The Encyclopedia of TAOISM

Volume I

Fabrizio Pregadio
Editor

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TAOISM

I

Edited by

Fabrizio Pregadio

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INTRODUCTION

Many readers will view *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* as one of the countless tools that provide, according to the stereotyped formulation, "fast and easy access" to an assortment of facts and data. Undoubtedly, those readers will be correct in reckoning the present book among the growing collection of reference works—encyclopedias, dictionaries, catalogues, indexes, bibliographies, and so forth—that some might view as one of the "signs of the times." Beyond its purpose as a convenient source of information, however, this book intends to illustrate the central principles and historical forms of Taoism, which is among the most misconceived traditions of antiquity that have survived to the present day. Neither the incessant feed of commercial publications on Taoism, nor the attempts to define Taoism in relation to science, medicine, psychology, ethics, and other branches of modern Western learning, have done much to eliminate those misconceptions, and often such efforts have contributed to their formation and dissemination. Readers will have different views on the qualitative aspects of the book, but in this regard *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* should help to dispel at least the most flagrant misinterpretations that surround a form of doctrine and practice whose features often contrast sharply—and sometimes radically—with the modern Western worldview.

The Encyclopedia of Taoism provides an overview of the Taoist tradition through a wide selection of themes, reflects the current state of Taoist scholarship, and aims to contribute to a better understanding of this and related fields of study. It also endeavors to acquaint a wider public with the viewpoints of researchers working in this area, a task made difficult by some of the assumptions predominant within broad sectors of academia and of the so-called general public. On the one hand, scholars working in the field of Taoist studies—an area that has grown beyond all expectations, perhaps even too rapidly, in the last three or four decades, as the present book also attests—are well aware of the richness and complexity of the Taoist tradition. Academic study, however, is not always capable of explicating the nature of Taoist teachings and the reasons for their plurality of forms to a wider audience. Not only are scholars accustomed to writing for other scholars, but the adoption of different standpoints and methodologies within the field results in an elaborate landscape of views and opinions that often contradict one another. Being typically relativist, moreover, scholarship cannot have—and in fact normally does not

claim to have—the final word on many of the most important notions associated with a tradition like Taoism: the continued search for the "new" (new theories, perspectives, and interpretations periodically replacing each other) that is vital for scholarship lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from the pursuit of the "old" (the primordial, original, or unchangeable) that characterizes premodern teachings like Taoism. On the other hand, many people outside the field of Taoist studies who are attracted by the cryptic sayings of the *Daode jing* and fascinated by the enigmatic stories of the *Zhuangzi* find it difficult or even unimportant to consider that Taoism has a proper history. Recent translations of other texts, addressed to the lay public, do not provide much help, as even the best among them consist of literal renditions that offer little or no support to the reader, or contain cursory and superficial "historical introductions." It is not surprising, therefore, that many people outside the field of Taoist studies are surprised or confused as they learn that the history of Taoism does not end with those two major books but is also populated by gods, demons, saints, immortals, rituals, exorcism, talismans, and elixirs, to mention just a handful of the main components. Yet, for its masters, priests, and adepts, this is what Taoism has been for about two and a half millennia.

According to one of several ways to understand it, the bewildering variety of forms that one observes in Taoism originates in the continuous reformulation of certain basic principles (in which belief, let it be said once, plays no part), and in the creation or modification of forms of individual and collective practice. This process of ongoing renewal, initiated by Taoist masters, priests, adepts, codifiers, commentators, and others, has responded to varying external circumstances and settings—historical events, social milieux, intellectual trends, and religious cults—and aims to ensure that their tradition (a word that is etymologically synonymous with "transmission") survives without major breaks.

