

ALAIN ARRAULT, *A History of Cultic Images in China: The Domestic Statuary of Hunan*. Translated by Lisa Verchery. Hong Kong / Paris: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press / École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2020. 200 pages, US\$60.00. ISBN 978-988-237-105-7 (hb)

This book is an important contribution towards the as yet unwritten history of cultic statues in China. Like most scholars, Arrault sees the advent of Buddhism from the 2nd century CE onwards as a crucial moment, introducing anthropomorphic statuary and ritual traditions of consecration in order to make the divine statues come alive. One might add that there already existed a much older tradition of making representations of humans in China. When placed in graves, such images serve the deceased and even take on their post-mortem punishment instead. Outside the grave they are used to represent a specific person in rituals of healing or harming. These figurines do not serve as an object of worship and they never resemble the persons they represent. In rituals, the connection is made by writing a name on the effigy and/or attaching a birthdate or some part of the person's body, such as hair or nails.

The statues analysed in this book were not collected through fieldwork, but stem from private or museum collections. The French photographer-filmmaker-sinologist Patrice Fava first discovered them on the Beijing art market and his collection forms the core of the materials studied by Alain Arrault. An important task for the author therefore was to reconstruct their socio-religious context, for which he created a detailed database of the more than 3000 statues. One unique feature is that these statues often contain written materials that identify them and list the names of their sponsors and sculptors. As Arrault (pp. 14–16, 19, 20) points out, the oldest known such statue (now in a Chinese private collection) dates back to 1594, and the majority come from the three counties of Anhua, Ningxiang and Xinhua westward of modern Changsha. They reflect a ritual culture also identified as *Meishan* (梅山) that covers southwestern China and is similar to the *Lüshan* (閩山) ritual culture in the Fujianese regions.

The author stresses that the statues came from domestic altars and not from communal temples (pp. 25ff). The physical appearance of the altars is discussed at the end of the book (pp. 148–156). I would have liked a brief comparison with communal statues. Certainly most of the Hunan statues have a connection to the religious world beyond the household. They include national deities such as Guan Yu (關羽), but more importantly the Kitchen God and his wife. Such statues often end up on the domestic altar because of a personal connection between the family and the deity, such as a pilgrimage or support during illness. Unfortunately, the book's discussions of individual deities are not always in line with current scholarship. For instance, rather than during the late Ming (pp. 37–38), Guan Yu was already widely worshipped long before and several temples are attested locally by the early 14th century.

Discussed next are local deities. The reader learns a lot about long-term connections between statues and worshippers, local history as remembered in later stories and ritual traditions. The deities described in this section are predominantly martial figures. One of them had actively fought bandits during his lifetime (pp. 50, 53) and others are known for their exorcist prowess (pp. 53ff). For the ritual masters who worshipped these figures, they were allies in ritual performances.

In the section on ancestors, Alain Arrault argues that the examined statues show that ancestral worship was not limited to the worship of tablets with names written on them. While I agree, these ancestral statues often hold ritual objects (pp. 68ff) and/or contain a consecration document that clearly indicates that the people they represent have been initiated as (lower level) ritual specialists. Thus, they are so much more than ancestors embodying a family line, but powerful figures on a par with ordinary deities. Unlike tablets they can intercede with the supernatural world on the worshippers' behalf. In some cases described in the book I would have been much more sceptical of the historical narrative. It is quite common to claim "Great Ancestors" on the basis of a shared family name to create a link with the hallowed Yellow River plains as the land of origin of Sinitic culture. More plausible are ancestors from nearby (pp. 78ff). These were selected to intercede on behalf of the sponsor(s) of the statues for a specific health benefit (e.g., pp. 79, 85–86, 89–90, 127–128, 129–130, 144) or to celebrate the initiation of the deceased into a higher order (e.g., pp. 80–85, 86–87, 89). As a result, they are much more than regular objects of ancestor worship, but have become deities.

A substantial group of statues consists of the Masters, mostly extra-family figures who were the ritual teachers of the sponsors. To some extent this category overlaps with the earlier category of local deities, who were also martial figures or exorcist masters, but were then more personally connected to the sponsor in terms of ritual transmission.

Compared to the detailed analysis of the statues, Arrault's discussion of the ritual traditions is relatively concise (pp. 103–120 and 157–160). For more detailed discussions we can consult the work of David J. Mozina (*Knotting the Banner*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2021) and others that are still forthcoming. In my opinion, the very fact that these traditions are so important in the documents indicates that these were not purely domestic altars, but had a much broader ritual context. The book's relative lack of background in the ritual aspects does produce some problems: I wonder, for example, whether the name of the ritual tradition of the "Sovereign of the Origin" or *Yuanhuang* (元皇, pp. 112–116) was not originally "Dark Sovereign" or *Xuanhuang* (玄皇). Xuan was an imperial taboo character because of the personal name of the Kangxi Emperor Xuanye (玄燁), which meant that the character was often replaced by *yuan* throughout the Qing pe-

riod. Related to this is the translation “Zhang Zhao the second Lord” for 張趙二郎 (pp. 114–115), which surely means “the two Lords Zhang and Zhao”. According to David Mozina (see above, pp. 179–180), the ritual specialist first takes on the body of the first Celestial Master (i.e., Zhang Daoling 張道陵) and then the even more powerful Dark Emperor (Xuandi 玄帝, called Yuandi 元帝 during the Qing), who was named Zhao Gongming (趙公明). “Dark Sovereign” and “Dark Emperor” are essentially synonyms. It made good sense to name one’s ritual tradition after this figure.

In addition to the elaborate consecration documents, the statues contain a variety of objects to represent a life force (e.g., medical substances, but unlike elsewhere no dead insects) as well as life in a more literal sense (organs out of silk). Interesting (and new to this reviewer) is the medical discussion of the various healing substances, which might also explain why these statues can be used in praying for health (pp. 130–139).

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, which will provide an excellent starting point to the religious culture of the western part of the Hunan region. Even despite the above mentioned weaknesses, it is a marvelous book. It is well translated, richly illustrated and deals in extensive detail with the domestic statuary of Western Hunan. It is part of a series of books that have already come out or will come out very soon on the religious culture of the region, putting it on the map in the same way that earlier scholarship elucidated the religious culture of Taiwan and parts of Fujian.

Barend ter Haar

USHA SANYAL, *Scholars of Faith: South Asian Muslim Women and the Embodiment of Religious Knowledge*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020. 409 pages, 10 illustrations, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-1901-2080-1

The existing scholarship on madrasas in South Asia, which investigates the socio-political aspects of these religious schools, is mostly based on madrasas for male students. Madrasas in South Asia are a parallel system of education for learning about Islam. The subjects one may study include the Qur’an, Islamic theology, Islamic jurisprudence and worship rituals, among others. During the last three decades women’s madrasas have become so popular that they now outnumber those for men¹ – a trend that is linked to increasing literacy among women.

The book *Scholars of Faith* by Usha Sanyal takes up this new development and provides a highly welcome addition to the research on madrasas by providing a

1 According to the official website of the largest madrasa examination board in Pakistan, <http://www.wifaqulmadaris.org> (accessed 15 October 2021).