

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Reading Patrice Fava's *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre: Mémoires d'un ethnologue en Chine*

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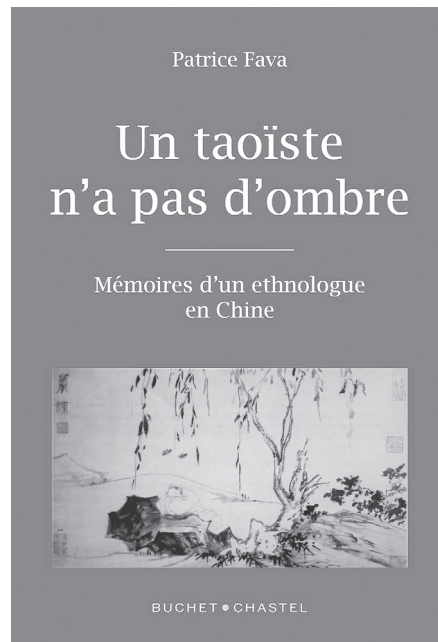
French Sinology has radically changed our picture of China. The works of Édouard Chavannes, Henri Maspero, and Maxime Kaltenmark, for example, represent the foundation of all our knowledge of the obscure Daoist tradition. It is on the shoulders of these giants that Kristofer Schipper has made Daoist Studies a legitimate subfield of Sinology. In fact, *Le corps taoïste* must be seen, as Patrice Fava rightly points out, as the golden book of Daoism. To this day, Daoist Studies remains a footnote to Schipper's oeuvre. The Schipper lineage, composed of Sinologists such as Michel Strickmann, Vincent Goossaert, Mark Meulenbeld, and David Palmer, to name only a few of its most illustrious representatives, fortunately continues to dominate the discourse on Daoism among the scholarly community. With his masterpiece—*Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre : Mémoires d'un ethnologue en Chine*—Fava revolutionizes Daoist Studies.

Among Sinologists, Fava needs no introduction. The French scholar is the source of an incredible empirical discovery, richly documented in his work. I am referring to the discovery, described in *Aux portes du ciel*, of the existence of a “Daoist society” in Hunan. Fava's studies on the subject have given rise to a vast literature on Daoism in that region, in particular, the work of David

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*Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre: mémoires d'un ethnologue en Chine*. By Patrice Fava. Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2023. Pp. 496. €26.00 paperback, €18.99 e-book.

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Mozina and the new book by Mark Meulenbeld, soon to be published by Harvard University Press.

*Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre* is a masterpiece. Fava established a new genre of writing on Daoism that will take a long time to be fully understood, digested, and integrated into Daoist Studies. The autobiographical style adopted in his work allows the person behind the writing to flourish as a crucial element of the text.

Fava divides the book into two parts. Composed of thirty-six sections, the first part is explicitly autobiographical. Fava recounts his encounter with surrealism and Daoism between 1965 and 2023. The second part of the book is theoretical. Here, Fava offers us a new theory on Daoism. This theory is based both on years of field research and on his interpretation of the relevant anthropological literature, notably the work of Philippe Descola. The first part describes Fava's journey to China, the circumstances of his marriages, the birth of his daughters, the discovery of living Daoism in Hunan, as well as his meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in the Forbidden City. It must be understood, however, that this part of the book should not simply be read as autobiographical. Quite the opposite. Fava uses his personal experience of living in China for more than fifty years as a narrative stage from which the scholar revisits the fundamental themes of Daoist Studies.

Indeed, the first part, “1965–2023: La Chine telle qu'en elle-même,” offers a unique reinterpretation of the most important themes of Daoism and its long history. I must begin with the title of the work itself, which Fava borrowed from Daoist narratives. *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre* is also the title of the last section of the first part.

