



Compte rendu de Barbara Hendrichske, *The Scripture on Great Peace. The Taiping jing and the Beginnings of Daoism* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2006)

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Barbara Hendrichske (trad.), *The Scripture on Great Peace. The Taiping jing and the Beginnings of Daoism*, Berkeley: The University of California Press (“Daoist Classic Series” no. 3), 2006. x + 410 pages

A hundred years ago, L. Wieger (1856-1933) compiled the first Western catalogue of the works included in the Taoist Canon of the Ming 明 dynasty, the fifteenth-century *Zhengtong daoang* 正統道藏. The entry therein dealing with the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (Scripture of Great Peace) today shows both a blatant incomprehension of the material and disdain: “*Sorte de somme, de valeur plus que médiocre, quoiqu’on prétende qu’elle fut révélée par Lao-tzeu en personne. Contient les sujets ordinaires, surtout des formules, pour vivre en paix, sans souffrances*” (Léon Wieger, *Taoïsme*, vol. 1, *Bibliographie générale*, Hien-hien, Ho-kien-fou: Imprimerie de la Mission, 1911, p. 175). Without their author realizing it, these two scathing sentences summed up the attitude, over two thousand years old, of the Chinese official sphere toward all intellectual production not vetted by the keepers of orthodoxy.

And yet, since the 1930s, an increasing number of Japanese, Chinese, and Western studies suggest that the *Taiping jing* is a priceless document for our understanding of Chinese society during the early centuries of the imperial era. Barbara Hendrichske (born 1940) joined the trend in the late 1970s, when she published in Germany the first book ever entirely devoted to this text in a Western language (Barbara Kandel, *Taiping jing: The Origin and Transmission of the “Scripture on general welfare.” The history of an unofficial text*, Hamburg: OAG, “Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens” no. 75, 1979). Following this first book, her numerous papers have built a heuristic edifice unparalleled in Western Sinology.¹ As a result, Hendrichske’s mastery of the *Taiping jing* is now widely acknowledged, even by Chinese scholars. This latest book, based on a partial translation of the text, naturally stands as the *magnum opus* of a career extending over more than three decades.

The raw canonical material of the *Taiping jing*, which amounts to nearly 650 pages, had never been translated into a Western language—but already punctuated, corrected, amended, commented, and transposed into modern Chinese several times. Typically, these transpositions simply reproduce the original text whenever it was obviously not understood—a trick unusable in the case of a translation into English. All of them are based on Wang Ming’s 王明 (1911-92) pioneer critical edition, the *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960; 2nd. ed. 1979), whose major weaknesses included punctuation; as Hendrichske gives us to understand at the beginning of her book (see CONVENTIONS, p. IX), Wang’s punctuation was corrected in subsequent critical editions (see their enumeration in her bibliography, pp. 373-4) as well as in several Japanese and Chinese papers (omitted in the bibliography). Besides punctuation, Wang failed to locate a number of erroneous characters and could not make the best use of the Dunhuang manuscript Stein no. 4226; this is why

¹ Hendrichske’s published papers in English include: “How the Celestial Master Proves Heaven Reliable,” in Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans-Hermann Schmidt (eds.), *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien. Festschrift für Hans Steininger zum 65. Geburtstag*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985, pp. 77-86; “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the *Taiping Jing*,” *East Asian History*, 2, 1991, pp. 1-30; “The Daoist Utopia of Great Peace,” *Oriens Extremus*, 35th. year, 1-2, 1992, pp. 61-91; “The Dialogues between Master and Disciples in the *Scripture on Great Peace (Taiping jing)*,” in Lee Cheuk Yin and Chan Man Sing (eds.), *A Daoist Florilegium: A festschrift dedicated to Professor Liu Ts’un-yan on his eighty-fifth birthday*, Hong Kong: The Commercial Press Ltd., 2002, pp. 185-234; “The Place of the *Scripture on Great Peace* in the Formation of Taoism,” in John Lagerwey (ed.), *Religion and Chinese Society*, vol. 1, *Ancient and Medieval China*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 2004, pp. 249-78. Hendrichske has also published in Chinese and presented conference papers on the same text.

unconditionally using his edition is more and more questionable today, especially since the publication of Yu Liming's 俞理明 *Taiping jing zhengdu* 太平經正讀 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2001), a critical edition which solves most of the linguistic problems, even though it is not free from flaws.

