

in the text and only chapter numbers at the top of the endnote pages. It is slightly more understandable, but still very regrettable, that anyone would prefer an old fashioned glossary to a combined glossary-index, and that the index itself is so inadequate. Authors: please pay attention and insist on better.

Readers: These small things should not impede your pleasure in this excellent, interesting, and important book by a scholar whose fine combination of library and field work should be an inspiration to us all.

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Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China. By Fabrizio Pregadio. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. xvii + 367. \$60.00.

Nearly twenty years ago, for an international conference, I was asked to sum up the state of research on Chinese alchemy. I reported that it was barely hanging on to life, but the study of alchemy in other cultures was also moribund.¹ The reason was not at all esoteric. Such research is inherently, quintessentially, a multidisciplinary pursuit. Nevertheless, the specialists on chemical history were not reading the specialists on alchemical art, and vice versa; both groups were ignoring religious hermeneutics and anthropology; and the philologists were disregarding them all. The result was a regular flow of narrowly focused articles that few people read and that did not change our understanding of what alchemy is, how it evolved, and why it is important.

Between then and now, there have been enough groundbreaking publications to indicate that the patient, if not full of life, is at least recovering. Bruce Moran has made alchemy an important part of his studies on European science, medicine, and patronage in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. He has shown for the first time how alchemy survived—and in parts of Europe, flourished—in the early modern period. William R. Newman and Lawrence Principe have shown how tightly linked alchemy and the nascent chemistry of the seventeenth century were, and thus banished a host of ancient stereotypes.

Alas, the few students of Chinese alchemy still do not follow advances in the study of Europe, and those of European alchemy remain unaware of anything they might learn from China. Nevertheless, the recent work of Fabrizio Pregadio has carried our understanding considerably beyond its primitive state *c.* 1989. He has begun to block out a real history, which locates the important historical transitions and explains why they took place when they did. Pregadio's essay "Elixirs and Alchemy," and his collaboration

¹ "Research on the History of Chinese Alchemy," in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17–19 April 1989*, ed. Z.R.W.M. von Martels (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 3–21.

with Lowell Skar on “Inner Alchemy (*neidan* 內丹),” both in the *Daoism Handbook* of 2000, innovatively surveyed the field. Pregadio also wrote most of the entries on the texts of laboratory alchemy for the most important recent reference work on Daoist scriptures.²

In addition to clarifying alchemy’s historical dynamics, Pregadio has lain to rest once and for all some of the odd ideas of earlier scholars. The best-known is the conviction of Joseph Needham and his collaborators that operative or external alchemy (*waidan* 外丹) was an early form of chemistry and that internal alchemy was “proto-biochemistry.”³ *Great Clarity* is part of a broad move away from the idea that early Chinese were clumsily striving to become modern scientists, and toward close attention, instead, to what they aimed to do. Alchemists, among others, were quite articulate about their goals, motivations, and intentions.

Pregadio has retired other platitudes as well, for instance the notion that Daoists were the founders and sole proprietors of alchemy (and the other sciences). That blissfully simple idea for a while inspired “Daoist alchemy” as a kind of tic in popular writing—as automatic and misleading a linkage as “Confucian official.” Some alchemical practice and writing was connected in various ways to various Daoist movements at various times, and some decidedly was not.⁴

Great Clarity is a history of early alchemical writings that eventually became the basis of a genuine Daoist religious tradition as the Great Clarity (*Taiqing* 太清) canon.⁵ These texts originated in eastern Anhui c. 200 as part of the eastward transmission of early—non-Daoist—religious culture from the region of ancient Chu 楚 toward the southeastern coastal region. We first learn about them at length from Ge Hong 葛洪 in his celebrated *Baopuzi neipian* 抱樸子內篇 (The inner chapters of the Master who Holds to Simplicity, c. 330). There is no reason to consider them the earliest alchemical writings in China, but they are the earliest that we can read.

By meticulous dating and critical study⁶ Pregadio has reconstructed a corpus of fourteen sources for Great Clarity alchemy that had accumulated in the seventh or eighth

² Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, sec. 4, vol. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (3 vols.; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Among many useful scholarly resources on Pregadio’s “Golden Elixir” web site at <http://venus.unive.it/dsao/pregadio/> are a regularly updated bibliographic essay on studies of Daoist scriptures, and an annotated bibliography of publications on Chinese alchemy in Western languages.

³ Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-djen, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, pt. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 288.

⁴ An important early example of this correction is Michel Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of T’ao Hung-ching,” in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 164–68.

⁵ By “Daoist” I mean initiation into the worship of the Dao through its direct emanations (rather than gods). Some specialists translate *Taiqing* “Supreme Purity.”

⁶ A couple of times the author accepts an account by Ge on the questionable ground that it “is not contradicted by any historically reliable source” (pp. 3–4, 125).

century, and extant, often in expanded form or as part of later writings, in the printed collection of Daoist scriptures (*Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏) of 1445. They tell us that before the Six Dynasties the art differed in several fundamental ways from what came after, and that what made most of the difference was transformations in Daoist religious thought.

Later external alchemists, as Pregadio explains it perspicaciously, processed chemical ingredients carefully chosen for their symbolic associations so that “they go through the stages of development of the cosmos in a reverse order” to become the essence (*jing* 精) “that spontaneously issues from the Dao and originates the world as we know it” (p. 67). Alchemist initiates of the Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清) movement accomplished this by assembling cosmogonic and cosmological models in space and time, using yin-yang, the Five Phases, imagery from the *Book of Changes*, and other powerful resources. These elaborate constructions were one of Highest Clarity’s keys to immortality.

Although correlative thinking was already a fixture in the intellectual life of the Han period, the alchemy of Great Clarity did not draw on it. What it depended on instead was elaborate ritual at every step in the process. Its product, the elixir, not only conferred immortality, but enabled communication with the gods, curing of illness, and protection from the many dangers, physical and spiritual, of life in the Period of Disunion. The book’s chapter 5 reconstructs the entire ritual sequence essential for transmitting the alchemical writings and oral teachings, preparing buildings and their equipment in an isolated place, purifying and protecting the site and the people involved, choosing propitious times for each step, building the “laboratory (*danshi* 丹室),” and configuring the furnace, kindling and feeding the fire, and finally consecrating and ingesting the elixir. The point, repeated in every Taiqing source, is that one can succeed only by carrying out every rite correctly and reverently.

One could also become an immortal by performing the right meditations. In the Daoist movements that originated among the southeastern gentry, as we have known for a long time, these mainly involved visualizations. Which path toward spiritual cultivation one pursued—or how one combined paths—depended, of course, on who one’s teacher was and what scriptures one received. In Great Clarity scriptures, alchemy was the way to the Way.

Before long, the coming of Buddhism and Celestial Masters Daoism to Jiangnan, where all these post-Han developments took place, engendered two new Daoist movements that redefined alchemy. The first, the Highest Clarity movement already mentioned, emerged from a large number of divine writings revealed between 363 and 370 to a family that included Eastern Jin officials. These scriptures gradually spread, and other people imitated them. They became socially significant shortly before 500, when the famous Tao Hongjing gathered all he could find and, realizing their importance, made them the basis for an imperial cult often named for his retreat in the Mao Hills (Maoshan 茅山). The second, the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寶) movement, was built on a new corpus revealed to a descendant of Ge Hong c. 400. Both offered their devotees access to perpetual life in higher heavens than that of Great Clarity, attainable mainly through elaborate “inner meditation and visualization.” Alchemy played no role in Numinous Treasure practices, and a clearly subsidiary one in those of Highest Clarity. Other spiritual disciplines ranked beneath alchemy, and could lead only to lengthened life rather than immortality.

As Pregadio makes clear, the subordination of external alchemy doubtless made it less attractive to many aspirants, but gave it a definite place in the new religious scheme of things. Over the centuries from the time of Ge Hong to the Tang period, additional Great Clarity alchemical revelations and expanded versions of old ones appeared, better adapted to new kinds of quest. In the Highest Clarity teachings—as they flourished under imperial patronage—adepts used alchemical terminology and imagery in meditations to envision the refinement of *qi* within their bodies. This was the case in the central Highest Clarity meditation text, the Authentic Scripture of the Great Cavern (*Dadong zhen jing* 大洞真經, now lost), which prescribes elaborate visualizations to generate an embryonic form of one's perfected self—a forerunner of internal alchemy.

