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Ho Peng Yoke, *Explorations in Daoism: Medicine and Alchemy in Literature*, London: Routledge, 2007, 256 pp.

Livia Kohn

[Livia Kohn, Ph. D., graduated from Bonn University, Germany, in 1980. After six years at Kyoto University in Japan, she joined Boston University as Professor of Religion and East Asian Studies. She has also worked variously as visiting professor and adjunct faculty at Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest, the Stanford Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, and San Francisco State University. Her specialty is the study of the Daoist religion and Chinese long life practices. She has written and edited thirty books, as well as numerous articles and reviews. She has served on numerous committees and editorial boards, and organized a series of major international conferences on Daoism. She retired from active teaching in 2006 and now lives in Florida, from where she runs various workshops and conferences, and serves as the executive editor of the Journal of Daoist Studies. *Her books include* Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques *(1989),* Daoist Mystical Philosophy *(1991),* Laughing at the Dao *(1995),* God of the Dao *(1998),* Daoism Handbook *(2000),* Daoism and Chinese Culture *(2001),* Monastic Life in Medieval Daoism *(2003),* Cosmos and Community *(2004),* Daoist Body Cultivation *(2006), as well as* Meditation Works, Chinese Healing Exercises, Introducing Daoism *(2008), and – most recently –* Daoist Dietetics *(2010) and* Sitting in Oblivion *(2010). Contact: liviakohn@gmail.com]*

Professor Ho, respected lecturer in physics and chemistry, first encountered scientific materials in the Daoist Canon working with Joseph Needham at the "Science and Civilisation in China" project when on leave from his native Singapore in the late 1950s. His interest in the subject was refreshed when Nathan Sivin spent several months with him in Singapore in the early 1960s and further encouraged when he became the head of the School of Modern Asian Studies at Griffith University in Australia in the early 1970s. During the 1980s, he presented his studies in Tokyo and Hong Kong, then enhanced them after succeeding Joseph Needham in Cambridge, a position he held until his retirement in 2001.

This book presents representative selections of his work over this 50-year period. They concern the dating and compilation of alchemical texts in the Daoist Canon, as well as the partial reconstruction of materials beyond the Canon, thus shedding new light on our understanding of Chinese herbal wisdom and proto-chemistry.

The book divides into 5 chapters. The first, "Introduction," outlines the history of the Daoist Canon and pinpoints issues regarding plant names

and alchemical terminology—both highly complex and multilayered. The second chapter, "On the Dating of Daoist Alchemical Texts," notes that about 7 percent of texts in the Canon relate to questions of alchemy, most of which are difficult to date. Clues include the listing of titles in official bibliographies and court catalogues; personal names, reign titles, geographical names, technical terms, and taboo words found in the texts; as well as comparisons with other materials of a similar nature, both within and without the Canon. The chapter then presents examples for such dating on three texts, the *Cantongqi wuxianglei miyao* 參同契五相類秘要 (Arcane Essentials of the Similarities and Categories of the Five Substances in the "Kinship of the Three"; DZ 905—dat. after 1117), the *Chunyang Lü zhenren yaoshizhi* 純陽呂真人藥石製 (Perfect Lü Chunyang's Book on the Preparation of Drugs and Minerals; DZ 903—dat. 1324-1445), and the *Xuanyuan Huangdi shuijing yaofa* 軒轅黃帝水經藥法 (Medicinal Methods from the Aqueous Manual of Xuanyuan, the Yellow Emperor; DZ 929—dat. c. 1400).

Chapter 3 discusses two alchemical texts of similar content and titles in more detail, the *Danfang jianyuan* 丹方監源 (Mirror of Alchemical Processes; DZ 925, dat. 10th c.) and the *Danfang jingyuan* 丹房鏡源 (Mirror of the Alchemical Laboratory; lost in Song; dat. Tang). Both discuss alchemical materials (metals, minerals, sands, stones, salts, powders, etc.) and both were cited variously in literature beyond the Canon. The chapter presents an examination of the texts, including fragments and citations, then moves on to a complete translation of both, in each section working to identify the substance in question in both Chinese and modern chemical terms.

Chapter 4, "Partial Restoration, Collation, and Translation of Lost Alchemical Texts," discusses six documents from various periods of Chinese history. (1) The *Gengxin yuce* 庚辛玉冊 (Precious Secrets from the Realm of Metals and Minerals), by the Ming prince Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448), is the last significant alchemical text in China; cited in late-Ming sources, it discusses a variety of metals and minerals, outlining their alchemical application in some detail. (2) The *Dijing tu* 地鏡圖 (Earth Mirror Charts) is a manual on mining and geobotanical prospecting, first mentioned in the bibliographic chapter of the *Suishu* 隋書 and thus going back to the sixth century; reconstructed in 1778, it gives indications on how to spot different kinds of jade, gold, silver, lead, and other treasures. (3) The *Zaohua zhinan* 造化指南 (Guide to the Creation of Things) probably goes back to the early fourteenth century; it describes key alchemical metals and minerals in their more cosmological dimensions. (4) The *Waidan bencao* 外丹本草 (Pharmacopoeia of Operative Alchemy) by Cui Fang 崔防 (eleventh century) provides similar information as well as a postscript with

biographical anecdotes on the author and a poem attributed to Wei Boyang 魏伯陽. (5) The *Baozanglun* 寶藏論 (Discourse on the Precious Treasury [of the Earth]) comes in three different versions dated to between the tenth and thirteenth centuries; they each describe different types of cinnabar, gold, and other alchemical ingredients. (6) The *Dantailu* 丹臺錄 (Record of the Alchemical Laboratory) goes back to Qingxiazi 青霞子, a name associated with two major masters, one from the sixth, the other from the tenth century; its rather sketchy fragments briefly outline major ingredients.

Chapter 5, "General Discussions," takes up various issues related to Daoist alchemy, its understanding and practice. They range from the more magical and cosmological dimensions of alchemy through terminology and geography to questions of intercultural contact. The book concludes with two appendices: "Proto-chemistry in the Pharmacopoeia" and "Extracts from al-Biruni's Pharmacopoeia with Added Commentaries," expanding the scope of the inquiry into dimensions beyond Daoism and Daoist literature. In addition, the work provides a comprehensive glossary of common Chinese alchemical terms as well as a list of plants with their various names and properties found in the texts presented in Chapter 2. An extensive bibliography and detailed index conclude the volume.

Based on solid scholarship in both the natural sciences and history of religions, this collection of articles by Ho Peng Yoke makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Daoist alchemy. It presents important materials, both from within the Canon and beyond, in their original wording and with careful examination of their provenance, editorial history, and traditional relevance. The scholarship is impeccable and the work most essential—providing access to materials otherwise hidden in the nebulous realm of Daoist alchemy and encouraging scholars to engage more actively in the interdisciplinary examination of traditional sources.