

Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China. Edited by Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo. SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. Pp. 375. Paper \$26.95, ISBN 9781438431888.

Reviewed by **James D. Sellmann** University of Guam jsellman@uguam.uog.edu

The Early Han enjoyed some prosperity while it struggled with centralization and political control of the kingdom. The Later Han was plagued by the court intrigue, corrupt eunuchs, and massive flooding of the Yellow River that eventually culminated in popular uprisings that led to the demise of the dynasty. The period that followed was a renewed warring states period that likewise stimulated a rebirth of philosophical and religious debate, growth, and innovations. Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo's *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on medieval China. It is a companion volume to their co-authored work, *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China* (SUNY Press, 2010). This new book contains a twenty-one page introduction, eleven chapters, and a useful index. Chinese characters are provided for translated text and place and personal names. The first five chapters discuss topics in *xuanxue* philosophy. The remaining six chapters discuss various topics in religion, Daoism, Buddhism, and ideas that cross over the various teachings.

In the Introduction, Chan briefly explains the origin of *xuanxue* philosophy and its historical context. He goes on to give an account of the chapters in the book, drawing connections between them when he can. Chan concludes that *xuanxue* shares certain family resemblances related to the moral and political issues and terminology of the day, but, he argues, it is not a uniform or "homogeneous school of thought" (p. 9). In concluding the introduction, Chan celebrates the diversity and wealth offered by medieval China as a field of study. He notes that the various philosophies and the religions of that period were focused on "practical concerns" (p. 14); even the abstruse *xuanxue*, he argues, was rooted in moral and political concerns.

In the first chapter, "Sage Nature and the Logic of Namelessness: Reconstructing He Yan's Explication of Dao," Chan explains He Yan's "understanding of Dao as *wu*" (p. 24) and "the nameless as harmony, which applies equally to the Dao and the sage" (p. 25). Chan argues that He Yan, like Xi Kang, held that the sage is born with a unique inner nature that sets the sage apart from the common people. In this, He is unlike Wang Bi, who held that common people can attain sagehood. Ethical and political implications follow quickly. For He Yan, the sage is not affected by changing circumstances; the sage is always impartial and calm due to his inner nature. However, He Yan maintained that it was unlikely that a sage would ever be on the throne in the present day. The next best situation was to ensure that worthy officials, who are sage-like, follow sagely examples, or set their minds on Dao, are selected for office. Given the basic limitations of the common people, Chan argues that He Yan appeared to be more inclined toward keeping them in check with legal rewards and punishments rather than through ritual propriety alone.

In "Tracing the Dao: Wang Bi's Theory of Names," Jude Chua argues that when Wang Bi's correlative semiotics is metaphorically integrated into his philosophy, Wang Bi finds a way to infer forms or to trace actualities from their source in the Dao. When Wang Bi shifts the intellectual focus from names and principles to profound discourse, he is still very much concerned about the "that-by-which" things are accomplished. Speculations about the Dao are tied to moral and political concerns such that the nameless and the formless are metaphors for political noninterference. The way the Dao operates and the way the sage-ruler governs are intimately tied together.

In "Hexagrams and Politics: Wang Bi's Political Philosophy," Tze-Ki Hon artfully extracts from Wang Bi's commentary on the *Zhouyi* a political philosophy that advocates a non-hierarchical political structure in which political leaders will make compromises, balancing the interests of the central administration and local authorities.

In "Li in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Coherence in the Dark," Brook Ziporyn, arguing against Wing-tsit Chan's claims in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1973) (p. 371), proves that Wang Bi "develops a theory of distinctive individual principles of things, while Guo [Xiang] puts forth a single principle for all things without exception: the principle of the self-so, *ziran*" (p. 97). Chan had proposed that Wang Bi emphasized the one and Guo the many. First, Ziporyn reviews the contours of early Daoist philosophy in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* to show how there is an ironic use of language being employed to talk about what cannot be talked about or to promote a sense of coherence for what is not coherent. He also discusses the non-ironic use of *dao* in other early Daoist texts such as the *Guanzi*. Then, he argues that Wang Bi's approach is to integrate the ironic into non-ironic coherences, providing various convincing examples of ironic or unintelligible *li* (principle or coherence) making manifest the particular intelligible *li* for any given situation. Ziporyn goes on to argue that Guo Xiang unites the ironic and the non-ironic such that coherence and incoherence become one and the same thing. One consideration, I propose, regarding the use of irony to interpret Daoist nondual philosophy and correlative thinking is that irony implies a hidden, transcendent ideal or ultimate negativity that is pointed to or hinted at through the double entendre of ironic words or expressions. As such it is unlikely that the Daoist writers employ irony in describing the correlative, all-encompassing character of the *dao*.

In "The Sage without Emotion: Music, Mind and Politics in Xi Kang," Ulrike Middendorf offers a new interpretation of Xi Kang's essay "Discourse on Sounds / The Sage without Grief or Joy" by arguing that this essay is best understood as a discussion of music, mind, and politics based on the social and political realities of the day. Xi Kang accepts many traditional (Confucian) ideas and assumptions about music, and he rejects a few key assumptions, namely that music is a system of signs and that music contains emotions or causes them to arise in people. After carefully unpacking the details of the traditional view, she draws out Xi Kang's differences with the tradition, differences that veil his criticisms of the ruling powers, revealing a deeper coherence and practical aim underlying the essay.

