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BOOK REVIEW

Religion and Poetry in Medieval China: The Way and the Words

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Religion and Poetry in Medieval China: The Way and the Words, edited by Gil Raz and Anna M. Shields, serves as a festschrift in Stephen Bokenkamp's honor. All the contributors to the volume are either his students or friends in Daoist or literary studies of medieval China, who "are inspired by and responded to Bokenkamp's work" (16).

The volume is divided into three topical categories: Poetry, Religion (mainly Daoism but also Buddhism), and Reflections on Daoist Studies. Chapter 1, "Brushing Past Rainbows: Religion and Poetry in the Xu Mi Stele," by J.E.E. Pettit, examines the "Stele Inscription for the Altar at the Old Lodge of Senior Administrator Xu" (*Xu zhangshi jiuguan tan bei*), composed by early medieval literatus and Daoist master Tao Hongjing (456–536) upon completion of the Scarlet Solarity Lodge on Mount Mao. The second chapter, "Li Bo and Hu Ziyang: Companions of the Way," by Paul Kroll, explores a series of poetic and prose compositions by the High Tang poet Li Bo dedicated to Hu Ziyang, a Daoist master who transmitted to Li Bo the esoteric technique of absorbing solar essence. The third essay, "The Vicarious Angler: Gao Pian's Daoist Poetry," by Franciscus Verellen, studies the Daoist poems by late Tang dynasty general Gao Pian, who was also an alchemist and a poet with a deep interest in Daoism. In her chapter, "Traces of the Way: The Poetry of 'Divine Transcendence' in the Northern Song Anthology *Literature's Finest* (*Wen cui*)," Anna Shields questions the categories of religion and poetry as she investigates the classification of poems in an important yet still understudied Song anthology, the *Wen cui* (Literature's Finest), showing dynamic changes in cultural and literary contexts that shaped the reception of Tang literature during the Song.

In Part Two, Wang Zongyu's essay, "A Re-examination of the Second Juan of the *Array of the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure*," is a philological analysis of different recensions of medical recipes in the seminal Daoist text *Array of the Five Talismans*, found in Daoist and medical collectanea. Chapter 6, "'True Forms' and 'True Faces': Daoist and Buddhist discourse on Images," by Gil Raz, focusing on the terms "true forms" (*zhenxing*) and "true faces" (*zhenrong*), examines the confluence of Buddhist and Daoist rhetoric, discourse, and practice in dozens of stelae installed by local communities composed of Buddhist and Daoist adherents in medieval China. In his article, "After the Apocalypse: The Evolving Ethos of the Celestial

Master Daoists," Terry Kleeman, based on the "Code of Teachings and Precepts of the Celestial Master," reconstructs the lived religion of the Celestial Master community as it diminished millennial fervor and made the transition to a more routinized and established structure. Chapter 8, "Shangqing Scriptures as Performative Texts," by Robert Campany, using as an example the *Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits* (*Huangtian shangqing jinque dijun lingshu ziwen shangjing*), presents a rhetorical analysis of Shangqing Daoist scriptures that suggests a new way to see these texts: as vehicles or scripts for the performance of an alternative identity as a divinely rejuvenated being or cosmic recluse in the here and now. James Robson's chapter, "My Back Pages: The *Sūtra in Forty-Two Chapters* Revisited," traces the textual history of the *Sūtra in Forty-Two Chapters* in a range of Chinese sources, focusing on the earliest exemplar of this *sūtra* in a Daoist text. It also explains how and why this short text came to play such a significant role in Western accounts of Chinese Buddhist history.

In Part Three, John Lagerwey's essay, "Taking Stock," reflects on the author's journey as a scholar of Chinese religion, and his realization of the centrality of Daoism, especially its ritual tradition, to Chinese religious life. The last chapter, "Traversing the Golden Porte—The Problem with Daoist Studies," by Stephen Bokenkamp, serves as an epilogue that both contemplates the intersection of poetry and Daoism and considers the state of Daoist Studies. Bokenkamp focuses on the Daoist term "Golden Gatetowers" (*jinque*), including its changing meanings across a variety of primary sources as well as various translations of it by modern scholars.

The most obvious feature of this volume is its interdisciplinary perspective. As Raz and Shields effectively critique in their introduction, "Our contemporary disciplinary labels tend to simplify the identities of medieval Chinese people—as adherents to a particular religion, or writers of a specific literary form—and thereby occlude the reality of their intertwined, multiple cultural practices" (9). Primarily, as the volume title "the Way and the Words" shows, the chapters read across traditions and disciplines of literature and religion. Not only is the volume organized into three parts of which the first focuses on poetry and the other two treat religion (largely Daoism), but also many of its essays individually discuss religion and literature at the same time. The chapters by Pettit, Kroll, Verellen, Shields, Campany, and Bokenkamp all deal with Daoist poetry, some with full treatment, and some partially. While Raz does not directly treat poetic art, he elaborates on the notions of "true form" (the "formless form" of the ultimate Dao) and "true face" (the physical manifestation of the ultimate (non) reality or truth) to discuss Daoist and Buddhist ideas of images and their use in visual art. Lagerwey even concludes that "religious and artistic traditions have much more to tell us than science" about the fundamental reality of human subjectivity in general and Chinese culture in particular (223). Shields articulates the biases in the Song accounts that minimized the role of Daoism in Tang literature due to the rise of Neo-Confucianism, the anti-religious scholarly tastes, and the political historical narrative of the eleventh century that attacked Daoist influence on the state. These biases to some extent remain today, and her thesis is relevant to contemporary scholarship.

