

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft  
**Band:** 65 (2011)  
**Heft:** 4

**Buchbesprechung:** Rezensionen = Comptes rendus = Reviews

**Autor:** [s.n.]

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 04.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## REZENSIONEN / COMPTES RENDUS / REVIEWS

JÜLCH, Thomas: *Die apologetischen Schriften des buddhistischen Tang-Mönchs Falin* with an English Summary. München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2011 (Sprach und Literaturwissenschaften Band 37). 690 S., ISBN 978-3-8316-4026-3.

This book, a slightly revised PhD thesis written in German, presents a discussion and translation of a large part of the apologetic writings of the Buddhist monk Falin 法林 (572–640). Falin was an acclaimed leader of the Buddhist community in the capital of the early Tang dynasty, at a time when the competition between Daoism and Buddhism for influence at court was at its height. Different from most other early medieval Buddhists, he is renowned not as a master specialized on a doctrinal issue or text, but as an apologist, possibly the greatest apologist in Buddhism's long history in China.

Buddhist apologetics found the attention of scholars interested in the reception of Buddhism in China very early (e.g. PELLLOT, 1903), and many of the primary texts have been studied.<sup>1</sup> However, Falin's voluminous but difficult works have so far been largely ignored. Thus the present study fills a gap in the study of Buddhist apologetics.

The book consists of two main parts: an analytical section of 120 pages, and an extensive translation, presenting Chinese text and annotated translations of the complete *Poxie lun* 破邪論 ("Treatise Destroying the Evil") T 2109, and six of the twelve sections of the *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 ("Treatise Discussing the Correct") T 2110, namely sections 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (contained in *juan* 卷 1, 2, 5 and 6) in more than 500 pages. An English summary of the analytical section and an extensive bibliography, but no index, complete the book.

The focus of Jülch's analysis is Falin's apologetic argumentation in relation to earlier apologetics and to later Buddhist historiography of the Tang dynasty.

A short discussion of the attitude and politics vis-à-vis Buddhism of the first two Tang emperors and a discussion of Falin's life and works with emphasis on the immediate background of the genesis of his apologetic essays introduces the historical context. Falin's main Daoist opponents are presented

1 Bibliographical details of the many studies can be found in the bibliography of the book under review.

with their arguments against Buddhism. Overall, these introductory chapters summarize relevant research from German, English, Japanese, and Chinese secondary sources.

The main part of the analysis then focuses on two research questions: the relation of Falin's apologetic arguments to previous apologetic writings, and "intertextual relations of Falin's writings and later Buddhist historiographical writings" (p. 3), attempting to investigate "Falin's influence on later Buddhist historiography" (p. 646).

A three page summary of the "position of Buddhism in the subsequent intellectual history of China" (p. 114), offering a cursory overview of the development of Buddhist apologetics in the Song and Ming, and an equally short conclusion complete the analytic section. An appendix lists the citations from the Apocrypha in Falin's two texts.

Addressing the positioning of Falin in reference to earlier apologetic writings, the author presents the arguments of the earlier apologetic tradition in China and then relates Falin's arguments to them. He distinguishes three "strata" of Buddhist apologetics: a "main stratum" ("Hauptstratum"), the scope of which was the political and ideological positioning of Buddhism in the competition for imperial patronage (p. 30), apologetics related to the defence of the independence of the Buddhist sangha, and those related to the debate on the immortality of the soul.

Jülch extracts from the earlier apologetic texts those arguments which he identifies as part of the main stratum and organizes them in three sub-groups: First, arguments aiming to fit Buddhism into a Confucian worldview, including answers to the Confucian vision of history and attempts to draw parallels between Confucian and Buddhist ethics; second, arguments that intend to show Buddhism is superior to Confucianism, and third, arguments that endeavor to prove that Buddhism is superior to Daoism. The arguments are presented together with the anti-Buddhist arguments they answered to. Numbered references allow the reader to compare these earlier arguments with Falin's arguments discussed later on.

While the reconstructions of the anti-Buddhist arguments are cited often from secondary studies, most of the Buddhist apologetic arguments are substantiated by citations in translation with accompanying Chinese text, mostly excerpted from Sengyou's 僧佑 (445–518) *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (Collection on Expanding the Light) T 2102 and its sequel, Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Continuation of the Collection on Expanding the Light) T 2103.



Next follows a section with a synopsis of the contents and a discussion of the structure of Falin's *Poxie lun* and *Bianzheng lun*, including some remarks on their commentaries and an explanation of the author's own complex technical organization of the texts in the translation.

Falin's arguments are then presented in the frame of the earlier apologetic argumentation, showing where Falin drew on existing arguments, and where he added new elements. A separate chapter discusses the reinterpretation of source texts and the reception of manipulated source texts. Lastly, text-critical issues and questions regarding the transmission of the texts are raised as far as they concern the immediate needs of the translation.

Overall, the author documents in this section, how Falin's apologetic writings are situated squarely in what he identifies as "main stratum" of apologetic argumentation, which aimed at a "political-ideological" positioning of Buddhism (p. 30).

Jülch's second research focus is the question of "Falin's influence upon later Buddhist historiography" (p. 649). He addresses it with detailed tabulated listings of inter-textual dependency of *Bianzheng lun* and *Poxie lun* as well as "historiographical materials on Falin's biography" (p. 102), namely the *Tang hufa shamen falin biezhuàn* 唐護法沙門法林別傳 (Alternative Biography of the Dharma Protecting [i.e. Apologist] Monk Falin from the Tang) T 2051, written by Yancong 彥琮 (active in Chang'an ~ 649–688), Falin's biography in Daoxuan's *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Sequel to the Biographies of Eminent Monks) T 2061, and "other Buddhist-historiographic writings" (p.107), intending Daoxuan's *Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡 (Critical Evaluation of Buddhism and Daoism Past and Present) T 2104, and its sequel, *Xu Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng* 續集古今佛道論衡 (Continued Critical Evaluation of Buddhism and Daoism) T 2105 by Zhisheng 智昇 (669–740). The inter-textual overlaps documented show that these texts in fact do depend on Falin's writings or on shared source texts.

