In memoriam Kristofer M. Schipper (1934–2021)\textsuperscript{1}

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Kristofer M. Schipper, known to his colleagues, friends, and students as Rik, passed away on February 18, 2021 in an Amsterdam hospital after a sudden hemorrhage. He left behind a huge scholarly \textit{œuvre} and trained or profoundly influenced dozens of Sinologists who now teach at universities around the world, in Asia, Europe, and North America.\textsuperscript{2}

Rik was born on October 23, 1934 in Jarnskog, Sweden, and grew up in a village near Amsterdam, Holland. His adoptive father, Klaas Abe Schipper (1906–1949), was a progressive intellectual with socialist sympathies and a pastor of the Dutch Mennonite Church. His mother, Johanna Engelberta Kuiper (1896–1956), was a brilliant writer whose novels for young readers are still read today. During the Nazi occupation, their convictions led them to take in many Jews, including children. They were eventually denounced to the Gestapo and Klaas Abe Schipper was captured and deported, surviving for only a few years after the liberation. Rik’s mother managed to escape with him, his brother, and several children under their protection and lived for many months hidden in a house in Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{3} He spent the end of the war in a boarding school, but maintained an unbreakable bond with his fellow escapees, as well as a visceral hatred for nationalist and totalitarian ideologies. He later asked for and obtained recognition for his parents through the conferral of the honorary title: “Righteous Among the Nations”; now, a monument honors them in his childhood village.

In 1955, his mother resigned from her position as pastor in the Mennonite Church of Amsterdam and left for Indonesia where her brother and older son lived. She died there in 1956, with Rik never having had the opportunity to see

\footnotesize{1} This is an English language version of a text published in French under the same title in \textit{T’oung Pao}, 107.3–4 (2021).

\footnotesize{2} I am deeply grateful to Caroline Gyss, Fang Ling, and Isabelle Ang who read this text and improved it in many ways.

\footnotesize{3} Kristofer Schipper 施舟人, Tongnian 童年, tr. Yuan Bingling 袁冰凌 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 93–200.
her again. After his baccalaureate at the Montessori High School (gymnasium) in Amsterdam in 1954, Rik decided to devote himself to the arts and humanities and left the Netherlands for Paris. He first thought of entering into the art market, so he enrolled at the École du Louvre, where he discovered—and was fascinated by—Chinese art. He graduated in 1958. At the same time, he studied languages and graduated with a degree in Chinese from the École nationale des langues orientales vivantes (1958), and then a second degree in Japanese (1960). Rik now had access to texts as well as images, and he proceeded to study the visions of the world that produced the masterpieces of Chinese painting and other arts. In the Religious Sciences Section of the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) at the Sorbonne he attended the seminars of Rolf Stein (1911–1999) and Max Kaltenmark (1910–2002). Sometimes he was the sole auditor, but he was later joined by Anna Seidel (1938–1991). In 1962, he obtained a diploma from the EPHE (which would not award national degrees, including the doctorate, until much later), with a thesis on a medieval text, the Han Wudi nei zhuan 漢武帝內傳, which relates the mystical initiation of the famous Han emperor Wudi. His first book, based on his thesis, was published in 1965.4

It was art history that led Rik to Daoist studies, and he would return to it throughout his career.5 Chinese art deeply marked his sensibilities and inspired his love of beauty. In Paris, Rik became more Parisian than a native Parisian; he deeply loved the city and its culture and shared in its gouaille and impertinence. He proudly applied for and acquired French citizenship, and he never failed to get angry when someone referred to him as a “Dutch sinologist.” Yet, it was in an eclectic, multilingual environment that he was particularly at home. He wrote and spoke elegantly in French, English, Dutch, Mandarin, and Hokkien, but also spoke German and Japanese. To express oneself gracelessly was a sign of appalling mediocrity for him.

