

*The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*. By Stephen Eskildsen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. Pp. viii + 274. \$50.00.

Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Realization) Daoism appeared in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and to this day has remained one of two major schools of the Daoist religion, the other being the Zhengyi 正一 (Heavenly Masters), which was passed on hereditarily since the Han dynasty in the second century A.D. As a monastic order, Quanzhen Daoism helped lay the groundwork for Daoist tradition of asceticism and self cultivation. Its importance in the history of Chinese religion has recently attracted the attention of scholars throughout the world. In its 2001 issue, the *Journal of Chinese Religions* devoted a special section with a collection of six articles on Quanzhen Daoism. Stephen Eskildsen's *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters* is the first full-length book in Western language devoted to the academic understanding of the Quanzhen religion.

Based upon a very detailed study of a number of primary sources, the book consists of ten chapters dealing with the spiritual, doctrinal and ritual aspects of early Quanzhen Daoism, with a focus on the teachings and practices of the early Quanzhen founder Wang Zhe 王嘉 (1113–1170) and his most renowned first-generation disciples, the “Seven Realized Ones” (*qizhen* 七真) such as Ma Yu 馬鈺 (1123–1184), Wang Chuyi 王處一 (1142–1217) and the most influential of all, Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227). In his Introduction, Eskildsen characterizes his book as one which aims to “provide a full exposition of the Quanzhen path of cultivation at both the mental and physical levels” (p. 19). Therefore, he uses a rich body of source material. He employs and translates a very large body of early Quanzhen masters' writings, which mostly consists of poetry, hagiographies and discourse records. Nevertheless, Eskildsen has obviously many obstacles to overcome in his lengthy translation process because all these literary texts are difficult to comprehend, not only due to the variety of poetic forms but also their abstruse inner alchemical (*neidan* 內丹) symbolism and language. Basically, the translation of Quanzhen's inner alchemy theory is useful. It supplies to the interested readers a great knowledge of the uniqueness of the early Quanzhen masters' attitude to ascetic self-cultivation.

Chapter one introduces the reader to the basic historical facts of the early Quanzhen movement in north China under the leadership of Wang Zhe. As a historical summary, there is nothing new in presenting Wang Zhe's religious bibliography as well as his Daoist ministry. Brief accounts of Ma Yu and Qiu Chuji are included in addition. For me as a historian of Daoism, I notice a problem in the author's treatment of primary sources. He is not quite careful in employing materials of hagiographies of Wang Zhe as well as his eminent disciples, but, instead, he often heavily uses later hagiographies to supplement the details of the Quanzhen masters' accomplishments that attracted a mass following throughout north China in the thirteenth century.

The next four chapters of the book discuss Quanzhen methods of cultivation of the inner self that aim at the ultimate goal of immortality. Quanzhen Daoism is well-known for its dual cultivation of inner nature (*xing* 性) and life (*ming* 命) as a means of achieving immortality. Chapter two, “Cultivating Clarity and Purity,” presents the Quanzhen self-cultivation of inner nature. Wang Zhe, the Quanzhen founder, frequently considered

*qingjing* 清靜 (“purity and tranquility” or “clarity and stillness”)<sup>1</sup> to be the key for cultivating one’s nature, frequently through mental discipline and meditation practice, e.g., *jingzuo* 靜坐 and *zuobo* 坐禪. When one’s mind is pure and tranquil, one’s true nature is illuminated. In this chapter, Eskildsen uses the term “clarity and purity” to refer to Quanzhen’s notion of *qingjing*. However, one wonders this translation is really accurate.<sup>2</sup> In the context of early Quanzhen writings, *qingjing* is a very important term in understanding Quanzhen’s cultivation of inner nature, as well as inner alchemy practice. The readers of this work do expect a detailed and systematic analysis of the primary material although there are already lengthy translations of Wang Zhe’s writings and poems. In particular, one cannot find in this chapter a clear definition and detailed exposition of the early Quanzhen masters’ use of and the meaning of *qingjing* in the context of their inner alchemy writings.

