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The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions

Edited by

Randall L. Nadeau

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Dedicated to Professor Daniel L. Overmyer, inspiring teacher and mentor,
pioneering scholar—sinological studies "from the ground up."

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Notes on Contributors

Joshua Capitanio is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of the West. He is a scholar of Chinese religions, with an emphasis on issues related to ritual theory and practice during the Tang and Song Dynasties. His current research is focused on interactions between Buddhism and indigenous Chinese religious traditions such as Daoism, particularly in the realms of ritual and meditative practice. He has been a fellow at Peking University and conducted advanced graduate research there. His research interests include Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, and a dictionary of medieval Chinese vernacular translated into English.

Shin-yi Chao is an associate professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Rutgers University, Camden. She has conducted research on various topics related to Daoism and popular religion in China. Her publications include *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices: Zhenwu Worship from Song to Ming (960–1644)* and articles on Chinese popular religion in traditional and modern periods, the Daoist examination system, and Daoist temple networks in early twelfth century China.

Philip Clart is professor of Chinese Culture and History at the University of Leipzig, Germany. His main research areas are popular religion and new religious movements in Taiwan, religious change in Taiwan and China, and literature and religions of the late imperial period. His monographs include *Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal* and *Die Religionen Chinas*. He has co-edited *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society* and *The People and the Dao: New Studies of Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer*. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of Chinese Religions*, *T'oung Pao*, the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, and *Ethnologies*.

Paul Copp is assistant professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. His research interests center on Chinese Buddhism in the Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern Song periods. He has recently completed a book manuscript on Buddhist incantation and amulet practice in the Tang, entitled *Incantatory Bodies: Material Incantation and Efficacy in Chinese Buddhism, 600–1000*. Currently, he is at work on a new book project on Buddhist manuscript culture in ninth and tenth century Dunhuang, as well as on smaller studies of Buddhist exegetical practice in the Tang and Northern Song.

Ryan Dunch is an associate professor of History and Chair of the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Alberta. He is the author of *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857–1927*, as well as articles and book chapters related to the past and present of Christianity in Chinese society. His principal current research focus is missionary publishing in Chinese before 1911. He serves as one of the editors of H-ASIA, an international listserv for specialists in Asian history and studies.

Stephen Eskildsen is a professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. He is the author of *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* and *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, as well as articles on Taoist mysticism and inner alchemy. His current research pertains to the sensory and physical phenomena of Taoist meditation. He offers courses on Chinese Religion and comparative mysticism and ascetic practices.

James D. Frankel is assistant professor of Religion at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His research centers on the history of Islam in China, a field that draws upon and informs his scholarly interests in the comparative history of ideas, and religious and cultural syncretism. He is the author of *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Ritual Law in Neo-Confucian China*, which examines Chinese Islamic scholarship and literature of the early Qing period. He teaches courses in Islam, comparative religion, and mysticism.

Beata Grant is professor of Chinese and Religious Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research interests include female monasticism in China, Chinese women's writing, and popular religious literature. Her articles have appeared in *Late Imperial China* and the *Journal of Chinese Religions,* and she was editor of and contributor to a special two-issue volume of *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* on the theme of religion and gender in China. Her most recent publications include *Eminent Women: Buddhist Nuns of Seventeenth-Century China* and, with Wilt. L. Idema, *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang.*

Guo Jue teaches at Western Michigan University and specializes in early China, from the Warring States period to the Han, with a focus on practice and beliefs,

particularly on a popular level that is not associated with traditional and institutionalized religions. Her research utilizes recently discovered archaeological materials including tomb objects and texts along with historically transmitted literature. She has published "Concepts of Death and the Afterlife Reflected in Newly Discovered Tomb Objects and Texts from Han China" (in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*) and is currently working on a book entitled *Facing Illness: Practices of Divination and Sacrifice in Warring States Chu China*. She teaches courses on Chinese religious traditions; thematic courses on afterlife, divination, and healing from a comparative perspective; and method and theory courses focusing on non-Western traditions.

Thomas Jansen is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David (Lampeter Campus) and director of the Confucius Institute in Lampeter. His research interests include courtly culture in early medieval China and the uses of popular religious scriptures between 1550 and 1949. He is the author of *Höfische Öffentlichkeit im frühmittelalterlichen China: Debatten im Salon des Prinzen Xiao Ziliang* and a number of articles on early medieval history and culture. Currently, he is co-editing a volume on Chinese religions and globalization since 1800.

Keith N. Knapp is professor of History and Chair of the History Department at The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina. His research centers on the articulation and transmission of Confucian values and what they disclose about the social and cultural life of China's early medieval era. He is particularly interested in moral stories, rituals, iconography, material culture, historiography, and education. He is the author of *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* and a number of articles published in journals and edited volumes on parental authority, ancestor worship, filial cannibalism, and Confucian commoners.

Louis Komjathy is assistant professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego and research associate in the Institute of Religion, Science, and Social Studies at Shandong University. He is also founding co-director of the Center for Daoist Studies and founding co-chair of the Daoist Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion. He has published three books: *Title Index to Daoist Collections*; *Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*; and *Handbooks for Daoist Practice*.

Mark Meulenbeld is assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. His research focuses on the interaction between the institutional tradition of Daoism and local religious traditions in various Chinese regions. In order to explore this interactive relationship, he uses a wide variety of sources, ranging from literature and historiography to ritual manuals and material culture. He is currently finishing his first book manuscript, entitled *Rethinking the Novel: Exorcism, Community, and Vernacular Narrative in Late Imperial China*. His next project will be based on almost a decade of fieldwork in Hunan and on Taiwan.

James Miller is associate professor of Chinese Studies in the School of Religion and Cultural Studies Program at Queen's University, Canada. His sinological work has focused on the medieval Daoist religious movement known as the Way of Highest Clarity. More broadly he researches the ways in which religions imagine human relations with the natural world and influence human behavior toward the natural environment. He has published four books on these topics, including, most recently, *The Way of Highest Clarity: Nature, Vision and Revelation in Medieval China.*

Randall Nadeau is Chair of the Department of Religion and Professor of East Asian Religions at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. He has published research on popular religious literature, deity cults, and folk religion in both China and Japan, as well as methodology in the study of religion, as applied especially to Buddhism and popular religious movements. His book on *Confucianism and Taoism* treats these two major religions as aspects of a single religious tradition. He is currently working on a book on religions of India, China, and Japan as philosophical and ritual responses to contemporary global concerns. He offers courses on Chinese and Japanese religions, and approaches to the study of religion. In the past two years he has lectured on theory and method in the study of religion at eight Chinese universities.

Mario Poceski is associate professor of Buddhist studies and Chinese Religions at the University of Florida. He has studied at the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as Komazawa University, Japan, Stanford University, and the National University of Singapore. A specialist in the history of Chinese Buddhism, his latest book is *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism*. His publications also include two other books and a number of articles and chapters on various aspects of Buddhist studies. Presently he is writing a book that surveys the history of Chinese religions, editing a volume on East and Inner Asian Buddhism, and working on several projects on Chinese Buddhist literature and history.

Gil Raz is associate professor of Religion at Dartmouth College. He has conducted three years of field work in Taiwan, working closely with a Daoist priest. His research ranges from medieval Chinese religion to contemporary Daoist practice. His book *Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* examines the appearance and development of Daoism in medieval China. His other publications include studies of Daoist sexual practice, the interface between divination and Daoist ritual, and the theory of ritual. He is currently completing a book manuscript that examines the formation of the Daoist religious tradition between the second and fifth centuries CE. He offers courses on Chinese Daoism, Buddhism, and apocalyptic literature.

Julius N. Tsai is a foreign service officer with the United States Department of State. His research areas have included ritual action and ritual change; religious biographies; the formation of religious identity; secrecy in religions; and the relationship

between religion and empire. His current research explores Daoist geomantic practices as part of a larger inquiry into ritual efficacy in China.

Jimmy Yu is Sheng Yen Assistant Professor of Chinese Buddhist Studies in the Department of Religion at Florida State University. His research interests center on the cultural history of Buddhism and Chinese religions, including the history of the body, material culture, scholarly representations of Chan/Zen Buddhism, and popular religious movements within the broader context of fifteenth to seventeenth century China. His forthcoming book, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500–1700*, features four distinct extreme bodily practices that cross religious and sectarian boundaries. His second book project is on the formation of a new Chan Buddhist lineage of Dharma Drum Mountain and the thought of Sheng Yen, who was one of the leading figures of contemporary Chinese Buddhism.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Randall Nadeau, Trinity University

Chinese Dynastic History

Mythic and Prehistorical Period	
Xia	c. 2200–c. 1600 BCE
Shang	c. 1600–c. 1100 BCE
Classical Period	
Zhou	c. 1100–249 BCE
Western Zhou	
Eastern Zhou	
Spring and Autumn period	
Warring States period	
Imperial Period	
Qin	221–207 BCE
Han	206 BCE–220 CE
Three Kingdoms	220–589
Period of North–South Division	
Six Dynasties	
Sui	581–618
Tang	618–907
Song	960–1279
Yuan	1271–1368
Ming	1368–1643
Qing	1644–1911
Modern Period	
Republic of China	1911–
People's Republic of China	1949–

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The Study of Chinese Religion

The Western encounter with Chinese religion began with the Jesuit "conquest" of China in the sixteenth century. Prior to this, it is difficult to find any references to Chinese religion as a distinct entity, even within China itself. This is because religion—arguably all religion, but we will limit our discussion to religion in China—is indistinguishable from wider cultural elements, and its conceptual isolation is a relatively recent (and peculiarly Western) phenomenon.

The first Western missionaries saw "Chinese religion" in reference to Christianity, and identified particular cultural forms that were already familiar to them: worship practices (offerings and sacrifice), institutional organizations (housed in monasteries and temples), a spirit world (gods, ghosts, and ancestors), ethical values and philosophies (usually identified with Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism), and a textual tradition (of scriptures or holy books parallel to the scriptures of all the "great religions"). But in the late imperial and modern periods, when Western missionaries and scholars had very little access to religion as actually practiced in China, Chinese religion was identified more and more with its elite forms, and in particular with the textual traditions of the "three religions." Consequently, one of the most significant achievements of the modern study of Chinese religion was the translation of the religious classics into English, as part of Max Müller's "Sacred Books of the East" project (fifty volumes published between 1879 and 1910). Four of these volumes were dedicated to "the texts of Confucianism," all translated by the Victorian missionary scholar James Legge (1815–1897):

- Vol. 3. *The Shû King* [*Shujing*: *Book of History*]. *The religious portions of the Shih King* [*Shijing*: *Book of Odes*]. *The Hsiâo King* [*Xiaojing*: *Classic of Filial Piety*].
- Vol. 16. *The Yi King* [*Yijing*: *Book of Changes*].
- Vol. 27. *The Lî Kî* [*Liji*: *Book of History*], part 1 of 2.
- Vol. 28. *The Lî Kî*, part 2 of 2.

Some ten years earlier (1865), Legge had already translated *The Chinese Classics in Five Volumes*, including *Lunyu* (*The Analects*), *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*), and *Zhongyong* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), all attributed to Confucius; *Mengzi* (*The Book of Mencius*); and *Shijing* (the *Book of Poetry*) and *Shujing* (the *Book of History*), said to have been "edited" by Confucius.

Legge was also the translator of two volumes of "the sacred books of the East" dedicated to "the texts of Taoism":

- Vol. 39. *The Tâo the king* [*Daode jing*]. *The writings of Kwang-tze* [Zhuangzi], books I–XVII.
- Vol. 40. *The Writings of Kwang Tse*, books XVII–XXXIII, *The Thâi-Shang Tractate of Actions and their Retributions* [*Taishang ganying pian*], other Taoist texts, and the index to vols. 39 and 40.

In addition, one volume included translations by Samuel Beal (1825–1889) of Chinese Buddhist texts:

- Vol. 19. *The Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king* [*Foshuo xingcan jing*: *Sutra on the Footsteps of the Buddha*], *a Life of Buddha, by Ashvaghosha, Bodhisattva; Translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha, A. D. 420*.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of these translations on the Western understanding of Chinese culture and religion, and the scholarly legacy of James Legge in particular has been far-reaching. For one thing, it identified Chinese religion with its texts or scriptures, placing them on a par with the Holy Bible of the Western Abrahamic traditions. In addition, it canonized certain of those texts as foundational for each of the Chinese traditions. For the Confucian tradition, these were the "four books and five classics" that had been identified by the Song Dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi as the basis for the imperial examinations. For the Daoist tradition, Legge chose the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, but also included several other scattered works from the Daoist canon, some alchemical and some hagiographic. A whole generation of scholars after Legge saw the *Analects*, the *Daode jing*, and the *Zhuangzi*, in particular, as the holy books of Confucianism and Daoism, and the basis for understanding Confucianism and Daoism as religions. Even a hundred years later, the Western popular imagination equates Daoism with the mystical philosophy of the *Daode jing*.

The second generation of sinologists (from the 1930s to the Second World War) were also textual scholars. Based on translations of Chinese scriptures, classics, dynastic histories, and other canonical works, these scholars composed the first comprehensive histories of China's "three religions":

- Herbert Giles (1845–1935)
- Henri Doré (1859–1931)
- Lionel Giles (1875–1958)
- Paul Pelliot (1878–1945)
- Henri Maspero (1883–1945)
- Marcel Granet (1884–1940)
- Arthur Waley (1889–1966)
- Homer Dubs (1892–1969)
- Paul Demiéville (1894–1979)
- Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989)
- Holmes Welch (1924–1981)

Representing a more anthropological approach to the study of Chinese religion in China's late Imperial period was J. J. M. de Groot (1854–1921), professor of sinology at the University of Leiden. Though certainly well-versed in China's classical literature, which he used to contextualize what he observed on the ground, de Groot was primarily an ethnographer, and his six-volume *Religious System of China*

(1892–1910) was based upon fieldwork conducted in Amoy (present-day Xiamen) and the Fujian countryside. In a series of lectures he delivered at Hartford Theological Seminary (around 1907), he began with the religion of the people. His first lectures were on "universalistic animism," "specters," and "ancestral worship," only later turning to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Even then, his lecture on Confucianism departs significantly from a text-based approach to the tradition, with discussion of the state (or imperial) religion (albeit based partly on the Han Dynasty *Book of Rites*), of popular temple-based religion, of burial practices and ancestor worship, and of popular religious deities, their images, and their histories.

Among the anthropologists working in China in the pre-Second World War period and immediately thereafter, mention must be made of Francis Hsü (*Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, 1948) and C. K. Yang (*Religion in Chinese Society*, 1961). Hsü, a student of Bronislaw Malinowski, taught at Yunnan University, Cornell University, and Northwestern University, and conducted fieldwork in southwest China from 1940 to 1944. Yang, a professor of sociology at Lingnan University (Guangzhou), Harvard University, and the University of Pittsburgh, based his study on fieldwork conducted in the People's Republic of China from 1948 to 1951. Their two works, on the ancestral cult and on "diffused religion versus institutional religion," were landmarks in the social and anthropological study of Chinese religion in the contemporary period.

The third generation of Western-trained anthropologists were severely curtailed in their work by social and political upheaval in China, and were largely forced to conduct their ethnographic research in Taiwan (especially in the 1960s and 1970s), which was heralded as a repository of traditional Chinese culture. Nonetheless, they set the standard for ethnography of Chinese religion, with detailed studies that have now been replicated on the mainland. In addition, a number of scholars, primarily British, conducted fieldwork in Hong Kong and the New Territories during the period between the Second World War and the repatriation of Hong Kong to the mainland.

Today, scholars are trained in both sinology (textual studies) and ethnography, and combine elements of both. Leading lights of this integrated approach are Daniel Overmyer, a scholar of folk religious movements, and Kristopher Schipper, a Daoist scholar who was himself ordained as a *Zhengyi* Daoist priest. The study of Chinese religion today, especially Daoism, is multidisciplinary and tightly focused, favoring "micro-histories" of particular communities, religious movements, and contemporary religious trends.

The Traditions in the Western Imagination

The paradigm of religious identity that Western scholars have followed for generations is one of *distinct* beliefs and practices associated with *discrete* religious institutions. We tend to view "religions" in contrast with one another, such that even

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for example, despite their common origins, are seen as three distinct, often conflicting, religious traditions. This model has been extended to the "world religions," often at the peril of failing to recognize multiple religious identities, syncretistic beliefs and practices, and religious borrowing and interpenetration that is in fact more characteristic of religious life as actually practiced throughout the course of human history.

This paradigm dominates the history of Western scholarship on Chinese religion, with its conventional demarcation of "three religions" (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) and, more recently, "popular religion." Certainly, Chinese themselves—especially at the most elite institutional levels—have sometimes seen these traditions as separate entities and we can view them as such as a point of departure, but this has not been the norm for the vast majority of religious practitioners across the centuries, who have not identified themselves as "believers" of one in opposition to the other two. Indeed, if the question were posed to most Chinese, they would respond that their religious beliefs and ritual practices are informed significantly by all three traditions, and would be hard-pressed to distinguish between them. In this introduction, we will first examine how Western scholars have understood the three traditions and provide brief overviews of each; then, we will turn to the more integrative approach of this volume.

"Confucianism"

In the West, we tend to identify religious traditions with their founders. We think of Christianity as having been founded by Jesus of Nazareth, or of Islam as having been founded by the Prophet Mohammed. The word "Confucianism" suggests a tradition that was "founded" by Confucius, who lived 2500 years ago. Westerners think of "Daoism" as having been founded by Laozi, and of "authentic Buddhism" as having been founded by the Buddha. This emphasis on founders is especially problematic in the study of Chinese religion. "Confucianism," for example, does not refer simply to one man or one collection of scriptures. We now know that the ideals, values, and behaviors that we call "Confucianism" actually predated Confucius by at least a thousand years.

The English word "Confucianism" is a relatively late invention (there was no use of the term before 1687), and Confucius himself was not known in Europe until Jesuit missionaries visited China in the 1600s. The Christian missionaries saw a strong link between the cultural values that they observed among Chinese officials and the classical texts attributed to Confucius and his followers, so they named this tradition "Confucianism."

Interestingly, the word "Confucianism" does not exist in the Chinese language. This is largely because "Confucian" values and behaviors pre-date Confucius himself; Confucius' contribution was to collect, organize, and highlight the beliefs and practices that were definitive of his culture. Confucius is recorded as saying, "I transmit

but do not create. I place my trust in the teachings of antiquity." As a "transmitter" or "systematizer" of values, Confucius was certainly important, but the values and behaviors of "Confucianism" were central to Chinese culture even before the beginning of recorded history, some one thousand years before Confucius. Neither Confucius nor his followers considered the "Grand Master" to be a religious "founder."

The terms that are equivalent to "Confucianism" in Chinese are *Ru jia*, *Ru jiao*, and *Ru xue*—the *Ru* school, the *Ru* tradition, and *Ru* studies. In Confucius' time, the *Ru* were "scholars," but at a much earlier time (1000 BCE or before), the Chinese character *Ru* referred to religious priests or shamans who were ritual experts—masters of religious music and dance—especially skilled in summoning good spirits, exorcising evil spirits, and bringing rain and other blessings. By the time of Confucius, the *Ru* were also historians, because the shamanic rituals of the past had fallen into disuse and were known only in the historical records. Confucius was an exemplary *Ru* scholar as he was especially interested in cultural history (the history of music, dance, and other arts) and in ritual. One of his major contributions was to codify and advance the ritual traditions of the early Zhou. Consequently, "Confucianism" refers to all of the values and practices of the "*Ru* tradition," and does not refer simply to the "religion of Confucius."

Since the Rites Controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western missionaries and scholars have debated the "religious" status of the Confucian tradition, a debate that reverberated among Chinese officials and intellectuals within China. For reasons far removed from religious practice itself, these constituencies concluded that Confucianism was "not a religion" and was, therefore, depending on one's point of view, (1) compatible with Christianity or (2) "modern" or "scientific."

The Rites Controversy revolved around the efforts of Italian Jesuit missionaries, led by Europe's first sinologist, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), to Christianize China by permitting the practice of "indigenous customs" among the common people, including the veneration of ancestors and the erection of temples to Confucius. Effectively, this meant that Confucianism was "not religious" and therefore not in conflict with Catholic rites and teachings. While the Church ultimately rejected this argument (Pope Clement XI decreed in 1715 that veneration of ancestors, and of Confucius, was incompatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church, a decree that was overturned only in 1939), the precedent was set for a view of Confucianism that was "cultural" rather than "religious."

For Chinese intellectuals in the late imperial and modern period, it was especially important to cast off the "feudal past" and its "superstitions," which were blamed on Confucianism. As in the West, considerable intellectual effort was expended to divorce Confucianism from its "supernatural" elements; in particular, the efforts of Chinese intellectuals in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) to restore Confucianism to its pre-Buddhist and pre-Daoist roots (through "evidentiary scholarship" and "Han learning") were based partly on a desire to prove Confucianism's "non-religious" character.

At the popular level, the religious status of the Confucian tradition has never been in doubt, and, since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in particular, Confucian practice has been fully integrated in a wide-ranging religious system affirming the "unity of the three-in-one": a syncretic religion incorporating Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian elements. The religion of China includes temples (or halls within temples) dedicated to Confucian masters or culture heroes who manifested Confucian virtues; a value system grounded in the Confucian ethical code (encompassing filial piety, ritual propriety, honesty, integrity, loyalty, and social harmony); and a sense of cultural identity that is explicitly Confucian, with Confucius himself heralded as the "founder" of China's cultural core.

Nevertheless, among Western sinologists, the religious status of Confucianism was the first and most frequent topic of discussion, and remains an ongoing debate. On the one hand, Confucianism has a strong humanistic and naturalistic emphasis. Tu Wei-ming, a professor at Harvard and at Beijing University who is recognized as a leader of the New Confucian movement, describes the tradition as "anthropocosmic"—that is, human-centered rather than God-centered. Traditionally, Confucian intellectuals often expressed skepticism about "supernatural" events or causes, and saw in worship and sacrifice only a social benefit, in bringing communities together and reinforcing ethical norms. According to this line of argument, Confucianism represents a system of values, not a cosmology or (religious) system of beliefs. It is a philosophy, not a religion, and should be studied as such.

On the other hand, Confucianism has a rich store of ritual norms and practices, set forth first in the ritual classics of the Han Dynasty (221 BCE—220 CE), and scholars today are engaged in focused research on this ritual tradition, based upon ritual codes and manuals as well as local histories, temple steles (engraved tablets), and archeological findings (Confucian ritual as actually practiced in particular times and places). Based on this growing body of evidence, there is little doubt that "Confucianism" does represent a "religious" tradition, with a variety of cosmological views and a complex set of ritual norms and practices.

What, then, is the "*Ru* tradition," and how should "Confucianism" be defined? For Chinese, it is the general term for the *religious and ethical ideals, values, and behaviors* that have shaped Chinese culture for the past three to four thousand years. These include

- The veneration of ancestors;
- Education in history and culture (poetry, music, painting, and calligraphy);
- The cultivation, through ritual principles and rites-based behaviors, of harmonious, hierarchical relations in one's family and social life; and
- The grounding of moral teachings and ethical principles in a religious or cosmic reality.

These are "Confucian" behaviors and values in the sense that Confucians value them, not because Confucius "invented" them. They have become so much part and

parcel of Chinese thought and practice that it is not an exaggeration to say that China, from antiquity to the present, is a thoroughly Confucian culture.

"Daoism"

"Daoism" is an even more complicated term. In English, the word was coined two to three centuries after "Confucianism," appearing in book titles as "Taouism" in 1839, "Tauism" in 1855, and finally "Taoism" in 1879. The term was used to translate the Chinese *Daojia* and *Daojiao*, which mean "school of the *Dao*" and "religion of the *Dao*." ("Dao" is the modern accepted Romanization of the Chinese character that was once Romanized as "Tao.")

Until recently, Western historians of China limited "Daoism" to a school of philosophy—set out abstrusely in the *Daode jing* and elaborated by the sages Zhuangzi (dates uncertain, but he lived between 370 and 301 BCE) and Liezi (a historical figure only known by a book appearing in his name, dating anywhere from 300 BCE to 300 CE). These three thinkers were said to be the authors of a philosophy that was distinctly "anti-Confucian": rebelling against education, against government service, against the moral and ethical codes of social interaction, and against the norms and rules that govern everyday life. These Daoists advocated instead a life of "free and easy wandering" (a chapter title from *The Book of Zhuangzi*), unbounded by the norms of society, or even by the constraints of language and logic. This is one reason that these books are often so confusing—because they are meant to be! The teachings of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi are the heart of this philosophical tradition, but little is known of a Daoist religious community in this early period, if it existed at all.

Daoists themselves trace their origins to the mythical Laozi, a name meaning "Master Old" or "Old Infant," the supposed author of the *Daode jing* (*Classic of the Way and its Power*). Legends tell of personal encounters between Confucius and Laozi, so this "religious founder" is purported to have lived, like Confucius, in the Spring and Autumn period of the Zhou Dynasty (770–476 BCE). These hagiographic myths relate that, while in human form, Laozi was a recluse or hermit, disgusted with the ways of the world, only deigning to share his wisdom when departing China for the mystical mountains of the West. Beseeched by a gate-keeper at the pass that separated China from the barbarian wilderness "beyond the sands," Laozi agreed to recite his lessons in "five thousand words"—this explains why the *Daode jing* is often called in Chinese the *Five Thousand Character Classic*. According to some schools of Daoism, Laozi was a seer and magician, capable of physical self-transformation, and is now a transcendent deity or "pure spirit."

Like Confucianism, however, "Daoism" is not limited to the teachings of one sage or one book. Daoists believe that the *Dao* itself "originated" in a far more distant past: it is a cosmic "Way" (the literal meaning of "*Dao*") that formed, or began to form, before the existence of all individual "things." As the *Daode jing* relates, "Before there was a 'two' and a 'three,' there was the 'One.'" This "Cosmic One" describes the original unity of the universe, an undifferentiated energy that "gave birth" to the

"ten thousand things." The *Dao* continues to exist. In fact, it is eternally evolving or "coming into existence" and is "never complete." It is an energy that permeates the universe and can be "tapped into" as a source of health, vitality, long life, and supernatural power. The Daoist religion is a historical transmission of texts and rituals that attempt to explain, harness, create, and recreate this cosmic energy.

After the Zhou Dynasty, Daoism emerged as a vibrant religious tradition, not limited to a few abstruse philosophical texts but featuring church-like institutions, rites, and ceremonies (with hundreds if not thousands of ritual instruction manuals), a rich tradition of physical and hygienic practices with the goal of long life or immortality, a pantheon of terrestrial and celestial deities, and mythologies of those deities' lives and heavenly existence.

Of course, historians have been aware of these religious elements for a long time—and all of these beliefs and practices continue to exist—but in the past we tended to denigrate them as superstition or folk religion, not realizing that they are highly elaborate, intellectually sophisticated, and ritually complex, and not recognizing them as part of a continuous whole. "Daoism," therefore, includes much more than the teachings of Laozi and his immediate followers. It is rather a religious tradition with all the elements of a complete religious system, including a priesthood, composed primarily of ritual specialists; rituals that benefit individuals or social communities by tapping into the power of the *Dao*; and a canon of religious texts (one of the most voluminous canons in the world's religions, including hundreds of scriptures, commentaries, treatises, and manuals).

Though it is meaningful to speak about a "school of the *Dao*" (*Daojia*) before the Han Dynasty, it had no identifiable social base or institutional organization. "Religious Daoism" as an *institutional* entity did not come into existence until the Latter Han, and enjoyed its fullest development as a religious tradition in the medieval period and after. Today, for most Chinese, "Daoism" refers not simply to a "naturalistic philosophy"—though this is certainly part of it—but more comprehensively to a religious tradition of immense color and complexity, replete with a complex institutional history, ritual traditions, architectural and artistic genres, a priesthood and a monastic tradition, and both home-based and communal worship.

Daoism is covered extensively throughout this book, but its basic contours can be summarized as follows:

- The sense that reality extends beyond the observable realm, and includes spiritual power that has physical effects and manifestations but is not limited to the physical world;
- The belief in *harmony*, not only among persons but between persons, the natural world, and the cosmos;
- The practice of meditation and physical exercises that emphasize the unity of an individual's psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual identity; and
- The belief that internal and external harmony has practical benefits, from social welfare to individual health and longevity.

"Buddhism"

Western scholarship on Buddhism was dominated for centuries, arguably since the Jesuit "conquest" of China in the seventeenth century, by a paradigm of historical decline and theological inauthenticity. Matteo Ricci first made his appearance in China in the guise of a Buddhist monk, but, seeing that it was gentrified scholar-officials ("Confucians") who had greater social prestige, he soon adopted the "costume" of a Confucian intellectual. From that point on, Western scholars bought into the official Chinese view of Buddhism in the late imperial period: a religion of "foreign" provenance that contributed little of any value to the cultural history of the great empire.

Buddhism first appeared in China in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The Han saw the establishment of a political meritocracy—the assignment of positions in government bureaucracy by virtue of merit, not birth—based upon classical learning. China during the Han was the most technologically advanced, economically complex, and politically stable nation in the world. Its renown was so great that, even today, the Chinese are known as "Han people" and the Chinese language is made up of "Han characters" (pronounced *kanji* in Japanese). The Han was the first of China's great empires: its political boundaries extended as far north as modern Korea and as far south as modern Vietnam.

One effect of the Han's great power was increased contact with the outside world. It was at this time that China first encountered Buddhism. Central Asian Buddhist monks traveled to the Chinese capital, bringing their scriptures and monastic regulations. They established translation centers and strived to explain Indian cosmologies in Chinese terms. Their influence in the Han was small, but these foreign monks were the seeds of a rich intellectual and monastic tradition that grew rapidly in periods of political disunity and was significantly sinicized (made Chinese) within three hundred years of its arrival.

The close connection between Confucianism and the imperial house meant that Confucian fortunes rose or fell with the imperial state. Consequently, Confucianism flourished during periods of political unity and was eclipsed during periods of political disunity. During the Period of North–South Division (220–581 CE), Buddhism and Daoism enjoyed a meteoric rise in influence and power, and gained widespread followings among the people. For Buddhism, this was a rich period of doctrinal development (including the emergence of rival philosophical schools and sectarian movements within Chinese Buddhism), monastic expansion (from 1800 monasteries housing twenty-four thousand monks and nuns in the fourth century to 40,000 monasteries housing three million monks and nuns by the seventh century), and popular devotional movements (such as "calling upon the name" of the Buddha Amitabha for rebirth in his Pure Land, with associated funerary rites) that appealed to almost all Chinese across the economic and social spectrum.

One of the schools to emerge in the late medieval period was the Chan (Japanese Zen) school. Establishing small mountain cloisters far from the great monasteries of the cities, with their rapidly growing wealth and social prestige, the first Chan communities saw themselves as "traditionalists," reaffirming the "original intent" of the Buddha by laying claim to an innate "Buddha-mind" and repudiating the "trappings" of institutional Buddhism as it had come to prominence in Chinese culture. Their self-seclusion provided fortuitous, when, in the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE), a Confucian minister named Han Yu (768–824) composed a memorial to the throne condemning Buddhists and Daoists in a statement of religious exclusivism rarely seen in Chinese history. This memorial expressed the key values of imperial Confucianism: social responsibility, loyalty to the state, veneration of ancestors and of the great teachers of antiquity, and a hierarchical ordering of society based upon intellectual achievement (reading, writing, and knowledge of history and the arts). Han Yu accused Buddhist monks in particular of being parasites upon the productive "four classes" of farmers, workers, artisans, and merchants; of neglecting the core Chinese (that is, Confucian) values of ritual propriety, social harmony, and moral responsibility; and of importing "foreign" or "aberrant" cultural norms. Han Yu's memorial is representative of the close links between Confucianism and the state, an association that can be traced back to the Han Dynasty and that has typified "imperial Confucianism" for the past two thousand years of Chinese history.

While it is possible to overstate his influence, Han Yu's memorial led ultimately to a great persecution of Buddhism from 842 to 845, recorded first-hand by a Japanese monk named Ennin who happened to be traveling in pilgrimage to China at the time. Many monks were forcibly returned to lay life, monastic treasuries were taken by the state, and Buddhism never again enjoyed the institutional presence that it did in the later medieval period. This, in combination with the "syncretistic" orientation of Chinese thought in late imperial and modern times, led to the refrain of "Buddhist decline" in Western scholarship. It is only in recent years that scholars have recognized Buddhism—even in the late imperial and modern periods—as a rich, vital tradition with a significant, even ubiquitous, presence in Chinese religious life.

In its long history in China, spanning some two thousand years to the present day, Buddhism offers

- A ritual tradition related especially to death and to destinies after death, most notably featuring the participation of clerics in public funerals;
- Cosmological conceptions of karmic reward and punishment, heavens and hells, and ideas of past and future lives—conceptions that are held almost universally among most Chinese as an underlying assumption about the moral law of the universe;

- The practice of meditation and worship—the former enjoying a significant revival, especially among young urban professionals, in contemporary China; and
- The choice of monastic ordination, open to both men and women, which—while chosen by few—is still admired and supported by society as a whole.

"Popular Religion" and Religious Syncretism

The last millennium of Chinese religious evolution has witnessed a series of creative elaborations on the major concepts and practices of the three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism). In this period, *syncretism* was the overwhelming strategy of choice in dealing with religious diversity, and the Buddhist and Daoist traditions outdid one another in developing integrative schemes, seeing the "three religions as one" though always recognizing their own tradition as the highest organizing principle and the most perfect manifestation of the Way. Self-consciously syncretic movements arose especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and continue to exist in various forms in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora. There is now a significant volume of Western scholarship on these movements and their social impact.

Western scholars until the mid twentieth century tended to classify Chinese religions in terms of these three "great traditions," but since the 1950s some of the most exciting ethnographic research has been at the level of the family, temple, and village or neighborhood community, with the study of Chinese "popular religion." As Philip Clart discusses in this book, "popular religion" is not easily classified but can be seen to include all elements of religious practice—especially in the family and community—determined by "inclusion" rather than by "membership"; that is, as a function of being part of a group as opposed to individually electing to "follow" a certain institutional religion. This is the "religion of the people" (not limited to the peasantry or the uneducated, but in fact including all classes of society) and includes such practices as the veneration of ancestors in the home, the worship of gods and expiation of ghosts in local temples, cyclical rites (such as annual festivals and rites of passage), and various forms of religious self-cultivation inspired by insights and practices that originated in one or more of the three religions.

The practice of religion in China in the modern era has been weakened by a series of cataclysmic events that have shaken the very foundations of Chinese culture. China's tumultuous modern history began with a crisis of cultural identity, a crisis that in some respects is still ongoing. Following a military uprising bordering on civil war (the Taiping Rebellion: 1851–1864) and the forcible opening of trade to the West (a drug trade in opium supported by the British and American governments), many Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) blamed Confucian traditionalism, "bookishness," and self-restraint for China's failure to compete economically and militarily with the West. This "blame game" led to a wholesale

rejection of China's Confucian past by late nineteenth and early twentieth century students and intellectuals and, most notably, by the Communist revolutionaries who eventually succeeded in gaining power and establishing the People's Republic of China of today: "Down with Confucianism!" and the backwardness for which Confucianism was to blame. "Smash the Confucian Shop!" "Eliminate the Four Olds [old habits, old ideas, old culture, and old customs]!" "Root out unscientific superstition [veneration of gods and ancestors, shamanism, temple construction, and divination]!" These were the rallying cries from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the Cultural Revolution of the 1970s.

Chinese intellectuals of the New Culture and May Fourth movements (in the late Qing and early Republican period) criticized Confucianism as the product of a feudal age. The late Qing reformers dedicated to the creation of a "new China" were skeptical of China's religious traditions, believing that religious "superstition" had contributed to China's "backwardness," to the nation's lack of resistance to the imperial aspirations of Japan and the West, and to the political despotism and stagnation of the central government. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—as well as the local folk traditions of the people—were associated with China's imperial past. Consequently, the nationalist government of the Republic of China (which was founded in Nanjing in the 1920s and moved its capital to Taipei, Taiwan in 1949) and the central government of the People's Republic of China (which established its capital in Beijing as a Communist state in 1949) placed restrictions on religious observance, especially at the local level, though these have eased significantly, both in Taiwan and on the mainland.

After the victory of Communist forces and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and for at least the next thirty years, the Chinese government continued its attacks on Confucianism and all things "old." Confucius himself was reviled as a feudal "slave holder," and Confucian values were condemned as oppressive and class-based. The Mencian ordering of "people who labor with their minds" above "people who labor with their strength" was reversed, as intellectuals were "sent down to the countryside" to learn from the peasants the values of hard work and physical self-sacrifice. For most of the past century, the nation's intellectual and political leaders have blamed Confucianism for everything that was wrong with "feudal" China.

Against this tide of cultural self-loathing is a modern tradition of Confucian resurgence. In the past fifteen to twenty years the central government has begun an aggressive "resuscitation" of Confucius and traditional Chinese culture, sponsoring academic conferences, establishing institutes of "classical studies" (*guoxue*), and even, at least rhetorically, taking public pride in Confucianism as the basis of Chinese civilization. But this follows a much more protracted effort by a small number of Chinese intellectuals—at home and abroad—to preserve the tradition, and to adapt Confucianism to changing conditions within China and the world. Today, a number of intellectuals argue that Confucianism represents what is best of China's cultural past and the hope of China's cultural identity in the future.

Today, Daoism, Buddhism, and "popular religion" are all resurgent in China, but the influence of Westernization (including Communism) has been great, and China's religious culture faces a number of challenges. At an institutional level, Buddhist monasteries and Daoist abbeys are administered by quasi-governmental "religious associations" answerable to political authorities. Religious institutions simply are not permitted complete freedom and autonomy, and voluntary religious associations ("cults" or "sects") are subject to severe restrictions. Nevertheless, the Chinese people today enjoy more religious freedom than they have had in half a century, and religious observance, writing, and research are enjoying a modest recovery.

Clearly, despite major setbacks since the end of the dynastic period, religion in China still survives, and many Chinese—from the relatively uneducated populace of the countryside to the upward-looking consumers of the booming cities—are looking to the traditions of the past for guidance and inspiration. For Western scholars, the cultural revival of religion in China, in both its communal and individual aspects, is an area crying out for new research.

Moving Beyond the "Three Traditions": The Structure and Organization of *The Wiley–Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*

Most books on Chinese religion (or "Chinese religions") are limited to "one" of the so-called "three religions" (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) or to an analysis of the three religions in contrast to one another. While accepting this convention to a certain extent (certainly chapters on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism can be found, and these religious designations are used throughout the book), the traditional view that Chinese religions were defined by and limited to the three traditions is both simplistic and erroneous, if our interest is in knowing how religion has actually been lived and practiced both in history and in contemporary China. This book goes beyond the conventional designations, and the traditional approach to Chinese religion as outlined above, in several ways:

Part I (HISTORICAL SURVEY) traces the history of Chinese religion through the formative periods of Chinese history: the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (c. 1600–249 BCE), the Han through the Six Dynasties (206 BCE—589 CE), the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), the Song Dynasty (960–1279), and the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911). In these opening five chapters the paths of development of the three traditions are outlined both independently and in relation to the others. The authors of these chapters see many of the most significant developments of Chinese religious history as the reflections of encounters between and among the traditions, and employ an integrative approach.

This book does not limit Chinese religious history to the three religions alone, but includes in Part II (THE TRADITIONS) popular religion, Islam, and Christianity in

addition to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. This gives a much fuller and more complete picture of the Chinese religious landscape in all its forms.

Finally, Part III (CRITICAL TERMS FOR THE STUDY OF CHINESE RELIGIONS) eschews the separation of the three religions altogether, with a wholly integrative approach. Though the names (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) are still employed, it is clear that all three contributed, in various degrees, to the actual beliefs and behaviors of religious practitioners. The focus here is on religion as lived, not doctrinal separation or institutional identities.

The nine chapters making up Part III can further be divided into three groups of three: (1) the chapters on SACRED TEXT, RELIGIOUS RITUAL, and MATERIAL CULTURE provide the reader with the basic "building blocks" of religion as such, often in comparative perspective; (2) the chapters on NATURE, DIVINITY, and GENDER examine the Chinese conceptualization of the cosmos and personal identity in both theoretical and practical terms, again crossing the lines of "Confucian," "Daoist," and "Buddhist" theories and practices; and (3) finally, the chapters on DIVINATION, ASCETICISM, and SELF-INFLICTED VIOLENCE delve into Chinese religious practice on an individual level by examining religious behaviors in terms of personal histories, albeit in relation to social and political forces.

The authors of these twenty essays are some of the foremost sinological scholars in the world, and all build upon the history of Chinese religious scholarship while extending our knowledge—and our orientations—in new directions. Therefore, this book is not simply an overview of Chinese beliefs and practices (though it is this as well) but also a critical examination of the study of Chinese religion as an academic discipline. Each of the authors proposes new modes of classification and categorization, new standards of evidence, new ways of thinking (often informed by comparative analysis with, for example, Western religious traditions), and "brand new" documentary, archeological, and ethnographic findings about the history and living reality of Chinese religious life, from early antiquity to the present day. Certainly the focus is historical, as no understanding of any culture—and this is especially true of China—can ignore its origins and development through time.

