

any event, both sorts of priest were jailed in 1986 while, as we have seen, the procession went on without them. The central ritual for the Reverent Lord, “the largest and most significant expression of popular religious activity in Fujian today” (132), proves to be the procession to the tomb of the god’s parents that Dean did not (or was unable to) attend. It is difficult to see, then, how the Daoist rituals Dean did observe (at what was originally a Great Emperor temple!) on the god’s birthday might “structure” more than a portion of this cult’s observances. Even the birthday of the Daoist deity, the Great Emperor, was not marked by a *jiao* ritual when Dean was there. Instead, as numerous groups of mediums brought their gods to pay homage, “one Daoist priest dared to don his robes briefly at the entrance of one large group” (66); on the actual birthday, “the Daoist priest who had been summoned some time before did not appear by the chosen hour . . . so the ritual had to be postponed” (67).

Dean does show how, historically, “Daoism came to cooperate with local elites organized around local cults by casting local gods as Daoist divinities,” and, in modern observance, “how Daoist ritual specialists fit into the functionings of cults” (179). These are not, however, activities that provide underlying structure, as he wants to argue.

What Dean does vividly demonstrate is the vitality and persistence of these three cults in the face of efforts by the central government — even, at various stages of history, by Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism — to define, reconfigure, and thus control them. Though Dean does not develop this point, it seems clear from the example of the procession of the Reverent Lord in 1986 that the government’s efforts to control popular religion by removing the more conspicuous heads — the professional clergy — is doomed to failure. Is this because such cults are in fact Hydra-headed serpents? Or do the structuring principles lie still deeper? It is hoped that Dean’s future work will answer this and other questions with the same care he has brought to the description of these three cults.

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NOTE

1. See particularly Dean’s “Field Notes on Two Taoist *jiao* Observed in Zhangzhou in December, 1985,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 2: 191–201 (1986) and “Funerals in Fujian,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 4: 19–78 (1988). Both articles contain close descriptions of contemporary Daoist practice on the mainland.

DREXLER, MONICA. *Daoistische Schriftmagie. Interpretationen zu den Schriftamuletten Fu im Daozang* [Daoist writing magic: Interpretations of the *fu* amulets in the *daoasang*]. Münchener Ostasiatische Studien, Band 68. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994. viii + 241 pages. Bibliography, Chinese glossary and index, illustrations and facsimiles. Paper DM 96. —; ISBN 3–515–06388–9. (In German)

The Chinese writing system, with its distinct characters, is both essentially pictorial and highly abstract; it shows a multiplicity of focus and meaning, yet is full of graphical inspiration. For this reason writing in China was, even from the earliest times, considered more than a mere means of communication; it was a collection of symbols full of sacred and magical power (CHAVES 1977). In religious Taoism, which tends to develop certain aspects of ancient Chinese culture in its own way, writing — in a celestial, pure, and thus more potent form — was elevated to the rank of the highest creative essence of the cosmos, the first manifestation of the Tao, from which the universe came into being (ROBINET 1993, 20).

It is thus not surprising that in ancient China stylized forms of writing were used in state

contracts and in formal announcements to the gods. The former consisted of pieces of silk, bamboo, or wood that were inscribed with the terms of the contract, then broken apart in an irregular pattern to be matched again whenever proof of the contract's veracity was needed. Such matching-piece contracts were called *fu* 符 or "tallies," and it is these that Monika Drexler's book is all about.

This ancient cultural heritage was applied in a new and distinct way in the Taoist religion, where *fu* were used as formally written talismans whose sacred script was believed to match the energies of heaven. They corresponded to mantras (formal incantations) and ritual acts, which were similarly believed to contain the power of a given deity or of cosmic energy. The talisman, together with the incantation and the ritual, gave the Taoist power over the forces of the world and allowed him to avoid disaster, bring rain, summon spirits to his service, and engage in free exchange with the celestials.

While the earliest Taoist talismans were found in second-century tombs (where they confirmed the rightful possession of the grave by the deceased; SEIDEL 1985), it was in the various Taoist schools of the middle ages (200–900) that their formal practice and application flourished most. In the Song dynasty (960–1260) they were particularly prominent in the school of the Center of Heaven (Tianxin 天心), whose practice focused on finding protection through the deities of the Northern Dipper, the Polestar, and other stellar constellations in the central sky. Dating back to the discovery of wondrous texts on Mount Huaga in 994, the school's methods were first codified in 1116 by Yuan Miaozong 元妙宗 in his *Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen biyao* 太上助國救民總真祕要 [Highest essentials of assembling the perfected to aide the state and save the people] (DZ 1227; BOLTZ 1987, 34). This work, which contains a detailed description of the writing methods of talismans as well as an analysis of the major *fu* of the Tianxin school, stands at the center of Drexler's work.

