

Taoism

The Enduring Tradition

BY RUSSELL KIRKLAND

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Russell Kirkland has offered those of us who teach about Chinese philosophy and religion an excellent introduction to Daoism. *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* will be especially useful to an instructor because the author uses his wide-ranging knowledge of the history and practice of Daoism, and of the Daoist literary canon, to provide correctives and dispel misunderstandings that are sadly still a part of the teaching about this important Chinese tradition.

The first place a reader will notice a substantial corrective of the received scholarship on Daoism is in the author's definition of Daoism itself. Kirkland does not privilege ancient Daoism over medieval or modern; nor does he focus only on male Daoists and not female ones. He tells us to take "Daoist" to mean anyone who self-identifies as a Daoist. Perhaps of most immediate interest is the author's chapter entitled *The Classical Legacy*. Many claims will seem shocking at first, but the author makes his case clearly and cogently.

For example, he says there was no such social entity or school of thought as "Daoism" or "Classical Daoism" in pre-Qin China, and that this taxonomy was the creation of Han dynasty (206 BCE–CE 221) thinkers. He reminds us that there is virtually no reliable primary historical data for the existence of Laozi or Zhuang Zhou outside of the *Zhuangzi* and some vague passages in the *Shiji*. And he makes it clear that both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* are composite texts not written by a single author.

Two very important contributions of *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* are brought together for the first time in Kirkland's work. He does a fine job of showing the significance of the *Neiye* for the classical legacy of Daoism, yet few persons teaching Daoism will know much about it. Kirkland sets it in context very well, allowing many teachers to realize that it is important not to think of Daoism as merely equivalent to the Lao-Zhuang tradition; indeed they will see the value of questioning whether we should even think of a Lao-Zhuang tradition at all. The other fascinating contribution of this work is the well-informed overview of women in Daoist history and practice. In my view, the role of female Daoists is one of the most neglected areas in Daoist studies. However, one could read pages 126–144 of this text and be confident in gaining an accurate view of the substantive issues on the crucial subject of women and Daoism.

The book offers a brief but informative historical summary of forty-one pages on the development of Daoism from the Han period to the present day. In the chapter *The Socio-Political Matrix of Daoism*, Kirkland reminds us that there were Daoist literati in various periods of Chinese history, and that not all Daoists were recluses living in mountain sanctuaries. Some Daoists were poets, historians, scholars, and even well-connected members of the

political elite who held government offices or served as advisors to high officials.

In *The Cultivated Life*, Kirkland devotes a chapter to what might be regarded as the central issue of Daoist studies. What was the ultimate goal of Daoist teaching and practice? Kirkland addresses the question of the Daoist interest in physical immortality directly and shows how it fit into the other more fundamental goals of Daoism. He sets aside the idea that the reclusive mountain dweller using a burner to cook the elixir of immortality is the one irreducible ideal in the practice of Daoism. And yet, he reminds us that a recurring goal was to attain an exalted state of transformed existence through diligent cultivation of the world's deeper realities. The author refers to this transformation in the book as biospiritual cultivation, and he argues that this is the ultimate goal of Daoist practice. ■

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Religions of the Silk Road *Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*

BY RICHARD C. FOLTZ

NEW YORK: ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2000

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The Internet, one might say, is the new Silk Road: it is a place that links various parts of the world; a place where people and other larger entities conduct business (e.g., e-commerce); a place fraught with danger (e.g., "hackers"); and a place where people exchange goods *and* ideas. While this picture of the new Silk Road works well as an explanatory device, Richard Foltz's *Religions of the Silk Road* situates the dynamics of cross-cultural contact and trade along the ancient Silk Road.

Foltz's intriguing work first surveys the variety of individuals who traveled the Silk Road; discusses the role of religion *and* trade along ancient trading routes; documents when, where, why, and how Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims traveled it; and concludes by reflecting on the collusion *and* collision of faith(s)—all the while demonstrating that both commerce and religion constituted the most important dynamics of the Silk Road's history.

As pioneering and commendable as *Religions of the Silk Road* is, non-specialist readers may balk at the barrage of details and unfamiliar names and places, many of which come without proper introductory context; several low-quality maps contribute to this critical commentary.