

Purposes, Means and Convictions in Daoism

A Berlin Symposium

Bearbeitet von
Florian C Reiter

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Edited by
Florian C. Reiter

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Foreword

In the year 2005 the Seminar für Sinologie of Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany) staged a second international symposium on Daoism. The general theme was: Purposes, Means and Convictions in Daoism. The symposium was sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG/Bonn). Most participants already took part in 2001, when we held our first symposium on Scriptures, Schools and Forms of Practice in Daoism.¹

The intention of the new conference was to focus on contents that either clearly surfaced or sometimes loomed in the background of the agenda of our first symposium. We wished to go ahead another step as to approach Daoism from a different angle that may reveal religious purposes, the underlying convictions and means that Daoist priests deployed to realize them.

Andreas Feldtkeller opened the symposium with his theoretical considerations: General Reflections on Religious Purposes, Means and Convictions. He intended to convey the perspectives of religious studies, quite independent of any individual religion. This paper was the first contribution in the symposium, and I present it to be the starter in the publication. The sequence of the other articles completely deviates from the program of the symposium. The participants in the symposium had exchanged their articles in order to cross-check them, and then I received them for publication. Due to this process, quite a new and different sequence of articles seemed to be advisable for the publication.

The first section: Historical and Ritual Traditions.

Terry Kleeman displays in depth the riches of Daoism in the Third Century. The author reflects on new results of scholarly textual studies, and continues to describe the major practical constituents of early Daoist communities that were kept together by compelling religious messages, evocative rites and a specific eschatology.

John Lagerwey studying The Old Lord's Scripture for the Chanting of the Commandments (*Laojun yinsong jiejing*) makes a further step towards the recognition of the inner conditions of early medieval Daoism in Northern China, where the veneration of the earth god points to an important system of population registry and surveillance. It was the time and region where the Heavenly Master Kou Qianzhi spread and established purist ideas and methods. Naturally, The Old Lord's

¹ Poul Andersen and Florian C. Reiter, eds.: *Scriptures, Schools and Forms of Practice in Daoism, A Berlin Symposium*. In: *Asien- und Afrika-Studien 20* der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Wiesbaden 2005.

Scripture for the Chanting of the Commandments is very much in the centre of this astonishing and detailed study.

Liu Yi takes up the study of a central name in Heavenly Master Daoism, namely Zhang Daoling, and he considers very pointedly the dichotomy of Myth and History (Chin.). Liu Yi analyses the historical records, the discrepancies in the dating of events, and he also reflects very consciously on other aspects of early Daoism. As a historian he features and explains the emergence and certain fortification of the myth around Zhang Daoling in a rather late period of Daoist history (Jin dynasty, 6th ct.).

Gil Raz draws our attention to the state administration and the osmosis of historical, mythological, religious and governmental elements that worked in this sphere, which *chanwei* literature documents. The theme of this author reads: Imperial Efficacy: Debates on Imperial Ritual in Early Medieval China and the Emergence of Daoist Ritual Schemata. The author helps the reader to get a deep understanding for the network of imperial and Daoist ritual schemata and convictions. This relationship certainly was well known during the Tang period, which leads to the second section of this book.

The second section: Varieties of Religious Activities and Functions.

T. Barrett gives a lucid presentation of the careers and advances of princess-nuns in the power structure of the high Tang Period. Religious Daoism had in store equal chances for men and women. Careers in Daoist institutions and ritual activities could mean shelter and public acknowledgement as well. We learn about singular and brilliant women, Daoist nuns, who managed to cope with the treacherous depths of the political scene at the Tang court. They illustrate the fragile standing of elite women in a male dominated society, and religion was a feasible way out. The author also notices *en passant* the poor understanding of this theme that some modern historians in China reveal. Important basic Daoist convictions about the intrinsic qualities of the human body and life, male or female, also surface in the following contributions.

This is not a new theme, and Stephen R. Bokenkamp observes that “in modern studies of Daoism, bodies are everywhere”. His contribution scrutinizes this amazing situation, putting the question What Daoist Body? The article clarifies the terminological and conceptual pitfalls and implications of the concept “the body” that Daoists use to speak about the Self. The author analyses the metaphor of the “multi-spirit body” and shows which purposes it serves. The author describes that most of this was not confined to Daoism but was well embedded in the world of thought within which Daoism developed. An additional major concern for this author is the sometimes erratic way in which modern scholars treat such themes, making “serpents of little girls”.

