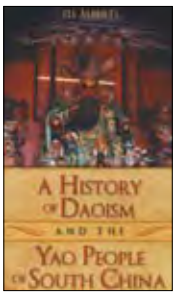

Eli Alberts. ***A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China.***

Youngston, New York: Cambria Press, 2006. xxi + 202 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US$84.95; ISBN-13: 978-1-934043-14-1.

This book explores how the various ethnic groups in mainland Southeastern Eurasia, known in Chinese as Yao, used Chinese writing and Daoist imagery to shape who they have been and who they are today. Professor Barend ter Haar's *Foreword* puts the book's results this way: "the 'Yao' as a people are very much the result of interaction with and construction by imperial Chinese politics and culture" (xv). The book itself states that "Chinese texts and other ritual objects in Yao politico-religious tradition…serve to legitimate the authority of village leaders and clan lines, as well as to create and maintain local and extra-local Yao identities" (2). Although the particulars of this claim are often left unspecified in the chapters to follow, the introduction (1–19) and five chapters fall into two parts, one on the history of the various Yao groups in south China (21–94) and one on the early history of Daoism (95–127). Together, they suggest a heuristic framework for further studies of how autonomous groups in China used cultural interactions with the Chinese state to gain new political rights. The problem of how the Yao groups in China relate to Daoism stem from scholars who, from the 1970s, sought to understand how Chinese religious elements wound up in Yao societies.

The three chapters of Part I explore contacts between Yao groups and the imperial Chinese state. By examining documents by Chinese officials and extant ritual texts of more recent Yao groups, the chapter suggests, without providing substantial evidence, however, that both types of writings grew from covenants made between leaders of southern autonomous groups like the Yao and representatives

of various Chinese regimes. Chapter one draws on Yao myths in Chinese official sources to show that the Chinese imperial state called some peoples "Yao" to grant them privileges because of the great deeds of their ancestors. Such official documents suggest that "Yao" went from being a label for groups in Hunan and elsewhere in south China who were "not under the jurisdiction of state administrative units" to a label for those who were "more integrated…into the administrative network," even though the larger political exchanges always went on in an ongoing "competition over territory and resources" (47). Using textual evidence from the fourth century BCE and the sixth century CE, the book next locates Yao history within a larger cultural narrative of southern autonomous groups known as "Man" in Chinese, arguing that as Chinese states strengthened in south China, autonomous Man groups changed from being seen as important allies for Chinese rulers to being viewed as dangerous threats to Chinese administrative structures. Chapter three further analyzes myths from early Chinese sources that dealt with relations between rulers of Chinese empires and leaders of autonomous groups in south China to argue that their ancestors' heroic deeds done on behalf of Chinese rulers led to their receiving freer passage through Chinese regimes in the south.

Part II turns to Daoism, examining the first Daoist movement—the Celestial Masters—from late Han dynasty times (second and third centuries) in relation to the many contemporaneous records of Man rebellions. It then uses a sustained scholarly dialogue with Terry KLEEMAN's *Great Perfection* (1998) to suggest links between the imperial covenants with Man groups with covenants that various groups made with the Dao that were central to the early Daoist movement in Sichuan. A final chapter studies an important Yao ritual charter text known as the "Passport for Crossing the Mountains" (*guo shan bang*) as part of "Yao ritual practice and…state practices of legitimation" with some "Daoist" elements, claiming that the Passport was one of an array of materials written in Chinese that helped to "identify the position and occupation of ritual specialists in Yao society" (145). The book ends with four hundred and fifty-four notes (147–183), a bibliography (185–196), and an index (197–202).

In exploring "Yao" as a cultural and religious item that has evolved within a political matrix, the book combines a mix of translated material from Chinese historical and religious sources, the close examination of several secondary sources (in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages), a few references to meeting Yao people in Northern Thailand and in California, and some ideas to link them all together into its thesis. The overall argument that Yao became an ethnic marker in China only from the Song dynasty (960–1276) or later, and that many of the Daoist written objects used in Yao ritual date from the same time is interesting, but most of the Chinese translated sources in the book date from before the seventh century (in chapters 1–4, except 36–45), so are not relevant to that claim. Awaiting future studies are fuller analyses of Chinese materials dated after the twelfth century in local histories, literati writings, and in religious writings which would help to bolster the book's argument, helping us to better know who were marked out by the term "Yao" and how Daoism had changed since the Song dynasty. Likewise, to fill out the themes in this book, further research is needed on the specific ways

that Yao groups integrate Chinese material into their cultural and social lives, recognizing the multiple groups called Yao today. In general the book's translations are adequate, and there are few major glitches in the text. The notes contain much information, but often contain undated references to "personal communications" (see notes 35, 73, 89, 91, 198, 226 & 240, passim) that would be better to specify.

As a pioneering book, the author does a good job of assembling various well-known materials related to Yao groups and situating them in a wider political context familiar to historians of China, but is weaker on closer spatio-temporal analyses of these materials for their political and religious dynamics, especially those of the various Yao groups. That is, the nuance offered as to the actual referents of the "Yao" in notes two and fifty-six are often elided in much of the book, which seems to presume a unity to the diverse Yao groups known in Chinese and Southeast Asia. In addition, more work is still to be done to understand exactly how Chinese cultural products fit within the Yao social and cultural processes, but also exactly how it is groups called "Yao" in Chinese ritually create their own identities using a wide array of materials, some deriving from China and some not. Attention to any differences in how the Iu Mien from Phayao, Thailand, and California created their identities as mentioned in the book, for instance, would be of interest.

Reference

Kleeman, Terry
1998 *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

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