A Library of Clouds: The Scripture of the Immaculate Numen *and the Rewriting of Daoist Texts*, by J. E. E. Pettit and Chao-jan Chang. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020. xx, 355 pp. US$72.00 (cloth), US$24.99 (ebook).

In *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire tu taoïsme* (1984), Isabelle Robinet discusses the "Art of Grafting" as it relates to the production of an important subset of Upper Clarity (Shangqing 上清) Daoist scriptures known as the Three Wonders (*sanqi* 三奇). She cites the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen* (*Suling jing* 素靈經), one of the Three Wonders, as an example of "particularly striking and poorly coordinated amalgamations."[1] In their work, Jonathan Pettit and Chang Chao-jan build on Robinet's monumental study, but in a marked departure they attempt to overturn the prevailing view of so-called apocryphal Upper Clarity scriptures—that is, texts that cannot be conclusively tied to the earliest layer of revealed content associated with the medium Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–386)—as awkward pastiches of secondary importance. Quite to the contrary, the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*, on which Pettit and Chang's book centers, was of fundamental importance for both Upper Clarity and medieval Daoism more generally.

Through their examination of how this layered scripture accrued over time, via grafts by successive generations of reader-compilers, Pettit and Chang invite us for a rare glimpse into the captivating world of Daoist scripture-making. Although the majority of Daoist scriptures do not telegraph their composite nature as clearly as the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*, many of them are nonetheless the result of collective editorial and compiling efforts, sometimes over the span of years, decades, or even centuries. Consequently, what Pettit and Chang uncover about the process of composition for their own scripture has profound implications for understanding how all Daoist scriptures were received, read, composed, and transmitted. Thus, *A Library of Clouds* will be of interest to scholars of Daoism

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[1]   Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire tu taoïsme* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), 1:77.

and Sinologists more broadly, but also to those who are interested in the history of the book and manuscript or scribal cultures, as well as those who focus on religious scriptures as material and/or social objects.

Aside from Robinet's treatment, the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen* has received surprisingly scant scholarly attention, although, upon reflection, this is not all that surprising given the unfavorable light in which it is generally viewed.[2] Pettit and Chang's book is the first detailed study devoted to the text in any language. It is also the first full translation, for the second half of their tome is composed of a painstakingly annotated English rendering (133–279). The first half is a meticulous "Translators' Introduction" (3–130), which doubles as a full, five-chapter study. It is preceded by a short but helpful preface by Stephen Bokenkamp (the New Daoist Studies series editor, along with Lai Chi-Tim), who situates Pettit and Chang's contribution in the broader context of the field of Daoist Studies. After acknowledgements and other front matter, the authors prologue their study with a brief "Background" section (3–9), where they explain the peculiar history of the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*'s composition, stress why it is meaningful to overturn its labeling as a "forgery," and reveal how they set out to elucidate the enigma of its composition.

Indeed, the question of "how," in other words methodology, should detain us here for a few moments, for it is one of the book's great strengths. Pettit and Chang adopt redaction criticism as their theoretical lens. Redaction criticism is a critical method of reading biblical texts which emphasizes that the author or editor of a text (its redactor) is the principal actor in giving the source its shape. By examining how the components of a literary composition are arranged and how they differ and vary from other sources or competing versions/recensions/editions of the same source, scholars may gain perspective on a specific author or editor's theological perspectives, ideological inclinations, political intentions, etc. Pettit and Chang draw inspiration from this methodology of biblical

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2   For Robinet's treatment of the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*, see *La révélation du Shangqing*, 1:75–85, 2:285–301.

studies and adapt it to the study of Daoist scriptures, blending it with insights from recent works in book history. In so doing, they map out hitherto uncharted connections between readers, editors, or authors and uncover new ways in which scriptures were born, developed, and died. It is their hope that this kind of work "will kindle interest in the Daoist canon as one of the principal sources for book history in China" (9).