In "The Ideas of Illness, Healing and Morality in Early Heavenly Master Daoism," Chi-Tim Lai argues that the early Heavenly Master Daoism belief in the Three Officials of Heaven, Earth, and Water both lends coherence to the Heavenly Master teachings and distinguishes them from popular religious beliefs. The practice of making a personal, written confession of one's sins to seek absolution and healing from illness is central to Heavenly Master Daoism. The Heavenly Master teachings, similar to other ancient religions, held that disaster in general, and illness in particular, were the result of moral transgressions. If a wrongdoer did not properly atone for his sins, then heavenly punishment could be enacted upon his descendants. Many of these ideas were widely held. Early Heavenly Master Daoism formed itself around the unifying idea that atonement had to be made to the Three Officials.

Stephen Bokenkamp, in "Imagining Community: Family Values and Morality in the Lingbao Scriptures," argues against the popular notion that Lingbao Daoism capitulated or surrendered to Buddhism, contending instead that Lingbao Daoism was actually restoring traditional values in response to the challenges current at the time and to a new notion of rebirth that came with Buddhism but that was reshaped in China. He argues that the image of a way or path is the dominant metaphor for religion in China, and as such a religion may and will intersect with other paths. A religion is not a pure container that absorbs external influences. In this context, he argues that Lingbao Daoism did not capitulate to Buddhism, but rather their mutual paths intermingled for a while in their respective attempts to resolve the trials and tribulations that confronted religious leaders and their communities. In the face of rapid social change, war, dislocation, famine, and other challenges, family solidarity was threatened. Bokenkamp works his way through various moral codes to show how the newly revealed Lingbao leaders had to defend their teachings against the practices of the village ancestor cults and the ever growing advances of Buddhism. He builds a case that the Lingbao teachings and interpretations of universal salvation and rebirth are intimately tied to the extended family, including the ancestors that form an "imagined community" based on Chinese ancestral practices. Lingbao Daoists were not concerned about the correct interpretation of Buddhist concepts; rather they used what was available to them to reconstruct their families and even return the ancestors to their natal families.

In "What Is *Geyi*, after All?" Victor Mair argues that the translation technique of "matching concepts or meanings" is a construction of twentieth-century scholars. He provides a very detailed textual analysis of both the original uses of the term *geyi* 格義 and the interpretations or translations given by Chen Yinke, Tang Yongtong, Kenneth Ch'en, and other modern scholars who misunderstood it. For Mair, *geyi* were originally numerical lists of Buddhist and non-Buddhist terms used for giving explanations; they were not lists of Daoist and Buddhist terms for translation. He concludes that these lists were important in early Chinese Buddhism, but they did not command a central place in its development.

In "The *Buddharāja* Image of Emperor Wu of Liang," Kathy Ku offers a detailed study of the *Buddharāja* image of Emperor Wu of Liang. She shows that Emperor

Wu's image as a Buddharāja is not a mere infusion of Indian ideal kingship blended with the Chinese ideal. She argues that it is "a typical expression of Buddhist cakravartinship [i.e., ideal universal rulership] or Buddharājaship of Maitreya, which was introduced to South China from India by Faxian in the first decades of the fifth century" (p. 283). Tempering Ku's claim with some of Bokenkamp's intermingling of paths would make good sense because the Chinese ideal of the sage ruler shares some values with the Buddharāja. In fact, many Daoists and others believed that Laozi was transformed and had manifested as the Buddha.

In "Social and Cultural Dimensions of Reclusion in Early Medieval China," Alan Berkowitz explores the ubiquitous role that reclusion played in early medieval China, especially focusing on the interplay of the portrayal and practice of reclusion and the social and cultural milieu. He concludes that political volatility may have made reclusion more attractive, but that in itself does not account for the widespread appeal of reclusion among the educated elite. He proposes that the integration of the various aspects of reclusion into the "cultural consciousness" characterizes and, in part, defines early medieval Chinese civilization.

In the final chapter, "Destiny and Retribution in Early Medieval China," Yuet-Keung Lo traces the increasing importance of the concept of destiny from the late Han through the early medieval period. After fleshing out the role of destiny and retribution in Han Daoist texts, he explicates their role in the *Xiang'er Commentary*. He reviews Han and early medieval Confucian attempts to explain destiny, and he links the *Xiang'er Commentary's* hard fatalism to Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's uses of the concept of *ziran*, which he also links to Ge Hong. He ties into the discussion the Buddhist concept of karma as a form of destiny. He concludes that the medieval Chinese adoption of the doctrine of karma to handle the discussion of destiny is evidence that Zürcher's expression "the Buddhist conquest of China" holds. Again the intermingling of paths might provide a better explanation than the conquest model. The mere fact that Chinese people in general used Buddhist terminology to discuss destiny is not evidence that Buddhism conquered China, especially when the meaning of the terminology changed over time, but rather it is evidence that the traditions shared commonalities that allowed them to borrow freely from each other.

What is not mentioned in the book should be noted. No one cites Feng Youlan's *New Edition of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, volume 4, but many of the topics in these essays are discussed by Feng in his later work. None of the authors uses the concept of nondual philosophy to describe Buddhist or Daoist philosophy or religion. Nondualism (*advaita*) is well known in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nondualism (or *yinyang* thinking) plays an important role in early and later Daoism. Some of the authors do discuss correlative thinking that is connected to nondual philosophy. Western philosophical terminology is freely used without explanation or justification. For example, the *dao* is described as having a "radical transcendence" (pp. 2 and 35), and "fatalism" (pp. 319 ff.) and "hedonism" (p. 335) are used as if these terms have universal meaning and application across cultures and philosophies. I think that Lo's article could have drawn a sharper distinction between destiny and fate or fatalism. Typically people play a role in crafting their destiny but not their fate,

which relates to the Buddhist concepts of impelling and compelling karmas. There are some staunch fatalists in the various traditions, but for the most part the major figures and texts of the Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist traditions implore people to craft their destiny through proper behavior, moral codes, ritual, meditation, and other practices.

Overall, *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarly work explicating the early medieval period in China.