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## The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite by Richard G. Wang (review)

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## REVIEWS

*The Ming Prince and Daoism: Institutional Patronage of an Elite* BY RICHARD G. WANG. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xxx + 301. \$74.00.

*Lucille Chia, University of California, Riverside*

Richard G. Wang's monograph on the engagement of Ming princely houses in a wide variety of Daoist activities is an impressively detailed study resulting from over a decade of research. The book brings together two subjects that remain understudied in Ming historiography: Daoism and, to a lesser extent, the principalities.<sup>1</sup> As Wang points out, scholarship on imperial elite involvement in local religious activities in the Ming period continues to lag behind that for the Song and Qing dynasties, and Timothy Brook's work on late Ming elite patronage of Buddhism<sup>2</sup> has not been matched by a corresponding examination of the imperial princes' religious activities. This neglect arises partly from a long-standing prejudice among scholars against the Ming princes, whom historian Fu Yiling described as "occupied with nothing because their food was from the estate rents and clothes were from the tax revenue. What they could do was to get addicted to Buddhism and involved in Daoist alchemy" (quoted by Wang, p. 64). How, then, can we demonstrate the historical importance of the imperial clansmen in both the national and local histories of the Ming?

<sup>1</sup> The Ming dynasty principalities have recently enjoyed growing attention from scholars in both China and the West. For numerous citations to the secondary literature on Ming principalities, see the introductory essay by David M. Robinson, "Princely Court of the Ming Dynasty," *Ming Studies* 65 (May 2012): 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1993).

For the entire Ming period, Wang identified 288 princes at the imperial or the lower commandery level, along with 291 princely members lower in the hierarchy, who were “involved in Daoist affairs.” These approximately 600 individuals made up less than 1 percent of the total number of imperial clansmen for the entire dynasty.<sup>3</sup> And certainly, other imperial clansmen whom we do not know about were also engaged in Daoism, as were imperial clanswomen, for whom information remains extremely scarce.

Why did these imperial clansmen patronize Daoism? Did they make use of religious activities to secure positions of still greater influence in the local societies where their fiefs were situated? Or did they use their patronage of Daoism to forge empirewide connections, especially to the imperial court? Answering these questions even for one individual shows how complex these issues are. Wang launches his prologue with a discussion of the deep commitment to Daoist cultivation by Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378–1448), a son of Ming Taizu and the founder of the Ning 寧 principality, which was originally located on the northern border in modern Inner Mongolia and later relocated to Nanchang in Jiangxi. By his late teens, Zhu Quan had compiled an encyclopedia that included a chapter on Daoism, in which he wrote fifty-three out of the sixty-five new entries. Of the over seventy works he wrote or compiled, at least twenty-five were Daoist in theme, as were three of his *zaju* plays. In addition to patronizing Daoist temples and clerics in his own fief and at nationally prominent Daoist sites, he became a master of the Jingming 淨明 school of Zhengyi Daoism. Finally, a number of his descendants, including several Imperial Princes of the Ning, ardently patronized and practiced Daoism. Although Zhu Quan’s devotion to Daoism was especially strong, his motives were shared by many other imperial clansmen: personal interest; the Ming state’s privileging of Daoist practitioners for state rituals (beginning with Taizu); the preferential worship of Daoist deities such as Zhenwu 真武 by soldiers such as those under the command of the earliest princes; the refuge Daoism offered later princes deprived of political and military power by the court; a way to assert their presence in local society in the areas around their fiefs; and a conduit for channeling religious and literary energies.

<sup>3</sup> Wang reports estimates of eighty thousand imperial clansmen in 1604 and possibly two hundred thousand at the end of the Ming dynasty (p. 15).

