

The Heavenly Court is truly an interdisciplinary study, with as much effort put into the explanation of the Daoist rituals and cosmologies at work in the selection of the artistic program as the discussion of style and painting production. I was very happy to see the volume richly illustrated with thirty-six color plates, sixty-five figures, and line drawings of the murals so crucial for Gesterkamp's detailed argument. This is an extremely valuable resource for those interested in Daoist art as well as the tradition of temple wall painting in North China overall. I know I will be referring to it often.

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The Mandate of Heaven and The Great Ming Code

JIANG YONGLIN. Asian Law Series, No. 21. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. xiv, 245 pages. US\$ 65.00 hardcover.

Was Chinese law fundamentally secular? Or was it ultimately derived from a belief system that could be interpreted as religious? In particular, was *The Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lü* 大明律, promulgated in its final form in 1397) essentially a tool for political and social control or should it be understood as an instrument for a religious mission? These questions are important, according to Jiang Yonglin, because answers to them would reflect and shape our understanding of China's legal culture. More significantly, answers to these questions would go a long way toward challenging the perception of China's yet another inherent "lack"—that of an independent and rational legal system.

Given the way his questions are framed, Jiang's central arguments are perhaps not surprising. *The Great Ming Code*, in Jiang's view, was not simply a tool for behavioral control; rather, it was conceived and perceived by Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), the Ming dynasty founder, and his officials as "a concrete embodiment of the cosmic order" (p. 4), "an instrument to manifest the Mandate of heaven" (p. 13), and "a moral textbook to educate the people and transform society" (*ibid.*). Centering his discussion on three core areas—regulation of rituals (chap. 3), demarcation of political and cultural boundaries (chap. 4), and delineation of officials' responsibilities (chap. 5)—Jiang argues that underlying the regulations in *The Great Ming Code* (and, by extension, Chinese law in the imperial period) was a "legal cosmology" that was ultimately founded on the notions of "heavenly principle" (*tianli* 天理) and "human sentiment" (*renqing* 人情) (chap. 2). The concept of the Mandate of

Heaven (*tianming* 天命), according to Jiang, was not simply a tool to justify state power; at least in the case of the early Ming, the idea was at the core of a belief system that propelled many of the Ming founder's reforms. *The Great Ming Code* was no doubt a device for control, but it was also an instrument "for carrying out the Mandate of Heaven" and a spiritual textbook "to deliver the human race from evil." As such, Jiang argues, *The Great Ming Code* must be seen as a central component of what was essentially "a religious mission" (p. 180).

It is important to mention here that, even though it is intended to be a stand-alone study, Jiang's work would most profitably be read alongside his complete translation of the *Code*.¹ There, one could find helpful background information (such as the textual history and organization of the *Code*) that has regrettably, though understandably, been left out of the present study.

Of the many intriguing issues raised in Jiang's important work, at least two deserve further consideration. The first has to do with the limits of historical interpretation. As Jiang makes clear, this is a study of the vision of the ruling elite of the early Ming. At the core of Jiang's argument is the claim that, even though the *Code* was obviously a political tool, it was ultimately founded on the ruler's *belief* in the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. "*The Great Ming Code*," Jiang argues, "was established to balance the cosmic forces" (p. 176) and to maintain "a state of harmony between the spirit world and human realm" (p. 175). While I am sympathetic to this claim, I am not sure whether, based on the official records used in this study, we can say for certain what the Ming founder did or did not *believe*. To be sure, historians must guard against becoming overly cynical—obviously, just because one does not subscribe to a particular worldview does not mean that Zhu Yuanzhang and his officials could not be sincere about it. Still, given the nature of the sources available to us, we would be on more solid ground if we focus on the *vision* (rather than *belief*) of the Ming ruling elite. This is not simply a matter of semantics. *The Great Ming Code*, as Jiang demonstrates, was founded on a vision (with provisions "restraining the arbitrary forces of the emperor and his civil and military representatives" [p. 13]); how we describe (cosmologically or otherwise) and explain the significance of this vision is precisely our challenge.

The second (and broader) issue has to do with the secular–religious dichotomy. One of Jiang's primary goals is to dispel the conventional assumption that "imperial Chinese law is a secular instrument serving the purpose of naked power" (p. 8). To that end, Jiang makes it his central point that "the *Great Ming Code* was a cosmological instrument to manifest the Mandate of Heaven and transform 'all under Heaven'" (p. 179). While I would accept Jiang's conclusion, I wonder whether by trying to underscore "the religiosity of Chinese legal culture" (p. 9), Jiang has inadvertently helped perpetuate the very "West-centered Chinese history" (p. 11) he seeks to revise. In particular, why should we continue to accept the

¹ *The Great Ming Code: Da Ming lü* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005).

secular–religious dichotomy? Does the case of *The Great Ming Code* not demonstrate that the political and the religious (that is, acknowledgment of, and references to, superhuman forces) were intertwined? Should the starting point of a “China-centered Chinese history” (p. 178) not be the recognition that it is often the terms of analysis that are suspect?

After all, how should we understand the significance of *The Great Ming Code*? One promising approach, as Jiang has shown from time to time, is diachronic. The idea of the Mandate of Heaven was of course not new. Neither, it would appear, was the use of law as a transformational tool. One obvious question then is to what extent was the *The Great Ming Code* a departure from its predecessors. Was the legal cosmology reflected in the *Code* significantly different from earlier (or later) periods? For students interested in these and other questions concerning Chinese law or religion in the late imperial period, Jiang’s learned study should be an obvious starting point.

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Der Orden des Sima Chengzhen und des Wang Ziqiao. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Shangqing-Daoismus in den Tiantai-Bergen

THOMAS JÜLCH. München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2011. v, 145 pages. ISBN 978-3-8316-4083-6. €49.00 hardcover.

Mao Shan 茅山, “Mao’s Mountain,” in Jiangsu was the center of the Daoist Shangqing 上清, or “Highest Clarity,” tradition which “prevailed among the upper classes of China from the fifth until the tenth century.”¹ When, in the middle of the eighth century, Li Hanguang 李含光, thirteenth patriarch of this tradition, made Mao Shan his home, “[...] Mao Shan has come to be the [true] begetter of studies of the Dao for all Under Heaven.”² However, Li’s predecessor Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735) had moved the Shangqing headquarters, as it were, to Tiantai Shan 天台山 in Zhejiang 浙江. Sima Chengzhen, arguably the most important Daoist of the Tang dynasty, played an important role as consultant to Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756), bestowing upon the emperor a religious diploma and assisting him in making

¹ Edward H. Schafer, *Mao Shan in T’ang Times* (Boulder 1980), 1.

² Yan Zhenjing, as quoted in Schafer 1980: 39.