In Chapter three, “The Asceticism of Quanzhen Masters,” Eskildsen discusses the early Quanzhen masters’ ascetic life as the foundation of their self-cultivation. Pure poverty, begging, bodily suffering, fasting, and sleep deprivation are ascetic practices that are considered conducive to cultivation of inner nature. Chapter four, “Cultivating Health and Longevity,” deals with the Quanzhen’s *neidan* techniques of nurturing the vital force (*qi* 氣) of one’s life. According to the early Quanzhen masters, one should recover the real vital force (*zhenqi* 真氣) of life in order to achieve immortality. This chapter outlines Quanzhen’s theory and various strategies employed for nurturing the body’s vital *qi*. The human body is considered as a mass of *qi* in many different forms such as semen, blood and saliva. The basic logic of Quanzhen’s cultivation of life clearly refers to minimizing the depletion of *qi* and replenishing the store of real *qi* in the body. Quanzhen’s principle for nurturing the *qi* lies in the ideal state of “non-leakage.” To illustrate this principle, Eskildsen discusses the Quanzhen practice of celibacy, which is thought to be a means to retain men’s semen *qi* and women’s bloody *qi*. In order to retain semen (*jing* 精) or blood (*xue* 血) in the body, generated out of *qi*, early Quanzhen masters employed physiological technique, named *neidan* (inner alchemy), which involves inner concentration and visualization carried out in various organs of the body. Since the Quanzhen *neidan* training is not easy to comprehend if one is not a practitioner, Eskildsen’s introduction of inner alchemy technique and theory obviously remains at a theoretical level of understanding. Continued work is needed in order to produce a scholarly study of inner alchemy based upon a growing knowledge of the early Quanzhen masters’ writings. As suggestion for further research, this chapter misses significant questions such as the links between the early Quanzhen inner alchemy and the inner cultivation of neo-Confucianism and Buddhism. Chapter Five, “Visions and Other Trance Phenomena,” turns to the early Quanzhen masters’ concerns with the “signs of proof” which are considered as indications of their progress of inner cultivation. According to Eskildsen, the Quanzhen masters seek means of testimony related to meditative trances, visions, and bodily sensations. In explaining their mystical experience, Eskildsen cites three

<sup>1</sup> Tao-chung Yao in his “Quanzhen—Complete Perfection” in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 581–82, translates *qingjing* as purity and tranquility.

<sup>2</sup> In Eskildsen’s translation of *qingjing*, he sometimes changes the order saying “purity and clarity.” See, e.g., p. 195. Such inconsistency should be avoided.

major cases, namely Yin Zhiping 尹志平 (the second-generation Quanzhen disciple), Wang Chuyi, and Qiu Chuji.

The next four chapters deal with other aspects of the early Quanzhen tradition, such as examining miracle stories in the hagiographies of early Quanzhen masters, discussing their accepting attitude toward death and altruistic activities, and finally introducing the ritual practices of early Quanzhen masters. These four chapters are not much related and thus cannot create a coherent framework of analysis which the readers would anticipate. The issues discussed in these four chapters do not reflect central concerns within the field of studies on early Quanzhen Daoism, as well as Daoism in general, such as the institutional history, ascetic rules, and celibacy practice of the early monastic Quanzhen order.

Chapter six, “The Miraculous Powers of the Quanzhen Masters,” presents miraculous accounts showing the extraordinary powers that the early Quanzhen masters possess in their meditative process of self-cultivation. Eskildsen cites an instance of the extraordinary ability to “send out the Spirit and enter dreams” (*chushen rumeng* 出神入夢) that Wang Zhe possessed by appearing as a Real Spirit to his disciples. Another instance is Wang Zhe’s posthumous miracles. Despite these miraculous accounts, Eskildsen argues that the early Quanzhen masters stress that the supernormal ability is attainable through the primal method of self-cultivation.

