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Artist: Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322)  
Title: *Daoist Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility*  
《太上老君說常清靜經》  
*Taishang laojun shuo Changqingjing jing*  
Dynasty/Date: Yuan, ca. 1292  
Format: Handscroll  
Medium: Ink on silk  
Dimensions: 29 x 58 cm (11-1/2 x 22-7/8 in)  
Credit line: Regents' Collections Acquisitions Program  
Accession no.: F1980.8  
Provenance: Yu Xiezhong 余協中 (1898–1983)

**Text:** The primary text consists of the *Taishang laojun shuo Changqingjing jing* 太上老君說常清靜經 (The Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility Spoken by the Most High Lord Lao), followed by three comments attributed to semi-historical or legendary Daoist figures.<sup>1</sup>

30 columns, small standard script

《太上老君說常清靜經》

老君曰：大道無形，生育天地。大道無情，運行日月。大道無名，長養萬物。吾不知其名，強名曰道。夫道者，有清有濁，有動有靜。天清地濁，天動地靜。男清女濁，男動女靜。降本流末，而生萬物。清者，濁之源。靜者，動之基。人能常清靜，天地悉皆歸夫人。神好清而心擾之，心好靜而欲牽之。常能遣其欲而心自靜，澄其心而神自清。自然六欲不生，三毒消滅。所以不能者，爲心未澄，欲未遣也。能遣之者，內觀其心，心無其心；外

觀其形，形無其形；遠觀其物，物無其物。三者既悟，唯見於空。觀空亦空，空無所空。所空既無，無無亦無。無無既無，湛然常寂。寂無所寂，欲豈能生。欲既不生，即是真靜。真常應物，真常得性。常應常靜，常清靜矣。如此清靜，漸入真道。既入真道，名爲得道。雖名得道，實無所得。爲化眾生，名爲得道。能悟之者，可傳聖道。

老君曰：上士無爭，下士好爭。上德不德，下德執德。執著之者，不名道德。眾生所以，不得真道者，爲有妄心。既有妄心，即驚其神。既驚其神，即著萬物。既著萬物，即生貪求。既生貪求，即是煩惱。煩惱妄想，憂苦身心。便遭濁辱，流浪生死。常沈苦海，永<sup>2</sup>失真道。真常之道，悟者自得。得悟之者，常清靜矣。《太上老君說常清靜經》。

仙人葛玄曰：吾得真道，嘗誦此經萬遍。此經是天人所習，不傳下士。吾昔受之於東華帝君，東華帝君受之於金闕帝君，金闕帝君受之於西王母，皆口口相傳，不記文字。吾今於世，書而錄之。上士悟之，昇爲天官。中士悟之，南宮列仙。下士悟之，在世長年。遊行三界，昇入金門。

左玄真人曰：學道之士，持誦此經萬遍，十天善神，衛護其人，玉符保身，金液鍊形，形神俱妙，與道合真。

正一真人曰：家有此經，悟解之者，災障不生，眾聖護門，神昇上界，朝拜高尊，功滿德就，想感帝君，誦持不退，身騰紫雲。

水精宮道人書<sup>3</sup>。

*The Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility Spoken by the Most High Lord Lao*

Lord Lao said: The Great Dao has no form, yet gave birth to heaven and earth. The Great Dao has no feelings, but set the sun and the moon in their orbits. The Great Dao has no name, yet it

nurtures the ten-thousand things. Since I do not know its name, I am forced to call it the Dao. The Dao has both the pure and the turbid, has both movement and tranquility. Heaven is pure and the earth turbid. Heaven moves and earth is tranquil. Males are pure and females turbid. Males move and females are tranquil. From root to tip, [these opposites] produce the ten-thousand things. Purity is the well-spring of turbidity. Tranquility is the foundation of movement. If one is constantly pure and tranquil, all of heaven and earth will revert to him. The spirit loves purity, but the mind disturbs it; the mind loves tranquility, but desires pull at it. [Therefore] if one is constantly able to banish his desires, the mind will naturally be tranquil; and if one quiets the mind, the spirit will naturally be pure.... *The Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility Spoken by the Most High Lord Lao.*<sup>4</sup>

The Immortal Ge Xuan [164–244] said: I achieved the Perfect Dao upon chanting this scripture ten-thousand times. This scripture is for the practice of celestial individuals and not transmitted to inferior gentlemen. Long ago, I received it from the Lord Emperor Eastern Effulgence, and the Lord Emperor Eastern Effulgence received it from the Lord Emperor Golden Portal, and the Lord Emperor Golden Portal received it from the Queen Mother of the West, which was transmitted orally from one to the other and not put down in written words. I have now in this age recorded it in writing. When the superior gentleman is enlightened by it, he will ascend and become a celestial official. When the average gentleman is enlightened by it, he will join the ranks of immortals in the Southern Palace. When the inferior gentleman is enlightened by it, he will live to great age in the mundane world. And wandering freely in these Three Realms, they will [each] ascend through the Golden Gate.