Let us turn now to a brief overview of each chapter, highlighting the particular contribution of each author to the academic study of Chinese religion. Each is creative, inventive, and path-finding in their approach to religious beliefs and practices that have been "known," but little understood, for hundreds of years.

Part I of the volume is a religious history of China, in five parts. The editor, Randall Nadeau, begins, in Chapter 2, with an overview of Chinese religion in antiquity, introducing the indigenous traditions (Confucianism and Daoism) but also the competing religious practices and worldviews of the earliest historical periods, the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (c. 1600–249 BCE). The chapter begins with Chinese mythic accounts of the origins of Chinese civilization, including legends of a primordial flood and the invention of writing. Summarizing the basic contours of Shang and Zhou cosmology (which are remarkably consistent with Chinese religious conceptions today), Nadeau turns to textual and archeological evidence for religious

practices of the common people, in particular their veneration for the family dead (ancestors) and their propitiation of vengeful spirits (ghosts). He then introduces the basic religious and ethical teachings of the pre-Han Confucian and Daoist schools.

In Chapter 3, Gil Raz traces both the intellectual and religious histories of the Han through the Six Dynasties periods (206 BCE—589 CE), beginning with the encyclopedic compilations of the Han Dynasty and their elaborate theories of *yin* and *yang*, the Five Phases (*wuxing*), and other aspects of early Chinese correlative cosmology. From this cosmological theory, as well as proto-Daoist writings of the pre-Han period (such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daode jing*), emerged methods of "immortality cultivation" that enjoyed imperial favor and inspired a full-fledged Daoist religion in the early Common Era. It was during this period that institutional forms of Daoism and Buddhism first emerged. What is especially notable about Raz's treatment of this history is his emphasis on social, political, and cultic dimensions of early Daoism and Buddhism, and not simply their "teachings" or "ideas."

Paul Copp, in Chapter 4, describes what was perhaps the "high point" of Daoist and Buddhist history in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), in both political and cultural terms. Copp's task is monumental, as the two traditions, under the protection of imperial sponsorship, produced a voluminous corpus of texts and a complex internal division into numerous sects and branches. Copp shows how the doctrinal divisions of the Chinese Buddhist tradition in particular were not purely "intellectual" but political as well, reflecting power struggles both in the monasteries and at court. Copp's chapter is based on new scholarship that has challenged fundamental assumptions about religious development in this axial period, and gives special emphasis to cultic dimensions of religious practice, in addition to the rich intellectual history of Daoism and Buddhism as reflected in the canonical texts.

Chapter 5 surveys significant developments, especially in Buddhism and Daoism, in the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Shin-yi Chao argues that the Song, often denigrated as a period of "decline" in Chinese religious history, was in fact just the opposite: a period of intense activity spurred by social and economic developments tied to technological innovation in transport and commercial activity. Chinese religion in the Song was thus characterized by laicization and commercialization. Institutionally, the Buddhist and Daoist monastic traditions took the form that they have today, through a retroactive process of lineage-making that gave authority and legitimacy to doctrinal innovations that were in fact new to the Song. In other words, Buddhist and Daoist doctrinal innovations claimed a much older provenance; it is only recent scholarship that has shown that the basic teachings and ritual practices of the Chan, *Tiantai*, and *Quanzhen* schools, which it was claimed originated centuries before, were in fact invented in the Song. Moreover, these teachings and practices spread widely among the people, aided by printing technologies and intensive proselytization on the part of Buddhist and Daoist clerics. Chao argues persuasively that the Song and Alien Dynasties were a watershed in the history of Chinese religions.

The historical chapters of the volume close with a survey of religion in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911), the last imperial dynasties prior to the establish-

ment of the Republic of China (1911–present) and the People's Republic of China (1949–present). Here, Mark Meulenbeld (Chapter 6) focuses on "popular religion" (which he terms more accurately as "local" or "territorial" religious practices) and its gods, temples, and forms of worship. One of the primary resources for the study of popular religion in late imperial China are popular novels, and Meulenbeld explores the close relationship between "fiction" and religious hagiography. Millions of Chinese even today are familiar with these sacred narratives and see them represented in temple architecture and re-enacted in theatrical performances. Demonstrating that the distinction between "popular religion" and "institutional religion" is not definite, Meulenbeld points out that another primary source for our knowledge of local cults is the *Daoist Canon*, which was edited in its final, or present, form in the Ming. Meulenbeld also discusses the three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) at a time when they were said to be "unified as one" (*sanjiao he yi*)—the author discusses the prevailing scholarly view that Chinese religion in late imperial and modern times is "syncretistic" in its approach to institutional diversity. The chapter closes with a discussion of state (imperial) religion, in its ritual aspect and in relation to religious institutions.

Part II of the volume is dedicated to "the traditions." While the three traditions certainly deserve pride of place in Chinese religious history, it is a particular emphasis of this book not to limit the Chinese religious landscape to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. At the same time, the book demonstrates just how far sinological research has advanced in recent years, including research into those major traditions that have already enjoyed several decades, if not centuries, of scholarly attention.

Keith Knapp's treatment of the Confucian tradition (Chapter 7) is a case in point. Not limiting himself to a survey of the life or writings (*Lunyu*, or the *Analects*) of Confucius, or the "philosophies" of the sages (Song "Neo-Confucianism" and Ming "Neo-Confucianism"), Knapp settles once and for all the question of the "religious" status of Confucianism by surveying the rich hagiographic narrative tradition of Confucian saints and their extreme acts of filial piety (*xiao*). From these findings, it is clear that Confucianism is a rich religious tradition, with fully developed cosmologies, rituals, and faith commitments, centered around the veneration of ancestors, gods, and saints.

Chapter 8, on the Chinese Daoist tradition, is based on new research, which has, in the past twenty years, outpaced the study of any other aspect of Chinese religion. Louis Komjathy begins with the "classical Daoism" of the pre-Han era as the basis for his survey of a fully articulated ritual and cosmological system that had its origins with the Celestial Masters' movement of the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). Komjathy's chapter consists primarily of a detailed history of the tradition, concluding in the present day, with an additional section on Daoist religious culture: a catalogue of people, movements, places, scriptures, gods, and material objects central to the tradition. One of Komjathy's scholarly principles is to treat Daoism as a "lived and living" tradition, still vital in China and Chinese communities worldwide.

Mario Poceski surveys the Chinese Buddhist tradition (Chapter 9), again providing the reader with a helpful and detailed chronological overview, from the tradition's earliest introduction in the Han Dynasty to the present. Poceski then analyzes five aspects of Chinese Buddhism: ethical observance, contemplative practice, doctrinal systematization, popular devotion, and interaction with other religious traditions. In the same way as the other traditions-based chapters, Poceski eschews the conventional presentation of Chinese Buddhism as a "history of ideas" and focuses instead on its social, ritual, and material aspects. With Buddhism enjoying a significant revival both in China and in Chinese-speaking communities worldwide, this emphasis on lived practice is especially important.

Basing his chapter on both historical studies and ethnographies, Philip Clart describes the most pervasive form of religious life in China, conventionally labeled "Chinese popular religion" (Chapter 10). As other authors note throughout the volume, this label is problematic, and Clart begins the chapter with a helpful overview of conceptual issues surrounding the term. Then, he describes the principal elements of popular religion: cosmology (gods, ghosts, and ancestors), religious specialists (shamans or mediums, as well as the ordained priests of the Daoist and Buddhist traditions), means of transmission (including both oral traditions and the non-canonized texts of popular religion, whether literary and vernacular), and the layered social contexts of popular beliefs and practices (the family, the community, voluntary religious associations, and the imperial state).

The primary focus of James Frankel's chapter on Islam in China (Chapter 11) is diversity, in particular the division of China's Muslim community into the ethnic minority populations of Xinjiang and the far west, bordering on Central Asia (Uyghur Muslims), and the thoroughly sinicized Han ethnic Muslims of central and southern China (Hui Muslims). The existence of these two groups, with their vastly different social and cultural histories, makes it difficult to make sweeping generalizations about Chinese Islam. Frankel surveys how these communities came into existence and examines their status today, especially in relation to the national government of the People's Republic. In the cases of Islam and Christianity in particular, "identity politics" comes to the fore, in a way that is much more pronounced than it ever was in respect to the traditional three religions of China. Frankel does not catalogue the full range of "beliefs and practices" of Chinese Islam—which are no different from the beliefs and practices of Muslims the world over—but rather how particular practices have been shaped and determined by ethnicity, acculturation, immigration, conquest, and political power.

Clearly, the problem of "Chinese identity" also plays a role in Ryan Dunch's treatment of Chinese Christianity (Chapter 12)—truly, in the modern period, a "Christianity with Chinese characteristics" (to paraphrase Deng Xiaoping's famous characterization of Chinese socialism). Dunch summarizes the history of Christianity in China briefly, but his principal contribution is a detailed overview of the state of Christianity in China as it enters the twenty-first century. The relationship between "state" and "religion" has always been intimate, and always contested, in Chinese

history, but never more so than in the present day with respect to Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Dunch brings us up to date on the contemporary situation. In the final section of his essay, he examines Chinese Christianity in relation to Chinese popular religion as well as the Chinese state, and draws fascinating comparisons between Christianity in China and in the West. For both Islam and Christianity (not to mention Buddhism a millennium before), "foreignness and the problem of authenticity" (to use Dunch's phrase) is an abiding Chinese preoccupation.

The first of the chapters on "critical terms" making up Part III of this volume unpacks the heavily freighted notion of the sacred text in Chinese religion (Chapter 13). Thomas Jansen points out that, whereas few texts in Chinese history have achieved the status of "infallibility" that we may associate with sacred texts in other religious traditions, the very idea of "text" itself has a cultural weight and importance that is uniquely Chinese. Jansen begins with a discussion of how the Chinese term *jing* (lit. the "warp" of cloth) may best be translated into English: "scripture," "classic," or "sacred text." This terminological flexibility is an indication of the wide variety of ways in which not only scripture but also other forms of "sacred writing" have been viewed in China, from "holy books" to talismans written on air. The latter half of Jansen's essay discusses three approaches to the academic understanding of sacred text in China, which he classifies as the "textual," the "functional," and the "epistemological": in Chinese religious traditions, texts do not simply "contain meanings" but also inspire elaboration (the rich commentarial tradition of Confucianism, for example) and material engagement (as objects of devotion, often with healing or apotropaic power).

Joshua Capitanio's discussion of religious ritual (Chapter 14), like Jansen's of sacred text, begins with Chinese terms and indigenous interpretations; arguably, no Chinese term is more important for understanding Chinese religion than *li* (ritual, rites, rites-based behavior, propriety). In this respect, Capitanio provides an extended discussion of one of China's foremost "ritual theorists," the Zhou Dynasty Confucian philosopher Xunzi. Concerning ritual itself, one of the first things we discover is that *li* was closely related to music and dance in the earliest records. In fact, *li* was "performative" in every respect (in J. L. Austin's sense of bringing about a new state of being for the ritual participants and their environs); Capitanio illustrates this point with Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist examples. But this "performative" aspect does not exhaust the meaning and significance of ritual in the Chinese religious context: religious rituals do not simply "appease the gods"; they also transform the people who perform them, and ritual behavior is seen in China to be a "civilizing" activity. Capitanio explores the performative function of Chinese ritual as an expression of effective power over self, society, and cosmos.

Julius Tsai addresses material culture (Chapter 15) as the third of the three foundations or building blocks of lived religion in China. In a religious context, a material object is not "just a thing"—it is a metaphor or representation pointing beyond itself, and thereby participating in the creation of culture. Tsai begins with an extended discussion of metaphors. For example, the same object (such as a mirror) can have

very different "symbolic meanings" in cultures, depending on the metaphors that are used to describe it (not just "reflecting," in the Chinese case, but also "shining" and "illuminating"). The use of these and other material objects in religious contexts affects the ways that participants understand their actions and their world. As an example of the ritual use of material objects, as well as their symbolic meanings, Tsai takes us through a fascinating account of a contemporary religious ritual performed in Taiwan, the Daoist rite of "Pacifying the Dragon" (*anlong*).

What is the Chinese religious understanding of the cosmos and personal identity? The first of three chapters on this theme concerns the natural world (Chapter 16). As we have seen in the case of every author in this volume, James Miller starts with indigenous conceptions: the Chinese religious understanding of "nature" in contradistinction to Western views and to modern scientific understandings in particular. Ideas of "nature," "heaven," and "earth" all have particular resonances within Chinese religion and philosophical thought. One of the key questions over the course of Chinese intellectual history was the relationship between natural occurrences and the "human" realm, whether individual, social, or political. For the most part, Chinese thinking on this matter has been "correlative," asserting a fundamental harmony—if not a reciprocity and mutual causation—between the natural and the human. Miller explores these themes through a close study of Confucian and Daoist texts, focusing on the concepts of "naturalness" and "spontaneity" (*ziran*), "heavenly command" (*Tianming*), and "innate vitality" (*xing*). The close relationship between the human and the natural allows China's religious traditions to see their actions (especially ritual actions) as potent and effective—theory quickly moves to "practice." Miller contrasts traditional religious views of natural balance and harmony with the "conquering" spirit of "Mao Zedong Thought" and China's drive to modernization.

Randall Nadeau explores Chinese conceptions of divinity in Chapter 17, providing a typology of spiritual beings as well as an analysis of Chinese philosophical views on the "existence" or "non-existence" of the spirit world. He writes that the concept of atheism is a "topological impossibility" in Chinese culture, as the spirit world is conceived immanently—as part of the natural world and an essential aspect of human nature: gods and spirits are neither supernatural (in the sense of being *outside* nature) nor transcendent (in the sense of being *beyond* nature). In fact, "spirits" or "spirituality" (*shen*: in Chinese the same word is used for both) are inseparable from life itself. While a skeptical tradition has existed in China since the beginnings of recorded history, this skepticism differs significantly from Western atheism and its "denial" of God or other "supernatural" forces.

Turning from the cosmos to the person, Beata Grant explores Chinese religious views and practices surrounding gender identity (Chapter 18) in a helpful overview of gender concepts as well as women's roles in Chinese religious traditions. Beginning with a survey of philosophical and religious conceptions of gender differentiation in elite forms of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, Grant turns to religion from the ground up, and the centrality of female shamanism and goddess

cults from antiquity to the present. She concludes the chapter with examples of female models of religious attainment, drawing on the Chan (Zen) Buddhist and Daoist traditions particularly. Clearly, "women's roles" are not peripheral to the history of Chinese religions.

Having surveyed the foundational and conceptual dimensions of Chinese religions, the volume concludes with three chapters on individual practice. In these chapters, which should be considered illustrative rather than exhaustive, the authors discuss practices from the "early," "middle," and "late" periods of Chinese dynastic history. What is especially noteworthy about these chapters is the authors' appreciation of the fact that Chinese religion on the ground is not singly Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist, but more typically includes elements of all three—indeed, the authors do not organize their essays around these designations.

The first of these chapters on individual religious practice takes us back again to the earliest period of Chinese history, the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, in a theoretically masterful essay on divination (Chapter 19) by Jue Guo. Drawing upon the most recent textual and archeological discoveries—some having been catalogued and accessed only since 2000—Guo discusses what might be considered the earliest form of individual religious practice: the role of the diviner. Following a discussion of new approaches to the study of Chinese divination, Guo outlines four aspects of divination practice, focusing primarily on the Shang and Zhou periods: occasions and purposes, techniques and mechanisms, practitioners, and functions. What we learn from Guo's research is that divination is one of China's most ancient and abiding religious practices; the newest archeological discoveries have unearthed its variety and complexity, as well as its central place in the religious lives of ancient Chinese.

Stephen Eskildsen discusses religious self-cultivation in the form of asceticism (Chapter 20), a practice that, as he notes, "was either prerequisite to or constituted a significant dimension of individual self-cultivation in all of the major Chinese religious traditions," especially in the period from the Han to the Song Dynasties (roughly the first millennium of the Common Era). Beginning with a review of the ascetic impulse in the pre-Qin philosophers—Confucius, Mozi, and the various authors of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* books—Eskildsen focuses on ascetic practices of medieval Daoism and Buddhism, with interesting notes on disagreements between Daoist and Buddhist theorists on the appropriate meaning and use of ascetic behaviors.

Jimmy Yu continues the same theme, focusing more on the last millennium of Chinese history (the late imperial period in particular) in his chapter on self-inflicted violence (Chapter 21). Here, the "ascetic impulse" within Chinese religion is pushed to the limit. Having certainly been hinted at in the early dynasties and having Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist precedents, the self-infliction of real bodily harm (burning, slicing, and other forms of self-injury, often resulting in death of the physical body) reached a high point in the early modern era, especially at the popular level. This does not mean, however, that it became purely a "popular" religious practice, as acts of supreme self-sacrifice were often rewarded by the imperial state,

and enjoyed its sanction and encouragement. In the late imperial period, this form of individual religious practice was particularly notable among women, and Yu discusses the implications of the mania for self-inflicted wounds by women as a means of female self-expression, social legitimation, and religious liberation. Some of these women ended up as fearsome ghosts, others as revered goddesses.

Altogether, the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions* is based on the newest discoveries and research in the field, and often covers whole topics that earlier generations of scholars could not have examined, if they were known of at all. Sinological scholarship today is multidisciplinary, requiring familiarity with archeological, ethnographic, and textual resources. Access to these materials, whether resulting from new discoveries or better cataloguing and more in-depth research, has expanded exponentially in the last decade. And there is much more to be done: China is open to ethnographic research into local religions, and has developed research institutes and doctoral programs in religious studies; young scholars around the world enjoy better language training in both modern and classical Chinese, at an earlier age, than their predecessors; catalogues of the Daoist canon and other sacred texts have recently been completed, with more to come; and interest in religion among ordinary Chinese has not waned, in spite of the dire projections of Marxist-Leninist thought and the globalizing influence of Western consumerism. All of this invites more research, and greater personal engagement, with China's rich religious history.

A Note on the Chinese Language and Chinese Names

Chinese characters (which are pictographic) are represented in English (which is phonetic) through "romanization." In this book, Chinese characters are romanized using a system called "*pin yin romanization*," developed in the People's Republic of China by Russian linguists in the 1950s. It has become the standard convention in China and around the world. All romanizations in this book reflect the pronunciation of the Mandarin dialect.

Books written originally in Chinese will appear with their titles in English translation followed by their Chinese titles employing the *pin yin* romanization. Given the ease with which online searches can be conducted, interested readers can find the Chinese characters for these titles (and often the texts themselves) using any scholarly search engine. The translations from Chinese texts were done by the individual authors unless otherwise indicated.

Some Chinese Daoist and Buddhist terms were originally adopted from Sanskrit; in such cases, the romanized Sanskrit terms are used.

Two other conventions that have been adopted for this book should be mentioned here: first, all Chinese names will appear in their proper order: surname followed by given name (with the exception of Chinese scholars who have adopted the Western order); second, all dates will appear in the forms BCE (before the Common

Era, corresponding to the Euro-American BC) and CE (Common Era, corresponding to the Euro-American AD).

Further Reading

A full bibliography of scholarship on Chinese religion, even in English, would be voluminous. Following is a list of one principal or representative work for each of the scholars cited in the first part of this essay, as well as a few studies that have been especially significant for the development of the field. Together, they constitute a handy overview of the history of the field, conceived not simply as an "intellectual history" but as a lived tradition. Additional suggested reading can be found at the conclusion of each chapter.

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PART I

Historical Survey

CHAPTER 2

Chinese Religion in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties

Randall Nadeau, Trinity University

The Mythic Origins of Chinese Civilization

According to early mythological accounts, the beginnings of Chinese civilization in the Xia Dynasty (c. 2200–c. 1600 BCE) were preceded by a great flood—a common motif in a number of the world's religions. The flood, and its control and resolution, is illustrative of the Chinese understanding of the relationship between humankind and the natural world.

In the time of Emperor Yao (dates unknown, but purported to have been the fourth of the five legendary emperors in the mythic period of Chinese history), the waters reversed their natural course, flooding the "middle kingdom." (The appellation "middle kingdom" is the literal meaning of the Chinese characters *zhong-guo*, "China.") Rivers overflowed their banks, the plains were covered with water, birds and beasts occupied the homes where humans were meant to dwell, and the people were forced to live in trees and caves, where birds and beasts were meant to dwell.

Emperor Yao appointed his son to control the flood. For nine years, Kun struggled, finally stealing from the gods a "swelling mold," which he used to dam up the waters. The theft of this sacred earth angered the gods, who slayed the Emperor Kun, leaving his body on a mountain peak. The "swelling mold" fell away in great clods of earth, which were swallowed up by the rising waters.

As the flood increased, a great creature emerged from the belly of Emperor Kun. His name was Yu: various versions of the myth describe him as a bear, a dragon, a turtle, or fish. Yu came down from on high to continue his father's work. He walked

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with a limp across the land—a walk that has been described as "the gait of Yu." His steps followed the pattern of the "Great Bear" in the sky, *Ursa Major*, the "Big Dipper." From high above (Yu appears to have been a gargantuan figure), he saw the river valleys and channels beneath the surface of the waters, and, rather than damming the flood as his father had done, Yu led the water into the seas by deepening the valleys and channels that already existed in the ground. He "wore the nails off his hands and the hair off his calves," and the flood receded. The water, flowing through the channels, formed the Yangze, the Huai, the Yellow River, and the Han—the four great rivers of China. The birds and beasts returned to their nests and caves, and the people of the middle kingdom were able to level the ground and live on it once more. As a reward for his efforts, Yu was made emperor, and founder of the Xia Dynasty.

This is, of course, a myth, with no historical evidence to support it (the account first appears in a book written some two thousand years after the purported events), but it illustrates important values of Chinese culture and religion. Some of these themes (listed below) we can later identify as "Confucian" or "Daoist," but the myth itself predates the emergence of Confucianism and Daoism and assumes no preference.

1. The flood is seen to be a natural event; it is not described as a divine punishment. The element of punishment in the myth has to do with taking from the gods what is rightfully theirs, the "swelling mold" used by Emperor Kun.
2. The proper order of things is for humans to live upon and till the earth, and for birds and beasts to remain in their proper place—the two should not be confused, or encroach upon one another.
3. The aggressive solution of "damming" the waters is improper, as it forces the water against its natural tendency (to flow in channels).
4. The more ecologically harmonious solution of "channeling" the waters is proper, and allows the water to follow its natural course. (cf. Teiser 1985, Birrell 1997)

Some scholars see this myth as reflecting the Neolithic transition from a nomadic culture dependent upon hunting and gathering, which involves greater interaction with the animal world (either as quarry, or in imitation of animal behaviors), to a culture that is settled and agricultural, where humans are more clearly "differentiated" from animals. We do know from archaeological evidence that this transition occurred at least four millennia prior to the first Chinese writing; by then, the people of the "middle kingdom" lived in fixed communities, as indicated by the discovery of earthen walls, wooden pillars, and kiln-fired pottery dating to that period.

Another legend—as described in the *Book of History* (*Shujing*) of the Warring States period but supposedly describing events many thousands of years before—recounts the "invention of agriculture" by the demigod Shennong:

> The ancient people ate meat of animals and birds. [When] there were so many people that the animals and birds became inadequate for the people's needs, Shennong taught the people to cultivate.
>
> There was a red bird holding in its mouth a cereal stalk with nine ears. Some of the grains fell onto the ground . . . Shennong picked them up and cultivated them in the field. Those who ate the grains lived long and did not die.
>
> Shennong invented wooden agricultural implements and taught the whole world his inventions . . . He instituted the market held at noon. He administered all the peoples of the world and gathered their produce in the markets. After exchanging their goods, the people went back to their homes and rested contented. (Chang 1971)

This is how the Chinese imagination of the Zhou Dynasty described the birth of agriculture. Archeologists believe that the Neolithic Revolution occurred around 6000 BCE in the dry plains of north-central China (an area that has been planted now for some eight thousand years). The chief crop was millet.

With the transition from hunting and gathering to an agricultural society came the development of permanently settled villages. Though the earliest sites (dating to the Yangshao period, 6000–3000 BCE) show no sign of social stratification—houses and burial sites are basically uniform—by 2000 BCE (the Longshan period, 3200–1800 BCE) some people lived better than others, and more elaborate burials were performed for an emerging class of nobles and kings. Their religious beliefs and practices can be inferred from practices such as these:

- Deer buried in the middle of fields.
- Cemeteries separated from villages, on hillsides overlooking the valley—some including more than one village, indicating lineage connections.
- Burial of objects with the dead, suggesting a farewell feast or use in a world of the dead.
- Secondary burial (reburial of the dead) in groups of fifty to eighty persons, stretched in parallel, heads facing east or south.

Archeological discoveries in the post-Second World War period have unearthed burial practices of numerous early Neolithic communities throughout China: all are evidence of practices suggesting the conviction that the dead survive in some form, and benefit from the care of the living (such as burial of household goods with the dead, many with bird and animal motifs inscribed in jade, clay, and, later, bronze). These findings indicate a fully developed ancestral cult, or at least some form of interaction between the living and the dead, before the beginnings of recorded history.

The Shang Dynasty

The first Chinese writing—and thus the beginning of recorded history—was engraved on the dried bones of sheep and oxen as well as the plastron (lower) shells

of turtles dating to the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600—c. 1100 BCE). First excavated in the 1920s, there are now more than one hundred thousand "oracle bones" in museum collections around the world, estimated to be five to ten percent of the total produced. Most are from the last century or two of the Shang. The ideograms carved into these objects are in pictographic form; about three thousand of the pictographs have been deciphered, and later evolved into the Chinese characters in use today.

These engraved bones and shells are known as "oracle bones" because the writing was used to record the results of divination. The procedure was as follows (Keightley 1978):

1. Pits were bored or chiseled on the back of the bone or shell.
2. A question was addressed to the oracle bone, often in the form of opposing alternatives; for example, "We *will* receive the millet harvest," "We *will not* receive the millet harvest."
3. A hot bronze poker was applied to the pits; the heat caused cracks to form.
4. The cracks were numbered and examined, and interpreted by court diviners as auspicious or inauspicious, predicting success or failure in a royal endeavor.
5. Records were engraved on the bones, usually to verify the accuracy of the prediction.

Shang religion was directed at three categories of divine being:

- *Shangdi*, the high god, who had dominion over the weather, harvests, urban settlements, warfare, sickness, and the king's person (this high god was not worshipped directly).
- *Royal ancestors*, who interceded with Shangdi for the king (they were worshipped only by the king, who played a shamanistic role in his interactions with divine beings).
- *Nature deities*, who directed the course of seasons, storms, and harvests, and were subordinate to the royal ancestors.

The gods and ancestors received offerings from the court: animals or grain were burnt, wine was poured into the ground, and sacred objects were thrown into rivers.

Principally, sacrifices were made to the royal ancestors, according to a rigid sacrificial schedule. If carried out correctly, these sacrifices were thought to have a constraining effect on the ancestors, forcing them to act for the king's benefit. This established ties of mutual obligation and reciprocity, and magical power over the spirit world. The king made sacrifices to his father, grandfather, and prior generations on a daily basis, reinforcing his sense of family identity and securing the blessings of the spirit world.

Although it is unlikely that the common people participated in such rites, it is evident that ancestor worship was the primary expression of early Chinese religion,

and certain basic beliefs have been maintained since antiquity. From the Shang Dynasty to the present, Chinese have assumed that

- People continue to exist after death;
- Ancestral spirits exert power over the living, influencing their everyday lives; and
- The dead depend upon the living for care and sustenance (cf. Allan 1979).

The continuity of ancestor veneration, based upon these three principles, is remarkable given the span of Chinese recorded history (well over three thousand years). Today, the veneration of ancestors in the home and at the gravesite is a universal everyday practice among Chinese, both in China and overseas.

The Zhou Dynasty

Zhou peoples lived to the west of Shang, and learned writing and the arts of civilization from Shang culture. In the eleventh century BCE (around 1040), they sacked the capital, overthrew the Shang court, and established a new dynasty. As the inheritors of an already ancient culture, they maintained many of its ways, including an ancestral cult (focused on Lord Millet, First Ancestor of the Zhou), a strict sacrificial schedule, and divination using oracle bones and milfoil stalks.

The Zhou kings sought a religious justification for their usurpation of power, and did so by appealing to *Tian*, a high god superior in power to Shangdi. Zhou texts describe *Tian* in one sense as an anthropomorphic deity, directing human affairs, and in another sense as an abstract, almost mechanical principle of natural order. More and more, the emphasis was on the latter definition, and *Tian* is best translated by its literal meaning of "heaven."

The *Book of History* (*Shujing*), a narrative account of China's first five dynasties (Tang, Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou), contains *The Great Declaration of King Wu*, the "military king" and Zhou founder. In this declaration, King Wu accuses the last Shang Dynasty king of oppressing his people, failing to maintain the calendrical cycle of sacrifices to the gods and ancestors, and being "abandoned to drunkenness and reckless in lust": "For his many crimes, the King of Shang has been punished by Heaven. Heaven is going by means of me to rule the people" (trans. Dubs 1958).

King Wu was succeeded by King Wen, the "civil king," whose fourth son, the Duke of Zhou, became China's greatest culture hero (especially esteemed by Confucius). At the center of the Duke of Zhou's religious and political thought was the concept of *Tianming*, the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven establishes the divine right to rule; it is conferred upon just kings and removed from unjust kings. As *Tianzi*, the "Son of Heaven," a king has a divine right and duty to rule his people and to ensure their welfare. Speaking to Shang nobles, the Duke of Zhou declared:

> King Wu of Zhou possessed a mandate that said, "Destroy the Shang Dynasty." Because our actions did not go contrary to Heaven's course of action, your Royal House has come under our control.
>
> I will explain it to you. Your ruler was greatly lawless. Our house did not originate this movement against your house. It came from your own court. When I reflect that Heaven has applied such great severity to the Shang ruler, it shows that he was not upright.

So, the political overthrow of the Shang Dynasty was justified in moral and religious terms. The idea of the Mandate of Heaven and the "moral right to rule" become central in subsequent Chinese political thought.

Like the Shang, the Zhou Empire practiced ancestor worship, divination, and ritual offerings to nature spirits and celestial deities. One feature of Zhou religion, evidence for which is based upon archeology as well as poetry collected or reconstructed a few hundred years after the fall of the Zhou, was shamanism.

"Shamanism" describes the close, even intimate, interaction between humans and spiritual beings—a "crossing over" between the material and non-material aspects of existence. There are two kinds of shaman. In one case, the adept is able to "send forth" his/her own spiritual nature (what we might call the "soul" or "souls") on "spirit journeys" to distant places in the world, galaxy, or cosmos. The second type of shaman is the spirit medium, who is able to "receive" spirits (gods, nature spirits, or spirits of the dead) into their own body, manifesting exceptional behaviors or displaying divine knowledge (often in the form of prognostication).

Both kinds of shamanism seem to have been central to early Zhou religion. For example, in a long prose poem entitled "Far-off Journey" (*Yuanyou*), shamanistic spirit journeys are described in marvelous detail—the shaman is depicted as flying through clouds and communing with ethereal beings wearing flowing robes and precious jades. "Far-off Journey" appears in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*), composed in the border regions of the south. Far removed from the royal court, where more formal ceremonies and ritual offerings were conducted, these poems reflect a mystical strain in early Chinese religion. Some of the poems suggest sexual encounters between humans and spirits (Hawkes 1985).

At court, another kind of shamanism was practiced. Here, the shamans—typically women or young girls—were mediums for the gods, receiving the gods' spiritual power and using this power to exorcise evil and misfortune from the royal house. These mediumistic rites consisted of stately dances and the performance of orchestral music, using bells, chimes, and woodwind and stringed instruments. Though this is still a matter of scholarly speculation, evidence suggests that women held extremely powerful positions in the early Zhou priesthood (Goldin 2002).

In recent decades, a wealth of textual and archeological evidence has been uncovered to complete our understanding of Zhou religion—including the excavation of numerous elaborate graves belonging to members of the nobility or gentry class. A richly developed conception of the afterlife is evident in the oldest tombs, and the

ancestors were clearly in intimate contact with their descendents. Deities were believed to be everywhere, representing both the spirits of nature and spirits of the dead. They were offered food and drink in exchange for material benefits, blessings, and good fortune, either in temples or on outdoor altars, based on a strict ritual cycle.

With the social and political decline of the later Zhou, the people began to question the power and motivations of *Tian*. If *Tian* loved the people, why was He not powerful enough to overcome the forces of chaos? If *Tian* was all-powerful, why was He punishing the people with war and starvation? Many poems of the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*) express skepticism and disillusionment about *Tian*, charging *Tian* with powerlessness or indifference, even going so far as to question the god's very existence.

This religious skepticism reflected the political developments of the time:

- The decline of the royal house (the Zhou an "empire" in name only).
- The decline of royal ancestral rites.
- A decline in the power of the royal ancestors.
- Constant warfare and its attendant ills: political instability, starvation, forced and voluntary migration.
- The use of religion for political purposes: to enforce alliances, to protect kingdoms and their armies, and to symbolize victories and transfers of power.
- Growing religious skepticism at every level of society, expressed in poetic references to Heaven's powerlessness or indifference.
- A steady decline in the number of independent states: from 1773 original states to 160 states by 770 BCE (beginning of the Spring and Autumn period) and seven states by 481 BCE (beginning of the Warring States period).

With these social and political developments, religious practices fell into disuse, and philosophical texts of the later Zhou are brazenly skeptical about the existence or efficacy of the spirits (for further discussion, see Chapter 17, DIVINITY).

Though the Zhou Dynasty produced China's greatest philosophers—Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Zhuangzi, and Mozi, to name but a few—it was a violent and uncertain time. Political life was dominated by feudatory rivalries, shifting alliances, annexation of the small by the great, assassination, civil war, bureaucratic mismanagement, starvation, and mass migration. Lu, the home state of Confucius, was invaded twenty-four times between the years 720 and 480 BCE.

The political uncertainties of the period contributed to the rise of a class of diplomats, administrators, and military advisors called *shi*. In earlier times, the term *shi* referred to warriors of the noble class attached to particular feudatory states, but, in the Spring and Autumn period and Warring States period, *shi* traveled from state to state seeking court recognition for their skills in debate, military strategy, diplomacy, and political administration. If their arguments seemed convincing, the dukes of the feudatory states adopted them as retainers. Even then, however, the *shi* prided themselves on their principled courage and independence, and a *shi* did not hesitate to abandon a state if the ruler acted against his advice.

The Confucians

One of the best known of these *shi* was Confucius (whose name is Latinized from *Kongfuzi*—Grand Master Kong). Born in 551 BCE, Confucius was an aspiring political advisor who lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn period. He traveled widely, offering advice on government, virtue, and education. Though he was never hired as a retainer and lamented his inability to reform his world, he was a great teacher, gathering a loyal following, traditionally numbered at three thousand, with seventy-two primary disciples. Confucius emphasized self-cultivation: education, high moral standards, and a deep-felt commitment to one's family and community. He appealed to eminent teachers and forgotten traditions of China's cultural past, and sought to "restore" the high culture of antiquity.

Confucius believed that an ideal society had once existed, under the leadership of the Duke of Zhou centuries before. He admired the Duke of Zhou so much that he dreamt of him, and he claimed that all of his ideas were firmly rooted in the past:

> The Master said: "I transmit but do not create. I put my trust in my love for antiquity." (*Lunyu* 7:1)

Li

The model or analogy for all of Confucius' major teachings is *li* (ritual), specifically the court sacrifices and ceremonies of the early Zhou. The character for *li* is illustrative of its meaning: on the left is an altar-shaped form common to all characters having to do with "religion," and on the right is a stand supporting a bowl half filled with rice, in which two sticks of incense have been placed. Etymologically, *li* means a ritual of "sacrifice" or "offering."

As a result of the social strife of the late Spring and Autumn period, the *li* of the early Zhou had long fallen into disuse. With dynastic power dispersed among the various states, the court no longer had the resources or the political power to sponsor grand ceremonies. Confucius knew of them only through his careful study of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), a detailed ritual manual that was one of the "five classics" of the Confucian curriculum. Reading this book today, we can imagine how elaborate and impressive the ancient ceremonies must have been. They featured thousands of musicians, playing panpipes (*yue*), plucked stringed instruments (*qin*), woodwind organs (*sheng*), drums (*gu*), and hanging brass gongs (*gong*) struck with hammers or mallets. In addition, dancers by the hundreds, arrayed in rows and columns, wearing long pheasant feather plumes and sashes with jade pendants, moved in unison to the harmonious sounds of the orchestra in the temple courtyard. Sacrifices of oxen and sheep were made by burning them on an altar, the smoke rising to the heavens, while wine was poured from ritual vessels into a hole bored into the courtyard grounds. Though no longer conducted, these grand offerings inspired Confucius and he ached to restore them. Even small-scale rites were treasured by the Master:

> Zi gong wanted to do away with the sacrificing of the lamb at the ceremony held at the beginning of each month to report to the ancestors. The Master said, "Zi gong, you are reluctant to give up the lamb, but I am reluctant to give up the ceremony." (*Lunyu* 3:17)

Why did Confucius love *li*? Part of the reason was aesthetic. Again and again, he tells how much he is moved by descriptions of *li*. One passage in the *Analects* tells us that he was so moved by a performance of ancient ritual music that for three months he was not conscious of the taste of food (*Lunyu* 7:14)! His nostalgia for the ancient *li* was deeper than mere aesthetic appreciation, however. He believed that the early Zhou was China's Golden Age, that it was a time of peace, of leadership by sage kings and loyal ministers, and of cultural achievement, dignity, and beauty. The ancient *li* were symbolic of a civilized society. Imagine a state that was so harmonious that it could afford to put its resources into music and dance rather than soldiers and armaments, or one that modeled itself upon the grandeur, order, and harmony of the great ceremony. Confucius was not interested simply in the restoration of the *li* but, more importantly, in the recreation of a civilization that cherished the *li*. Such a society had its priorities straight: culture, tradition, and the harmony of humans and cosmos. This was the first reason that Confucius talked often about *li*.

Confucius made ritual the cornerstone of his philosophy. He advocated a "return to *li*," meaning literally the restoration of the ancient ceremonies. But he redefined the term for ritual, *li*, and gave it an expanded, symbolic meaning. For Confucius, the word *li* refers not only to religious rites or ceremonies but also symbolically to all "ceremonial" behavior; *li* describes the proper patterns of action for *every* situation, in a living human context. Religious rituals are models for *li* but do not exhaust its meaning. In a Confucian sense, *li* means both *ceremony* and *ceremonial living*. It is a word whose meaning even in modern Chinese includes "ritual" but more commonly "etiquette, propriety, and decency"—in short, the traditional norms of social interaction.

It was crucial to Confucius that *li* should not become "ritualistic" in the negative sense: mechanical, fake, or hypocritical. He believed that ritual should be performed with sincerity and emotion:

> The Master said, "Unless I take part in a sacrifice with all my heart and mind, it is as if I did not sacrifice at all." (*Lunyu* 3:12)

And he believed that *li* as an abstract principle, representing the sincerity, reverence, and religious awe of the sacrifice, should be the basis for moral self-cultivation and self-understanding in every context:

> The Master said, "Do not look at what is contrary to *li*. Do not listen to what is contrary to *li*. Do not speak what is contrary to *li*. Do not act in any way that is contrary to *li*." (*Lunyu* 12:1)

To quote his greatest disciple, Mencius, "Every motion, every stance precise in the performance of *li*: this is the highest virtue." This means that *li* should not just be a set of actions, or rules, but a *principle* of conduct—one might even say an "attitude" toward how one lives one's life. There can be no true *li* without sincerity.

Tian

Confucius grounded his moral philosophy in religion: in particular, the religious rites of antiquity (*li*), which he generalized to describe all moral action. In another specific sense, Confucius based his life upon religious belief. In the *Analects*, Confucius refers frequently to a high god named *Tian* ("Heaven") as a personal protector and divine arbiter of justice.