The still later transition that strongly altered the character and status of external alchemy was largely influenced by the *Zhou yi can tong qi* 周易參同契 (Token for the agreement of the three according to the *Book of Changes*). Pregadio shows that scholars of the Six Dynasties knew of this scripture, but no surviving version is older than c. 700, and we know little about the contents of earlier recensions.⁷ That and later versions show the strong influence of Jiangnan alchemical writings. The book fully exploited the imagery of the *Book of Changes*, and incorporated other established cosmological correlations and symbols, not only for alchemical process but for the relations of multiplicity and change with “the unity and the constancy of the Dao” (p. 216). Its great popularity added to the dignity of alchemy, which it gave priority over both ritual and meditation. At the same time, it rejected the particular chemical models of the Great Clarity tradition, insisting on reactions of lead and mercury. Its adepts also abjured that tradition's aims, seeking not access to the gods and protection against dangerous beings, but a means to embody the principles that govern the cosmos. The *Zhou yi can tong qi*'s imagery, applicable to alchemical processes carried out inside the body as well as outside, made way for the transition to internal alchemy. As a result of this redirection, “the alchemy of the Great Clarity lost its reason to exist..., and no author after the mid-Tang period felt the need to write about” it (p. 223). Gradually, from the Song on, what devotees practiced was internal alchemy, and in time most denied that external alchemy had ever existed.

Much of this view of the history of alchemy is new and original, and I find it convincing. The Daozang Project, with its twenty-nine authors working for three decades, made possible a new command of the Daoist literature. Building on it and pulling this account together by attentive, critical reading of the primary sources is a considerable accomplishment.

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⁷ Pregadio, pp. 214–15; Schipper and Verellen, vol. 1, pp. 328–29. For a view of this book in another context, see Lowell Skar, “Golden Elixir Alchemy: The Formation of the Southern Lineage and the Transformation of Medieval China” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), pp. 167–70 and elsewhere.

As a consequence of this fine account, it is possible to recognize some obvious next steps that call for study.

Great Clarity is a history of texts, of a corpus of books. It should be feasible to begin work on a history of alchemists, as individuals in their own collectivities and in élite society. This book offers many clues. I will mention three examples that might round out our comprehension:

1. Pregadio mentions that in the ritual transmission of a scripture, “the master receives tokens” from the disciple as evidence of commitment. He notes that these include objects of gold and jade, as well as lengths of hemp and silk fabrics. “Pure liquor” and incense, both quite valuable, figure in alchemical as in other ritual (pp. 11, 80–81). Michel Strickmann once suggested that the great expense of these rituals deserves attention for its social implications. But that was a long time ago, and no one has looked further into this economic dimension. We have so many accounts of transmission and other rites in other domains of learning that it is time to push beyond the borders of alchemy.

2. Among the few social entities that come up in the book is *fangshi*, which Pregadio appropriately translates “masters of the methods” and describes as “a heterogeneous group of practitioners of techniques ranging from divination to healing” and “specialists in cosmological and esoteric arts.” He suggests an interesting but enigmatic role for this group, on the basis of a conviction that “the actual performance of the esoteric arts was the prerogative of the *fangshi* alone” (pp. 3, 16–18, 29). He therefore sees a basic distinction between the élite alchemist “on whose initiative and for whose benefit the whole alchemical process was performed,” and his “hired helpers” who knew how to grind ingredients, smear mud on a crucible, feed a fire, and so on. These latter, he proposes, were *fangshi*. Pregadio makes this suggestion hesitantly for, oddly enough, the term *fangshi* never appears in *Great Clarity* texts.