The Perfected One of the Left Mystery said: If a gentleman who studies the Dao holds fast to reciting this scripture ten-thousand times, the benevolent dieties of the Ten Heavens will guard and defend such a person, jade talismans shall protect his body and elixers of gold transmute his body, and when his body and spirit are both made subtle, they shall merge with the Dao in perfection.

The Perfected One of Perfect Unity said: If one has this scripture and he is enlightened and released by it: Calamity will be blocked and not occur, for all the sages shall defend his gate; His spirit shall ascend to the supreme realm and make obeisance to the High and Venerable; Filled with merit and accomplished in virtue, his thoughts shall be moved by the Lord Emperor; And holding fast to chanting [it] without retreat, his body shall mount unto the purple clouds.

Written by the Daoist of the Crystal Palace [Zhao Mengfu].

Signature: 水精宮道人  
Daoist of Water Crystal Palace [Zhao Mengfu]

Date: none (ca. 1292)<sup>5</sup>

Seals: (2)  
*Zhao shi Zi'ang* 『趙氏子昂』 (square relief)  
*Songxuezhai* 『松雪齋』 (rectangle relief)

**Colophons:** (1) – Kangli Naonao 康里巉巉 (1295–1345)

Ink on separately mounted sheet of paper.

Dimensions: 29 x 52.5 cm (11-7/16 x 20-11/16 in)

14 columns, cursive script

趙文敏公好書道經，散在名山甚眾，此其一焉。而王右軍法書流傳於世，唯《黃庭》為稱首。今觀趙公所書《清靜經》，飄飄然若蛻骨為仙，凌厲霞表，前輩所稱右軍『灑素寫道經，筆精妙入神』，同歸此意，宜矣。至正四年五月十六日，題於杭州河南王第之西樓，康里巉識。

Duke Zhao Wenmin [Zhao Mengfu] loved to write Daoist scriptures, many of which were dispersed among famous mountains, and this [text] is one of them. Now, of all the calligraphic works by Wang of the Army of the Right [Wang Xizhi, ca. 303–ca. 361] that have passed down through the ages, it is his [transcription of the] *Yellow Courtyard [Scripture]* that is praised as best.<sup>6</sup> Today I viewed the *Scripture of Purity and Tranquility*, which was written by Duke Zhao in so light and airy manner—as if he had shed his bones and become an immortal soaring fearlessly beyond the rosy clouds—that it would be appropriate, indeed, to apply to him the same praise of *youjun* [Wang Xizhi] expressed by former generations: “Splashing the silk and writing Daoist scripture, / the spirit of his brushwork entered the divine.”<sup>7</sup> Sixteenth day in the fifth lunar-month of the fourth year in the Zhizheng reign period [June 26, 1344], inscribed in the West Tower at the residence of the Prince of Henan in Hangzhou. Recorded by Kangli Nao.

Signature: 康里巉  
Kangli Nao

Date: 至正四年五月十六日  
Sixteenth day in the fifth lunar-month of the fourth year in the Zhizheng reign period [June 26, 1344]

Seals: (2)  
*Zishan* 『子山』 (square relief)  
*Zhengzhai Shusou* 『正齋恕叟』 (square relief)

**Collector seals:** (16)

1. Liang Qingbiao 梁清標 (1620–1691) – (5)



*Cangyan* 『蒼巖』 (square relief) – ZMF/ mounting silk 2 join, middle  
*Yeqi yuyin* 『冶溪漁隱』 (rectangle relief) – mounting silk 2/colophon join, middle  
*Jiaolin* 『蕉林』 (square relief) – colophon/endpaper join, bottom  
*Jiaolin Yuli shi tushu* 『蕉林玉立氏圖書』 (square relief) – endpaper, right  
*Guan qi dalue* 『觀其大略』 (square intaglio) – endpaper, right

