

Daoist Studies Publications Rooted in Religious Studies

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Although increasing numbers of scholars of Daoism have received their PhDs in departments of Religious Studies and have parallel academic appointments, few actually have been trained in and utilize a Religious Studies approach. This is even more the case with associated publications, most of which often are simply Sinological studies of Daoism as a Chinese religion. That is, they mistakenly conflate the study of Chinese religion with Religious Studies as such. The latter is not simply about the study of religion/religions; it also is an interdisciplinary scholarly field utilizing theory informed by and informing the comparative and cross-cultural study of religion, and vice versa. The following is a list of some important publications that employ and develop a Religious Studies approach, which may in turn serve as models for research in Daoist Studies with a comparative and theoretical sensibility. Note also that Louis Komjathy is the only field-specific scholar who has published actual theoretical and hermeneutical books informed by and informing Religious Studies, namely, *Contemplative Literature* (2015) and *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (2018).

Girardot, Norman. 1983. *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Girardot trained under the Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), who was then-professor in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.* In addition to being a key founding-figure of Religious Studies, Eliade published definitive comparative studies of religion and myth. In *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, Girardot in turn embraces and applies an Eliadean mythological framework to interpreting Daoism.

Kohn, Livia. 1987. *Seven Steps to the Tao: Sima Chengzhen's Zuowang lun*. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Steyler Verlag.

While primarily a Sinological study of Sīmǎ Chéngzhēn's 司馬承禎 (Zhēnyī 貞一 [Pure Unity]; 647-735) *Zuòwàng lùn* 坐忘論 (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036; ZH 992) and related late medieval Daoist meditation manuals, the book contains some germinal engagements with larger issues and literature related to meditation more generally. Unfortunately, the new edition (*Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation* [2010]) is an inferior publication, often perpetuating popular misconceptions and advancing a hybrid spiritualist agenda.

* Unfortunately, the UChicago Divinity School hired Brook Ziporyn, a scholar of so-called "Chinese philosophy," to fill its Chinese religions position, thus resulting in the dilution of its Religious Studies legacy, not to mention Daoist Studies as such. Not surprisingly, this appointment apparently occurred without consulting Donald Harper and Edward Shaughnessy in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. On a positive note, however, Ziporyn was hired over Stephen Bokenkamp, another Sinologist whose students have been problematically appointed to Religious Studies positions, largely due to academic cronyism and hegemony. NB: I was not a candidate for the position.

Kohn, Livia 1991. *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The first book in Daoist Studies to engage the emerging subfield of mysticism studies (cf. John Blofeld's *Taoist Mysteries and Magic* [1973]), including as articulated by Kohn's then-colleague Steven T. Katz. While largely absent of independent theoretical frameworks, Kohn summarizes, applies, and clarifies dominant theories at the time. Also connects with her roughly contemporaneous *Taoist Mystical Philosophy: The Scripture of Western Ascension* (1991), later *Readings in Daoist Mysticism* (2009), and eventual Daoism section contribution to Katz's edited volume *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources* (2013). The latter has a variety of deficiencies and issues in terms of the overall volume and the individual sections.

Kohn, Livia. 1998. *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan.

While primarily a historical discussion of Lǎojūn 老君 (Lord Lao), the deified Lǎozǐ 老子 ("Master Lao"), the book explores theoretical and interpretive issues related to "myth." In this way, it intersects with Girardot's *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism* (1983). Also develops Kohn's earlier work on the Daoist mountain hermit and eventual immortal Chén Tuán 陳搏 (Xīyí 希夷 [Infinitesimal Subtlety]; d. 989), specifically in her German publication titled *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan* (1981). The latter has now become supplanted by Louis Komjathy's *Traces of a Daoist Immortal* (2024).

Komjathy, Louis. 2007. *Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*. Leiden: Brill.

Komjathy earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies with an emphasis on Daoism at Boston University. He trained under Livia Kohn, with both Steven Katz and Harold Roth serving as members of his dissertation committee. *Cultivating Perfection* is the first book to explicitly utilize and advocate for a Religious Studies approach to Daoist Studies, including a critique of conventional Sinology. In addition to deep engagement with mysticism studies, partially influenced by Kohn's *Early Chinese Mysticism* (1991) and Roth's *Original Tao* (1999), the book begins to articulate Komjathy's innovative theory of praxis. The latter became more fully developed in his *Contemplative Literature* (2015), *Taming the Wild Horse* (2017), and *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (2018).

Komjathy, Louis. 2013. *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

While there are traces of Religious Studies in Livia Kohn's *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (2001) and James Miller's *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (2003), the present book is the most sophisticated introduction to Daoism in terms of both Daoist Studies and Religious Studies. It is now the standard work on the topic. In addition to engaging all of the major reference works of

Western Daoist Studies, the organizational structure is one informed by and expressing an explicitly Religious Studies approach.

