

## **Abstract**

The dissertation focuses on the texts of a religious movement known as Tianshidao (the Way of the Celestial Masters) from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Tianshidao is presented as a multifaceted tradition that should not be reduced by a predefined essence or a teleological vision of history. Instead of reconstructing one coherent cosmology, the author interprets the texts as representing various alternative cosmologies. They are compared according to the theory of *cultural bias* of Mary Douglas, in terms of *grid* and *group*. Special attention is paid to the employment of the *bureaucratic imagery* and the *representations of time* which are interpreted in the context of the cultural bias and the various modes of relationship towards the institutions of Tianshidao and the state. The author also analyses the millennialist character of the movement which was noted by previous research and distinguishes between various types of millennialism.

## **Key words**

Tianshidao, Daoism, Early-Medieval China, cosmology, millennialism.