), and the line indicating the author – Lü Dongbin. As we can see, Lü Dongbin had become a defender of Buddhism (*Bintui lu*: 4135).

But Lü Dongbin did not confine himself only to communicating with those who had a relatively high social position. As mentioned before, he liked to mingle with crowds in disguise and speak to different people, although specific accounts on how he met someone are limited. One of the most famous is collected in *Yijian zhi* and tells a story of Lü Dongbin asking a young girl at a tea house for a drink (*Yijian zhi*: vol. 1, 7).

Not only did he frequently appear amongst common people, but he also would make sure that he could be recognized. *Houshan tancong* has a record that during the Southern Tang<sup>3</sup> an heir to the throne ordered to find a portrait of Lü Dongbin different from the popular one where he looked like a common ink-seller. After a long and futile search for an alternative it was obtained through help of a person who turned out to be Lü Dongbin himself (*Houshan tancong*: 1603).

There is also a record on obtaining the immortal's portrait in *Yueyang fengtu ji* and a number of stories in *Yijian zhi*. It seems that having a truthful portrait and, as a result, being able to recognize Lü was quite important and, according to legends, Lü would help people on this matter.

Another thing that is important to mention is the skills that the immortal possessed. His vocations are only one side of a coin which can explain to us the origin of his cult and excuse his frequent intercourse with common people. But it is reasonable to assume that people expected from the immortal-ink-seller something more than just incredibly good ink.

One of the important skills Lü possessed was his ability to foretell the future. In a story from *Yang Wengong tanyuan*, described earlier in this article, he predicted high official positions for two persons and, as historical sources show us, he was right and both of them attained high-ranking positions. One more example is *Huixian lu* (回仙錄, The Record of Immortal Hui) written by Lu Yuan-guang (陸元光), based on a Su Shi's preface to one of his verses. It was preserved in the collection *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* (茗溪漁隱叢話, The Collection of Sayings

<sup>3</sup> The Southern Tang (937–975) was one of the ten kingdoms during the Five Dynasties period

of Hermit from the River Tiaoxi) compiled by Hu Zi (胡仔, 1110–1170). There Lü Dongbin visited a wine maker who was very hospitable and recognized Lü as an outstanding daoist, and predicted how long the life span of the latter would be. The anecdote in its finishing line claims that ‘Things that Lü Gong says are always fulfilled’ (*Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*: vol. 2, 306). In later sources it is also indicated that Lü Dongbin had a connection with prominent soothsayers like Master Hemp-Robe (*Mayi daoizhe*, 麻衣道者) who foretold the victory of Zhou Taizu (周太祖, 951–954) over Li Shouzheng (李守正), and Chen Tuan.

Apart from prophecies Lü Dongbin was also skilled in healing. For example, in *Beimeng suoyan* (北夢瑣言, The Gossip about Dreams of the North) he gave a medicine to an ill woman saying that after taking it one would not suffer any illness. This medicine was most probably connected with a belief in pills *dan* (丹) produced by alchemists – ‘pills of immortality’ that in a popular belief were close to being all-powerful.

But a method more representative of Lü Dongbin was healing with the help of his ink. Sometimes he would craft it from things he had at hand like soil and wine and gave it instead of medicine, even healing the blind (Baldrian Hussein 1986: 141).

But more often ink was obtained from the inscriptions Lü left in different places, as in this case one did not have to look for Lü himself. There are two indicative anecdotes that with different amount of detail retell one story on Lü Dongbin writing two verses on the gates of Tanqinguan temple. The earlier one in *Huaman lu* (畫墁錄, Painting on Plaster) describes how people visiting the temple scraped the characters and consumed the scrapes in order to cure illnesses and, although the gate at some places had become measurably thinner, some ink still could be seen (*Huaman lu*: 66). Only after a few decades *Jilei bian* (雞肋篇, Tasteless Records) witnesses that this practice had already led to a hole in the gate (*Jilei bian*: 4064). This shows us that already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the belief in healing power of Lü’s ink was strong. And, as it seems, places with inscriptions that were claimed to be Lü’s were not rare. As *biji* describe, he was an excellent calligrapher and a poet, so often he would write a few lines or a verse at a place he visited. Those inscriptions were not only used to heal people, sometimes they were a very effective way of advertisement, especially for wine shops, as Lü was renowned as a wine lover. There are several stories of different taverns that claimed to have writings by Lü Dongbin, and some of those places even had been transformed into shrines.

