

BOOK REVIEWS

Daoism in History: Essays in Honour of Liu Ts'un-yan. Edited by Benjamin Penny. London: Routledge, 2006. Pp. xiii + 290. £70.00.

Grown from a conference held in honour of Liu Ts'un-yan at the Australian National University in 1999, this volume brings together a group of historical Daoist studies and a newly translated essay by the honoree. Professor Liu of course is well known for his work on literature and Ming popular religion and, as pointed out adroitly in the first contribution by the editor, Benjamin Penny, has had a long and distinguished career since his birth in 1917 and his first book in 1935. Although Daoism did not feature in his work until the 1960s, he has since made considerable contributions to the field and is one of its early protagonists and senior scholars. Only recently has he ventured into the earlier phases of the Daoist religion — and it is this aspect of his work that dominates this volume.

In contrast to the dominant focus of Professor Liu's studies, whose main stomping ground was the Ming dynasty, this book is dedicated to the early phase of Daoist history, from its precursors in the Zhou dynasty well into the Six Dynasties and Tang, with only minor excursions into the Song. It is divided into two parts: contributions by Daoist scholars who participated in the conference, and Professor Liu's essay: "Was Celestial Master Zhang a Historical Figure?"

The latter, which was translated by the editor with the help of several others and takes up about a quarter of the book (pp. 189–253), is a *tour de force* through the various historical circumstances and connections of the early Celestial Masters in the second century A.D. It presents innumerable facts about administrative structures, military campaigns, major figures, and religious/exorcistic activities of the period, surrounding the first Celestial Master with a tightly woven network of subtle details.

Not always easy to follow, the essay comes to the fundamental conclusion — you will be relieved to know — that, yes, indeed, Zhang Ling was a historical person who migrated from central China to Sichuan and established a religious organization that took contributions in the form of rice. That much is true. What is rather fictional are the various embellishments in later hagiographies, often due to the conflation of his life with that of various other figures (some even also called Zhang Ling); the genealogy that links him with Zhang Liang, the Duke of Liu and founding saint of the Han dynasty; and various details about his family, disciples, and activities. Also, the group he founded was not unique but one among many religious organizations, and it is likely that he was part of a larger community of *fangshi* who supported and taught him. Liu singles out especially Luan Ba as a likely forerunner and teacher of Zhang Ling. In Zhang's wake, his son and grandson continued the work, and especially Zhang Lu, whose historical existence was never in doubt, joined the original organization with others of the same ilk and put it firmly on the map.

The same overarching tendency toward historical detail and meticulous elicitation of facts is also apparent in the contributions contained in the first part of the book. They all

have in common that they focus on early Daoist history, delve into previously unexplored aspects of the religion, elicit often obscure but fascinating details, and require serious dedication from the reader who sometimes has to work hard to follow the textual intricacies and conceptual arguments.

The first contributions are Peter Nickerson on Daoist practices of death in relation to ancient Chinese mortuary ritual, showing convincingly how ancient death rites shifted from an emphasis on separating the living and the dead and related concerns of pollution to fears of hauntings, an active bureaucratization, and elaborate rites of exorcism; Timothy Barrett on a Daoist version of the *Dhammapada* and the close relationship between Buddhist translators and Lingbao Daoists, revealing how the Ge family was involved in adapting Buddhist texts into Daoism and how the *Sutra in Forty-two Sections* was not actually a Buddhist document; Stephen Bokenkamp on the *Visvantara-jataka* in Buddhist and Daoist translation, showing how a tale of the Buddha's previous life was transformed to be relevant to Daoists, reflecting social structures and economic concerns to a much greater degree than the original tale.

After that follow Christine Mollier's work on early Daoist demonology, concepts of evil, and practices of exorcism, focusing largely on the fourth-century *Nüqing guilü* and its colourful descriptions of demons and detailed instructions on how to eliminate them; Maeda Shigeki's study of Daoist adaptations of the karma doctrine and its fusion with the *chengfu* concept of inherited evil, connecting ancient Chinese and Daoist ideas of fate with the various later developments; Fabrizio Pregadio's examination of meditation practices in connection with alchemical concoctions and the use of alchemical metaphors in Highest Clarity practice, showing that the practice of inner alchemy, commonly associated with the Song, has roots that go back very far in Daoist history; and, last but not least, Franciscus Verellen's work on ritual and contemplative graphics in Daoist scriptures, such as illustrations, talismans, charts, and diagrams which — full of transformative powers — show abstract and complex formalizations of doctrine and cosmology and are used in visualization, as pictorial metaphors, and as dynamic symbols.

Altogether this volume is not for the faint of heart. Superbly edited, with a detailed character glossary, an extensive bibliography, and an index, it is addressed mainly to dedicated aficionados of the tradition. It makes a powerful and important contribution to Daoist studies, only slightly lessened by the omission of more recent scholarship due to the long hiatus between the conference in 1999 and the book's publication in 2006. Focusing on topics like death, karma, evil, and exorcism, the contributions shed light on the shadowy underside of a religion that is all too often painted in romantic pictures of sunny mountainsides and whispering pines. They create a more realistic image of what Daoists believed and practiced and establish relevant connections to political history, Zhou religion, popular practice, and Buddhism. The book marks a big step forward in our understanding of early Daoism and will over the years greatly contribute to transforming the presentation of the religion in both general publications and the classroom.

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