Affiliation and Transmission in Daoism

A Berlin Symposium

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The Department of Sinology at Humboldt University in Berlin staged in June 2011 the International Symposium on Affiliation and Transmission in Daoism that was sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) in Bonn. The participants came from Germany, England, Hongkong, Taiwan, Japan and the United States of America.

We assembled for a few days of vivid exchanges of discussions, always based on lengthy presentations of lectures, and we are happy to present most of them as scientific articles in this volume.

Considering the length of the Taoist history and its many ups and downs, the vicissitudes of administrative and social changes and challenges, the theme of affiliation and transmission in Daoism has a superb importance. What were the conditions of transmission and affiliation? What did it mean to become a disciple and member of an affiliation, taking into account changing times and locations? Such themes and related questions came to our mind when we planned the symposium and received an enthusiastic response from the prospective participants.

Affiliation and transmission are not the topics the canonical sources are perfectly outspoken about or informative as many aspects were left to personal relationships and family habits that were not entrusted to public knowledge and aired in the more or less public forum of the Daoist Repository (Da Ming daozang jing). And yet, the historical sources allow us to sift out much information about our very special theme. The relevant information may be coached, for example, in the history of the transmission of rituals and professional skills or other ritual specialties.

The participants were free to contribute in accordance with their personal preferences and expert knowledge to explore the many aspects of the theme and possibly open up new approaches that we had not imagined before. In a sense the conference was a laboratory for inventive persons who operated with the firm and wide net that the literary background for Daoist studies and the methods of traditional Chinese studies provide, more often than seldom in combination with field work on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan.

We do not describe the individual contributions in more detail but hope to induce the reader to study the articles for entertainment and scholarly information. We thank very much the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) in Bonn for their fine support which was indispensable. We could not have staged the symposium without the scope of support that DFG granted.

I especially thank my secretary Mrs. Elisabeth Schulze for her fine efforts to prepare the layout of the book and make it ready for publication. We also
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Florian C. Reiter, Humboldt University, Berlin, March 2012