There are two more facets of Lü Dongbin worth mentioning. First one is his affiliation with alchemy. He indeed was considered a specialist in *neidan* (內丹), the inner alchemy that focused its attention on meditative practice, whereas the outer alchemy *waidan* (外丹), roughly speaking, was more concerned about producing external means of prolonging one’s life and becoming an immortal. By the end of the Northern Song dynasty there were a number of works on inner alchemy ascribed to Lü Dongbin and his teacher, Zhongli Quan (鐘離權). With

the passing of time the number of those works grew and eventually a new school of inner alchemy, Zhong-Lü (鍾呂), named after the two immortals, had emerged. However, apart from those works that could not be a product of folk legends, there are not a lot of *biji* on this subject and those which exist describe Lü's encounters with his teacher Zhongli Quan, like the one in *Houshan tancong*, describing Lü Dongbin becoming a disciple of the latter.

Another facet of Lü is his connection with mediums and exorcists. A lot of works ascribed to Lü Dongbin were actually transmitted through mediums and among revelations on alchemy there also were his 'autobiographies' designated to clear all misunderstandings about the immortal. *Nenggai zhai manlu*, a Southern Song book of *biji* that collects one of the early ones, tells us that Lü Dongbin after learning the ways of golden elixir, i.e. attaining immortality, from Zhongli Quan also met the 'Realized Man of Bitter Bamboo' (*Kuzhu zhenren*, 苦竹真人) who transmitted to him ways of expelling spirits (*Nenggai zhai manlu*: 504). *Yueyang fengtu ji* also records that Lü learned sword techniques from an immortal (*yiren*, 異人) (*Yueyang fengtu ji*: 9). Although there are not many references to this skill in early sources and Lü Dongbin seems to be a peaceful immortal, his sword, the 'Green Snake' (*qingshe*, 青蛇) is mentioned more and more often with the course of time starting with poems ascribed to Lü Dongbin himself, like the one from *Qingsuo gaoyi* (青瑣高議, Lofty Discussions near the Palace Gate) which begins with the words 'holding Green Snake in my hand...' (*Qingsuo gaoyi*: 1073).

### *Biographies written by the Perfect Realization School*

Biographies of the immortal that are known to us start to emerge from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Two of them have already been mentioned – *Yueyang fengtuji* and *Nenggai zhai manlu*. At the same time daoists started to acknowledge Lü Dongbin and also included some facts about him in their works, the earliest of which were not much different from the descriptions in *biji*<sup>4</sup>.

The biggest difference with the early accounts can be seen in the works of the followers of the Perfect Realization School which started its existence in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. Its founder Wang Chongyang (王重陽 or Wang Zhe 王喆, 1113–1170) was said to have met two immortals in 1159 who passed the teaching to him. There were two more encounters – one in the next year after the first one and another in 1164. Only after the third meeting, in 1167, Wang Chongyang obtained Dao and decided to start accepting disciples. Thus, it is considered to be the year of the foundation of the school. Earliest descriptions of those encounters did not mention who were those immortals, but Wang's immediate disciples already started to name them: Lü Dongbin, his teacher Zhongli Quan and disciple Liu Haichan (劉海蟾) (Katz 1999: 69).

<sup>4</sup> A detailed account on different biographies of Lü can be found in (Katz 1999).

