

Preface

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Jacopo Scarin is one of the most promising new scholars of late imperial Daoism. Already in his 2017 thesis, a systematic study of the ongoing significance in the Qing dynasty of one of Daoism's most persistently important abbeys, the Tongbaigong in the Tiantai mountains in northern Zhejiang, he showed himself to be an innovative, methodical, and meticulous scholar. While some of his discoveries have been published in article form, with this book we have a full and rich account of the successive strata of the history of the Tongbai Palace.

The story begins with the Han immortal Wangzi Qiao, acquires the Lingbao 'patriarch' Ge Xuan along the way, but does not really enter Daoist history until the year 711, when the Tang emperor Ruizong builds a temple for the Shangqing master Sima Chengzhen. From then on, the Tiantai mountains belonged to the system of Daoist 'blessed lands' (*fudi*) first formalized by Sima, later developed and confirmed by Du Guangting, who himself dwelt for a time on Tiantai. At one point in his career, Sima left Tiantai to move closer to the capital, but some decades later a Daoist lineage claiming Sima as its patriarchal master took up residence in the Tongbai Palace and remained active there to the end of the Tang.

In the Song, the texts kept in the Tongbai Palace became a partial source for the compilation of the Daoist canon under Zhenzong, in the

early 11th century. Over the course of the Song, two important shifts occurred: the temple's history is henceforth more closely linked to private sponsors than to the court and, according to later records, the statues of two Confucian culture heroes, the martyrs Bo Yi and Shu Qi, were brought to the palace. Tiantai Daoists also played an important role in the transformation of Lingbao Daoism from the 13th century on, but the lack of sources makes it difficult to say what exactly that role was and how it interacted with the ever-more central role of Tiantai in Buddhist history in the Song.

Although sources are scarcely more abundant for the Yuan and Ming, Scarin does glean information about a number of Daoists on the mountain. Above all, the patterns set in the Song can be seen to carry on, with Bo Yi and Shu Qi in "their double role as Confucian saints and deities ruling the mountain" and elite private sponsors and local officials replacing the court entirely. That by the end of the Ming the Tongbai Palace was in total disrepair Scarin illustrates with a moving account by the official Pan Lei of his visit to the palace in 1691:

Today everything is covered in vegetation, except the Sanqing Hall. Raindrops become tears dripping from Tianzun's saddened face. The son of a local official's family is buried next to the temple. People say that the biggest responsibility for the temple's decline is this person's deluded geomantic practices and his avid interest in these propitious lands. There is nothing that this kind of people would not do in order to obtain the land, even openly occupying Buddhist or Daoist temples and burying their own bones under that soil.

This account sets the scene for the fascinating story of the legal battle for the recovery of the Tongbai temple lands from the local Zhang family. Such contests are frequent in the increasingly gentry-dominated local society from the mid-Ming on, but rarely are they so thoroughly documented as in the local official Zhang Yuanliang's *Qingsheng Ci zhi* 清聖祠志. This temple gazetteer about the Qingsheng Shrine dedicated to Bo Yi and Shu Qi contains "a collection of communications and memorials that the author Zhang Lianyuan 張聯元 himself wrote between 1712 and 1722". While Zhang's account records how, in the end, the lands were officially restored to the temple, it "also reinterpreted the temple as a place of worship devoted to the two Confucian sages and Daoist deities Bo Yi and Shu Qi, choosing to give prominence to what had hitherto been regarded as secondary features of Tongbai Palace".

The Yongzheng Emperor, who came to the throne in 1722, had a completely different reason for taking an interest in the Tiantai traditions, namely, Zhang Boduan, the Song Daoist to whom is attributed one of the most important texts of internal alchemy, the *Wuzhen*

pian. In his thesis, relying in part on a Yongzheng stele erected at the time of the imperially sponsored Tongbai restoration and of which he discovered fragments during a field visit to a Tiantai village – complete versions are still extant in the literature – Scarin showed that “Yongzheng was not interested in Zhang Boduan merely as a Daoist, but as master of the integration of Daoism and Chan Buddhism”. This provided a plausible explanation for why an emperor so heavily invested in Buddhist patronage, both in the capital and on Tiantai, also took an interest in Tiantai Daoism.

In the ‘Introduction’ to the present book, Scarin cites a text of Yongzheng, “Instructions [to Exhort] Local Officials to Pay Special Care for the Sustenance of the Self-cultivation Practitioners and Monks”, that gives interesting insight into his reasons for investing in harmonious relationships between the Three Teachings: “I think that the principle of each one of the Three Teachings that enlighten the people in the realm comes from the same origin”. Unfortunately, he goes on:

Those who worship the Dao say that the Buddha is not as worthy [of praise] as the Dao [itself], while those who favour the Buddha say that the Way is not as great as the Buddha. Confucians censor both [teachings] as heterodox. They hold selfish motives, dispute to gain victory, and do not yield to each other.

Yongzheng’s interest in the Tongbai Palace provides the backdrop for Scarin’s meticulously researched study in ‘Chapter 4’ of the subsequent role of the Tongbai Palace as “a node in the expanding network of Longmen communities of southeast China”. Centred on the Jingu Grotto of Hangzhou, this network added yet another stratum to Tongbai history, one which retained its significance “at least up until the first part of the 19th century, when a number of Longmen Daoists associated with Mt. Weiyu visited Tongbai Palace and received training there”.

In his ‘Introduction’, referring to the authors who have inspired him, Scarin reflects succinctly on his ideas of religion. “The process of socialisation and of the production of meaning”, he writes, are “the defining feature of human beings”, and religion is “*practised meaning*”. The ever-changing central figures and actors in the long history of the Tongbai Palace are so many

different ‘strata of meaning’, by which I mean layers of religious significance [...] The way in which these strata interact, intersect, come to replace one another, and arise and disappear over the course of the temple’s history is therefore determined by how people transmitted this knowledge and these stories, by what they did at the temple and in relation to it, by the importance that they at-

tached to each stratum and to the perceived relationship between different strata.

It would be hard to state more precisely the contribution of this case study to our understanding of the logic of Daoist religious history, and of its relationship to changing social and political environments in the course of Chinese history.

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