Confucius believed that he had been given a task by Heaven to restore the early Zhou ideal of social harmony and order, based upon the ritual culture of the past, and that Heaven would ensure his teachings would be spread far and wide. His brief "autobiography" expresses his confidence in a personal mandate from Heaven:

> The Master said, "When I was fifteen years old, I became serious about my studies. When I was thirty, I took my stand in *li*. When I was forty, I was no longer uncertain about right and wrong. When I was fifty, I learned the will of Heaven [*Tianming*]. At sixty, I heard the will of Heaven with an obedient ear, and at seventy, I could do whatever my heart desired without overstepping proper bounds." (*Lunyu* 2:4)

Especially when threatened, Confucius fell back on his belief in Heaven's support:

> Confucius was threatened with his life in the state of Kuang. He said: "King Wen is dead, but his style lives on here [in me], does it not? If *Tian* intended for civilization to die out, it would not have been preserved for later generations. But if *Tian* does *not* intend for civilization to die out, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (*Lunyu* 9:5)

A similar incident occurred when a feudal lord named Huan Tui, enraged with Confucius' "meddling" in state affairs, sent assassins to put him to death. Hearing of this,

> The Master said, "Heaven engendered the virtue that is in me. What can Huan Tui do to me?" (*Lunyu* 7:23)

Frequently in the *Analects*, Confucius laments his lack of recognition, but he has faith that Heaven approves his work:

> The Master said, "Alas! No one understands me. By studying things on a lower level, I reach to a higher level. The one who understands me is *Tian*." (*Lunyu* 14:35)

Confucius was described by his followers as a kind of prophet, "a bell with a wooden clapper," reminding people of Heaven's intention (*Lunyu* 3:2).

Tian is clearly anthropomorphized: Heaven knows, commands, intends, punishes, and responds to men. Most importantly, Heaven is the final judge and authority for morality and virtue. Confucius appeals to Heaven as the ground of his ethical convictions.

It is clear that Confucius interpreted his own life in explicitly religious terms—appealing to the belief in a Mandate of Heaven and grounding moral action in religious ritual. Living in a time when such beliefs had been weakened by social unrest and political decline, Confucius sought to restore them, and to restore the values that flowed naturally from religious conviction. As part of this "restoration project," Confucius expressed an almost anachronistic belief in *Tian*, and showed great confidence in Heaven's power and benevolence.

What we see in Confucius is the clear sense that *Tian* is a god-like being whose primary concern is moral virtue and the restoration of culture. At the same time, Confucius' primary concern was moral cultivation and social reform, which is supported by religious practice.

The religious conception of Heaven was relatively short-lived, and is almost peculiar to Confucius. By the end of the Warring States period—that is, within three hundred years of Confucius' death—*Tian* was no longer anthropomorphized and no longer viewed as a god. Rather, late Zhou Confucians "de-mythologized" Heaven, interpreting *Tian* as a mechanistic process of nature, or, simply, as "the heavens" (the sky).

The followers of Confucius called themselves *Ru*, "ritualists" or "scholars." The *Ru* were often mocked as anachronistic eccentrics, attempting to restore the ritualism of earlier times. They dressed in an archaic style that came to be known as *Ru*-clothing, held performances of ancient court music and dance, and even spoke in an old dialect no longer in use. As "scholars," they banded together in "brotherhoods" under esteemed masters (preferably first-generation disciples of Confucius), to whom they granted the same respect and obedience a son grants his father.

The *Ru* supported themselves meagerly, as teachers (through patronage) and as ritualists (conducting funerals). The *Ru* School ceased to exist as an institutional body with the persecutions of the "Great Unifier," first emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE). Though Confucianism enjoyed a revival in the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and exerted profound influence upon Chinese culture throughout its history, the *Ru* School existed only in Zhou times.

Two other Zhou Dynasty Confucians warrant mention here, as they came to define the core values of Confucianism in later generations: Mencius and Xunzi.

"Mencius" is the Latinized form of the name Mengzi, Master Meng, renowned as the "second sage" of Confucianism. An advocate of righteous leadership, Mencius (c. 371–289 BCE) believed that the wisest rulers appeal to that which is best in human nature: inherent virtue at the core of the human heart-and-mind.

Defending his point of view against the lesser-known Gaozi (who held that human nature is inherently neither good nor evil), Mencius declared that humans have a natural inclination to do good, just as water has a natural inclination to flow downhill:

> Gaozi said, "Human nature is like swirling water. Open a passage to the east, and it flows east. Open a passage to the west, and it flows west. The basic indeterminacy of good and evil in human nature is just like the basic indeterminacy of east and west in the flow of water."
>
> Mencius said, "Water certainly has no particular tendency to flow east or west, but can the same be said of flowing up or down? The basic goodness of human nature is just like the downward flow of water. There is no more a human being utterly lacking in goodness than there is such a thing as water that does not flow downward.
>
> "Now, with my hands or my feet I can splash water over my head; by channeling it, I can direct it all the way to the top of a hill. But is this the basic nature of water? No. These results are due to external force. The fact that people can be made to do evil reflects the same violation of their basic nature." (*Mencius* II.A.2)

Mencius employs a number of illustrations demonstrating the innate presence of virtue in the human heart. For example, anyone, he says, who suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, will have an immediate feeling of alarm and distress. Whether or not you are able to save the child—and, if you do make the attempt, no matter what external motivations may have influenced your decision to act (to gain favor with the child's parents, to seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, to avoid the censure arising from the failure to act, or purely out of altruistic concern for the child's life)—it is that initial, reflective reaction that Mencius emphasizes:

> Mencius said: "All persons have a heart that cannot bear to see the suffering of others. The Sage Kings had such a heart, and their governments did not permit the suffering of the people. In ruling the kingdom, if you manifest this heart to implement such a government, you can hold the world in the palm of your hand.
>
> "What I mean by saying that 'all persons have a heart that cannot bear to see the suffering of others' is this: Anyone who suddenly came upon a toddler about to fall into a well would have a heart of alarm and concern. And we cannot say that this heart arises from wanting to be favored by the parents, or from seeking the praise of one's friends and community, or from hoping to avoid a reputation for callousness.
>
> "Clearly, one who did not have the heart of concern would be inhuman. One who did not have the heart of shame for wrong-doing would be inhuman. One who did not have the heart that places others before oneself would be inhuman. And one who did not have the heart that distinguishes between right and wrong would be inhuman." (*Mencius* II. A.6)

Mencius argues that virtue is a "feeling." It is natural, not learned. Moreover, it is definitive of humanity: lacking it, one is nothing more than a beast. This feeling has four aspects or kinds:

1. Compassion, commiseration.
2. Shame (feeling ashamed for doing wrong).

3. Modesty, deference, compliance.
4. The ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and the inclination to approve of the one and disapprove of the other.

Moreover, these four kinds of feeling are the "seeds" or "sprouts" of full-fledged virtue:

> The *heart of concern* is the sprout of kindness [*ren*]. The *heart of shame* is the sprout of morality [*yi*]. The *heart of yielding* is the sprout of ritual propriety [*li*]. The *heart of judgment* is the sprout of wisdom [*zhi*].
>
> Having these four "sprouts" is like having arms and legs. If you say that you cannot act upon them, you are discrediting yourself, just as if you say that a ruler cannot act upon them, you are discrediting his rule. Anyone who has these four sprouts within themselves knows how to develop them and perfect them: they are like the initial spark of a fire, or the first waters of an open spring. If you can perfect them, you will be able to embrace the whole world with your virtue; if you do not perfect them, you will not even be able to serve your own parents. (*Mencius* II.A.6)

Mencius uses the organic metaphors of nurturing and growth to describe the development of the personality. Education is a form of cultivation, which allows the four sprouts to become the four full-flowering virtues. Humans will be good as long as they are guided by their innate feelings. By contrast, evil results only when these feelings are neglected or abused, "like Niu Mountain [naturally forested and green] denuded by axes and hatchets" (*Mencius* VI.A.8) or "the foolish man of Song" who tried to help his crops to grow by pulling up on the sprouts (*Mencius* II.A.2)—unpropitious outcomes resulting from acts contrary to nature.

On the basis of a person's inherent goodness, Mencius says, he/she is capable of becoming a sage. His belief in human perfectibility sometimes leads him to speak in mystical terms of the "vast, flowing vital breath (*qi*)" of the human heart and even of a cosmic unity of one's heart with the universe. He writes,

> One who goes to the bottom of one's heart knows his own nature, and knowing his own nature he knows Heaven [*Tian*] . . . All the ten thousand living things are found within us. There is no greater joy than to look into ourselves and find this to be true. (*Mencius* II.A.2)

Xunzi or "Master Xun" (312–230 BCE) was born Xun Qing in the later years of the Warring States period. Among the last of the "hundred philosophers" who established the intellectual heritage of China, Xun Qing studied in his thirties and forties with the great thinkers of his day at the renowned Jixia Academy. Xunzi idolized Confucius but he was highly critical of his contemporaries. He met a number of these "Confucians" ("*Ru* scholars" or "ritualists") at the Jixia Academy, and directed many of his strongest polemical arguments against "heterodox *Ru*." These "Confucians" included the followers of Mencius (Mengzi), and some of Xunzi's most

spirited writing is in refutation of the Mencian interpretation of human nature. The other group that most concerned Xunzi were the followers of Mozi, who subscribed to the doctrines of social egalitarianism, frugality, religious literalism, and universal love. These doctrines were, for Xunzi, not only naive with regard to human nature and the natural world but also threatening to the stability of the state. In addition, Xunzi was exposed during his tenure at the Jixia Academy to the works of Shen Buhai, Yang Zhu, Hui Shi, Gongsun Long, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Zou Yan, as well as a number of other thinkers only known through Xunzi's comments on their doctrines. Consequently, Xunzi's writings are an excellent source for the intellectual life of the final years of the Zhou. His own thinking reflects the incorporation (or explicit rejection) of Mencian Confucianism, Mohist Philosophy, Daoism or Eremeticism, Dialectics or Linguistic Philosophy, Cosmological Theory, and Legalism—the so-called "six schools" of pre-Qin philosophy.

Xunzi is best known for his harsh view of human nature. He said, "Human nature is evil; goodness is acquired." (All translations are taken from two essays by Xunzi: *Xing'e* ("Human Nature is Evil") and *Lilun* ("A Discussion of Rites").) He is the only major Chinese philosopher ever to have made such a statement; Mencius did not entertain this position even as a possibility. (Recall that Mencius defended his belief in the goodness of human nature against the position of the philosopher Gaozi that human nature was neither good nor evil.) As opposed to Mencius, Xunzi argued that the natural inclination of a person is the satisfaction of personal, usually selfish, desires. "With life, there is the tendency toward self-benefit." Xunzi agreed with Mencius that humans are basically feeling-oriented, but he did not describe feelings in the same morally positive terms: the "feelings" are not "compassion," "shame," "deference," and so on, but rather the emotions love, hate, pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy. In response to outside stimuli, these feelings manifest themselves as desires, the satisfaction of which is basically selfish and anti-social. Since human desires are inexhaustible, their natural expression is chaotic and competitive. If persons indulge their feelings without restraint, the result will be wrangling and strife, violence and crime, licentiousness and wantonness.

Whereas for Mencius the natural development of basic human feelings produces virtue or "goodness," Xunzi maintains that the natural development of feelings produces suffering or "evil." Acts of virtue (benevolence, trustworthiness, filial piety, loyalty to the state, and so on) "are all contrary to a person's nature and run counter to the emotions."

Xunzi's is not a doctrine of metaphysical evil, such as that found in the West. Rather, evil is the consequence of the unchecked expression of human emotions and desires. In this sense, humans tend to be self-interested, animalistic, and unrestrained, and must acquire the ability to harness and control their natural inclinations.

Despite his view that human nature is "basically evil," however, Xunzi was thoroughly Confucian in his conviction that humans are perfectible, that "any man can become a sage." This can be accomplished by the guidance of rulers and teachers, the implementation of universal standards of behavior, and the proper ordering of

society. "Goodness is acquired" through a process of gradual "accumulation" of models of behavior from the outside.

The key word employed by Xunzi in this context is *wei*: to contrive, manipulate, or create; to deliberate; and, as a noun, "activity," "construct," or "artifice" (the character literally means "man-made"). Goodness is a human construct, invented by the sage kings of the early Zhou in the form of laws and rites. These standards of goodness are passed on from rulers to subjects and from teachers to students, and can be cultivated within individuals through education. Xunzi concluded from his negative evaluation of human nature that education is fundamentally a molding process that "civilizes" the young, and that public ritual (*li*) is the primary means for the creation of a prosperous and peaceful culture. *Li* was, of course, a defining idea for Confucius, who emphasized the broader meaning of "propriety" and "decency" in all interactions, and Xunzi's indebtedness to Confucius on this point defined him as a Confucian thinker. In Xunzi's terms, *li* are the rules of proper conduct in both ceremonial and everyday contexts that can shape individuals to think less often of themselves. He does not deny that this is a manipulative, "unnatural" process. Just as straight wood can be shaped into a wheel or dull metal can be sharpened, a person can "become clear in thought and faultless in action" through education and the practice of *li*.

The distinction between the natural and the artificial also applies to the feelings and mind. While feelings are natural, thought is "artificial" or "contrived," deliberate. "The likes and dislikes, happiness and anger, sadness and joy of human nature are called 'emotions.' When the emotions are aroused and the mind chooses between them, this is called 'thought.' When the mind is capable of action on the basis of deliberation, this is *wei*." Deliberation is an "artificial" molding activity that functions to harness emotions and to suppress their natural, selfish expression.

This capacity for overcoming natural desires distinguishes persons from animals. It also makes social life possible, as the unchecked expression of emotion would preclude the possibility of civil society. In Xunzi's terms, what distinguishes persons from animals is "differentiation," both as a function of rational thought and as the basis for communal existence.

"We are not as strong as oxen . . . yet they are used by us. Why? . . . Because we differentiate among ourselves." Condemning the social egalitarianism of the Daoists and Mohists in the strongest terms, Xunzi underscored the ideals of social hierarchy, division of labor, and clarity of roles described by Xunzi and his Confucian predecessors as the "rectification of names." Successful statecraft involves the proper identification of duties, the creation of models and standards for behavior, and the judicious implementation of rewards and punishments. Within such an environment, goodness can be "constructed" and society made harmonious. (For further discussion of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, see Chapter 7, THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION IN CHINA, and Chapter 17, DIVINITY.)

We can summarize the religious values and practices of classical Confucianism as follows:

- The veneration of ancestors.
- The grounding of moral teachings and ethical principles in a religious or cosmic reality (*Tian*).
- A sense of unity between the individual and the cosmos conceived in moral and ethical terms.
- A belief in individual and social perfectibility, modeled on the sages of early Zhou antiquity.
- The modeling of individual comportment and social harmony on religious ritual (*li*), especially as practiced in early antiquity.

The Daoists

"Daoism" is a difficult term to define (see Chapter 8, THE DAOIST TRADITION IN CHINA), and most scholars would say that "Daoism" did not exist as a coherent religious tradition until the Han Dynasty. Prior to this, in the Zhou Dynasty, the Daoists were associated with hermits or recluses, who saw no point in trying to right the world's wrongs and regarded efforts at political reform to be futile. Confucius is purported to have had an encounter with two such recluses during his travels. They had "gone back to nature" and advocated a self-sustaining lifestyle of subsistence farming. They urged Confucius' followers to abandon the world: "Instead of following one who avoids certain men," they said (referring to Confucius' refusal to associate with "petty" or selfish persons), "why not follow those who avoid men altogether?" Confucius disdained them, saying, "Who are they, flocking with birds and beasts? There is a way of the world; how can they presume to change it?" On one occasion, Confucius' disciple Zi lu came across a recluse working as a city gate-keeper:

> Zi lu was staying overnight at the Stone Gate outside the city. The gate-keeper for the morning watch asked him, "Who sent you?"
>
> "Confucius," Zi lu replied.
>
> "Oh, isn't he the one who knows full well that something can't be done, but goes ahead and does it anyway?"

From these passages in the *Analects*, we know that the recluses advocated an agrarian or pastoral lifestyle (they may have belonged to a pastoral "School of Tillers"), avoiding conscription, government service, and wider social responsibilities.

Best known of all of these recluses was Zhuangzi ("Master Zhuang," 368–289 BCE), a contemporary of Mencius who was from the state of Song in the south, and thus part of the southern tradition of Zhou shamanism. Though Zhuangzi was probably a member of the gentry (*shi*) class, he repeatedly refused to serve as an official or to offer his advice to state rulers. On numerous occasions, his flippancy and disregard for social convention led to threats on his life.

What we know of Zhuangzi is derived from a book in thirty-three chapters by the same name, seven of which can accurately be ascribed to Zhuangzi or his immediate contemporaries. These seven are known as the "inner chapters":

1. Floating and Wandering
2. A Discussion of the Sameness of Things
3. Principles of Caring for Life
4. In the Human World
5. Amulets Replete with Power
6. Great Ancestor-Teacher
7. Countering Political Authority

Zhuangzi was not a system-builder. His was an attitude of toleration, pointing out the relativity of all distinctions and hierarchies, and offering new perspectives to a society made sick by competition, entanglement, anxiety, and futility. Yet Zhuangzi's solution to these social problems was not social but individual and attitudinal. The trap we are in is of our own making; life itself is free, peaceful, and joyful, and we realize this by retiring from worldly affairs and "sitting in forgetfulness" (*zuowang*), contemplating the universal *Dao*.

Even better known as a Daoist "founder" was Laozi, the "old boy." Laozi was a semi-mythical figure of an unknown time. The work ascribed to him, entitled *Daode jing* (the Classic of the Way and the Power), probably dates from the fifth or fourth century BCE, about the time of Zhuangzi and Mengzi.

The *Daode jing* was compiled in its present form later than the *Zhuangzi*, but tradition places Laozi before Zhuangzi, and much of the work dates to 480 to 360 BCE. The book consists of sayings and poetic aphorisms that were probably compiled by a group of individuals rather than written by a single author. These sayings are brief, cryptic, and imagistic, and therefore subject to many interpretations. It is no wonder that the *Daode jing* is the source of well over a hundred English translations, often so different from one another that it is hard to believe that they are translations of the same work! The language of the book is vague and perplexing, suggestive of a mystical or shamanistic orientation toward the cosmos. For example, the predominant images employed to describe the *Dao* are "mother," "ancestor," or "storehouse"; the ideal person is likened to an infant, a young girl, or an old man; the goal of life is to imitate or resemble water, a mirror, a valley, or an "uncarved block." The *Daode jing*, with its mysterious images and phraseology, is concerned with a great number of issues, including aesthetics, ethics, cosmology, human nature, the natural world, sagehood, epistemology, political power, and both spiritual and practical achievement. Both in East Asia and in the West, the sayings of Laozi have meant many things to many people.

Reconstructing the community that composed the *Daode jing* is extraordinarily difficult. Modern scholars think that the book was a compilation of images, ideas, and sayings that were "floating around" among a group of individuals who were

seeking alternatives to the more predominant values of the early Warring States period (475–221 BCE). One scholar has helpfully identified "targets" of the "Lao-ist" critiques as well as "stances" that are suggested (though they are rarely made explicit) in the *Daode jing* (LaFargue 1992):

Targets	**Stances**
Exciting and "desirable" things	Be content with what one already has
The cultivation of "showy" personal qualities	True substance often appears unimpressive or negative
Status-seeking by self-assertion	Self-effacing people gain the most true esteem
Impressive and strict rule	A deferential and flexible attitude wins the allegiance of the people
Problem-solving by force and confrontation	War, even in victory, is "unlucky"
Social improvement programs, whether material or educational	Organic goodness and social harmony will be present without conscious intervention

The Dao

Both Confucianism and Daoism, sharing a common cosmological orientation, emphasize *harmony*. But, whereas Confucianism seeks harmony within social relations, the classical Daoists strove for harmony between humans and the natural world. If for Confucius the central image or standard of life is ritual and court ceremony, the Daoists base themselves on the *way of nature*: the "*Dao*."

Though we tend to associate the *Dao* solely with the Daoists, they were not the only school to make use of the term. Confucius also uses the word *Dao*, but his is a moral and social *Dao*, the *Dao* of right action or righteousness. Thinking of the *Dao* as a path, Confucius advocates following the path of the sage kings, who ruled with wisdom, justice, and benevolence. In this sense, one is either "on the path" or "off" it, either living as a self-cultivated *junzi* ("gentleman") or living as a self-interested "small man." To live in accordance with the *Dao* is to follow the path of righteousness and virtue.

Confucius' *Dao* is straightforward. There is nothing mystical about it. It is also completely human:

> Confucius said: "It is persons who make the *Dao* great, not the *Dao* that makes persons great." (*Lunyu* 15:19)

This is to say that the *Dao* is not something outside human affairs. In fact, it is principally a product of human activity, and therefore demands personal responsibility. By contrast, Laozi's *Dao* is a metaphysical abstraction. He calls it (variously) "the One," "the nameless," "non-being," "mother," "ancestor," and "the great form."

The *Daode jing* describes the *Dao* as the ultimate source of all existence, most evident at the beginning of time, before the division of reality into the "ten thousand things." Because the world is now differentiated—"many" rather than "One"—it is difficult to perceive or "know" the *Dao*. Laozi can "point to it" but can never "pin it down." It is "invisible," "inaudible," "vague," "elusive," "profound," "distant," "vast." Because of this, the *Dao* cannot be described; in fact, it can hardly be named:

> The *Dao* that can be spoken is not the Eternal *Dao*.
>
> The name that can be spoken is not the Eternal Name. (*Daode jing* 1)
>
> We look for it but do not see it; its name is "Invisible." We listen for it but do not hear it; its name is "Inaudible." We reach for it but do not find it; its name is "Minute." These three cannot be further understood, and they dissolve into one. Above, it is not bright; below, it is not dark. Unraveled, it cannot be given any name.
>
> It returns to non-being.
>
> This is called "the shapeless shape, the insubstantial form." It is called "Indistinct." From the front you cannot see its front. From the back you cannot see its back.
>
> Grasp the *Dao* of old in order to guide things in the present. Then you will know the primeval birth. This is called "the weave of *Dao*." (*Daode jing* 14)

The Sage

For the classical Daoists, the only non-relative perspective is that of the *Dao* itself. And this is theoretically possible for the enlightened sage, the *zhenren* or "perfected one." The character *zhen* means "perfected" or "true." Etymologically, it shows a figure standing tall beneath a character meaning "to see or survey," which is beneath another character meaning "transformation." So, the "perfected one" stands above the rest, surveying the spontaneous transformations of the universe. The *zhenren* has an expansive vision, a mind of equanimity and imperturbability and—as a foreshadowing of the "immortality cultivation" of the mature Daoist tradition (described in later chapters of this book)—a lifespan rivaling the oldest living creatures in the world.

The *Book of Zhuangzi* describes the perfected one in these ways:

- The *zhenren* has no fear of poverty, and takes no pride in wealth.
- The *zhenren* has no fear of "failure," and takes no pride in "success."
- The *zhenren* makes no plans, but acts naturally and spontaneously.
- The *zhenren* "does not dream in sleep, does not wake with a start"; "his breathing is deep and steady, and comes from his heels."
- The *zhenren* can "climb up high without being frightened, enter water without getting wet, enter fire without being burned."
- The *zhenren* lives out his Heaven-appointed years; his life is not cut short—and yet, the *zhenren* "doesn't understand loving life or fearing death."

The perfected one has "a mind like a mirror" and sees things simply for what they are, not as objects of knowledge or tools for our use. This is only possible by "forgetting oneself," or "emptying oneself of self," and adopting a perspective of indifference or "disinterestedness." Thus, one achieves mystical unity with the *Dao*.

Zhuangzi explains how to become "perfected":

> Focus your will. What cannot be heard with your ears can be heard with your mind. What cannot be heard with your mind can be heard with your vital spirit [*qi*] . . . The spirit is empty and waits on all things. Only the *Dao* can gather this emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (*Zhuangzi* 4)

The "fasting of the mind" means "forgetting" the Confucian values of benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*), "forgetting" the Confucian practices of ritual (*li*) and music, and, further still, "sitting down and forgetting everything." Zhuangzi summarizes this as "sitting in forgetfulness"—perhaps a kind of meditation in which the practitioner empties the mind of thoughts and images.

For Laozi as well, sagehood is attained through meditative practices—practices later elaborated by the Daoist tradition (see Chapter 8). Laozi describes meditation in this way:

> Can you carry the soul and embrace the One without letting go?
> Can you concentrate your *qi* and attain the weakness of an infant?
> Can you polish the mirror of mystery so as to make it spotless?
> Can you practice *wu-wei* in loving the nation and governing the people?
> Can you adopt the role of the female when the gates of Heaven open and close?
> Can you abandon all knowing even as your intelligence penetrates the universe?
> To give birth and to rear, to give birth but not to possess, to act but not to depend on the outcome, to lead but not to command: this is called "mysterious power." (*Daode jing* 10)

Laozi says, revert to the female, the infant, the uncarved block, the empty mirror. This is the way to act non-aggressively, and to realize the mysterious power of non-being.

Both the *Daode jing* and *The Book of Zhuangzi* contain mystical elements, and suggestions of the spirit-journeys of ancient shamanism. "Without feelings and intentions, annihilating body and mind, my heart like dead ashes, and form like dry wood," says the *Zhuangzi*, "I can travel far." The *zhenren* or "perfected one" is a religiously enlightened being, at one with the principle of change.

The third of the preeminent Daoist sages of the classical period was Liezi. We know very little about the historical Liezi, but he appears as a heroic figure in *The Book of Zhuangzi*; however, the book attributed to Liezi himself did not exist prior to the Han Dynasty. Liezi championed a reclusive and hedonistic (pleasure-seeking) lifestyle, and was completely oblivious to social constraint, duty, or responsibility. This is reminiscent of Zhuangzi, part of a long tradition of hermits or recluses, retir-

ing from worldly affairs to pursue meditation and creative arts. The famous story is told of a feudal emissary sent to draft Zhuangzi for government service. He promised Zhuangzi a reward of great riches, including a jewel-encased tortoise. Zhuangzi scoffed, "Do you think that your tortoise would rather be set on display, covered with jewels? Or would it rather be dragging its tail in the mud?" When the emissary stuttered his reply, Zhuangzi rebuffed him: "Go away! I'd rather drag my tail in the mud." Zhuangzi's favorite activities were fishing, wandering, and beating on a drum. Some of China's greatest artists and poets were recluses inspired by Zhuangzi, Liezi, Yang Zhu, and other hermits of the classical period. Without going into detail here, we can identify these characteristics of China's eremitic tradition:

1. *Indifference to worldly affairs and material wealth*: disregard for social convention; uselessness of reputation, wealth, rank, fame, social service; spontaneous generosity.
2. *Hedonism*: spontaneous indulgence; not rebelling against desire; a positive view of natural feelings and inclinations.
3. *Favoring life over death*: lack of concern for death or the dead; avoidance of risk, including government or military service.
4. *Love of drink*: wine as escape from structure and order, nature as escape from culture; equation of "drunkenness" with "naturalness": going along with whatever happens, including emotions and desires.

The Search for Immortality

Daoists of the Han and later periods interpreted the *Daode jing* as an immortality handbook, with encoded messages describing breathing techniques, elixirs, and meditation exercises ensuring long life. Whether the *Daode jing* actually describes these techniques is debatable, but the quest for long or permanent life (early texts do not maintain a distinction between longevity and immortality) is so ancient that it was a natural aspiration of any Chinese by Han times. As early as the Zhou Dynasty, bronze bowls were produced with inscriptions such as "long life" (*shou*), "delay old age" (*nanlao*), and "non-death" (*wusi*). No one would have questioned its desirability, though certain Eastern Zhou philosophers (including Confucius, Xunzi, and Zhuangzi) did express a certain disdain for active attempts to cultivate it.

Generally, the soul was thought to be unhappy after death, yearning to enter once more into the world and affairs of the living. Pre-Han texts do not portray it in much detail, but the *Zuozhuan* (a historical work of the fourth century BCE) describes a "Yellow Springs" (*Huangquan*) where souls resided after death: it is portrayed as a miserable place. The *Book of Zhuangzi* shows a similar cosmology, though other theories of death appear in the book as well. For example, in one passage, Zhuangzi's friends speculate that, after death, they will be "transformed" into other living things—a "rooster," a "crossbow," a "carriage." In another passage, Zhuangzi

speculates that his wife, who has recently died, has "progressed," like the four seasons: "now she's going to rest peacefully in a great chamber." Dating of these chapters from the *Zhuangzi* is an inexact science, but clearly by the end of the Zhou Dynasty death was not "final," and some kind of ongoing life beyond the grave was widely accepted. Moreover, interactions between the living and the dead were at the heart of early Chinese religion: shamanic communion, mortuary rituals, ancestor veneration, the intercession of the dead (as gods and ghosts) in the world of the living, and actively seeing out immortals (beings who had transcended death) in far-away mountains and isles were all widely practiced, were elaborated in infinite varieties in the subsequent two thousand years of Chinese history, and still exist, in greater or lesser degree, to the present day.

We can summarize the religious values and practices of classical Daoism as follows:

- The sense that reality extends beyond the observable realm, and includes spiritual power.
- The rejection of conventional values and behaviors, including those associated with Confucius and his followers.
- The practice of meditation and physical exercises that reinforce the unity of an individual's psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual identity.
- The belief in harmony between persons, the natural world, and the cosmos.
- The belief that harmony has practical benefits, from social welfare to individual health and longevity.

The Six Schools

By the end of the Zhou Dynasty, the various religious and philosophical systems of the classical period had developed—based on an "intellectual history" composed in the Han—into six schools:

1. *Confucians* (known as "Ritualists" or "Scholars"): dedicated to the restoration of political and social conditions established by the Duke of Zhou centuries earlier.
2. *Mo-ists*: followers of the philosopher Mozi, who taught the doctrines of radical pacificism and "universal love."
3. *Realists* (or "Legalists"): dedicated to a realpolitik of political power, social control, and law and order.
4. *Daoists*: recluses who rejected *shi* status, "civil" society, and its values.
5. *Dialecticians* (or "Logicians"): dedicated to the study of language and logic, perhaps as a rejection of political engagement.
6. *Yin-yang Cosmologists*: dedicated to the study of the cosmos and its interrelations.

In the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the basic contours of indigenous Chinese religion—that is, "Confucianism" and "Daoism," as well as the "popular religion" of gods, ghosts, and ancestors—were well-established, and it is not unreasonable to say that Chinese religion of this period shaped the religious beliefs and practices of today, more than two millennia later. In the twenty-first century, these traditions are still very much alive, and in fact are enjoying a significant revival in mainland China, where they suffered from oppressive measures of the Nationalist and Communist governments from the early 1900s to the 1970s and 1980s, when restrictions on religious belief and practice were eased in both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan. In a very real sense, Chinese identity remains intimately connected to classical Confucian and Daoist values, and to the spiritual cosmology of China's ancient religious traditions.

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CHAPTER 3

Chinese Religion from the Han to the Six Dynasties

Gil Raz, Dartmouth College

The eight centuries that span the era of the Han Dynasty (207 BCE—220 CE) and the Six Dynasties (220–589 CE) are among the most important in Chinese religious history. The Han—following upon the short-lived Qin (221–207 BCE), which unified the realm—established an integrated empire based upon unifying cosmology. This cosmology, which I discuss in detail below, was accepted to such an extent that the collapse of the Han was perceived not as a mere political problem but as a cosmic breach. Indeed, the emergence of Daoism as an institutional religion and the integration of Buddhism into the Chinese world order may to a large extent be seen as a response to the cosmological crisis at the collapse of the Han.

The long rule of the Han was followed by an almost equally long period of disunion, during which various rulers and dynasties, many of them not ethnically Chinese, controlled different parts of China. The period immediately following the Han is called the Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo*), referring to the contemporaneous polities of Wei, Wu, and Shu. This period ended with brief unification of the realm by the Western Jin in 280 CE. North China, however, was soon overrun by non-Han peoples, as the semi-nomadic Xianbei people captured the ancient capitals of Luoyang in 311 and Chang'an in 317. This conquest was followed by continuous warfare among various non-Han peoples, who vied for control over the north China plain. The political situation may best be summed up by the traditional Chinese designation for the period: "sixteen kingdoms of the five barbarians." It was only in the late fourth century that some stability was achieved, under the Northern Wei (386–534), established by the Tuoba people. The Northern Wei was followed by several short-lived dynasties. Meanwhile, remnants of the Jin Dynasty reestablished themselves in the

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southern coastal region. Known as Eastern Jin (318–420), this was the first of the Southern Dynasties, a succession of short-lived dynasties. The realm was not reunited until the Sui Dynasty (589–618). This period of disunion is known as the Six Dynasties. The continued political and social turmoil in north and south China during the Six Dynasties was perceived as further proof of the cosmic crisis and provided further impetus for the developments of Daoism and Buddhism.

Before discussing different traditions of religious practice in Han China, we should indicate some commonly shared ideas and practices. By the beginning of the Han, there was general agreement that the cosmos, known as "heaven and earth," operated through various natural patterns of change, such as *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases. In this way of thinking, the cosmos and its patterns of change are held to be encapsulated in a unitary, ineffable process known as *Dao*, the Way. All things in the world emanate from this unitary *Dao*, and are made of a single substance, *qi*. A useful way to think about *qi*, which is difficult to translate or explain in Western terms, is the visual metaphor of the character itself, which indicates the energetic vapor rising from cooking rice. This dynamic vapor pervades the cosmos, and is the basic constituent of all things. The multifarious things of the world, be they stars, plants, or human emotions, are particular manifestations that result from the complex ways in which the natural patterns transform *qi*.

Another complex of ideas and practice common to most people in Han China was an intense concern with the ancestors. Great care in funerary, burial, and mourning rites was necessary to transform the recently deceased into beneficent ancestors, who could act as intercessors for the living members of the family and the realm of the spirits. The deceased who did not receive proper care threatened their families with illness and other calamities. Other dead who were unburied or whose deaths were violent or untimely could become dangerous ghosts. Much of the common religion was concerned with apotropaic practices to ward off threats from the dead, appease potentially unhappy ancestors, and exorcise ghosts.

The primary mode of interaction between the living and the various types of spirits—superior gods, ancestors, and ghosts—was sacrifice. Sacrificial rites were at the core of the highest imperial rites, at shrines to local gods and at ancestral offerings. It was against this backdrop of sacrificial rites that Daoism and Buddhism advocated distinctly different religious systems.

Han Imperial Religion

The religious developments of the early Han can be seen as the culmination of processes and developments that began during the Warring States era, and even earlier. By the late Han, however, we witness developments that came to structure Chinese religion henceforth. The two most important of these developments were the emergence of Daoist communal religion and the integration of Buddhism into the social and cultural fabric of China.

The conquest of the realm and establishment of the Han were legitimated by the ancient notion of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*), which asserted that the ruling dynasty obtained its authority from heaven. The ruler was thus known as Child of Heaven (*Tianzi*) and was the only one allowed to offer sacrifice to Heaven. The sacrifice to Heaven was the peak of a ritual system that extended to encompass all ritual activities within a single ritual hierarchy. This idealized ritual order was advocated by the "literati" (*Ru*), who studied and transmitted the ancient classics associated with the Confucian tradition. This so-called Confucian literati tradition came to dominate the scholarly and administrative apparatus of the imperial state, from the Han to the early twentieth century.

Another very influential group, but difficult to define socially, were the *fangshi* ("masters of esoterica"), who transmitted various technical traditions, such as divination, medicine, calendrics, alchemy, and methods for cultivating and nourishing *qi*. Most importantly, the *fangshi* sought ways to transcend the mundane limits of life and death, and attain immortality. Traditionally said to have originated in the Yan and Qi coastal areas, the *fangshi* transmitted legends of three islands in the eastern sea "where transcendents roamed, and medicinals for avoiding death could be found, the beasts and birds were all white, and palaces were made of gold and silver" (Sima Qian, *Shiji*, "Fengshan" 28.1370). The religious practices associated with the *fangshi* extended from the highest levels of imperial ritual, such as the cult to Taiyi ("Great One") and the *fengshan* rite, to local religious rites. Most importantly, the *fangshi* and their quest for immortality had a deep influence on the religious aspirations of many emperors.

By the end of the Warring States period, the politico-religious notion of the Mandate of Heaven had been augmented by a far more complex and all-encompassing cosmology announced in encyclopedic texts such as *Lüshi chunqiu* (*Lü Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), compiled in 239 BCE under the guidance of Lü Buwei (the prime minister of the state of Qin), and the *Huainanzi*, compiled by Liu An (uncle of the Han Dynasty Emperor Wu) and presented to the emperor in 139 BCE. Both texts were written as blueprints for a universal empire. While differing in various details, these texts represent an emerging discourse in which the ideas of cyclical transformation, cosmic temporality, human history, and resonance between the human and natural realms merged within a vast unified cosmic vision. Vital to this unified cosmic vision was the figure of a single human ruler over "all under Heaven" (*Tianxia*), whose ritual activity ensured proper harmony between the human and celestial realms. This vision of the emperor was to dominate imperial ideology for the subsequent two millennia of imperial China.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the unified cosmology was the notion of the Five Phases (*wuxing*). This cosmological framework developed during the late Warring States period, but it was only in the early Han that the full correlative system was determined. This cosmology was based on the notion that *qi*, the unitary, primordial, and pervasive matter of the cosmos, attained its multifarious forms in the things of the world through dynamic patterned transformations of Five Phases.

Table 3.1 The Five Phases (*Wuxing*)

Phase	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Direction	East	South	Center	West	North
Color	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Season	Spring	Summer		Autumn	Winter
Animal	Dragon	Bird	Snake	Tiger	Turtle
Planet	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Body part	Eyes	Mouth	Stomach	Ears	Navel
Organ	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
Sacred peak	Mount Tai	Mount Huo	Mount Song	Mount Hua	Mount Heng
Flavor	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty

The phases were perceived as following each other in two sequences: the sequence of "production" (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) or the sequence of of "conquest" (wood, metal, fire, water, earth). All things of the world were correlated within one of the Five Phases, and they were perceived as interacting with each other according to the sequences of the phases. The Five Phases thus correlated all cosmic, temporal, geographic, and bodily functions to basic directional and temporal categories.

Among the clearest statements of the correlation between human ruler, natural phenomena, and the Five Phases is found in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which describes the natural omens that appeared at the dynastic rise of each of the five ancient mythical rulers. These rulers are labeled *di*, a term that during the Shang Dynasty referred to royal ancestors, and particularly to *Shangdi*, "high lord," the supreme deity. By the late Warring States period the word *di* was applied to label ancient mythical rulers. Most importantly, the First Emperor of Qin (*Qin shi huangdi*), upon ascending the throne and proclaiming himself ruler of all-under-heaven adopted the word *di* as part of his title to indicate his celestial stature. This title was used by all succeeding emperors. I therefore adopt the translation "thearch" for the Chinese word *di* to indicate the simultaneous divinity and rule embodied in these mythical figures, while I use "emperor" to refer to living rulers. But we must remember that the Chinese label is the same. The *Lüshi chunqiu* thus describes the auspicious events at the rise of the Yellow Thearch:

> Whenever a Thearch Lord is about to arise, heaven invariably manifests omens to the people below. In the time of the Yellow Thearch, heaven first manifested great mole crickets and great earth worms. The Yellow Thearch announced: "The *qi* of earth is ascendant." As the *qi* of earth was ascendant, he revered the color yellow, and modeled his affairs on earth.

This passage, and the succeeding passages that refer to the remaining emperor, exemplify the merging of the notions of the Mandate of Heaven and the Five Phases. The

political implications of this new ideology, however, were further developed in the political theory of "cyclical shifts of the Five Virtues" (*wude*) associated with Zou Yan (305–240 BCE). According to this theory, the succession of dynasties followed the natural patterns of rise and decline of the Five Phases; each ruling dynasty was perceived as ruling in accordance with the ascendant phase. The first to adopt this theory was the First Emperor of Qin (259–210 BCE), who ascended the throne as emperor in 221 BCE. The Qin claimed to rule under the auspices of the water phase, which conquered the Zhou, identified retroactively with fire. While the early Han rulers continued to follow the Qin claim, in 104 BCE the dynasty announced that it ruled under the auspices of earth, the conqueror of water. A century later, as the Former Han was nearing its end, new voices claimed that the correct sequence of succession was the "production" cycle, and therefore that the Han was in fact correlated with fire. This new interpretation was adopted by Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57 CE), who re-established the Han after the brief usurpation by Wang Mang (r. 9–23 CE).

The power of such a claim is obvious, and it is not surprising that succeeding dynasties also asserted their legitimacy based on omens which proved their alignment with the cosmic patterns. Claiming to rule in accordance with the ascendant phase, however, becomes problematic when signs of decline become evident, as was the case in the second century CE. As the Han Dynasty lost its power, challengers rose with their own cosmological claims.

The most important challenge was by a movement known alternatively as Great Peace (*Taiping*) or the "Yellow Turbans" (referring to the yellow headdress worn by its followers). The color yellow was also adopted as the first reign-title by the Wu Dynasty, one of the three rival kingdoms that followed the Han. The notion of Great Peace was an ancient idea of an ideal state, in which a benevolent ruler presided. I discuss this movement in more detail below.