With regard to the principles, this perspective presupposes that change occurs in the realm of spoken, written, and visual representations of essential notions that by their own nature are not tied to particular places, times, cultures, or languages. The many expressions of Taoist practice are ways of framing and periodically recodifying ritual practices and self-cultivation methods, adapting them to particular settings according to the characteristics and needs of different individuals or groups, and to the changing circumstances mentioned above. One of the unifying features that underlies this variety of forms is the ideal, but fundamental, view that Taoist doctrines and practices—where "practices" again refers to both self-cultivation and ritual—ultimately derive from the Dao itself, usually through the intermediation of deities (seen as "transformations" of the Dao) or realized beings (anonymous or identified, historical or legendary, but always described as having "attained to the Dao") who have revealed them to humanity as a whole or to particular circles or groups. Teachings and methods aim to make it possible for various individuals and communities to "return" to the Dao, and at the same time to discourage them from beliefs and practices deemed to be unproductive or even harmful.

This historical process of continuous renovation is strongly influenced by the incorporation of external elements (Buddhism is the most conspicuous example), paralleled by the less frequent but likewise significant reverse phenomenon of "disconnection" of certain components from their doctrinal sources, especially in the domain of practice. Even more widespread and elaborate are the exchanges between Taoism and the Chinese folk religion, which lead not only to the assimilation of religious elements such as local deities and cults into the domain of Taoism, but also to instances of Taoist priests performing, besides Taoist rituals, a variety of additional religious functions, such as exorcism and ritual healing—functions that are also fulfilled by other religious specialists who, on the contrary, are not entitled to officiate the properly Taoist liturgy. Scholars often claim that such phenomena of exchange and reformulation result from competition among different religious groups, and label the incorporation of external elements into Taoism—from Buddhism, the folk religion, or elsewhere—as appropriation. These views may or may not be accurate, but in any case the phenomena under discussion are far from being arbitrary or unjustified: they may occur because of analogy of contents, the intent to connect (or bring back) "loose" forms of practice to doctrinal principles, the ambition to elevate life for individuals and communities, or simply the need to comply with local customs.

As a result, like all major traditions in which the preservation of the inner doctrinal core primarily relies on transmission from master to disciple (or rather on "initiatory chains" that may not even be historical in nature), Taoism also plays a comprehensive social role that involves two overlapping processes: the integration of features of the folk religion that do not intrinsically conflict with that core, and the creation of forms of practice meant to address the needs of wider groups beyond the circles of adepts. These two aspects of Taoism, which in a very general sense pertain to the distinction between "esoteric" and "exoteric," highlight the crucial function of transmission—in both its forms, initiation and ordination—not only as an essential feature of the Taoist tradition, but also as one of the key elements that differentiate it from the native varieties of folk religion in China.

While several scholars would certainly dispute or at least qualify this understanding of Taoism, consideration of these and related points might help to solve the dilemma of whether Taoism is philosophy or religion. These two notions did not exist in premodern China in the sense with which they are meant in the modern Western world, and their use in Taoist scholarship has

raised questions that have not yet been answered in a satisfying way. Whereas in earlier times Taoism was deemed by Western scholars to be nothing but philosophy, and any involvement in the domain of religion was either denied or classified as "superstition," in the last few decades Taoist scholarship has shifted to the opposite extreme, sometimes even going so far as to deny any foundational role to a work like the *Daode jing* (the latter opinion has been held only by a few scholars working primarily in the broader field of Chinese religion rather than Taoism). The same quandary surrounds the related issue of *daojia* versus *daojiao*, the two terms to which the first entries in this book are devoted. Even though the origins of these terms may lie in mere bibliographic categories, Taoists have sometimes used them interchangeably to denote what we call "Taoism," and sometimes separately to distinguish the teachings of the *Daode jing* (and a few other works including the *Zhuangzi*) from "all the rest." While these terms do not seem to have raised major issues at any time in the history of Taoism, the questions that they have generated in the scholarly realm are largely products of their early flawed translation, or rather interpretation, as "philosophical Taoism" and "religious Taoism," respectively. Based on the way of seeing outlined above, Taoism is not exactly either a philosophy or a religion, but rather a set of consistent doctrinal notions that have taken many forms and given rise to a large variety of individual and collective practices throughout the history of the tradition. Taoist ideas and practices have always been in touch with various philosophical and religious trends, generating an intricate net of intellectual and religious phenomena that on the surface may appear to be unrelated to each other.