There was a reason for such a choice. *Quanzhen* was a part of the so-called 'Daoist reformation', a movement that gave birth to new schools among which the Perfect Realization one turned out to be the most well-organized and long-lived. The main tendency was a turn to individual practices like meditation and monastic vows (Torchinov 1993: 242-3). Those also included the 'inner alchemy', and by the time Wang Chongyang burned down his own house to mark the start of his new life, the *neidan* school Zhong-Lü that claimed to have gained its knowledge from the texts transmitted by Lü Dongbin and Zhongli Quan through mediums was so popular that it was the only natural for the founder of the new school who gave great importance to inner practices to support his sayings by the authority of those two masters. Apart from that, Perfect Realization Daoism offered a more universal and simple way of avoiding hell that required monks helping commoners in attaining Dao and actively interacted with popular cults. The latter also meant including popular immortals or gods into the official pantheon which helped greatly in attracting followers. So, even if Lü Dongbin was not a master of the inner alchemy, he still would have been included in the pantheon, as his cult by that time was widespread and had many followers.

At the same time usage of local cults was not a process of thoughtless merging. Starting from the very first disciples of Wang Chongyang, the overall educational level of top ranks of the school's members was very high, there was a large number of those with literati background. This was a factor, that helped immensely in choosing a good strategy of development and becoming a strong school with a great number of high quality religious treatises by the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century (Qing 2006: 213). As a result, cults were incorporated into the basic teaching with a thought, some of popular gods were tied to the inner alchemy practices to make them an organic whole with the teaching and, as we will see further on the case of Lü Dongbin, members of Perfect Realization also tried to modify understanding of those gods to correspond to their belief.

There are three major biographies of Lü Dongbin created within the framework of the Perfect Realization School before the Ming (明, 1368–1643) dynasty. The first one is in *Jinlian zhengzong ji* (金蓮正宗記, The Record of the Orthodox Lineage of the Golden Lotus) and was written in 1241 by Qin Zhian (秦志安, 1188–1244), the second is in *Jinlian zhengzong xianyuan xiangzhuàn* (金蓮正宗仙源像傳, Illustrated Hagiographies of the Immortal Origins of the Orthodox Lineage of the Golden Lotus) by Liu Zhixuan (劉志玄) which was composed in 1326. Both of them are quite small, and are only a part of collections, but they already depict a different Lü Dongbin's image starting with the statement that he passed the imperial exams. Studying texts, including those which were not strictly Daoist, there was one of the basic doctrines set by the founder of the school in 'Fifteen discourses of Wang Chongyang' (*Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun*, 重陽立教十五論). So, it seems that it was important for the members of the Perfect Realization School that the immortal was successful in this sphere. Starting from these biographies



more and more sources began describing Lü Dongbin as someone who passed the examination.

The third biography was written by Miao Shanshi (苗善時), a follower of a famous master of the inner alchemy Li Daochun (李道純, 1219–1296) who lived in the late 13<sup>th</sup> – early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Zhong 2001: 57). His work, *Chunyang dijun shenbua miaotong ji* (純陽帝君神化妙通記, An Account of the Divine Transformations and Wondrous Communications of the Sovereign Lord of Purified Yang) seems to be the biggest biography of the immortal<sup>5</sup>. In the preface Miao Shanshi notes that he included one hundred and twenty separate stories based on sources from the Tang and Song dynasties. Only 95 of them have survived until our days, and sources only for 24 of them have been found (Katz 1999: 87–90). The author also mentions that during the compilation he excluded all the superficial details, so that people could use the text as a guide on achievement of Dao (*Chunyang dijun shenbua miaotong ji*: 447). Thus, it is no surprise that even those stories that have a known origin are somewhat different from the source. This work had a didactic nature; things that seemed improper were rewritten. Additionally, most of the stories of Lü Dongbin have a commentary by Miao Shanshi. This points out that *Chunyang dijun shenbua miaotong ji* is a thoughtful revision of the Lü Dongbin's image according to the Perfect Realization's dogmas.