Alongside the unifying philosophical framework provided by texts such as the *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Huainanzi*, the early empires attempted to unify the realm by importing local cults to a central site, where the emperor could personally offer sacrifice to, and supervise, the diverse gods of the realm. By the time of the Qin unification, hundreds of altars for various deities had been established at the cultic center of Yong, the ancient Qin capital. This localization of the worship of various gods from different regions in the imperial cultic site was one aspect of the imperial unification project. The First Emperor frequently participated personally in the rites at the site. The localization of cultic practice at Yong was complemented by the almost ceaseless journeying by the First Emperor to sacred sites around the realm, where he personally sacrificed to local spirits. Thus, the political unification of the empire was paralleled by a unification of the spiritual realm, and a tendency to monopolize cultic practice in the person of the emperor. While the Inaugural Emperor's ritual peregrinations had a political motivation, he was also deeply invested in a quest for personal immortality, and in his journeys along the coast he sought instructors in the secret methods of transcendence and tried to locate the isles of the immortals.

Among the most important of the gods revered by the emperors were the Five Celestial Thearchs, who were perceived as manifestations of the Five Phases and sometimes identified with ancient mythical rulers. Cults to the directional emperors were initiated during the Qin Dynasty, but the Qin did not establish a complete ritual system for all five. It was Liu Bang, the first Han emperor, who added a cult to the fifth directional emperor, while making the cult to the Yellow Thearch the central and most important. The first Han emperor did not personally attend these rites, and it was the third Han emperor, Wendi, who first personally participated in the worship of the Five Thearchs, in 165 BCE. After the Five Thearchs manifested at Weiyang, the emperor instituted worship at this auspicious site. Worship of the Five Thearchs continued at the Yong ritual site with infrequent personal participation by Han emperors, even after the imperial cult to Taiyi ("Great One") had been established in the Han capital of Chang'an.

The establishment of Taiyi as the highest deity in the imperial pantheon reveals the complex interaction between local, common, and imperial religion. It also further shows the importance of the *fangshi* in the imperial religion. Taiyi was later incorporated into the Daoist religion, and thus bridged several religious traditions in medieval China, although there were evidently different perceptions of the identity and function of the deity.

The establishment of the imperial cult to Taiyi is described in the Han Dynasty *Book of History* (*Shiji*), in the "*Fengshan*" chapter, which is devoted to criticizing imperial ritual innovations. The passage shows the importance of the *fangshi* in the establishment of imperial ritual, while revealing debates about the meaning and significance of Taiyi:

> Miu Ji, a man of Hao, submitted the method of worshiping Taiyi: "What the heaven and spirits cherish is the Taiyi. The aides of Taiyi are called the Five Thearchs. In the past, the Son of Heaven sacrificed to Taiyi at the southeastern suburb in spring and autumn, using a great offering [*tailao*, an offering of an ox, a sheep, and a pig]. The sacrifice lasted seven days. He made an altar, and opened eight paths for communication with the spirits." The Son of Heaven ordered the Great Invocator to establish this cult in the southeastern suburb of Chang'an, and to regularly offer sacrifice in accord with this method.
>
> Later, someone else presented a memorial that said: "In the past, the Son of Heaven used a great sacrifice once every three years to worship the spirits of the Three Ones: Celestial One, Terrestrial One and the Taiyi." The Son of Heaven assented to this and ordered the Great Invocator to perform worship at Ji's Taiyi altar according to this method [too]. (*Shiji* 28.1386)

While the cosmological significance of Taiyi was not fixed and was open to debate, there was general agreement that the deity inhabits the star at the precise celestial North Pole. In the *Huainanzi*, Taiyi was identified as the highest deity, also named Celestial Sovereign Great Thearch (*Tianhuang dadi*), resident at the Northern Chrono-

gram (*beichen*) at the center of the circumpolar stars, in the Palace of Purple Tenuity (*Ziwei gong*) (*Huainanzi*, "*Tianwen xun*" 3:9a9; see Major 1993).

Prior to becoming the highest deity of the imperial pantheon, Taiyi was apparently a high deity in the Chu region in south China. The earliest references to a deity named Taiyi may be in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*), of the third century BCE, which refer to a "Great One Sovereign of the East" (*Donghuang taiyi*) as the highest deity of the local pantheon. In the nearly contemporary *Great One Gave Birth to Water* (*Taiyi shengshui*), a manuscript unearthed at Guodian in 1994 and closely associated with the *Daode jing*, Taiyi is the primordial deity who initiates the process of genesis and participates in a series of hierogamic unions as the process unfolds to form the world. This cosmogonic deity is presented as a cosmic principle in the *Lüshi chunqiu*: "Taiyi brought forth the dyadic couple, the dyadic couple brought forth *yin* and *yang* . . . the myriad things that emerged were created by Taiyi and transformed by *yin* and *yang*." Later in the passage, the *Dao* is defined as the ultimate essence, which is formless and nameless; but, "forced to give it a name, I would call it Taiyi." With this allusion to the *Daode jing* the passage identifies the *Dao* and Taiyi.

Practices related to Taiyi reveal that this deity was a remote cosmic entity that held the attention of the elite and formed a significant part of routine daily life, from divination and sacrifice to incantation and magico-ritual performances. Archaeological data reveal that practices associated with Taiyi were geographically and socially widespread.

One of the primary roles of Taiyi during the late Warring States period and early Han Dynasty was as an apotropaic deity who repelled weapons. For example, a figure identified as Taiyi appears on a silk manuscript discovered at Mawangdui, entitled by the scholars the "Weapon Repelling Chart" (*Bibing tu*). In this chart the anthropomorphic figure of Taiyi is linked to a triad of stars in the form of an arrowhead. This triad of stars is a representation of the Three Ones (*sanyi*), which, as we saw, was one of the primary associations of Taiyi. The image on the chart appears to be similar to an image inscribed on a banner attached to the Taiyi Spear described in the *Shiji*:

> When attacking Nanyue, [the emperor] offered prayer to Taiyi. On a banner attached to a pole of non-fruiting jujube wood he drew the sun, moon, northern dipper and the Ascending Dragon, and an image of the three stars of Celestial One (*Tianyi*), thereby making a Taiyi Spear. It was called the Numinous Banner. The Grand Scribe raised and pointed it in the direction of the state to be attacked while praying for victory.

In 133 BCE, Emperor Wu followed Miu Ji's memorial and established an altar southeast of Chang'an as a cultic site for Taiyi. Although Miu Ji claimed that the Five Thearchs were subsidiary to Taiyi, Emperor Wu continued the cult for the Five Thearchs at the old ritual site in Yong. In 122 BCE, the emperor established a ritual site at Ganquan, with an octagonal altar with three levels. The ritual procedure

followed that of the imperial "Suburban" sacrifice (*jiao*), with the officiants wearing clothing coordinated with colors of the respective thearchs. Those responsible for the Taiyi cult wore purple, associating the deity with the Palace of Purple Tenuity, the celestial center. Later emperors continued these sacrifices, despite opposition by various literati that led to temporary annulments of this cult.

In Wang Mang's ritual system the supreme celestial deity worshipped in the southern suburb of the capital was named Luminous Heaven High Thearch Taiyi (*Huangtian shangdi taiyi*). Marianne Bujard interprets this title as a synthesis of the various supreme deities addressed in the suburban ritual according to different ritual schemes: (1) Taiyi, which the *fangshi* advocated and which received sacrifice at the Ganquan altar; (2) Shangdi, the ancient high deity prescribed in the ritual manual *Liji*; and (3) Huangtian, which was the title of heaven advocated by the literati authors of the *Zhouli* (Bujard 2009).

Taiyi remained a high deity to the end of the Han, and was adopted into the cults of immortals and into the Daoist religion that developed from these cults. Taiyi is the supreme deity mentioned in the two stele inscriptions to the transcendent Wangzi Qiao and the defied Laozi, erected at the behest of Han Emperor Huan (r. 147–167).

These two steles were erected in the emperor's final years, during an especially intensive period of religious activity. The emperor, however, was reputedly devoted to seeking immortality from an early age. Within two years of ascending the throne, he established a shrine to Laozi at Hu county in Chen (in modern Henan), a site traditionally seen as Laozi's birthplace. A stele bearing an inscription to Laozi's mother (*Shengmu bei*) was erected at the site. The date of this stele is disputed—it may have been erected in 153 or in 305.

In February 165, Emperor Huan dispatched a eunuch-official to the shrine to offer sacrifice to Laozi. This sacrifice was followed by another in January 166. In August of 165, Emperor Huan dispatched an envoy to perform a sacrifice and erect a stele for the transcendent Wangzi Qiao, after the latter appeared at a shrine in Meng (in modern Hunan). On an auspicious *jiazi* day (the first) of the next month (the eighth month of the eighth year of the *yanxi* reign: September 24, 165 CE), a stele inscription celebrating the deified Laozi and explaining the emperor's motivation to emulate Laozi was erected in Hu. In September 166, the emperor personally offered sacrifice to Laozi at the imperial palace. Intriguingly, this was a joint sacrifice to a deified Laozi (here named "*Huang-Lao*") and to the Buddha.

The imperial inscription to Laozi must be placed in the context of a general belief that Laozi, the ancient philosopher and purported author of the *Daode jing*, was identified with the *Dao*. While some advocated a view that Laozi was a human manifestation of the cosmic process, the imperial inscription presents a vision of Laozi as the ultimate adept, who attained his celestial status through specific psychophysical practices. According to the inscription, the emperor was intent on following Laozi's example.

The inscription begins by outlining Laozi's human biography as it had come to be accepted by the Han Dynasty. Although his birth is associated with the changing

fates of the Zhou Dynasty and related to the transformations of *yin* and *yang*, he is portrayed as a man and loyal official of the Zhou, and over two hundred years in age. A short verse section provides a more numinous image:

> Those in the world who cherish the *Dao* encounter his likeness and revere it. They believe that Laozi disperses and merges together with the *qi* of primordial chaos, and his beginning and end equals that of the three radiances. Observing the heavens, he makes prognostications, he ascends and descends to and from the dipper and stars. Following the sun he transforms nine times, he diminishes and rests in accord with the seasons. He regulates the three radiances with the four numinous beasts at his side. Contemplating his Cinnabar Field, and Taiyi in the Purple Chamber, his *Dao* was completed and his spirits transformed, he sloughed off his shell as a cicada and "crossed the generations."

The practice by which Laozi attained his unity with the *Dao* was meditation on the "cinnabar field" (*dantian*), a region below the navel not recognized in mundane anatomy that was perceived as the site for focusing and generating *qi*. As cinnabar, mercury sulfide, was the major ingredient in Chinese alchemy, the name of this mysterious region conflates it with the alchemical furnace. This is one of the earliest references to what was to become a core practice in Daoist ritual meditations—a contemplative inner journey by the adept to the cinnabar field. The term "Purple Chamber" refers to a locus in the head, where the meditator could encounter the spirits. As the term resonates with the region of "Purple Tenuity," the astronomical region around the Big Dipper, the interior of the head is correlated with the center of the cosmos.

The final lines of the inscription also mention Laozi's practices, referring again to internal alchemical practice, and merging the astronomical and cosmic with the interior of the body:

> Unifying his radiance with sun and moon, merging with the five planets,
> Entering and exiting the cinnabar furnace, ascending and descending from the Yellow Court,
> Turning away and abandoning popular vulgar customs,
> He conceals his effulgent spirits and hides his form.
> Embracing the primordial, his spirits are transformed.
> He inhales and exhales the ultimate *qi*.

Finally, we learn that Laozi's attainment was a model for the personal practice of the emperor himself, whose motivation is described in the inscription:

> The Imperial Highness, revering Virtue and exalting the Way,
> Ingesting the vast radiance, contemplating his spirits and nourishing his form,
> He set his intention on ascending to the clouds. He therefore fixed his mind on the Yellow Thearch and matched tallies with the High Ancestor. Seeing Laozi in his dream he revered and offered him worship.

Emperor Huan, therefore, did not revere Laozi as a cosmic god, but rather as a successful adept who had attained extra-human status through practice. The inscription clearly implies that the emperor was determined to attain such status and had begun practicing psychophysical meditations based on *qi* circulation even before his encounter with Laozi in a dream. The dream was interpreted as a response to having already made some progress along the path—and a request for further aid from the accomplished adept and master, Laozi, to the determined neophyte, the emperor.

The imperial inscription to Laozi, however, needs to be seen in the context of other similar inscriptions. It appears that by the late second century several seekers of immortality who had been recognized as having attained their goal became foci of cults. These sites drew worshippers and practitioners of various types with varied motivations. One good example for such a cult is the stele inscription to Wangzi Qiao, an ancient practitioner of esoteric arts and one of the main exemplars of the *fangshi* and seekers of immortality. The text on the Wangzi Qiao stele begins by describing the appearance of the immortal on his grave mound and the subsequent establishment of a shrine. The inscription then presents the site as a locus of wide-ranging cultic practices:

> Then, those who delighted in the *Dao* came from distant places to gather there. Some strummed zithers and sang of Taiyi, others practiced meditation to visit their cinnabar field. Those who were sick or crippled and who silently bowed and prayed for good fortune were granted it straight away, but those who were lacking in respect were struck down immediately . . . thus it was that it was a tomb of great virtue, the tomb of a perfected one [*zhenren*].

The importance of this inscription lies in the fact that it provides us with a range of public practices performed at the site. While the inscription does not associate any particular practice with Wangzi Qiao himself, the people congregating at the site are said to perform a variety of distinct practices, which may be divided into three types. The first appears to have been communal performances of ritual music associated with Taiyi, the highest god of the Han pantheon. The second practice mentioned is the same type of meditative journey by the adept to the cinnabar field that we saw in the imperial inscription. The third type of practice mentioned is unspecified supplications performed for the ill and afflicted with the expectation that the numinosity of the shrine will provide them with healing and good fortune. Unlike the two types of practice mentioned above, these were not psychophysical practices and probably did not require any special training. In contrast to the practices of religious specialists and adepts, these practices were truly at the public and popular level. Whether the emperor's attention to the shrine resulted from these public performances, from emperor's interest in personal transcendence, or, as is probably the case, from a combination of both, cannot be determined with any certainty. Despite these difficulties in ascertaining the specific practices and motivations associated with the shrine,

the inscription demonstrates a merger of imperial and popular practice around a figure initially associated with the quest for immortality.

The erection of the two inscriptions during Emperor Huan's spate of religious activity mark a significant and transformative moment in the religious history of China. The emperor's sacrifice at the palace to a deified form of Laozi and to Buddha, while unique in the history of China, presages the future relationship between the imperial state, on the one hand, and Buddhism and Daoism, on the other. The emperor could no longer rely solely on the traditional deities, but had to turn to the powerful deities advocated by rival religious traditions. The complex relationship between the three "institutional" religions—the imperial religion (usually labeled "Confucianism," due to the role of the literati in prescribing the ritual codes), Buddhism, and Daoism—remained at the core of the history of religion in China.

Emperor Huan's reverence of the deified Laozi and the Buddha is particularly intriguing as both religions were still at a nascent stage in the Chinese religious landscape. In the following sections I turn to an examination of the emergence of Daoism and Buddhism as institutional religions in early medieval China.

The Emergence of Daoism

The emergence of Daoism during the late Han and Six Dynasties periods is one of the most complex developments in Chinese religious history. Its development is further complicated by the fact that it is very difficult to define Daoism, and to distinguish it from other contemporary and similar traditions. Indeed, the word Daoism does not correspond to a single Chinese term, but may be applied to any number of Chinese terms that refer to a variety of religious and philosophical traditions.

The origins of Daoism extend back to ancient China, where diverse ideas and practices circulated that advocated ways for individuals to be aligned with the *Dao* in order to live in harmony with the patterns of the cosmos and attain the fullness of life. The quest for attaining the *Dao* was not merely an abstract notion, but a basic premise that underlay various social, cultural, and political practices as well as an array of technical and esoteric traditions, such as medicine, alchemy, divination, and psychophysiological practices of hygiene, gymnastics, and meditation, by which the hidden potencies of the cosmos could be approached, manipulated, managed, and embodied.

Daoists constructed their new syntheses while relying on various older and contemporary practices in a complex process. This process involved interactions between diverse traditions, including local cults, shamanism (*wu*), immortality cults, various technical traditions and practices associated with the Masters of Esoterica (*fangshi*), and elements of Han imperial ideology and ritual. From the outset, the Daoist lineages distinguished themselves from other traditions, and each other, by laying claim to the proper, and most efficacious, practices by which to attain the *Dao*. Daoist

authors and redactors therefore took great pains to delineate the proper practices by which the *Dao* may be attained and harmony restored. Daoists thus claimed to possess the correct understanding of the patterns of the universe, which in turn proved the efficacy of particular practices.

Among the important sources for the emerging Daoist religion were the cults of immortals. Central to these cults, as we saw above, were the communal practices that coalesced around the figure of the individual transcendent. While the most significant of these figures was Laozi, who during the Han became identified with the *Dao*, there were many other adepts who were perceived as having the *Dao* and who became foci of local and transregional cults. A second major source for the development of Daoism were new communal movements that appeared in the late second century, as the Han Dynasty was collapsing. These movements adopted and adapted the ancient ideas and practices for the benefit of their community and even society as a whole. While these movements identified the *Dao* as ineffable, they also claimed it was an active force that intervened in human history, usually taking human form and descending to the human realm as an instructor in the correct way to attain the *Dao*. The various Daoist movements defined themselves through strict rites of initiation, in which they transmitted diverse scriptures and methods for communicating with the *Dao*. We must remember that Daoism emerged from multiple sources, and that there was constant tension between the notion of individual attainment and ideas that emphasized communal salvation.

The two best-known of the early communal movements that arose during the final decades of the Han are the afore-mentioned *Taiping* movement, which ranged across the eastern provinces, and the Way of the Celestial Master, which emerged in the Sichuan region. Official historical sources are biased against these groups, which they perceived as threatening to the peace and stability of the imperial order. This was especially true in the case of the *Taiping* rebellion, which was among the major causes of the fall of the Han Dynasty as the generals that defeated the rebels eventually turned against each other and the imperial center.

Despite their bias and lack of interest in the religious teachings of these groups, the official histories do allow us a glimpse of the groups' religious practices. Both movements were organized in administrative units, which in the case of the *Taiping* were probably quasi-military. Both groups practiced some form of faith healing, rejecting traditional medical treatments, and requiring instead confession of sins and the ingestion of water imbued with ashes of paper inscribed with talismanic figurations. While both movements were motivated by eschatological ideas, their visions were very different. The *Taiping* movement called for an immediate end not only to the current dynasty but also to the imperial order itself, and for its replacement by a new order as spelled out in the revelatory text, the *Scripture of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing*). A major problem for understanding this movement and its ideas is that there were several texts with similar titles circulating during the late Han. The relationship between these various texts, the rebel movement, and the *Scripture of Great Peace* preserved in the Daoist canon remains very problematic.

While the *Taiping* movement was crushed by the imperial armies, the community that coalesced around the Celestial Master in the Sichuan region managed to survive through the succeeding era of turmoil, and developed by the Tang Dynasty as the core movement of the Daoist religious tradition. According to Daoist sources, Lord Lao, a deified form of Laozi, appeared to Zhang Ling in 142 CE on Mount Heming in Sichuan and bestowed upon him the title Celestial Master (*Tianshi*).

The community of the Celestial Master was organized in a sacral and ritual system that was modeled on an idealized imperial and cosmic order. The community was organized into an administrative system of twenty-four parishes, correlated with the twenty-four periods of the year. All adherents were registered at one of the parishes, and placed under the jurisdiction of "libationers" (*jijiu*), who were seen as the terrestrial echelon of a bureaucracy that extended into the heavens and below the earth, populated by deceased men and women who had ascended to their posts due to the merit they attained in life. The main divisions of this all-encompassing realm were the "three bureaus" (*sanguan*) of heaven, earth, and water.

The main functions of the libationers were publicly reciting the *Daode jing*, healing, and overseeing the registration of the community during their three annual gatherings. Illness, according to the Celestial Master's teachings, was an offense against the *Dao*, and healing required meditation in a "silent chamber," confession, ingestion of talismanic water, and petitioning the extra-human bureaucracy for help. Petitions, which were the central mode of communication between the living and the extra-human bureaucracy, were written on prepared forms, inscribed with the precise name, address, and details of the illness of the person. Prepared in triplicate, one copy of the petition was exposed or burnt, a second copy was buried in the earth, and a third was thrown into water or a cave in order to transfer the petition to the celestial, terrestrial, and watery bureaus.

As we saw in our discussion of the inscriptions to Laozi and Wangzi Qiao, the seekers of immortality developed notions of mysterious bodily locations. This notion was further developed in Daoist practice and merged with the bureaucratic aspect modeled upon the state structure into a complex esoteric vision of the body, sometimes known by scholars as the "Daoist body." The human body was envisioned as a microcosm populated by gods, perceived as officials dwelling in and administering the various organs. A core aspect of the petitioning rite was the activation and externalization of the body gods of the priest who carried the petition to the celestial hall. This remains a central mode of Daoist ritual to the present.

Another important aspect of the practices of the Celestial Master that combines bureaucracy and exorcism is the graded initiation of registers and talismans. All initiates into the ranks of the Celestial Master community received registers listing the spirit-generals under their control. The idealized process began at childhood, with boys and girls receiving a register of one general at age seven, and later receiving registers of ten, and ultimately seventy-five generals. The highest form of initiation for regular members of the community supposedly entailed a sexual rite by which the seventy-five spirit generals of a male and a female initiate were combined

into a register of 150 generals. This rite was known as "merging *qi*" (*heqi*), referring simultaneously to the *qi* of the initiates and that of the spirit generals. Although there are numerous criticisms of this rite in later Daoist and Buddhist texts, its actual details are not at all clear.

Following the Taiping Rebellion in 184, as the realm fell into civil war, the third Celestial Master, Zhang Lu (grandson of Zhang Ling), managed to run his community autonomously in the Hanzhong area (a region straddling the border between modern Sichuan and Shanxi) for almost thirty years. In 215, as the warlord Cao Cao was consolidating his control over north China, Zhang Lu decided to capitulate to him. Cao Cao rewarded Zhang Lu with the title Protector of the South, bestowed titles on five of Zhang's sons, and gave one of his own daughters as a wife to one of Zhang's sons. However, Cao Cao also removed the Celestial Master community from its base in the mountains of Hanzhong, and moved over eighty thousand households to the capital region. Importantly, in 220, Cao Cao's son, Cao Pi, established the Wei Dynasty, the largest of the Three Kingdoms that succeeded the Han. Celestial Master sources complain that following this move, and the death of Zhang Lu, the proper initiation and ordination protocols were disregarded and the cohesion of the community was broken. Yet, it may be precisely this organizational disorder that allowed for the practices of Celestial Master Daoism to spread throughout the north; they became widely popular, including among some of the most important elite families.

Significantly, Zhang Lu's capitulation was not merely a clever political or opportunistic move. Unlike the Taiping rebels, the Celestial Masters never claimed to replace the imperial system. Rather, the Celestial Masters viewed themselves as guardians of the realm in the absence of a proper ruler, and as instructors to the ruler when an emperor "who ruled by the *Dao*" was on the throne. Thus, we find in a text entitled *Commands and Admonitions of the Families of the Great Dao*, composed in the late third century, a celebration of the Wei Dynasty:

> The Wei house received the mandate of Heaven and eradicated all these evils. Calendrical signs showed that this was so. Their ascension was recorded in the *River Chart* and *Luo River Writ* and in other portents suspended in the heavens. Conforming to the celestial dispensation and the propitious times, I received the mandate to be Master of the Kingdom. The Martial Thearch (Cao Cao) launched the empire. (Bokenkamp 1997)

The text is in the voice of Zhang Lu (perhaps channeled through a mediumistic séance), the third Celestial Master, who died soon after his capitulation to Cao Cao. This passage in the revelation text reminds the readers—that is, the adherents of the Celestial Master—that the Wei Dynasty is ordained by heaven. The establishment of the dynasty supposedly brought about Great Peace, by eradicating the evils that the text lists: the civil war at the end of the Han, social turmoil in the family and in the empire, illicit sexual behavior, and astronomical anomalies. There is little proof for the historicity of the sexual and astronomical disorder. The point of the passage is

to show that the social and political in the state were reflected in the homologous realms of the family and the heavens. Most importantly, the Celestial Master asserts that his own role in the empire was to be Master of the Kingdom—that is, instructor to the emperor.

The *Commands and Admonitions* goes on to promise salvation to all those who rectify their actions and resume proper practice in accordance with the teachings of the Celestial Master. Proper behavior begins with internal harmonization, and proceeds to helping the state:

> Drive from your heart excesses of jealousy, joy, and anger so that your emotions are constantly harmonious and your eyes and belly in accord. Aid the kingdom in strengthening its mandate. Abandon all of your past evil pursuits. Those who, from today on, practice good actions will find that disaster and disease melt away from them, and will become seed people of the later age.

This passage expresses the eschatological ideas of the Celestial Master. The promise of the text is for salvation beyond the calamities of the present age. But salvation depends on correct behavior in this age. Internally, one should control emotions and harmonize mind and body, thus ensuring the stability and preservation of one's *qi*, while externally one is to be loyal to the Wei Dynasty in its efforts to harmonize the realm. Correct behavior in this world ensures that when the current age finally comes to an end, and all humanity is eradicated, the adherents of the Celestial Master community will return to life in the new age, as the seeds of the new humanity that will repopulate the earth. We see here that the notion of longevity, or immortality, in this world was merged with the temporal Five Phase cosmology to produce a notion of transcendence beyond this world age.

The mass migration of refugees to the south following the conquest of the north by non-Han people in the early fourth century naturally included many adherents of Celestial Master Daoism, among them some of the most powerful elite families of the north. The arrival of these elites from the north led to conflicts with local elites in the south. These conflicts, which were also played out in the spiritual realm, soon led to the appearance of new Daoist revelations: "highest purity" (*shangqing*) and "numinous treasure" (*lingbao*). These revelations appeared in the latter half of the fourth century among a closely related group of southern elite families living near Jiankang (modern Nanjing), the capital of the Southern Dynasties.

The southern elite, and the general population, shared traditions—local deity cults, exorcism, divination, healing, and the quest for immortality—similar to those in the rest of China. It was through the interaction of these local lineages with Celestial Master Daoism that a new Daoism emerged. The *Shangqing* revelations were received by Yang Xi (330–?), a medium in the service of a court official named Xu Mi (303–373) and his son Xu Hui (341–c. 370). As these revelations occurred for the most part on Mount Mao, about fifty miles from the capital Jiankang, this tradition of Daoism is also known as Maoshan Daoism. The *Shangqing* revelations

incorporated various older practices, especially alchemy and Celestial Master rites, inscribed into a complex and imaginative cosmology—with a significantly more complex imagination of the inner workings of the human body. The term *Shangqing* itself refers to a name of the highest heaven, higher than the heaven of *Taiqing* ("great clarity"), which referred to the sky above and which was the heaven revered by Han-era practitioners, the alchemists, and the Celestial Masters. Yang Xi received his revelations from perfected ones (*zhenren*), a class of beings higher than the immortals and transcendents of the earlier traditions of immortality seekers and of the Celestial Masters. Yang Xi thus claimed knowledge of much higher realms and, most importantly, knowledge of the practices that would lead one to these realms. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the *Shangqing* revelations was the internalization of previously external practices, such as alchemy, and even sexual practices. *Shangqing* practices were complex visualization exercises in which the adept was to travel to remote celestial realms as well as undergo psychophysical changes that would thoroughly refine the mundane, gross body into an ethereal, radiant form.

About a generation later, another set of revelations appeared in the same town. Like *Shangqing*, these new revelations, known as *lingbao* ("numinous treasure"), incorporated older practices in a new synthesis. The term *lingbao* is an ancient one, referring to the conjoining of the numinous aspect, such as spirits, within a terrestrial vessel, such as a human body or scripture. The *Lingbao* scriptures thus presented themselves as the physical manifestation of the primordial numinous powers. Indeed, the *Lingbao* scriptures claim to have emanated from the primordial *Dao* prior to the appearance of heaven and earth.

The *Lingbao* scriptures and rituals were a conscious attempt to create a complete religious order that would supersede all other traditions and practices. Most importantly, the *Lingbao* scriptures responded directly to Buddhist ideas and practices, which had become quite popular by this time. Rather than simply mimicking Buddhist texts, the *Lingbao* teachings incorporated some of the most important Buddhist ideas, such as universal salvation, while recasting many Buddhist ideas to fit the Daoist, and traditional Chinese, worldview. One of the major motivations of these texts was a desire to replace Buddhism, viewed as foreign and unsuitable for China, with a teaching that incorporated ideas that had already taken root in China. Thus, for example, among the most important scriptures of the *Lingbao* collection and the scripture that remains the first text in the *Daoist Canon* is the *Scripture on Limitless Salvation*, which describes its own appearance and efficacy in the cosmos:

> The inhabitants of this heaven, having encountered this scripture and its ritual practice, at once universally achieved salvation and lived out their originally allotted spans of life . . . The kingdom was harmonious and the people flourished, in joy and Great Peace. When this scripture first emerged, it instructed an entire kingdom by means of the Dao. Those with the intention of wholeheartedly revering it as the source of their practice will without fail transcend their generation. (Bokenkamp 1997)

This passage is cast in the ancient past, when the scripture was first heard in the heavens, but the promise it makes is for the present upholders of the text, who will carry out the ritual program outlined in this and other *Lingbao* scriptures. The *Lingbao* rituals were communal retreats in which entire communities, and even the state as a whole, were to participate. The purpose of the ritual as explained by the *Scripture on Limitless Salvation* was to avert cosmic calamities at the end of the world age:

> Whenever the cycles of heaven and earth come to their end, you should practice retreats, presenting incense and reciting this scripture . . . Above, it dissolves celestial disasters and provides surety for the thearchs and kings who rule on earth; below, it drives off pestilential injuries and provides salvation for the masses. It provides a security in both life and death; its propitiousness is unequaled. This is why it is said to provide universal and limitless salvation to the people of heaven.

The *Lingbao* teachings and rituals became quite popular. They form the basis of Daoist rituals to the present. It is important to note that the universal salvation promised in the *Lingbao* scriptures entailed the attainment of individual transcendence by the officiating priests, thus combining the individual attainment emphasized in teachings such as the *Shangqing* scriptures with the communal teachings advocated by the Celestial Master.

The various Daoist teachings were finally brought together into a complex hierarchy of initiation and ordination at the end of the Six Dynasties. However, various lineages continued to follow their preferred teachings and practices, and new Daoist teachings continued to appear, so that the Daoist tradition continued to develop and change.

The Integration of Buddhism

While Emperor Huan's worship of the Buddha in conjunction with Laozi in 166 reflects early understanding of Buddhism in China, it is not the earliest reference. Rather, the fact that the emperor revered the Buddha reveals that Buddhist ideas and practices that had been circulating in China, especially in enclaves of foreign merchants and monks, had already penetrated deeply into the Chinese religious imagination. Nevertheless, as the emperor's act shows, many in China viewed the Buddha as a powerful deity, and indeed as a secondary aspect of Laozi himself. The relationship between Daoism and Buddhism was to remain a major point of discussion and tension throughout the Six Dynasties era.

The integration of Buddhism—a religion that appeared and developed in India under vastly different social, cultural, and philosophical circumstances—in the Chinese realm is among the most fascinating topics in the history of Chinese religion. We should note, however, that rather than a Buddhist "conquest of China," in

Eric Zürcher's felicitous phrasing, the Buddhism that emerged at the end of the Six Dynasties period was distinctly Chinese and very different from the religion of foreign merchants and monks that entered China in the first century CE. We should also note that Buddhism is an overarching term for a wide range of traditions with different forms of practice and ideology, reflecting centuries of development prior to the arrival of the first Buddhists in China. I will not deal with this rich diversity in this chapter but will limit my discussion to the interaction between Buddhism and Chinese indigenous traditions, Daoism, and the imperial court.

The earliest references to Buddhism in secular histories show that Buddhists and Buddhism were known in China by the first century. Significantly, these references reveal courtly interests in Buddhism. The best known, albeit legendary, account of the arrival of Buddhism in China is the dream of the Han emperor Ming (r. 58–75 CE).

According to this story, the emperor dreamed of a golden man who flew to his palace. A light that emitted from the man's head illuminated the hall where he stood. The emperor's officials told him he had dreamed of the Buddha, a god of the west. The emperor then sent envoys to Tianzhu (India) to search for Buddhist scriptures. The envoys met two eminent Indian monks—given in Chinese as Jiayemoteng (generally reconstructed as Kāśyapa Mātanga) and Falan (reconstructed as Dharmaratna)—and returned with them to Luoyang along with a white horse loaded with Buddhist scriptures and a portrait of Buddha Sakyamuni. The emperor lodged the monks at the Honglu Temple, which had a guesthouse for foreign emissaries. Living quarters for the monks were built in the temple the following year. The temple was renamed Baima (White Horse) Temple in memory of the white horse that "carried Buddhism into China."

The source for this account is the preface to the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*, which is claimed to be the first Buddhist text translated in China. I discuss this text further below; here, suffice it say that this narrative is clearly anachronistic. The preface probably dates from the third century with accretions as late as the fifth century. Nevertheless, the narrative is significant for emphasizing that Buddhism was brought to China by the emperor, who sought and invited foreign missionaries to reside in an imperially established monastery. While the historical circumstances of the earliest Buddhists in China were quite different, this claim reflects the image Buddhists wished to project as the place and status of Buddhism became more contentious in medieval China.

The earliest authentic reference to Buddhism in official history is a brief report in the *History of the Latter Han* (*Houhan shu*) stating that Liu Ying (the king of Chu, younger brother of Emperor Ming) "cherished the teachings of Huang-Lao and performed fasting and sacrifice to the Buddha" at his capital Pengcheng (*Houhan shu* 42.1428). This report shows that early understanding of the Buddha in China conflated him with the gods of the emerging Daoist tradition. We saw that Emperor Huan, a century later, still held similar ideas. However vague this report may be, it indicates that some form of Buddhism was known and practiced in China in the first

century—enough to attract the interest of the court. This conclusion is supported by archaeological evidence, such as statuary, and references to ritual Buddhist activity. We should note, however, that this Buddhist activity was probably restricted to a small number of foreigners, monks, and merchants, and a few Chinese converts. It would be another century before any Buddhist texts became available in Chinese.

The earliest translations of Buddhist *sūtras* appear in the late second century with the works of An Shigao and Lokaksema, who both worked in the capital, Luoyang, during Emperor Huan's reign. An Shigao was a monk from Parthia, perhaps originally a prince who renounced the throne and embarked on a life as a Buddhist missionary. He is credited with at least thirty-four translations, which introduced some of the most basic Buddhist concepts into China. Most of the texts translated by An Shigao were of mainstream Buddhism, with only a few associated with Mahāyāna teachings. As the first translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, An Shigao had a profound impact on the history of Buddhism in China. His translation partner, Lokaksema, was a Yuezhi, an ethnic group usually identified with the Kushans of northern India. Lokaksema's translations were all of Mahāyāna *sūtras*. These two well-known translators were soon followed by many others, so that by the third century there were hundreds of Buddhists of various genres and teachings available in China.

As a result of the efforts of translators and missionaries, Buddhism soon changed from a little-understood religion of foreign monks and merchants to a vast institutional religion, with a huge number of monasteries and monks. The *Record of Monasteries of Luoyang* (*Louyang qielan ji*) by Yang Xuanzhi, completed in 547, claims that, while in the early fourth century there were only forty-two Buddhist monasteries in the capital, by the Northern Wei (sixth century) the number had increased to over a thousand. The total number of Buddhist monasteries in the mid fifth century is estimated to have been 6478, with over 770,000 monks and nuns. By 515, the number of monasteries passed 13,000, with over a million monks and nuns, while a decade later the number of monasteries reached 30,000, with over two million monks and nuns.

While translations were certainly one of the main avenues for the popularization and acceptance of Buddhism in China, it is through the composition of indigenous scriptures that we can truly see the integration of Buddhism in Chinese culture. Buddhist texts written in China are often ignored in Buddhist studies as they are deemed "apocryphal" or unauthentic; that is, they were not "spoken by the Buddha." Leaving aside the issue of whether any of the Indic scriptures, especially Mahāyāna *sūtras*, can actually be traced back to the Buddha, we should note that Chinese Buddhists themselves worked hard to determine whether the texts they possessed originated in India, and categorized texts composed in China as "apocryphal." It is clear, however, that these indigenous scriptures were in fact very popular at specific times and locales. Moreover, these scriptures reveal specific interests and needs that it was necessary for Buddhists to respond to in China. For example, renunciation of the family, which was at the core of the Buddhist quest for liberation, was criticized by

Chinese authors as unfilial. Buddhism was seen as threatening to the order of the state. And, most importantly, Buddhism was attacked as a foreign religion unsuitable for the Chinese. Indigenous scriptures responded to all these criticisms, and participated in the apocalyptic discourse that, as we saw above, was also central to the development of Daoism.

For example, in response to claims that monks and nuns abandoned their families and were not filial, Buddhist authors composed texts such as the *Sūtra on Requiting Parental Kindness* (*Fumu enzhong jing*), which emphasized the role of filial piety in Buddhist practice. Even more significant, perhaps, were texts such as the *Transformation Text of Mahāmaudgalyāyana Saving his Mother from the Dark Regions* (*Damuqianlian mingjian jiumu bianwen*), which formed the narrative basis for the ritual complex of the ghost festival, which from the end of the Six Dynasties became among the most important in the Chinese liturgical calendar. During this holiday, Buddhist monks performed rites of universal salvation (*pudu*) that promised the release of all beings from infernal paths into better rebirths. This holiday thus dealt with some of the most important issues in traditional Chinese religious life, ensuring that the deceased of the family became beneficent ancestors and that unvenerated spirits of the dead would not become "hungry ghosts." As Stephen Teiser has shown, this holiday provided the Buddhist renunciants with a place at the heart of the family cult of the ancestors (Teiser 1996).

Another indigenous scripture, the *Sūtra for Humane Kings* (*Renwang jing*), was a Buddhist response to criticism against Buddhism's apparent threat to social and political stability. The text also shows that Buddhists shared in the eschatological fears of the era. The *Sūtra for Humane Kings* promises order in the state and protection from natural calamities. Although the text claims to have been presented by the Buddha to the Indian king Prasenajit for use during the era of the "decline of the *dharma*" (*mofa*) it was probably composed in north China in the late fifth century, following the persecution of Buddhism under the Northern Wei, between 446 and 452. The first known instance of an emperor deploying the full ritual instructions to activate the efficacy of this *sūtra* was in 559 by Emperor Wu of Chen (r. 557–559). Following the instructions to organize a ritual "fast for humane kings," the imperial ritual summoned a hundred monks to the palace, where they recited the *sūtra* twice a day for seven days. Since then the *sūtra* and the rite were employed by numerous Chinese emperors in times of duress, as well as by Korean and Japanese rulers in later times, even into the twentieth century.

The eschatological discourse that developed in medieval Chinese Buddhism borrowed from Indic Buddhist sources as well as from Daoist ideas. Two ideas, which were unrelated in early Buddhism, seemed to fit into the eschatological mood of medieval China. First, prophecies about the decline of the *dharma* appear in several *sūtras*, both of mainstream Buddhism and of the Mahāyāna tradition. While some of these prophecies of the decline and end of the *dharma* refer to a period of 500 years after the death of Buddha, others to 700 years, and others to a sequence of periods, with an intervening period of "counterfeit *dharma*" (*xiangfa*), they all agree

that the Buddha's teaching will decline and eventually disappear from the world. These prophecies were read and interpreted in medieval China as referring to the contemporary chaotic situation. Chinese Buddhists thus began to discuss the "end of the law" (*mofa*), the period of decline and end of the *dharma*, as imminent or even as the current state of the world. A second notion that developed in early Buddhism that appealed to medieval Chinese Buddhists was the idea of Maitreya, the future Buddha. While in early Buddhism the appearance of Maitreya in the world was in the remote, almost incalculable, future, in medieval China the expectation of Maitreya took on a messianic tone as Buddhists awaited his imminent arrival.

Chinese Buddhists responded in different ways to the eschatological and messianic ideas entailed by the notion of *mofa* and the expectations of Maitreya. Several of these responses led to the composition of indigenous scriptures and the appearance of new sects. One such response was the Three Stages sect (*Sanjie jiao*), which appeared in the late sixth century and rose to prominence in the following century, before its suppression in the mid Tang. The teachings of this sect proceeded from the notion that the current age was one of corrupt *dharma*. The sect called for the abolition of distinctions between lay and monastics as its adherents viewed the established Buddhist order as embodying the corrupt *dharma*. All other *sūtras* were to be supplanted by the revelations received by the sect's founder. With such a challenge to the established Buddhist order, and in turn to the state itself, it is little wonder that the sect was violently suppressed and its texts proscribed.

Among the most significant challenges facing Buddhism was the assertion that it was a foreign religion unfit for China. This claim is often found in the context of a mytho-historical narrative called "conversion of the barbarians" (*huahu*). According to a well-known narrative, Laozi left China during the Zhou Dynasty and was never seen again. It was during this journey that the guardian of the pass westward out of China recognized Laozi and requested he write down his teachings. Thus appeared the *Daode jing*. The *huahu* narratives continue this traditional tale to tell how Laozi continued on his journey west, whereupon he either taught, or was transformed into, Sakyamuni, and spread a new teaching, fit for the barbarians.