Upon graduation, Rik was recruited by the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) as a researcher (1962 to 1973). He immediately left for Taiwan, where a posting at the Academia Sinica in Taipei awaited him. The political and ideological context there was not very conducive to the study of Daoism and Taiwanese scholars told him that this religion had all but disappeared. But after encountering a local god’s procession, he understood that this was not the case. His curiosity and natural inclination led him away from libraries and into temples, where in 1964 he witnessed a grand jiao 饗 offering ritual celebrated by Daoists

of the prominent Chen 陳 family of Tainan. This experience was a turning point for Rik; he moved to Tainan, where he later welcomed and introduced many Western scholars to the living religion of the area. He was adopted as a sworn brother by Chen Yung-sheng 陳榮盛 (1927–2014) and joined his family’s troupe. Rik learned liturgy, as well as music and all the Daoist arts, ran around the villages to celebrate auspicious (celebration of local gods) and somber (funerals) rituals. He lived in the “other” Taiwan that spoke only Hokkien, which would lead to tense relations and violent encounters with the Kuomintang authorities. His wife Wendela and their two daughters, born in Taiwan, were also part of this life embedded in local society. The training of this future Daoist master culminated in March 1966 with his ordination, presided over by the 63rd Heavenly Master Zhang Enpu 張恩溥 (1904–1969).

While studying ritual, Rik delved into the texts and began to discover the deep continuities between the Chen family manuscripts he had copied and the Daoist Canon. From his privileged position as a Daoist officiant, he also observed local society and the organizations that invite daoshi 道士 to celebrate their gods with them, something he would later call the “liturgical structures of local society.” He was particularly passionate about puppet theater, whose fundamental ritual function he documented, and about the groups of amateur musicians who practiced nanyin 南音 (or nanguan 南管) together in temples in the evening. In 1982, he organized a tour in France for the singer Tsai Hsiao-yue 蔡小月 and her troupe, the Nanshengshe 南聲社, during which recordings were made, introducing this superb tradition to the European public.

The impact of Rik’s discovery of the living tradition of Daoism was considerable. One of the founding moments was in Bellagio during the first international conference of Daoist studies (September 7–14, 1968), which had been organized by Holmes Welch (1924–1981) and Anna Seidel. Whereas the other participants specialized in ancient textual sources, Rik described the practice of these texts in contemporary ritual. Rik’s paper, which he never published in the hope of improving it, is undoubtedly among the most cited manuscripts in the field.

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8 François Picard played a major role in this tour, which also visited four other countries, and in the recordings in the Ocora series.
From his fieldwork, Rik nonetheless drew material for seminal articles, such as his essay on the complementarities and differences between priests of the classical liturgy (daoshi) and exorcists (fashi). He published a book on a small rite, the division of lamps (fendeng), to serve as a model for how to analyze liturgy. But the results of his fieldwork in its entirety will never be fully published. As recently as 2020, he was talking about finally getting around to writing a book that would give a full presentation and comprehensive analysis of his experience in Taiwan. This synthesis will unfortunately never see the light of day. He considered it premature for publication for various reasons, among them the desire to build collaborative projects rather than write alone and also the need—shared by many of his disciples and collaborators—to better understand the historical roots of what he had observed in the 1960s and 1970s.

Upon his return from Taiwan in 1972, Rik had to address another urgent task, that of teaching and making the reality of Daoism understood by a public that had no idea what a great seven-day jiao offering ritual could be like. From 1972 onwards, he taught in the Religious Sciences section of the EPHE, on the recommendation of Claude Levi-Strauss, and was made a directeur d’études (research professor) in January 1973. During this period of teaching, in which he drew on a broader range of sources than his ethnographic and liturgical materials, he published his first major work Le corps taoïste (1982), a synthesis of Daoism that went on to become one of the very few bestsellers in the discipline and was quickly translated into several foreign languages. Le corps taoïste has had a profound impact on all historians of Chinese religions and beyond, since the book is one of those that cannot be closed until it has been read in its entirety. In it, Rik lays out what he would continue to develop in his later works: a vision of Chinese culture as a whole that is deeply coherent and where individual practices—nourished by aspirations for autonomy and freedom and whose highest expression is immortality—are organically linked to a vision of society and to local forms of organization always in tension with a central state, which are all expressed in ritual and artistic practices.

His teaching at the EPHE lasted almost thirty years, from 1973 to 2000. The Friday afternoon seminar around the massive wood table in the Marcel Mauss room in staircase E in the Sorbonne, has become legendary. Students and auditors crowded the room—many were attracted by the exoticism of the subject and then became faithful after having understood that real Daoism was infinitely more interesting than the one they fantasized about. There were also colleagues who were already established but who could not bear to cut themselves off from this inexhaustible source of ideas; there were also foreign colleagues passing through who attended. It would be difficult to find a Sinologist specializing in Daoism in Europe or North America who had not spent at least a few months in Paris with Rik; everyone has stories to tell about his generosity.

