

Colour a collection:

ANU Library rare books



Featuring images from one of the oldest Chinese titles
in the ANU Library's rare books collection

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The Australian National University Library holds rich and diverse historic collections that are significant not only for their rarity, but for the continued impact they have on research and researchers worldwide.

Coinciding with the Library's exhibition of two Chinese texts from the [Xu Dishan Collection](#), the Library has created a colouring book featuring images from *Laojun bashiyi huatu* or *Lord Lao's Eighty One Transformations, Illustrated* 老君八十一化图.

According to University Librarian, Roxanne Missingham, the colouring book is an example of how a rare Chinese text can be used in a new and unique way.

"The Library's historic collections open up a world of traditional research possibilities to researchers the world round, but we encourage students and researchers to see the not-so-obvious ways these items can be used".

Director of the Australian Centre on China in the World, Dr. Benjamin Penny, has used *Laojun bashiyi huatu* in his research over many years.

"The edition on display is an illustrated hagiography of Laozi showing his supposed eighty-one interventions in human form in the life of the world. The text gained fame in the disputations between Buddhists and Taoists during the Yuan Dynasty and was destroyed after the proscription of all Taoist books bar the Daode jing. As a result, no version of this text exists in the Taoist Canon. The particular notoreity of the Eighty One Transformations was due largely to its explicit claim that the Buddha was but one of the transformations of Laozi.

"It begins with the three images of Laozi and a picture of an inscribed stela reading "Long live the emperor". This is followed by sixteen pages depicting thirty one Taoist patriarchs, many from the centuries immediately preceding the book's composition. Then follow the depictions of the eighty one transformations themselves, each accompanied by a short text. In the famous 34th illustration, Laozi transform Yin Xi into a Buddha and sends him to explain the Sutra in Forty Two Sections to the Hu barbarians. The final illustrated transformation is dated to 1098.

"The precise origins of the Eighty One Transformations is murky, and the question of whether surviving texts claiming to be the original can authentically make that claim is unclear. There are descriptions of four extant editions of this text — one in Berlin (1598), two in Japan and one in Liaoning (1532). The edition exhibited here and held by the ANU Library is credited to the Ma'nao publishing house and is undated," said Dr. Penny.

Images are taken from

Title: Lao jun ba shi yi hua tu shuo (老君八十一化圖說)

Place of Publication: [Hangzhou杭州]

Publisher: Ma nao jing fang yin zao liu tong (瑪瑙經房印造流通)

Publishing date: [1891]

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