The *huahu* narratives thus explain the presence of Buddhism in the world in the context of Daoist history while simultaneously relegating it to a derivative teaching unfit for the Chinese population. Several versions of this narrative circulated in medieval China, and they naturally became a central point of contention between Daoists and Buddhists, who repeatedly appealed to the emperors to proscribe the relevant texts. Some Buddhists, however, responded by composing texts that made opposite claims. One such text was the *Sūtra of the Questions of Kongji* (*Kongji suowen jing*), which claimed that Laozi, Confucius, and Yan Hui (Confucius' foremost disciple) were all followers of the Buddha and were dispatched to China in order to civilize it.

The contentious relationship between Buddhism and Daoism is best seen at the level of the imperial courts. While most emperors tried to balance the various religious trends, some were clearly supportive of one over another. A particularly

intriguing case is the short-lived Daoist "theocracy"—established during the reign of Emperor Taiwu (r. 424–452)—of the powerful Tuoba Xianbei people, who controlled much of north China from the late fourth century and ruled as the Northern Wei (386–534).

Soon after acceding to the throne, Taiwu was introduced to Kou Qianzhi (365–448), a Daoist who had recently emerged from thirty years of reclusion on the sacred peaks of Mount Hua and Mount Song, during which he received revelations from the deified Laozi that granted him the title Celestial Master and called upon him to cleanse and re-establish the Celestial Master community. Kou presented the emperor with the scripture he received. The emperor established in the capital an altar of five levels (based on Kou's design), where he offered regular service. Nevertheless, in the following years, the emperor continued to patronize both Buddhists and Daoists. It was after the conquest of the Northern Liang and the unification of the north in 439 that the emperor's religious policy clearly shifted toward Daoism. In 440 the emperor changed his reign name to Great Peace (*Taiping*). In 442 he received Daoist initiation by "receiving registers" from Kou Qianzhi. In 446, after the discovery of weapons in a monastery in the capital, Taiwu announced an imperial proscription of Buddhism—which he labeled "barbarian" (*hu*)—and the establishment of a Daoist state. It may well be that the adoption of Daoism as the state religion resulted from the policy of sinification promoted by the emperor, who thereby wished to gain the support of the Chinese elite for his efforts to conquer the entire realm.

The ascendance of the Daoists was short-lived, as Kou's death in 448 was soon followed by the execution in 450 of the prime minister Cui Hao—who had introduced Kou Qianzhi at court and who played a major part in establishing the Daoist state—and by emperor Taiwu's death in 452. Later northern emperors reverted to more inclusive policies, but all followed Taiwu's example and "received registers" during their reigns.

About fifty years later, we find the opposite case in the religious attitude of Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549). Originally an initiate and practitioner of Daoism, Emperor Wu converted to Buddhism in 504, announcing that Daoism was the "correct path" (*zhengdao*) and that all other teaching were "perverted" (*xiedao*). Moreover, he announced that "Laozi, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius, who were disciples of the Buddha, followed paths of transformation that were perverted, and led to mere mundane results but could not guide one to transcendence." The emperor is here possibly alluding to the *Sūtra of the Questions of Kongji*, or another scripture that asserted the primacy of the Buddhist teachings. Among the most ardent imperial supporters of Buddhism, Emperor Wu four times surrendered himself to the *sangha* and required the state to "ransom" him. He sponsored the construction of numerous monasteries, and supported an institution for translating Buddhist *sūtras* at the Hualin Park in the southern capital, Jiankang. The emperor participated in ritual fasts during which sermons were recited, and several times personally preached to the assembly of monastics and laity. Despite Emperor Wu's clear support for Buddhism, he also continued support for Daoism, particularly for the *Shangqing* patriarch Tao Hongjing (456–536).

Concluding Remarks

The two examples of the complex court policies and debates on religious activity discussed above are indicative of only a small part of religious life during the Six Dynasties. Nevertheless, they reveal that by the end of the period under discussion religious life in China had significantly changed since the Han Dynasty. During the Han, religious life for most people was limited to the common religion of local gods and shrines; beliefs and practices associated with local gods, ghosts, and demons; and various apotropaic rites and practices. At the level of the court, a complex set of rituals was implemented by which the emperor and his officials functioned as agents within the patterned cosmos. The main ritual action at both the imperial and the local level was sacrifice. By the end of the period, we find two completely new religious institutions contending for a place. Both Daoism and Buddhism claimed new forms of allegiance and new forms of practice. Both traditions rejected sacrifice as the main ritual, and both offered complex cosmological visions. The religious landscape at the end of the Six Dynasties was completely different from that of the Han, both figuratively and literally, with thousands of monasteries, temples, and shrines dotting the mountains and plains of China.

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CHAPTER 4

Chinese Religion in the Sui and Tang Dynasties

Paul Copp, University of Chicago

The political fragmentation and continual warfare of the centuries following the collapse of the Han Dynasty came to an end in the late sixth century, when the Sui Dynasty (581–618) reunified much of the old empire. The unity hammered out by the Sui, however, did not last long. Within forty years the Sui had fallen, and another imperial house, styling itself the Tang (618–907), arose from the chaos of that collapse to forge a more lasting unity and a vaster empire. The period covered in this chapter, stretching from the start of the Sui in 581 through the final fall of the Tang in 907 and into the period of returned fragmentation known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–960), was one of the most vibrant ages in the history of religious practice in China. Indeed, well beyond religious practice, Chinese have traditionally looked to this period, and especially to Tang times, as one of the culturally defining periods of Chinese history (many Chinatowns in the West, for example, are called "Streets of the Tang People"). The Tang saw flowerings in poetry, painting, sculpture, and other forms of human genius that have in some respects remained unmatched in Chinese history.

In terms of China's religious history, the Sui and the Tang were great ages indeed. In Buddhism, they saw tremendous growth and deepened sophistication in philosophical movements among the religion's scholastic elite. Some of these, such as the doctrinal tradition of the *Huayan*, or "Flower Garland," movement, brought to fruition trends that had been growing in China for centuries. These fruitions often took the shape of bold systematizing projects in which monastic scholars imposed unity on the vast and disparate body of texts and practices that had been making their way into China, often to the confusion of Buddhists there, for over half a millennium. Zhiyi (538–597), the key figure in the history of the *Tiantai* Buddhist tradition, for

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example, produced a set of immensely influential treatises, commentaries, and tale collections at the start of the Sui that created a framework for the vast Buddhist literary and practical tradition, a project understood at the time (and ever since) as paralleling the greater imperial unification. Many in later years would be inspired by his example.

Other movements, especially the teachings of the Esoteric (or Tantric) masters, were of more recent Indian vintage and were newly imported. Though the ideas and deities of the Esoteric tradition would be absorbed into a range of practices in premodern China, Esoteric Buddhism's most lasting impact would be seen in Japan, where to this day it remains an important part of that culture's religious heritage. This points to another feature of Sui and Tang religion: its deep and lasting influence across East Asia. The Tang is often called a "cosmopolitan" age, and key sites of this relative cultural openness were the Buddhist monasteries that filled the empire and that were in turn filled in part by monks from across Asia—perhaps most importantly those from Korea and Japan, who brought home texts, ritual objects, images, and minds and bodies reshaped by years of Buddhist practice in China. Buddhism in Korea and Japan remain profoundly marked by the styles of practice ascendant in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties period.

More broadly in the Buddhist culture of the age, the spread in the late Tang and Five Dynasties of the new technology of block printing (which Buddhists had helped to develop) reshaped diverse forms of the religion, providing wide access to objects such as printed amulets and votive images, often containing short descriptions of how to properly worship with them. Moreover, the Tang saw what proved to be the last period of the importation and translation of Indic texts that would shape the religion's path across East Asia. Though texts arrived again in the early Song Dynasty and were duly translated, they seem to have had little impact. The basic philosophical and practical ground of Chinese Buddhism—which over the centuries had produced such deeply Chinese movements as the Chan (or "Zen") teachings—had been set, it seems, by the middle years of the Tang.

The growth and transformations of Daoism in this period were no less dramatic. Most dramatic of all was the religion's precipitous rise within the Tang imperial court, where in many instances it came to shape, or even to replace, the ancient rites central to the establishment and endurance of the state and the imperial clan. These developments were perhaps most complete in the mountain ranges that were sacred both to the court and to local religious groups, where Tang emperors proclaimed that the true spirits of the ranges were not the older deities that had been worshipped there for centuries but the newer gods of Daoism. In a very literal way, this transformed China into a Daoist realm. The grounds for this ascendency were set, in no small measure, by a coincidence: the new imperial clan shared the same family name—Li—with Laozi, the legendary author of the classic work called the *Daode jing* (*the Classic of the Way and the Power*). Laozi, though originally understood to be simply a sagacious human being, had been revealed as a deity during the years of the collapse of the Han Empire in the second century CE. In a range of socioreligious

movements and in the scriptures they produced—most importantly in the movement that became the Daoist religion—Laozi, now the "Most High Lord Lao," was understood to speak for the *Dao* itself, and to lead the way to a paradise of human life fully in harmony with the cosmos. Though Laozi's place in the cosmic hierarchy had fallen during centuries of sectarian contestation within the Daoist religion, with his "descendents" now on the imperial throne—the traditional intersection of Heaven and the human in Chinese cosmology—the cult of the Most High Lord Lao experienced a remarkable resurgence, both within Daoism and within late medieval Chinese culture as a whole. Daoist priests and adepts, taking advantage of this new glamour, made the Tang the period of their religion's greatest influence upon Chinese political and cultural life. Monks, priests, and other religious adepts had of course often had the ears of rulers in China (as elsewhere); Daoist priests, for example, had been influential presences at court during the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou Dynasties. But not since Han times had the power associated with these relationships been as great as it was in the Sui and Tang. The wealth and power of the Tang emperors, especially, brought the elite forms of Chinese religion to new heights of majesty and intricacy.

Mirroring, in part, the imperial court's absorption of northern and southern cultures that had grown apart in the years of disunity, and the greater unity of aristocratic literati culture that resulted from it, Daoists (like Buddhists) forged systematic syntheses of their distinct regional traditions in this period, such that today most textbooks on the tradition speak of "Tang Daoism" as a coherent tradition existing across China, a marked shift from the emphasis on separate textual and ritual lines in accounts of earlier ages. Among the sub-traditions that underwent transformation and increased synthesis were those of "external" and "internal" alchemy (*waidan* and *neidan*). These were in some practices combined into a part-material, part-symbolic art that was at times further combined with the Daoist practices of contemplation and visualization known as "internal contemplation" (*neiguan*), meditation practices that by the Tang were strongly influenced by Buddhist contemplative styles. The period treated in this chapter, in fact, saw developments that scholars have identified as central to the history of alchemy and contemplation in Daoism and that set the stage for their ascendency in later periods.

Transformation was not the only feature of the Daoism of this age, however. Traditions dating back to the religion's birth in the early medieval period continued to be vital, and to spread beyond their original locales. Thanks to the work of James Robson, it is now known that *Shangqing* Daoism, for example—a tradition strongly associated with the region around Maoshan, near the modern city of Nanjing—was a vital presence as well on the "southern sacred peak" of Mount Heng, in modern Hunan, where it maintained a separate lineage of masters and disciples well into the Tang. Its great teachers of this era, such as Sima Chengzhen and Li Hanguang, were among the most prominent religious figures of the age (cf. Robson 2009).

After the middle of the eighth century—that is, after the first of the great rebellions that would shake and finally bring down the Tang Empire—the story of religion

in medieval China was once again one of increasing disunity and of the rise of regional centers and traditions, a trend that would continue well into the Song Dynasty. The rebellion of An Lushan (703–757) and Shi Siming (d. 761) in 755 dealt a heavy blow to the Tang, from which it would never fully recover. After this period, though imperial support would remain an important factor, religious groups that had strong presences outside the great metropolitan centers of the north—especially the capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang—were able to survive in this era of renewed social chaos and war. Others suffered harder fates, for example the lineages of Esoteric Buddhists that were closely tied to the culture of the imperial court. They fell into a quick and steep decline and all but disappeared as a distinct tradition in China. Elsewhere in Buddhism, scholars point to this period as crucial to the rise to preeminence of the Chan movement. More broadly, traditions that had strong presences in Sichuan to the west—such as the Daoist community in which the influential figure Du Guangting practiced—and the Jiangnan region to the southeast thrived well into the tenth century. In the ravaged center, rites of protection and healing at times took on increased stature. The havoc of the late eighth and the ninth centuries called for powerful religious responses, a fact seen in the imperial decree from 776 that the Buddhist incantation known as the *Incantation of Glory* (*Zunsheng zhou*)—a charm said to offer succor on a mass scale to both the dead and the living, and one by then with nearly a century of history with the Tang imperial clan—be chanted in all the Buddhist temples of the empire. In a closely related phenomenon, stone pillars carved with the spell came to dot the landscape of Tang China in this period, promising to ease the karmic suffering of anyone who passed by them or saw them on hilltops from afar.

Beyond Buddhism and Daoism, other changes to the landscape of Chinese religious practice were brought by the stabilization of the inner Asian trade routes and the westward expansion of the Tang empire, which reached its greatest extent in the year 751, when Tang armies met and were defeated by the eastward-advancing forces of the Arab Abbasid Caliphate and their Turkic allies in the famous Battle of Talas. These changes included especially the introduction or increased presence of foreign traditions such as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Nestorian Christianity, and Judaism, as well as a generally westward orientation of religious culture. The western market of Chang'an in Tang times was famously abuzz with foreigners and their practices; indeed, more broadly, archaeologists have discovered rich evidence of their religious lives throughout the city during the Tang. Some made their marks in the canonical histories, as well. The Nestorian priest known to us only as Adam was a prominent figure in the late eighth century, even on one occasion aiding a newly arrived Indian monk in the translation of a Sanskrit text (to famously disastrous result).

After the rebellions and defeats of the mid eighth century, and the loss of Dunhuang and its environs (the northwestern desert gateway to and from the Inner Asian trade routes) to the Tibetan Empire, this westward orientation, which had in many ways begun in the early Han Dynasty, came to an end. Tang culture turned

inward and toward the trade routes and waterways of the southeastern coasts. This reorientation was ultimately cemented by the tremendous changes in the demography of China that began to occur after the mid eighth century. Massive migrations to the south remade the human landscape, especially once that region proved much more hospitable to human society than the north had ever been. The population grew vast. In these ways the eighth century was something of a pivot in Chinese history, religious and cultural. The northern-centered and westward-oriented civilization of the period stretching from the Han Dynasty into the eighth century shifted southwards, away from the ancient heartland of the Chang'an area. As the population exploded, it eluded the easy control of the old imperial centers, which with brief exceptions grew weaker and weaker as the dynasty wore on. Religious orders that had been wed to the imperial court vanished or were weakened severely and a new era of Chinese religious practice began to dawn.

Daoism

For Daoism, sometimes called "China's indigenous high religion," the period stretching from the seventh through the tenth centuries was an age of unification and stunning institutional growth and power. In terms of the empire, as a range of scholars, including Timothy Barrett, have noted, the Tang "marked the high tide of Daoist influence upon Chinese political life." At times in the Tang, Barrett notes, "something on the way to full-blown theocracy" was achieved, in the sense of the symbolic unity of the Daoist church, the state cult, and the imperial clan (Barrett 2005). During the reign of Xuanzong, in the mid eighth century, an attempt was briefly made to instate a Daoist government. In terms of the growth of the religion itself, disparate scriptural and liturgical traditions were brought together during the Tang within an overarching system that carried forward a project begun in the fifth century by Lu Xiujing that placed in the foreground the southern traditions of *Shangqing*, *Lingbao*, and the occult heritage of the southeast. The religion was unified under the name "Teachings of the *Dao*," or *Daojiao*, a name chosen to parallel the "Teachings of the Scholars" (*Rujiao*), what is known in the West as the Confucian tradition, and the "Teachings of the Buddha" (*Fojiao*), the name for Buddhism in China and throughout Asia (*Buddhadharma, Buddhasāsana*, etc). Indeed, it was especially in contesting with (and adapting from) Buddhism that Daoists remade their religion in the Tang. Borrowing in part from the foreign tradition, Daoists deepened both the foundations of their growing monastic system and the sophistication of their philosophical thought. But first and most of all it was their ancient god Laozi, the "Highest Lord Lao," who made possible their greatness with the empire of the Tang.

The institution of the emperor as "Son of Heaven" (*Tianzi*) was inherently cosmological. The "Mandate of Heaven" (*Tianming*), said to justify earthly imperial rule, had long been tied to the cosmic cycles understood to operate according to Five

Phases theory—thus, the "Yellow Emperor" was "yellow" because earth, which is associated with the color "yellow" in the scheme, was ascendant as he took the throne. The waxing and waning of each cosmic phase was said to be reflected in the quality and fortunes of the ruling dynasty on earth—thus, in part, the convention of virtuous first emperors and evil last ones. Over the course of the early medieval period, both Buddhist and Daoist ideas were woven into this basic model, including their dramatic millenarian visions of catastrophe at the end of phases or world ages. The period in which Yang Jian founded the Sui Empire was marked by powerful millenarian visions, which Yang harnessed through use of some of the Buddho-Daoist imagery available to him. As Stephen Bokenkamp has noted, Yang took his reign title, "Inaugural Luminary" (*Kaihuang*) from the name of a "*kalpa* cycle" featured in Daoist *Lingbao* scriptures, in which the supreme deity of those scriptures "first takes human shape to rule over an aeon of unspeakable bliss" (Bokenkamp 1994). In the time-honored way, portents and sacred objects were discovered throughout the empire and proclaimed to demonstrate the cosmic rightness of the Sui Dynasty.

Yet, as the Sui faltered and began to collapse, the millenarian wave its dynasts had ridden to power engulfed them in turn. Rumors circulated, in forms such as popular songs, of a man named Li who was destined to rule—a man who in these songs and tales seemed to blend with more ancient legends and prophecies of the mystical figure of Li Hong, who some texts said would appear in the world to herald a new age, perhaps arm in arm with the Buddha Maitreya. As Bokenkamp notes, the imagery found in such songs, poems, and tales drew on the rich store found in the textual traditions of both Daoism—especially the *Lingbao* and *Shangqing* corpora—and of new hybrid forms of Chinese Buddhism. The Li clan capitalized on this environment (as did others, though ultimately with less success) both during the rebellion against Sui rule and afterward, as it sought to solidify its power in part through the circulation of new versions of the legends that left no room for doubt that it was the Tang imperial house that had always been destined for power.

The close connection with Laozi and with Daoist pictures of the cosmos remained strong throughout the Li clan's reign, reaching its apogee during the rule of the Tang's most storied emperor, Xuanzong, in the eighth century. But, even in the century before him, the association of the state with the Daoist cosmos asserted by the clan was at times intensely strong. As Timothy Barrett describes it, though the favor shown Daoism seems initially to have simply been part of a strategy to unify the empire (and, ultimately, the wider region) under a "purely Chinese cult"—a need perhaps felt with special acuity by a clan that was itself not fully Han Chinese—already in Taizong's reign (r. 626–649) the empire was "well on the way to full-blown theocracy." The emperor displayed an "almost obsessive concern with the relationship between his family line and the supernatural powers" of the Daoist cosmos, a concern that was part of a larger effort to attain a symbolic unity of the Daoist church, the state cult, and the family line. Later in the century, under the reign of Emperor Gaozong (r. 649–683) and his wife, Wu Zetian—in the twilight years of her husband's rule the main power on the throne and herself later emperor

of China (r. 690–705)—the place of Daoism within imperial literati culture was deepened. In 678, for example, the *Daode jing* (the *Classic of the Way and the Power*), the classic work attributed to Laozi (who had been given an exalted imperial title in the year 666), was made a compulsory text in the imperial exams, a status it lost during Wu Zetian's own rule somewhat later but then regained upon her death in 705. Connections between the imperial clan and the Daoist priesthood were, as well, further cemented: in the year 678, imperial administration of Daoist temples and priests was put under the control of the Court of Imperial Clan Affairs. In another sign of the identification of imperial clan and Daoist cosmos, the emperor Gaozong took the title *Tianhuang* ("celestial luminary"), the name of a godly ruler reigning over an age of peace found in the Daoist textual tradition associated with the *Sanhuangwen*, one of the three main divisions of the Daoist canon (Barrett notes, too, that the Japanese term for emperor, *Tennō*, is the Japanese pronunciation of *Tianhuang*, and was perhaps borrowed from the Tang usage of this period).

The emperors of the early Tang relied on the wizardly powers of a range of Daoist masters, the most famous being Pan Shizheng (585–682) and Ye Fashan (631–720). Pan was considered the eleventh patriarch of the *Shangqing* lineage and had been a prominent student of Wang Yuanzhi (528–635), one of the Daoists most closely associated with the Tang's securing of Daoist legitimacy—Wang had, for example, transmitted the registers of the Daoist priesthood in secret to the first Tang emperor. Between the years 676 and 683, Pan received imperial visits from both Gaozong and Wu Zetian at his abode on Mount Gaosong (in modern Henan), even at one point rejecting Gaozong's request for talismans and sacred texts, a move that helped to secure his reputation for mystic authenticity and power. Ye Fashan was, famously, a favorite of five different emperors, stretching from Gaozong on through the early years of the reign of Xuanzong. The latter personally composed an inscription in his honor, praising his powers to spiritually transform the people and protect the realm. In later years, the Daoist Wu Yun (d. 778), who seems to have received only the lowest level of formal Daoist initiation (administered by a disciple of Pan Shizheng), nevertheless achieved a degree of popular status as an adept of the tradition, befriending the poet Li Bai (701–762)—himself deeply involved with Daoist practices—and composing Daoist works of various genres, including visionary poetry. In the mid eighth century, Wu Yun was invited to the imperial court, where he is said to have engaged the emperor in conversations about the religion. He was named a member of the prestigious Hanlin Academy, a perch that helped him in his desire to popularize Daoism among the literati as an alternative to Buddhism.

Yet, even in a dynasty renowned for its Daoist connections, the Tang emperor with the greatest investment in Daoism was easily the great (but, in the end, fatally flawed) emperor Xuanzong. As Mark Edward Lewis notes, the emperor "placed paired statues of himself and Laozi in all state-sponsored Daoist temples, dedicated the Tang ancestral temples in [the dual capitals of] Chang'an and Luoyang to Daoist worship, and ordered the Daoist clergy at all state-sponsored institutions to perform rituals on the empire's behalf" (Lewis 2009). In part as a way to honor the great

Daoist master Sima Chengzhen (646–735), another in the line of imperially favored Daoists (and a descendent of the royal house of the former Jin Dynasty), in 721 Xuanzong had Laozi's *Classic of the Way and the Power* inscribed in three different calligraphic styles as written by the master. These inscriptions formed a material and visual counterpart to the classics of Confucianism, which had received similar treatment. In 727, following the precedent of Gaozong in the previous century, Xuanzong made a move that remade the empire itself—and not just the imperial clan—as Daoist in essence: he reframed the five sacred peaks of the realm as Daoist holy sites, taking advantage of Sima Chengzhen's declaration that the ancient gods of the mountains—long the focus of both imperial and local cult—were not the true highest gods of the ranges. Instead, the deities of the Daoist *Shangqing* hierarchies were proclaimed the proper objects of cult and all relevant rituals were changed accordingly. The empire itself was in this way reframed as a Daoist holy land (just as, at other times, it had been reconstrued as a Buddhist one).

The rise in prestige of Laozi's *Daode jing* continued in Xuanzong's reign. Though the work was not originally a text of the Daoist religion at all (it was a pre-Daoist product of the spiritual and intellectual ferment of the Warring States period), as Timothy Barrett has pointed out, by the year 720 it had become the *central* Daoist text, at least in terms of the form of religion advocated by the court. Whereas before it had been simply one Daoist classic among others, it was in this year singled out for ritual enactment and study. In 730, lectures sponsored by the emperor were given on the text; in 732, the text was inscribed in stone again, this time with a new imperially authored commentary attached; in 733, it was decreed that every home should possess a copy of the text and new questions on its content were added to the imperial exams; finally, in 745, the text was proclaimed the number one classic of all Chinese civilization. Beyond the *Daode jing* alone, all Daoist literature was given imperial support: ten copies of the entirety of the Daoist canon were made in 749 and distributed, and then five more two years later.

All of this was toward the creation of what Barrett has aptly characterized as a full Daoist government: the reframing of the physical geography of the realm as Daoist in essence; the worship of Laozi as both Daoist god and imperial ancestor; an education system featuring a College of Daoist Studies, based on Daoist rather than Confucian classics; and the development of a bureaucratic class loyal to the imperial family and its lineage. Xuanzong's second reign period—Tianbao, "celestial treasure"—was named for a talismanic treasure object whose location was revealed by Laozi and that was the culmination of a series of miracles reported throughout the year 741—what Barrett called a "constant stream of miraculous happenings" that among other things launched a new system of Laozi worship that remained in place throughout the 740s and 750s.

The prestige of the *Daode jing* extended beyond the simple fact of its legendary (and, by the Tang, divine) authorship to include its philosophical content. Owing no doubt in part to its new presence, and preeminence, within the imperial exams that enabled access to positions in the highest strata of the government, the text was a

key element in the Daoist (or Buddho-Daoist) philosophical movements that gained popularity among the literati elite of the Tang, a fact that led Barrett to characterize it, aptly, as a form of "spiritualized gentry Daoism." Perhaps the most prominent trend within this larger set of texts and thinkers—though it may have merely been, as Robert Sharf has argued, a bibliographical category imposed retrospectively to make sense of a disparate body of *Daode jing* commentary—was known as *Chongxuan*, or "Twofold Mystery." The works in this category, which are understood to have been named after a famous phrase in the *Daode jing*, are made up of nearly equal parts Daoist and Buddhist styles of thought—on the Buddhist side, especially the tetralemma-style logic of Mādhyamika philosophy. "Twofold Mystery treatises are, in fact," as Sharf has made clear, "so permeated by Buddhist thought and terminology that extended passages could be approached as inventive exercises in Buddhist rereadings of the Daoist classics" (Sharf 2002). Buddhists, in turn, took the new hybrid styles of thought and writing into their own tradition. Perhaps the most striking example of this is to be found in *Treasure Store Treatise*'s opening line, an adaptation of the famous first line of the *Daode jing* ("The *Dao* that can be construed as a *Dao* is not the eternal *Dao*") to describe the nature of "emptiness," one of the key concepts in Buddhist thought: "Emptiness that can be construed as emptiness is not eternal emptiness."

Deep engagement with Buddhism was not only to be seen in the new philosophical texts of Daoism; new Daoist practices were also steeped in the teachings of the Buddhists, though it is crucial to keep in mind that, by the Tang, Buddhism had already been in China for many centuries and had become a profoundly Chinese tradition, which had over the centuries been transformed according to the styles and concerns of Chinese civilization. Thus, one must be cautious when assigning labels to particular elements of religious practice in this era, which, as the opening line of the nominally Buddhist *Treasure Store Treatise* suggests, were often profound intertwinings of Buddhism, Daoism, and other things besides.

Though the outward grand cosmological focus of Daoist practice remained strong throughout the medieval period (as it would in later periods and does still today), "inner alchemy" (*neidan*) and "inner contemplation" (*neiguan*) increased in importance in the Tang, as did new styles of philosophical and meditative exploration that drew upon centuries-old native traditions, such as "dark learning" (*xuanxue*), as well as upon newer understandings of Buddhist thought. The scholar Isabelle Robinet has explored the ways techniques of inner contemplation differed from earlier Daoist contemplative methods, which tended to focus on the visualization of ecstatic flights into celestial realms (Robinet 1993). Drawing in part on Buddhist practices, *neiguan* practitioners focused on what was described as the emptying of the spirit and the attainment of oneness with the *Dao*. As Robinet recounts, the text describes a meditation program that in its early phases draws heavily on longstanding native practices and conceptions of the body and its relation to the cosmos. Following ancient traditions, the practice understands the body as animated most basically by primordial *qi*, the fundamental stuff of the cosmos. Further, drawing on earlier Daoist

practices, it is understood to be a microcosm of the larger universe: the eyes, for example, correspond to the sun and moon while the hair connects with the strands of stars. The adept begins by perceiving within his/her body the formation of a spiritual embryo—once again, long a centerpiece of the Chinese spiritual imagination (Robinet notes that it was already present in the classic pre-Daoist work known as the *Huainanzi*)—as well as the presence within the body of the gods elaborated in earlier Daoist meditative traditions. It is at this point that Robinet thinks the presence of Buddhist conceptions begins to be felt in the practice. The practitioner is to pay attention next to the *xin*—the "heart/mind," as it is often translated. As Robinet notes, the *xin* "is in this context both the physical organ (the heart) in which affectivity and intellect reside, and the spirit itself. It is here that Daoism and Buddhism merge." Both traditions, she says, locate "the source of all troubles and errors in the emotions," whose source lies in the heart/mind. The practitioner thus goes to his/her source, emptying the spirit and self and identifying with the *Dao*.

The basic stages of spiritual perfection that Robinet finds at play in a range of *neiguan* texts are well-represented by a text called the *Scripture of Concentration and Contemplation* (*Dingguan jing*). Though a key text of the Daoist canon, the title uses the Buddhist term for meditation, *zhiguan*, the most typical Chinese translation of the Sanskrit words referring to, on the one hand, focused meditation, and, on the other, more analytical or contemplative practices.

Though the Daoists borrowed extensively from Buddhism, they were clear about the differences between the two traditions. Texts of inner contemplation were often at pains to emphasize the fact that Daoism demanded an utter and gradual transformation of being on the part of the adept—a fact that, especially in the Tang period, would have marked it as clearly separate from what was becoming the mainstream of Chinese Buddhist thought, which emphasized a thoroughgoing doctrine of the inherence of the perfected state (and hence its "sudden" attainment). Robinet describes the *Dingguan jing*'s template of attainment, which mostly maintains its basically Daoist character throughout, as beginning in the ancient ethical and meditative practices of "embracing the one and keeping the mean." The adept then attains, in sequence, a series of progressively higher states of being, all described by elaborate titles long familiar within Chinese tradition. First, he becomes an "immortal," returning to a more youthful appearance and gaining numerous powers. After this, the adept attains the status of "perfected," his body luminous and now pure *qi*. Consequent upon further training he becomes a "spiritual man"; his body of *qi* having been refined into pure spirit, he attains power over the world. Still later, his body of spirit having been refined to such an extent that it unites with the world of form, he can change shape at will to aid beings, a conception of divinity clearly drawn from the Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva, beings known to act in similar ways. Finally, the adept transcends the world altogether, attaining the ultimate *Dao*.

One of the most notable aspects of Daoism in the Tang was the growing prominence of women in the tradition, visible in surviving sources. Some of the most vivid evidence comes from the writings of Du Guangting (850–933), one of the truly

towering figures of late medieval Daoism. He lived in an age in which rebellions had weakened the central power of the imperial court and its support of Daoism, and when Daoism was well into the process of regionalization that would characterize it in the coming centuries. In 881, when the rebel armies of Huang Chao (d. 884) occupied the capital, Du Guangting fled with the court of Emperor Xizong (r. 873–888) to Sichuan (eventually a part of the kingdom of Shu, formed in 901 as the Tang was on its deathbed), where he remained. While in Sichuan, especially in his later years, Du was a prolific writer and systematizing cataloger of his religious tradition, and these activities made him a pivotal figure, whose works shed light both on the past of his by-then millennium-old tradition and on new developments that would grow in importance after his death.

Among his most famous writings were collections of miracle tales and biographies of Daoist adepts, including many tales of Daoist women. In this regard, Mark Lewis has emphasized the ways in which Du's accounts emphasize "the marriage crisis, where the imperative to wed conflicted with an aspiration toward self-perfection through religious devotion" (Lewis 2009). Daoism, indeed, offered one of the key avenues of escape for women from the often oppressive patriarchal culture of medieval China. As Lewis notes, "for many women Daoists, entry into a convent was a way to pursue education and a literary career," as well as an escape from an unwanted marriage—these concerns in part seem to have been behind the ordination as Daoist nuns of a few Tang imperial princesses. Legendary women adepts became the objects of local cults, often, as Catherine Despeux has noted, because of their reputed ability, celebrated in a broad range of hagiographical literature, to guarantee the birth of sons and to heal various forms of illness (Despeux 2003). Poetry was another vehicle for exalted images of female Daoists, who were sometimes depicted as the erotic spiritual companions of male adepts (by the Tang an ancient trope in Daoist writings), sometimes as celibate masters of self-cultivation, and sometimes as married women. Du Guangting, especially, as Lewis has made clear, "accepted marriage as one route to transcendence." This was part of a larger transformation of Daoist religious institutions, where, as Barrett has emphasized, by the eighth century the Daoist priesthood was no longer exclusively the "preserve of aristocratic priests in the scholarly tradition of Tao Hongjing" but had become more broadly a religion also of married men and women.

Buddhism

The unification of China under the Sui Dynasty saw Buddhism's fortunes there rise and stabilize in the north after centuries in which it had been repeatedly attacked by the various imperial dynasties of the early medieval period. Emperor Wen of the Sui, while he was still simply Yang Jian in the service of the Northern Zhou, had worked to lessen the harshness of his government's attacks on Buddhists and their institutions. As Kenneth Ch'en described for Western readers long ago, Yang Jian allowed

monks to reopen one monastery in each of the empire's principal cities, Chang'an and Luoyang, and saw to it that qualified monks could once again practice and propagate their religion (Ch'en 1972). These measures, in part taken to win the support of segments of the population that had been harshly treated by the Northern Zhou rulers in the mid 570s, served Yang Jian well as he soon after moved to seize the throne and consolidate his power. As emperor, in some of his first actions, taken well before he had fully established his rule, he strongly promoted Buddhism, forging connections between it and the ancient religious culture of the state by, as Ch'en notes, "calling for the establishment of Buddhist monasteries at the foot of each of the five sacred mountains, and for the donation of landed estates for the support of each one." The mountains, as we saw in the discussion of Daoism in the Tang, anchored the Chinese state at the center of the cosmos. Changes in the official landscape thus wrought profound changes in the religious character of the state. In a move that further wedded Buddhism to the Sui Empire, Emperor Wen had temples built at the sites of his and his father's victorious battles, and held Buddhist masses for the war dead within them. Ch'en notes that since at this time there were still battles to be fought as the Sui expanded its new empire into the south, these masses for fallen warriors sent a signal to the emperor's armies that should they fall in service of the empire their souls would be cared for in the afterlife and honored among the living. In 585, his armies at war for his empire, his craftsmen working to restore its Buddhist monasteries, and his scribes working to repair and re-copy its Buddhist scriptures, Emperor Wen took the vows of a Buddhist layman, as eventually did the empress and a number of the most powerful officials of his court. Aside from proclaiming a very public form of devotion, this act further transformed the character of the imperial throne—whose occupant had long been known as the "Son of Heaven"—for Emperor Wen was henceforth known as the "Bodhisattva Son of Heaven." Though it was not to last, through these actions Buddhism had taken a place at the very heart of the Chinese cosmos.

Emperor Wen's attitude toward Buddhism cooled when it was discovered that the Chen emperor to the south—the last holdout against the Sui juggernaut—had mobilized Buddhist (and Daoist) institutions against the northern invaders. The emperor curtailed some of his support for the Buddhist *sangha* after this, especially in the south, and ordered that they be monitored for any signs of incipient rebellion against the court. As Ch'en notes, the flourishing culture Buddhism had long enjoyed in the south—in contrast to its frequent suppressions in the north—"suffered a period of temporary eclipse." Yet, with the death of Emperor Wen at the hands of his legendarily rapacious and dissolute son, Emperor Yang, Buddhism's fortune within the empire once again rose, for Yang proved himself a zealous patron of the *sangha*. His vision of the religion was, like his father's, one in which it was closely bound to the state: in the south of his empire, in the former Chen lands, monks had long been free of the law that said all subjects must pay ritual reverence to the emperor and his high officials—but Emperor Yang ended this exemption in 607. Buddhism's central place in medieval China's official culture and religion ended with the Sui itself. Collapsing

under the weight of Emperor Yang's cultural, fiscal, and military overreach, the empire came to an end in 618 in yet another conflagration of murder and war, out of which arose the greater empire of the Tang.

In terms of Buddhism's development in China (and East Asia more generally), the Sui saw among other important events the rise of the doctrinal tradition named for the *Tiantai* mountains in the southeast, the site most closely associated with its tradition's founding thinker, the great monk Zhiyi (538–597). Zhiyi, a southerner, became one of the most important and influential thinkers in the history of Chinese Buddhism. His works, which were often given as lectures later edited by his students, both organized the vast Buddhist textual and philosophical tradition—which had come into China randomly as individual texts often shorn of the intellectual and practical contexts in which they had been formed—and provided systematic instruction in the disciplines of meditation that became standard in China for centuries. The *Tiantai* tradition named for him (though he himself claimed merely to be transmitting and building on the teachings of his masters, who were thus established as the originating patriarchs of the tradition) took the *Lotus Sūtra* as the preeminent Buddhist scripture, particularly its ideas of the "one vehicle" and *upāya* (Ch. *fangbian*), or "expedient means."

Zhiyi organized the unmanageable array of Buddhist doctrines into a *Lotus*-centered system, based on the guiding principle of *panjiao*, or "judgments on the doctrines," by which logic he took the *Lotus* as supreme and ranked the other principal scriptural traditions into a graded hierarchy, based on his judgment of their accuracy and comprehensiveness. Other scholastic traditions—most notably the *Huayan*, or "Flower Garland," tradition, so-called for the scripture of that name—would take this same tactic, ranking their favored scripture as the one that expressed the ultimate truth most effectively and organizing the rest of the tradition accordingly. Zhiyi's most influential works include the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan*; a vast work covering nearly all aspects of Buddhist thought and practice), the *Smaller Calming and Contemplation* (*Xiao zhiguan*; a brief and extremely influential meditation manual), the *Mystic Meaning of the Lotus* (*Fahua xuanyi*; an exploration of Buddhist philosophy in the light of Zhiyi's interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*), and the *Words and Phrases of the Lotus* (*Fahua wenju*; an exhaustive interlinear exegesis of the scripture). Another text that should be mentioned here was not a philosophical work or a guide to ritual practice but a collection of "miracle tales" concerning the mystic potencies of the *Lotus Sūtra*—and not its philosophical import but the actual physical scrolls upon which it was inscribed: *Records of the Transmission of the Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua jing chuanji*). Tales such as those found in this collection—which were a thriving genre in Sui and Tang China—told of the miraculous events attendant on the copying of the scripture (such as earthquakes or astonishing lights) or its powers to save those in harm's way.

The *Huayan* doctrinal tradition overtook the *Tiantai* teachings in prominence during the Tang (though the latter retook that place in the Song, alongside the Chan teachings). The Tang *Huayan* masters—the traditional lineage includes Zhiyan

(602–668), Fazang (643–712), Chengguan (738–839), and Zongmi (780–841)—saw its origins in the person of the mysterious late Sui wizard-monk Dushun (557–640), though the tradition drew at least as much on thinkers from earlier periods. Like the *Tiantai* monks, those of the *Huayan* lineage took their own preferred scripture, in this case the *Huayan jing*, or *Flower Garland Sūtra*—a text that, they claimed, presents the unmediated cosmic vision the Buddha experienced at the moment of his awakening—as supreme in their own *panjiao* schema. As Peter Gregory, in his study of Zongmi, has made clear, however, later members of the lineage, though they continued to pay formal honor to the scripture that gave their tradition its name, in fact based their thought on other texts, in particular the *Scripture of Perfect Awakening* (*Yuanjue jing*) and the *Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun*). Both of these texts had been written in China and reflected the particular philosophical styles and concerns of new forms of Chinese Buddhism—forms of whose later permutations the *Huayan* thinkers were themselves exemplars. Perhaps most central to these new doctrines was the concept of the "Womb of the Buddha" (*rulaizang*; *tathāgatagarbha*), a doctrine that, originally, held that all sentient beings contained within them the possibility of buddhahood, as a seed or embryo to be nurtured. In later uses, in combination with other developing doctrines such as that of the "Buddha-nature," it came to refer to the notion that all beings in their basic nature are always already, just as they are, fully buddhas. In some writings, indeed, buddhahood was extended to all things: the world itself was the pure mind of the Buddha.

Versions of this idea were central, as well, to the Chan tradition, which began to take a dominant place within Chinese religious and literati culture at this time. In terms of the history of Chan, the Tang saw what modern scholars have identified as its "early" and "middle" periods; that is, the periods in which Chan began to develop into an individual tradition marked—not by doctrinal innovation, since in their basic character its doctrines were the same as those of the *Huayan* tradition, for example—but by distinctive exegetical and (perhaps) instructional styles. In the Tang, as T. Griffith Foulk has made clear, Chan did not constitute a separate monastic institution; instead, monks and laypeople who identified with the Chan movement, perhaps like those of the other major schools of Tang Buddhism, appear for the most part to have engaged in their study in the large monasteries of the period. It was only in the Song Dynasty that the notion of a "Chan monastery" seems to have become prevalent, and indeed it was in the Song that the great collections of religious tales and their commentaries, the *gong'an* literature so closely associated with Chan, rose to prominence in the tradition, and along with them new pictures of the high Tang as a golden age of Chan Buddhism (Foulk 1999). Thus, one must exercise special caution when using them to understand the "middle" period of Chan's development, since in many cases the pictures they contain appear to have been at least in part shaped to meet contemporary Song political needs.

