



GIVING FORM TO THE FORMLESS:

THE INTRODUCTION OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGERY IN DAOIST PRACTICE



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The Way, the Dao, is formless, ineffable, and cannot be named. As Daoism emerged as a religion in the late 2nd century, Daoists insisted on the ineffability of the Dao and explicitly rejected figural imagery. Such aniconic practices continued to dominate ritual systemizations for 4 centuries. Yet, statues became an integral part of Daoist ritual as presented in the early 7th century ritual compendiums. Where and when did Daoist statues appear? And, How were they accepted and incorporated into orthodox Daoist ritual? This paper traces the introduction of statues and iconic imagery into Daoist ritual and the changes in ritual practice entailed by the use of iconic imagery.