I will, thus, start the discussion from this final section the first part. The fundamental theme of this section is “the misunderstandings that have so often characterized relations between China and the West.”<sup>1</sup> One of such misunderstandings is the characterization of Chinese culture as a fully secular phenomenon, a land of philosophers where supposedly bizarre beliefs like popular religion and Daoism represent nothing more than a distortion of a deeply rational culture. Fortunately, the China Fava seeks is not the philosophical China imagined by Christian missionaries and their Chinese collaborators, but the China of local gods and Daoist immortals. As Schipper rightly argues in *Le corps taoïste*, Daoism has always existed in a complex symbiotic relationship with the so-called shamanism and its local gods.<sup>2</sup> To the dismay of some, what connects China to the spectrum of world civilizations is not *Confucius sinarum philosophus*, but the phenomenon of mediumship (*wu* 巫). On this subject, Fava states in *Aux portes du ciel*:

What I especially learn from Madame Zeng is that shamanism and Daoism are not as opposed as is generally claimed. Throughout its history, as Rolf Stein and Michel Strickmann have very well highlighted, Daoism, which represents the written tradition, has never ceased to reject both shamanism and bloody sacrifices, but while being on the fringes of these practices, it has never ceased to seek to channel and contain them. Today's *daoshi* generally hold in low esteem women shamans, whom they also call by the pejorative term *wupo*, and often very peremptorily assert that they have no connection with Daoism. Here, it is quite the opposite: not only does Madame Zeng work closely with a Daoist, Master Duan Peng, but he also organizes *wupo* ordinations. Having

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<sup>1</sup> Fava, *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, p. 313: “les malentendus qui ont si souvent caractérisé les relations entre la Chine et l'Occident.” All translations from the French in this review article, unless otherwise specified, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Kristofer Schipper, *Le corps taoïste: corps physique – corps social* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), p. 18.

a Daoist ordination certificate is a guarantee of obtaining a privileged position in the other world.<sup>3</sup>

Daoist immortals, Fava explains, are often venerated as local gods, though they exist in ideological opposition to them. What are local gods if not the very shadows of the tragedies experienced by the Chinese people? Daoist immortals, by contrast, have no shadows. Being above the vicissitudes of human tragedies, immortals cast no shadows when illuminated by the sun and moon. In a sense, immortals are themselves a source of light. As such, they continue to illuminate the lives of the Chinese people through revelatory rituals in which humans communicate directly with the divine bureaucracy. Such rituals include both popular mediumistic trance and the more elitist rituals of divine revelation through automatic writing, known as *fujū* 扶乩. As Fava maintains, “All these revelations produced in dreams, in trances, or in meditation, then transcribed and edited, are part of the analogist system of thought which maintains, beyond space and time, the emotional links between humans and gods, disciples and their masters.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of analogism is fundamental to understanding the importance of Fava’s work.

Contrary to the common idea that ritual is the staging of a myth, Schipper very explicitly emphasized that the great offering ceremonies (*jiao* 醮)

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<sup>3</sup> Patrice Fava, *Aux portes du ciel: La statuaire taoïste du Hunan* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013), p. 133: “Ce que j’apprends surtout avec Madame Zeng, c’est que le chamanisme et le taoïsme ne sont pas aussi opposés qu’on l’affirme généralement. Au cours de son histoire, comme l’ont très bien mis en lumière Rolf Stein et Michel Strickmann, le taoïsme, qui représente la tradition écrite, n’a cessé de rejeter et le chamanisme et les sacrifices sanglants, mais tout en étant en marge de ces pratiques, il n’a cessé de chercher à les canaliser et à les contenir. Les *daoshi* d’aujourd’hui tiennent, en général, en piètre estime les femmes chaman qu’ils appellent, eux aussi, du terme péjoratif de *wupo* et affirment souvent très péremptoirement qu’elles n’ont aucun rapport avec le taoïsme. Ici, c’est tout le contraire: non seulement Madame Zeng travaille en étroite collaboration avec un taoïste, Maître Duan Peng, mais, de plus, il organise des ordinations de *wupo*. Avoir en sa possession un certificat d’ordination taoïste est l’assurance d’obtenir une position privilégiée dans l’autre monde.”

<sup>4</sup> Fava, *Un taoïste n’a pas d’ombre*, p. 317: “Toutes ces révélations produites en rêve, en transe ou en méditation, puis retranscrites et éditées, s’inscrivent dans le système de pensée analogiste qui maintient, par-delà l’espace et le temps, les liens affectifs entre les humains et les dieux, les disciples et leurs maîtres.”

are part of “the bureaucratic metaphor,” that is to say, the offerings entail an analogy between the human world and the divine world. This argument sheds light on many aspects of Daoist liturgy and allows us to differentiate between rituals in the classical language and vernacular rituals, the latter often relying on a legendary background, as, for example, during the exorcism of the gods of pestilence (pp. 436–63).