Rik’s teaching covered an extraordinary variety of subjects and was always lively, free, and spontaneous.\(^\text{12}\) He rarely missed an opportunity to joke or to gently mock people with strong certainties. In the spirit of the EPHE, he brought primary sources to read with the students and auditors, including liturgical manuscripts, some of which were from his own collection; foundational texts like the *Zhuangzi*; historical sources, especially epigraphy, which are in general local sources that he particularly appreciated for the direct testimony they offered rather than being rewritten—except in exceptional cases—by the central power; and ethnographic materials. His long-standing interest in psychoanalysis led him to devote some time to ethnopsychiatry in his seminar. There is no period that he did not study: antiquity, to which he always returned; the Han and the medieval period, with the emergence of the Church of the Heavenly Master 天師道 and the first Daoist liturgical texts,\(^\text{13}\) but also the cult of the immortals; the Tang and the Song, with the rise of local temples and the definition of the relations between the Three Teachings—which resulted in an article published in *T’oung Pao*;\(^\text{14}\) the Ming and the Qing, particularly the temples of Beijing; and modern and contemporary transformations of Daoism. Echoing this vast array of domains and disciplines, he welcomed and trained students from a wide variety of backgrounds: history, thought, ethnology, and art history. He would have liked to see more of his students observe live rituals *in situ*: “You learn more in a day in the field than in a year in the library,” he would say over and over again. However, he also had a great deal of expe-

\(^{12}\) Abstracts of all his seminars are available at https://www.persee.fr/collection/ephe.

\(^{13}\) He devoted a synthetic article to this subject, which marked the end of his teaching at the EPHE: “Le pacte de pureté du taoïsme,” *Annuaire de l’École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses* 109 (2000–2001): 29–53.

rience with libraries, as when he went to Japan—where he built very strong friendships—to study ancient editions of the Daoist Canon held in collections there. He also carefully and passionately managed the library of the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, where he was the director from 1988 to 1992, and later founded his own library in China.

Rik was also fully involved in the institutions that helped coordinate and defend Asian studies (Oriental studies as it was then called) in France and Europe, serving in roles that were often quite time-consuming. In 1991, faced with the threat of the fragmentation of Asian studies within the CNRS, he used the convening power of the Société asiatique to organize a vast colloquium entitled “Pour une nouvelle politique de l’orientalisme” (“For a New Policy of Orientalism”), which brought together all the key figures of French Orientalism and representatives of various European countries who were united against the policies of marginalization of Oriental studies. This colloquium resulted in the publication of Livre blanc de l’orientalisme français (White Book on French Orientalism).

When Erik Zürcher (1928–2008) retired from Leiden University, Rik was appointed as a professor there (1993–1999). He settled in Leiden while continuing to teach his seminar in Paris, on Saturday mornings. In Leiden, he found the opportunity to not only teach Daoism, but Chinese civilization as a whole. This allowed him to put together all the pieces of the puzzle of the cultural coherence of the Chinese world. He also returned to the pleasures of speaking and writing in his native language. He eventually published Dutch translations of the Daodejing, the Lunyu, and, above all, the Zhuangzi. The latter had accompanied him throughout his life, and he kept coming back to it and finding more and more proof of the absurdity of separating this text from the living religious traditions of China.

While Rik loved teaching and was still giving an informal seminar for students in Paris when the COVID-19 pandemic brought it to a halt in March 2020, he also had an equal passion for collaborative research. His career was marked by a succession of major projects in which he was the soul and tireless leader.

16 Lao Zi: Het boek van de Tao en de innerlijke kracht (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Augustus, 2010).
18 Zhuang Zi: de volledige geschriften, het grote klassieke boek van het taoïsme (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Augustus, 2014); an earlier translation of the “Inner Chapters,” Zhuang Zi: De innerlijke geschriften, was published in 1997 (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff).
The first of these was a project aimed at producing an analytical catalog of the Daoist Canon (Daozang 道藏). The Daozang was the last major canon of one of the world's religious traditions to lack a systematic research aid, and in the 1970s there was still no punctuated edition of the canon. Rik assembled a team to describe and analyze its approximately fifteen hundred texts. The “Projet Tao-tsang” (“Daozang Project”) was housed in the warmly welcoming room of the Centre de documentation et d’étude du taoïsme, in the Maison de l’Asie, on Avenue du Président Wilson, a stone's throw from the Musée Guimet.