2. An Qi 安岐 (1683–after 1742) – (4)

*Guxiang shuwu* 『古香書屋』 (rectangle relief) – mounting silk 1, top left  
*An Yizhou jiazhencang* 『安儀周家珍藏』 (rectangle relief) – ZMF, lower right  
*Chaoxian ren* 『朝鮮人』 (rectangle intaglio) – endpaper, left  
*An Qi zhi yin* 『安岐之印』 (square intaglio) – endpaper, left

3. Puyi, the Xuantong emperor 溥儀 (1906–1967; reigned 1908–12)<sup>8</sup> – (1)

*Xuantong yulan zhi bao* 『宣統御覽之寶』 (oval relief) – ZMF, upper right

4. Yu Xiezhong 余協中 (1898–1983) – (1)

*Xiezhong shangwan* 『協中賞玩』 (square relief) – mounting silk 2/colophon join, top

5. Unidentified – (5)

*Wu X* 『吳□』 (square intaglio, right half)<sup>9</sup> – ZMF, left edge, middle  
*Gucun* 『谷村』 (oval intaglio) – ZMF/mounting silk 2 join, top – (1/3)  
*Gucun* 『谷村』 (oval intaglio) – mounting silk 2/colophon join, bottom – (2/3)  
*Xingshi tushu* 『醒石圖書』 (square intaglio/relief) – mounting silk 2, lower right



*Gucun* 『谷村』 (oval intaglio) – colophon/endpaper join, bottom – (3/3)

**Traditional Chinese catalogues:** (3)<sup>10</sup>

Zhang Chou 張丑 (1577–1643). *Zhenji rilu* 真蹟日錄 (1620s). Manuscript copy. China: Feng Enkun 馮恩崑 (19th–20th century?), 1918?. 2:29b.

Liang Qingbiao 梁清標 (1620–1691). *Qiubitang cangtie* 秋碧堂藏帖. 8 vols. China: n.p., n.d. Vol. 8, no pagination, last item.

An Qi 安岐 (1683–after 1742). *Moyuan huiguan* 墨緣彙觀. Preface 1742. Beijing: Hanwenzhai 翰文齋, 1914. Vol. 2, separate pagination, 2a–b.

**Selected Bibliography**

Chen Rentao 陳仁濤 (1906–1968). *Gugong yiyi shuhua mu jiaozhu* 宮已佚書畫目校註. Hong Kong: Dongnan shuju, 1956. P. 54.

Nakata Yūjirō 中田勇次郎 (1905–1998) and Fu Shen 傅申. *Ōbei shūzō: Chūgoku hōsho meiseki shū* 歐米收藏：中國法書名蹟集 (Masterpieces of Chinese Calligraphy in American and European Collections). 4 vols. Tokyo: Chūōkoron-sha, 1981. Vol. 3. Plates 14–17, and pp. 137–38.

Fu Shen, Glenn D. Lowry, and Ann Yonemura. *From Concept to Context: Approaches to Asian and Islamic Calligraphy*. Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986. Pp. 30–31 and 34–35.



Fu Shen 傅申. “Zhao Mengfu shu xiaokai *Changqingjing jing* ji qi zaoqi shufeng” 趙孟頫書小楷《常清靜經》及其早期書風. In Fu Shen, *Shushi yu shuji: Fu Shen shufa lunwenji (yi)* 書史與書蹟：傅申書法論文集（一）. Taipei: Guoli lishi bowuguan, 1996. Pp. 183–89, and 137–38 (plates 14–17).

Yang Renkai 楊仁愷. *Guobao chenfu lu: Gugong sanyi shuhua jianwen kaoliie* 國寶沉浮錄：故宮散佚書畫見聞考略. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991. Pp. 230–31.

Liu Jinku 劉金庫. *Nan hua bei du: Qingdai shuhua jiancang zhongxin yanjiu* 南畫北渡：清代書畫鑒藏中心研究. Taipei: Shitou chuban, 2007. Pp. 348 and 390.