Komjathy, Louis. 2017. *Taming the Wild Horse: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Daoist Horse Taming Pictures*. New York: Columbia University Press.

This is the first book to fuse Animal Studies, Contemplative Studies, Daoist Studies, and Religious Studies. As such, it not only provides a model for a Religious Studies approach to Daoism, especially with respect to meditation studies, but also demonstrates the ways in which deeper study of Daoism may benefit from additional issues, questions, and topics (e.g., animals and contemplation). Along with Miller's *China's Green Religion* (2017) and Palmer and Siegler's *Dream Trippers* (2017), *Taming the Wild Horse* was featured in "New Directions in Daoist Studies," a panel organized by Komjathy for the Daoist Studies Unit at the 2017 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.[†] This became another glimpse of New Daoist Studies (NDS) as articulated and envisioned by Komjathy.

Komjathy, Louis. 2024. *Traces of a Daoist Immortal: Chén Tuán 陳搏 of the Western Marchmount*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

On the surface, this is a Sinological study of the Daoist mountain hermit and eventual immortal Chén Tuán 陳搏 (Xīyí 希夷 [Infinitesimal Subtlety]; d. 989). It draws upon, corrects, and ultimately supplants the earlier and often problematic scholarship of Livia Kohn. However, on a deeper level, it is a mythic engagement with the life and legend of Chén, including a new model for overcoming the hyper-historicism of conventional Sinology (contemporary nineteenth-century Orientalism [CNO]). It also may be read as a meta-critique of mainstream academia and an origin-story for new Daoist being. It thus enacts both Komjathy's advocated scholar-practitioner approach (SPA) and critical adherent discourse (CAD).

Miller, James. 2017. *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future*. New York: Columbia University Press.

James Miller also studied under Livia Kohn at Boston University, although he was technically under the supervision of the comparative theologian and Boston Confucian Robert Cummings Neville in the School of Theology. While sometimes approaching an Orientalist sensibility, *China's Green Religion* is the definitive study of Daoism and ecology, including attentiveness to larger issues related to "religion and ecology." Along with Komjathy's *Taming the Wild Horse* (2017) and Palmer and Siegler's *Dream Trippers* (2017), *China's Green Religion* was featured in "New Directions in Daoist Studies," a panel organized by Komjathy for the Daoist Studies Unit at the 2017 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

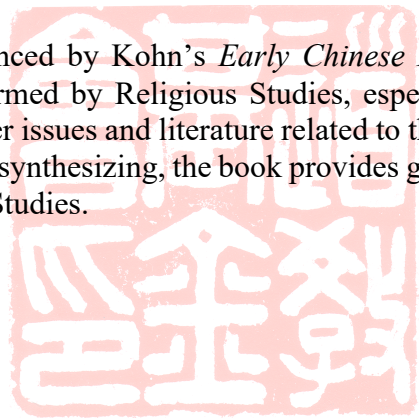
[†] The Daoist Studies Unit (DSU) was established under the principal leadership and organizational vision of Louis Komjathy, who served as founding Co-chair for two three-year terms (2006-2012). It is now controlled by individuals affiliated with The Sinological Mafia (TSM) and without formal training in or a sophisticated understanding of Religious Studies as such.

Palmer, David, and Elijah Siegler. 2017. *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elijah Siegler earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies with an emphasis on American religions from the University of California, Santa Barbara, one of the most important centers for Religious Studies.[‡] While primarily employing a social scientific framework, anthropology in particular, *Dream Trippers* combines a variety of theoretical insights and methodological approaches to the study of global Daoism. Along with Komjathy's *Taming the Wild Horse* (2017) and Miller's *China's Green Religion* (2017), *Dream Trippers* was featured in "New Directions in Daoist Studies," a panel organized by Komjathy for the Daoist Studies Unit at the 2017 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

Roth, Harold. 1999. *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Paralleling and partially influenced by Kohn's *Early Chinese Mysticism* (1991), *Original Tao* explores classical Daoism informed by Religious Studies, especially the subfield of mysticism studies. Roth also explores larger issues and literature related to the academic study of meditation. While largely summarizing and synthesizing, the book provides glimpses into what would become Roth's work in Contemplative Studies.



[‡] Unfortunately, UC Santa Barbara's Department of Religious Studies hired the Sinologist Dominc Steavu to fill their Chinese religions position, thus diluting its Religious Studies legacy. Its "Asian religions" faculty, in turn, more often conduct research along the lines of Area Studies. NB: I was not a candidate for the position.