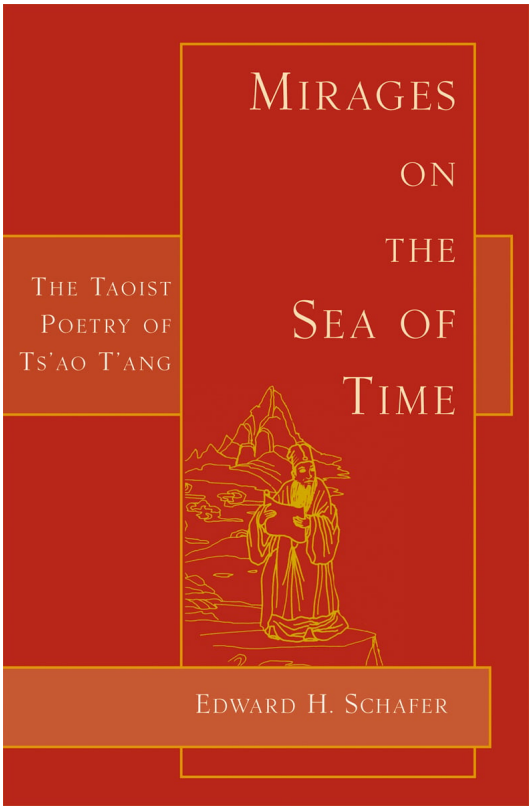
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Mirages on the Sea of Time

The Taoist Poetry of Ts'ao T'ang

Edward H. Schafer

ISBN	9781891640452
Publisher	Floating World Editions
Binding	Paperback / softback
Territory	USA & Canada
Size	6.29 in x 9.11 in
Pages	164 Pages
Price	$40.00

- All surviving verse of the enigmatic ninth-century poet, with introductory remarks on the source of his imagery and short essays on his treatment of figures of the Taoist pantheon

Since the early seventeenth century, Taoism – the native religion of China – has been generally regarded by authorities there as base superstition and potentially subversive. The Taoist poetry of medieval China was consequently ignored by Chinese arbiters of taste and, until recently, most Western scholars and translators have accepted this judgment uncritically; a body of beautiful verse, with analogs in the poetry of Christian mysticism, has remained virtually unknown in our time. This book augments the efforts of a few contemporary Western scholars to recover the meaning and value of this literary heritage. The eminent sinologist Edward H. Shafer translated all the surviving verse of the ninth-century poet Ts'ao T'ang, and to the selections published here has added introductory remarks on the source of the poet's imagery and short essays on his treatment of figures of the Taoist pantheon. Ts'ao T'ang has placed these deities in celestial gardens, sparkling palaces on the summits of sacred mountains, and secret places of rendezvous on magic islands in the eastern sea. The poet creates a world of illusions, in which it is difficult to distinguish vestments from rainbows, castles from crags, birds from spirits, sea-waves from sea-mounts – even lords from ladies. These contrived wonders are all metaphors for a world completely inaccessible to our mortal senses.

Published 29th Jun 2010