Some of the biggest changes were to Lü Dongbin's social status and appearance. This biography, in common with the previous two, stresses the high level of his education, although here young Lü refused to participate in the exams after meeting his future teacher on the way there. Nevertheless, afterwards he often appears disguised as a *xiucai*, a person of literati who passed the exam. There is also a lot of poetry in this biography, including some entirely secular. They fit perfectly into the tradition of writing poems commemorating persons the author had met, rebuses in verse and instructions on alchemy and self-perfection. Miao sometimes leaves an entire story for one poem only giving a brief explanation on the circumstances when it was written. In the Miao Shangshi's description he was also excellent in calligraphy (given the large number of poems, there were many occasions when this talent could be mentioned) and painting: in 'Visiting Luofu' (*Youxi Luofu*, 遊戲羅浮) Lü Dongbin encoded his name in a landscape he drew.

Lü's appearance also underwent a change. During the Song dynasty, as *biji* describe, pictures of the immortal looking like a commoner were popular. But in biographies of *Quanzhen* School he resembles someone of noble origin, a refined celestial, who had little in common with the earthly world. Descriptions of him

<sup>5</sup> There is also *Lüzu zhi* (呂祖志) written in the end of the Ming dynasty, but the biographical part is not big, a vast part of the work consists of poems ascribed to Lü. Other big works dedicated to Lü are *Lüzu quanshu* (呂祖全書) compiled in the late Qing dynasty and contemporary *Xinbian Lü Dongbin zhenren dandao quanshu* (新編呂洞賓真人丹道全書). Both of them are collections of writings ascribed to Lü Dongbin and pay little attention to his biography.

have expressions such as ‘noble and remote from earthly matters’, ‘appearance of an immortal’ etc. (Ibid.: 448)

Apart from that, Miao Shanshi uses Lü Dongbin’s figure to illustrate the dogmas of his school. He does this consistently, sometimes his commentary on meaning of deeds of the immortal greatly surpassed the size of the story it is explaining and the latter got lost in voluminous speculations on righteous behavior.

As a member of the school that attached great importance to monastic life, Miao Shanshi describes Lü Dongbin as a person who gave a vow of celibacy and spent a lot of time in reclusion. According to him, Lü Dongbin decided that he did not need any sexual relations when he still was young and had not yet met Zhongli Quan (Ibid.: 448). He would sometimes visit prostitutes, but only to steer them onto the right path. This makes a striking difference with the descriptions in popular literature. According to it, Lü indeed visited various women, but his intentions were quite straightforward: there is a famous story of Lü Dongbin seducing Bai Mudan and even tales about him trying to seduce bodhisattva Guanyin (Katz 1999: 189-190).

As for being reclusive, in *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* the immortal spent most of his time in mountains: first, in one of the grotto heavens, and then on the Huaifen (華峰) mountain with Zhongli Quan. Only after forty years as a hermit he decided to return to the world with the only intent – to help people (Ibid.: 455). However, he still would often prefer hiding in the mountains to communicating with people. Likewise, this image is quite different from that of Lü in the Northern Song short stories, who liked to mingle with crowds most of all. Also, while in *biji* Lü’s help in attaining wealth and longevity was quite arbitrary, Miao Shanshi, echoes a phrase from *Jinlian zhengzong ji* which states that Lü Dongbin ‘sold medicine to save the ill and sold ink to help the poor’ (*Jinlian zhengzong ji*: 32). He would give a son who showed his filial piety a brew to save his mother and presented a woman who treated him well the medicine that helped not only her, but saved a lot of lives during the times of epidemic (*Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji*: 467). He would also sell medicine on markets directly telling everyone who he was, although very few would believe him. The role of the immortal as a healer might have been stressed not only because it was one of his most distinct features from the beginning of the cult, but also because it corresponded one of the ‘Fifteen discourses of Wang Chongyang’: preparing medicinal herbs. Also he would sometimes help poor shop-owners by leaving calligraphic inscriptions on their walls.

Caring for people’s longevity was only a small part, as saving people mostly meant teaching. The Perfect Realization School paid great attention to relationships between mentors and students, and so did Lü Dongbin in his biography: among those who studied under his guidance were famous immortals He Xiang (何仙姑) and Cao Guojiu (曹國舅) who, together with Lü, became members of famous Daoist ‘eight immortals’. All in all, *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* has

records on almost two dozen of Lü's followers not including those who failed to pass Lü's trials and were not accepted.

