

Knotting the Banner: Ritual and Relationship in Daoist Practice. By David J. Mozina. New Daoist Studies. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2021. Pp. xv + 349. \$65.00 hardcover.

Knotting the Banner is a stimulating, thought-provoking, and at times even moving account of the Daoist apprentice Chen Diwen 陳迪文 (not his real name) performing the Banner Rite (to Summon) Sire Yin (Yingong fanfa 殷公旛法; Banner Rite for short) in order to complete his ordination as a Daoist master in Central Hunan (Xiangzhong 湘中), the goal of this rite being to see whether the wind would cause the five pennant-like streamers cut into the unattached end of a blue cloth banner to tangle into knots, thereby signifying the deity Yin Jiao's 殷郊 favourable response to Chen's summons. This book also explores the history of Chen's lineage, which features a dual Daoist-Buddhist identity that encompasses rites to Yin Jiao (also known as Celestial Lord Yin Jiao, or Yin Jiao tianjun 殷郊天君), Thunder General Yin Jiao (Yin Jiao leijiang 殷郊雷將), or Prime Marshal Yin Jiao (Yin Jiao yuanshuai 殷郊元帥), together with Buddhist rituals said to have been created by the Song-dynasty monk Pu'an 普庵. Despite the unspeakable hardships that Chen's masters and so many other religious practitioners suffered during China's modernization, particularly the tribulations of the Cultural Revolution, their traditions survive to the present day, preserving beliefs and practices that can be traced back to at least the eleventh century if not earlier.

David Mozina's research is noteworthy for its in-depth exploration of the Banner Rite's efficacy in its own terms, specifically the need for Daoist masters to form close bonds with the powerful yet fickle Yin Jiao, whose participation in their rituals is hardly guaranteed. Mozina also considers the extent to which the Banner Rite and other practices may be linked to the local Daoist movements dating back to the Song and Yuan dynasties (960–1368). However, the core theme of this study is that ritual centres on forms of communication between religious specialists and the deities they worship, which aims at establishing contractual ties that bind the two together. As such, the data presented in *Knotting the Banner* provide intimate insights into Daoism as a living ritual tradition with the potential to reshape our knowledge of the phenomenology of Chinese religious life.

Central Hunan has been at the forefront of ethnographic studies of Daoist ritual, starting with the pioneering work of Patrice Fava and Alain Arrault and perpetuated by younger scholars such as Lui Wing Sing 呂永昇, Mark Meulenbeld, and this book's author. Mozina undertook extensive field research in the region from 2004 to 2018, earning the trust of local specialists, painstakingly documenting their ritual traditions, and gaining their permission to reveal at least some esoteric details of these rites (as the author points out on pp. 176–78, religious secrets are allowed to be revealed under certain circumstances, such as enlightening disciples or providing a means to save sentient beings). Mozina and his partner, the photographer Doug Kanter, also deserve

immense credit for creating a website to accompany this book, thereby enabling readers to truly appreciate the vibrancy of Central Hunan's Daoist traditions and their meaning for those who take part (see <https://www.davidjmozina.com/>).

Knotting the Banner opens with a Prelude, which takes us alongside Chen Diwen as he nervously waits to see whether the banner will knot, with his very career hanging in the balance (giving new meaning to Bob Dylan's classic tune, "Blowin' in the Wind"). Here Mozina clearly delineates this book's focus on communication and relationships, especially between ordinand Chen Diwen and deity Yin Jiao. In addition, Mozina draws our attention to his interest in the phenomenology of ritual, which has been shaped in part by Poul Andersen's views on its relational nature, namely what certain rites can mean to men and women in the contexts of their experiences (p. 13).

Chapter One (The Ordinand: Chen Diwen) describes Chen's life prior to becoming a ritual specialist, including his bouts with illness and the trials he experienced trying to make it in post-Mao China. Mozina also presents a detailed account of the Daoist lineage Chen ended up joining (see also the book's Appendix on pp. 271–74). This chapter is truly remarkable for its moving accounts of how some of Chen's masters suffered during the Cultural Revolution, the inclusion of which is a clear testament to the success of Mozina's field research.

Chapter Two (The Deity: Celestial Lord Yin Jiao), the longest chapter in the book, presents a thoroughgoing study of representation of Yin Jiao in hagiographical texts as well as works of art, beginning with works preserved by Chen's lineage but also examining how this lineage's portrayal of Yin Jiao "resonates strongly with depictions of the god in certain ritual texts and hagiographic literature from the Southern Song and Yuan periods" (p. 76). Mozina's exhaustive research shows how Yin Jiao became a revered exorcistic spirit in part due to his links to two revered deities, the Emperor of the North (Beidi 北帝) and Shen the Realized One (Shen zhenren 申真人). This chapter also treats the importance of one hagiography of Yin Jiao preserved in the *Reprinting of Illustrated Comprehensive Records in Search of the Gods since the Origins of the Three Teachings* (*Chongkan huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* 重刊繪圖三教源流搜神大全), which seems to have influenced Chen's lineage (pp. 134–41, esp. 136), but the lengthy discussion of vernacular literature's apparently limited influence on this lineage (pp. 142–55) might have been condensed or published as a separate article. It is also not clear why data on the Correct Rites of the Heart of Heaven (*Tianxin zhengfa* 天心正法) Daoist movement is organized into three sections entitled "Devotion," "Practice," and "Orthodoxy" (see pp. 97–106).

Before moving on to the actual description of the Banner Rite, Mozina provides a brief interlude about Chen's asking to become ordained and the preparations he underwent prior to this ritual's performance. The information presented here reminds

readers of the intensity of these practices, with Chen's very livelihood being at stake. Mozina also presents his initial definition of the talisman that Chen will inscribe on the banner, which "embodies all the ritual processes" that contribute to forging Chen's relationship with Yin Jiao (p. 165).

