

LAUGHING AT THE TAO

Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China

LIVIA KOHN



In the early centuries after the introduction of Buddhism to China, the new religion had to come to terms with the worldview of the Confucian elite, the inherent Chinese sense of ethnic superiority, and China's indigenous higher religion of Taoism. The *Xiaodao lun* (Laughing at the Tao) is an important document of the debates among Buddhists and Taoists, debates that contributed to the process of cultural adaptation. Written by the Taoist renegade Zhen Luan in the year 570, this text aims to expose the absurdity and inconsistency of Taoist doctrine, mythology, ritual, and religious practice.


In a complete and fully annotated translation of the *Xiaodao lun*, Livia Kohn draws on rich Japanese scholarship to place the work within the context of the debates and expose the political schemes behind the apparently religious disputes. Richly informed and highly relevant to an understanding of medieval China, Kohn's work greatly enhances the study of medieval Buddhist and Taoist myth, rhetoric, and ideology.

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—Kenneth DeWoskin, University of Michigan
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