After years of familiarity with the text, Hendrischke nonetheless offers an occasionally ambiguous vision of the basic material.² She writes, so as to justify her dropping the chapter numbering, that “*each section typically deals with a single topic, and the sections assembled in one chapter often have little in common*” (p. ix), then immediately adds, as a justification for her retaining the section numbering, that “*the Taiping jing is a long scripture, and yet I have observed that its internal logic is remarkable*” (p. x). To notice that each textual unit in the *Taiping jing* deals with “*a single topic*” somewhat misses the point, for only the shortest sections resist the temptation to digress (for mere lack of space). Quite often, the “topic”—either imposed by the master or stemming from a disciple’s question, as Hendrischke explains at the end of her book (p. 348)—hardly constitutes more than a starting point and, as the dialogue develops, the speaker and his audience are lead to tackle a rather broad range of themes. (And the *Taiping jing* also contains parts which are not dialogues.) The phenomenon called by our translator “*random change of topic*” (p. 45) is not unfamiliar to the seasoned *Taiping jing* reader. If sections seemingly unrelated sometimes occupy the same chapter, the contrary is also frequent; see, for example, sections 44-45 (chapter 36); 47-48 (chapter 37); 52-54 (chapter 40); 56-58 (chapter 42)... The extant canonical text results from a literary history pervaded by uncertainty but known to have been long and eventful; its literary structure is far more complex than what its apparently random or convenient organization may suggest at first sight, and the section numbering is no more and no less “*irrelevant*” than the chapter numbering.

The long introduction (pp. 1-66) preceding the translation is not intended for the specialist (see p. 54, n. 5) but rather for the student in Chinese studies or the lay reader. Divided into nine unequal paragraphs, it is a complete but rather conventional synthesis of what has already been published on the topic in several languages and by a great number of scholars. It is to her credit that Hendrischke straightaway casts doubt on the abusive label “Taoist,” which has been attached to the *Taiping jing* since it was incorporated into the Taoist Depository centuries after the emergence of the Great Peace tradition (p. 3). The first paragraph (THE NOTION OF GREAT PEACE, pp. 4-13) situates the theme of “Great Peace” (*Taiping*) in the intellectual and literary context of China from the third century B.C. to the end of the Later Han 後漢 dynasty (25-220), reminding us that the theme was originally not specific to any given school or current (p. 5). The second paragraph (THE PEACE THAT WILL SAVE THE WORLD, pp. 13-6) emphasizes the peculiar value given the notion in the *Taiping jing*, in contradistinction to contemporary usage. According to the translator, the ideology of the text challenged the very permanence of Han rule, and heralded the messianic movements which were to characterize the period of political division (3rd. to 6th. cent.) (p. 16). We may add,

² In this regard, it will not be unnecessary to specify that the canonical text is divided into 57 “chapters” (*juan* 卷), numbered from 35 to 119, which are subdivided into 129 “sections” (mostly called *fa* 法 or *jue* 訣), numbered from 41 to 213. (Here I adopt Hendrischke’s translations to designate the textual units, in order to make references to the primary source easier.) This “master text” is incomplete. It is preceded by the *Taiping jing chao* 太平經鈔 (a sort of digest of the master text, in 10 chapters, numbered from 1 to 10 but not subdivided into sections) and followed by the *Taiping jing fuwen xu* 太平經複文序 (a 2-page preface) and the *Taiping jing shengjun bizhi* 太平經聖君祕旨 (a 7-page collection of stanzas focused on a single theme). These four texts are anonymous and undated.

nevertheless, that the views of the *Taiping jing* did absolutely not call into question the monarchical régime, which was seen as the ideal sociopolitical model because of its conformity to universal order; this is why the *Taiping jing* cannot be regarded as a “revolutionary” text, as Hendrichske rightly writes further on (p. 40).