In fact, the concept of analogism is a central interpretive key in *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*. However, some readers of Fava may be unwilling to accept the premises and, perhaps more importantly, the consequences of his argument. If one embarks on Fava's intellectual adventure, one must accept that there are multiple ways of existing in the world and that there is not necessarily such a thing as a universal human nature that transcends all differences between cultures. For some segments of academia, this is an uncomfortable, if not dangerous, idea. In his review of *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, for example, Lagerwey states:

*In Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), Edward Slingerland lays definitively to rest any idea of China as the monistic exception. As for going “beyond nature and culture,” first, Fava seems in fact to extend the “analogical ontology” to all traditional societies (see p. 462 but also, passim, references to the pre-naturalistic West). Second, and more to the point, is that porous boundaries between categories and analogy as the way to bridge them does not mean there is no boundary nor imply that the boundary can be crossed with ease. Were that the case, there would be no history of asceticism or mysticism—histories as prevalent in the West as in China or elsewhere. To give just one example, Fava is right to refer to the phrase “Heaven and Humans united as one” 天人合一— as a central concept in Chinese religious thinking. But how different is that, in the end, from the priestly prayer in the Mass which asks, “As this water mingles with the wine for the sacrament of the Alliance, may we be united to the divinity of Him who took on our humanity”? Heaven and Earth constitute, already in the Song of Solomon and then in early rabbinic thought, a vast metaphoric system for enabling earthlings, as a community, to unite with the Most High (as Lord Lao is also called).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Lagerwey, “Patrice Fava, *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*. *Mémoires d'un ethnologue en Chine*,” *T'oung Pao* 110, nos. 3–4 (2024): 517.

Lagerwey's interpretation of Fava's analogism has several shortcomings. As a careful reader of both Lagerwey and Fava—two great intellectuals whom I deeply admire—I cannot help but examine these shortcomings with extreme care in order to enable future readers of Fava to understand the true meaning of his work. First, Lagerwey should explain to his readers why we should accept Edward Slingerland's arguments. Simply citing Slingerland as an authority does not seem viable to me. Second, and contrary to what Lagerwey suggests, Fava did not mean that the analogist ontology applies to *all* traditional societies. Fava's theory of Daoism, which will be explained in more detail below, is the product of phenomenal empirical research.<sup>6</sup> Fava's book does not endorse gross generalizations such as the one Lagerwey mentions. Third, at no point does Fava suggest that analogism is a bridge across which porous categories can be crossed. The analogism that Fava describes is a way of being, not a methodology. Finally, Lagerwey provocatively asks his readers how the Chinese analogism embodied in the phrase "Heaven and Earth united in unity" is different from the mystery of Jesus uttered at the Catholic Mass. In my view, the differences are obvious. In his review of Fava's book, Lagerwey makes clear the origins of his theologizing language. Lagerwey makes no secret of his Christian convictions, which form the basis—legitimate, I would say—for his interpretation of Daoism. However, recognizing the legitimacy of Lagerwey's Christian comparative project does not necessarily mean endorsing such a project. Fava has an opposing view on this subject, which he sums up by writing: "We must dechristianize Daoism" (p. 247). In any case, Lagerwey's observations must be paid attention to because a careful reading of Fava and Descola shows that the themes of analogism and Christianity come together in the theme of sacrifice. In order to explain the importance of the very notion of analogism, I have to offer a relatively lengthy—but necessary—academic contextualization.

Fava's interpretation of Daoism is based on a reinterpretation of Schipper, specifically Schipper's theory that Daoism is the sacrifice of the scriptures/writings. For Schipper, the heart of such a sacrificial logic lies in the possibility of communication between the pure Daoist gods and their human disciples.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf., e.g., Patrice Fava, *Hunan Daoshi he fashi de shenhua—Xinhuaxian Daojiao shenxiang weiguan lishi* 湖南道士和法師的神化——新化縣道教神像微觀歷史 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 2021).