Bai Lixian 白立獻 and Chen Peidian 陳培站, comps. *Kangli Naonao shufa jingxuan* 康里巎巎書法精選. Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 2008. Pp. 30–31.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> While purporting to preserve the words of Laozi 老子 (ca. 6th century b.c.e.), the founder of Daoism, the *Changqingjing jing* 常清靜經 (Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility) was in fact a creation of the Tang dynasty (618–907). The Daoist Canon includes several versions of the text, the earliest of which is that containing annotations by the Daoist priest, author, and hagiographer, Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933). The *Scripture* later became an important text in the syncretic Quanzhen sect 全真派 of Daoism, which was founded in northern China by Wang Zhe 王喆 (1112–1170) and enjoyed widespread popularity in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries under the Jin and Yuan dynasties, when the text received several important commentaries. For discussions of the various versions and annotations of this scripture contained in the Daoist



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Canon, see: Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 and Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬, eds., *Daocang tiyao* 道藏提要 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chebanshe, 1991), 447–48 (no. 0615), 541–45 (nos. 0749–0755), 728 (no. 0968), and 925 (no. 1159); and Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), vol. 1, 316 and 562.

<sup>2</sup> As written here (column 19, character 3), the character *yong* 永 (eternal) is missing its final downward stroke on the right side. This is a deliberate omission and marks the calligrapher's observance of a taboo (*hui* 諱), which dictates that one should avoid writing any characters in the personal name of an especially revered figure, such as one's father or the emperor, and if such usage cannot be avoided—for example, when transcribing a religious text—one should write said characters with a missing stroke or by using a recognizable substitute. As the collector An Qi 安岐 (1683–after 1742) noted in his catalogue entry on this work, it is unknown what taboo would apply in this case. See An Qi, *Moyuan huiguan* 墨緣彙觀 (preface 1742) (Beijing: Hanwenzhai, 1914), vol. 2, separate pagination, 2a–b.

<sup>3</sup> A small area of silk at the bottom of the final character *shu* 書 (written by) and top of the following seal has been replaced. See note 10, below.

<sup>4</sup> For two translations of this scripture into English, see: Eva Wong, *Cultivating Stillness: A Taoist Manual for Transforming Body and Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992); and Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 24–29.

<sup>5</sup> For the dating of this work to ca. 1292, see Fu Shen 傅申, “Zhao Mengfu shu xiaokai *Changqingjing jing ji qi zaoqi shufeng*” 趙孟頫書小楷《常清靜經》及其早期書風, in Fu Shen, *Shushi yu shuji: Fu Shen shufa lunwenji (yi)* 書史與書蹟：傅申書法論文集（一）(Taipei: Guoli

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lishi bowuguan, 1996), 183–89. For an unsubstantiated view that the text is an early Ming dynasty copy, see Liu Jinku 劉金庫, *Nan hua bei du: Qingdai shuhua jiancang zhongxin yanjiu* 南畫北渡：清代書畫鑒藏中心研究 (Taipei: Shitou chuban, 2007), 348 and 390. Note: In this source, the author neither states the basis for his conclusion, nor supports it with any reference or presentation of evidence.

<sup>6</sup> Dating to the mid-fourth century of the common era, the *Huangtingjing* 黃庭經 (Scripture of the Yellow Court) is one of most influential and popular texts belonging to the Shangqing 上清 (Highest Purity) school of medieval Daoism. Among the revelations transmitted by the immortal lady Wei Huacun 魏華存 (251–334), foundress of Shangqing Daoism, to her disciple Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–386), the scripture purports to provide the esoteric methods to restore one’s physical health and achieve eternal youth. The *Scripture of the Yellow Court* exists in two poetic versions: a single 99-line text known as the outer scripture (*waijing* 外經) and a 435-line text divided into thirty-six stanzas, known as the inner scripture (*neijing* 內經). The great early calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (ca. 303–361), himself a practicing Daoist, was said to have transcribed both versions of the scripture in standard script. Wang’s ostensible association with the *Scripture of the Yellow Court*, which here is treated as his finest surviving work, ensured that the text would enjoy an important place in the calligraphic tradition, and starting in the Song dynasty, it was frequently transcribed and commented upon by literati calligraphers. For a short precis of the early calligraphic tradition surrounding the *Scripture of the Yellow Court*, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 199), 70–71. For a reproduction of the outer version of the text ostensibly by the hand of Wang Xizhi and dated 356, see Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) et al., comps. (*Yingyin Mingtuo*) *Tingyunguan fatie* (影印明拓停雲館法帖, 2 vols. (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), vol. 1, 1–8.

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<sup>7</sup> In this sentence, Kangli Naonao quotes lines 5–6 of an eight-line poem by the Tang dynasty poet Li Bai 李白 (701–762) on the subject of the calligrapher Wang Xizhi (ca. 303–ca. 361), who once held the title *youjun jiangjun* 右軍將軍 (General of the Army of the Right). See the poem titled “Wang youjun” 王右軍 (Wang [Xizhi] of the Army of the Right), in Li Bai, *Li Bai shi quanji* 李白詩全集, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), vol. 2, 22:1028–29. Note: While Kangli wrote the first character of Line 5 as *sa* 灑 (to sprinkle, splatter), in published sources the character usually appears as *sao* 掃 (to sweep, swipe, brush).