Scholars who face this range of phenomena take different approaches according to their individual interests and inclinations. Some emphasize doctrinal content while others stress religious features, some focus on ritual practices and others on self-cultivation methods, and so forth. This variety of approaches, as noted above, has sometimes occasioned the neglect, marginalization, or even rejection of certain components in favor of others. Taoism itself, however, does not lack examples of comprehensive models of teachings and practices coordinated in a hierarchical arrangement, the most important being the Three Caverns (*sandong*). Whether these models can be reproduced in scholarship is not the point. What is crucial is rather the fact that attention to the central principles allows one to identify the position that individual forms and phenomena associated with Taoism occupy within the tradition as a whole, and to eschew reductive interpretations, including those that view Taoism exclusively as a religion, or as a philosophy.

The Encyclopedia of Taoism aims to provide its readers with a tool to appreciate the complexity of this tradition and its multiple historical sources, representatives, and manifestations. It does so by offering a large number of entries—most of which would better be characterized as short essays—on those manifold facets, concerned not only with their specific nature but also with the links or differences that exist among them. An initial list of about 1,800 potential topics drawn up in the earliest stage of this project was later reduced to a more manageable and efficient number. Contributors have played a role in shaping the final table of contents by suggesting that entries be added, deleted, or merged. This lengthy but indispensable process has resulted in the approximately 800 entries that compose the present book.

These entries are divided into two main sections. Although the first section is entitled "Taoism: An Overview," it does not consist of a systematic description of Taoism, which is an impossible task given the lack of "system" that is characteristic of this and all other traditional teachings. Rather, these essays aim to provide a short but fairly comprehensive exposition of themes and issues that cross over the boundaries of individual traditions, texts, or authors. The seventy or so relevant entries appear under the following categories: Definitions; Lineages and Traditions; Scriptures and Texts; Cosmology; Deities and Spirits; Sacred Sites; Views of the Human Being; Views of Society; Religious Organization; Aspects of Religious Practice and Experience; Taoism and Chinese Thought and Religion; Taoism and Chinese Society; Taoism and Chinese Culture; and Taoism outside China.

The second section of the book contains entries arranged in alphabetical order. The essays here are concerned with schools, lineages, and traditions (ca. 30 entries); persons (ca. 150 entries); texts (ca. 200 entries); terms (including ritual and self-cultivation practices, ca. 225 entries); divinities and immortals (ca. 80 entries); temples (ca. 20 entries); and mountains (ca. 20 entries). Needless to say, there is no difference of status between the entries in the first and second sections of the book, but only one of focus, which is broader in the first part and sharper in the second. The alphabetical arrangement makes it easy to locate entries in the second part, but this system will not be helpful to readers who wish to identify all entries related to a comprehensive topic, such as a particular Taoist lineage. For this reason, the Synoptic Table of Contents provides a "reading guide" that users of this book may find convenient to consult.

As should be clear from the earlier part of this introduction, the most difficult task in editing this work, but also the most absorbing one, has been the attempt to mediate between the scholarly outlook of the forty-six contributors and the perspectives of the intended readership. No one, myself included, will be entirely satisfied with the results. Scholars will likely find many features incorporated for the benefit of non-specialist readers to be superfluous, and non-specialist readers will surely deem many details provided for the sake of consistent scholarly style to be redundant.

In principle, the readership of *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* consists of scholars, students, and the elusive "learned public." In addition to Taoist studies, the main fields relevant to its subject matter are Chinese studies, religious studies, and, broadly speaking, the humanistic disciplines. Beyond this convenient formulation, the precise identity of one's readership is the most significant question for those who write a work like this one. The artificial landscapes created by marketing do not help much in drawing an accurate mental map of the actual readers of a book and their different expectations, especially if that book, as does the present one, attempts to cover a vast and largely unfamiliar territory. Nevertheless, I would like to try to clarify briefly what various readers may expect to find in this encyclopedia.