Yet, that said, it is clear that, as with the other great movements of medieval Chinese Buddhism, the Tang was an age of great vitality within the Chan movement.

The early period, which stretched from the middle of the seventh century through the end of the eighth, was, as John McRae has written, the age in which "a number of stable community groups and competing factions emerged and the basic terms of the school's teachings and historical self-identity were first elaborated in writing" (McRae 2004). In many ways our first evidence for an independent Chan tradition begins with the group known as the East Mountain teachings. East Mountain Chan, in this one case apparently true to its name (the Chinese word "*chan*" was derived from the Sanskrit word for meditation, *dhyāna*), seems to have been simply a group of meditation teachers and their students residing in Huangmei, in modern Hubei Province. The two most prominent monks associated with the East Mountain teachings were Daoxin (580–651) and Hongren (601–674), who in later years were enshrined as the fourth and fifth patriarchs, respectively, of the Chan tradition as a whole, following the earlier more legendary figures of Bodhidharma, Huike, and Sengcan. McRae emphasizes that these two monks appear to have been simply meditation teachers; as he says, "there is no evidence that they engaged in any Buddhist activity other than this."

The contest over the identity of the sixth patriarch, the true anointed successor of Hongren, was perhaps the defining feature of the rest of the early period. The first claimant was Shenxiu (c. 606–706), who, before arriving at the capital in 701, where he became one of the most honored monks of the age, had continued the East Mountain tradition in Hubei to the south. Shenxiu represented a style of Chan that became known as "Northern Chan," which appears to have carried forward the teachings of Hongren and which became, as McRae notes, "spectacularly popular" among literati Buddhists in the imperial capitals. Later, beginning around 730, well after the death of Shenxiu, when his memory and teachings continued to be revered in the capitals, a monk named Shenhui (684–758) appeared on the scene, denying that Shenxiu had in fact been Hongren's true successor at all, and further denying that Shenxiu's teachings expressed the true spirit of Chan. In place of the "gradual" vision of mindful practice that Shenxiu had advocated, Shenhui put forward the "sudden" teachings of the monk he claimed to be his own teacher, Huineng (638–713), an otherwise unknown figure. Shenhui claimed to represent the "Southern Chan" teachings, which held that the awakened state was inherent and that enlightenment was thus to be achieved in a sudden flash of insight rather than through a process of gradual increase in understanding or "gradual enlightenment." The legend of Huineng would be further elaborated in the famous *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, which appears to have been a late eighth century product of the Ox-Head School of Chan. In this text the logic of inherent awakening is taken to its logical conclusion in the figure of Huineng, now described as an illiterate spiritual genius, a simple woodcutter, whose "sudden" grasp of the truth outdoes all the educated and religiously cultivated monks of Hongren's circle. Huineng's status as "sixth patriarch," no doubt in large part through the power of this scripture and the preeminence of the prestige of the emblem of the "sudden teaching" within later Chan circles, remains in place to this day.

In terms of the history of the development of Chan as a separate tradition of Chinese Buddhism, the remainder of the Tang saw the branching out of the tradition from the single line of "patriarchs" into a more complex picture of individual teachers and lineages. The age produced many of the figures who would go on to be remembered both for their vivid teaching styles and for the lineages they either founded or maintained. Among them were such monks as Shitou Xiqian (710–790), Mazu Daoyi (709–788), Zhaozhou Congshen (c. 778–897), Baizhang Huaihai (749–814), Nanquan Puyuan (748–834), and Linji Yixuan (d. 867). As Mario Poceski has argued, it was Mazu Daoyi and his Hongzhou School that "replaced the various traditions of early Chan and dominated the Chan movement for nearly a century, from around the aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion (755–763) until after the Huichang-era (841–845) persecution of Buddhism" (Poceski 2007). Linji, the founder of the Chan line that would dominate in the Song Dynasty (and, as the Rinzai lineage, would also be prominent in Japanese Zen), was himself a third-generation disciple of Mazu.

Though, as discussed above, Daoism had a singular relationship with the imperial house in Tang times, Buddhism's connections to the court were often profound as well. The most famous imperial patron of Buddhism in this age was doubtless the Empress Wu Zetian, who turned in large part to Buddhism for cosmological justifications for her rule. To this end, a Buddhist scripture—the *Great Cloud Scripture*—was revised such that it predicted the empress' wise and saintly rule, and she herself was proclaimed the reincarnation of Maitreya, the "Buddha of the future," long prophesied in Buddhism to be the Buddha of the next world age to come. The empress—in fact, simply "the emperor," since she took the male title (there being no equivalent female version)—proved herself in many ways a faithful supporter of the religion, especially where her support could translate into glory for her person and empire. She sponsored many of the most awe-inspiring monumental Buddhist sculptures in Chinese history, statues that still tower over their cliff-side locales today. These include the great image of Mahāvairocana—the "Great Sun Buddha" figured in sculpture, painting, and textual description as the lord of the cosmos—cut into the living rock at Longmen, near the eastern capital of Luoyang, and the towering statue of the Buddha in the desert caves at Dunhuang.

Wu Zetian accepted instruction from some of the most prominent monks of her age and took at least symbolic part in some of their most important projects, such as the new translation of the *Flower Garland Scripture*. She honored Shenxiu, the famous proponent of the Chan tradition best remembered today for the unfairly negative view of him given in the *Platform Sūtra*, as a spiritual master, doing so in the grand imperial style. John McRae's translation of the traditional accounts presents a "spectacular demonstration of imperial reverence."

> Empress Wu Zetian sent a palace messenger to escort Shenxiu to Luoyang. Monks and laypeople spread flowers in his path, and the banners and canopies [on the vehicles of the wealthy and prestigious] filled the streets. He entered the palace riding on an impe-

> rial palanquin decked with palm leaves. Empress Wu, following him, touched her forehead to the ground in a spirit of reverent dedication and chaste purity. When Shenxiu administered the precepts to the court ladies all the four classes of Buddhists [that is, monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen] took refuge in him with the same feelings of veneration they had for their own parents. From princes and nobles on down, everyone in the capital took refuge in him. (McRae 2004)

The empress was not sectarian in the favor she bestowed upon the great monks of her reign, however. Fazang, in some ways the true founding thinker of the *Huayan* scholastic tradition and another supremely eminent monk of his era, met with similar honors. The most famous interaction recorded between Fazang and the empress was a lesson he is said to have given her about the nature of the cosmos as understood within his school of Buddhism. In a practice evidenced also in the writings of the great seventh century monk Daoxuan (596–667), and thus perhaps well-known by Fazang's time, he set up a "mirror hall" for the Empress, to teach her the Buddhist doctrine of the universal interpenetration of phenomena—that everything in the cosmos is intimately related to, even identical with, every other thing, and that ultimately they are all the same thing: the Buddha. Fazang illustrated this, it is said, by placing a Buddha statue in the hall such that it would be reflected infinitely within the ten mirrors set up around it (ten being, in *Huayan* doctrine, a symbol of infinity). Such images of mind-boggling interfusion and immensity were characteristic of *Huayan* writings, in fact. The most famous of these is no doubt the passage on the "Jeweled Net of Indra" from the *Flower Garland Scripture* itself, which illustrated the "all is one and each one is all" doctrine of the tradition through an image of an inconceivably vast net spread throughout the cosmos, each of whose intersections held a perfect gem reflecting—and thus, according to the logic of the image, *containing*—all the others, and the net as a whole.

Another image said to have been employed by Fazang, this time less to illustrate the infinity present in each particular than the unity of all seemingly disparate particulars, was a golden statue of a lion. Though its many attributes—eyes, mane, claws, teeth—were distinct, all were really the same thing: gold. In the same way, the infinite array of phenomena in the infinite array of worlds, past, present, and future, were in fact the same thing: the one mind that is the Buddha.

Not long after Wu's reign came to an end, China saw a brief flowering of Tantric, or Esoteric, Buddhism in the great monasteries of its capital cities. Esoteric Buddhism, as it appeared in Tang China, propounded doctrines similar to those found in the Chan and *Huayan* traditions, though its versions tended to take on what we might think of as an especially mythological cast. The unity of phenomena, for example, was often figured in the form of the Buddha as king: Mahāvairocana, the "Great Sun" Buddha, the only Buddha depicted in painting and sculpture wearing a crown and other ornaments of royalty and divinity. Other images of royalty came with the tradition, as well. The *maṇḍala*—in earlier forms of Buddhism, simply a name for the ritual spaces of incantation-centered forms of the religion—was figured

as the royal court, with the Buddha in the center surrounded by his "ministers": the bodhisattvas and the other deities who attended him. Consecration, as well, the ancient Indic rite of royal enthronement—found in earlier forms of incantation-centered Buddhist ritual, whose ritual techniques the founders of the Indian Esoteric movement had synthesized into highly systematic programs—became a central practice, along with forms of visual contemplation that also enabled the practitioner to ritually transform himself into the Buddha.

The most famous Esoteric master, Amoghavajra, became, in the later years of the reign of Xuanzong (712–756) and in those of his immediate successors, the most powerful Buddhist monk in the history of medieval China, repeatedly called upon by emperors to exercise his powers in defense of the state. Among Amoghavajra's passions was the cult of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, to whose glories he devoted considerably of his time and spirituo-economic capital. One result of this devotion was the construction of the famous Temple of the Golden Pavilion in the Wutai Mountains to the northeast of the capital, where Mañjuśrī had for decades been said to dwell. This claim, which seems to have been widely credited across medieval Asia, moved Tang China to the center of the Buddhist world from its periphery, thus greatly increasing the grandeur of the empire in the eyes of its peers. Like the scriptural basis for Empress Wu's claims to being a Buddhist sage-ruler, the basis for the idea that Mañjuśrī took the Wutai Mountains as his abode derived from a rewriting of a Buddhist scripture, in this case the *Flower Garland Scripture* itself.

The most famous tale featuring the international renown of the mountains was certainly fictional, but it gives a vivid picture of how the range and the bodhisattva figured in the Tang Buddhist imagination. The Buddhist spell (*dhāraṇī*) known as the *Incantation of Glory*, the Chinese version of the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā dhāraṇī*, it was said, was brought to China from India at the request of the bodhisattva, who despaired over the woeful spiritual state of the people of his adopted home. The story forms the core of the preface to the most famous translation of the scripture. The Indian monk Buddhapālita, as the tale begins, has just completed the long and perilous overland journey along the desert trade routes connecting India to China in order that he might gaze upon the visage of Mañjuśrī, last lord of the ancient days of the Buddha said still to remain in the human realm:

> When he reached the Wutai Mountains he prostrated himself upon the earth. Facing the mountains he ritually touched the crown of his head to the ground and said, "After the extinction of the Tathāgata, the holy ones all hid their spirits—only on this very mountain does the great sire Mañjuśrī still guide common beings and teach bodhisattvas. What I, Pālita, bitterly regret is that, having been born among the Eight Hardships that prevent one from meeting a Buddha, I may not see the Buddha's holy countenance. Long have I journeyed over the flowing sands to pay respect and gain an audience. I submit to and beseech the all-encompassing great kindness and compassion of Mañjuśrī to allow me to gaze on his venerable form." When he finished speaking, tears of grief fell like rain; he [once again] faced the mountain and ritually touched his head to the

> ground. When he finished he raised his head and, unexpectedly, saw an old man coming out of a mountain who spoke to the monk in a Brahmanic tongue.

The "old man"—who in later years was understood to be none other than the bodhisattva himself—tells Buddhapālita that unless he has brought with him the *Scripture of the Incantation of Glory* he has come in vain. The monk reveals, not surprisingly, that he has not brought this (rather obscure) scripture with him—in fact, he has come empty-handed, desiring only to gain an audience with the divine bodhisattva. The old man promises him that if he were to return to India, journeying back over the "flowing sands" of the brutal deserts of Central Asia, and retrieve this scripture, when he returned with it Mañjuśrī would meet him in person. Buddhapālita, we are told, indeed does this; he returns with the *Scripture* and, as promised, meets the bodhisattva, who later welcomes him to live within the "diamond grotto" hidden in the mountains, where in later centuries Buddhists on pilgrimage to the mountains would at times claim to meet him.

The scripture Buddhapālita brought back from India, along with its incantation, would go on to have a remarkable career in premodern China in the form of "incantation pillars"—stone pillars inscribed with the spell, often also containing the tale of Buddhapālita and his encounter on the mountain. These pillars, which in their earliest form were simple octagonal posts inscribed only with the transcribed incantation, began to appear in the capital region at the start of the eighth century (one can see an example of this kind in the Princeton University Art Museum). The ways in which these pillars were said to work as delivery mechanisms for the spells they bore is fascinating, and reveals much about the ways Tang Chinese understood the potencies of Buddhist objects of power, including spells in written form. The most famous accounts describe the wind-blown movement of dust off objects inscribed (and so enchanted) with the spell, as well as the enveloping movement of the enchanted (and enchanting) shadows they cast. The key passage in the incantation scripture, in which the Buddha addresses the god Indra, runs as follows (note that in China the "banner" described here seems nearly always to have been understood to include pillars as well; indeed, the same word was used to describe both):

> Inscribe this spell upon a tall banner and place it on a high mountain, a tower, or within a stūpa. Then, Heavenly Emperor [Indra], if monks or nuns, male or female donors, men or women, were to see this banner or come close to it, and were its shadow to fall upon them, or wind to blow the dust from the dhāraṇī banner onto them, then, Heavenly Emperor, all these beings' sinful deeds, which should ordinarily cause them to fall into the evil paths of hells, or animal births, or the realm of King Yama, or the world of hungry ghosts, or birth in the body of an demi-god, would have no ill effects at all. They will not be polluted with sinful taints. Heavenly Emperor, these beings will receive the prophecies of future Buddhahood from every single Buddha. They will attain the stage of non-regress within *annutāra-samyak-sambodhi* [that is, perfect and supreme awakening as a Buddha].

The imagery of dust and shadow, especially, captured the imagination of the Tang literati and became a key focal point in Tang accounts—those inscribed upon pillars and elsewhere—of the power of the incantation in material form. For a brief example, we can take a Chang'an pillar carved with the *Incantation of Glory* erected in 818 beside the tomb of a Buddhist nun named Wei Qiyi. It is in many ways a typical example. Its colophon praises the spell in terms that by the ninth century had long been familiar:

> The mystic storehouse of all the scriptures, the wisdom seal of the Thus-Come Ones, they are all located here [in this inscribed spell]. The pillar's shadows, absorbed into the body, its dust floating and alighting on beings, can purify the evil paths of rebirth so that all will experience *bodhi* [awakening].

The *Scripture* encourages its readers to construct pillars at locations where they may have the greatest impact—at crossroads, on mountaintops—and archaeological evidence confirms that many of these sites were indeed chosen. Perhaps the most often-attested locations are the entrances to temples (where incantation pillars may still be found today) and either beside or within tombs. In tombs the pillars could bathe the dead in their blessings for all time. In this they resembled the practice of burial *ad sanctos* common in medieval Europe, where graves would be sited near churches, reliquary shrines, or other holy sites that they might benefit from the proximity to holiness and its blessings.

Indeed, relics—and the intensities of devotion they inspired—were as powerful a part of Buddhism in late medieval China as they were in medieval Christianity. As proxies for the Buddha himself, offerings made to relics were especially potent generators of merit, or blessings, for donors. This fact combined with the passionate levels of devotion and worship common among Buddhist believers in this age to produce remarkable expressions of devotion. Offerings in the form of self-immolation—the burning of parts (or on occasion even all) of one's body—were not uncommon in premodern Chinese Buddhism, as James Benn's work has made clear (see Benn 2007). Such practices were not, as has sometimes been said, limited only to non-elite (or "popular") practitioners: no less an eminent monk than Fazang himself (as we have seen, founding thinker of the *Huayan* scholastic lineage and tutor to Empress Wu), as a fifteen-year-old aspirant to the Buddha Way, set his finger on fire in an offering to the relic of the Buddha (a fingerbone) housed in the famous reliquary tower at Famen Monastery, near the capital of Chang'an. The most famous—or infamous, depending upon one's view—episode of relic worship in all of Chinese history took place in 819 when the Famen relic was brought from the monastery to the imperial court, as it was from time to time during the late eighth and ninth centuries. Han Yu (768–824), a staunch cultural conservative and one of the finest prose writers of the Tang, reprimanded the emperor for, in his view, sullying the imperial throne—the spiritual heart of the culture, according to the traditional "Confucian" position—by doing honor to what Han saw as merely the

dirty bone of a barbarian corpse. According to Han Yu's vivid and dismayed account, devotees thronged the reliquary carriage in great carnivals of ecstatic devotion all along its path, making offerings not only of their entire personal or even clan wealth but also in some cases of their very bodies, burning fingers or even their heads as gifts to the Awakened One. Han Yu's is not the only account of such a procession; we know from others that his descriptions seem not to have been at all exaggerated. Another describes a similar procession in 873, when the finger bone was welcomed into the capital city to similar scenes of ecstatic social chaos. Kenneth Ch'en has translated a contemporary account:

> On the eighth day of the fourth month of 873, the bone of the Buddha was welcomed into Chang'an. Starting from the Anfu Building at the Kaiyuan gate, all along the way on both sides, cries of invocation to the Buddha shook the earth. Men and women watched the procession of the relic respectfully, while monks and nuns followed in its wake. The Emperor went to the Anfu Temple, and as he personally paid his respects, tears dropped down to moisten his breast . . . Those who came to see the spectacle all fasted beforehand in order that they might receive the blessings of the Buddha. At that time, a soldier cut off his left arm in front of the Buddha relic, and while holding it with his hand, he reverenced the relic each time he took a step, his blood sprinkling the ground all the while. As for those who walked on their elbows and knees, biting off their fingers or cutting off their hair, their numbers could not be counted . . . The Emperor welcomed the bone into the palace chapel, where he built a comfortable couch with curtains made of golden flowers, a mat made of dragon scales, and a mattress made of phoenix feathers . . . Within the city the rich families one after another sponsored preaching assemblies, and along the streets they tied together silks to form pavilions and halls, poured mercury to form pools, set up gold and jade as trees, and competed against each other to assemble the monks or to establish Buddha images . . . They also ordered several barefooted children with jade girdles and golden headgear to sing praises and to play as they wished. (Ch'en 1972)

The Popular Religious Landscape

Throughout this age of ritual and philosophical innovation, of the rise and collapse (and rise) of empires and cultural orders, older cults and practical traditions continued, in basic ways as they had for centuries, since at least the period in which we begin to have evidence for religious practice in China. In the most general terms, the character of the human relationship with the spirit world continued to be a central feature of Chinese religious practice (as it does today). Glen Dudbridge, in his study of the *Great Book of Marvels* (*Guangyi ji*), a Tang collection of occult tales, notes that the nature of the relation—encapsulated in the oft-occurring saying, "men and spirits go different ways"—was of central concern in the late medieval period (Dudbridge 1995). Yet, given how often these ways are shown to collide in the collection—and across a wide swath of religious and occult literature—the statement seems to

have constituted something like a form of wishful thinking. Indeed, it was for the most part in protecting against the results of such collisions that the occult technical cultures of medieval China—whether Buddhist, Daoist, or otherwise—claimed efficacy. Among the most common techniques were those of the ancient heritage of travel magic and other rites of protection against the various dangers of the wild, including the predations of spirits and sorcerers. The fear of sorcery—whose "antiquity and virulence" in the Chinese religious imagination, as Christine Mollier has made clear, are "confirmed by both archaeology and dynastic histories"—was in particular an abiding concern well into the tenth century (Mollier 2008). Techniques that offered protection from sorcerous attacks can be found in the period's manuals of medieval medicine, as well as in the ritual handbooks of religious practitioners of not only Daoists and Buddhists but also those who worked in older native traditions that had no strong institutions or abiding names. They were, notably, features of the ritual techniques of the loose tradition that in recent years has come to be known (not entirely satisfactorily) as "Buddho-Daoism," hybrid forms of religious practice characterized, for example, by Buddhist uses of native Chinese talismanic written figures, or *fu*. Mollier has examined a range of such techniques evidenced among the manuscripts found at Dunhuang, dating primarily to the ninth and tenth centuries. Many of these rites claimed to provide protections from and countermeasures against forms of magical attack such as the ancient *gu*-sorcery or the fatal seductions of the sorceresses known as *mei* and *yao*, all of which, by the Tang, had long been a feature of Chinese religious and magical practice.

The appearance and growth of block printing in the later years of the Tang proved to be a democratizing force in the spread of talismanic and votive technologies. The hoard of texts and objects discovered at Dunhuang and the more recent archaeological excavations of tombs have made clear the spread of printed religious objects among a wide array of medieval Chinese, from Dunhuang and Sichuan in the west to the region south of the Yangzi to the east. Most striking, perhaps, are the amulets of the Buddhist *Incantation of Wish-Fulfillment*, Chinese versions of the Sanskrit *Mahāpratisarā dhāraṇī*, a charm whose scripture prescribes its use as an amulet to be worn on the arm or around the neck for protection from a wide array of dangers, from hailstones to the attacks of demons or sorcerers, as well as from the crushing effects of one's own past actions, stretching over many lifetimes. That many of these amulets—stunningly beautiful sheets combining both text and image worn folded and rolled within armlets or pendants—have been found in tombs testifies to their use during one's lifetime and after. The earliest examples were hand-written and painted and would have been quite expensive to obtain, which would have limited their spread among the people. But, beginning in the late eighth century, xylograph amulets that appear to have been produced in greater numbers begin to appear. Both at Dunhuang and in tombs across a far-flung region, scholars have found examples that were clearly made from the same printing blocks, a fact that strongly suggests that the new technology increased the availability of the amulets across a wide range of geographical regions and social groups. The amulet sheets also attest to the

reorientation of China's religious culture that occurred in this era, away from the overland trade routes to the northwest and toward the sea routes of the southeast. The iconography featured at the centers of the sheets in the later printed amulets bears no relation to the images prescribed in the incantation scripture that had been imported from the west; instead, it depicts the eight-armed bodhisattva Mahāpratisara, a figure not mentioned at all in the Indian scripture or in later Indic texts describing the spell, but featured in a range of material contexts across Southeast Asia.

The spread and democratization of religious culture that the new technology of block printing enabled is visible elsewhere at Dunhuang, as well. Scholars have, for example, discovered multiple examples of block printed votive images of bodhisattvas or buddhas, complete with instructions for how to use them in the worship of the deities, often containing short spells to be recited in the course of the rites. Some of these prints appear to have been rather carelessly made, a fact that suggests something approaching a process of mass-production, a phenomenon that would both have raised funds for the monasteries that likely sold them and also helped to spread the cults of the deities figured on the sheets—along with the personal rites for their worship—among a broad range of literate believers. This spread and increased availability of religious practices and technologies, which increased in the centuries following the fall of the Tang, was perhaps the last of the dynasty's many gifts to Chinese civilization.

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CHAPTER 5

Chinese Religion in the Song and Alien Dynasties

Shin-yi Chao, Rutgers University

Chinese society during Song times (960–1271) witnessed some watershed changes. Block printing became popular and dramatically increased the spread of information. Techniques such as stenciling were used in the mass production of images. Commercial printing became common. Inheriting the legacy of the Tang Dynasty, China gradually moved toward modern times. Commercial growth was intertwined with the growth and spread of market towns, connecting villages to one another in a market network. Affluent urban dwellers engaged in a range of commercial activities. Office-holding endogamous landlord clans that had once controlled the political and economic resources were destroyed by rebellions, and the ensuing warlord regimes prevailed during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. Social mobility was real: while individuals could climb from the bottom to the top of the social ladder on their own in their lifetime, they could fall just as fast. Insecurity and anxiety were reflected in the worldview of the newly rising urban-dwelling middle class: demons and other malicious creatures were everywhere and waiting to take away people's livelihoods. The world of the dead was equally unsettling thanks to centuries of development of purgatorial tortures in the popular imagination. The popular image of a postmortem tribunal, entailing tortuous punishments, was stabilized in the Song thanks to the extensive application of printing technologies, such as murals, stencils, and woodblock printing. Cults of salvation including those centered on Guanyin (the Chinese adaptation of Avalokitesvara), Mulian (the Chinese adaptation of Mahamaudgalyayana), and the Ten Kings of Hell penetrated the social stratum. Rituals to release the dead from the purgatorial underworld multiplied thanks to Buddhist and Taoist clerics' ritual responses to the demands of the laity.

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A sectarian trend emerged among the ordained clerics of Song times. They invented and reinvented their lineages by engendering new doctrinal interpretations and ritual practices. Sectarianism was further enhanced by construction and reconstruction of genealogical histories. These lineage histories were authoritative up to the twentieth century. The intellectual life of the clerics was exuberant and its impact extended to the laity. In Buddhist monasteries, debates over doctrines and practices among monk-scholars led to innovation and reform. Daoist ritual masters created and modified liturgical meditation systems for self-cultivation and for public service. Ritual manuals that surfaced during the Song-Yuan period constitute fully one third of the *Daoist Canon* compiled during the Ming Dynasty.

The government took measures to keep monasteries under check. Clerics were selected to serve as government agents to keep records of their fellow clerics' activities. More importantly, the state imposed its presence in the monastic world by outlawing ordinations without certification. The government issued ordination certificates, the cost of which rose steadily after 1067 as the state starting selling them to increase revenue. Moreover, the certification system served to control the size of the monastic community and to select certain temples or individual clerics for official favor. Clerical apprentices relied on lay patronage to gather funds to obtain ordination certificates; without this funding, they remained as apprentices or became unlicensed religious professionals of lower prestige.

The state was the most powerful patron. Monasteries and clerics were exempt from some taxes and corvée by law. The court and the local government were generous in supporting monasticism financially and symbolically (although official support declined during the Southern Song). Imperial patronage was sometimes expressed in a violent way. Emperor Huizong's promotion of Daoism was accompanied by a repression of Buddhism. Kubilai Khan decreed the burning of the Daoist canon (except for the *Daode jing*) after the Daoists lost in court debates with the Buddhists, a debate over which Kubilai Khan, himself a Buddhist, was the single judge.

Despite the growth of institutional religion, religious practice was increasingly democratized, with ritual power more and more belonging to uninitiated laity. Using the example of the cult of Wenchang (conventionally rendered as the God of Literature), which grew from a regional serpent cult in Sichuan Province to a national cult, Terry Kleeman (1993) argues for lay people's "improved access" to the gods in Song times. The intercession of priestly personnel who possessed esoteric knowledge in communicating with the divinity could be bypassed.

Voluntary religious societies grew rapidly in the Song. These societies were also lay-based, and allowed for the spread of religious movements outside the reach of both the imperial state and the organized Buddhist and Daoist institutions. In general, then, we can observe the increasing "laicization," to use Robert Hymes' term, of Chinese religion in the tenth through the thirteenth centuries—a relative shift in the balance of religious power and initiative from religious professionals toward the laity. The religious outlook of the Song period can be characterized by the marketplace metaphor: competition between providers of ritual services ranging

from the priestly elite to unlicensed self-trained spirit mediums. Cults of local saints multiplied, some becoming empire-wide in scope. The people of the Song had an extensive supply of spiritual options and they were not always loyal customers; they shopped around constantly.

Buddhism

Thanks to a growing body of new research produced since the later part of the twentieth century, the paradigm of the Song as the beginning of a long decline of Chinese Buddhism has been replaced by that of "climax" in an ecological sense; that is, after a period of evolution the "ecosystem" as a whole became stabilized even though further development still occurred (McRae 2004). Sectarian innovations in doctrine and practice that surfaced during the Sui-Tang period reached completion in the Song. While the influence and importance of the laity grew tremendously during the Song, doctrinal innovations were produced by the monastics; it was they who defined, defended, and redefined sectarian identities. This section thus focuses on monasticism, starting with government monastic regulation, which in every sense provided an environment that promoted *zong* (school)-identity among monastics. Two schools merit special mention here: *Chan* and *Tiantai*.

Chan Buddhism

At the beginning of the Song, the Chan school was predominant in Buddhist monasteries. Such an institutional advantage benefited this school's growth and ensured government oversight and support. The legal code of the Song divided monasteries into two main categories: hereditary and public. Hereditary monasteries were legally owned by the monks or nuns residing within. The residential monastics formed a fictive family, or "tonsure family," as Welch termed it (Welch 1968). The succession of the abbacy within a hereditary monastery, as specified in the state's statutes, ran within the tonsure family. Factors outside the monastery at least in theory could wield little impact on the succession of the abbacy as long as there were legitimate candidates available within the tonsure family.

If a private monastery lost all its tonsure family members, it would be legally converted into a public monastery. The choice of the abbot of a public monastery, in contrast to the hereditary monastery, fell to the determination of the local prefect. He should make his pick based on the recommendations of abbots of other public monasteries in the area, but, in practice, the secular authority often made the decision without consulting the clergy first. It is not surprising that the state favored the public monasteries, whose abbacy was more controllable than that of the private monasteries, which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, there was still

a basic rule that local magistrates observed: only monks or nuns who belonged to the same school (*zong*) for which the monasteries were designated could be considered as candidates for the abbacy.

At the beginning of the Song, most public monasteries were designated as belonging to the *Chanzong*. Chan was not yet a fully discreet single tradition in terms of doctrines or practices in the mid tenth century, but the monasteries were so classified in the law and the abbacy of Chan monasteries went to individuals who were ordained and registered as Chan monks and nuns. The favoritism toward public monasteries shown by the government thus benefited the Chan school: this system helped to form the framework of an institutionalized Chan school.

Another event that shaped Chan identity was the construction and reconstruction of the Chan lineage. Chan transmission histories concerned themselves primarily with genealogy. The earliest transmission history of the Chan school was the *Patriarchs' Hall Collection* (*Zutang ji*), compiled in 952, but this was out of circulation in China after the eleventh century, preserved only in the thirteenth century Korean Buddhist Canon and remaining in oblivion until the early twentieth century. Rather, it was the *Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Flame [of the Dharma]* (*Jingde chuandenglu*), compiled in 1004, that fostered a new genre of Chan literature whose titles typically included *denglu* ("lamp-record"). The "lamp-records" tell stories of the enlightenment experiences of great Chan masters of Tang times and before, as well as their sermons, poems, encounter dialogues, and pedagogical legends that inspired students of Chan in the Song and later. *Gongan* collections were produced and circulated during Tang and earlier times, but it was not until the Song that Chan monks and nuns consciously collected and commented on these records as pedagogical materials. The *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyan lu*), compiled and including commentary by Yuanwu Keqin, and the *Gateless Pass* (*Wumenguan*), by Wumen Huikai (printing blocks carved in 1245), are among the most studied by Chan students and wielded tremendous influence in shaping Chan Buddhism both in image and in reality.

The editing style of these materials, in the meantime, also created the mythical image of Chan as an unbroken line of "*dharma* transmission" that could be traced all the way back to Sakyamuni through a series of Indian and Chinese Chan patriarchs. Thus, the Song established both the legitimacy and the authority of the Chan school as a discreet tradition.

The flourishing of publications by the Chan monastics should be examined internally and externally. Although the catastrophic Huichang persecution ended in 845, the following fifty years witnessed the loss of great masters to death one after another. A sense of crisis of a disruption of the *dharma* transmission compelled Chan monks to preserve the teachings of the great masters in a lasting form. In the meantime, as discussed above, the Chan school enjoyed an institutional advantage in the early Song. To legitimate their privilege, Chan monks appealed to history by creating the genealogies of their schools according to their ideals. Further, within the Chan school, the competition for orthodoxy was played out in the genealogical histories.

The rise of the Linji school in utilizing the *Recorded Sayings of Linji* (*Linji yulu*), a collection of what Linji should have said rather than what he actually said, is a good example (McRae 2004, Welter 2008).

During the Song, the Five Houses (lineages) of Chan Buddhism merged into two: Linji and Caodong. Between them, the former predominated until the early twelfth century. The line of Caodong was essentially broken for a few decades after the death of Dayang Jingxuan (942–1027). Furong Daokai (1043–1118) and his *dharma* brother Dahong Baoen (1058–1111) initiated the Caodong revival of the twelfth century. In many ways, the Caodong sect that we are familiar with was reinvented by the twelfth century masters. The quiet-sitting approach that has became the signature Caodon meditation style was first promoted by Daokai (Schlütter 2008). Daokai instructed his students that they "should be completely at rest" and enter a prolonged meditation ("months and years" if necessary) to bring out the "original enlightenment" inherent in every person (McRae 2004). Then, Hongzhi, a second-generation disciple of Daokai, composed the *Inscription on Silent Illumination* (preface dated 1131), which reads: "In complete silence words are forgotten, total clarity appears before you . . . Transcendent wisdom [*miao*] exists in the silence, striving for achievement is forgotten in illumination" (trans. Schlütter 2008). This was said to encourage the meditator engaged in the rest-meditation method to sit until "white moles start growing at the corner of your mouth and grass starts growing out of your tongue" (Schlütter 1999). The underlining doctrine of Silent Illumination Chan is that all human beings have inherent enlightenment. Sitting in quietness separates the practitioners from the world of delusion so that the inherent enlightenment manifests itself naturally. Quiet-sitting eventually became the trademark of Caodong praxis and was accepted by its counterparts in Korea (*Jogye Seon*) and Japan (*Sōtō Zen*) in later centuries.

The Silent Illumination method resonated with, in particular, lay literati and brought the Caodong revival to its apogee. This approach, however, also became the target of severe criticism launched by the Linji monk Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163; also known as Dahui Pujue). Dahui Zonggao was probably the most famous Buddhist figure in Song times and his attack on Silent Illumination is "the single issue that is best remembered about Song-Dynasty Chan Buddhism in the East Asian Buddhist World" (Schlütter 2008). Daohui's strong disapproval of Silent Illumination must be understood in the context of his own enlightenment experience as well as the social milieu. Ordained at the age of eighteen, Dahui followed various teachers and finally reached enlightenment under the supervision of no less a personage than Yuanwu Keqin himself, the Linji master who produced the *Biyan lu*. Yuanwu assigned Dahui to meditate on the phrase "The East Mountain walks over the water," from the *gong'an* (Japanese *kōan*) of the Chan master Yunmen (c. 862–949). Dahui tried to respond to it numerous times but Yuanwu disapproved with each and every consultation. Then, during a lecture that Yuanwu gave at the request of Madame Chang Kangkuo, Dahui expanded on this *gong'an*:

> Once a monk asked Yunmen this question, "Where do all the Buddhas come from?" Yunmen answered: "The East Mountain walks over the water." But if I were he, I would have given a different answer. " 'Where do all the Buddhas come from?' 'As the fragrant breeze comes from the south, a slight coolness naturally stirs in the palace pavilion.' " (trans. Suzuki 1933)

Dahui continued his recollection: "When I heard this, all of a sudden there was no more before and after. Time stopped. I ceased to feel any disturbance in my mind, and remained in a state of utter calmness" (trans. Yu 1979). This was Dahui's first enlightenment experience; a sense of breakthrough is clearly indicated. Dahui reported the experience to his teacher. Yuanwu found it commendable but not yet perfect. "You have only died but are not yet reborn," said Yuanwu to Dahui; "your greatest problem is that you do not doubt words enough." Yuanwu then assigned Dahui another riddle: "To be and not to be—it is like a wisteria leaning on a tree." Dahui worked on this phrase intensively. He could be so absorbed in his thinking that at a meal he "just held the chopsticks and forgot to eat." Nevertheless, for half a year, he could not come up with a response that demonstrated his arrival at enlightenment. Then, he learned about Yuanwu's own response to the phrase "What if the tree suddenly breaks down and the wisteria dies?" The moment he heard this response, Dahui conveyed, he had the final breakthrough. Afterwards, Yuanwu gave Dahui more *gong'an* and Dahui's responses to them demonstrated his perfect enlightenment. Yuanwu recognized that Dahui had grasped the Linji teachings. From then on, for several decades, Dahui would be a tireless monk-teacher instructing thousands of students, monastic and lay, male and female. His teaching emphasized "enlightenment as an experience that occurs at a single moment in time . . . a shattering and decisive sudden event" (Yu 1979).

Dahui held the position of abbot for a relatively short period of time but still managed to train more than a hundred *dharma* heirs. He also wrote profusely. He himself did not publish much, but his sermons, letters, and exchanges with *dharma* seekers were collected and published as the *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Dahui Pujue* (*Dahui Pujue Chanshi yulu*). Two collections bear his name as an editor: the *True Dharma Eye* (*Zheng fayan zang*), a collection of *gong'an* of previous Chan masters, and *Treasured Teachings of the Chan Monastic Tradition* (*Chanlin baoxun*), consisting of instructions of eminent Chan monks.

Dahui's most distinctive contribution to Buddhism was in developing and promoting the method of *kanhua*, or "viewing phrases." *Kanhua chan* thence became a synonym for the Linji style of introspection. *Kanhua* is an abbreviation of *kanhuatou*, which can be roughly rendered into English as "viewing phrases." The word *kan* means "to see," "to view," but also "to read" as in *kanshu* ("reading a book") or *kanguan* ("venerable readers"). *Huatou* is the key phrase or the key word of a *gong'an*, which, in the Buddhist context, poses a Chan problem. Let's use Dahui's first enlightenment experience cited above as an example: the question "Where do all the Buddhas come from?"—which provoked Yunmen to answer, "The East Mountain

walks over the water"—was a *gong'an*, and the answer itself the *huatou*, the key phrase of the *gong'an* and what Dahui was investigating. Another example is the famous episode about the Tang master of Chan, Zhaozhou, which Dahui often used. A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" to which Zhaozhou answered "*wu*" (no). The exchange between the two monks is a *gong'an*, and Zhaozhou's answer, "*wu*," is the *huatou*. What a monk should contemplate is not the entire *gong'an* but the *huatou*; in this case, the single word, *wu*. However, how can one contemplate "no"? Chün-fang Yü explains:

> Surely it makes no "sense." The entire exchange between the disciple and Chao-chou [Zhaozhou], just as the other exchanges Ta-hui [Dahui] mentions, is unintelligible and cannot be thought about or understood rationally no matter how hard one tries. Actually, the very opaqueness to reason and the stubborn refusal to be "figured out" are intrinsic features of *koans* [*gong'an*] and constitute their effectiveness as meditative devices. (trans. Yü 1979)

Huatou resists the discursive, reasoning, ratiocinative thinking process. *Huatou* provokes the "sense of doubt" (*yiqing*) to question our habitual way of thinking, to function as an "opening wedge" that cuts into the practitioners' accustomed perception of the universe. If, and only if, the "wedge" penetrates deep enough—the meditator works on the *huatou* hard enough, that is—it eventually breaches the meditator's "taken-for-granted expectancies." This moment, the moment one's old perceived world collapses, is the moment of enlightenment. Therefore, the enlightenment experience is sudden and untranslatable into words.

The *Kanhua* method was not invented by Dahui, of course; he was himself a benefactor of this method, as we have learned from his own journey to enlightenment. Yet, Dahui was the first who left a record elaborating on *kanhua* as a meditation device. As he instructed the Buddhist nun, Miaodao, the very first student whom Dahui approved for the "lamp transmission,"

> I cited Mazu's "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not a thing" and instructed her to look at it. Moreover, I gave her an explanation: "(1) You must not take it as a statement of truth. (2) You must not take it to be something you do not need to do anything about. (3) Do not take it as a flint-struck spark or a lightning flash. (4) Do not try to divine the meaning of it. (5) Do not try to figure it out from the context in which I brought it up. 'It is not the mind, it is not the Buddha, it is not a thing; after all, what is it?'" (trans. McRae 2004)

Despite Dahui's ferocious attack on Silent Illumination ("the wicked Silent Illumination," or *mozhaoxiechan*, as he referred to it), Dahui and Hongzhi demonstrated mutual admiration toward each other in words and in action. It has been suggested that Dahui's fierce attack against the Silent Illumination method was not simply a doctrinal disagreement. The quiet-sitting method was well-accepted by the lay literati, the primary patrons of monastic Buddhism during the Southern Song, during

which time the state withdrew its generosity in supporting monastic Buddhism. Schlütter argues that Dahui's attack therefore has to be understood as part of the competition for patronage that was crucial to the survival of his branch (Schlütter 2006).

Three points should be emphasized in our investigation of the Chan school in the Sung. First, although Chan was said to have originated in the Tang Dynasty, everything about its origins in China was filtered through the Song. Second, it was only in the Song, with the establishment of the imperially sponsored system of public abbacy monasteries, that monasteries came to be designed as specifically Chan institutions. Finally, the most distinctive forms of literature by which the Chan tradition has come to be known—the genealogical histories, discourse records, *gong'an* anthologies, and monastic regulations—were all produced in the Song.