The “Daozang Project” was innovative in many ways. First, its structure was new, since it received a large grant from the European Science Foundation (1978–1984), which made it one of the first Sinological projects to receive this type and scale of funding. Second, it also innovated by creating a truly international scholarly community; young scholars came to participate in the project from France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and later from the United States, when John Lagerwey joined the team after graduating from Harvard University. All of these scholars published books and articles based on their work within the project. Third, it was also innovative in its use of technology: names, dates, places, titles, and other information identified in each text of the canon were systematically entered into a computer, sorted, and printed. I was still using these indexes in the 1990s, at a time that must seem so remote to the younger generations who are now used to finding texts online.\footnote{Rik had already, during his Taiwanese years, compiled by hand and published preparatory indexes on essential texts such as Baopuzi 抱朴子, Huangtingjing 黃庭經, and Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籤: Concordance du Pao-p’ou-tseu nei-p’ien et Concordance du Pao-p’ou-tseu wai-p’ien (Paris: EFE, 1965–1969); Concordance du Houang-t’ing king (Paris: EFE, 1975); Projet Tao-tsang: Index du Yunji qiqian (Paris: EFE, 1981–1982, 2 vols.).}

It is on the basis of these indexes that contributors were able to make progress in dating texts, identifying textual filiations and implicit or explicit borrowings, and defining schools. In short, they helped to bring order to the overwhelming complexity of the Daozang. The project slowed down after 1984, when the funding ended and the careers of many of its members began to evolve in their own directions. The majority of the entries had been written but there was still much work to be done. Franciscus Verellen joined Rik a few years later and they took over the final editorial responsibilities of the manuscript, writing the missing entries, correcting and updating the existing ones, and building the overall architecture of the book. The three-volume work was published in 2004.\footnote{The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004).}
The next major collaborative project Rik organized was: “Beijing as a Holy City.” Very early on, as soon as the People’s Republic of China gradually opened up after 1978, Rik was attracted by the immense field of investigation that mainland China offered. He was convinced that the vitality of Daoism, which he had demonstrated in the case of Taiwan, also existed on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. He remained sensitive to the sometimes critical remarks of colleagues who claimed that his theories were not valid for the Chinese world in general, but only for the very particular case of Taiwan. Rik was a passionate advocate for the autonomy and specificity of local societies, but he was equally convinced of the cultural coherence of the Chinese world. He therefore proposed to show that what was true for Tainan—namely that society is organized in autonomous communities worshipping their saints, with Daoist rituals providing them with structure and legitimacy—would prove to be just as true around the walls of the Forbidden City. He launched this project in 1995 and a new generation of researchers, including the present author, was trained through participation in it.

The “Beijing as a Holy City” project, of course, included fieldwork, with memorable group visits and numerous individual missions. Much of Rik’s efforts were, however, devoted to the collective reading of inscriptions. The then recent publication of one hundred volumes of rubbings preserved in the National Library of Beijing, which included the results of systematic efforts to survey the steles of Beijing’s temples, provided him with the primary materials for the project. Rik founded a journal to publish these materials: Sanjiao wenxian 三教文獻: Matériaux pour l’étude de la religion chinoise. In this new journal, he asserted, no in-depth analyses or grand theories would be published since the time for that would come later. For the moment it was necessary, according to the formula he so often used, “to say not the last word, but the first” and to present unpublished materials.21 The first issue opens, however, with a programmatic article in which he develops his theory of liturgical structures.22

Among all the temples in Beijing one in particular attracted Rik’s attention: the Eastern Peak Temple (Dongyuemiao 東嶽廟).23 In the aforementioned article he recounted his emotional discovery of it from the window of a nearby high-rise apartment. This temple represented a model of what Chi-
Chinese civil society was for him: an official institution sponsored by the imperial state, but managed by Daoists and housing hundreds of pious associations and guilds that funded its ritual, philanthropic, and artistic activities. As with the “Daozang Project,” “Beijing as a Holy City” was an incubator of vocations and ideas. It was interrupted in 2001 due to a lack of funding and institutional support, but was resumed in 2002 by Marianne Bujard, who has been running it continuously and has already published five large volumes of material out of a planned total of eleven.24