However, the claim that this traces Falin's "influence upon later Buddhist historiography" (p. 649) is somewhat misleading, because it seems to introduce a distinction between *historiographic* writings of Yancong, Daoxuan, and Zhisheng, on the one hand, and *apologetic* texts, on the other. While Yancong and Daoxuan are rightly praised as eminent Buddhist historiographers, their writings, at the same time, have a strong apologetic flavor. In fact, early Buddhist historiography emerged in the context of apologetics (SCHMIDT-GLINTZER, 1982: 5). Daoxuan and Yancong belonged to the same group of Buddhist clergy in the capital, whose leader had been Falin until 640. The

competition of Buddhism and Daoism for imperial patronage in the capital continued throughout the Tang dynasty (ASSANDRI, 2004: 142–145; BENN, 1977: 33ff; FORTE, 1976). Like Falin, Yancong, Daoxuan, and Zhisheng all wrote in a time and environment where Buddhism had to defend its stand against Confucian and Daoist teachings. Yancong's writings include, apart from his Falin biography, also the *Ji shamen buying baisu deng shi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 (Record of [Debates] on the Fact that Clerics Should not Bow to the Lay) T 2108, an apologetic text in defence of the independence of the Buddhist sangha. Also Daoxuan's *Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng* (T 2104) is apologetic (ASSANDRI, 2004). Thus it seems to this reviewer that the inter-textual overlaps between Falin's texts and other "Buddhist historiographic" texts of the early and mid Tang dynasty underscore the close relation of Buddhist apologetics and Buddhist historiography at the time rather than document "Falin's influence on later Buddhist historiography." However, this technical quibble does not detract from the value of this study as for its introducing the long neglected and difficult writings of Falin to a Western readership.

Scholars interested in early medieval and Tang dynasty religion and thinking will greatly appreciate this first annotated translation in a Western language (German). The choice to present the translation side by side with the Chinese text is to be commended, as it allows the researcher eventually to form his own opinion on difficult passages. The style of writing and annotations are those of a PhD thesis, including copious references to dictionary entries. Thus, this book is not an "easy read;" it is written for a specialized academic readership.

As Jülch convincingly documents, Falin does represent the apex of Buddhist apologetics. In addition, Falin's writings are of crucial importance for our understanding of many other unexplored aspects of early Tang dynasty religion, not the least of them Daoism. Falin's exceptionally broad education is reflected in the range of texts he adduces to substantiate his arguments. In addition to the Classics, literary and historical texts, he is one of the very few non-ordained Daoists of his times<sup>2</sup> who actually cites not only the *Daode jing* 道德經, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and similar philosophical texts, but also sacred Daoist scriptures which were generally imparted only to the initiated. Falin had converted to Daoism during the Sui dynasty for about a year, and in this time he must have gained access also to the esoteric scriptures of the Daoists. The secrecy with which most Daoist scriptures were guarded in early medieval times has pre-

2 The only other exception was the official Zhen Luan 甄鸞, who had been ordered by Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou in 570 to evaluate the Daoist scriptures. See KOHN 1995.



vented Daoist authors from citing them in non-esoteric writings or in public debates (ASSANDRI, 2005: 434). There are indications that the Daoists self-censored many of their own scriptures shortly after Falin's lifetime, when strict esoterism proved increasingly untenable, eliminating obvious borrowings from Buddhist texts (ASSANDRI, 2009: 45).<sup>3</sup> Therefore Falin's works are also a valuable source for the study of early medieval Daoism.

In this respect, this study, and in particular the translation, rather than being a "last word" on Buddhist apologetics, is a "first step," and a very significant one, opening up new and promising source texts for the research of Tang dynasty religion.

## References

ASSANDRI, Friederike

2004 "Die Debatten zwischen Daoisten und Buddhisten in der frühen Tang-Zeit und die Chongxuan-Lehre des Daoismus." PhD thesis Heidelberg 2002. Ann Arbor: Proquest, UMI, Microfilms, No. 3111333.

2005 "Understanding Double Mystery: Daoism in Early Tang as Mirrored in the FDLH (T 2104) and *Chongxuanxue*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32.3: 427–440.

2009 *Beyond the Daode jing: Twofold Mystery Philosophy in Tang Daoism*. Magdalena: Three Pines Press.

BENN, Charles D.

1977 "Taoism as Ideology in the Reign of Emperor Hsüan-Tsung (712–755)." PhD. thesis, University of Michigan.

FORTE, Antonino

1976 *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the 7th Century. Inquiry into the Nature, Authors, Function of the Dunhuang Document S.6502, Followed by an Annotated Translation*. Napoli: Instituto Universitario Orientale, Seminario di Studii Asiatici.

KOHN, Livia

1995 *Laughing at the Tao*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- 3 A detailed analysis of Falin's citations of Daoist scriptures, including those in the sections of *Bianzheng lun* that are not translated in this book, and their relation to extant scriptures in the *Daozang* 道藏 and to citations of such scriptures in Zhen Luan's *Xiao Dao lun* 笑道論 (in T 2103), might shed some light on this issue.

PELLIOT, Paul

1903 “Les Mo-ni et le Houa-hou-king”. *BEFEO* 3: 318–327.

SCHMIDT-GLINTZER, Helwig

1982 *Die Identität der buddhistischen Schulen und die Kompilation buddhistischer Universalgeschichten in China*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Friederike Assandri