were not of that grand genre. The last Lao kings were both feudalistic and French-oriented elitists. Decades after Thai kings had abandoned the feudalistic tradition of polygamy, King Sisavang Wong of Laos had twelve wives.

An additional serious misunderstanding of Kremmer relates to his attempt to describe the nature of Lao reeducation camps and those sent off to "seminar" after the communist revolution. Initially, the king of Laos was given an honorary "advisory" position in the new government. He and his family were only sent to "waste away" in such camps after their alleged implicit involvement in counterrevolutionary actions against the government, and their serving as a potential rallying point for resistance to the regime.

In addition, the experiences of those sent to "seminar" and reeducation camps varied considerably depending on the nature of their activities under the previous regime. Those, such as teachers and doctors, previously involved in non-nefarious activities did not spend long periods in "seminar." Those most severely punished were those involved with the American side during the secret war in Laos such as military, police, and interior officials, and those profiteering from drugs, prostitution, and gambling, for example.

The most disturbing part of the book comes toward the end of the volume when Kremmer asserts that Laos "remains a country worth saving." Here Kremmer asserts the patronizing "white man's burden" to "save" Laos, as though it needs to be "saved" from an "evil" regime which has finally brought peace, independence, and unity to a country which previously had been plagued by violence, chaos, and decades in which it had lacked political, economic, and cultural sovereignty.

Kremmer's fascinating "search for Laos" could be used fruitfully in social science classes as a means to stimulate critical thinking about such issues as revisionist history, ethnocentrism, the nature of monarchy in Asia, and historical comparisons between contemporary Laos and the country before the communist revolution. Kremmer's book could also be used effectively in combination with such works as *Air America*; the novel, *The Brinkman*; and Dr. Tom Dooley's trilogy to assess the unanticipated consequences of U.S. covert political intervention and related intensive secret bombing in Laos which helped bring about the political conditions which Kremmer so deplores.

Kremmer has helped put Laos back on the map, but unfortunately his nostalgia for Laos's lost monarchy detracts him from searching for the authentic Laos which represents an amazing amalgam of Buddhism, Marxism, and free market mechanisms. ▫

Gerald W. Fry

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The Shambhala Guide to Taoism

BY EVA WONG
BOSTON AND LONDON: SHAMBHALA PUBLICATIONS, 1997
X + 268 PAGES

Until the 1990s, there were virtually no suitable texts for teaching about Taoism (Daoism). General textbooks—both texts on Chinese civilization and texts on "world religions"—usually contain a mishmash of nonsense and long-obsolete data, and often give the mistaken impression that Taoism, at least after Lao-tzu (Laozi) and Chuang-tzu (Zhuangzi), was nothing more than foolish superstition. Such impressions were generally reinforced by the few general scholarly works on Taoism, such as Holmes Welch's *The Parting of the Way* (1957), and Max Kaltenmark's *Lao Tzu and Taoism* (1969). Used alongside the anthologies of Wm. T. deBary (*Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 1960) and Wing-tsit Chan (*Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 1963), such texts perpetuated the anti-Taoist biases of the Confucian intelligentsia. Modern Confucians, wishing to be perceived by Westerners as the noble stewards of a noble civilization, were generally embarrassed by all forms of religion (which is still considered foolishness by the Enlightenment mind). They therefore taught Westerners that Taoism held nothing of value and should be derided to heighten appreciation for the ethical rationalism of Confucianism.

This book is the first comprehensive introduction to Taoism by a modern practitioner of the tradition itself. Wong, raised in Hong Kong, is a practitioner of the little-known Hsien-t'ien (Xiantian) tradition of Taoism, and has authored several books on Taoism for the general public.[1] Scholars brought up on the texts mentioned above may be surprised by this book's contents, for it presents the "superstitious mishmash" of Taoism as a cultural tradition that has a clear and

identifiable history that can be understood and appreciated alongside other religions of the world.

Part One lays out the "History of Taoism," methodically introducing the major phases in the evolution of Taoism that scholars today recognize. Scholars will quibble with her presentation, but it is generally sound. It actually betrays the same weaknesses seen in the works of some of today's specialists, such as the dubious contention that Taoism arose from early Chinese shamanism. But it also helps counteract scholars' common overemphasis on Taoism prior to the T'ang (Tang) dynasty. Readers do find here the familiar references to medieval alchemists, but they also find a substantial introduction to the highly important (and still mostly overlooked) Ch'üan-chen (Quanzhen) tradition, in which the spiritual life is understood and practiced in terms quite comparable to its contemporary movements, Neo-Confucianism and Zen.

Part Two seeks to elucidate the variety within Taoism by identifying distinguishable "paths," here labeled as five distinctive "Systems of Taoism." Wong's interpretation here is subject to debate, but it is basically a viable one. The same can be said for Part Three, "Taoist Practices." These sections introduce the reader to how Taoists actually practiced their religion in imperial China.

In form, this book is an introductory text, complete with all appropriate maps, bibliography, index, and suggestions for further readings. What is regrettable is that Wong has, perhaps at her publisher's urging, tarnished her text by labeling it "a guide to the spiritual landscape of Taoism" (1). She maintains that "a guide differs from a textbook [for] a true guide has a perspective and does not pretend to be objective" (2). To some extent, this is true. But upon closer inspection, the book seems to hold up reasonably well as an "objective" introduction to Taoism. It does contain occasional factual errors, and some debatable interpretations. But I know of no comparable work today, even by leading specialists, of which the same cannot be said.

Wong's omissions, and her evasion of certain issues, will be noticeable only to specialists, and they are understandable given the level of the text. She does indeed have her own "perspective," but it seldom interferes with her presentation of facts. If read as an "insider's guide" which seeks appreciation for the tradition as much as an understanding of it, the book stands up quite well.

Its main weakness is that the publisher seems to have compelled her to market it as fare for the "spiritual seeker," rather than as a text for students and their teachers. The title, in particular, is appalling, since the "Guide" was composed by Wong, not by the publishing house, and the book's bibliographies are crammed with gratuitous references to Shambhala's related publications, many of which are quite shoddy. Teachers who can guide students past those flaws may find this book a useful addition to courses on Asian religions. ▫

NOTE

1. Of special note is her translation, *Seven Taoist Masters: A Folk Novel of China* (Shambhala, 1991), and her companion-piece to the present book, an anthology of extracts from Taoist texts, entitled *Teachings of the Tao* (Shambhala, 1997). A better anthology, however, is Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology* (SUNY, 1993).

Russell Kirkland

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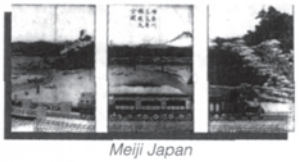

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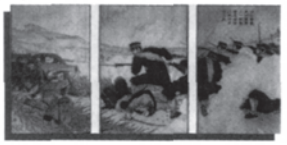

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