CHINA

KOHN, LIVIA. *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. xiii + 281 pages. Appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US$45.00; ISBN 0-691-03483-4.

This new book by Professor Kohn is a fully annotated translation of a sixth-century anti-Taoist polemical text written by the official Zhen Luan 甄鸞 during the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 560–78) of the Northern Zhou 北周 dynasty (556–81). The text, entitled *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論 [Laughing at the Tao], is one of many documenting the struggle for power and influence at court by rival Buddhists and Taoists. Acrimonious debates between the two began in the third century, when a Taoist named Wang Fou 王浮 forged a sutra, the *Huahu jing* 化胡經 [Scripture of the Conversion of the Barbarians], in which Laozi is said to have traveled to the West and there, as the Buddha, converted the "barbarians" to Buddhism. Taoism was thus claimed to be superior to Buddhism. This was denied by the Buddhists, starting a debate that continued throughout the fifth and sixth centuries and later.

The *Xiaodao lun* is important for understanding not only the history of Chinese religion and its complex relationship to statecraft and society, but also the nature of medieval Taoism, since the text is a treasure trove of quotations from Taoist texts, many no longer extant. Zhen Luan, a metropolitan commandant, renowned mathematician, and astronomer, was equally at home with Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist literature. Although a staunch Confucian, he had been attracted to Taoism in his youth but distanced himself from it out of disgust for the sexual rites practised by the Taoist community. When the emperor, in search of a unifying orthodoxy to integrate all the teachings and beliefs of the time, commissioned Zhen Luan to evaluate Buddhism and Taoism, he hoped thereby to install the latter as a state religion. By keeping Confucianism on the political plane and Taoism on the religious, the emperor, of non-Chinese origin, intended to demonstrate his complete Sinicization. Buddhism was seen as a negative, outlandish religion incapable of adapting itself to Chinese culture and Confucian tradition, while indigenous Taoism was seen as part of the ethnic Chinese heritage and thus as superior to the religion of the "foreign barbarians."

It was under these circumstances that Zhen Luan wrote the treatise presented to the emperor in 570 CE Zhen was not a devout Buddhist, but he felt that Buddhism was a more appropriate state religion than organized Taoism (philosophical Taoism was deemed acceptable) with its exorcisms, talismans, vulgar sexual rites, and immortality techniques. He consequently set himself the task of denigrating and ridiculing all aspects of Taoism, drawing upon Taoist texts and scriptures to lay bare their doctrinal inconsistencies, lack of logic, and superstitions.

In his zealous attempt to revile the Taoists, Zhen Luan proved that he had understood neither Taoism nor the intentions of the emperor. The emperor's desire was to legitimate the dynasty and show that he had received the mandate of heaven from a "Master of the Country" (國師), similar to the legitimation of the Wei 魏 (220–65) and Liu Song 劉宋 dynasties by a dynastic teacher (SEIDEL 1969, 82). Zhen's examples of Taoist plagiarism of Buddhist texts simply proved to the emperor that Taoism had assimilated Buddhism without loss of identity (LAGERWEY 1981, 29–30). The emperor, unconvinced by Zhen's arguments, had the treatise "burned then and there" (32); neither Kohn nor Lagerwey explain the provenance of the extant version of the text.

Kohn's translation, based primarily on Japanese scholarship, was made during her participation in a research seminar at the Institute for Research in Humanities (Jinbun Kagaku

Kenkyūjo), Kyoto, in the 1980s and revised to its present form after publication of the research material in Japanese. She draws upon the ample annotations and textual identification of Chinese sources in the Japanese version but leaves out the philological notes. In her own notes she adds a wealth of information from secondary sources, including analyses and discussions of texts, interpretations, and comparisons. The notes and references to numerous studies on the subject in Western languages should prove invaluable both to the general reader and to specialists in the field.

The book contains an introduction (1–46); translation (44–156) with copious notes; summaries of the major texts of medieval debates (Appendix 1, 159–86); short entries discussing provenance, dates, editions, and contents of Taoist texts cited in the *Xiaodao lun* (Appendix 2, 187–223); Chinese titles of texts cited (Appendix 3, 225–34) (these without Chinese characters or page references); glossary of Chinese names, terms, and book titles (234–43) (with characters but no page references); bibliography (245–65); index (267–81).

