Finally, there are some minor problems that a reviewer would be remiss not to point out:

The name Duangan Mu 段干木 is misconstrued as "Duan Ganmu" (p. 67).

The Chinese word *shi* 士 is too often translated as "scholar," and I suspect this has something to do with the evident overreliance on the Neo-Confucian commentary of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). (Almost all the commentarial opinions cited in the notes derive from either Zhu Xi or David S. Nivison.) In certain cases, "scholar" is more than simply misleading. For example: "When the scholars are put to death though they are guilty of no crime . . ." for 無罪而殺士 (p. 87). That sounds like the Ming dynasty, with its heroic scholar-officials (and where Bloom did most of her earlier work), not the world of Mencius. (Even the word "the" before "scholars," which suggests that they constituted a cohesive social class, miscolours the original.) Elsewhere, Bloom-Ivanhoe say "man of service" for *shi*—a much more plausible rendering that I have occasionally used myself.

The famous maxim of Gaozi 告子, *sheng zhi wei xing* 生之謂性, is transmogrified by the highly unlikely translation, "Life is what is called nature" (p. 121). If that is truly what Gaozi meant, it would be hard to understand why Mencius objected. Rather, as we see from 6A.4, where Gaozi specifies appetite for food and sex as *xing,* he means *what is inborn,* not "life." Lau's translation of the same sentence is better: "That which is inborn is what is meant by 'nature'" (p. 241)—and the quotation marks around "nature" are important, inasmuch as Gaozi is attempting to define a *terminus technicus.*

The original draft seems to have used Wade-Giles Romanization, which was then systematically but incompletely converted to *pinyin.* Some vestiges of Wade-Giles remain, and they are distracting (e.g., "Yingong To" for Yingong zhi Tuo 尹公之他, p. 91; also "The Announcement Concerning Lo" for Luo 洛, p. 136, n. 10).

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Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China. By Robert Ford Campany. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. Pp. xviii + 300. $48.00.

In *Making Transcendents,* Robert Campany delves into a large corpus of Chinese writings from 220 B.C. to A.D. 343 that tell the stories of men and women who, through a variety of esoteric and ascetic practices and often with the assistance of holy beings, transcend the mundane world, earning places for themselves among the divinities and achieving immortality. The mysterious heroes of these stories live on strange pills, pine resin, lead, fungi, dew, *qi* 氣 or their own saliva. Their esoteric and ascetic practices transform them into extraordinary beings capable of passing through walls, flying, disappearing in a cloud

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of vapour, converting half-digested food into swarms of bees, curing the sick, riding white cranes and dragons, sprouting wings and raising the dead. They lick the seeping ulcers of their powerful masters in exchange for secrets, and command all manner of animals, rodents and demons with their peculiar techniques. But their greatest feat of all is avoiding death entirely, faking their own burials and leaving behind swords, bamboo staves and old shoes in otherwise empty coffins. It is easy to see how a previous generation of scholars were attracted to these stories as clues to the roots of Chinese fiction: they are spectacularly imaginative, nothing if not exotic. Robert Campany, in his earlier works *Strange Writing* and *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth,*[1] and most forcefully of all in this new book, demonstrates how much we miss if we read these stories as merely the fanciful inventions of inspired novelists. Read in context, the stories reveal a world profoundly concerned with beliefs and practices associated with figures known as "transcendents." Perhaps the main contribution of the book is, as in the title of its first chapter, "Bringing Transcendents Down to Earth," that is, showing the relationship of the stories to the society they emerged from.

"Transcendent" is the increasingly prevalent translation of *xian* 仙, once more commonly translated as "immortal." Campany points out that "*xian* are not necessarily or strictly credited with immortality proper" (p. 34), but he later says that "deathlessness" is the chief characteristic of *xian* and gives no example in the book of a *xian* actually dying (pp. 51, 59). The most convincing argument for the translation of the term as "transcendent" is etymological: the meaning of the word itself is much closer to "transcendent" than "immortal."

Temporarily setting aside the question of the initial inspiration and dissemination of the stories, Campany asks the question of how the stories were read. The sheer number of such stories in various collections testifies to their popularity among an audience that, at least in part, took them as accurate descriptions of real events; and Campany notes wisely that reading accounts of transcendence for their entertainment value does not preclude accepting them as real. Others, however, found bird-like immortals absurd. Sima Qian 司馬遷 was famously sceptical of adepts' claims to have achieved deathlessness, while growing rich off gifts from their admirers (p. 178). Wang Chong 王充 typically dismissed the possibility of transcending the confines of a normal life, though his arguments—since humans are creatures and all creatures must die, so humans must die, and, since humans don't have feathers and transcendents do, they are not human—are surprisingly unconvincing (p. 246). Even Ge Hong 葛洪 admitted that many so-called transcendents are in fact impostors, but goes on to insist that a few false claims do not disprove all claims to transcendence.