The sacrifice of the scriptures would therefore establish a communication between the sacred and the human, which for Hubert and Mauss defined the sacrificial act as a social reality, without resorting to the slaughter of animals.<sup>7</sup> Influenced by Frits Staal, Schipper understood this sacrificial act as a matter of establishing ritual efficacy and not of conveying meaning:

To be efficacious, a *fu* must be ritually consecrated, then “transformed” (*hua*). This transformation is what we call the “sacrifice of the scriptures.” Daoism does not know bloody sacrifices, the ritual destruction of living beings (man, animal, or plant) is totally foreign to it. It is the writing, replica, transcription of a primordial truth, which must be “transformed” by fire, by digestion, or simply by the effect of time, so that it returns to its primordial and invisible state—therefore fully efficacious.<sup>8</sup>

Schipper was, without knowing it, the first proponent of a theory of cosmic kingship. As the recent work of A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern has argued, cosmic kingship is a matter of allowing society to flourish through ritual means.<sup>9</sup> After important works by John Lagerwey, Lü Pengzhi, and Gil Raz, the world of Daoist Studies turned its back on Schipper's theory of Daoism as the sacrifice of scripture. In his *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, published in 1987, Lagerwey offers an early reinterpretation of Schipper's theory. Like Schipper, Lagerwey understood that Daoist religion, despite its initial rejection of ancient blood sacrifices, contained elements of the sacrificial

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<sup>7</sup> See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Schipper, *apud* Fava, *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, p. 58: “Pour être efficace, un *fu* doit être consacré rituellement, puis « transformé » (*hua*). Cette transformation est ce que nous appelons le « sacrifice des écritures ». Le taoïsme ne connaît pas de sacrifices sanglants, la destruction rituelle d'êtres vivants (homme, animal ou plante) lui est totalement étrangère. C'est l'écriture, réplique, transcription d'une vérité primordiale, qui doit être « transformée » par le feu, par la digestion, ou simplement par l'effet du temps, afin qu'elle retourne à son état primordial et invisible – donc pleinement efficace.”

<sup>9</sup> A. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern, *Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), “Introduction.”

logic that its rituals attacked. In his Christian-inspired—but no less pertinent—reinterpretation, Lagerwey argues that what the Daoist priest sacrifices is not so much the writings as himself. For both Sinologists, Daoism establishes itself as a social reality through an inversion of the sacrificial logic. Unfortunately, neither Schipper nor Lagerwey received the attention they deserved. Except for an unfortunate reading by Catherine Bell, who castigates Lagerwey's book for what she perceives as a lack of conceptual rigour,<sup>10</sup> *Taoist Ritual* has not received much attention from Sinologists. I should also point out that Lü Pengzhi wrote a long article with the intention of pronouncing the death sentence on Schipper's theory. The article—or rather, the short monograph of over 100 pages—argues that Daoism has nothing to do with sacrifice, or *jisi* 祭祀.<sup>11</sup> But despite this near-fatal blow, Schipper's theory survives. Franciscus Verellen states that “[g]iven the scribal nature of Heavenly Master ritual and the sacral nature of Chinese writing, the petition documents were in a sense themselves the sacrifice that conveyed and empowered a prayer.”<sup>12</sup> This passage does nothing more than repeat Schipper's arguments. A few years earlier, Strickmann had given a brilliant and rarely read exposition of Schipper's theory in his *Mantras and Mandarins*. In a passage comparing Daoism and Tantrism, Strickmann states:

The Daoist's meditations focus on an incense burner, not a homa hearth; while Tantrism prepares a banquet for the deity, Daoism holds a formal assembly. Consequently, the sacrifice, the means of exchange between the officiant and the higher powers, does not consist of food, but rather of inscribed paper: it is a written document, consumed and transformed by the flames, and carried to the sky by the fragrant smoke. Tantric ritual establishes a relationship of host and guest, while Daoism reaffirms

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<sup>10</sup> Bell's review of Lagerwey's *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, *History of Religions* 28.2 (1988): 168–71.

<sup>11</sup> Lü Pengzhi 吕鹏志, “Zaoqi Daojiao jiaoyi ji qi liubian kaosuo” 早期道教醮儀及其流變考索, in Tan Weilun (Tam Wai Lun) 譚偉倫, ed., *Zhongguo difang zongjiao yishi lunji* 中國地方宗教儀式論集 (Hong Kong: Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), pp. 19–145.