After their initial discussion in the "Background" section, Pettit and Chang flesh out their methodological approach in the first pages of Chapter 1, "Thirty-One Fascicles: Cataloguing Scriptures of the Heavens" (11–27), taking their cue from the study of biblical scriptures, where discrepancies and agreements between different Gospels have unlocked perspectives on the production of sacred texts and their circulation. The rest of the chapter examines a handful of catalogues that identify the so-called "original" thirty-one fascicles (not scriptures) of Upper Clarity revelations—the ones that derive directly from the medium Yang Xi's visions. Using the same comparative method as in the Gospels example, Pettit and Chang highlight a substantial lack of consistency between the catalogues. In so doing, they draw attention to the fact that these "original" fascicles, key documents of early Upper Clarity, were in constant flux—reworked, recombined, or replaced well after Yang Xi's time. Yet, these newer versions were, more often than not, touted as divine writings issued from the initial revelations. As Pettit and Chang underscore, this mode of textual production consisting of "borrowing, reformulating, and repackaging older texts through revelation was the norm and not the exception in mid-fourth-century Daoism" (27).

Chapter 2, "Three Ones: A Stereoscopic View of Daoist Hagiography" (29–53), centers on the hagiography of Zhou Yishan 周義山, the Perfected of Purple Yang (Ziyang zhenren 紫陽真人). Here Pettit and Chang undertake a close reading of its different versions in comparison with older source passages (hence the "stereoscopic view"). They chronicle the process by which Upper Clarity reader-authors reached into the bedrock of older beliefs and practices, extracting and reformulating them. The shift from transcendence (*xian* 仙) to perfection (*zhen* 真) is cited as a case in point, as is the transition of visualizations of the Three Ones (*sanyi*

三一) from a meditation on gods of the body to a cosmic journey by which the microcosm of the inner landscape is linked to the macrocosm of the stars. While those who produced Upper Clarity writings did integrate older concepts, they relegated them to lower rungs within new hierarchies, privileging their own theological or soteriological innovations. In and of itself, this account of the mechanics of Daoist revelations is not particularly new, but it is fascinating to see them unfold so concretely in a few very focused examples and a small number of targeted sources.

Chapter 3, "Five Stars: Remaking Daoist Ritual" (55–75), continues along the same avenue of inquiry as the last part of the previous chapter, delving deeper into the status of meditations on the Three Ones in a number of sources, including the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. Pettit and Chang trace how the visualizations vary over time, and, by extension, how the features of medieval Daoism are fundamentally plastic. In Upper Clarity texts, meditations on the Three Ones incorporate talismans (*fu* 符) and emblems (*zhang* 章) to make the deities manifest. What is more, the triad of somatic gods adopts a resolutely astral dimension through their association with the Five Dippers (*wudou* 五斗).

Chapter 4, "Nine Palaces: Later Reconstructions of Upper Clarity" (77–98), concentrates more squarely on the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. Here, Pettit and Chang turn their attention to the reasons for the composition and transmission of the source. They arrive at their findings through a comparison of a section revolving around the Nine Palaces (*jiugong* 九宮) from Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 (456–536) *Secret Instructions for Ascent to Perfection* (*Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱決) and a part of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen* devoted to the same topic. Both sources rely on a common pool of earlier materials, but they frame and organize content in their own ways, ending up with divergent pictures. This in turn lays bare different editorial intentions: both Tao Hongjing and the author/compiler of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen* attempt to reconcile a number of different traditions in their texts, but the latter also devises a classification scheme for Upper Clarity scriptures and other Daoist liturgical traditions. The aim is to unify various scriptural lineages in a tiered structure (one that would eventually become the three basic

divisions of the Daoist canon) while also ensuring that the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen* ends up on top.