Drexler's discussion of the structure and meaning of Taoist talismans is in four parts, beginning with an introduction that traces their idea and development from the beginnings through Han sources and into Taoist practice (5–14). Part 2 contains a discussion of the graphic elements of talismans and pays particular attention to the techniques of "alienation": the intentional transformation of normally written graphs into incomprehensible and therefore mystically powerful symbols through the use of elongations, abbreviations, permutations, cursive forms, series connections, and multiple layers (15–22). Part 3 focuses specifically on talismans of the Tianxin tradition, discussing the history of this school and its three major tallies: the Network of Heaven (Tiangan 天剛), the Three Luminants (Sanguang 三光) and the Dark Warrior (Xuanwu 玄武) (23–83). It also contains a summary of the text in DZ 1227 and a translation of its talismanic analysis (29–74). The fourth and last part analyzes the ritual power of talismans, looking at their use in the Taoist ceremonies of various schools and traditions (85–121).

As the study makes clear, talismans were written upon celestial inspiration for use as equivalents of, and in joint practice with, incantations in ritual performances. In order to produce a talisman of full celestial power, the adept had first to prepare expensive ink (sometimes of gold or cinnabar) and fine paper or silk in his meditation chamber. He would then visualize the corresponding deity, chant the deity's spell for his protection, place his hands in a particular position, and inhale deeply to write the talisman in one single breath, containing the maximum celestial impact in its words.

Talismans usually consisted of several characters or clusters of characters that, together with pictorial representations, either expressed the celestial authority of the deity or contained the ritual formulas used in his worship. They can be categorized according to the five major methods of creating the graphical forms:

- 1) The alienation of characters, whereby lines are lengthened, doubled, curved, or in other ways changed, but where (vague) recognition of the original words is still possible. An example is the Talisman of the Great Demon-Killing Sage, Network of Heaven (see illustration 1).

- 2) The combination of characters with pictorial representations, where the name of a



ILLUSTRATION 1
Talisman of the Network of Heaven (p. 157; DZ 1227, 2.15a)



ILLUSTRATION 2
Talisman of the Demon-Killing Dipper (p.94; DZ 1220, 196. 2ab)

ILLUSTRATION 3
Talisman of the Perfected Warrior (p.161; DZ 117, 2.6a)

ILLUSTRATION 4
Talisman of the Triple Radiance of Fivefold Fire (p.159; DZ 567, 10ab)

certain deity is spelled out and joined with a graphic representation of his/her characteristics. An example is the Talisman of the Demon-Killing Dipper, which combines the characters *dou-sha* 斗煞 (dipper-kill) with seven strokes symbolizing the seven stars of the constellation and three connected dots that show the starry nature of the deity (see illustration 2).

3) The anthropomorphic depiction of the deity, which also includes the writing of characters but often completely subsumes them under an image. An example is the Talisman of the Perfect Warrior (the Perfect Warrior being another powerful constellation of the northern sky, often called the Dark Warrior [MAJOR 1986], that was particularly venerated during the Song) (see illustration 3).

4) The overwriting of characters and graphic images of the deity onto a dense, spiked

ball of black ink that only initiates would recognize for more than a blob. Here we have the Talisman of the Triple Radiance of Fivefold Fire, which combines the character for “fire” written five times with three vertical and horizontal lines as well as with three spirals, showing the threefold radiance in its various directions (see illustration 4).

5) The condensation of formulas into individual lines, so that each line stands for four characters. A complex character of, say, ten lines could thus contain a full ritual incantation for the deity. An example is the Talisman of the Network of Heaven (illustration 1), where the four lines of the character *tian* 天 (heaven) stand for the four highest celestial deities, while the thirteen lines of the character *gang* 剛 (network) condense a sixty-character ritual incantation for protection by this deity (32).