The book is very well structured, but there remain some minor points that detract from its overall value. The lack of Chinese characters is the first problem, especially in the case of reign titles. Translations such as "Established Prime (140 BCE)" or "seventh year of Everlasting Peace (64 CE)," (58, 93) are, without transcriptions, difficult reading for the specialist, while the general reader probably pays more attention to the date than to the ornate translation. If characters were too difficult to include in the book (surprising in this day and age), some transcriptions at least could have been added. Moreover, a reduced photocopy of the *Xiaodao lun*, which is not a very long text, would have helped avoid some confusions arising in the translation.

Regarding the sentence "His feet are one hundred paces wide," Kohn states in note 7 that she "read 'feet' for 'body'" following the Japanese version (113). But the standard edition of the *Xiaodao lun* also reads 足廣百步, so why the correction? On the same page a text entitled *Laozi yi bai bashi jie* 老子一百八十重戒 [The one hundred and eighty precepts of Laozi] is quoted, but the standard edition gives the title as *Laozi bai baishi jie zhonglü* 老子百八十戒重律 [Hundred and eighty *important* rules], a title commonly used in Tang texts. There are also some problems of interpretation. "Daoshi shou sanwu jiangjun, jin yan zhi fa" 道士受三五將軍,禁厭之法 is rendered, "Taoists receive the commanding general's method to control the three [forces] and five [phases]," yet here the numbers three and five are clearly referring to registers of protection that enable the Taoist to control and exorcise noxious elements (see the list of Registers in CHEN 1963, 352). There exist other anomalies, such as "Size of the Sun and the Moon" (83, heading) for textual differences concerning the diameter of the sun (日徑不同).

Typographical errors abound, but these are of lesser consequence: Quig Õ Qing (32, 219), *fanzhi* Õ *fangzhi* (56), caudron Õ cauldron (68), you can served Õ serve (70), Longan Õ Louguan (98, n. 1), Siuin Õ Sivin (152, n. 14), Hans-Georg Muller or Möller? (Kohn forthcoming b, 252). Mistakes in the bibliography are more serious, since these entail a loss of time for the student. An example: Granet, Marcel. 1918. *Universismus* and [1892–1910] 1964. *The Religious System of China*, 6 volumes. Both of these books are by de Groot, and Granet's *Danses et légendes de la Chine ancienne* (written *anciénne*) is sandwiched between them.

In sum, setting aside these minor details, the book is well presented, informative, useful, and a delight to read.

REFERENCES CITED

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MILLER, LUCIEN, Editor. *South of the Clouds: Tales from Yunnan*. Translated by Guo Xu, Lucien Miller, and Xu Kun. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995. xiv + 328 pages. Maps, appendix of traditional Yunnan ethnic minoritiy cultures, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US$40.00; ISBN 0-295-97293-9. Paper US$19.95; ISBN 0-295-97348-X.

Artist Ting Shao Kuang's cover illustration for this beautiful volume already provides the reader with an introduction to its contents. The graphic simplicity of the picture makes one hear the cries of the cicadas and the faint echo of the kettlegongs among the mountains of Yunnan, the area "South of the Clouds."

The book has a general introduction of forty pages by Miller in which the National Minorities are described and the Chinese authorities' strangely vacillating approach to folklore is discussed. In an introduction to folk literature, Xu Kun explains the seven categories into which the stories have been divided to provide samples of the rich store of folktales in the area:

1) Stories about creation
2) Why people do what they do
3) Heroes and heroines of the people
4) Animal friends and animal foes
5) Wonder and magic
6) Wise and foolish folk
7) Lovers

Under each heading there are four to six stories from various peoples. The number of tales from the respective minorities varies; the Drung, for instance, have only one, while the Yi have three and the Dai four.

Following the 200 pages of tales is an appendix of 28 pages, where the various minorities and their cultures are presented. As would be expected considering the Chinese authorities' controversial approach to defining minorities, the reader is left in some doubt as to their status. In the discussion in the general introduction it is said that there are twenty-five officially recognized National Minorities in Yunnan. Yet one finds tales and descriptions of twenty-six minorities in the book. The twenty-sixth is the Kucong, a small ethnic group of some 3,000 people that has not received the status of National Minority. Missing entirely is the ethnic group known as the Kammu, whom my coworkers and I have been working with and collecting tales from for over twenty years in several Yunnan villages. Officially they belong to the Dai minority, despite the fact that the Dai speak a Tai language while the Kammu speak a Mon-Khmer language. The description of the Dai in the appendix pertains