Rik’s retirement from Leiden in 1999 and the EPHE in 2000 left him free to build new projects elsewhere. With his second wife, Professor Yuan Bingling 袁冰凌, he moved to Fuzhou where he was appointed professor at Fuzhou University. There he founded a library, the Xiguan cangshulou 西觀藏書樓 (Library of the Western Belvedere), whose name evokes the Daoist roots of the great Han imperial library. He donated an important part of his personal library and acquired, thanks to donations that he was able to solicit, collections of books in Western languages (including, among others, English, French, and German) on the humanities, literature, and classics, in order to facilitate cultural and intellectual exchanges between China and the West. His house in Fuzhou, like those previously in Tainan and Paris, was wide open to friends, colleagues, and students. Rik taught in China, in Fuzhou and in Beijing—his lectures at Beijing University in the 2010s filled the largest lecture halls—and he was distinguished with awards and honors, such as the Friendship Medal 中國人民共和國友誼獎 (2004). Inserting himself into the academic, political, and media world of twenty-first century China was a new form of fieldwork for him and he repeatedly claimed that he learned as much from that experience as he had thirty years earlier in the villages around Tainan. In Beijing, he launched a major project to translate the Chinese Classics into English. Throughout his career he never lost sight of the Sishu wujing 四書五經 and the question of cultural continuity between antiquity and contemporary society. During the 2000s, Rik devoted all his attention to this project. He was convinced that an understanding of the living tradition would enable us to reread the foundational texts and the nature of the great intellectual turning point of the fourth century BCE in a new way in order to radically rewrite Chinese history. The translation project encountered obstacles that are not scholarly in nature, but the intellectual work, both collective and individual, continues.

24 Beijing neicheng simiao beike zhi 北京內城寺廟碑刻志, ed. Marianne Bujard (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2011–).
Rik’s last major project was the “Sanctuaries of Nature,” for which he and Yuan Bingling created the Aishan 爱山 foundation. Long interested in the relationship between Daoism and ecology, he developed this project to document through texts and ethnography not only the thirty-six “grotto-heavens” (dongtian 洞天) and the seventy-two “blessed lands” (fudi 福地), a list that was codified under the Tang dynasty (618–907), but also the countless holy places beyond the already dense Daoist sacred geography that are found in every corner of the Chinese world. Rik saw them as reservoirs of biodiversity, thanks to the prohibition of hunting, fishing, gathering, and preservation practices. He hoped to show the intimate link between the history of local rituals and saints’ cults and the history of the environment. He dreamed of procuring funding to enable students and young scholars to devote dissertations, articles, and monographs to each of these sites. He himself had done this work for Huotongshan 霍童山, a holy place north of Fuzhou that was crucial to the history of medieval Daoism.

Rik’s work is immense and varied, yet from beginning to end a certain number of strong themes are evident. I would like to mention two of them here. The first was his interest in what he called “the other China” or the “real country,” that of local languages and societies whose communal, even democratic, character—which was always in tension with the centripetal forces of imperial power and its successors—he wanted to capture. He saw the Daoist worldview as a powerful tool for integrating the multiplicity of local societies into a coherent whole without crushing their autonomy and specificity. This conception was nourished by the humanism inspired by his own life experience. He was confident about the capacity for local societies to endure in the twenty-first century. It also underpinned his firm conviction in the intellectual necessity of putting Daoism at (or returning it to) the center of Chinese studies.

The second enduring theme of his work was his focus on the “living tradition,” which he foregrounded in the subtitle of a collection of essays and articles published in 2008. With this focus he sought to demonstrate that the cultural and religious history of China had not totally and completely disappeared, but that one can still find—if only in snippets that are sometimes difficult to recognize—living forms of the rites, arts, cults, and forms of social organization that have structured the evolution of Chinese societies since antiquity. Such a

25 https://www.aishanfoundation.org/.
conviction led Rik to propose broad hypotheses and schemes of *longue durée* historical evolution, which did not always receive the support of Sinologists asking for specific proof for what he was advancing. Yet, Rik always proposed these great schemes as postulates that should lead us to discover new sources or to reread known texts with a new eye. Such hypotheses could, of course, prove to need radical revision upon closer examination, which he accepted wholeheartedly, but the simple fact of having explored them opened up entirely new fields of knowledge. I am fortunate to have been one of the many who was able to live and share in these experiences with Rik.

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