Originally planned as a collection of short essays on a large number of subjects, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* has preserved this format, without attempting to simplify a subject that is by nature complex. Readers who wish to become acquainted with topics and issues related to Taoism—as well as those who wish to know how Taoism has dealt with topics and issues shared with other traditions—may find here reliable accounts written by specialists in the academic field of Taoist studies (in almost all cases, contributors have written on topics relevant to their own specialization within the field). Throughout the lengthy editorial process, however, the book has also taken on many of the features of a specialized reference work. I deem this to be a positive development and would be pleased if students and scholars find *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* helpful for study, research, and possibly also for teaching. Cross-references, bibliographies, lists of related entries, and other features of the book should enable all readers to use *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* as a starting point for further investigation.

From the beginning of the editorial process, the expectations and requirements of the non-specialist reader have been kept in mind. In particular, care has been taken to provide, whenever possible, consistent translations of Chinese terms, in order to make the continuity among entries dealing with related topics clearer to readers who must depend on the English translations to find their way through the book. I am indebted to all contributors for assenting to this general principle, even though this has often meant they have had to cast aside their preferred translations and replace them with others. Nevertheless, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* still reflects the current lack of consensus among scholars on how several major terms found in Taoist texts should be rendered into English. Those terms that have retained multiple translations in this work include, for instance, *xin*, variously translated as "mind," "heart," "mind-heart," or "heart-mind"; *wuxing*, translated as "five agents" or "five phases"; *xianren*, translated as "immortal" or "transcendent"; and *zhenren*, translated as "true man," "real man," "authentic man," or "perfected."

The Encyclopedia of Taoism has been in preparation for much longer than most people involved would have wished or imagined when the project began. I apologize for this delay, for which I am ultimately responsible. I have been honored by the trust that so many colleagues have accorded to me, and I hope that they will be among the first to benefit from this book. Beyond this, I am grateful to all contributors for their support and encouragement, and for the patience they have displayed at all stages. All of them have taught me many important things.

I am certain that all the authors of this book join me in remembering two of us who have not seen their contributions published. Julian Pas passed away on June 12, 2000, and Isabelle Robinet on June 23 of the same year. Julian contributed many of the illustrations that appear in this book. Having published his *Historical Dictionary of Taoism* in 1998 (in cooperation with Mam Kam Leung; Lanham, Md., and London: The Scarecrow Press), he responded to my invitation by sending about five dozen original black-and-white photographs, from which I have selected those that match the content of the entries most closely. *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* would have been not only much less attractive but also much less valuable without his help. Isabelle wrote about sixty entries, all of which reflect her profound understanding of the multiple levels of the Taoist discourse. "And with these, it makes almost a book," she wrote to me when she sent her last batch of entries; indeed, her essays might be read as one of several books that an attentive reader can find contained within *the Encyclopedia of Taoism*.

I am grateful to the three production editors who helped begin the project and bring it to completion. Jonathan Price of Curzon Press contacted me in late 1996 with an invitation to take care of this book; his enthusiasm and the genuine interest that he showed in the subject of the encyclopedia are among the factors that persuaded me to accept this task. Since the project moved under Routledge's aegis, Dominic Shryane has displayed an almost unimaginable patience in helping to solve all kinds of major and minor issues. And in the final but decisive stages of the project, Gerard Greenway has made sure that everything moved in the right direction so that the book would, at long last, see the light of day.

George Clonos and Ben Brose, graduate students of the Department of Religious Studies, Stanford University, have closely collaborated with me at various stages; I have enjoyed their help and friendship. Carl Bielefeldt, Bernard Faure, Michael Zimmermann, Michael Loewe, Ed Shaughnessy, Nicola di Cosmo, and Bent Nielsen have offered their advice and contributed to improve certain details of the book. Poul Andersen, Kim Daeyeol, Monica Esposito, and Vincent Goossaert, in addition to writing their own essays, have helped in areas beyond my expertise. Gaynor Sekimori, Joachim Kurtz, Jason

Josephson, and Dominic Steavu have drafted translations of entries originally submitted in Chinese and Japanese. Su Xiaoqin, Yang Zhaohua, Kenneth Koo, and Noreen Khawaja have provided much-needed assistance. I am also grateful to Mitamura Keiko, Tanaka Fumio, and Tsuchiya Masaaki who have coauthored some entries with Yamada Toshiaki.

