

Series Editors' Preface

A Library of Clouds is the first monograph devoted to the important Upper Clarity text the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*. Upper Clarity (*Shangqing* 上清), or Maoshan (茅山), revelations designate a group of Daoist texts—and the slightly later scriptures that imitate them—that were bestowed by deities upon the medium Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–86 CE). The full title of the scripture treated in *A Library of Clouds* is *Taishang suling dongxuan dayou miaojing* (*Most High Wondrous Scripture of the Immaculate Numen that Penetrates the Mystery of the Great Existence*). Like other Upper Clarity scriptures, its name designates the celestial realms where the original work was thought to have been stored. *Suling* (Immaculate Numen) and *Dayou* (Great Existence) are the names of the room and palace, respectively, where the heavenly prototype of this text was kept.

The Upper Clarity scriptures have been of intense interest to scholars because they were collected and catalogued by the Daoist scholar Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536 CE) and thus are roughly datable. Although Tao's main compilation of Upper Clarity texts, the *Secret Instructions for Ascent to Perfection* (*Dengzhen yinjue* 登真隱訣), is mostly lost, his *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao* 真誥) includes more general information and has provided modern researchers with a guide to the scriptures. Still, the fourth to seventh centuries saw a rapid proliferation of Daoist scriptures, both Upper Clarity texts and writings from other traditions. Scholarly debate on the relative priority of and connections among these works is intense. By deploying

redaction criticism, a methodology seldom applied to Daoist writing, J. E. E. Pettit and Chao-jan Chang have found a way around the roadblocks to greatly advance our understanding of medieval Daoist scripture.

Redaction criticism is a congeries of methods developed to uncover the composition history of the Christian Bible. The methods center on an understanding of how premodern texts came into being through the work of one or more compilers rather than the pen or brush of a single author. Chang and Pettit modify redaction criticism to fit the Daoist case. They probe the different layers of an important scripture from the Upper Clarity lineage to demonstrate how Daoist authors of the fourth to seventh centuries each contributed strands to what is now a single scriptural fabric. Hence the *jing* (scripture) proves to be the work of not one but multiple authors, sometimes working in concert and sometimes attempting to correct one another. Through analyzing this process closely, Pettit and Chang show that, while other religious traditions held sacred writings as immutable, medieval Daoists considered their scriptures to be imperfect human approximations of celestial originals and often altered them in response to new findings.

In the case of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*, Chang and Pettit argue that Wang Lingqi 王靈期 (fl. 404) was likely the work's most prominent editor. We have known since the earliest modern studies of medieval Daoist scripture—Chen Guofu's 陳國符 (1914–2000) *Daozang yuanliu kao* 道藏源流考 (1949), for example—that Wang was a forger of Upper Clarity texts, but *A Library of Clouds* is the first to offer evidence as to which scriptures might be the product of his revisions and how the editing process might have worked. It therefore provides us with a key to unraveling the proliferation of Daoist scriptures that appeared during the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Finally, but not least, *A Library of Clouds* includes a full, annotated translation of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen*.

In the present work we not only have a new account of the very meaning of *jing* in the early Daoist context, but also are introduced to methodologies that address questions of dating and authorship. Through meticulous textual analysis and close reading, *A Library of Clouds* sheds light on the processes of redaction and composition in medieval Daoism that might

be applied to a number of undated and problematic texts. To quote the authors, a study of the *Scripture of the Immaculate Numen* “offer[s] insights into the persons and institutions who reformulated these (Upper Clarity) texts and...into what they reflect about the changing norms and expectations of Daoists in this early period.” In our view, *A Library of Clouds* represents an important step forward in studying the Upper Clarity tradition and, indeed, the scriptures of medieval Daoism more generally.

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