Conforming to the Cosmos: Esoteric Daoist Lifewriting and Official Biography in Early China

Friday, March 30, 2012 1:30 Hagerty Hall 0050

This presentation will examine several genres of lifewriting in pre-modern China through. First, it will discuss the esoteric hagiography of the Daoist “perfected,” Lord Pei (Peijun zhuan) from the Seven Tallies of the Cloudy Satchel, a Song Daoist collection, and will address both the esoteric instructions for transcendence found in the text and the way in which the biographical narrative reflects this transcendence. It will then address the official biography of Wang Dao (276-339) from the History of the Jin, an early Tang dynasty historical work, and examine the narrative of state sanctioned historiography as a form of hagiography.

Matthew Wells is Assistant Professor of Chinese Language and Culture and Director of Chinese Studies at the University of Kentucky. He is the author of To Die and Not Decay: Autobiography and the Pursuit of Immortality in Early China as well as several critical biographies of key figures in early medieval literature and several articles on the field of lifewriting in early China. This talk is part of a study that examines diverse genres of lifewriting in early China such as biography, hagiography,

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