A special, heartfelt thank goes to Sarah Fremerman Aptilon, who copyedited the book with exceptional dedication and care for detail; her task included making entries that are written by contributors who speak about ten different native languages readable in English. David Goodrich of Birdtrack Press has given a splendid shape to the book, with his expertise in several East Asian writing systems and his readiness to improve even the most minute of details. Kitamura Yoshiko has offered constant support and has helped in more ways than I could ever say. Finally—and everyone will understand that here I am simply reverting the actual order of things—I wish to thank Tim Barrett, and not only for agreeing to write his foreword in addition to several essays. What exactly he did for this book is still somehow unclear to me; he may even have done nothing, of course in the Taoist sense.

Fabrizio Pregadio

CONVENTIONS, FORMAT OF THE ENTRIES, ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Conventions

Systems of transcription. The *pinyin* system of alphabetic transliteration from Chinese is used throughout the book, except in quotations of passages from works that adopt the Wade-Giles system. Conversion tables from and to the *pinyin* and the Wade-Giles systems are found at the end of the book. For the Japanese and the Korean languages, the book adopts the Hepburn and the McCune-Reischauer systems of transcription, respectively.

Personal names. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean personal names are cited following the native convention, with the surname preceding the first name. Persons are typically referred to with their *ming* 名 (given name). The headings of entries devoted to persons indicate, when they are known and when this information is significant, the person's *zi* 字 (variously referred to in English as cognomen, courtesy name, or style) and *hao* 號 (appellation or sobriquet).

Official titles. Official titles are translated according to Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Hucker 1985), except where contributors have indicated that they prefer different translations.

Place names. As a rule, place names are followed by the corresponding Chinese characters and the indication of the present-day province. Chinese characters are omitted, however, for the following place names that occur repeatedly throughout the book: Beijing (Peking) 北京, Chengdu 成都, Chang'an 長安, Guangzhou (Canton) 廣州, Fuzhou 福州, Hangzhou 杭州, Kaifeng 開封, Luoyang 洛陽, Nanchang 南昌, Nanjing 南京, Shanghai 上海, Suzhou 蘇州, and Xi'an 西安.

Titles of texts. Titles of texts are typically followed by the corresponding Chinese characters and an English translation. Chinese characters are omitted for texts that have independent entries in the book, for titles of the Standard Histories, and in parenthetical bibliographic references. Titles of works found

(*wailu* 外籙) for the laity. The Esoteric Registers are in the form of chart-registers (*tulu* 圖籙), which consist of images or maps of the cosmos and the names of transcendents, and thereby act as passes for safe conduct to the otherworld. The talismanic registers (*fulu* 符籙), which are the Exoteric Registers of the laity, are excerpts from the more comprehensive registers of the masters.

Amy Lynn MILLER

📖 Benn 1991, passim; Dean 1993, 53–58; Kroll 1986a, 108–13; Lagerwey 1987c, 157–61 and passim; Ren Jiyu 1990, 340–90; Robinet 1993, 143–51; Robinet 1997b, 57–58; Schipper 1978, 376–81; Schipper 1985c; Schipper 1993, 60–71; Seidel 1979; Seidel 1981, 241–47; Seidel 1983a, 323–32 and passim

※ FU [talisman]; ORDINATION AND PRIESTHOOD; TRANSMISSION

Hagiography

The Taoist biographical tradition primarily celebrates the exploits of immortals, those who have transcended the bounds of a standard life and attained the deathless and supreme state. It records their extraordinary feats and their powers and capabilities that exceed those of normal people. In some instances the biographies recount how these figures attained their exalted condition, for all of them passed from a human existence to a transcendent one, and why such a destiny fell to them and no-one else. Importantly, however, the biographies do not, in general, describe the techniques by which immortality was attained. Discussions of the preparation of elixirs, rules for entering sacred mountains and writing of talismans (*FU) are notable by their scarcity in Taoist hagiography. Rather, the purpose of these biographies appears to be to provide evidence for the existence of immortals and records of models for emulation, rather than to give instructions on the attainment of immortality. For that, keen readers would have to look elsewhere.

