
This carefully edited volume contains a number of excellent articles on religious culture during the Tang and Song dynasties. The survey of the religious and historical landscape of that period by Peter Gregory and Patricia Ebrey, the extensive annotations throughout the book (including cross references to other contributions) and the detailed index also make it very suitable as a first introduction for students or starting researchers. It is recognized throughout that religion was an intrinsic part of Chinese social life and not a separate dimension that can be studied in splendid isolation (Teiser, pp. 132–135, makes this point explicitly). The real focus of the book is on the Song period, despite its title (apart from the excellent introduction by Gregory and Ebrey, only one article deals specifically with the Tang period, namely the contribution by Stephen Teiser on belief in the purgatory, and even this took off on a large scale only in the early tenth century [p. 130]).

The link between the social and the religious comes out in a wonderful way in the very creative analysis by Judith Boltz of the practice of exorcist rituals by local magistrates (pp. 241–305). She shows how dreams and other incidents involving deities and other supernatural beings functioned to solve real or potential conflicts between the magistrates and local forces. Daoist ritual was a means for local magistrates of bringing local sorcerers, their cults and their following under their control. This approach is well-established in the anthropological literature and Western religious history, but has yet to be introduced in a more systematic way to the China field (as she notes in note 3 on p. 287). The contribution by Boltz should be read by everybody who is engaged in the study of social history during the Song and Yuan periods.

Gregory and Ebrey point out in their introduction (p. 27) that the Shenniao ritual tradition arose in response to the threat from the north. Boltz suggests (pp. 265–269) that there was an increased need among the social elite for exorcist expertise during the Song (meaning from circa A.D. 1100 onwards and referring largely to China below the Huai River) to deal with the new threats that were posed by the local supernatural beings of the

© Brill, Leiden, 1999

T'oung Pao LXXXV
south to migrants from the north. A second change during the
Southern Song was the increasing involvement of educated elites
in local society itself, instead of orienting themselves mainly to
the political center (Chang’an and Luoyang during the Tang,
and Kaifeng during the Northern Song) as had long been cus-
tomary. Daoist exorcist rituals played an important role for mag-
istrates and the educated elite in competing for power with other
established local leaders.

Boltz provides much information and important views that will
help other researchers to think more clearly. Two issues should
be noted, however. First, there is the enormous amount of
information in The Record of the Listener (Yijian zhi 夷堅志), which
causes everything that is recorded in this source to show an
apparent quantitative boom as compared with past or following
centuries. Second, there is the "Daoist" nature of these exorcist
traditions. Paul Katz has argued convincingly that what we see
here is the ongoing Daoicisation of local exorcist traditions. He
suggests that the early Shenxiao movement was not yet Daoist.\footnote{Paul Katz, Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 32–38.} In
itself, Katz’s suggestion complements the thrust of Boltz’s analysis
about the increasing involvement of elites on a local level, by
showing that local traditions also adapted to elite traditions such
as Daoist ritual.

Another truly excellent contribution is the one by T. Griffith
Foulk (pp. 147–208) which shows that, contrary to being a period
of decline, the Song was the period when Chan Buddhism as we
see it today through its own historiography was more or less
"invented." Foulk argues convincingly that the construction by
Song historians of the Chan of the Tang as the golden age of
Chan Buddhism and the Song as a period of decline served to
hide fundamental Song contributions and to legitimate these
changes by projecting them back into the Tang. It is a phenom-
enon that seems somewhat similar to the history of Neoconfu-
циanism, which constructed the Han as a period of decline and
the Song as the period when the original teachings were recov-
ered (whereas what really happened was obviously the invention
of a wholly new "tradition").

Like the contributions by Boltz and Foulk, the other articles all
add important insights to the field. Often, however, the larger