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[1] *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

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Critiques like these—in particular Sima Qian and Ge Hong's complaints about phoney transcendents—discloses a world of drifters and grifters, quacks and conmen, that Campany fills out through deft selection from the literature. Take for example the case of one Chen Chang 陳長. "Whenever any of the people who served him were ill, they took vessels and asked for some offering water 祭水 from him; on taking it, they would be cured. *But if according to their allotted lifespan they were due to die, Chen Chang would give them no water*" (p. 162). While admitting that the passage may have been intended to emphasize Chen's skills in prognosticating the destinies of his patients, Campany also suggests that the passage offers an unintended glimpse into a healer hedging his bets by refusing treatment to the severely ill. Or consider the dubious case of Li Kuan 李寬 who, when disease swept through his community and he took ill, "entered his hut to fast and keep the precepts," ultimately ascending to the heavens after simulating his own death and burial (p. 157). Campany sees in this account a transparent attempt by Li's disciples to explain an embarrassing "public relations problem" of a supposedly accomplished practitioner of the arts of longevity who took ill and died. But there is more to these shady figures than charlatans in search of the easy life; behind the stories we can also see the shadows of earnest naturalists, mystics, ascetics and holy men exploring the boundaries of self-cultivation, life and death.

Separating the sincere holy men from the cynical frauds is probably impossible—too many layers of texts and retellings stand between us and them—and Campany is reluctant to weigh in on the sincerity of the adepts behind the stories, or even, *in any particular case,* to attempt to reconstruct the historical figures on whom a story may have been based; he devotes most of his attention instead to the values revealed by the stories as a whole. Rather than attempt to assess motivation for the adepts, he tries to understand why their audience admired them. This is not as obvious as it might at first glance seem. For the most part, ordinary people did not themselves attempt the feats they heard of in stories of transcendents. In the words of Peter Brown (quoted by Campany), saints were more often enjoyed than imitated (p. 18). Similarly rather than examine the chemical properties of individual minerals or plants, Campany uncovers their meaning in their relation to other things. This structural approach is particularly enlightening in Campany's discussion of avoidance of grain promoted in many writings about transcendents. Why avoid grain? The most commonly seen explanation in modern scholarship is that the "three worms" or "three corpses" which live in the human body and report to officials in the other world of their host's misdeeds feed on grain. But in fact, Campany argues, only very rarely are the "three worms" linked to grain, and when the connection is made it is in texts that post-date the fourth century (p. 81). Curiously, in the accounts of transcendents, though the admonition to avoid grains is common, there is virtually no discussion at all of why grains are bad for you. The key, Campany argues, is the centrality of grains to everyday, conventional life. Not only were grains a staple of the diet; they were also central to religious life since the ancestors were fed, in part, with grains and wine, a grain product. Hence, the rejection of grain was a powerful rejection of normalcy. As Campany puts it:

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> I suggest that "grains" were, to echo a passage from Claude Lévi-Strauss, "good to oppose" rather than being seen as intrinsically "bad to eat" and that they were good to oppose because of all that they expressed, symbolized, and implied, all of the other cultural values and institutions to which they were attached. Providing an alternative to eating grains meant providing an alternative to all that eating grains entailed, invoked, and had been linked to. (p. 85)

The same style of structural analysis allows Campany to make sense of, for instance, attitudes towards sex in stories about transcendents. Some adepts avoid sexual intercourse, never marry, or marry but, conspicuously, produce no children; while others take multiple partners or successive spouses (p. 55), suggesting that they engage in some sort of sexual yoga. This analysis through structural opposition is a strategy that works well for other types of hagiography as well. For example, Campany notes in passing that biographies of Buddhist monks who eat meat and drink wine are asserting the extraordinary nature of their protagonists in the context of the standard image of the monk as ascetic—a technique he terms "secondary differentiation" (p. 45). Campany lists attitudes towards sex and reproduction under the category "Freedom from social convention and constraint." Other core motifs under which Campany lists common characteristics of adepts include: "esoteric practices," the "ascetically enhanced body," "mastery of space, time, and elements," "eating," "dwelling," "mastery of nonhuman others," and "endings" for ways in which adepts depart from the mundane world. Drawing on anthropological scholarship, Campany presents these characteristics as the elements of the adept's repertoire, or "toolkit" from which hagiographers and adepts drew when fashioning their subjects.

In sum, *Making Transcendents* describes the features of the transcendent, analyzes the logic behind these features, and reconstructs both the world of texts and the society from which stories about transcendents emerged. But owing to the authors interest in broader theoretical issues in religious studies and his wide reading in any number of disciplines (chiefly anthropology and sociology, but also literary theory, philosophy and history), *Making Transcendents* provides insights even for those with no particular interest in the transcendents of early China. Campany summarizes scholarship on the sociology of secrecy, recent work on how identity is shaped through culture, and he supplies the best discussion I have read on the problems and explanatory potential of hagiology. The epilogue which addresses the fundamental problems of how we can assess the sincerity and motivations of adepts and the extent to which we can determine from stories about transcendents *what really happened,* is especially clear and eloquent. In short, this is a book as surprising and rich in detail as the stories that inspired it.

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