Chapter 1 provides a useful summary of facts about the principalities. Here, Wang points out that the great military power that Taizu entrusted to the earliest princes had become greatly reduced by the late part of the Yongle reign (1403–1421). Under the *fanjin* 藩禁 regulations, which “barred holding military commands, participation in politics, holding government office, and engaging in the professions of scholar, peasant, artisan, or merchant,” the later princes and their relatives became increasingly restricted in their actions (p. 10). They were also prohibited from traveling outside their own fiefs and associating with other princes, and “they could live only on the official stipend granted by the court” (p. 10). The princes’ main official function was to represent the state in their localities by performing state rituals, and these had a pronounced Daoist flavor and were conducted by Daoist priests. Their familiarity with Daoist rituals probably fueled their own personal interest in Daoism. Some of them became Daoist masters who were ordained into a Daoist lineage; performed Daoist rituals themselves; patronized Daoist clergy; (re-)built and supported Daoist temples; and wrote, edited, and printed Daoist works.

In scattered parts of Chapters 1 and 2, Wang further discusses why and how the Ming princes and other members of the principalities were attracted to Daoism. One reason that he offers, but does not fully develop, is that both Taizu and the Yongle emperor had close ties to Daoism and Daoist priests and distrusted the Confucianism championed by the scholar-officials—stances that influenced their relatives and their descendants. Wang also suggests that when the later members of the principalities lost much of their political and military power, “their sense of worthlessness, and social isolation” led many of them to religion, including Daoism. Moreover, the early Ming imperial preference for Daoism meant that many of the state rituals were performed by Daoist clerics, not only at the imperial court but also in the principalities, so that the imperial princes who represented the state in their principalities naturally became familiar with Daoist ritual specialists and interested in Daoism.

Further exploring how the involvement of the Ming princes in Daoist rituals, Chapter 3 identifies some points of conflict between what the *fanjin* rules allowed and what they actually did. For example, the princes were not permitted to join Daoist orders or to become ordained Daoists, yet a number of them did, including the highest-ranking princes

who ruled the main principalities. Some, like Zhu Quan, were masters in the Jingming school of Zhengyi Daoism. Other imperial clansmen declared their preference for their Daoist over their imperial identity. Zhu Xianjie 朱憲爚, ruler of the Liao 遼 principality, dressed up in Daoist priest garb even under ordinary circumstances, whereas Zhu Changchun 朱常淳 of the Ji 吉 principality, who was a member of the Longmen 龍門 lineage of the Quanzhen 全真 school, faked his own death rather than succeeding to the title of prince. Still other imperial clansmen may have used Daoist rituals as a way to pursue political ambitions. For example, Zhu Bo 朱柏, the first prince of Xiang 湘, whose sobriquet *Zixuzi* 紫虛子 (Master of the Purple Vacuity) suggests that he received the full Zhengyi ordination at its highest grade, was a Daoist master. In 1399, he commissioned a performance of the Daoist ritual, the Great Universal Heavenly offering, which was limited only to the imperial court. In doing so, Zhu Bo, who committed suicide shortly thereafter, may indeed have been guilty of seditious activity against the second, short-lived Jianwen emperor, who at the time was in the process of arresting several of his uncles suspected of treason. Wang could have elaborated on his speculations in addition to enumerating the copious examples of the princes' Daoist rituals.

Ming imperial princes were actively involved in producing and consuming books, and those who were engaged in Daoism certainly were involved in writing, compiling, editing, printing, collecting, and copying Daoist works. This subject is explored in Chapter 4, where Wang provides numerous examples of Daoist works produced by the principalities, several of which were incorporated into the *Daozang* or supplements of the Daoist canon. Wang argues that since the Ming princes produced their imprints in limited quantities to present as gifts to the emperor, to Daoist institutions or clerics, or to friends and acquaintances, these works were of high quality and did not circulate widely. This was clearly true for some of the principality publications, which featured dedications to the emperor or a preface written by a high-level Daoist priest at the imperial court. Nonetheless, some principality editions did end up being reprinted commercially and became quite popular soon after their compilation. Examples of these include well-known compilations of medical prescriptions like *Qianjin fang* 千金方; collections of biographies of sages and saints; and *Jindan zhengli daquan* 金丹正理大全, which is a collection of inner alchemy (*neidan*

內丹) works compiled by Zhu Zaiwei 朱載堉 of the Zhao 趙 principality. And not all the later printings were of high quality; the woodblocks for a number of works that were originally engraved by the principalities actually ended up being lent or transferred to other government or commercial publishers because these blocks were worn or because the paper used was inferior to that used in the original printing.