Given the lack of positive evidence in the alchemical sources, one can hardly go further; but if we look beyond alchemy for data, the picture is a bit clearer. As I have argued at length elsewhere, “*fangshi*” is not the name of a social group.⁸ Those so called are not distinguishable by occupation. *Fangshi* is an epithet. That is to say, people use it not to define or describe a collectivity, but to express mild disapproval of people unlike themselves, generally but not always one at a time. Common English epithets include “superstition,” which designates other people’s wrongheaded religious beliefs that one has no interest in understanding, and “lazy,” which implies that someone is unwilling to do what one wants them to do, but one does not care why not. *Wu* 無 is another run-of-the-mill Chinese epithet, in prose and poetry from the Han on, applied indiscriminately to spirit mediums, popular priests, Daoist masters, and other varieties of religious operative that well-born authors despise. The simplest criterion for an epithet is that people never seriously apply it to themselves. I have failed to find even a single case of someone calling himself *fangshi*. It is, in short, a pigeon-hole for people notably skilled in arts that gentlemen avoided taking too seriously.

⁸ I have analyzed “*fangshi*” and “*wu*” in “Taoism and Science,” in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections* (Collected Studies Series; Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), chapter 7, pp. 27–31.

If we survey those whose biographies appear in the treatises on masters of methods (*fangshi*, *fangji* 方伎, *fangshu* 方術, or *yishu* 藝術) in the dynastic histories, we find that they include physicians, architects, diviners of all stripes, wonder-workers, imperial retainers with odd skills, initiated Daoists, a Buddhist patriarch, and so on. Almost every one belonged, in fact, to “the social élite.” A large proportion came from families that held official posts, and their writings are normally of high literary quality. Sun Simo (or Simiao) 孫思邈, the alchemist whose writing this book calls an anthology of Great Clarity Daoism, was accorded a biography in the *Old History of the Tang* as a *fangji*. In the *New History of the Tang* he was promoted to recluse-scholar, but still portrayed as a cultivated and prescient imperial client. That kind of historiographical promotion, far from unique, signals an epithet, not a career pattern.⁹ This is an instance of how studying broader domains of history can open the curtain that often shrouds the social dimension of alchemy.

3. The dimension of personal experience also deserves more attention. When discussing a definition of alchemy suitable for comparative research, Pregadio begins with that of Robert Halleux, “an aggregate of practices and speculations related to the transmutation of metals.” This definition is unsatisfactory because, as Pregadio says, it ignores the “doctrinal and soteriological background.” The transmutation of minerals, not metals, is the goal of Great Clarity alchemy’s processes. Pregadio finally defines alchemy pragmatically by the relationship between “‘practices and speculations,’ or between techniques and doctrines” (pp. 23–24).

The only definition of alchemy I know of based on studies of several civilizations, that of H. J. Sheppard, is based on entirely different dimensions: “The art of liberating parts of the cosmos from temporal existence to achieve perfection, which for metals, was gold, and for man, longevity, immortality and, finally, redemption. Material perfection was sought through the action of a preparation (for example, Philosopher’s Stone for metals; Elixir of Life for humans), while spiritual ennoblement could result from the receipt of inner revelation (*gnosis* or other mystical experience).”¹⁰ The words “revelation” and “experience” give this definition depth.

What we know of alchemy includes practices and speculations, but the former largely adapted the work of artisans, and the latter largely came from the thought of philosophers, ritualists, people adept in various kinds of self-cultivation, and others. If we ask what goes beyond that derivative work and thought to complete the definition of alchemy, it is the personal and individual experience of contemplating the process, and the final prize of transcendence, whether the outcome is ataraxy, ecstasy, a profoundly aesthetic personal transformation, or joining the ranks of immortals in the bureaucracy of the gods. This alchemical poem, which speaks of the elixir as the Medicine, puts the centrality of experience definitively:

⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, *juan* 191; *Hsin Tang shu* 新唐書, *juan* 196.

¹⁰ H. J. Sheppard, “Alchemy,” in *Dictionary of the History of Science*, ed. W. F. Bynum, E. J. Browne, and Roy Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 9, elaborated in “Chinese and Western Alchemy: The Link through Definition,” *Ambix* 32 (1985), pp. 32–37. Sheppard, like Halleux, overemphasizes the importance of metals.

Necessary that the maturing come within man,
 Due to the maturing of his heart and mind.
 If heart and mind have reached divinity, so will the Medicine;
 If heart and mind are confused the Medicine will be unpredictable.
 The Perfect *Tao* is a perfect emptying of heart and mind.
 Within the darkness, unknowable wonders.
 When the wise man has attained the August Source
 In time he will truly reach the clouds.¹¹

Because both meditative and alchemical approaches could lead to immortality, in order to more fully understand this experiential aspect we will need to investigate it in both. If we combine them, the evidence will be plentiful enough.