Discussions of the purpose of Taoist biographies found in prefaces to collections and the like justify their existence on two major grounds. First, the lives recorded countered the perennial objection that immortality was not possible and that those who claimed to have attained it were simply charlatans. Secondly, the collections were often defined by their position in a debate that resounds through the history of immortality, namely whether the ability to gain this exalted state was dependent on the fate one received at birth (length of life was, and to some extent still is, regarded as fated) or whether immortality was something that anybody could attain given the right

information, sufficient study and apparently boundless enthusiasm. The *loci classici* for the two sides of this discussion are *Xi Kang's (223–62) *Yangsheng lun* 養生論 (Essay on Nourishing Life) and *Wu Yun's (?–778) **Shenxian kexue lun* (An Essay on How One May Become a Divine Immortal Through Training) respectively. Other motivations may be inferred from some collections compiled with a specific purpose in mind. Notable among these are the desire to record (or invent) a lineage or line of transmission such as the **Han tianshi shijia* (Lineage of the Han Celestial Master) which records the lives of the Celestial Masters from *Zhang Daoling, who ascended to Heaven in the second century, to the forty-ninth Celestial Master, Zhang Yongxu 張永緒, who lived in the sixteenth century. Another motivation is revealed in *Du Guangting's (lost) *Wangshi shenxian zhuan* 王氏神仙傳 (Biographies of Immortals of the Family Name Wang; Yan Yiping 1974, vol. 1) where a particular family is exalted—in this case the family of the ruler of the state of Shu in which court Du found himself. Similarly, there exist collections with a regional focus which bolster local pride and those associated with specific mountains or other cult sites.

Biographies of Taoist immortals—especially lesser known ones—are often remarkably stable over time. The rewriting of biographies, or the composition of a new one where an older version exists, is generally an indication that the subject of the biography has gained a new importance or a new role.

The earliest collection in the tradition is **Liexian zhuan* (Biographies of Exemplary Immortals) which may indeed, perversely, be said to predate Taoism itself. Traditionally attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–8 or 6 BCE; IC 583–84), its very existence points to the prevalence of the idea of immortality in early China. Its biographies are short with only the most rudimentary narrative. In the second collection that survives, *Ge Hong's (283–343) **Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of Divine Immortals), the biographies are much fuller but still are rarely more than a few pages long. Various collections followed Ge's model: **Dongxian zhuan* (Biographies of Cavern Immortals; by Jiansu zi 見素子 who has not been satisfactorily identified, Six Dynasties), **Daoxue zhuan* (Biographies of Those who Studied the Dao; by Ma Shu of the Chen dynasty), **Xu xianzhuan* (Sequel to Biographies of Immortals; by Shen Fen 沈汾 of the Southern Tang dynasty). Du Guangting was a pivotal figure in the history of Taoist hagiography as he was in so many areas of Taoism. Among his works were the aforementioned *Wangshi shenxian zhuan*, the *Xianzhuan shiyi* 仙傳拾遺 (Uncollected Biographies of Immortals; Yan Yiping 1974, vol. 1), and the **Yongcheng jixian lu* (Records of the Immortals Gathered in the Walled City), which was an important attempt at comprehensive classification. Later, Zhao Daoyi 趙道一 (fl. 1294–1307) completed his monumental **Lishi zhenxian tidao*

tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror of Perfected Immortals and Those Who Embodied the Dao through the Ages) with over 900 biographies. This collection also broke new ground by including biographies of greater length than previously seen, some taking an entire chapter.

Benjamin PENNY

📖 Bokenkamp 1986c, 143–45; Boltz J. M. 1986c, 156–59; Boltz J. M. 1987a, 54–101; Bumbacher 2000c; Campany 1996, 294–306; Campany 2002; Chen Guofu 1963, 233–51; Giles L. 1948; Kaltenmark 1953; Penny 2000; Sawada Mizuho 1988; Seidel 1989–90, 246–48

※ For related entries see the Synoptic Table of Contents, sec. II.7 ("Immortals and Hagiography")

