

already stretches to 1,500 pages. The nature and length of the text makes it unlikely that any but the most dedicated readers without knowledge of Chinese will ever take it on from beginning to end, and anyway it makes no sense to read it like that. So, more searching devices would be welcome. For a thorough examination of a topic one needs to take a two-pronged approach, keying the Chinese text as printed in Unschuld and Tessenow's 2003 *A Dictionary of the Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* to the two volumes of translation. At least an appendix with pinyin/Chinese characters/translation/page numbers would have made life easier. There is a point at which seasoned readers of Classical Chinese will just revert to a searchable Chinese text.

The best way to work with the text is to scan it for areas of interest: the concept of wind as an aetiology of disease, dietary therapy, and contusions are the topics that I have searched for in the last week alone. In the style of Unschuld's translation of the *Nan Jing* this text is heavily footnoted with the translations of pre-modern Chinese commentaries not otherwise available in European languages. Zheng Jinsheng's comprehensive annotated bibliography provided on a CD is also a fabulous research tool. For scholars of Asian medicine the new translation is therefore a treasure.

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ROBERT FORD CAMPANY:

Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China.

(Kuroda Institute. Classics in East Asian Buddhism.) xix, 300 pp.

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012. \$65. ISBN 978 0 8248 3602 3.

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Signs from the Unseen Realm is a translation and study of the *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, a collection of 129 Buddhist stories compiled by Wang Yan 王琰, an obscure minor official of the fifth century. These brief anecdotes, none more than a few pages in translation, recount the adventures of men who died and returned from the underworld to describe the world beyond, of prisoners saved from unjust punishment through their devotion to Guanyin, of ghosts and demons, magical books and startling experiences that reveal the workings of karma.

In a series of books published over more than a decade, including both extensive translations and analysis, Robert Ford Campany has guided readers through the genre of literature to which *Signs from the Unseen Realm* belongs. Once dismissed as little more than the crude forerunner of the great works of Chinese fiction, informal narratives, often based on oral accounts of events said to have taken place in the recent past are in fact, Campany has argued, particularly suited for understanding the nature of Chinese religion. There is a proximity, an urgency, to these stories that differentiates them from, for instance, stories of the lives of the Buddha or even from biographies of eminent monks, because miracle tales “happened to someone very much like you, in the presence of named witnesses, at a particular place and time in your country” (p. 3).

While Campany's previous books examined “records of the strange” (*zhiguai* 志怪) and Daoist accounts of “transcendents” (*xian* 仙), *Signs from the Unseen Realm* focuses on Buddhism. The fifth century was a particularly fecund period for Buddhist miracle tales, producing a number of collections of accounts of the power of Buddhist texts and deities and illustrating the truth of Buddhist doctrines.

But *Signs from the Unseen Realm* represents by far the largest such collection, never before translated in full, packed with information on lay Buddhism, conceptions of the afterworld and everyday life. Although the text does not survive as an independent work, it has for the most part been preserved in quotations in other texts which do survive, most notably the seventh-century *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林. In addition to the translation, Campany provides a brief commentary following most of the accounts, as well as a substantial introduction in which he discusses the nature of the collection and makes a case for its significance.

Clues in the anecdotes themselves suggest that they were not invented by Wang Yan from whole cloth but were instead “collectively fashioned by many parties” (p. 17). Like the horrific accounts in twentieth-century urban myth of poodles exploding in microwaves, the point of origin, much less the veracity of a given story in these collections, is notoriously elusive. When an origin is ascribed to a story, it is usually just to supply the names of those who supposedly heard or saw or even just related what someone else heard or saw. Campany speculates at least once on the origins of a story, suggesting that an account of rebirth originated in talk about a boy born with unusual qualities (p. 185), but the ultimate origins of such stories – along with those unfortunate pets in microwaves – are surely beyond the historian’s grasp. And while it is possible that Wang Yan rewrote the stories he collected, as Campany argues, “it is easy for us, influenced by modern models of authorship, to make too much of this reshaping by end-stage collectors” (p. 47). Buddhist networks of friends and storytellers no doubt played an even more important role in the development of the stories. Nor do these murky origins make the material any less important as a historical source, reflecting as they do the broad concerns of Chinese Buddhists in the sixth century. These concerns share traits but do not overlap entirely with those of monastic leaders (preoccupied with the monastic regulations), or court ministers (rightly sensitive to the implications of the growth of Buddhism for official policy), or doctrinal specialists wrestling with the subtleties of Buddha nature, the existence of the soul or the teaching of emptiness. The primary focus of these stories is on the working of karma, particularly as played out in the afterlife, lay devotion (especially to Avalokiteśvara), vegetarianism and demonology.