The Tiantai School (including Pure Land)

In the Song Dynasty, the Tiantai School was in direct competition with Chan for privilege, prestige, and patronage. It, too, had suffered from the devastating imperial persecution against Buddhism of the Huichang reign (841–846 CE) in the later Tang Dynasty. But, by the second half of the tenth century, this school began to recover. In 950, the ruler of the Min-Yue Kingdom in the southeast of China retrieved Tiantai texts from Korea and Japan in addition to assigning Tiantai monks to head a handful of monasteries within his kingdom. The Tiantai school thus began its revival in both doctrine and practice in the early years of the Song.

An important figure of Song Tiantai Buddhism is Siming Zhili (960–1028). From the Song forward, orthodox Tiantai doctrine has been based upon Zhili's doctrinal elaborations on Tiantai teachings. Zhili was best known for his interpretation of the thought of Zhanran (711–782), the sixth Tiantai master, who commanded great respect and imperial patronage in the Tang Dynasty. Zhanran himself had revised the Tiantai doctrines established by Zhiyi (538–597), the de facto founder of this school. While there is no doubt that Zhanran had opened a new horizon for the Tiantai School, his theory was ambiguous concerning the nature of reality and self-cultivation. Zhili brought forth his judgments on these ambiguities and established the standard for Tiantai doctrine from this point forward.

Zhili's doctorial elaboration on Zhanran's teachings was generated during debates with other Tiantai monk-scholars over Zhanran's works. The victorious faction, led by Zhili, was retrospectively known as the Home Mountain (*shanjia*) Teaching in contrast to their opponents, labeled the Off Mountain (*shanwai*) Teaching. In his *Exposition of the Essentials of Ten Gates of Non-duality* (*Shi buermen zhi yaochao*), a commentary on Zhanran's *Ten Gates of Non-duality* (*Shi buermen zhi*), Zhili criticized his opponents' interpolation of *Huayan* and Chan thought in Tiantai doctrine. Zhili upheld the concept of "nature inclusion" (*xingju*), affirming the unity of mind and

reality. For Zhili, even the unenlightened mind is capable of contemplation that leads to enlightenment (Gregory 1999). Zhili's decision to criticize members of his own school was based on his concern that the core tenets of Tiantai doctrine were being adulterated by interpretations heavily influenced by *Huayan* and Chan thought. Zhili embraced as a fundamental principle the concept of nature inclusion that had first been articulated by Zhanran. For Zhili, existence in its tainted, multitudinous "particulars" had to be taken every bit as seriously as the formless absolute "principle." "Mind" does not take ultimate precedence over "form," so one can reach enlightenment by contemplation of the ordinary unenlightened mind. Though we cannot go into greater detail here, Zhili articulated a fundamental tenet of Tiantai thought: "the perfectly integrated three truths: non-substantiality of the phenomenal world, provisional positing of the phenomenal reality, and the middle which refers to the simultaneity of the first two" (Chan 1999).

Zhili's interpretation of Zhanran's thought was not unanimously accepted within Tiantai at first. Yet, Zhili produced a line of *dharma* heirs while his opponents did not. Eventually, Zhili's interpretation made it into the Buddhist Canon while the others' failed to do so, and, as Zhili's interpretation was canonized, other interpretations were left in oblivion. Tiantai orthodoxy for the following centuries was defined during the Song Dynasty.

The Tiantai revival was not limited to scholasticism but extended to monastic practice. Ciyun Zunshi (964–1032), the other pivotal figure in the Tiantai revival, painstakingly promoted Tiantai ritual in order to reform lay Buddhist ritual. He was especially concerned to convert the populace from making blood sacrifices to deities and from using meat and wine for funerary and ancestral rites. He argued that blood sacrifices generated demerits leading to negative retribution. Still, Zunshi incorporated popular religious practices in his ritual instructions, which "were aimed at converting local deities and spirits to Buddhism, thereby allowing them a legitimate role within the hierarchical structure of the Buddhist world as "retainers" or "vassals" to the more exalted and powerful Buddhas and bodhisattvas" (Stevenson 1986). Thus, as Daniel Stevenson argues, ritual offered a channel for Buddhism to adopt the Chinese local deities as its own and for local religious practices to adopt Buddhism as their own; this was a major turn in the long history of the sinicization of Buddhism.

Repentance had been an important part of Tiantai practices since the beginning. However, by Zunshi's time, the Tiantai repentance ritual had been badly distorted. Traditionally, a major benefit of performing the repentance ritual was the ritually generated miraculous power that can grant people's wishes. Nevertheless, in the Tiantai tradition, as manifested in the liturgical manuals that Zhiyi produced, the repentance ritual is most beneficial because it removes the demerits and consequently the delusion caused by demerits; carrying out the ritual therefore generates the effects of karma improvement and *dharma* learning. Zunshi, who composed and revised numerous repentance rituals, further emphasized rebirth in the Pure Land as the ritual purpose.

Zunshi emphasized that repentance was a paramount practice for rebirth in the Pure Land:

> Repentance was a requisite of Tiantai disciplines and remained a central focus throughout Zunshi's career. His personal commitment to ritual repentance was also extended to others and, in all likelihood, was a theme that he stressed within his Pure Land societies . . . The Tiantai emphasis on repentances through Pure Land societies is representative of the Tiantai school's contribution to the preoccupation with sin and the afterlife that pervaded Song society. (Getz 2004)

Both Zunshi and Zhili were Pure Land devotees. Pure Land devotion, centering on the belief in the Buddha Amitabha and the rebirth in the Pure Land that Amitabha generated, had been popular among Buddhists—monastic and lay—since the fourth century. But it did not become a discrete Buddhist school (or *zong*) until the Southern Song. The formation of Pure Land Buddhism as a distinct institutional entity with a self-conscious lineage and doctrinal system began in the Northern Song under the aegis of the Tiantai masters. The Tiantai cleric Shengchang (959–1020) is credited as a patriarch in the genealogical histories of the Chinese Pure Land school. Both he and Zunshi formed "lotus societies" (*lianshe*), so called in memory of the White Lotus Society, founded by the scholar-monk Huiyuan (334–416), a Pure Land devotee later revered as the first patriarch of this school. Zhili also organized a congregation with "meditation on the Buddha [Amitabha]" (or, "reciting the name of the Buddha [Amitabha]," *nianfo*) as its primary practice. As a matter of fact, the organization was called the *nianfo hui*. It was inclusive, aiming at a membership of over ten thousand men and women, reaching out primarily to lay followers. Zhili envisioned assigning 210 lay "assembly heads" who would be responsible for forty-eight assembly members each. Each member would receive a *nianfo* calendar for tracking their *nianfo* practices. The involvement of lay leadership and the utilization of printing techniques are key innovations of this movement.

Zunshi's *Two Teachings for Resolving Doubts and Establishing the Practice and Vow to be Reborn in the Pure Land*, produced in 1017, articulated ritual programs for the lay society members to observe. These programs established *nianfo*—invocation of the Buddha's name and meditative recollection of the Buddha—as the primary form of lay ritual practice from the Song Dynasty forward. The creation of a Pure Land patriarchy and self-awareness as a distinct religious community were to a large extent indebted to the efforts of the Tiantai masters of the Song. Such Pure Land practices remain central to Chinese popular devotional practices to the present day.

The Song-period Tiantai monks' enthusiasm for organizing Pure Land devotional societies among the laity produced an unexpected impact on sectarianism later in the dynasty. In 1133, the Tiantai monk Mao Ziyuan (1096?—1166) established the White Lotus sect (*Bailian zong*). Mao was addressed as Guiding-Master White Lotus (*Bailian daoshi*) and the followers were called "white lotus vegetarians." Eventually the so-called White Lotus teachings, or *Bailian jiao*, would become the label for all

government-condemned religious groups in Ming-Qing China. Mao's teachings were in fact in accordance with the Tiantai tradition. He preached the practice of repentance and composed liturgical manuals as well as establishing "repentance halls" according to the model that Zunshi created. Nevertheless, Mao's ritual formula was much simpler than that of Zhushi, and the White Lotus repentance halls accommodated both men and women, allowing them to carry out the ritual together. In addition, married men and women were entitled to preach or take charge of the repentance halls. Mao's self-glorifying title of "guiding master," the lack of gender segregation in the congregations, and the practice of allowing married clergy, on top of the presumed watered-down distortion of the Tiantai teachings, made Mao and his congregation a target of criticism within and outside Buddhism. Nevertheless, the evaluation of Mao Ziyuan was not consistent during the Song-Yuan period. In addition, the White Lotus produced some eminent monks, who managed to befriend court officials and imperial personages (including a Korean prince). Thus, the government attitude toward the White Lotus swung back and forth between endorsement and banishment.

During the Yuan period, the repentance halls spread widely and some of them were as grand as ordinary Buddhist temples. Members of the White Lotus movement donated their residences for conversion into congregational meeting places and purchased land for congregational revenues. While the White Lotus sect still followed many Pure Land practices and some of its most prominent monastic leaders belonged to the Pure Land school, it departed significantly from traditional Pure Land teachings and practices. The employment of married clergy, for example, was a common practice and had its own genealogical records. This priestly movement can hardly be classified as a branch of the Pure Land sect; it should be viewed as a discreet Buddhist sect in its own right.

A few words should be said about the presumed rebellious image of the White Lotus movement. In the insurgencies at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, a good number of the rebellion forces consisted of generals recognized to be White Lotus members. Nevertheless, it is misleading to characterize the rebels as White Lotus sectarians, since their guiding millennial ideology was not part of the White Lotus teachings.

Daoism

In the history of Daoism, the Song has been referred to as a period of Daoist renaissance. The contemporaneous and later Jin and Yuan dynasties witnessed the continuing development of the Song trend. During the period, four editions of the Daoist canon were compiled, each larger than the previous one. Inner alchemy, a new system of self-cultivation developed in Tang times that would become the dominating form of Daoist self-cultivation for the next thousand years, came to be fully developed during Song times. Ritual innovations, most notably the Thunder Rite (*leifa*) and Salvation through Refinement (*liandu*), dealt with with people's needs for

security in a rapidly changing society. Liturgical lineages/schools multiplied rapidly, as attested in the collections of liturgical manuals. Finally, new institutionalized sects took shape in the late twelfth century in north China under the regime of the Jurchen Jin, most notably the Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) school, which would dominate Daoist monasticism for the next millennium. In the meantime, the Heavenly Master school reinvented itself and finally established its hegemony in the Daoist circle. The Northern Song state established two empire-wide Daoist temple networks, "Celestial Celebration" and "Divine Empyrean," for a religiopolitical purpose. Nevertheless, complaints arose that Daoist monastics kept wives and children within their compounds. Such observation suggests a lack of monastic self-discipline. By the thirteenth century, finally, the autonomy of Daoist monasticism reached its maturity in the north under the rule of the "alien dynasties" of the Jin and Yuan.

The Daoist Canon

Imperial efforts to collect the texts that would make up the Daoist canon started in the reign of Emperor Taizong (r. 976–997). During the reigns of Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) and Huizong (r. 1100–1125), two editions of the Daoist canon were compiled at the imperial court. A byproduct of the former was the *Seven Lots from the Bookcase of the Clouds* (*Yunji qiqian*), an invaluable anthology of Daoist texts up to the early eleventh century. The Daoist canon produced during Huizong's reign was the first ever printed. The printing blocks later entered the custody of Jurchen Jin and served as the foundation of the Jin edition of the Daoist canon. However, the printing blocks and the printed copies were destroyed during the Mongol invasion of Beijing, except for one copy. Based on this sole survivor, the Yuan edition of the *Daoist Canon* was produced in 1244, thanks primarily to the efforts of the Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) school. In addition, the *Quanzhen* Daoists welcomed whoever brought their own paper and ink to use the printing blocks. As a result, over one hundred copies were produced. In the next four decades, under the reign of Kubilai Khan, the Daoist canon experienced two purges that almost led to its utter destruction. Nevertheless, a good portion of it survived and served as the foundation of the Ming edition of the Daoist canon, the definitive Daoist canon to the present day.

Inner Alchemy

Neidan, or inner alchemy, has dominated Daoist self-cultivation for the last millennium. Its practitioners uphold that the elixir that allows them to unite with the *Dao*, or to find "illumination by returning to the fundamental order of the cosmos" (Robinet 1993), can be generated within the body instead of the cauldron. The internal elixir, or *shengtai* (lit. "holy fetus"), is the true self. With proper nourishment,

it grows up. When it matures, the adept can obtain "release from the corpse" (*shijie*) and return to the union with the *Dao*. This state is referred to as becoming a celestial transcendent (*tianxian*) or "celestial official" (*tianguan*).

Numerous techniques and theories about "cultivating the holy fetus" have been generated. As a distinct class of theories and practices, *neidan* synthesizes the *yangsheng* ("nourishing life") traditions of breathing techniques, meditative exercises of internal visualization, correlative cosmology, and terminology as well as methodology found in older operative-alchemy (*waidan*) texts such as the ancient *Zhouyi Cantongqi*. Secret teachings were passed down generation by generation from master to disciple. Lineages formed and died. Three of these were retrospectively known as the Southern School (*nanzong*), the Zhong-Lü, and the Northern School (*beizong*). The Southern School of *neidan* started with Zhang Boduan (987?–1082), whose teachings are best presented in the *Chapters on Awakening to Perfection* (*Wuzhen pian*), probably the most influential *neidan* text produced in the Song. At the regime change of north China from Song to Jin, the *Wuzhen pian* tradition moved southwards and came to prominence under the influence of Bai Yuchan (1194–ca. 1227), a native of the Hainan island in the South China Sea; he was active in the southeast coastal province of Fujian, where he attracted a large number of disciples, especially among the learned men. As Bai's followers grew, a discreet school took shape.

The Zhong-Lü tradition is named after two legendary immortals: Lü Dongbin (b. 798?) and his mentor Zhongli Quan (b. second century?). The eighteen chapters of *Zhongli Quan's Transmission of the Art [of Immortality] to Lü Dongbin: A Collection* (*Zhong Lü chuandao ji*) contains discursive dialogues on Inner Alchemy that allegedly occurred between the two title figures. The text focuses on the theoretical background; an empirical complement to it is the *Secret Transmission of Master Zhengyang's Complete Methods of the Sacred Jewel* (*Bichuan Zhengyang zhenren lingbao bifa*). Master Zhengyang in the title refers to Zhongli Quan himself. Numerous *neidan* texts of Song times were written in the form of commentaries on the *Zhongli Quan's Transmission to Lü Dongbin* and shaped the Zhong-Lü tradition. Among the successors of the Zhong-Lü tradition, the Complete Perfection school founded by Wang Zhe (1113–1170) in 1170 (see below) in Shandong Province stood out and developed its own tradition. Wang allegedly met the two immortals, Zhongli and Lü, in person, and received their teachings directly. Established in the territory of the Jurchen Jin, the Complete Perfection school's activities were restricted in the north until the Mongols united China in late thirteenth century. The *neidan* system of the Complete Perfection is thus referred to as the Northern School.

Details of inner alchemy practices vary not only from lineage to lineage but from master to master. Nevertheless, there is a generally accepted progressive timetable that describes "three stages" on top of "laying the foundation." In "laying the foundation," the aspiring practitioners enter an ascetic lifestyle (including, for example, restraint from sexual activities and alcohol consumption, a vegetarian diet, and seclusion) to prepare the body and mind. After the foundation is laid, the practitioner begins to refine the body energies by forcing them to fuse together and travel around

the body through two invisible channels (*mai*): one ascending along the spine from the coccyx to the head (called the *du* channel) and the other descending at the front of the body (called the *ren* channel). The channels have nodal points, called "passes." If the passes are closed, the circulation of the *qi* is obstructed. The practitioner must work to open the passes. Along the channels, in addition, there are three energy centers referred to as the "elixir fields."

The first of the three stages of inner alchemy practices ensues: "refining the essence to transform it into the pneuma" (*lianjing huaqi*), which takes "one hundred days" (a period that should not be taken literally). Through traveling this inner-body cycle, the essence is refined and transformed into pneuma. The next stage, "refining pneuma into spirit" (*lianqi huashen*), aims at uniting pneuma and spirit. The lungs and the kidneys play crucial roles as the sources of the "perfect water" and "perfect fire," respectively. The perfect water and fire work together to refine the pneuma into spirit. The inner alchemy term for this process is *qukan tianli*, or "taking [the middle line of] *kan* (☵) to fill the [broken middle line of] *li* (☲)"—for, in the trigram system, water is represented by the *kan* and fire by *li*. At the end of this stage, the holy fetus is produced from the spirit. This stage takes "one year" (certainly not to be taken literally). The third, and final, stage, "refining spirit and reverting to emptiness" (*lianshen huanxu*) is when the practitioner focuses on nourishing the inner fetus to grow until it can discard the physical body completely and thereby transcend the realms of the mortal and immortal. A successful *neidan* practitioner thus transcends the boundaries of space and time. By now, the spirit can return to emptiness, or the *Dao*.

Thunder Rites[1]

The force of thunder has been appreciated in Chinese society since antiquity. Thunder deployment entered the Daoist ritual reservoir relatively late. In an eighth century Daoist text, we first see students of the *Dao* commanding thunder deities to combat rowdy spirits. Three centuries later, we begin to see eminent Daoist masters involved in practicing, discussing, and creating Thunder Rites. Since then, Thunder Rites continued to grow in complexity, variety, and importance.

The Daoist Thunder Rites serve mainly to manipulate the weather and to pacify or demolish harmful spirits. Since demons and vengeful ghosts were thought to cause illness in Daoist pathology, Thunder Rites were also used as a therapeutic remedy. Cases in which Thunder Rite masters successfully treated demonic possession (i.e., psychotic disorder) or literally blew up temples of mischievous deities with thunderous bursts of flames can be found in both Daoist and non-Daoist sources. Modern scholars have offered rational explanations for such miraculous ritual powers, including the effects that the ritual could produce on the participants' psychological conditions (Davis 2001) and Daoists' knowledge of the science of gun-

powder (Boltz 1993). However, to the writers and compilers of Thunder Rites literature, the efficacy of their ritual derived from the fact that it was carried out by the thunder deities under the command of initiated Daoists. For Daoist practitioners to enforce Thunder Rites, therefore, they must be able to summon thunder deities swiftly at will. Always armed with weapons and often dressed in armor, the thunder deities are portrayed as militant in nature and are assigned ranks such as those of general and marshal in the Daoist bureaucratic paradigm. They are reputed to be unruly. Superlative Daoist masters assured their disciples that, as fierce as thunder deities were, summoning them could (and should) be done in accordance with the principle of cosmic resonance, simply using the master's spirit to summon the spirit of thunder, or the master's *qi* to unite with the *qi* of thunder; techniques such as walking patterns, hand gestures, incantations, and talismans were supplements. As the *Correct Method of the Celestial Heart of the Upper Clarity* explains, "As for ritual officials who have not practiced for a long time, how can they obtain the affinity between the divinity and the human?" The immense Daoist ritual compendia produced after the Five Dynasties instructed the practitioners to "envision oneself as" or "metamorphose oneself into" a divinity. "By achieving such as transformation, a practitioner was perceived not merely as a manipulator of divine forces but as the agent through whom they took charge" (Boltz 1987).

However, temporarily transforming into a deity—in other words, subjugating one's own identity to that of a divinity—resembles too closely the divine possession that was rejected by the Daoist priestly tradition. As "dignitaries of the *Dao*," Daoist priests view themselves as the equal of the divinities. By contrast, divine possession is an activity of village spirit mediums who are merely "servants" or "mouthpieces" of the gods. Therefore, it is understandable that Daoist masters who embraced the techniques of becoming gods had to retheorize the practice of temporary identity-change to make sure it had absolutely nothing to do with divine possession. They appealed, as Kristofer Schipper points out, "to the inner ritual of meditation" (Schipper 1993) and exhausted the available sources in Daoism, old and new, and tantric Buddhism. Finally, they created the meditative techniques that facilitated an identity-transformation without falling into the trap of divine possession: the liturgy of "transformation into the divinities through inner refinement" (*bianshen neilian*), often abbreviated as *bianlian* (transformation-refinement). Through this meditative liturgy, Daoist ritual masters subordinated their identities to that of the individual deities in commanding the thunder generals in carrying out Thunder Rites.

A manuscript entitled "Model rites for submission, dispatch, fusing, and refinement" (*Zou chuan hun lian fashi*) in the mid fourteenth century compendium of the Thunder Rites, the *Retrieved Pearls from the Sea of Rituals* (*Fahai yizhu*) serves as an example to this internal meditation:

> Form your hands into the hand gesture of transformation into the divinity [*bianshen jue*], then place them next to your waist. First visualize yourself as a withered log of wood. The two hands form the sign of *wu* [*wu wen*] [by joining the thumbs to the tips

> of the middle fingers], inhale the *qi* of the south, and merge it with that of the heart to form the perfect fire. Next, flick your thumbs from the tip of your middle fingers to set the log afire from the bottom. At once, the flame rises up. Now form the sign of *si* [*si wen*] [by putting your thumbs on the tips of your index fingers] to generate the wind of the *xun* [trigram] to blow away the ashes; leave no traces.
>
> [Following this,] visualize an infant growing larger in your cinnabar field. [See him] with loose hair and barefoot, clad in a black robe and golden armor, looking like the Perfected Warrior. Beneath his feet, there is a dark-green turtle exhaling *qi* which merges with that of the kidneys ([original footnote]: place [your thumb on] *zi* [the bottom of the ring finger], [visualize] the head of the turtle moving); there is also a red snake exhaling *qi* that merges with the *qi* of the heart ([original footnote]: place [your thumb on] *wu* [the bottom of the index finger], [visualize] the head of the snake moving). (trans. Chao 2011)

Thus, in meditation, the material body is symbolically refined by the "perfect fire" (*zhenhuo*) and the cosmic wind (*xun* is the symbol of wind in the Eight Trigrams of the *Book of Change*). As the *mudra* (hand gesture) that begins the instruction declares, this visualization aims at transforming the practitioner into the divinity. Indeed, after reducing the old body to ashes and blowing the ashes away, the practitioner conceives and generates a pure spiritual body, the "infant" (*yinger*), in the "cinnabar field." The inner-body infant then grows into a god, Zhenwu in this case, with whom the practitioner merges. In the temporary apotheosis, the adept proceeds to wield the miraculous powers promised by the Thunder Rites. Here, the underlining idea is to impersonate the "prototype of the ritual practitioner" in order to assume the power and authority attached to that identity. The impersonated figures were often "seen to be the active force operating in and giving effect to the method in question" (Anderson 1995).

Cultivating an inner infant to replace the material body and integrating correlative cosmology with self-cultivation meditative exercises are the characteristic traits of *neidan* meditation. The Daoists' application of *neidan* concepts and terminology "naturalized" the exercise of subjecting the priests' own identities to the domination of the divinities. In the meantime, transforming into a divinity through meditation in order to appropriate the deity's power is as close to Tantrism as one can get. Under the influence of Tantrism, Daoist masters reinterpreted identity-alteration in their traditional theology via internal alchemy principles, and thus managed to maintain a theological coherence after the development of the Thunder Rites movement.

Ritual Lineages

Liturgical innovations corresponded with the growth of liturgical lineages. Among them, the Correct Rites of the Celestial Heart is the earliest and probably the most popular of Song times. It is known for its therapeutic exorcist ritual, especially the method of "summoning for investigation" (Davis 2001). Its genealogical lore traces

the revelation of the Celestial Heart texts and oral secrets (*jue*) to two men: Rao Dongtian (fl. 994) and his mentor Tan Zixiao (fl. 935–after 994). Rao, a native of Jiangxi province, received a revelation that led him to discover a batch of texts entitled "Secret formula of the Celestial Heart" (*Tianxin mishi*). The "secret formula" contained coded language beyond Rao's capacity. A second revelation instructed Rao to see Tan Zixiao, an eminent Daoist priest sojourning on Mount Lu in northern Jiangxi at the time. Rao went, studied under Tan, and eventually began the lineage of Celestial Heart. The transmission of this lineage was left in oblivion for the next century. Then, in 1115, Yuan Miaozong (fl. 1086–1116), a Celestial Heart master by then in practice for over thirty years, was invited to the court of Emperor Huizong to participate in the imperial Daoist Canon project. He compiled and presented in 1116 to the court the *Secret Essentials of the Most High Principle Zhenren Assisting the Country and Saving the People* (*Taishang zhuguo jiumin zongzhen miyao*; hereafter, *Secret Essentials*). Probably around the same time, a certain Deng Yougong composed the *Correct Method of the Celestial Heart of the Supreme Clarity* (*Shangqing tianxin zhengfa*), among other ritual compendia. Deng's and Yuan's works preserved the Celestial Heart ritual in its early form, despite the fact that they were written down a century after the school's establishment.

Around the same time that the Celestial Heart began codifying its ritual system in writing, another ritual lineage emerged: the Divine Empyrean (*Shenxiao*). The ritual program's first human recipient was Lin Lingsu (c. 1074–1119), probably the most famous, or infamous, Daoist priest in Song times. Lin was a native of Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province) in the east coastal area and an itinerant ritual master well versed in the Five Thunder (*wulei*) rites. He was recruited to the court at a later stage of Huizong's decade-long search for the wonder-making Daoist talents. Lin inspired the emperor's fascination with his elaborate cosmology of the Divine Empyrean, the highest level of the nine levels of heaven. Lin explained that the Divine Empyrean was headed by the Divine Empyrean Pure Jade Monarch, also known as Grand Lord of Long Life, who was the legitimate son of the Supreme Emperor. This divine sovereign descended in an incarnated form that was, Lin claimed, none other than Emperor Huizong himself. Lin also identified other courtiers and imperial family members to be incarnations of divine figures. As for Lin himself, he was the incarnation of a divine clerk, Chu Hui, and the "Chief Judge of Thunderclaps, the Lord of the Teachings of the Divine Empyrean." Emperor Huizong enthusiastically promoted the Divine Empyrean methods; he ranked Daoist teachings into five categories, with the Divine Empyrean, headed by himself, ranked above the limitation of the categories. He also decreed the establishment of a Divine Empyrean temple network across the country in order to promote this tradition (Chao 2006). Lin Lingsu disappeared in 1109 under mysterious circumstances. His protégée, Wang Wenqing (1093–1153), continued to represent the Divine Empyrean in the court through the Northern Song. After the Song court moved south, Wang entered into retirement in Jiangxi despite the continuing imperial patronage that Emperor Gaozong (r. 1127–1162) showed him. Posthumously, Wang was enshrined and worshipped by the locals (Hymes 2002).

The Divine Empyrean, like the Celestial Heart, was an important force of Daoist exorcism. In addition, the Divine Empyrean was also deeply involved in the ritual for the dead, promising to relieve souls from purgatory by refining them. The ritual of refining and saving (*liandu*) found in *Shenxiao* texts became a hallmark of Daoist universal salvation that can be distinguished from Buddhist soteriology.

Another important ritual lineage, the Pure Tenuity (*Qingwei*) School, was founded by a woman called Zu Shu (fl. 889–904) in Guangxi Province in southern China at the end of the Tang Dynasty. In one version of the school's genealogy, matriarch Zu's teaching passed from individual to individual through a series of four generations of heiresses followed by another four generations of heirs. They left only scarce traces. Then, the lineage's legacy passed on to Huang Shunshen (1224–after 1268), who brought Pure Tenuity teachings to distinction. The codification of the Pure Tenuity ritual in written form, however, did not begin until the second half of the thirteenth century. Pure Tenuity has had a long-lasting influence. Some of the most accomplished Daoist masters in the ensuing centuries—such as Zhang Shouqing (1254–1336) of Mount Wudang; and Zhang Yuchu, the forty-third-generation Heavenly Master (1361–1410)—were all initiated practitioners of the *Qingwei* tradition. Its presence remains clear in modern Taiwanese Daoist rituals.

Complete Perfection School

The later years of the period, especially the forty years following the fall of the Northern Song in 1127, witnessed the rise of new sects in Daoism that continued to thrive through the next century and that have shaped the subsequent history of Daoism to the present. Those standing out were the Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) School, founded by Wang Zhe (also known by the sobriquet Chongyang, 1113–1170). Other prominent new sects included the Great One (*Taiyi*), established by Xiao Baozhen (d. 1166) in Weizhou (Henan province) during the Tianjuan era (1138–1140), and the Great Way (*Dadao*), founded by Liu Deren (1122–1180) of Cangzhou (in Hebei province) in 1142. The Great Way went through a schism after the fourth-generation patriarch passed away; the successful faction, with the endorsement of Möngke Khan (also known as Emperor Xianzong, r. 1251–1259), then called themselves the True Great Way (*Zhen Dadao*) (cf. Yao 1995).

In the history of these new sects, nothing is more important than the founding of the school of Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) by Wang Zhe. This new school grew quickly. By the early thirteenth century, under the leadership of Wang's youngest disciple, Qiu Chuji (also known by the sobriquet Changchun, 1148–1227), the *Quanzhen* school had developed into the dominant Daoist sect in northern China. This victory was to a great extent the consequence of Qiu's meeting with Genghis Khan (1162–1227). In the winter of 1219, the Khan's emissary had come all the way to Shandong, where Qiu Chuji was living, to invite the latter to a meeting.

Thus, Qiu, at the age of 79, embarked on a heroic cross-continental journey with an entourage of disciples who later also became important figures of the Complete Perfection sect. The journey, which took place between 1220 and 1223, would become legendary in *Quanzhen* Daoist history, and the honors bestowed on Qiu by the Khan provided Complete Perfection Daoism with state-endorsed authority. After this meeting, Genghis Khan decreed that Qiu would take charge of religious clerics and their properties. The sect was, moreover, officially placed in charge of all Daoist affairs within the Mongol empire. Over the four decades of Qiu Chuji's leadership, the Complete Perfection movement would become the dominant Daoist sect in northern China, eclipsing even Buddhism in popularity.

In the middle of the thirteenth century, Buddhist monks reacted to the growth of Daoism, and especially of the *Quanzhen* sect, and sought to arrest its popularity by challenging its precepts. Beginning in the second half of the 1250s, Buddhist monks attacked Daoist texts for insulting Buddhism and condemned Daoist institutions for seizing Buddhist monasteries. In time, their complaints led to a large-scale government purge of Daoism. Nevertheless, the *Quanzhen* sect managed to survive this purge, and by the end of the thirteenth century it had recovered imperial support. It continued to flourish throughout the Yuan Dynasty, and to this day continues to be the primary form of monastic Daoism.

Although *Quanzhen* has been described as a distinct Daoist sect, it was intimately connected to forms of Daoism that developed in the first millennium. *Quanzhen* Daoists, including its founding patriarchs, performed community offering rituals (*jiao*), believed in the possibility of miracles, and embarked on quests for immortality just as had the old Daoist masters before them. In addition, their efforts to synthesize the "three teachings" (*sanjiao*)—that is, Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—represented a current in Daoism that can be traced back to as early as the Six Dynasties.

At the same time, *Quanzhen* was distinct enough to form a denominational self-identity. In *Quanzhen* teaching, the concept of ascension in flesh (which had been one of the main goals of Daoist practitioners from very early on) completely gave way to the goal of spiritual immortality attained through the recovery of one's "radiant spirit" (*yangshen*). The traditional Daoist psychophysical meditational method of cultivating one's radiant spirit, termed internal alchemy (*neidan*), was adopted as the primary method in *Quanzhen* training. While neither the concept of radiant spirit nor the practice of internal alchemy were new to twelfth century Daoism, it was the *Quanzhen* sect that made them central to its teaching and practice.

Quanzhen Daoists were also known for their austere lifestyles: the founding patriarchs believed that the practice of self-denial complemented their meditative method of internal alchemy. Again, this asceticism was not new—it had been part of the legacy of Daoist hermits and eccentrics since the Six Dynasties. However, whereas ascetic techniques were previously developed and carried out individually, in the

Quanzhen tradition they were ritualized and institutionalized, as the asceticism of the founding patriarchs was transformed into an exemplary virtue that later generations were expected to emulate (Goossaert 2001).

Quanzhen identity was expressed (and thus enhanced) through emphasis on the sect's family-like lineage organization. For example, *Quanzhen*'s terms of address were (like the Buddhists) based largely on kinship terms: a master was called master-father (*shifu*) and fellow disciples referred to themselves as "families outside this world" (*fangwai juanshu*). The master–disciple relationship so celebrated in the *Quanzhen* tradition from the very beginning of the movement clearly paralleled that between children and parents. In addition, a *Quanzhen* member received a new religious name, designed in part to indicate the person's generational place in the lineage-family, from his/her spiritual master. The religious name was not only a symbol of a member's affiliation to the sect but also a clear statement of his/her *Quanzhen* identity.

In this way, *Quanzhen* Daoism grew from a small spiritual movement based on fraternity into a powerful, prestigious, and closely bonded monastic religious sect. It developed a framework of monasteries (mostly small and often doubling as temples) that were headed by clerics and supported by lay congregations. By the end of the thirteenth century, according to Vincent Goossaert's estimate, there were some four thousand monasteries and twenty thousand ordained *Quanzhen* clerics, one third of whom were female (Goossaert 2001).

In southern China, the older Daoist schools continued to flourish. Among them was the "Way of Piety" (*xiaodao*), which centered on a fourth century apotheosized figure named Xu Xun. The cult won some attention during Tang times. It underwent a renascent development at the beginning of the Southern Song (1127–1279) and transformed itself into the Pure and Bright Way of Loyalty and Piety (*Jingming zhongxiao dao*, hereafter the Pure and Bright Way). Its headquarters on Xishan (West Hill) outside the city of Nanchang, Jiangxi, attracted a flood of visitors, especially during the annual festival celebrating the ascension to heaven of Xu Xun (239?—292/374), the sect's foremost saint and patriarch. The Pure and Bright Way was known for both its promotion of ethics and its expertise in traditional Daoist liturgy; even the hypercritical ritual master Jin Yunzhong (fl. 1224–1225) revered the Pure and Bright Way as "the crowning achievement" of Daoist liturgy.

The competition for ritual services during the Song was so heated that it constituted a commercial market. Unlicensed ritual specialists reduced their fees to attract bargain-hunting customers (Hymes 2002). The competitive market further stimulated the development of novel ritual techniques and the master–disciple lineages centered around them. Such innovations were so threatening to traditionalist Daoists that they felt the need to condemn some of their colleagues for taking too many liberties in their techniques. Jin Yunzhong, a self-described heir of the authentic rituals of the *Lingbao* school, relentlessly attacked the new ritual practices as distortions of tradition (Boltz 1987). Huang Gongjin (fl. 1275), another Daoist master of the Southern Song, complained that "latter-day itinerant ritual officers

(*faguan*) contrived new rituals to entice the younger generation and added talismans to fool the beginners." The rivalry and acrimony among sectarian Daoists and ritual specialists reveals not only the seriousness of competition among the lineages but also the active role of the ritual masters, who were tirelessly inventing new ritual techniques or seeking to learn them from others to attract an ever-demanding customer base.

The spread of Daoist practices among the people at large extended to the psychophysical exercise of inner alchemy (*neidan*), which attained mass popularity in the Song. Daoist masters such as Chen Pu (fl. 1078) entered market towns and scoured the countryside for worthy disciples. The people also flocked to pilgrimage centers made famous by Daoist illuminaries. The monks on Mount Wudang in Sichuan Province were the key element in transforming the mountain into the main pilgrimage center for the worship of the god Zhenwu (the warrior god who remains to this day perhaps the most widely venerated god in the Chinese pantheon) in the fourteenth century. It was against such a background—growing competition in a marketplace of religious ritual, creative marketing by ritual specialists, and the growing role of Daoist monasticism in society—that the worship of Zhenwu became institutionalized in Daoism and in the Chinese religious landscape. Daoism, both institutionally and in the public sphere, thus gained its popular status as China's higher religion, shaped by developments in the Song.

Popular Religion

"Popular religion" is used here as a generic term for religious beliefs and practices that cannot be comfortably placed under Buddhism or Daoism. "Popular" does not necessarily imply an opposite to "elite" although many elements of popular religion were criticized by learned men in words. However, in reality, practices of popular religion "were popular in the sense that they were practiced by members of all social strata" (Ebrey and Gregory 1993).

Deity worship constitutes the core of Chinese popular religious practices. The Song witnessed important developments in some ancient cults. The spread of deity cults was not a new phenomenon of the Song—for example, the cult of Liu Zhang (d. 176 BCE) spread across six commanderies (*jun*) in the Eastern Han—but it was not until Song times, as far as the available material shows, that the geographical spread of local cults became a common phenomenon. Some deities that achieved empire-wide prestige in Ming-Qing China first went beyond local boundaries during the Song-Yuan period. For example, Wenchang, well-established as god of literature during late imperial times, was a local cult of Zitong in northern Sichuan Province until the Southern Song (Kleeman 1993). Zhenwu (Perfected Warrior), also known as *Xuantian shangdi* (Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven), first appeared in human form in the tenth century and entered the limelight of the imperial religious stage in the eleventh century; subsequently, he received enormous patronage from the Ming royal house and his temples can be found in every corner of China even to modern times.

The Song Dynasty also witnessed the origin of many local cults. Among them, the one with the most long-lasting influence is arguably the cult of Mazu. Also known as the Heavenly Empress (*Tianhou*), Mazu has commanded enormous political capital since Qing times, and even more so nowadays in the context of the Beijing–Taipei relationship. The goddess was reportedly born in 960 CE (give or take a few decades) in Putian, Xinghua Prefect, Fujian Province. According to the earliest written record of her cult (composed in 1150 CE), the goddess, whose surname was Lin (given name Moniang in later sources), was a spirit medium (*yi wuzhu weishi*) who could predict fortune and misfortune (*neng yuzhi ren huofu*). In the early stages of her cult, the locals came to her temples during times of flood and drought, the spread of the plague, or when pirates threatened nearby. In 1133, the port city of Mingzhou (present Ninbo) in Zhejiang Province (next to the northern border of Fujian) gained its first Mazu temple, which was converted from a residence donated by a Fujian seaman reportedly saved by Mazu from shipwreck during his journey from Mingzhou to the South China Sea. The nature of Mazu's godhead transformed as her cult spread beyond her native location in Xinghua. She became a tutelary god, and began to assume the role of protector of sea travel and sailors among Fujian migrants. With the flourishing of sea-route trade during the Southern Song, merchants' influence on and networking with the political elites grew. The cult of Mazu spread quickly with the collaborative support of merchants and government officials (including current, retired, and future ones). During the Yuan period, the invasions of Japan and the reliance on sea-route transportation instead of the Grand Canal brought the experienced seamen of Fujian to the north and accordingly the cult of Mazu followed them.

The commercialism of Song times led to the expansion of market towns, around metropolitan cities such as Kaifeng, Hangzhou, Mingzhou, Quanzhou, and so on. Valarie Hansen argues that the increasing commercialization of the Southern Song was a critical force in remodeling the late medieval Chinese religious landscape, inaugurating the transregional religious cults of today. Their growing influence argues "for the power of local lay choice in the rise and fall of deity cults" (Hansen 1990).

With the growth of deity cults, urban dwellers transformed the ancient biannual communal religious festivals of agrarian communities (*she*) into a new form of festival celebrating the anniversary of a god's birthday or heavenly ascension. Some of them were regional spectacles. The temple festival of King Zhang in Hangzhou took the following form:

> On that day, various societies put on shows to highlight their specialty. For example, the Equestrian Society walked their steeds complete with ostentatiously decorated saddlery and the Jewelry Society displayed their best treasure. The food offerings contained the finest cuisine made of rarely seen delicacies and were decorated with exquisitely carved vegetables and jewelry; each dish was worth tens of thousands of coins. (Zhou Mi (1232–1298), *Wulin jiushi* 3.5)

Large-scale temple fairs attracted pilgrims from a distance. The Eastern Peak (*Dongyue*) temple on Mount Fu in Changshu prefect, Jiangsu Province, attracted visitors, who came to make offerings, from along the coastal areas from northern Jiangsu down to Guangdong. Many of them came in groups referred as *shehui*. There were tens of thousands of them. Similar observations can be found in other places for other cults; for example, the birthday celebration of the Mountain God (*shanshen*) of Kuanshan or the celebration of the ascension of Xu Xun at Xishan in Jiangxi Province.

Temple fairs of popular religion were organized by lay believers. They organized themselves into voluntary groups (*hui* or *she*) and performed religious piety collectively. Such groups could be organized for a particular purpose, as indicated by names such as "incense and oil society" or "offering society." They were not necessarily affiliated with particular temples, although many of them were. Such groups were led and managed by lay people, who were typically referred to as *huishou*, among other titles. Contemporary opinions about *huishou* were polarized as presented in the writings of scholar officials. Chen Chun (1159–1223), a disciple of Zhu Xi, characterized *huishou* to be men of no good who coerced dwellers of the wards to pay "incense money" in the name of worshipping gods. The money, Chen believed, was misappropriated by *huishou* to benefit themselves. In contrast, Huang Zhen (1213–1281), another renowned spiritual heir to Zhu Xi, claimed that *huishou* was a position that surely led to financial ruin. Everyone tried to avoid it and whoever served did so because they were chosen by divine lot. The polarized observations indicated a lack of government regulation or supervision.

