

The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition, by Gil Raz. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. viii, 292 pp. US\$168.00 (cloth).

In *The Emergence of Daoism*, Gil Raz offers a fresh look at the formation of Daoism as a religious tradition between the second and sixth centuries CE. Defining Daoism as “an assemblage of intersecting textual and ritual lineages with a set of shared core beliefs or attitudes which formed a commonality as opposed to other traditions such as Buddhism, on one hand, and the practices of common religion, on the other” (4), Raz portrays the creation of a shared Daoist identity as a constant negotiation between various “communities of practice” competing in the religious marketplace of early medieval China. Rather than offering a neat scheme of the historical development of Daoism, Raz opts to highlight the intricate nature of this process, focusing on the strategies used by Daoist lineages to distinguish themselves from their rivals by debating, adopting, and rejecting elements from a wide repertoire of contemporary practices.

In chapter 1, Raz examines the emergence of a new type of communal practice in the Eastern Han centered on the cult of local immortality-seekers. Drawing on a variety of stele inscriptions dedicated to the glorification of such individuals, Raz demonstrates how the practices associated with the personal quest for immortality were systematized by Daoist lineages and later reformulated and subsumed into a wider religious, cosmological, and mythological system. Chapter 2 focuses on the role of the transmission of esoteric texts and practices in the process of lineage construction. Raz identifies the shift from blood oaths to “pure” initiation rites as a critical juncture in the history of Daoism and emphasizes the significance of the production of retroactively constructed transmission lineages that connected specific master-disciple communities with larger “imagined communities” in the formation of a shared Daoist identity. In chapter 3, Raz attempts to uncover the reasons behind the importance of talismans in Daoist practice. By tracing the role of talismans within the Han imperial bureaucratic apparatus and their use as instruments of exorcism

and healing in popular religion, Raz demonstrates how talismans were granted elevated status in Daoist discourse as actual manifestations of the primordial cosmic *qi* 氣 as written in a cosmic script that is simultaneously incomprehensible yet recognizable as a divine manifestation of power and authority.

Whereas the first three chapters deal with the assimilation and sublimation of rival practices into a new Daoist comprehensive framework, chapter 4 discusses a complementary strategy—the gradual rejection of sexual self-cultivation by Celestial Master (*Tianshi* 天師) communities and the subsequent attempts to erase any reference to sexual practices by new Daoist movements, such as Upper Purity (*Shangqing* 上清), in the fourth and fifth centuries. Similarly, Raz shifts his emphasis in chapter 5 to the internal debates among the rivaling communities of practice and details the continuous attempts to create orthodoxy by integrating various Daoist scriptures, lineages, and ritual schemes.

Raz's greatest accomplishment in this book is the conclusive demonstration that the emergence of Daoism should be regarded as “a product of organic growth of indigenous Chinese religion” (39) and not simply a Chinese reaction to the arrival of the foreign religious traditions of Buddhism. By tracing the continuities not only within the realm of praxis but also in the strategies used by religious communities to define themselves against the backdrop of their rivals, Raz shows the importance of studying the internal tensions between the various Daoist lineages instead of treating Daoism as a cohesive and inclusive socio-religious movement that only emerged in response to the challenges posited by their Buddhist rivals. For instance, Raz's analysis of the vehement rejection of sexual cultivation among fourth-century Daoist lineages reveals that, far from being a mere adoption of a Buddhist stance against these practices, such attempts to erase any trace of sexual elements in Daoist praxis can be traced to an ideological shift from collective rites of the Celestial Master communities to the internalized rituals of the Upper Purity lineage, which regarded the body as a closed and self-sufficient system for attaining transcendence. The same can be said concerning Raz's reading of the Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao* 靈寶) project of standardization,

which culminated in the formation of the Three Caverns Daoist Canon by Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 in the fifth century. By analyzing Lu's efforts of orthodoxy creation against the backdrop of previous attempts to develop an integrated scriptural and ritual system, Raz demonstrates that, although the Numinous Treasure lineage is often said to represent the "first true infiltration of Buddhism into Daoism," the creation of the Three Caverns canon should not be seen as an attempt to provide a Daoist alternative to the Buddhist *Tripitaka* but as an elaboration of the indigenous cosmogony found in chapter 42 of Laozi's *Daode jing*.

A minor criticism might be directed at Raz's decision to follow previous scholarship in translating the term *fangshi* 方士 as "Masters of Esoterica," which implies that they were a coherent social group, rather than acknowledging that the title is merely an epithet applied by historians, bibliographers, and other literati to people they tacitly acknowledge as fellow members of the elite but of whose learning and practices they disapprove. By not challenging this convention, Raz assigns historical agency to a heterogeneous group of individuals who never shared a common group identity or labeled themselves as "*fangshi*." Likewise, Raz's decision to render *wu* 巫 as "shamanism" is problematic. This term, which was another catch-all phrase used by the literati, referred to a broad range of ritualists and healers who claimed to be channeling spirits into their bodies or transforming themselves into deities, but rarely did the use of the word refer to the actual practices of shamans, who were political leaders of small communities and gained their power by making spirit journeys to commune with gods. Slight misgivings regarding the translation of certain peripheral terminology aside, *The Emergence of Daoism* is an original, meticulously researched, and convincingly articulated study that highlights the significance of debates over issues of praxis in the construction of religious and communal identity.

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