Epigraphy

Taoist epigraphy mainly consists of inscriptions on stone (stelae) and, to a lesser extent, on bronze or other metals (bells, incense burners, and various liturgical implements). Whereas early studies focused on their artistic quality (e.g., the *Yihe ming* 瘞鶴銘, *Inscription on the Burial of a Crane*, or the many Yuan Taoist stelae from the brush of Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫, 1254–1322) or their philological value (e.g., the Tang dynasty stele of the *Daode jing* at Yixian 易縣, Hebei), in recent decades scholars have begun to tap their vast potential as resources for social history. As religious archives are unavailable, epigraphic sources yield the richest documentation on the life of Taoist communities in the past. Especially the reverse sides (*beiyin* 碑陰) of the stelae, with their lists of religious personalities, their titles, and the names of their patrons, provide firsthand information on the economic basis and social background of Taoist establishments. Since stelae were often used as a public and reliable records for grants, contracts, or other official acts, they also document the legal status of communities. Moreover, inscriptions are a primary source for the history of cults, and even data on rituals or alchemical practices are available in stelae devoted to such issues.

Taoist inscriptions do not formally differ from other Chinese epigraphic sources. Most of their authors are lay people: sympathetic or, occasionally, critical literati. Their often standardized format and formulaic expressions are the same as those of their counterparts in Confucian, Buddhist, or popular contexts. However, Taoist epigraphy also includes some peculiar genres, however, including calligraphic samples of roaming immortals like *Lü Dongbin, or charts of the human body for use in meditation (see **Neijing tu* and *Xiuzhen tu*). These stelae, along with the alchemical poems frequently carved on stone from the Song onward, attest to the open diffusion and potentially vast audience of seemingly arcane and mystical expressions of the Taoist tradition.

The earliest inscriptions related to Taoism are those of the cults to immortals dating from the Han period. Some of them, like the Tang Gongfang 唐公房 stele (Schipper 1991a; Campany 1996, 187–92), have been known for a long time, while others, like the *Fei Zhi bei* 肥致碑, are still being discovered today (Schipper 1997b; Little 2000b, 150–51). These early stelae bear devices—for instance, holes for offerings—showing that, in accordance with their archaic function, stelae were themselves the objects of rites: the erect stone represented the god. This notion seems to disappear shortly after the Han. During the Six Dynasties, Taoist communities produced iconic stelae (*zaoxiang bei* 造像碑) comparable to better-known Buddhist ones. We have many inscriptions from the Tang period onward devoted to Taoist temples and abbeys, as well as funerary stelae of eminent Taoists (Confucian-style *muzhi ming* 墓誌銘, or, rarely, Buddhist-style *taming* 塔銘). The Yuan dynasty is a Golden Age of Taoist epigraphy, and especially the *Quanzhen order seems to have promoted the systematic erection of stelae in all its communities. An exhaustive count of extant Taoist inscriptions dating from the Jin and Yuan periods yields some 1,100 items, about 500 of which are of Quanzhen provenance. This only includes inscriptions primarily concerned with the activities of the **daoshi*, and does not consider the titles of lost inscriptions or inscriptions for shrines of popular cults which were also often staffed by Taoists. A corpus of this size is the best resource with which to gauge the presence of Taoism and its variations in space and time.

Like all Chinese inscriptions, the Taoist ones are scattered among records in old epigraphic treatises, local gazetteers, literary anthologies and recent archeological publications; collections of rubbings in Chinese, Japanese and Western libraries; and the actual stelae when they still exist. Whereas ancient inscriptions are well documented, those of the Ming, Qing, and contemporary periods are rarely published and must be collected through library study and fieldwork. These more recent inscriptions are nevertheless important to chart the history of modern Taoism, since few canonical or historiographical works are available for this period.

Recent fieldwork, for example, has documented fifty-three stelae dating from the Ming onward in the *Baiyun guan (Abbey of the White Clouds; Marsone 1999), and fifty-four of the same period at the *Louguan (Tiered Abbey); Wang Zhongxin 1995). Thousands of smaller sites await similar investigation. For the earlier periods, the situation has much improved since the publication of *Daojia jinshi lüe* 道家金石略 (A Collection of Taoist Epigraphy; Chen Yuan 1988), an anthology compiled by the great scholar Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1880–1971)