In Chapter 5, "Three Hundred Fascicles: Rethinking the Authorship of Daoist Scriptures" (99–126), Pettit and Chang continue to deploy redaction criticism in order to shed light on questions of authenticity and transmission surrounding Upper Clarity scriptures. They compare crucial passages about the origin and transmission of those scriptures from Tao Hongjing's *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真誥), and from the writings of polymath Gu Huan 顧歡 (420/28–483/91). The exegetical tensions that emerge from this comparison expose Tao Hongjing's preoccupation with critically identifying sources as authentic, "original" Upper Clarity scriptures. Gu, on the other hand, was more preoccupied with establishing an unbroken line of textual transmission from Yang Xi or even before, when the scriptures existed only in Daoist heavens and were already being edited and modified by deities. For Gu Huan, the ongoing production of new revelations on earth after Yang Xi's time would not raise suspicions of compromised authenticity. One figure who produced such revelations was Wang Lingqi 王靈期, a fifth-century master notably accused by Tao Hongjing of forging scriptures for profit. Pettit and Chang connect him to graded catalogues of the "original" Upper Clarity scriptures, using his reshaping of the corpus to suggest that he may actually be the primary author of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. The text establishes three grades (*sanpin* 三品), atop which sit the now three hundred fascicles of Upper Clarity writings, but the Three Wonders and the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen* surpass even those.

Lastly, a brief "Conclusion" (127–130) reiterates the major themes that traverse the first part of the book. One of them is the insistence on distancing ourselves from understanding Daoist scriptures as static sources that ossified into a definitive shape as soon as the ink on them dried. Rather, it is more accurate to approach them as collaborative patchworks that were dynamic and sometimes contradictory. Instead of glossing over these inconsistent aspects of Daoist scriptures or ignoring "forgeries" altogether, Pettit and Chang argue that it is more productive to tackle them head on.

Despite the substantive introduction, which is in fact a full-fledged study, the centerpiece of Pettit and Chang's book is a complete and thoroughly annotated translation of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. It spans well over a hundred pages (133–279). The original Chinese text is conveniently provided every few lines after the English, as are references to the text's pagination in the Daoist canon. Talismans are thoughtfully reproduced where they appear in the original. A detailed account of the scripture's contents would be out of place in a book review. For those interested, Robinet offers a comprehensive overview of the scripture, perspicaciously signaling borrowings, correspondences, and overlaps with other texts.[3] I will, however, provide a succinct outline of the five distinct sections that make up the scripture.

The first section (133–157) discusses the Three Caverns (*sandong* 三洞) in their earliest incarnation. Here, the term has nothing to do with the familiar scriptural categories of the Daoist canon. The Three Caverns are instead the three gods of Heaven (*tian* 天), Earth (*di* 地), and the Abyss (*yuan* 淵), each of whom governs a palace in the Immaculate Numen Heaven, occupies one of the three Cinnabar Fields (*dantian* 丹天) of the body, and is associated with one of the Three Wonders. The section introduces the names of the deities and their appearances. It also describes a contemplation method in which adepts are meant visualize the gods.

The second section (159–181) is devoted to the Nine Palaces of the upper Cinnabar Field, located in the brain. After some general remarks on methods of the Three Ones, it alternates in somewhat piecemeal fashion between, on one hand, descriptions of the Nine Palaces and their locations and, on the other, meditations related to the sites or their male and female resident gods.

The third section (183–215) deals with the Three Ones. It is divided into two parts. The first provides a general account of the

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3   Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, 2:285–301. The *Scripture of Immaculate Numen* also benefits from detailed entries in Fabrizio Pregadio, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2:921–922; and Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the* Daozang, 1:187–188, both authored by Robinet.

deities and the contemplations related to them. It also includes an interesting synthesis of the theory of the Three Pneumas (*sanqi* 三氣), the Three Primes (*sanyuan* 三元), and the Three Wonders. The three Cinnabar Fields are also discussed. The second part of this section contains an incomplete description of the method of the Three Ones of the Five Dippers.

The fourth section (217–229) is composed of six invocations addressed to six high-ranking Upper Clarity deities. In an appreciated feature, the rhyming patterns for the invocations are added in the notes (as they are for other passages from the text written in verse). After the incantations, Pettit and Chang include in this section a few pages on transmission (44a–46a). It is noteworthy that Robinet considers these pages part of the next section—a perspective with which I would agree. In any case, this passage elucidates a hierarchical model for the transmission of Daoist scriptures: the three grades. Upper Clarity scriptures occupy the top tier, Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶) scriptures the middle tier, and Three Sovereigns (Sanhuang 三皇) scriptures and alchemical materials occupy the third and last tier. The three grades are thus a prototype of the Three Caverns scriptural classification scheme. A second hierarchy is also presented, this time for the Three Wonders alone, which crown the Upper Clarity revelations.