As well as disciplinary boundaries, the volume endeavors to cross boundaries between religions, showing Buddho-Daoist interactions in medieval China. Pettit discusses Tao Hongjing's combination of Buddhist and Daoist practices. Kroll reminds us that it was the Buddhist monk Zhenqian who asked Li Bo to eulogize Daoist Master Hu, revealing the close personal links among Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, and poets. Kleeman attributes the more mature vision of the Celestial Master path—with its more normal, settled form and less tension about interactions with non-

believers—to the Buddhist impact. The very objects of study by both Raz and Robson are directly about Buddho-Daoist interaction. In the case of Raz, it is the Buddho-Daoist stelae and their notions and practice of figural images. Robson's essay of course examines various sources for the Buddhist *Sūtra in Forty-Two Chapters*. But it consults the seminal Daoist text, the *Zhen'gao* (Declarations of the Perfected), as one of the earliest exemplars of this *sūtra*, which helps us to understand the nature of this *sūtra*.

The third interdisciplinary aspect of the volume is the reliance on both conventional texts and stelae. This emphasis alerts us to the significance of materiality in discussing the effect and efficacy of texts. As Kroll shows, Li Bo's most extensive composition on Hu Ziyang is an inscribed stele, rather than a piece of poetry, erected at his tomb site. The main focus of both Pettit's and Raz's chapters is a stele. Pettit emphasizes the materiality of the stele on which the text was inscribed, while Raz analyzes the terms "true forms" and "true faces" in the Buddho-Daoist stelae to show the aspirations and motivations behind combined Buddhist and Daoist iconographies. One key feature of this volume is indeed the use of stelae, either as texts or the objects of study. It is here that we can talk about materiality of texts. Unlike conventional received texts, which lie in the hands of a private reader, these stelae are public texts, another aspect of their materiality in relation to their social function and readership. Adam Chau has proposed the idea of "text acts" for writing and inscribing "cliff inscriptions" on Chinese sacred mountains: "The presence of these texts assumes a fetishistic power. They act upon their audience and produce effects (awe, submission, recognition, etc.). More than (and sometimes rather than) reading these texts, the audience *feels* the force of their presence."[1] In this light, should scholars consider Li Bo's "Stele Inscription for Master Ziyang of Handong," Tao Hongjing's "Stele Inscription for the Altar at the Old Lodge of Senior Administrator Xu," and the Daoist stelae with combined Buddho-Daoist iconographies in North China to be kinds of "awesome" cultural achievements, which make pilgrims or readers submit to the "fetishistic power" of the inscriptions, religiously or culturally? This question deserves further attention.

The boundary-crossing between literature and religion, between Buddhism and Daoism, and between received texts and stelae leads further to Wang Zongyu's essay. Beyond reminding us of the common discourse and practice shared by Daoists and physicians, Wang alerts us to the materiality of manuscripts, Daoist and medical, that is occluded not only by modern print editions but by traditional woodblock prints as well.

Last but not least, there is one more interaction. While Robson and Wang Zongyu conduct meticulous textual criticism, Campany offers a hermeneutical interpretation of Shangqing scriptures. Using the *Purple Texts* as an example, he elucidates that doing the practices in Shangqing Daoism must have invested the practitioner with an expanded, alternate identity. "The more the practitioner performed the role laid out in scriptures, the less engaged he was in his roles in this world" (192). This interpretation differs radically from conventional readings, and Campany fleshes out what that means and what difference it might make in our understanding of these scriptures and Shangqing Daoism.

The volume makes its argument for boundary-crossing in part by addressing the biases in Neo-Confucian discourse and contemporary disciplinary categories with regard to medieval Chinese culture and elite identity. These biases are also shaped by

[1]Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 97.

the contours and gaps in the textual archive and limited sources as they were transmitted and refashioned by centuries of readers. The solution suggested by the contributors to the volume, as Gil and Shields expound in their introduction, is to "read across traditions and disciplines, providing new contexts for their specific topics, whether reading Daoist scriptures in light of medical compilations, determining the religious leanings of compilers of poetry anthologies, and of poets, examining archeological and epigraphic sources across religious traditions, and delving into the complexities of Buddhist and Daoist interactions" (10). Not only do we need to read beyond disciplinary boundaries, but we should also understand any given medieval historical figure as someone who may be a celebrated poet but also a religious practitioner performing the role prescribed in scriptures, who patronized Daoism but also befriended Buddhists or cited Buddhist *sūtra* in his own works, and whose Daoist writings could also have impact on medical recipes. This way, a history of medieval China and its culture would be more multifaceted and thus more believable, albeit undoubtedly more complicated, and surely more challenging to write.