<sup>12</sup> Franciscus Verellen, *Imperiled Destinies: The Daoist Quest for Deliverance in Medieval China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019), p. 47.

the place of the officiant in the official hierarchy. Tantrism imitates conviviality, Daoism imitates bureaucracy.<sup>13</sup>

With great clarity, Strickmann establishes a fruitful comparison between Chinese and Indian rituals. Each in their own way, Lagerwey and Strickmann opened the doors of comparativism. Lagerwey turns to theological speculation which, despite its lack of prestige in the secular academic world, is of great importance in the intellectual history of humanity. Strickmann uses textual methods that demonstrate the presence of ritual exchanges between Buddhists and Daoists in China and Japan.

Fava has overcome both these attempts. Unlike Lagerwey and Strickmann, Fava gives his reinterpretation of Schipper an eminently theoretical character. With *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, we have a more substantial theoretical contribution to recent anthropological theories. Consider the paragraph below:

While in the alliance renewal festivals called *jiao* 醮, there is, in principle, no sacrificial victim, Kristofer Schipper continued to speak of sacrifice to describe the oblation of the sacred writings that marks the dispersion of the altar. The expression “sacrifice of the writings” seemed inappropriate to many of his readers, while it allows us to emphasize that it is the writing that serves as a means of exchange between the officiant and the gods. “Like his mandarin counterparts in the courts and chancelleries of the Chinese Empire,” writes Michel Strickmann, “the Daoist master is first and foremost a master of writing.” The ritual transformation by fire of talismans, memoirs, mandates, and permits,

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins: Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 47: “Les méditations du taoïste se concentrent sur un brûle-parfum, et non pas sur un foyer homa ; si le tantrisme prépare un banquet pour la divinité, le taoïsme, lui, tient une assemblée officielle. Par conséquent, le sacrifice, moyen d'échange entre l'officiant et les puissances supérieures, ne consiste pas en nourriture, mais plutôt en papier couvert d'inscriptions : c'est un document écrit, consommé et transformé par les flammes, et emporté au ciel par la fumée odorante. Le rituel tantrique établit une relation d'hôte à invité, tandis que le taoïsme réaffirme la place de l'officiant dans la hiérarchie officielle. Le tantrisme imite la convivialité, le taoïsme la bureaucratie.”

are of the same order as the offering made to heaven of a living being. It takes its place and has the same ostentatious function.<sup>14</sup>

By asserting that the Daoist ritual of destruction by fire and the sacrifice of a living being are, in reality, two practices of the same order, Fava invokes a theoretical element ignored by Schipper. This element is addressed explicitly in the second part of the book, which proposes a new theory of Daoism:

Rather, it would seem, as Philippe Descola shows with his theory of the four ontologies, that the so-called psychic unity of humanity has been a dead end. The fantastic time machine that is the Daoist ritual is rather a vast analogist device that was built from cosmology, the doctrine of *yinyang wuxing*, psychophysiological practices of internal alchemy, and exorcist medicine of shamanic inspiration. Rethinking the ritual from this theoretical framework should allow us to restore its true place in history and to make a more appropriate reading of it. The ontological turning point inaugurated by Philippe Descola opens a new path to the study of ritual which, without much change, has spanned the centuries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fava, *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, p. 213: "Alors que dans les fêtes de renouvellement d'alliance qu'on appelle les *jiao* 醮, il n'y a, en principe, pas de victime sacrificielle, Kristofer Schipper a continué de parler de sacrifice pour qualifier l'oblation des écritures sacrées qui marquent la dispersion de l'autel. L'expression « sacrifice des écritures » a paru impropre à bon nombre de ses lecteurs, alors qu'elle permet de souligner que c'est l'écrit qui sert de moyen d'échange entre l'officiant et les dieux. « À l'instar de ses homologues mandarins dans les cours et les chancelleries de l'Empire chinois, écrit Michel Strickmann, le maître taoïste est d'abord et avant tout un maître d'écriture ». La transformation rituelle par le feu des talismans, mémoires, mandements, laissez-passer, sont du même ordre que l'offrande faite au ciel d'un être vivant. Elle en tient lieu et a la même fonction ostentatoire."