The human body and its divine potentials that body divinities represent, is the theme of the following contribution by Li Gang. The article: The Subtlety of Body

Divinities and their Fortification, a Discussion of the Basis for Going Beyond Life and Death in the Daoist Philosophy of Life (Chin.) presents a great collection of Daoist canonical sources (Han-Yuan) that describe the relationship between the human physical body and its transcendent qualities that the inhabitant divine potentials (“body divinities”) constitute. This is connected with religious means that are used to foster the relationship between body and the divine.

The underlying convictions and purposes also surface in the ritual means and practices that Florian C. Reiter displays in his contribution: The Management of Nature: Convictions and Means in Daoist Thunder Magic (*Daojiao leifa*). The author speaks about the ranking of Thunder Magic in the history of religious Daoism and proceeds to describe *mudrās* (*shouyin*) and Thunder amulets (*leifu*) that serve as practical means in order to manage nature. Much attention is paid to the spiritual condition for the composition and deployment of Thunder amulets, which is the ritual process of turning to be divine (*bianshen/ lianshen*).

Li Yuanguo analyses the larger historical frame for such practices in Song Thunder Magic and presents: The Development of Daoist Thunder Magic and its Background in the Southern Song Period (Chin.). The author shows that Thunder Magic derived from Daoist sources and activities that were current in earlier periods (Tang). Thunder Magic branched out during the Song period, and due to the activities of outstanding priests (esp. Wang Wenqing), Thunder Magic gained official recognition as genuine asset to the Daoist ritual profession. The author speaks about the historical situation (Nan Song), the religious components (divinities/*leishen*) and intellectual tendencies (*sixiang*) that characterize Thunder Magic in the Southern Song period.

Volker Olles makes the step into the 19th century and describes the Chinese Literati and Daoist Sacred Space, A Nineteenth Century Inscription in Pujiang County (Sichuan Province). The author presents an inscription (text and translation) and analyses the intermingling of religious notions and literati traditions that converge in one local scene. The area in consideration is the site of an antique Diocese of Heavenly Master Daoism in Sichuan province. The contribution says much about the reality of the mountainous stage, where Daoism developed within folk life. Such a local stage was and still is “sacred space”, which in this case reflects the cosmic dimension of the mountain *Changqiu shan* (Pujiang County).

Wang Zongyu presents another study of local and religious realities as documented in local gazetteers and other historical and religious sources. The contribution is entitled: The Relationship between Quanzhen Daoism and Local Cults (Chin.). The author addresses various themes that are important for Daoist scholars. Quanzhen Daoists often prove to have had a rather opaque connection with ritual Daoism. They were dedicated to a celibate life, but still had to make a living among the people. Quanzhen Daoists who upheld the formula “the three religions unite to be one entity” (*sanjiao heyi*) roamed the countryside where they found shelter in established temples that housed local deities and cults. The author presents and analyses abundant documents that describe how differently Quanzhen Daoists

handled the situation and eventually adapted to religious surroundings that had nothing in common with Quanzhen Daoism.

All these contributions show in one way or the other the workings of purposes, convictions and means in Daoist religious life. I have to thank the contributors who made great efforts to work on their oral presentations in order to compile veritable scholarly articles that they made available for this publication. It was important to have the publication come out soon after the symposium in 2005. It is for this reason that we did not revise some individual liberties concerning the style of the articles.

I also thank very much my secretary Mrs Elisabeth Schulze who brought the whole book into the proper layout. I wish to thank Volker Olles and Harald Rasch who in the final phase of publication preparations helped me to compile the glossary and to do the final proof reading. At this stage we also appreciated very much the helpful suggestions by the printing house Harrassowitz Verlag (Wiesbaden). The printing costs of the publication were met by the Seminar für Sinologie of Humboldt University. Finally, I wish to convey all my best thanks to those who supported us and helped again to make the symposium a most pleasant event.

Florian C. Reiter
(Humboldt University, Berlin)