《道教研究學報：宗教、歷史與社會》第五期（2013）
Daoism: Religion, History and Society, No. 5 (2013)

書評 BOOK REVIEWS

Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China, by Shih-Shan Susan Huang. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012. xxv, 497 pp. US$69.95 (cloth).

Susan Huang's book is a new and exciting contribution to the study of Daoist art, exploring Daoist visual culture from the tenth to the fourteenth century. In contrast to most scholarship of Daoist art focusing primarily on icons and iconography, it takes aniconic, immaterial, and ephemeral Daoist visual materials as its key subjects of study. These materials, including illustrations for visualization, body charts, ritual diagrams, cosmological maps, talismans, and magical scripts, have been considered outside the scope of art historical research. Their visual aspects have also been neglected, even though they have been explored a little in Daoist religious studies. Taking on these under-studied materials, *Picturing the True Form* is a pioneering and ambitious work that bridges the fields of Daoist art and Daoist religion, and opens up an uncharted and important area where the two fields converge.

True form (*zhenxing* 真形) is the overarching theme that connects the great diversity of visual materials discussed in the book. Huang argues that the notion of true form is unique to Daoist visuality. True form denotes "the original shape something has as part of Dao, the inner, invisible, and formless quality of an entity, in contrast to its outer, visible, and concrete attributes" (135). The dichotomy between the inner and the outer underlines the division of the book between the inner chapters dealing with esoteric Daoist images associated with meditation, visualization, and breathing practices, and the outer chapters concerning exoteric Daoist works related to ritual performance. The superiority of true form (inner) over the exterior (outer) bolsters Huang's claim that aniconic, immaterial/invisible, and ephemeral are three modes of images central to Daoist symbolism (13). Since these three modes of imagery and material are closely connected with the ever-changing quality of true form, they are superior to Daoist icons and

iconography, which are primarily concerned with the outer appearance of deities. Huang emphasizes that the book endeavors to encompass Daoist images "within a cultural system of symbols" and advocates to study them "holistically, beyond sectarian, media-based, methodological boundaries" and to shift the focus of investigation from "the theological or intellectual meanings of texts and images" to "their production, consumption and physicality" (7). Huang takes her words seriously.

The main strengths of the book lie in Huang's ability to gather and map out a huge amount of visual materials, within and beyond the Daoist tradition, to demonstrate pictorially links between the Daoist images and other representations, and to explicate their use as described in Daoist texts. These strengths are especially notable in her first three "inner chapters" on esoteric Daoist images. Chapter 1 focuses on Daoist images of body gods, imaginary journeys to the stars, harmful spirits and body worms, and inner bodies showing the physiological workings of internal alchemy. Chapter 2 concerns cosmographic charts and pictorial representations of heaven, earth, and the underworld. Chapter 3 discusses the true form charts, especially those associated with earthly paradise, and their relation to cartography, *fengshui* 風水, calligraphy, talismans, and herbal medicine. Huang traces the original sources and visual conventions of Daoist images and brings to light the techniques of Daoist cultivation and ritual practices associated with them. She uses primarily visual materials from the Ming woodblock-printed edition of the Daoist Canon, but also compares them with many images from archaeological finds and with extant artifacts. Huang's meticulous observation of the details of these materials leads her to discover similarities among them and to argue for their association one to another. Her holistic approach further allows her to link visual materials of diverse sectarian backgrounds, media, and origins and to see them as constituents of cultural systems of symbols. Huang's treatment of Daoist images gives rise to much inspiration but also to some questions about Daoist visual culture.

Huang's emphasis on tracing the visual convention of Daoist images and her decision to take on all related visual materials offer readers quick references to a great variety of images under a single

theme. Her examination of manifold pieces of visual evidence of Daoist cosmography, for instance, fully exemplifies the multiple perspectives concerning Daoist creation in traditional China. However, I am at times puzzled by the undetermined way in which multiple images are discussed under a single theme, even though they share some common visual characteristics. For example, Huang's discussion of the *True Form Charts of the Man-Bird Mountain* (*Renniao shan zhenxing tu* 人鳥山真形圖) draws on a diversity of visual materials from different traditions, ranging from the T-shaped banner from the Western Han tomb at Mawangdui (142), to bird-like mountains depicted in a Northern Song *fengshui* manual (144), to bird scripts inscribed on a Han-dynasty bronze vessel (157). Huang aims to show that "many of their visual elements converge with principles underlying Daoist magical scripts and talismans" and that the *True Form Charts* "provide a site where myriad cultural conventions meet" (164). I acknowledge that the various visual materials she discusses share common visual elements as well as underlying principles with the *True Form Charts*, but I remain uncertain if the *True Form Charts* are results of the convergence of the different visual and cultural conventions mentioned. The various images discussed embody different cultural notions and each has its own life span and development in history. Without establishing the interrelationship between different images and their cultural traditions, it would seem difficult to discern if all or some of the visual and cultural conventions ever conspired in the Tang-Song period to give rise to the *True Form Charts* that Huang takes up, especially since the datings of both charts are uncertain, with one roughly dated to the period from the Six Dynasties to the Tang, and the other an undated chart preserved in a Northern Song collection.

This also points to the advantage and inadequacy of the concept of "visual culture" as used in this study of Daoist images. On the one hand, it fosters the exploration of visual materials beyond the Daoist tradition and rightly positions Daoist images within the web of Chinese visual culture from which the former, no doubt, draws most of its visual vocabulary and cultural references. On the other hand, its emphasis or overemphasis on the commonality

between visual materials from diverse sources may lead to ambiguity in our understanding of the making of Daoist images and of their links with the multiple visual traditions that existed at different points of history in traditional China.