<sup>15</sup> Fava, *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, pp. 386–87: "Il semblerait plutôt, comme le montre Philippe Descola avec sa théorie des quatre ontologies, que la soi-disant unité psychique de l'humanité ait été une impasse. La fantastique machine à remonter le temps qu'est le rituel taoïste est plutôt un vaste dispositif analogiste qui s'est construit à partir de la cosmologie, de la doctrine du *yinyang wuxing*, des pratiques psychophysologiques d'alchimie interne et de la médecine exorciste d'inspiration chamanique. Repenser le rituel à partir de ce cadre théorique devrait permettre de lui redonner sa véritable place dans l'histoire et d'en faire une lecture plus appropriée. Le tournant ontologique inauguré par Philippe Descola ouvre une nouvelle voie à l'étude du rituel qui, sans grand changement, a traversé les siècles."

The analogism that Fava speaks of is one of the four ontologies theorized by the French anthropologist Descola in his extensive oeuvre. Descola has breathed new life into the discipline of anthropology. In fact, Descola is a proponent of a grand theory of universal implications. He is primarily interested in the varieties of human existence on this planet. Descola summarizes these varieties in terms of four ontologies: animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism. We naturalists live under the rule of a dualistic thought according to which reality is divided into large blocks such as nature and culture, body and thought. Having lived for decades among the Amazonian peoples, Descola has learned to question the supposed universality of our naturalistic dualism. He notes that the Amazonian peoples he lived with did not necessarily have a conception of society, nor were they interested in dividing existing beings into humans and non-humans. This early investigation led Descola to embark on a monumental project on various human ontologies. According to him, the Chinese, like the Hindus and the Europeans of the Renaissance, are typical representatives of the analogist ontology, even though it does not mean that these cultures are the same.

Analogism, Descola explains, consists mainly of establishing relations of continuity between elements that do not intrinsically have such a possibility. The Chinese theory of the Five Phases is a classic example of analogist ontology. What do phenomena such as fire, the colour red, the direction south, and the heart have in common? From the perspective of naturalistic ontology, the answer is: absolutely nothing. Analogist ontologies, however, build a theoretical edifice that establishes relations of identity between disparate elements. Another very common analogist phenomenon in Chinese culture is the relationship established between words and bodily elements. Therefore, eating walnuts is good for the brain because the former's shape resembles that of the human organ. Bats (*fu* 蝠) appear throughout Chinese art as an auspicious element because the pronunciation of the Chinese word resembles that of the word for "blessings" (*fu* 福).

Fava and Descola consider sacrifice as a fundamentally analogistic element. In this dialogue conducted almost exclusively in French, not only do Fava and Descola participate, but also Hubert, Mauss, Schipper, and Strickmann. In a breathtaking chapter, Descola makes the following observations on the relationship between analogism and sacrifice:

One last coupling device must be mentioned, if only as a hypothesis and with the reader's indulgence. One cannot help but note that sacrifice is present in regions where analogist ontologies dominate—

notably in Brahmanic India, West Africa, ancient China (where it was mainly linked to political functions), the Andean zone, and pre-Columbian Mexico—while it is unknown in totemic Australia and in those animistic lands par excellence, namely the Amazon and subarctic America. One could certainly argue that, except for the dog in North America, animal husbandry is absent, or only recently introduced, in these regions: without domestic animals to sacrifice, sacrifice would become impossible. But invoking this practical reason would only shift the question, because one would then have to explain why there is necessarily incompatibility between animal domestication and animistic or totemic ontologies, a problem that will be examined in the last part of this book. Furthermore, it would be theoretically possible in such cases to sacrifice humans; for one can probably generalize this precept of Vedic India that the only authentic victim is the person of the sacrificer who takes the initiative of the rite and expects an effect from it, the sacrificed animals being only his substitutes, which can themselves be replaced by other things in this function.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), pp. 397–98: “Un dernier dispositif de couplage doit être mentionné, ne serait-ce qu’à titre d’hypothèse et en réclamant l’indulgence du lecteur. On ne peut s’empêcher, en effet, de constater que le sacrifice est présent dans les régions où dominent les ontologies analogistes — notamment dans l’Inde brahmanique, en Afrique de l’Ouest, en Chine ancienne (où il était surtout lié aux fonctions politiques), dans la zone andine et dans le Mexique précolombien —, tandis qu’il est inconnu dans l’Australie totémique et dans ces terres animiques par excellence que sont l’Amazonie et l’Amérique subarctique. On pourrait certes faire valoir que, à l’exception du chien pour l’Amérique septentrionale, l’élevage est absent, ou d’introduction récente, dans ces régions : sans animaux domestiques à immoler, le sacrifice deviendrait impossible. Mais l’invocation de cette raison pratique ne ferait que déplacer la question, car il faudrait alors expliquer pourquoi il y a nécessairement incompatibilité entre la domestication animale et les ontologies animiques ou totémiques, un problème qui sera examiné dans la dernière partie de ce livre. En outre, il serait théoriquement possible en de pareils cas de sacrifier des humains ; car on peut probablement généraliser ce précepte de l’Inde védique qui veut que la seule victime authentique soit la personne du sacrifiant qui prend l’initiative du rite et en escompte un effet, les animaux immolés n’étant que ses substituts, lesquels peuvent être eux-mêmes remplacés par d’autres choses dans cette fonction.”