Drexler does an excellent job of presenting and analyzing the uses and meanings of talismans in the Taoist tradition, especially as they were explained by the Tianxin masters of the twelfth century. She focuses largely on the text in DZ 1227, whose detailed unraveling of condensed talismans she translates with acumen. In addition, she succeeds admirably in placing the Tianxin practices into a larger context and giving a thorough and sophisticated description of the graphics and techniques of talisman writing. Examples are numerous, and the breadth of the survey equals its analytical depth. Moreover, the text of the study is highly compact and does not repeat itself superfluously. Ending with a general résumé on page 121, it is followed by an extensive annotated appendix (125–43), a bibliography (144–52), a glossary/index (153–56), pictures of many, many different kinds of talismans (157–232), and references to their sources in the Taoist canon (233–41).

The only shortcomings of the book are found in the discussions at the beginning and the end. The book starts with an examination of tallies in ancient China, moves on to finds of Taoist *fu* in Han tombs, then takes up the Tianxin texts and techniques that form the book’s true nucleus. The reader is somewhat taken aback when she has to jump from the second to the twelfth century within one paragraph on page 11. The end of the book is similarly abrupt, moving suddenly from a technical discussion of the secret method of writing the Talisman of the Three Terraces to a rather dry résumé of the work as a whole. The reader is left a bit disappointed, and a number of interesting questions go unanswered. How, for example, do the various modes of talismanic writing relate to the different forms of Chinese script? What do they tell us about the nature of sacred writing in Chinese culture? How do talismans relate to the idea of symbol in Chinese religious practice? What forms of talismanic writing appear at what periods? In what schools of medieval Taoism were they applied? Which deities of the Taoist pantheon were particularly given to talismanic representations, and which were not? Were all talismans used equally in rituals and for protection? Or were particular forms used more in one way than another? And so on.

The notion of the *fu* is so central to so much of Taoist practice that a slightly wider range of inquiry would have raised the study from the excellent technical analysis it undoubtedly is to a truly pathbreaking work that would have allowed a much deeper understanding of the idiosyncrasies of the Taoist religion. Although no one expects a single volume to provide full answers to questions as complex as those mentioned above, an appreciation of the wider implications of talismanic beliefs and practices would have helped readers think creatively and activated new and challenging inquiries into waters as yet uncharted. Nevertheless, Monika Drexler is to be thanked for opening up one window to those areas, and it is hoped that she will continue her fruitful line of study, expanding it to include larger issues in the Taoist religion.

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FENG JICAI. *The Three-Inch Golden Lotus: A Novel on Footbinding*. Fiction from Modern China. Translated by David Wakefield. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. xx + 239 pages. Cloth US\$28.00; ISBN 0–8248–1574–2. Paper US\$12.95; ISBN 0–8248–1606–4.

If a novel is itself improper, perhaps a reviewer is allowed to begin a review in a slightly improper way, that is to say without a single word of comment. Let us thus consider first this passage, lifted from the eleven-page preface of *The Three-Inch Golden Lotus*, entitled “Some Idle Talk Before the Story.”

One fact is quite clear: it would take two or three days to go into a discussion, even a brief one, of the care, rules, knacks, criteria, techniques, attainments, cultivation, and unique and secret methods related to foot binding. It was a complete body of knowledge. Now, I don’t want to fool anybody; I’ll cover all these things later in the book. And please, if you haven’t studied this subject, don’t go interrupting my story with your comments. If you think foot binding is painful, well, it can also be quite beautiful! If you think it’s ugly, then, hey, maybe it thinks you’re ugly, too. If it weren’t so, then why, when the Qing dynasty fell, did some people cry, while others laughed? (2)

Several aspects of this quotation are indicative of this fascinating and important novel as a whole. For starters, we meet a narratorial persona both jaunty and confident, and one who insists that readers must bend to the rules of the text. We detect a propensity for litany (“the care, rules, knacks”). There is in fact a lot of repetition in this work, much of it no doubt by design since it deepens and intensifies the comedy and social criticism here. The quote above indicates that *Lotus*, set in the waning years of the Qing dynasty and extending into the 1930s, is also concerned with matters historical, if not outright political. (Standing in the wings from first breath to last are all sorts of allegorical ghosts relating to the Cultural Revolution and a host of other ideological waves.) Finally, our narrator advises in the preface that we should prepare ourselves to encounter mixed feelings within ourselves as we read: “If you think foot binding is painful, well, it can also be quite beautiful.” And yes, this novel is indeed an entire text about mixed feelings.

The violence is graphic. In one scene a young husband loses face when his wife loses a “competition” for the most beautiful bound feet. He becomes enraged.

He roared, “I’ll kill you, you stinking pig!” . . . He grabbed the thick pole used to bar the gate, raised it in the air, and began to beat Fragrant Lotus. The others tried to stop him,