<sup>8</sup> It is unknown exactly when this scroll entered the Qing imperial collection, for it only bears one imperial seal belonging to the last emperor, Puyi 溥儀 (1906–1967; reigned 1908–12). However, many works from the former collection of An Qi (see notes 2, above, and 10, below), such as the Freer scroll, were acquired in the mid-eighteenth century by the Qianlong emperor (reigned 1735–96), and it is likely that this scroll entered the collection at that time, but was never recorded and did not receive any imperial seals until this one, probably in the early 1920s before Puyi was evicted from the imperial palace in late 1924.

<sup>9</sup> At least one known individual surnamed Wu is associated with ownership of a Zhao Mengfu scroll such as the current work (see note 10, below); however, the visible portion of the half-seal seen here cannot be assigned to him at this time, as no other other examples of such an impression have been located.

<sup>10</sup> The late Ming dynasty collector Zhang Chou 張丑 (1577–1643) recorded having seen a rendition of the *Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility* written by Zhao Mengfu in small standard script (*xiaokai* 小楷) in the collection of Wu Xiyuan 吳希元 (1551–1606), from Qinan 溪南 in Anhui Province. At that time, the scripture was preceded by a portrait of Laozi in color, and followed by two unrecorded colophons: one by Kangli Naonao, and a second by Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (*zi* Yuanyu 元馭, 1534–1610). Zhang Chou likened Zhao’s calligraphy to that of the

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*Huangtingjing* (Scripture of the Yellow Court), a famous example of small standard script attributed to Wang Xizhi (see note 6, above). Zhang also recorded Zhao Mengfu's unusual signature, which employed the same alternative name that appears on the Freer work, Shuijinggong daoren 水精宮道人 (Daoist of the Crystal Palace); however, the final character following the name was written *hua* 畫 (painted by)—presumably in reference to the painting of Laozi—instead of *shu* 書 (written by), as it appears on the Freer scroll.

In his anthology of the calligraphy in his collection, the *Qiubitang cangtie* 秋碧堂藏帖, the early Qing collector Liang Qingbiao 梁清標 (1620–1691)—five of whose seals appear on the Freer scroll—reproduced a *Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility* written in small standard script by Zhao Mengfu, which is virtually identical to the Freer calligraphy. However, the signature on this work also ends with the word *hua* (painted by), instead of *shu* (written by). In addition, the text is followed by three seals (two belonging to Liang Qingbiao), only one of which is impressed on the Freer scroll and not in direct association with the Zhao Mengfu calligraphy.

The earliest traditional source that records the Freer scroll as currently constituted is the eighteenth-century catalogue of An Qi (1683–after 1742), four of whose collector seals are impressed at the beginning (two seals) and end (two seals) of the current scroll. An Qi opined that a painting of Laozi must once have preceded the *Scripture of Constant Purity and Tranquility* by Zhao Mengfu, and noted that the final character in the signature had been intentionally altered from *hua* (painted by) to *shu* (written by). He also noted that the character *yong* (eternal) in the text is missing its last stroke (see note 2, above), a unique characteristic of this particular version of the text that is also present in Liang Qingbiao's *Qiubitang cangtie* reproduction.

In his discussion of the Freer work, Fu Shen (1996) concluded that the text reproduced in the *Qiubitang cangtie* and the Freer scroll are one and the same. In particular, he noted that a small patch of silk has been replaced at the bottom of the final character in the signature and the top line of the following Zhao Mengfu seal, which shows a slight gap. Magnification reveals that the strokes differentiating the graphically similar characters *hua* (painted by) and *shu* (written by)

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are written on this patch. Based on this observation, Fu Shen speculated that an owner or dealer subsequent to Liang Qingbiao must have cut off the portrait of Laozi, perhaps to sell separately, and simultaneously altered the character at the end of the signature from *hua* (painted by) to the *shu* (written by) to accord with its absence. This act was perpetrated before the scroll came into the possession of An Qi.

If this conjecture is correct, then the Zhang Chou entry—which Fu Shen does not cite—may also record the Freer scroll at an even earlier time, when the final character in the signature was still intact, and both the Laozi portrait and now missing second colophon were still attached.