Chapter Three (The Banner Rite: Recovering the Divine Self) features a vivid account of the visualizations and inner alchemy techniques that Chen uses to incinerate his mundane body in order to transform into a divine being (*yuanchen* 元辰) with the power to communicate with Yin Jiao. As part of these processes, Chen takes on a series of divine bodies (referred to as *bianshen* 變身 / 變神), including the Daoist patriarch Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the Dark Emperor (Xuandi 玄帝; also known as the True Warrior, or Zhenwu 真武), the ultimate goal of these actions being for Chen to recover the primordial part of his divine self that inhabits the celestial realm. These rites also feature the visualization of a journey to the heavens, which seems somewhat shamanic in nature. Mozina's ethnography grants us the opportunity to witness the challenges of doing such rites, including Chen's nervousness when throwing divination blocks (p. 175) and getting help from his masters when he loses his place (p. 184).

Chapter Four (The Banner Rite: Inscription of the Talisman) reveals that the lengthy talisman Chen inscribes on the banner represents a mode of communication constituting a "ritual amalgam" (p. 218) that combines written graphs, oral incantations, and internalized visualizations, as well as the transformation of the brush and ink into divine implements, all of which derive from Chen's preparation of his divine self as described in the previous chapter. In addition, Mozina provides an exegesis on all the graphs and components of this talisman, while considering their links to earlier Song-Yuan ritual traditions. He also points out the importance of knowing deities' names, especially taboo names (which can signify relationships between specialists and deities) as well as the importance of writing. The book concludes with a Postlude, which portrays Chen's anxiety about the consequences of a failed rite followed by unbridled joy when the banner does knot and his practices are deemed successful.

Knotting the Banner achieves a number of major breakthroughs with immense potential to shape future research on Daoist ritual and Chinese religions as a whole. To begin with, Mozina's work sheds new light on how Daoist specialists interact with the deities they rely on to perform their rituals. All relationships are complicated, and these relationships are especially so, with Yin Jiao described with adjectives such as "fickle," "capricious," and "fearsome" (see for example pp. 8, 13). Therefore, Chen Diwen and his peers have no choice but to both cajole, threaten, and even beseech Yin to respond to their summonses (pp. 21, 218, 252), with Chen's ritual performance and creation of the talisman described in Chapter 4 designed to "pique Yin Jiao's sense of duty and convince the fickle martial deity to obey" (p. 243).

Mozina's analysis of these phenomena can prompt us to rethink ritual's role in establishing relationships, not just between ritual specialists and their deities but also with other specialists and ordinary worshippers.

In addition, Mozina's study contains eye-opening information on the status and influence Daoist masters enjoy in local society, thereby shattering previous stereotypes of such individuals as largely marginal figures. One of Chen's masters was chosen to serve as administrative director of his village (*cunzhuren* 村主任) (p. 31), while another is described as being a "powerful master and effective politician" (p. 62). Mozina also presents data on marriage networks binding together elite Daoist lineages (p. 61). One only wonders why he found it remarkable that one apprentice was elected village head (*cunzhang* 村長) (p. 68).

Perhaps most importantly, Mozina proves adept at balancing the tension between emic and etic views of ritual practices, based on his humility as an ethnographer as well as his indefatigable intellectual curiosity about the meaning of the rites he observed. On the one hand, Mozina notes that Chen Diwen and his peers had "little idea" or "knew nothing" about the intricacies of certain practices (pp. 70, 141), pointing out that, "Although . . . [one master] did not confidently understand whole swaths of the theoretical text, he diligently explained . . . how to do the series of visualizations, incantations, and hand mudras as his own master taught him" (p. 173). On the other hand, Mozina does not hesitate to advance his own eloquent interpretations of phenomena like the talisman, which he portrays as "pregnant with all the invocations and visualizations by which Chen attempts to recover his primordial self" and "imbued with the ontological weight of ritually cultivated ancestral *qi* [氣]" (p. 165).

As with any pioneering study, there are a few issues that might require further consideration. For example, the lengthy presentation of hagiographical and liturgical data about Yin Jiao in Chapter Two (84 pages in total) runs the risk of losing focus on this deity's significance to Chen's own lineage, with discussions of the rites of Fengdu 酆都 or historical accounts of Wang Wenqing 王文卿 (1093–1153) and Chen Nan 陳楠 (d. 1213) presenting background material seemingly more relevant to the history of Song-Yuan Daoism than the development of Chen's lineage and the rites performed by him and his peers. In addition, Mozina overlooks some recent Chinese-language scholarship on local Daoist traditions, including books by Huang Jianxing 黃建興 and Hsieh Ts'ung-hui 謝聰輝.¹

¹ Huang Jianxing, *Shijiao: Zhongguo nanfang fashi yishi chuantong bijiao yanjiu* 師教：中國南方法師儀式傳統比較研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018); Hsieh Ts'ung-hui, *Zhuixun Daofa—Cong Taiwan dao Fujian Daotan diaocha yu yanjiu* 追尋道法——從臺灣到福建道壇調查與研究 (Taipei: Shin Wen Feng Print Co., 2018).

Despite these minor issues, however, *Knotting the Banner* merits our appreciation for its many outstanding achievements. By committing himself to fully narrating the significance of the Banner Rite in its own terms, particularly its role in establishing new and lasting relationships, Mozina has set a new standard for ethnographic research on Daoist ritual, as well as the interdisciplinary study of Chinese religious life.

DOI: 10.29708/JCS.CUHK.202301_(76).0008

PAUL R. KATZ
Institute of Modern History,
Academia Sinica