The next two paragraphs (THE TAIPING MOVEMENT, pp. 16-24; THE MOVEMENT OF THE CELESTIAL MASTERS, pp. 24-30) sum up all the available data concerning the two major sociopolitical movements of the end of the Han era. The single flaw of these pages is the total assimilation of the A.D. 184 movement known as the Yellow Turbans rebellion to a “Taiping (or Great Peace) movement”. This assimilation might induce the unprepared reader to believe that there is a clear historical connection, scientifically established, between this so-called “Great Peace movement” and the *Scripture of Great Peace* of which he or she is about to read translated parts. In fact, the expression *taiping dao* 太平道 appears only once in the dynastic histories, in a quotation of a source written less than a century after the events took place but today lost.³ This *locus classicus* happens to be our unique source concerning the religious activities of the group—which, interestingly, is not referred to using the usual pejorative nickname of official sources (“yellow turban bandits”) in this quotation. On the other hand, Taoist sources never associate the phrase “*taiping dao*” (or *taiping zhi* 之 *dao*) with the name of Zhang Jue 張角, the historical leader of the A.D. 184 insurgents. Moreover, linking Zhang Jue’s name to a Great Peace text was first done by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445) in his *Hou Han shu*, a work completed in 445, i.e. more than two and a half centuries after the rebellion; Fan Ye mentions a *Taiping qingling shu* 太平清領書, not a “*Taiping jing*”. Even if we re-examine every facet of the problem, it is bound to remain insoluble unless, for instance, a first-hand Great Peace text dating back to the Han is discovered in archaeological context. Rather than constantly writing virtually the same things all over again, we should bear in mind that most of the relevant primary sources were produced several centuries after the events they report took place, and question the historicity of what has come to be accepted as established facts. Only through strict historical criticism will simplification and over-interpretation be kept at bay.

In this respect, reading the fifth paragraph (THE TAIPING MISSIONARY PROJECT, pp. 30-1) will prove useful to any reader who failed to distinguish between Yellow Turbans, Celestial (or Heavenly) Masters 天師 (the early Taoist Church), and the promoters of Great Peace. But is it legitimate to translate the word *zui* 罪 as “crime” in Celestial Master context and “sin” in the *Taiping jing*, and then use this difference to claim for Zhang Lu’s 張魯 rule a “theocratic” nature? (See also, p. 26, about Zhang’s state in Hanzhong: “China’s first, and for a long time its only, theocracy.”) Shouldn’t we rather emphasize the fact that the Chinese language resorts to a single term to cover both our Western concepts, including in current usage (*zuiren* 罪人 means “culprit” as well as “sinner”)? For this suggests, with other pieces of evidence whose discussion would be inappropriate here, that it is the very nature of political power which is intrinsically religious in China; hence Zhang Lu’s rule was no more and no less “theocratic” than the rule of any “Son of Heaven”.

The sixth paragraph (HISTORICAL STAGES OF A SCRIPTURE ON GREAT PEACE, pp. 31-8) recapitulates the literary history of the texts named after Great Peace, and tries to relate them as much as possible to the ever-changing political context of the relevant period. As other

³ The *Dianlüe* 典略 (c270) by Yu Huan 魚豢, cited by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451) in his commentary (completed 429) to the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志; taken up in the commentary written by Li Xian 李賢 (651-84) and his collaborators to the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 between 675 (date of Li’s accession to the status of Heir Apparent) and 680 (date of Li’s imprisonment). Famously, Li Xian’s commentary mentions and quotes the *Taiping jing* four times.

specialists of the *Taiping jing*, Hendrischke relies on late, isolated occurrences to justify the usually retrospective identifications conveniently offered to fill in disturbing gaps. The following paragraph (THE ORIGIN OF THE TPJ, pp. 38-43) leaves these fragments of an uncertain literary history and turns to the text itself. In spite of her conviction that “*the [Taiping jing] as we have it today goes back to the sixth century*,” Hendrischke goes back to the Han era—the social and mental background against which the ideology of the text seems to have been formed, even if she admits that a thorough examination of the text enables one to restore but a “*vague*” picture of this cultural environment (p. 41).

