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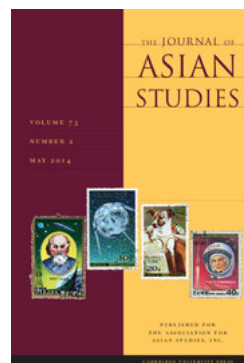
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***The Heavenly Court: Daoist Temple Painting in China, 1200–1400.* By Lennert Gesterkamp. Leiden: Brill, 2011. xxiv, 470 pp. (including 96 pp. of illustrations and one foldout). \ \$187.00 (cloth).**

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CHINA

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Melding art history with Daoist studies, this book makes two major contributions. First, it explains the historical development and artistic merit of the influential Daoist ritual images known as “heavenly court paintings” (*chaoyuan tu*). Second, it articulates a convincing argument for the importance of reconstructing “iconopraxis,” namely the “accustomed practices and actions associated to the images” (p. 9): since these paintings were themselves depictions of rituals, Gesterkamp argues, their development and production must be considered together with changes and variations in the nature of the rituals.

Chapter 1 identifies the different kinds of heavenly court paintings, the historical phases of their development, and the characteristics that distinguish them from other kinds of ritual paintings. Gesterkamp notably develops the idea of “imperialization” to explain the way that Daoist spirits came to be represented as an emperor with a bevy of ministers. He further contextualizes this “*chao* (court)-audience ritual” (p. 2) iconography within the history of Chinese painting by showing how similar images were manifested in earlier visual representations of Buddhist donors and tomb processions. At the same time, Gesterkamp argues that there was no fixed way to visually represent a Daoist deity, and he thus criticizes an earlier interpretation by Anning Jing for assuming that there is an authentic, immutable tradition for Daoist visual cultures.⁶

Chapter 2 combines temple history and art history in a discussion of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century wall paintings that constitute Gesterkamp’s central sources: those at the Palace of Eternal Joy (Yongle gong, Shanxi Province), at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (also originating in Shanxi Province), at the Southern Hermitage (Nan’an, Shaanxi Province), and at the Northern Peak Temple (Beiyue miao, Hebei Province). Gesterkamp excels particularly in the way he uses visual and site-specific clues to identify the deities in these paintings. However, his detailed analysis of the Northern Peak Temple paintings also raises issues of commensurability: their iconography and layout are so different from the others that it challenges Gesterkamp’s hypothesis that they should be considered part of the same genre.

Chapter 3 examines the physical, ideological, and iconographic aspects of “audience ritual” (*chaoyi*), and it comprises Gesterkamp’s most significant contribution to Daoist studies. He delves deeply into the significance of these rituals for Daoist priests and argues that there is a *visible* aspect to these ritual performances, as well as a *visualized* dimension in which priests imagine the court ritual in their minds. A central ritual element was the Daoist altar, and Gesterkamp examines its historical development and how it was integrated with the murals on the surrounding walls. A revealing example is Gesterkamp’s case study of the paired murals of the Palace of Eternal Joy, which demonstrates that the three-tiered Daoist altar described in earlier texts had evolved into a four-walled ritual space. Also important is the way that he uses ritual

⁶Anning Jing, “Yongle Palace: The Transformation of the Daoist Pantheon during the Yuan Dynasty (1260–1368)” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1994), 287–89.

texts to reveal the relationship between the hierarchy of gods mentioned in petitions and the visual representations on the walls.

The next two chapters explore the material and social factors that influenced the form and content of these paintings. Chapter 4 details the technical and artistic processes employed in the creation of these murals. Here Gesterkamp identifies fourteen different stages of production, beginning with sketches and designs that were then turned over to artists of different ranks in a painting workshop. Chapter 5 suggests that the iconography of these murals was also influenced by the different motives and tastes of the patrons who paid for them. Gesterkamp seeks to discern these patterns of “personalization” by analyzing the distinguishing idiosyncratic or “irregular” features of each of the four sets of murals.

While appreciating Gesterkamp’s meticulous descriptions, I was not always convinced by some of his hypotheses. For example, in his analysis of why the Toronto murals chose to depict the Nine Heavens (*jiuxiao*), the King Father of the East, and the Queen Mother of the West, Gesterkamp concludes that these depictions were “personalized to specifically accommodate” the Rite of Sublimation (*liandu*) (p. 254). The Rite of Sublimation, however, was used to save the souls of the deceased, and it seems unlikely that a ritual devoted to the dead would be represented on the walls of a Daoist temple. Furthermore, the depiction of the Nine Heavens was likely a common convention among a variety of temples in the Song dynasty, and there is no indication that its appearance here is intimately related to the Rite of Sublimation. Similarly, Gesterkamp proposes that the images of the Twenty-Four Heavenly Emperors that distinguish the Southern Hermitage murals are related to the Twenty-Four Life Diagrams (*er shi si sheng tu*) of the Lingbao corpus, but this system of practice does not appear to have been relevant after the early medieval era. Furthermore, the diagrams are not typically correlated to a pantheon. Thus, I think this and other similar hypotheses have yet to be fully validated.

In his conclusion, Gesterkamp synthesizes the themes of his substantive chapters to highlight the methodological advantages of studying the “parallel development of painting and ritual” together (p. 315). He shows that one must consider how the development and content of these paintings (including which deities they included) were connected to the content of rituals conducted in a specific ritual space. Furthermore, he argues that local identities were fused onto the representation of Daoist gods, and that the orientations of financial and religious sponsors were integral to the design of these murals. In sum, by reading texts and paintings against each other, Gesterkamp has successfully developed a productive, new methodological approach that allows a more profound understanding of these Daoist murals.

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Explorers and Scientists in China's Borderlands, 1880–1950. Edited by DENISE M. GLOVER, STEVAN HARRELL, CHARLES F. MCKHANN, and MARGARET BYRNE SWAIN. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. xii, 300 pp. \$75.00 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper).
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This book is a collection of exciting, if somewhat uneven, essays that examine about ten European and American scientific explorers and collectors in southwestern China in