Like Hubert and Mauss, Descola understands sacrifice to be something like the substitution of one thing for another: the sacrificed replaces the sacrificer. More importantly, this mechanism is essentially analogistic since it draws its logic from a system of relations in which similarity presents itself as identity. As Descola notes, the killing of a victim, even ritually, does not always mean that a sacrifice has taken place. For sacrifice to take place, the act of destruction must be carried out under the auspices of a logic for which similarity signifies identity. From this perspective, Schipper's theory of the sacrifice of scripture is not absurd.

With Fava, we have a genuine reassessment of the cultural significance of Daoism in relation to China's analogist sacrificial culture. Fava's work both explains the nature of Daoism as just another manifestation of Chinese analogism and puts to rest the controversy surrounding Daoism as an anti-sacrificial religious revolution. Following Fava, we understand that Daoism inverts the sacrificial logic, but that there is nothing in its analogist ontology that justifies the idea that Daoism should be defined in terms of a rejection of sacrifice; rather, it is quite the opposite. If we truly understand the implications of the theoretical edifice that Fava constructs, we will realize that Daoism is an essentially sacrificial critique of ancient modes of sacrifice. The sacrifice of sacrifice is an act of ritual critique—even a meta-ritual act—by which the Daoist establishes his dominance and superiority over both the imperial cult and shamanism. It is, therefore, not surprising that throughout its long history, Daoism has incorporated elements of both blood sacrifice and mediumistic practices. Regarding the latter, Descola aptly points out that mediumship—the act of manifesting a god through one's own physical existence simultaneously to one's psychological deconstruction—is the analogist phenomenon *par excellence*. Daoists developed their own analogist inversion of mediumism: the ritual construction of the Daoist as a divine being (*bian shen* 變神) who dominates the celestial bureaucracy, which includes the mediums' local gods.

By constructing his theory through the prism of Descola's thought, Fava achieves at least three fundamental academic goals. First, he shows other colleagues in the field of Daoist Studies that the real work of a Daoist scholar is to develop theories that have greater implications for academia as a whole. Second, he proves that this work of thinking deeply about theories is as objective as the important empirical work of discovering, collecting, and describing new historical sources. Third, he establishes a new parameter by which to judge academic output on Daoism. *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre* is destined to become a required reading among the scholarly community.

Fava's recent contribution suggests that empiricism for empiricism's sake is not viable. As the excellent work of Chinese scholars such as Lai Chi Tim 黎志添, Lü Pengzhi, Xu Wei 許蔚, and Chang Chaojan 張超然, to name just a few of the most representative, makes clear, the future of Daoist Studies as a purely empirical discipline based on the discovery and description of new sources lies in the Sinosphere. The future of Daoist Studies as a discipline based on the study of the very nature of ritual, on the other hand, will depend on the willingness of new generations to return to the theoretical questions formulated in a laconic and enigmatic manner by Schipper, which Fava tackles with unique theoretical robustness. Through *Un taoïste n'a pas d'ombre*, the discipline of Daoist Studies allows itself, for the first time, to assume a leading theoretical role in relation to other disciplines of the human sciences.

Fava teaches us to become creators of theories, not mere consumers. It is now time to turn our attention to the new work of theoretical-anthropological synthesis carried out by Fava. Taking seriously the questions proposed and examined by the anthropologist, Daoist Studies could occupy a prominent place in the world of human sciences. As theorists of religion and ritual, scholars of Daoism should offer guidance to historians, anthropologists, and, especially, philosophers, not the other way around. Fava inaugurates a new era.

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