The fifth and last section (231–279) is largely composed of a standalone text, the *Illustrious Code of the Nine Perfected* (*Jiuzhen mingke* 九真明科, DZ 1409), which has been fully integrated into the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*. The section opens with an invocation and some curt instructions on the transmission of the Three Wonders. The *Illustrious Code of the Nine Perfected* begins in earnest after this. It is divided into five parts. The first is a general introduction to its contents. The second consists of rules for the transmission of Upper Clarity scriptures, sub-divided into nine groups. The third enumerates nine important ritual transgressions that must be avoided during the transmission of scriptures. The fourth concerns ways of absolving ritual infractions. The last part, which also concludes the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen*, is a set of four hymns addressed to four major Upper Clarity deities.

In addition to its innovative methodology, Pettit and Chang's *A Library of Clouds* is also praiseworthy in that it foregrounds translation, the bread and butter of any Sinologist. Broadly speaking, the trend in Asian studies has been to turn away from philology toward theoretical analyses and the spinning of narratives that sometimes relegate textual evidence to a mere prop for defending a sensational argument. Worse yet, primary sources are sometimes cherry-picked, their meaning deliberately distorted in support of otherwise untenable theses. And most blasphemous, primary sources are occasionally ignored altogether, with authors relying instead on a vast array of secondary sources to make their points. For the last decade or two, this trend away from philology has accelerated, but Daoist studies has on the whole resisted being drawn too deeply into the spiral.

Most recently, however, the pendulum appears to be swinging in the other direction and translation-based studies are making somewhat of a comeback. There is increasingly less need to justify the value of a scholarly annotated translation, even as a first book. Perhaps this is attributable to the rise of translation studies (which, ironically, talks a lot about translation without always *doing* translation). Or perhaps it is the recognition that translation is, after all, the result of the same intense intellectual labor as other types of scholarship. Moreover, the contributions of translation are just as significant, if not more so, in shaping the way a field develops, in impacting the questions it asks and how it asks them, and in forging its historiography in a manner that is distinct from and more organic than topical analyses. The potential longevity and reach of scholarly translations is also impressive: authoritative translations published half a century or more ago are still assigned, read, cited, and relied upon by students, specialists, and the general public. How many analysis-driven studies can this be said about?

Pettit and Chang's *Library of Clouds* fully embraces its identity as a work of scholarly translation—and for good reason. The translation is elegant, precise, and well executed. The book as a whole will earn praise from scholars of medieval Daoism, especially specialists of Upper Clarity scriptures. With the exception of their

methodological homage to biblical studies, the authors do not appreciably engage with other fields or reach out to a broader readership, which, under the circumstances, is a virtue. Pettit and Chang set out to accomplish their goals without pandering to anyone's expectations. It is in fact a common approach in Daoist studies, where frank, uncompromising scholarship is celebrated. On the other hand, the field as a result often faces accusations of excessive silo-ing, criticisms of self-isolationism, and even charges of irrelevance. I recall when I had just finished my PhD and was frantically looking for a postdoctoral position, a senior colleague in Buddhist studies found my lack of success predictable, exclaiming: "When will scholars of Daoism start working on things that other people care about?" Pettit and Chang's answer to this question would be refreshingly flippant: not today.

Nevertheless, although the unapologetically sharp focus of *A Library of Clouds* is laudable, it remains double-edged. Instead of solely concentrating on what is there, some readers might focus on what is not. To parry this, authors can always make a handful of minor adjustments, resulting in greater inclusivity. In this case, a more fleshed out discussion of how the book's re-definition of authorship impacts literary production in general would have drawn potential connections to a variety of fields (in addition to biblical studies or the history of the book), so that a broader contingent might find points of intersection between medieval Daoism and their own interests.

