

The Illumination of Ritual: Lu Xiujing's Reflections on the Retreat

Franciscus Verellen
(École Française d'Extrême-Orient)

Lu Xiujing's 陸修靜 (406-477) exceptional contributions to the history of Taoism have long been recognized, especially in three areas: his reform of the Heavenly Master community, his organization of the first Taoist canon, and his patronage of the recent Lingbao scriptural corpus 靈寶經 (ca. AD 400) together with its new, Buddhist-influenced liturgy. A seemingly staunch defender of the early Heavenly Master church, Lu's views on religious practice in his time embraced not only the new Taoist revelations of the Shangqing 上清 and Lingbao scriptures, but also the mounting Chinese enthusiasm for the beliefs and rituals of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Thanks to the patriarch's recorded instructions to his disciples and the Taoist community in fifth-century southern China, we are able to form a vivid appreciation of his religious convictions and personality. Lu's sermons, especially, preserve the intimacy of his private pronouncements prior to performing the Retreat 齋 ritual. The present paper, besides offering a synopsis of Lu's extant oeuvre, will focus on the patriarch's teachings on the purpose and meaning of the Retreat, the rules for performing it, and the spiritual preparation required of its practitioners.