But beyond reflecting individual beliefs, the stories also reveal the structure of Chinese religion. In his introduction, Campany expands upon ideas he has developed elsewhere of religion as a repertoire of discreet elements constantly changing in response to local conditions rather than as a creed defined by a set of core tenets. Here, Campany’s notes explaining how a particular quality or practice is defined against or together with similar traits or practices in Daoism or popular religion are especially useful (e.g. pp. 91 and 108). Perhaps in order to emphasize that these stories were read as history and not as fiction, Campany has little to say about their literary qualities. But surely their success is owing at least in part to their entertainment value, a quality that many of the stories hold to this day.

The translations are clear, accurate and colloquial, reflecting an awareness of the difficulties inherent in translation and the merits of rendering difficult terms in language that is easily understood. *Zhai* 齋 is translated as “abstinence”, *hu* 胡 as “Western”, *Ru* 儒 as “classicist” and *diyu* 地獄 as either “earth prison” or “purgatory”, depending on the context. Notes indicate the reasoning behind these translations and suggest some of the nuances that may be lost. I have yet to warm to the neologism “transcendent” for *xian* 仙 (I prefer sylph), but Campany and others translating Daoist texts have used the term so consistently that it is only a matter of time before it enters the language and appears in standard English dictionaries.

Taken together, the translation and study are valuable both for scholars and for undergraduates in courses on Buddhism, religious literature or Chinese religion.

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LENNERT GESTERKAMP:

The Heavenly Court: Daoist Temple Painting in China, 1200–1400.
(Sinica Leidensia.) xxiii, 380 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2011. €140. ISBN 978
90 04 18490 9.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X12001723

This book studies four sets of Chinese temple murals. They include three groups of murals still in situ in China (one in the first hall of Yongle Gong now in Ruicheng, Shanxi; the second in Beiyue Miao in Quyang, Hebei; and the third in Nan An in Yaodian, Shaanxi) and a pair of murals originally from Shanxi but now in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada. In the book under review they are all categorized as “paintings of Heavenly Court”, derived from the phrase *Chaoyuan tu* or picture depicting audience with the Origin (in Heavenly Court). Adopting a conceptual scheme informed mainly by studies of Daoist rituals, the book views all of them as “*chaoyuan tu*” (audience with the Origin) despite their great differences. By recasting these complicated and diverse works in the same conceptual mould, Gesterkamp is able to treat them in this single book. He relates them to an act in the rituals in which the priest sends his memorial to the Heavenly Court (the so-called *chaoyuan* audience), and to prescribed visualizations in the Inner Alchemy.

The book consists of five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 traces the historical development of the *Chao*-audience theme in early Chinese art. Chapter 2 introduces the temples, the murals and the related scholarship, and discusses the murals’ iconography. Chapter 3 establishes the ritual element of sending memorials, ritual altar installation and Daoist cosmology as the conceptual framework for the “Heavenly Court” paintings. Chapter 4 discusses the technical aspects of mural production: the workshops, the production process and the use of drawings as modules to form a complete design. Chapter 5 examines the “personalization” or the irregular elements in each set, which point to the designers’ intentions. The conclusion advances two theories: first, “the parallel development of painting and ritual”, namely that the historical developments of the two are closely related; and second, “correspondence of identity”, i.e. that the patrons’ identity is presented in the designs.

Other scholars have different views concerning the murals’ subjects and dates: two groups (Toronto and Beiyue Miao) are not about *chaoyuan*, and two cannot be dated prior to 1400 (Beiyue Miao and Nan An). The Beiyue Miao, strictly speaking, was an official rather than a “Daoist” institution, and the murals depict rainmaking. All other investigators of the Nan An murals date them to the middle or late Ming, or Qing.

Some of the book’s introductions to the monuments are imprecise. For example, Yongle Gong was discovered by “archaeologists” (in reality Cui Douchen, an official) in 1952 (in fact 1951) when the government planned the construction of a dam (actually, first planned in 1954), and they (in fact architectural historians) initiated the temple’s relocation in Ruicheng. The Daoist name of Lü Dongbin, the most