The reason for such selfless behavior might have been another vow Lü Dongbin took: as the biography describes, before ascending to heaven he would save all the living beings. That is almost an exact copy of the vow of bodhisattvas in Buddhism, the only difference being their final destination: for Buddhists it is nirvana, while for Lü Dongbin it was the Jade heavens (*yuxu*, 玉虛) (*Chunyang dijun shenbua miaotong ji*: 455). This shows us how the ideas of Buddhism that greatly influenced the Perfect Realization school were promulgated. But even without this reference to Buddhism, the twelfth of the 'Fifteen discourses of Wang Chongyang', 'The way of sages' states that one should selflessly help those surrounding him. This 'discourse' also speaks of accumulating good deeds, and the biography echoes it when Zhongli Quan discussed with Lü whether the latter had accumulated enough of them (*Ibid.*: 451), or when it is pointed out that the visit and the help of the immortal were only a result of someone's virtuousness<sup>6</sup>.

Miao Shanshi also gives much attention to the theme of recognizing and finding someone who could become a teacher: 70 of the known stories are about conversion or salvation of various people or the ways to recognize an immortal, at the same time only 17 were dedicated to Lü Dongbin's magical abilities (Katz 1999: 86).

### Conclusion

As we can see, the depictions of the immortal within the framework of the Perfect Realization School had much altered the original image. The popular cult depicted Lü Dongbin as someone who was close to the discriminated classes. He often appeared at easily reachable locations like markets and even made some efforts to be recognized, like presenting his portraits to mortals so that people had a true image of him. He was obviously a master of magic and gave people through various means predictions of the future, wealth, health, longevity and sometimes hints on becoming immortals themselves.

In the biographies written by clergy, Lü Dongbin, by contrast, was much closer to the social elites; his passing of the imperial exams is often mentioned. Besides, in these texts he was distanced from all the possible 'lowly' habits such as his exceeding love for women and wine. Moreover, he is now tied to morality that he actively promulgated, his assistance of certain people for reasons that

<sup>6</sup> Although Wang Chongyang stressed out selflessness in favor of individual salvation, more common in earlier Daoism, the idea of 'accumulating good deeds' was not new and resembled, among others, 'morality books' (*shanshu*, 善書) which appeared at the Song period and gave a Daoist version of the idea of karma. Interestingly, one kind of them, tables of merits and demerits (*gongguoge*, 功過格) that were literally tables to count how virtuous someone was, has a version ascribed to Lü Dongbin (Torchinoy 1993: 243).

were unclear or even seemed accidental in the popular belief, had a clear motive here – saving all the living souls, but, first of all, he came to those who were worthy and corresponded to his moral standards.

On one hand, this difference actually corresponds to the difference between Daoist and Buddhist biographies in earlier period: Mu-chou Poo showed that in biographies of the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Daoist ones emphasized the benefits one could gain from an immortal, who was not so different from common people and whose figure was so attractive, because he was not entirely separated from the world. The miracles performed by immortals in those descriptions were on a large scale identical to Lü Dongbin's: curing the ill, bringing wealth, foretelling future and foretelling the ways of obtaining immortality, and one did not necessarily have to be virtuous to get help from an immortal or to become one, in many occasions it relied solely on his or her luck. At the same time, eminent monks, described in Buddhist biographies, much more often seemed to come from the literati class, and although possessing magical powers, concentrated on curing and helping the poor. Those texts also have a better connection with moral aspects of the teaching (Poo 1995). The shift in the description of Lü Dongbin, thus, seems to be partly due to adoption of a large number of Buddhist ideas by the Perfect Realization School.

On the other hand, this difference in the image of Lü Dongbin can show the major difference in understanding of the religion by lower and higher social levels: the masses are more interested in pragmatic and magical aspects while the elites are more concentrated on more abstract ideas including the higher good and morality. Although those interests are quite different, it is important to remember, that there is no distinct border between the two types, only extremities to describe, and that in Chinese culture the differences were often smoothed and different social levels were brought to a loosely coherent entity on cult sites by means of unified rituals (Bell 2003: 374-5).

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