The eighth paragraph (LANGUAGE AND STYLE, pp. 43-7) brilliantly shows the peculiarity of the text within Chinese literature and discusses the array of characteristics suggesting a vernacular origin: the occurrence of numerous disyllabic and trisyllabic compounds; the specific usage of particles; the length of the sentences; the verbosity and redundancy of expression. Contrary to what we are told (p. 44), however, the *Taiping jing* marks the plural when necessary, by prefixing the character *zhu* 諸, for instance in the expression *zhushen* 諸神, “the deities” or “the gods” (36 occurrences in Wang Ming’s edition). Concerning the issue of composition, Hendrischke’s views have changed. Although she used to be convinced of the rhetorical function (and, therefore, artificiality) of the dialogue style, she seems now inclined to accept the existence of a sort of proto-material made out of raw notes taken by an audience of pupils or disciples. Even though Hendrischke makes a rather good case for her theory (see pp. 89-90, n. 38, for relevant textual references), it is hardly compatible with the most basic principles of methodology. Great caution is required whenever, basing ourselves on style, we construct an interpretative model supposed to extend beyond the boundaries of literary form. The fact that the *Taiping jing* comes from a milieu of which almost nothing is known allows one to believe this milieu to have been radically different from the rest of the contemporary social fabric, but absolutely does not offer any proof that the main part of the extant text underwent only the slightest editorial alteration during the centuries separating the production of the earliest Great Peace writings from the integration of a *Taiping jing* into the Ming Taoist Canon. And, needless to say, the dialogue form as a literary style appeared in China before the formation of the scriptural tradition of Great Peace.

The last paragraph (THE SCRIPTURE’S MESSAGE OF SALVATION, pp. 47-54) presents a thematic selection from the “*program*” of the authors of the *Taiping jing*, particularly as regards their social views. One wonders if this development was really necessary, given that, first, it does not present anything new, and second, the translation of each section is preceded by a short introductory paragraph with the same purpose (see below).

Hendrischke’s major achievement in this book is the superb English translation, without question a scholarly *tour de force* (pp. 67-342). She had earlier contributed the translation of two textual units from the *Taiping jing* to an anthology recently published (see Victor H. Mair, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Paul R. Goldin [eds.], *Hawai‘i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005, pp. 225-30); this remarkable preliminary work is naturally included in the present volume (pp. 136-52). Hendrischke wisely chose to translate the first 25 sections of the text in reading sequence, from section 41 (chapter 35) to 66 (chapter 49), thus encompassing the first 14 chapters (out of 57) of the canonical text. Though her translation only covers some 20% of the canonical text (15% if the *Taiping jing chao* is to be included as relevant material), a huge step has been made towards a full English translation.

Each translated section opens with a paragraph introducing its topic and summarizing its content. Then the translation unfolds, followed by dense endnotes. Setting the dialogue alternately in normal style (the master’s part) and in italics (the disciple’s part) proves to be

the right editorial choice, while the accuracy of the translation helps recreate the seeming spontaneity of the verbal exchanges: as a result, the dialogue comes to life. Regretfully, a warning in the opening pages of the book (p. 4) about the length of the notes—a caution seldom found in scholarly publications—now takes on its full meaning: the endnotes, numerous and often long, somewhat interfere with the reading. Admittedly a few lines are essential to explain any concept peculiar to the text or clearly point out any textual emendation; however, digressions filling several paragraphs or pages will end up confusing rather than enlightening the reader. Keeping to the 53 notes of the first translated chapter, such may be said of notes 9 (on the figure twelve thousand, pp. 78-9), 22 (on the concept of central harmony, pp. 82-3), 29 (on the division of the world into 81 territories, pp. 86-8), and 47 (on infanticide, pp. 92-3); as for the last note (p. 94), which offers a translation of the section's end title, its content should simply be moved back to its corresponding location in the Chinese text, i.e. after the last line of the section. (On the problem of these “end titles,” see also below.)

One may object to the English title “*Scripture on Great Peace*” (discussed by Hendrischke, pp. 4-5) that it seems to imply that Great Peace is restricted to the thematic content of the scripture, whereas Great Peace actually is a cosmic revelation of which the scripture is an integral part; hence “*Scripture of Great Peace*,” or simply “*Great Peace Scripture*” which follows the original syntax, are both preferable renderings. Still concerning translation details, one may wonder why *shen* 神 is systematically rendered as “*spirit*” throughout the book, with awkward results like “*spiritlike man*” for *shenren* 神人 (p. 207, etc.); while the “Controller of Fate” (*siming* 司命), also a *shen*, and also present in the human body, has earned the right to be called a “*deity*” (p. 90, n. 39). Finally, as regards the phrase *jianling* 姦令 from the *Dianlie* (quoted in Pei Songzhi’s commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*), the translation “*to control evil*” (p. 27) seems grammatically incorrect; it would appear that the phrase refers to the illegitimacy of the concerned officials (according to Terry Kleeman, “Community and Daily Life in the Early Daoist Church,” communication to the international conference “Rituals, pantheons and techniques: A history of Chinese religion before the Tang,” Paris, December 14-21, 2006).