Following up on this idea, the work's methodological indebtedness to biblical studies, which has consistently supplied theoretical fodder for Daoist studies, could have been diversified to accommodate other fields. Translations for emic concepts such as *jing* 經 (scripture), *zang* 藏 (canon), *jiao* 教 (teaching), *xin* 信 (faith), *yi* 儀 (rites), *sheng* 聖 (sainthood), *zhen* 真 (truth), *shi* 師 / *shi* 士 (priest), *dao* 道 (church), *guan* 觀 (abbey), and so on, transparently rely on Christian concepts as their touchstones, despite often having distinct meanings and an independent intellectual history in Chinese. Without necessarily sidelining biblical studies, scholars of Daoism can cast their nets wider, drawing on more varied sources for methodological inspiration. Post-structuralism, for example,

could offer some insights, particularly Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests*, which is cited in the epigraph to chapter 4 but not elaborated on (77). Actor network theory, developed by sociologists and scholars of science and technology studies (STS), could also have been helpful in grappling with issues related to transmission, borrowing, and circulation. More important, Pettit and Chang could have entered into a fruitful dialogue with others in their disciplinary backyard who have written about similar themes. For instance, Tobias Zürn's work on intertextuality in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 is acknowledged but not significantly unpacked.[4]

Of course, the idea is not to cite everyone who might have written something tangentially pertinent, but rather to situate *A Library of Clouds* in relation to previous work and thereby provide a broader context for understanding its meaningful contributions. Such an effort would additionally give readers a wider array of reference points, making the subject matter more approachable for those outside the field. In her treatment of the scripture, Robinet achieves a framing of granular issues surrounding the *Scripture of Immaculate Numen* vis-à-vis medieval Daoism writ large. I found myself referring back to her work on a few occasions in order to gain a better perspective. Pettit and Chang could have attempted something similar, maybe even a simple yet detailed paraphrase of Robinet's findings to guide along the more casual readers of their book.

In the same vein, Pettit and Chang's book contains such a wealth of details and technical terms that they may potentially occlude the connections between individual chapters of the introduction or different parts of the same chapter. This is attributable in large part to the disjointed and chaotic nature of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. Accordingly, Pettit and Chang refrain from imposing an artificially systematic reading of the text, allowing its

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4 Tobias Zürn, "Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*'s Self-Fashioning as Embodiment of the Way" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2016). More recently, Zürn has condensed much of the argument from his dissertation into an article; see his "The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*'s Self-Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way," *Journal of Asian Studies* 79.2 (2020): 367–402.

nature to shine through in their "Translators' Introduction." They let the disorder speak and demonstrate that it was indeed at the heart of textual production for many Upper Clarity works. Still, some regular signposts at the outset and end of chapters, or between sections, explaining where readers have arrived and where they are headed, would be welcome. This is accomplished in the introductory and concluding chapters, but not consistently throughout the other chapters.

To be clear, these quirks—which are not to be wholly imputed to Pettit and Chang but to the field of Daoist studies, whose standards they reflect—will not hamper the reader's enjoyment of *A Library of Clouds*. Most will not long for having their hands held as they turn through its pages. Nor will they pine for excessive "evidence board" connections within the field and without, since they will to a large extent be able to draw them on their own. Nevertheless, I cannot help but hear the echo of the senior Buddhist scholar's words. Could they be true? Perhaps it is possible, in the end, to make small adjustments to render our work more intelligible and enjoyable to a broader spectrum of readers without compromising scholarly integrity.

In sum, with its expert translation and penetrating introduction, *A Library of Clouds* is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of medieval Daoism, a necessary read for anyone with an interest in the field. Pettit and Chang have effectively modified the way we must look at Daoist texts. Their findings paint a picture of scripture-making in medieval China that is enthrallingly complex and enchantingly messy, challenging many of the most persistently received notions about authorship and textual production. Pettit and Chang compel us to read Daoist materials differently, keeping our eyes on multiple moving pieces at once, following their trajectories as they continuously shape and reshape textual sources over time, changing them "just like billowing clouds in the sky."

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