Chapter seven, “Death and Dying in Early Quanzhen Taoism,” turns to the issue how the early Quanzhen masters dealt with death in a dignified manner. Heavily relying on Quanzhen hagiographical sources, Eskildsen tries to show the Quanzhen masters’ joyful attitude to facing death. For Eskildsen, the reason underlying this accepting attitude is simple but lies in a proto-Buddhist principle of detachment from one’s physical body (p. 148). In this regard, Eskildsen does not bring in the uniqueness of Quanzhen’s insight into its Daoist narrative of death. He concludes that “[a] good Quanzhen adept was expected to face death with equanimity” (p. 153). Chapter Eight, “The Compassion of the Early Quanzhen Masters,” presents the early Quanzhen masters’ virtuous deeds. Eskildsen cites the well-known example of Qiu Chuji, who saved many lives by persuading Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227; r. 1206–1227) to adopt a more benign approach in his conquest of China, to show that altruistic deeds, combined with self-cultivation, bring about the Quanzhen master’s ultimate recovery of eternal life. This chapter is short, and the author does not give much insight in his discussion. Given many lengthy translations of the early Quanzhen masters’ writings, one is still hard pressed to grasp the specificity of Quanzhen’s ethical values. Readers of the book would really like to know further how the altruistic involvement of the early Quanzhen movement contributed to its success in revitalizing Daoism in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

The final chapter takes up the early Quanzhen’s ritual practices, a very important issue to which Daoist scholars need to pay more attention.<sup>3</sup> The early Quanzhen masters’ attitudes towards ritual should be re-examined. As well-known, the Quanzhen order was a representa-

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the five articles collected in the special section on “New Perspectives on Quanzhen Taoism,” in *Journal of Chinese Religions* (2001), one cannot find any discussion of Quanzhen ritual tradition.

tive of the new Daoist movement whose primary concern lay in the areas of self-cultivation, meditation, and monastic life. Nevertheless, Eskildsen argues that “the early Quanzhen masters did engage in ritual activities and believed strongly in their efficacy (if properly performed)” (p. 192). Despite his thesis, one cannot find sufficient evidence in this chapter convincingly showing ritual activities performed by the early Quanzhen masters. Aside from evidence that appeared in the early Quanzhen masters’ poems, the author provides no further historical material that can help readers know what kinds of ritual these masters actually performed. More importantly, in contrast to the well-developed liturgical tradition of the Zhengyi sect, the author might have examined what is the distinctive feature of the Quanzhen ritual tradition.

The concluding chapter summarizes the important points of the entire book. It reiterates that the objective of the work is to explore the “doctrines and practices of the early Quanzhen masters in details” (p. 195).

Eskildsen’s attention to the specifics of the early Quanzhen masters marks this book as worthy of being carefully read as an important reference in a Western language in regard to the asceticism and mysticism of Daoist religion in pre-modern China. Early Quanzhen Daoism is certainly one of the most prominent representatives of inner alchemy practice and theory in the history of Chinese religions. This book will stimulate more research in the field of Quanzhen Daoism and inner alchemy, as well as more translations of Quanzhen masters’ writings in Western language publications on Daoism.

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*A Chinese Ethics for the New Century: The Ch’ien Mu Lectures in History and Culture, and Other Essays on Science and Confucian Ethics.* By Donald J. Munro. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005. Pp. xlv + 158. \$33.00.

Donald J. Munro finds in the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Xunzi*, and in the Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi a core set of Confucian themes: that hierarchy in human society is desirable and natural; the importance of the *li*, ritualized rules laying out the forms of interaction between occupants of social roles; that the sages of antiquity articulated and justified the obligation implicit in these rules; and the primacy and universality of family sentiments according priority to the welfare of one’s own. Munro is here concerned to defend the continuing relevance of Confucianism and in particular the Mencian variety that explicitly grounds these themes in a theory of human nature and its relation to morality.

Mencius’ doctrine of the four minds or beginnings of goodness represents a conception of the natural equality of human beings, which Munro compares with the “evaluative equality” he finds to be prevalent in the modern West. The two conceptions differ, but Munro points out that the difference is complex and more one of emphasis. Natural equality concerns similarities that exist as a matter of fact among human beings, while evaluative equality concerns their equal worth and requires equal treatment of certain kinds. However, Chinese descriptive equality of the