Chapter 4 describes some of the activities of the princes involved with receiving and bestowing copies of the Ming *Daozang*. For instance, the imperial court presented copies of this work to several of the principalities. Such gifts were limited, however, and at least one request for a second copy (by Prince Zhuang of Hui 徽莊王) was turned down. Does the limited number of copies mean that the princes could not bestow copies on the temples they patronized? It is interesting that, as with the Buddhist Canon, the princes and other imperial clansmen apparently did not take an active role in compiling the Ming edition of the Daoist Canon (completed 1447)—perhaps again because of constraints, tacit or otherwise, imposed by the imperial court.

Chapter 5 discusses one very visible piece of evidence that Ming princes patronized Daoism: their support of temples—through grants of land, money, art, and books; through the sponsorship of (re-)building; and through enclosing temples and shrines in the princely estates or turning them into family shrines. This support, particularly by the imperial princes, was similar to, but perhaps more lavish than, the support that the non-imperial elite gave to religious institutions of their choice. Significantly, the majority of the at least 386 Daoist temples supported by the Ming imperial princes and their relatives were in or around the fief-cities of their patrons. The choice of location reflects the restrictive *fanjin* regulations. Furthermore, the precise location of the Daoist temples reflects the status of the imperial clansmen who patronized them. The highest-ranking imperial princes were able to give their support to temples farther away from their principalities, including Daoist sites of national importance, such as Mount Wudang in Hubei, where twelve different principalities were involved in establishing Tea Temples (*cha'an* 茶庵) for resident Daoist clergy and pilgrims. The imperial princes commanded both great financial resources and connections to the imperial court. In four instances identified by Wang, imperial princes had the means to facilitate the bestowal

of a copy of *Daozang* on a Daoist temple—a signal favor from the emperor—a temple that they had previously helped to (re-)build.

Yet, as Wang points out (p. 113), lower-status imperial clansmen were subject to less surveillance from the central government and so had greater freedom of movement. Therefore, we should keep in mind the possibility that the imperial clansmen, in interactions with their local communities, were closer in status and behavior to the non-imperial elite or even the more prosperous of the common people. The problem, of course, is that information about the lower-status imperial relatives is much more difficult to find. Only in fortuitous circumstances do these lower-status clansmen appear in the documents—for example, when their names are included in a list of pilgrims in an association (*she* 社).

Chapter 6 deals with the imperial princes' literary patronage in relation to their Daoist activities. Wang argues that since the imperial clansmen were constrained in their movements and because their contacts were generally limited to their subordinates and religious personnel, they could not enjoy interactions with the most eminent scholar-officials of their day. Consequently, with the exception of the late sixteenth century when the country's greatest literati, including Wang Shizhen and Wang Daokun, the princes generally patronized lesser literary talents. As for the princes' own literary production, it chiefly constituted verses with Daoist themes.

Chapter 7 has two sections. The first deals with the princes' relationship with Daoist clerics, especially the more nationally prominent ones. Wang shows that these clerics were friends and religious advisers whom the princes often invited to the principalities to perform rites at temples. Indeed, the eminence of some of these clerics, who held high-level religious positions in the central government or were favored at the imperial court, actually redounded to the princes' benefit. The clerics thus provided an extra conduit between the princes and the emperor. Furthermore, these Daoists seemed to be just as, or more, politically aware than the princes; they would avoid dealings with princes who were involved in seditious activities or were politically out of favor with the imperial court.