The Ming edition of the Daoist Canon is Huang's primary source of research materials. She acknowledges at the forefront that the illustrations in the Ming Daoist Canon may not be coeval with the texts they illustrate, but considers it "beneficial to think beyond the Ming framework and start looking for more historical references for the *Daozang* images that link them to other visual sources outside the Daoist Canon" (19). Throughout the book, Huang demonstrates an unexpressed conviction that the Ming edition's Daoist images shown in texts compiled from the tenth through fourteenth centuries are almost, if not exactly, the same as their Song originals. Drawing on recent scholarship and new archaeological discoveries, she puts forward a number of cases that would seem to substantiate her conviction. For example, she convincingly shows that the lower of the three deathbringers, with an ox-head and one-legged body, shown in the Ming edition of the *Scripture for the Protection of Life* (*Chu sanshi jiuchong baosheng jing* 除三尸九蟲保生經, DZ 871) is comparable to a ceramic figurine excavated from a Southern Song tomb in Sichuan, and that the one-legged design shared by disease-related images probably originated from the Sichuan area (55–56, 58). In another example, the *True Form Chart of Mount Fengdu* (*Fengdu zhenxing tu* 酆都真形圖) illustrated in the Ming edition of the *Standardized Rituals of the Supreme Yellow Register Retreat* (*Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀, DZ 508) is almost identical to two diagrams carved in stone and found in tombs dated to the Southern Song (125). Examples such as these tend to show a tight link between the illustrations in the Ming edition of the Daoist Canon and their Song originals. However, even given the reliability of most examples Huang has cited, it is still far from conclusive that the Ming editions of the scriptural illustrations are faithful reproductions of the Song originals. The variety and number of illustrated scriptures dated to the Song period that were collected in the Ming Daoist Canon are simply too great. I am thus alarmed

that illustrations to early texts, such as those in the Ming edition of the Six Dynasties work *Illustrated Instructions for How to Untie the Twelve Embryonic Knots* (*Jiebao shi'er jiejie tujue* 解胞十二結節圖訣, DZ 1384), are taken as visual evidence of Daoist divinities in bureaucratic attire from early sources (33). Such subtle claims of identity between the illustrations in the Ming edition with their Song originals can stand only with more external visual and textual support.

The three "outer chapters" of the book are concerned with the performative, visual, and material dimensions of Daoist ritual. Juxtaposing ritual diagrams and extant artifacts with textual descriptions of Daoist ritual, Huang presents a virtual tour through the sacred space of Daoist ritual in chapter 4. Chapter 5 focuses more specifically on the Yellow Register Purgation (*huanglu zhai* 黃籙齋) as a case study. Since objects used in Daoist rituals are usually burned or buried and so no longer extant, Huang's discussion in these two chapters depends heavily on descriptions recorded in Daoist liturgical manuals and in modern ethnographic documentation. Chapter 6 discusses a Southern Song triptych, the *Three Officials of Heaven, Earth and Water* (*Tian di shui sanguan tu* 天地水三官圖), housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and takes it as an example of a collection of ritual objects "whose images provoke the performer's actions in rituals" (281). The process of manufacture and the visual convention of the paintings are investigated along with their role in ritual. Huang argues convincingly that the introduction of narrative elements in Song dynasty devotional paintings, as exemplified by the *Three Officials of Heaven, Earth and Water*, helps viewers better grasp the invisible actions of gods during the Daoist priest's imaginary journey to heaven, and thus enlivens not only the visible ritual space but also the invisible ritual actions stemming from the priest's visualizations. The three outer chapters well demonstrate the possibility of better understanding the material and visual aspects of Daoist ritual despite its ephemeral nature, and they invite more in-depth studies.

Picturing the True Form is a book that delves into a new field of study and gathers many important Daoist images yet to be studied. The fifty-four pages of bibliography compiled by Huang attest to her familiarity with modern scholarship on Daoism and to

her cautiousness in interpreting the Daoist images she discusses. Despite her endeavors, her readings of some images remain debatable. For example, Huang takes an illustration from a Ming edition of the *Precious Scripture of the Jade Pivot* (*Yushu baojing* 玉樞寶經) preserved in the British Library as support for the textual description of Daoist priests' meditative journey during the performance of Daoist rituals (250–251). However, the figure whom she described as the meditating master ascending "to the heavens to pay homage to the heavenly deities" during ritual performance, repeatedly appears in other illustrations of the same scripture that do not concern rituals. The figure concerned is most probably the image of Master Haoweng 皓翁, to whom the Celestial Worthy of Thunder (Lei tianzun 雷天尊) delivered teachings of the scripture. Also drawn from the same scripture is an illustration showing the Seven-Storied Terrace (*qibao cengtai* 七寶層臺), the realm of the Celestial Worthy of Thunder, as stated in the scripture itself. However, Huang takes the illustration as "depicting the grand view of the vertical heavens" due to its resemblance with visual representations of the Buddhist vertical cosmos (101–102). This reading of the illustration does not agree with the scripture and requires further support. Such disputes over the reading of Daoist images seem difficult to avoid as the field of Daoist art is still in its infancy. The examples above well reflect the desperate need for more contextualized and in-depth research on Daoist images in order to unravel how changing notions embedded in pictorial representations seemingly share the same visual conventions.

Picturing the True Form has, nevertheless, brought the study of Daoist art to a new level. Its comprehensive analysis of Daoist images collected in the Ming edition of the Daoist Canon and its plain language in explicating their esoteric meanings and functions have made Daoist visual materials much more accessible to researchers of Daoism, as well as to those of non-Daoist traditions. Hopefully, the text will lead other scholars to explore the richness of Daoist visual culture.

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