Finally, there are several concrete questions that historians have ignored despite their obvious importance. The most pressing is the origin of not only the rituals but the alchemical methods of Great Clarity. Pregadio puts it like this: “For virtually all ritual forms documented in its texts, the Taiqing legacy draws from the local traditions of Jiangnan” (p. 14). He extends this connection to other aspects of religion, and to alchemy as a whole. But what exactly are these local traditions? Isabelle Robinet stressed this connection nearly three decades ago in order to show that these aspects of (in her case) the Shangqing revelations were not Daoist in origin. Shortly afterward, Michel Strickmann gave her findings a more social setting. Everyone accepts their link between early practices of the Southern gentry and later Daoist movements, but in all this time no one has made it less vague. I suspect that is because most scholars of Chinese religion think of popular religion as a Pandora’s box and are reluctant to open it.

Pregadio, at least, has shown the same local derivation for Great Clarity. Still, when he writes of talismans “in texts attached to the southern Daoist traditions” (p. 15), one wants to know what traditions he means, and in what sense they are Daoist.

Part of the difficulty arises because this book’s reconstruction of Great Clarity is based on the writings of Ge Hong. The content of *Baopuzi neipian* is consistent with that of Great Clarity texts, but Ge is far from a typical author. His accounts of ways to immortality are informed by great feats of reading and listening to adepts. On the other hand, his *Inner Chapters* are clearly not the account of someone who has practiced and mastered all of the arts he describes. In that respect his book contrasts decisively with the scriptures and handbooks that he quotes. Over a long career, so far as we know, he remained an aspirant. He assiduously collected anything which proved to his satisfaction that immortality was

¹¹ Translation from *Dan lun jue zhi xin jian* 丹論訣旨心鑑 (Mental mirror and directions regarding doctrines and explanations on the elixir, late ninth to early eleventh centuries), p. 14a, translated in Sivin, “Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time,” in *Science and Technology in East Asia* (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), pp. 108–22, at p. 121. My “The Theoretical Background of Elixir Alchemy,” in Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, pt. 4 (1980), pp. 210–305, reconstructs some of the experiential aspects of alchemy at greater length.

attainable. He eventually compiled what he found, not as an aid to those deeply involved in practicing the arts of immortality, but to convince aspirants like himself that those arts could be effective. It is therefore wise not to take his interpretations at face value.

There are astonishing gaps in his knowledge. After all, in his fourth-century book there is not a hint of awareness that the Celestial Masters movement existed. That is why I once had occasion to refer to him as “the Alan Watts of his time.”¹² That was, I fear, too naughty for most sinologists, who tend to think highly of the people whose writings they read. Trust in Ge’s interpretations remains the rule. It is time, I suggest, for a fresh look at the origins of Daoist movements in Jiangnan, and no doubt a more critical look at Ge’s book will contribute to it.

These questions come to mind because Pregadio has given us a vastly improved picture of early alchemy, one that will certainly inspire a new generation to jump the barriers of scholarly habit. His deep textual study and willingness to ask new questions show that it is not too late to revivify the study of alchemy and its religious connections.

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Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song. By Hugh R. Clark. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 473. \$55.00.

Why is local history a productive approach to the study of China? How can local perspectives shed light on the history of a country of such vast size and with such a long tradition of shared culture and centralized administration? There are a number of possible ways to answer this question, some historical and others historiographical. For one thing, until recent times the local was the key frame of experience for the vast majority of the population. Though they were certainly conscious to some degree or another of their position within the larger Chinese whole, for most people it was the local structures of family and community that mattered to daily life. The local was how ordinary people saw the world. For another, from the Song onwards localism emerged as a conscious ideology and organizing principle for the élite, a way of understanding their position in national culture. The local was thus also a way by which élites made sense of their world. Hugh

¹² “On the Word Taoism as a Source of Perplexity. With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,” *History of Religions* 17 (1978), pp. 303–30, at p. 326, reprinted in Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China*, chapter 6, same pagination. My brief acquaintance with Watts suggested that he was a much better persuader than a practitioner.