



Stele-statues and Manuscripts: Exploring the Buddho-Daoist Stelae of the Northern Dynasties

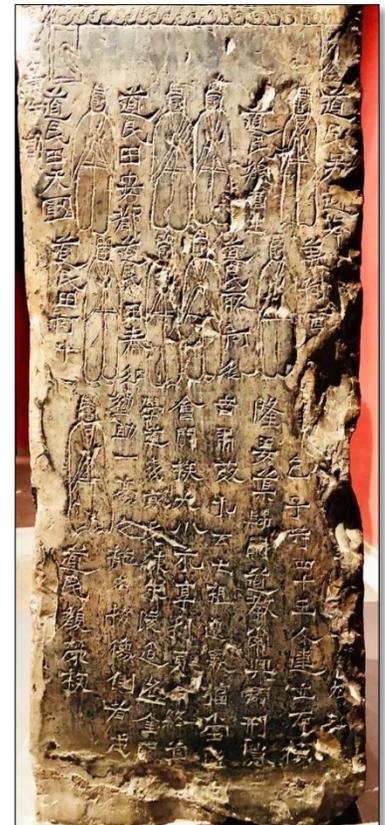
Gil Raz · Dartmouth College

For a century, between the late 5th and late 6th centuries, new religious communities appeared in north China that consisted of Buddhist and Daoist adherents. These communities erected stelae engraved with images of the Buddha and of Lord Lao and inscribed with votive texts that merge Buddhist and Daoist discourse, motivations, and aspirations.

The Daoist images on these stelae are the earliest anthropomorphic images of Lord Lao, the personification of the Dao. This marked a major shift in Daoist practice that counters the hitherto aniconic Daoist ritual that was based on the fundamental notion of the ineffability of the Dao.

Moreover, the votive inscriptions, that cite the *Daodejing* as well as medieval Daoist scriptures, reveal that the creators of these stelae were fully aware of the controversial theological implications of this practice.

The first part of this presentation will introduce the stelae as visual and material objects and discuss the development of anthropomorphic imagery in Daoist ritual practice. The second part of the presentation will explore the textual sources of some votive inscriptions, revealing the creative use of medieval Daoist scriptures. These explorations will also alert us to crucial differences between canonical Daoist texts and Dunhuang manuscripts. Intriguingly, exploring the Buddho-Daoist stela inscriptions will allow us to reconsider the manuscript culture of medieval China.



April 8, 2022, 4:30 – 6:30 pm

Faculty House, 64 Morningside Drive, Columbia University

*please check the announcement board in the first floor lobby for room information

Seminar Co-Chairs:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University