The bibliography (pp. 373-91) and index (pp. 393-410) are preceded by an appendix (THE COMPOSITION OF THE TPJ, pp. 343-72), in which Hendrischke addresses specialists. This closing essay was perhaps initially intended to introduce the translation, because it returns to most of the issues already dealt with in the opening part of the book—the peculiarity of the language (p. 346); the lack of internal organization of the canonical text, the fact that each section deals with a single topic “*or at least with interconnected topics*” (the admission would be welcome at the beginning of the book), and the reason for retaining only the section numbering (p. 347); the dialogue form and its alleged origin in genuine notes taken during sessions of religious instruction (pp. 348-9), etc. Despite these duplications, this essay on the textual history and literary structure of the *Taiping jing* raises the right questions and offers well-documented and often convincing elements of answers.

Why does this partly redundant essay appear at the end of the book? Integrating it into the introduction and deleting all repetitions would have profitably reduced the critical apparatus—which is already overloaded with 961 endnotes filling one third (140) of the total pages—and allowed several extra sections to be included in the translation, which merely takes up 30% of the book pages.

Slightly more “technical” than the introduction, this appendix also lays itself more open to criticism. Significantly, Hendrischke’s caution now gives birth to a number of sequential hypotheses, embodied at the discursive level in a recurrent conjectural vocabulary (“*may assume*,” “*must assume*,” “*must expect*,” “*seem*,” etc.). This tangle of hypotheses

allows little room for historically established facts. An ingenuous sentence perfectly expresses the methodological problems faced by any modern approach to the text: “*The external appearance of the [Taiping jing] conforms to what we can conjecture about its origin*” (p. 346). Given that those conjectures are mainly based on the current appearance of the text, it is certainly no wonder that the extant text seems to “conform” to them. Wouldn’t it rather be that the “*external appearance*” of the text dictates how we reflect upon its origin?

Hendrischke rightly draws our attention to the titles located at the end of some sections and chapters, which she interprets as “*one-line summaries*”. Generally ignored by scholars and dealt with in less than one page here (pp. 345-6), this material indeed requires a full study, which would allow us first to check if these end titles were as badly transmitted as we are told, to the extent that they are now “*often corrupt beyond any hope of emendation*” (p. 345). Is textual corruption not always conveniently adduced whenever reading problems fail to be solved? Perhaps such a study would also allow us to verify if the initial titles may be safely attributed en bloc to Taoist editors of the sixth century, and the end titles (the so-called “summaries”) to a different and necessarily earlier editorial intervention.

Equally delicate is the issue of the “*textual layers*” (or strata) first defined on a stylistic basis by Xiong Deji 熊德基 (1913-87) in a foundational article (“*Taiping jing de zuozhe he sixiang ji qi yu Huangjin he Tianshidao de guanxi*” 太平經的作者和思想及其與黃巾和天師道的關係, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, 4, 1962, pp. 8-25; on the limits of a strictly stylistic definition of these textual layers, see my arguments at the beginning of my paper in *Asia Major*, third series, 15, 2, 2002, pp. 1-5). Hendrischke makes the point that the stylistic variations are very often coupled with thematic differences (p. 348) then, once again, maintains that the dialogic material (her layer A) stems from original “*note taking*” (p. 349). But, when two extra layers (A’ and B’) are added to the basic three layers (A, B, and C), one begins to wonder if the concept of textual strata as a heuristic tool is really effective. Would a notion of thematic field not be more relevant? It is no accident that Hendrischke later on adopts a thematic approach to defend the validity of her division into strata, finally casting doubt on her own method and confessing the comparative obscurity of her exposé (pp. 351-3).

Barbara Hendrischke’s superb translation of the first chapters of the *Taiping jing* should quickly become a must-read for every student and scholar involved in the history of early imperial China, and demanding readers will soon expect the book to take the place it deserves among the basic reference works of their academic institution or library. Even if it is not labeled “volume 1,” *The Scripture on Great Peace* looks like the first of a series whose subsequent volumes should henceforth be eagerly awaited. It is hoped for that the talented translator will take up the challenge of completing the first full Western translation of the *Taiping jing* ever and ensure a publishing follow-up to this praiseworthy work.

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