

Series Editors' Preface

David Mozina's *Knotting the Banner* is the first book in the New Daoist Studies series to focus on modern Daoist practice. We are extremely excited to introduce it, along with its accompanying website, to the scholarly public.

Knotting the Banner is a tightly focused piece of scholarship. It explores in detail the initial ordination ritual performed by the Hunan Daoist Chen Diwen and the importance of his personal relationship with the primary exorcistic deity of his lineage, Yin Jiao. It carefully traces the roots of Chen Diwen's lineage through several centuries of both Daoist and Buddhist practice in Hunan and clarifies the foundational images of Yin Jiao from Song–Yuan liturgical and hagiographic sources that inform the ordination ritual.

Such a description, however, does not do justice to Mozina's work. Its significance for the field of ritual studies—and religious studies more generally—goes far beyond its undeniable contribution to the study of Chinese religions. Precisely because Mozina's book focuses on one lineage and a single ritual conducted by that lineage, it offers an unprecedented look at the living Daoist tradition, its historical antecedents, and, most importantly, what that tradition might have to teach us about the phenomenology of ritual beyond what we have learned from more fully studied religions.

Mozina was among the group of young scholars interested in Daoist ritual that went to central Hunan in the 2000s in the wake of Patrice Fava's pioneering discoveries there. He was one of the few who stayed on, earning the trust of local priests, painstakingly observing rituals (and making video

recordings), gathering documents (including manuscripts that priests show only to trusted outsiders), and amassing oral-historical material of considerable depth and breadth. In the highly charged environment of religion in China, this was in itself a remarkable achievement: Few non-Chinese scholars have the stamina and skill to engage with and persevere in such work. In presenting his findings, Mozina is further attentive to not only the placement of this tradition in Daoist history but also how its ritual practice might add perspectives hitherto unnoticed in the field of ritual studies more generally.

In the words of Vincent Goossaert, research professor of Daoism and Chinese religions at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, whose work will be appearing in our series soon: “Nowhere else I have read an account of a Daoist ritual tradition that balances so convincingly the social and local contexts of the performance, the history and textual basis of the liturgy, and its meaning for participants, notably the priest himself. This allows Mozina to elaborate a ‘Daoist theory of ritual’ that is not abstract and disembodied but allows us to comprehend clearly the understanding of humanity and divinity that compels Daoists to perform as they do.”

This persuasive theoretical construct arises from Mozina’s close attention to the writings and words of his Daoist informants. We fully expect *Knotting the Banner* to set a new standard for the collection and presentation of ethnographic material. But it also adds a new dimension—a distinctive understanding of “ritual efficacy”—to theoretical discussions of ritual. We look forward to the discussions it will elicit and the future work, by Mozina and others, that will follow in its wake.