



Invité par l'assemblée du Collège de France
sur proposition de la professeure Anne CHENG

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Authenticity, Authentication and Transmutation in Late Classical and Early Medieval China

Dans le cadre du séminaire « Autour de l'authenticité : lectures, réflexions, discussions ».

Amphithéâtre Salle Jacques Glowinski — de 14 h à 15 h

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “authenticity” has a complex etymology and history with at least three distinct threads of meaning: (1) “reliable, trustworthy, or entitled to acceptance” (implying that it’s partly a matter of social reception); (2) “real, actual, or genuine” (i.e. a property inherent in the thing itself); (3) “really proceeding from its reputed author” (i.e. a matter of a thing’s relationship to its source). When it comes to an animistic worldview such as that found in China ca. 300 BCE to 800 CE, where beings and even “objects” were assumed capable of transmutation across species lines, the ambiguities of authenticity only multiplied. Things could become other sorts of things, partially or completely. Beings that began as members of one kind could morph into—or could be perceived and treated by others as—members of another kind. In such a society, methods for *authentication* necessarily proliferated. I will present textual passages illustrating these and related points. The passages will be drawn from several genres, including anecdotes, hagiographies, essays, philosophical works, writings on methods of self-cultivation, and Daoist and Buddhist scriptures.

Illustration : *Immortals Riding Dragons: Section of a Tomb Pediment*, Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), 1st century, China. Art Institute of Chicago .Domaine public.