The second section of Chapter 7 explores the adoption of Daoist names by imperial clansmen, and reveals the range of religious commitment by those with ordination names (*faming* 法名) to those who

had sobriquets that labeled them as [with the title] *Daoren* 道人. This section contains useful information, but may have been better placed along with a fuller discussion of *faming* in an earlier chapter, such as Chapter 3.

The most satisfying chapter is the epilogue, which details the engagement with Daoism by generations of members of the Su 肅 principality in Lanzhou (in modern Gansu). From the time of the first prince of Su, Zhu Ying 朱熜, who possessed an impressive knowledge of Daoist works and rituals, and continuing through to the last prince of Su, members of this principality supported Buddhist and Daoist temples in the Lanzhou area. Wang points out several reasons, other than personal interest, for the Su princes' support of Daoism. First, the large military presence in Lanzhou, especially when the first prince led over twenty thousand soldiers along the northwest frontier, meant that the soldiers and their families constituted some 50 to 70 percent of Lanzhou's population. Military officers worshiped Zhenwu, the Dark Warrior, who defended the northern border against non-Chinese barbarians. Thus a number of temples and shrines devoted to the Zhenwu cult existed in and around Lanzhou, especially in military garrisons.

Evidence of the participation of military officers in a variety of Daoist activities is especially clear in Wang's discussion of the lay associations (*hui* 會) connected with Xuanmiao Abbey in Lanzhou. The members of these associations are listed on four stelae, erected in 1560–1561, which describe the efforts to rebuild the abbey. Indeed, the preponderance of military officers over civil officials suggests a military preference for Daoism over state-sponsored Confucianism. Furthermore, that the principality members actively initiated and made crucial donations to the abbey's reconstruction probably inspired other individuals in the local community—the principality officers, the local elite, and merchants—to contribute to the same cause. Finally, Wang proposes that in this northwest frontier region, the “Ming princes and aristocrats . . . more likely advocated Daoism as a sign of Chinese identity in addition to the official, and in these regions often ineffective, Confucian ideology” (p. 178)—a phenomenon that he notes also in a Daoist temple in Yunnan.

In sum, Wang's useful study is chock full of information about the Ming princes and their involvement with Daoism. Indeed, many sections pack facts so densely together that one wonders whether they

could have been better presented in a few well-designed tables, leaving more room in the main text for discussion and speculation. Furthermore, the many questions that Wang raises about the Ming princes and Daoism could be asked about this very elite group's engagement with Buddhism, a subject for a companion volume.

Readers will be grateful for the in-text characters at the first instance of each name or term, although occasionally characters are missing. A glossary-index, especially a comprehensive one, would have been more useful and convenient. To give but one example of the index's incompleteness, only thirteen members of the imperial family (including two emperors) are listed in the index, whereas in the first three chapters alone, over thirty imperial clansmen are named, some of whose activities are discussed in a paragraph or longer. Further, absent from the index is Zhu Ying, the first prince of Su, whose Daoist activities are described in several chapters, especially the epilogue. Given that those most actively involved in some form of Daoist activity would be mentioned throughout the book, it would be helpful for a reader to track these individuals in the index. The important Table 1.1 ("Fief-locales of the Ming princes") could have included many more Chinese characters. Appendix A, "Genealogical Chart of the Ming Emperors and Their Lines of Descent," provides useful information but requires a magnifying glass to read the characters. These quibbles serve to point out that such a valuable work should not undercut its usefulness by neglecting such details.

*Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000–1400* BY BEVERLY BOSSLER. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013. Pp. xiv + 464. \$39.35.

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In *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity*, Beverly Bossler seeks to identify the place of gender in the great social, economic, political, and ideological transformations of the Song and Yuan dynasties. She argues that between 1000 and 1400 C.E. a growing market in female labor "created new roles for women both in and out of families" and