A story in the *Yijianzhi* tells of two *huishou* of a voluntary society formed in order to carry out the Yellow Register Offerings on the birthday of Zhenwu for the welfare of the neighborhood. The *huishou* in charge, called *dushou* (head-in-chief), stole the funds of the society. When the scheduled offering ritual was about to happen, he begged the other *huishou* to take over the chief position. The latter agreed. The replacement used his own money to resolve the deficit and supplied all of the expenditure of the ritual. However, the copier he hired did not carefully update the name of the man in charge when he produced the ritual writs by copying the old documents from the previous year; the *dushou* altered between the two *huishou* and "the two men did not examine [the petitions] carefully." The two men, not the copier, received divine punishments because of this carelessness. In this story, the *huishou* took full responsibility for organizing the festival. Not only were they responsible for managing the society's funds and organizing the ritual but also for ensuring the correctness of the ritual. Daoist clerics did not appear in the story at all, even though the Yellow Registration Offering is a standard Daoist ritual. Combining Chen Chun's and Huan Zhen's comments and the *Yijianzhi* story, we see the absence of supervision and regulation by the government or by an established religion such as Buddhism or Daoism. The autonomy of the voluntary communal organization is reflected here.

Temple festivals did not go unnoticed by local administrations. The latter were aware of the increasing tax revenue, especially from alcohol, and the prosperity of

businesses during the festival periods, even though some of them, especially the Neo-Confucian ones, constantly proposed that the temple festivals should be prohibited. Judging by the temple records found in gazetteers and the personal anthologies of literati, however, it appears that local elites were also eager participants in local religious fairs.

Conclusions

From this survey of the major developments in Buddhism and Daoism, it is clear that the Song-Yuan period was hardly a period of "religious decline" in China's cultural history. On the contrary, the rapid development of communication and transportation technologies, the expansion of trade and commercial markets throughout the empire, and the doctrinal elaborations of the *Chan*, *Tiantai*, and *Quanzhen* schools (among others) gave shape to a Chinese religious landscape that was arguably richer and more fully integrated into the fabric of Chinese society than ever before in history. Moreover, the contours of religious life that we can observe in China today—from temple worship and deity cults to institutionalized forms of Buddhism and Daoism (from ritual protocols to monastic rules and regulations)—were established in the Song and Alien Dynasties and have continued, uninterrupted, for a thousand years. The religious traditions of late imperial and modern China owe their vitality to the economic, philosophical, and religious innovations of the Song.

Notes

1 The sections "Thunder Rites" and "Ritual Lineages" are largely summarized from Chao (2011, pp. 52–69).

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CHAPTER 6

Chinese Religion in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Mark Meulenbeld, University of Wisconsin

The Religious Landscape of the Ming and Qing

The Chinese religion of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties has often been studied along the lines of the so-called "three teachings" of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. The scriptural traditions of these three major traditions are extensive, and, in the case of Buddhism and Daoism, have been compiled into voluminous canonical collections that were commissioned by imperial order: the *Buddhist Canon* and the *Daoist Canon*. The relatively clear-cut religious parameters of these three textual traditions have, however, made it all too easy to marginalize the predominant form of Chinese religion, namely the territorial forms of religion that were practiced in localities across the Chinese empire. The present chapter will therefore pay close attention to this paramount form of religion, which was at the same time a form of social organization.

Local strata of religion were neither sanctioned by the imperial government nor organized from within any central governing organ. Indeed, partly as a result of this lack of official recognition by the imperial state, and the lack of institutional definition as legitimate bodies of religious practitioners, scholars have often imagined the many regional varieties of Chinese religion to be an unorganized hodge-podge of superstitions that lacked coherence. Intellectuals have sometimes understood local religion to be a rural or low-class phenomenon, and therefore have indiscriminately and somewhat disparagingly referred to it as "popular religion." While it is true that the religion of the people was not organized in ways similar to the major three traditions in terms of self-conscious denomination, or in terms of institutional charisma,

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the assumed lack of coherence is a fallacy. Despite obvious regional variations there were equally obvious similarities. Moreover, while local religion was certainly "popular," the term "popular' "should only be understood in the sense of a large number of followers, and not in any sense that might exclude the participation of the various cultural, political, economic, or even religious elites. (For further discussion of the designation "popular religion," see Chapter 10, CHINESE POPULAR RELIGION.)

In terms of sheer numbers, indeed, Chinese religion during the Ming and Qing massively revolved around local temples in the neighborhoods of communal settlements. These communities might be found in (or even defined as) rural villages and regional market towns, but also in capital cities such as Nanjing or Beijing. There was no categorical distinction between rural and urban temples, or the religion practiced in them. Temples primarily lodged divinities that had once been known as living beings associated with a particular region. First and foremost they were local heroes who had protected their communities from danger, often involving spectacular feats of martial prowess. From the large number of legends that present their heroes as skilled demon-slayers, it appears that most local temples fulfilled the function of territorial protection, and that the powers of these local gods were invoked in order to exorcize the intrusion of demons that caused such calamities as drought and disease. Local communities identified themselves closely with these heroic tutelary saints, taking pride in the construction and maintenance of impressive temples devoted to their local hero.

Many other temples were further devoted to immortals who had cured the sick and the suffering using miraculous powers or unique magical herbs. It was not uncommon to build monasteries on sites where such immortals had resided, as they were commonly associated with mountains, rocks, cliffs, and peaks. Stories present these immortals as having transformed into an element of the landscape by the time of their final transcendence. In that sense, the worship of local immortals constituted quite literally a sanctification of the local landscape. Other very common temples were dedicated to dragons—beings that were thought to be present in every locality and that were more generally associated with the production of rain. A rather significant portion of temples was dedicated to the spirits of certain animals, or even trees, as well as those of most lakes, rivers, and mountains. Almost all the conspicuous landmarks of particular localities might have been divinized in one way or the other.

Yet, in addition to these very local divinities, almost every locality during the Ming and Qing would comprise temples devoted to gods that were less obviously local and much more widespread throughout the entire Chinese empire. Probably the most popular god was Guan Yu, a famous hero from the period of the Three Kingdoms, usually referred to as "Lord Guan" (Guangong) or "King Guan" (Guanwang). A good second may have been the "bodhisattva" Guanyin, goddess of compassion, who could save souls from the courts of hell, and whose late imperial hagiography had presented her as a princess called Miaoshan. Other popular gods included the God

of the Eastern Peak (lord of the netherworld), the God of Walls and Moats (ruler over the dark spirits that loomed in every locality), and the Five Emperors of the Five Directions (closely associated with plague and possession). Last but not least, the stars, planets, and stellar constellations were worshiped throughout China. While the provenance of the gods in these temples was certainly not local, the ways in which they were embedded in local society differed little from their territorial counterparts.

Although most of these temples have not survived into the present age, the traces left by temple activities in other cultural expressions have been harder to delete. Generally, records from the Ming and Qing suggest that most inhabited areas were dotted with an overwhelming number of temples. Some of the greatest glimpses into the world of late imperial religion can be gained from the sheer endless descriptions of temples, gods, and shrines that figure in literary jottings, vernacular literature, theatrical plays, and so on. Although many of the famous vernacular works from the Ming and Qing have been treated as "literary fiction" by scholars in academic institutions since the early twentieth century, it seems that their content has a lot more to say about late imperial Chinese religion than it has about literature. In the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*), the famous Guan Yu becomes a god; in *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu zhuan*), the story's 108 protagonists are rewarded with a divine rank among the stars, much the same as in *Canonization of the Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi*), in which the gods of stellar positions are supplemented with the celestial offices that regulate powerful phenomena such as thunder, fire, and pestilence. Even *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*) elevates its five main protagonists into the ranks of the divine, and canonizes them as the Five Saints. These four books constitute the most popular core of a vast array of stories that are almost always quite explicitly related to late imperial Chinese religion.

In addition to the narrative exploits of martial gods, exorcistic stellar constellations, therapeutic immortals, and all kinds of other saints, some written materials allow us to relate such narratives of a more legendary kind concretely to regional forms of religion. For example, many of the ritual manuals that were included in the *Daoist Canon* of 1445 and its supplement of 1607 are explicitly related to regional traditions. Some of these manuals show how local priests recorded the roles played by local gods in their rituals, and other texts explain the histories of certain gods worshiped in local temples. Daoists, especially, had incorporated local saints into their liturgies.

To a lesser extent, the data gathered by "local gazetteers" provide a final perspective on the religion of the late imperial Chinese. Local gazetteers were compiled by representatives of administrative units throughout the empire and they purported to present an overview of regional characteristics, more or less compiling the best of what a locality had produced in terms of eminent scholars or statesmen, local produce, or local landmarks such as buildings or the shapes of hills and mountains. Although they were not necessarily interested in local gods, or even in religion generally (some explicitly ignored these topics), the close intertwinement of gods and

temples with the local landscape, as well as with the local economy and local pride, ensured a certain attention to local expressions of Chinese religion. For example, in addition to straightforward records of officially sanctioned temples, many local gazetteers list popular temples that were officially proscribed—temples dedicated to the local heroes described above. Moreover, the records of strange events or legendary figures that were commonly included at the end of gazetteers were often related to the narrative lore that revolved around local temples and their gods.

Territorial Temples and Their Gods

Local temples were important, and a significant portion of late imperial religious activities transpired in relation to these temples. One can roughly divide these activities into the two categories of communal and private—that is, large-scale sacrificial festivals and individual acts of worship. Each of these activities could be occasioned by the calendar (anniversaries of gods or of temples) as well as by haphazard circumstances (drought, disease, propitiation). The following section will further refine the picture of late imperial Chinese religion by analyzing one important aspect—social organization—in relation to the local temple. If the above introduction has presented the local temple as the starting point for understanding Chinese religion, the following discussion will show that one can barely study Chinese religion as a self-contained area of culture, or a realm separate from society and social concerns.

Similarly to the way that the ancient tribes each used to have their own totemic divinity, communities of the Ming and Qing were organized around their own local god. The term most commonly used for this type of local community was *shehui* ("community of the territorial god"), a term that is now used in modern Chinese to mean "society," broadly speaking. The term *she* is often taken to mean "god of the soil," but at least in late imperial China this term more generally refers to the tutelary god of a certain stretch of land and therefore is best understood as a "god of the *local* soil," or a "territorial god." In other words, the most basic form of social organization in premodern China, the *shehui*, had an explicitly sacred character.

Who were these "territorial gods"? We have seen above that most of them were local tutelary saints. Although theoretically each locality had a different saint with a different story and different sacrificial customs, it appears that by late imperial times these territorial gods had emerged out of theological principles that applied in most localities throughout the empire. In principle, the spirit of any powerful being that was somehow related to local identity could end up being venerated as a territorial god. Browsing through the pages of late imperial gazetteers it becomes clear that every mountain was thought to embody a spiritual force, and every river, lake, or marsh was pervaded by the presence of some spirit. Rocks, trees, mounds—all were imbued with some sacred cosmic energy. As indicated above, even animals, such as foxes, toads, snakes, or monkeys, had the potential to become a locally powerful god.

The longer any given being or object was left unperturbed in solitude or darkness, the better was its opportunity to pass through many time-cycles and thereby reach an unusually high age. Stories abound of thousand-year-old foxes who can transform themselves into human shape, old monkeys who take possession of women, and so on. Further, the spirits of deceased human beings also might receive veneration as "territorial gods." The lives of local gods often present their subjects as local heroes: ancient conquerors of barbarians, slayers of demons, or extraordinary, selfless men and women who sacrificed their own lives for the greater good of the community. All of these beings were candidates for local sainthood.

The theological principles that determined whether a process of divinization would be initiated by a local community in order to elevate the status of a powerful spiritual being and canonize it with grandiose titles such as "king" (*wang*), "lady" (*furen*), "lord" or "sire" (*gong*), or the like seem to have been fairly consistent throughout most of China during the Ming and Qing. The first rule of Chinese theology was related to the social model of the family. The normal postmortem destination for a spirit was inclusion in the ancestral cult. That is to say, every human being who grew up within the structure of a family would commonly continue to partake in family activities even after death: the worship of ancestors guaranteed the stable existence of the deceased. Ideally, with the progress of generations, the further removed in time certain ancestors were from the living family, the more anonymous they became. The spiritual energies that constituted their individual soul were thus allowed to gradually dissolve and disperse back into the cosmic cycle of life and death. Most ancestors were ultimately represented by a wooden tablet that only stated the general family ancestry without reference to individuals.

Orphan Spirits

Sometimes, however, particular individuals were barred from entering the ancestral cult after they died. The souls of those who had died prematurely, for example, were thought to be extremely inauspicious. Death on the battlefield, or because of a serious illness, or after committing suicide, inevitably led to exclusion from the ancestral cult. These miserable souls became "orphan spirits" (*guhun*), a term literally expressing their expulsion from the family. In practice this meant that they were not entitled to receive sacrificial offerings of food, nor were they allowed to find the comfort of stable lodging that the ancestral cult otherwise would have provided. Thus, "orphan spirits" had no other option than to roam about restlessly, searching for food and shelter. Their spiritual energies could not dissolve, and their individual identities remained intact—albeit in an altered form. Sadly, men and women who had not been able to procreate knew that the same fate awaited them. Monks and nuns who had "left their family" (*chujia*) and entered monastic communities would be ritually adopted by their masters, receiving new names and new identities in order to prevent them from ending up as "orphan spirits." There is evidence that rituals of

propitiation had to be carried out for the postmortem wellbeing of monastic residents, be they Buddhist, Daoist, or other.

The lack of descendants who could make sacrificial offerings and provide a stable form of lodging theologically unified the "orphan spirits" of human beings with those powerful spirits that might sometimes evolve out of inanimate objects or animals—neither of these groups could dissolve safely into the anonymity of natural death, so that they would have to live on as unwanted demons. Both of these groups of demonic spirits maintained their individuality and had to devise tricks in order to find food and shelter. Most commonly, such spirits would harass living beings to extort from them the vibrant energies of life. The restless powers of undissolved spirits oftentimes demanded sacrificial offerings from strangers, and there are many stories of spirits who are given a young maid for matrimony, or who are always on the lookout to eat meat and drink blood.

In the narrative traditions of the Ming and Qing, a most famous example of such a restless spirit who exists outside the ancestral cult is constituted by the "Handsome Monkey King." In the *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*), the story begins like this:

> Since the creation of the world, [the stone] had been nourished for a long time by the seeds of Heaven and Earth and by the essences of the sun and the moon, until, quickened by divine inspiration, it became pregnant with a divine embryo. One day, it split open, giving birth to a stone egg about the size of a playing ball. Exposed to the wind, it was transformed into a stone monkey endowed with fully developed features and limbs.

Born from a stone, the monkey did not have a family name, nor, of course, a family. This unrestrained autonomy foreboded trouble. Soon, indeed, the monkey started robbing, plundering, and extorting his way up in the world of men, and even in the world of the gods: Heaven. Below we will see the ways in which the theology of late imperial China would allow for rationalized responses to these autonomous and unruly forces.

Reintegration and Canonization

Notwithstanding the large number of ghost stories that warn the living against the threat of such wanton spirits, human beings were not powerless in the face of such otherworldly dangers. The solution was to reintegrate demonic spirits back into society by providing food and lodging in a separate shrine. Such shrines were small and located at the margins of society, in the outskirts of a city, or along the side of its roads. At first these shrines might be built where the corpse had originally been buried or found, and travelers might make modest offerings in order to ensure a safe journey. Many of such shrines probably remained insignificant or were gradually absorbed into larger sacrificial cults. However, as soon as rumors emerged that

attested to the supernatural efficacy of the spirit residing in the shrine, these would lead to an increase in sacrificial offerings and prayers from people who specifically visited the shrine in the hope of receiving a miraculous response. At this point, it seems, there was no turning back. The increase in worshippers would often lead to the construction of a larger shrine or a temple. The more honors that were bestowed on these spirits, the greater the hopes were for the miracle of divine benevolence. Stories emerged that spoke of the history of the spirit, its deeds while alive, and its peculiarities. In short, what had originally been an "orphan spirit" was now honored with a temple, and entered into a reciprocal relationship with the living.

The "Handsome Monkey King" first receives a name—Sun Wukong—from a master who has adopted him as disciple in order to teach him divine martial arts. But with this increase of his powers Sun Wukong causes so much trouble that the celestial authorities ultimately feel compelled to control him by giving him a divine rank:

> It is not surprising that this monkey, with a body nurtured by Heaven and Earth, a frame born of the sun and moon, should achieve immortality, seeing that his head points to Heaven and his feet walk on Earth, and that he feeds on the dew and the mist. Now that he has the power to subdue dragons and tame tigers, how is he different from a human being? Your subject therefore makes so bold as to ask your majesty to remember the compassionate grace of Creation and issue a decree of pacification. Let him be summoned to the Upper Region and given some kind of official duties. His name will be recorded in the Registers and we can control him here.

Thus, right from the start of *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong's condition exactly parallels the most common spirits in temples: "orphan spirits" who have been pacified by providing a divine rank within a religious hierarchy. At first this might be a lowly position, but upon consistent performance of meritorious activities a local spirit could receive higher appointments.

Spirit Mediums

Many local temples were associated with a particular type of religious practitioner, known as a "temple shaman" (*miaowu*) or also as "divine youth" (*shentong*). These men and women provided one of the most fundamental services current in late imperial China: spirit possession. By allowing their bodies to become possessed by the spirit residing in their temple, the "temple shamans" and "divine youths" functioned as mediums through which a particular spirit could speak to the living. It was through their voice that a particular god might ask for the construction of a temple.

More generally, spirit mediums could convey messages from the world of darkness, they could make divinations, and, perhaps most important, they embodied the power of the temple spirit in a physical shape and thereby demonstrated in

spectacular ways the powerful potential of a spirit as local protector. Thus, the local community might entrust their fate to the local tutelary saint, expecting him to ward off the demons of drought or disease. It was the spirit medium or temple shaman who was the most immediate and visible proof of a certain god's miraculous powers. Local gazetteers of the Ming and Qing often lament the fact that shamans were patronized more often for ritual therapy of illness than practitioners of herbal medicine. Local authorities frequently confronted spirit mediums by issuing prohibitions of their practices, but it seems that the powers of imperial officials were limited on a local level; their reformist campaigns never succeeded in eradicating the practice of possession. Moreover, records show that most officials themselves were likely to engage the services of spirit mediums as much as regular citizens—perhaps only the most zealous bureaucrats should be excluded.

The power of territorial spirits to protect their community against the demons of drought or disease was often symbolized by the garments of the spirit mediums, who would wear the skins of tigers, bears, leopards, or snakes, representing their conquest of the fierce powers of dangerous intruders. Sun Wukong, again, was similarly said have the "power to subdue dragons and tame tigers," and was also represented as wearing the skin of a tiger he had subdued:

> Dear Monkey King! He pulled off one strand of hair and blew a mouthful of magic breath onto it, crying, "Change!" It changed into a sharp, curved knife, with which he ripped open the tiger's chest. Slitting the skin straight down, he then ripped it off in one piece. He chopped away the paws and the head, cutting the skin into one square piece . . . He took the knife and cut it again into two pieces; he put one of these away and wrapped the other around his waist.

In late imperial China, spirit mediums were frequently possessed by this kind of spirit that could subdue dragons or tigers. Not only Sun Wukong from *Journey to the West* but also Li Nezha (a dragon slayer) from *Canonization of the Gods* was frequently called down to possess spirit mediums. Further, Guan Yu from the *Three Kingdoms* was one rather famous example of the many exorcist spirits known for their demonifuge capacities who were invoked to manifest their martial prowess through the bodies of spirit mediums.

To some extent, communal activities that revolved around local temples were structured as attempts to reintegrate the autonomous "orphan spirits" into society. This reintegration of spirits into society was taken very literally, and acted out frequently. The general designation of society, *shehui*, the "community of the territorial god," was not only the abstract designation of a local community but also referred very specifically to the moment during which a locality united into a tangible community, namely as an "assembly" or congregation (*hui*). Several times a year, each community would gather in order to celebrate the anniversary of the local god, or of the founding of its temple. Terms for these communal activities included "temple congregations" (*miaohui*) and "congregations to welcome the gods and repay them"

(*yingshen saihui*). Almost any temple, monastery, altar, or shrine could be the object of (or site for) such festivals, and often the celebrations would involve several temples or gods that were affiliated to the central temple by means of regional ties, lineage membership, or any other link that was expressed in temple records or sacred narratives.

The central concern in festivals for a local god was the celebration of the god's position as protector of a territorial realm, and the affirmation of the sacred status of a particular divine presence within a given community. Interestingly, the practice of affirmation of sacred status was commonly re-enacted in vernacular stories as a kind of "canonization." Most of the great novels of the late Ming end their narrative of battle and conquest with a list of characters that receive a celestial rank and title as a reward for their actions throughout the stories. The *Journey to the West*, for example, concludes the exploits of its protagonists in this way. Sun Wukong is asked to approach the throne of the Buddha in order to receive his celestial appointment:

> Sun Wukong, when you caused great disturbance at the Celestial Palace, I had to exercise enormous *dharma* power to have you pressed beneath the Mountain of Five Phases. Fortunately your Heaven-sent calamity came to an end, and you embraced the Buddhist religion. I am pleased even more by the fact that you were devoted to the scourging of evil and the exaltation of good. Throughout your journey you made great merit by smelting the demons and defeating the fiends. For being faithful in the end as you were in the beginning, I hereby give you the grand promotion and appoint you the Buddha Victorious in Strife.

This same rationale underlies other stories from the late Ming. For example, in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*), the historical hero Guan Yu becomes a god after his wrongfully assassinated spirit has taken possession of his enemy in order to avenge his death. This coheres with Guan Yu's primary visibility in temples: as a god whose cult may have been the most widespread throughout late imperial China, and not as a historical figure in the narrow sense. Similarly, the protagonists of *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu zhuan*) receive a canonization as stellar gods; the protagonists of *Canonization of the Gods*, as the title suggests, also are rewarded with a celestial appointment. In addition to these famous examples, hundreds of shorter books, plays, and stories seem to have been structured along such hagiographical lines, presenting the narrative content of popular gods as an occasion to bestow the written testimony of a canonization.

Temple Communities and Official Business

Religious festivals were not merely colorful celebrations of local lore but equally occasions for communal gatherings. Important decisions were made during these

times. In many regions of the Ming and Qing empires, religious festivals were presided over by a person often referred to as the "host of the censer" (*luzhu*) or "head of the festival" (*huishou*). This was a rotating function occupied by a person who had been elected to represent his lineage. The "host of the censer"—a reference to the fact that the person hosted the incense burner from the temple under celebration—headed the organization. Moreover, as "head of the festival" he presided over religious ceremonies and rituals no less than he supervised the allocation of funds or the organization of the festive banquet. During the communal gatherings, oaths had to be pronounced to support the weak and defend the community in times of distress. Other important communal decisions would be made during these celebrations. As a token of responsibility and authority, the presiding family would host the incense burner from the relevant temple in their home.

This kind of organization was autonomous from, and unrelated to, the imperial government, whose representatives were always outsiders not native to the region in which they operated. Indeed, the representatives of the imperial government were not directly relevant for the organization and administration of local communities, who would turn to officials mostly when they wanted to communicate with the higher bureaucratic authorities. Because temples to local gods formed the absolute majority of China's polytheistic religion, this predominance always challenged the central powers of the empire. Bureaucrats sent from Peking into the unfamiliarity of distant regions felt themselves confronted with communities that were already autonomously organized around their temples. To make matters worse, the Daoist priests residing in those communities were known for their ritual capacity to communicate directly with the Celestial Emperor, known as the Jade Emperor in the Ming and Qing. Their rituals included the submission of a written document that was offered to Heaven and thus paralleled the imperial prerogative of sacrificing to Heaven, and bypassed imperial authority (a situation that is emphatically described in the first chapter of *Outlaws of the Marsh*). Imperial prohibitions during the Ming and Qing targeted this specific aspect of Daoist ritual.

As such, administrators carrying out imperial policy on a regional level inevitably faced tough choices between local autonomy and imperial politics. Official rhetoric regarding the religious activities associated with local temples was therefore highly pronounced. From an imperial perspective, because these local cults were not included in the registers of state sacrifices (*sidian*), they were "deviant." Official ideology propagated the destruction of these cults, but in practice such radical solutions were rarely enforced.

In fact, records from local gazetteers make it clear that officials participated in local religious activities on a grand scale. They initiated or otherwise contributed to the restoration of local temples, they participated in sacrificial rites, and they wrote commemorative pieces for inscription on temple steles. In those relatively rare cases where officials were remembered for their forceful repression of certain local temples, the compilers of local gazetteers often note that the local community resumed its religious activities as soon as the official had been transferred to a different area.

Finally, the authority provided by an imperial stamp of approval was still thought to enhance the standing of territorial cults. While the practice of imperial canonizations of local temples had been widespread during the Song and continued into late imperial China, during the Ming and Qing this type of imperial involvement in local religion appears to have been rare. Local gazetteers did regularly record canonizations of local gods during the Ming and Qing, but it appears that the most popular gods of late imperial China did not receive such recognition—at least not straightforwardly from the imperial government.

Spectacle and Excitement

Much of the activity associated with sacred festivals did have another aspect that some deemed immoral: mingling of the sexes. Occasions for men and women to socialize in public were usually few and far between, but during festivals there were plenty of public spaces where they could gather. Among the more important aspects of religious festivals—be they devoted to territorial gods or to more universal celebrations on the calendar such as New Year's Eve—was the hustle and bustle of the local market. All kinds of goods and services were sold on these markets, especially the particular foodstuffs associated with each festival. A crowded market allowed for some relaxation on the behavioral codes of such otherwise improper acts as flirtation, public inebriation, and physical proximity.

Theatrical performances formed another great opportunity for uncommon excitement. There existed many varieties of theater. Some were included in the long processions that accompanied the sedan chair on which the statue of the territorial god was taken on his tour of inspection through the community. Acrobats walked on stilts, made somersaults, and performed many other artistic feats. Local militia regularly joined in with the processions and showed off their martial prowess. But there were many other forms of local theater. Bands of actors participated in the processions (professionals as well as amateurs), acting out *tableaux vivants* of scenes from famous stories. Moreover, in front of the main temple there would usually be a stage for theatrical performances. The larger temples almost always had a small building that served as a stage; for the smaller temples, people would erect a stage for the duration of the festival. The dramatic repertoire included episodes from the same narrative cycles that became famous in the Ming novels, such as *Outlaws of the Marsh Journey to the West*, *Canonization of the Gods*, and so on, as well as stories of local heroes—and, of course, the territorial divinity in whose honor the festival was staged.

The "Three Teachings": Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

Despite the predominance of territorial religion, this survey of late imperial Chinese religion would not be complete without reference to the "three teachings." It is

obvious that the major textual traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism had become much intertwined by late imperial times. However, we would do well to caution against an all too simplistic understanding of the three teachings as a model that represents late imperial religious traditions by conflating them into a set of three increasingly overlapping traditions that shared the single goal of peaceful coexistence. Although it is true that the rhetoric of the "unity of the three teachings" (*sanjiao guiyi*) became particularly popular during late imperial China, it was a type of rhetoric that found more followers among those social groups who had something to gain from controlling and curtailing religious activities than among those who would self-consciously define themselves as belonging to any particular one of those teachings. In that respect it is certainly no coincidence that the teachings of Kongzi (known in the West as Confucius) were often placed at the apex of the three teachings.

A positive assessment of the unity of the three teachings is implicit in the scholarly model of syncretism that has been applied to late imperial Chinese religion. This attribution of syncretism—one religious tradition's incorporation of, or reconciliation with, elements from other traditions—is uncritically based on assumptions of "tolerance," "openness," or "dialogue," whereas the evolution of religious traditions may have been less a product of intellectual curiosity than of cultural change, political pressure, social demand, or certain theological patterns that shaped the way in which traditions responded to each other. Below we will explore the meaning of syncretism, the concept of the three teachings, and the way in which different religious identities were expressed and negotiated.

In the first place, the strict lines that modern scholars have drawn between different religious affiliations have failed to take into account the wide range of religious practices that the late imperial Chinese might participate in—as worshipers visiting temples, as practitioners performing rituals, as intellectuals writing religious texts, or as all of the above. Although this tendency has been critically addressed in recent years, many modern scholars, Chinese and Western alike, still understand religious identity too much in monotheistic terms. That is, the implicit understanding of Chinese religion seems to be that one belongs to one tradition at the exclusion of others, similarly to the Abrahamic idea of faith in one god.

This is especially true in regards to the modern view of civil officials. Because these men were trained in a civil examination system that was based on the curriculum of Confucian classics, the assumption is that they would single-mindedly devote themselves to the study of Kongzi's ideas to the exclusion of other creeds. Although it is certainly true that civil officials were expected to use Kongzi's ideas as a yardstick for representing Chinese culture in their official documents, they were usually not "orthodox" believers in a single cultural tradition. The most common type of official that was produced by the examination system was one who publicly advocated the purity and supremacy of the Confucian tradition, but who would be involved in Buddhist, Daoist, or local religious affairs just as much as most of the other late imperial Chinese who surrounded them.

Most commonly, men of classical learning would not limit themselves to some sort of dogmatic orthodoxy. A prime example of this was the court historiographer of the first Ming emperor, Song Lian (1310–1381). His collected writings seem to leave no ideology untouched; he depicts each of the three teachings at times favorably and at other times critically. Here it must be emphasized that, while the first Ming emperor is known for his usage of the term "three teachings" as a political slogan in his attempts to control religious institutions, Song Lian discusses and promotes aspects of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism without advocating their synthesis or emphasizing an ideology that promotes their common origins.

This brings us back to the topic of syncretism. At first sight, the practice of borrowing and incorporating ideas from other religious traditions was widespread during the Ming, and could be taken to exemplify some sort of religious tolerance. For example, highly influential Ming Dynasty thinkers such as Wang Yangming (1472–1529) brought the much older trend of reinterpreting Confucianism along the lines of Buddhism and Daoism to a boiling point, while Buddhist intellectuals such as Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623) wrote commentaries on Daoist classics such as *Zhuangzi*, and Daoist masters such as Zhang Guoxiang (d. 1611) included hagiographies of Buddhist saints in their canonical scriptures. Zhang Guoxiang, indeed, even included the saints of territorial traditions in his *Supplement to the Daoist Canon* of 1607. It seems almost as if there were no boundaries to the fluidity of late imperial religious traditions.

Despite the indisputable lack of orthodoxy that was current in Ming religion at large, we should ask some more critical questions. Did Wang Yangming incorporate so many ideas from Buddhism out of sheer interest, or were his reformulations intended to close the gap between Confucian ideals and social trends by promoting Confucian ideas to an audience that was more interested in Buddhist salvation than in Confucian morality? Did Hanshan Deqing write a commentary to *Zhuangzi* because he wanted to reinterpret a Daoist classic in Buddhist terms or because texts and ideas from the Daoist tradition had become the intellectual standard of the late Ming? Did Zhang Guoxiang incorporate saints from Buddhism and territorial religion because he was open-minded or because he did not want to lose the support of those who were involved in the worship of those saints? The answers to these questions are not readily available, but it should be clear that the idealistic representation of syncretism as a benign characteristic of a culturally tolerant epoch is not the final answer.

Moreover, syncretism should not be understood as a mere blurring of boundaries between religious identities. The religious communities that were constituted by each of the three teachings were certainly not confused about their religious affiliations. In contrast to laymen, the clerical residents of monastic institutions did exclusively define their identity on the basis of one religion. Neither Wang Yangming, Hanshan Deqing, nor Zhang Guoxiang would consider themselves to be anything other than Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist, respectively. Each of them would claim that their ideology represented a pure tradition.

In addition to intellectual aspects of religious identity, there was the social dimension and the interaction between monks and the society that had produced them. It may be true that Buddhists were reputed for "leaving the family" and detaching themselves from "worldly concerns," and it may also be true that Daoists were known for choosing the seclusion of mountains over the hustle and bustle of cities. Yet, few (if any) late imperial cities would not count several Buddhist as well as Daoist monasteries. Stereotyped monastic claims of social seclusion notwithstanding, the religious services of both Buddhist and Daoist clerics were heavily geared toward the ritual demands of lay communities, and clerical concerns cannot be understood essentially as the private pursuit of salvation, or as individual self-cultivation: monks had multifarious interactions with the local communities close to them and were, in fact, expected to provide opportunities for laymen to accumulate merit, absolve the dead, and so on.

Further, the so-called Confucian "academies" should not be omitted from the religious landscape of the Ming and Qing, although the term "seminaries" would more accurately reflect the largely religious training received by the *Ru* (Confucians) in these institutions. As places of learning and cultivation that provided a type of training based primarily upon Buddhist models, the life in these Confucian monasteries included sacrificial worship of the statue of Kongzi and other saints of the Confucian canon, as well as the frequent performance of rituals. However, it was precisely during the Ming and Qing that the ideologies promoted by the Confucian monasteries changed rather drastically: in the sixteenth century all statues physically representing Kongzi *et alia* had to be replaced by wooden tablets that only allowed for a more abstract representation of the Confucian saints by means of written titles. More generally, the end of the Ming witnessed a fundamentalist turn of Confucianism that more than ever emphasized the authority of the canonical texts—a development that continued into the Qing Dynasty and produced the conservative type of orthodoxy that is often mistaken to represent a universal trait of the Confucian tradition.

To conclude, although there may have been positive or constructive sides to the interaction between the three teachings, it is not easy to discern how this interaction was motivated by lofty ideals of intellectual improvement or cultural tolerance. There can be no doubt that as self-conscious traditions the three teachings were bent on securing the institutional space they had come to occupy within late imperial Chinese society. As we will see below, the expression of religious identity was particularly clear in the highly contested area of ritual services.

Denominational Boundaries and Ritual Expression

As is obvious from the diversity of the religious landscape during the Ming and Qing, the terms "sect" and "denomination" are not very useful yardsticks for measuring Chinese religion. The overwhelming majority of late imperial Chinese would not

think of defining themselves in denominational terms. It was often on the basis of a specific occasion that they would determine their choice of religious patronage. For example, in case of drought a local community would most likely hire Daoist liturgists who could perform thunder rituals, while the hope for absolving ancestors from their perils in the netherworld would probably be translated into donations to Buddhist institutions or the performance of a land and water ritual. Yet Buddhists sometimes also were asked to pray for rain, and Daoists had their own rituals for absolution. Moreover, these two types of religious specialist could also be called upon for a variety of smaller occasions, such as individual disease, repentance, vows, exorcisms, and so on.

The late imperial market for ritual services was large, but also very competitive. In addition to priests of the three canonical religions, local spirit mediums claimed to possess (or, rather, to be possessed by) the powers of the local gods to which they belonged, and they too engaged in the competition for clients. This rivalry between different religious practitioners was less ideological than economical: ritual services formed the sole source of financial support for most clerics. In other words, a lack of clients not only led to a loss of social or religious prestige but also to a loss of wealth.

Therefore, if "sect" and "denomination" are not very helpful for understanding Ming and Qing religion, it was precisely during the public performance of rituals that religious affiliation or identity was expressed. There can barely be any doubt that the capability of performing rituals defined a person as belonging to a more narrowly defined stratum of religious practitioners. Priests were reputed for their ritual efficacy—that is, the powers they were able to marshal by means of the ritual services they performed. Reputations were made or broken during the performance of ritual.

It was, therefore, most obviously in the realm of ritual, the realm where religious men and women manifested themselves most dramatically to their clients, that religious identities conflicted. In villages, different ritual traditions competed for patronage during important religious occasions. At court, Buddhists claimed victories over Daoists, Confucians condemned Buddhists, and Daoists took advantage of the Confucian resolve to stay away from demons and spirits. Ritual methods were a decisive factor in the self-definition of religious traditions. More than any other aspect of Chinese religion, the possession of ritual methods with the correct pedigree could boost one's claim to religious efficacy. Such claims not only increased one's charisma but also defined one as belonging to a particular tradition.

Here, too, it should be emphasized that, in this competition for power, civil officials participated just as much as adepts of the other traditions. Even though the religious functions of the Confucian-trained bureaucracy have not been much appreciated in scholarship about the Ming and Qing, it is undisputable that local magistrates could also be called upon in times of religious need. It is certain that local bureaucrats would at times be involved in ritual performances for the procurement of rain or the expulsion of demons, albeit on a less comprehensive scale than Daoists, Buddhists,

or shamans. But, if the ritual scope of all these traditions was similar, their procedures differed, each expressing themselves in their own jargon and expressing different types of relationship to the divine.

Local Religion vis-à-vis Religious Institutions

The abundance of local religious variances notwithstanding, even the most remote territorial temple did not exist in a cultural vacuum. By the Ming and Qing, the nationwide traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism had long become self-conscious religious institutions with great prestige. Each had their own mythology and liturgy, as well as ordination procedures that bestowed a nominal religious identity upon its members. These "three religions" functioned as points of reference for the territorial saint and its complex of sacrificial practices and narrative traditions.

To be sure, despite their local character, the territorial saint and its temples were not situated entirely outside the institutional traditions. In addition to spirit mediums, who mostly served their gods simply by making their bodies available for trance possession, most localities had developed their own ritual traditions. These traditions were upheld by "ritual masters" (*fashi*) or "ritual officers" (*faguan*), as these priests would call themselves, or "shamanic masters" (*wushi* or *shiwu*), as outsiders might refer to them. The label "shaman" (*wu*) could be applied to a wider range of religious professions: in addition to the "ritual master," the term "shaman" could also be used for spirit mediums, charismatic healers, or any practitioner of occult arts.

The difference between "ritual masters" and "spirit mediums," however, is relatively clear. Instead of being subjected to the territorial spirit's need to possess human bodies, these ritual masters could marshal the powers of local gods by assuming the role of a military commander. Thus, the territorial spirit could be deployed on exorcist expeditions against intruders. In most cases these ritual masters would represent themselves as belonging to Daoist ritual traditions, claiming that the patron saint of their particular tradition had been a disciple of the deified Laozi (for example, Chen Jingu in Fujian, Zhang Wulang in Hunan, Xu Jia in Taiwan). Thus, although such local traditions were not nominally "Daoist," they certainly referred themselves to Daoism. Many of them operated "barefoot and with hair undone," similarly to the Dark Emperor in his sacred precinct of Mount Wudang, the epitome of a local "ritual master" whose powers had ultimately become associated with Daoism.

Confucian notions also formed points of reference for territorial cults, albeit in a way different from Daoism. Most—if not all—local gods would be canonized with increasingly high titles, disguising their demonic nature with attributes of superior morality, such as "King Who Manifests Loyalty" (*Xianzhong wang*) or "Prince of Benevolent Munificence" (*Renji hou*). Such titles expressed the virtuous character of the local god, in keeping with Confucian morality. The older the sacrificial cult of a regional divinity was, the less emphasis would be placed on martial prowess and

the more on virtue and nobility. Although the more dogmatic representatives of the imperial bureaucracy were vocal opponents of local temple cults, late imperial gazetteers show that prefects, magistrates, and other civil officials were usually involved quite actively in the local cult—offering sacrifices in their official capacity of local dignitary, as well as in their private capacity of sponsor.

Ties with Buddhist institutions are less obvious, but they certainly existed. Just as Daoist monasteries were often built on the site of a local tutelary saint, it appears that many Buddhist monasteries had similar connections with territorial religion. In addition to the fact that a significant number of local spirits were represented as having achieved Buddhist enlightenment, more often than not, Buddhist temples and monasteries were built around shrines to local gods with a Buddhist hagiography. Stories abound of extraordinary men and women who achieved enlightenment and could subsequently perform extraordinary feats of spiritual power, or who sacrificed their lives by feeding themselves to fierce tigers or giant snakes.

As liturgical specialists, Buddhists were hired for ritual festivities alongside Daoists or Confucians. Funerals, for example, were occasions that required optimal religious preparation and the participation of as many ritual specialists as possible. Buddhists would chant scriptures for the dead, while Daoists purified the home of the deceased from "killing breaths" (*shaqi*) and kept the destabilizing forces of death at bay. Significantly, Confucian-trained officials played an important role in funerals, as priests of the ancestral cult. The transition of the deceased spirit from corpse to ancestral tablet was brought to its conclusion by a local official. With his brush dipped in red ink he would place a dot on the ancestral tablet and thereby consecrate it, fixating the spiritual energies of the deceased in the tablet.

Regardless of which specific branch of the three teachings a certain priest represented, from the perspective of the territorial cult any priest of the great institutional religions represented forces of a scale that was larger than the local community could boast. The fact that they each represented extensive scriptural traditions no doubt added to the prestige they enjoyed on a local level. Even if individual religious affiliation did not commonly present itself as an everyday choice or as a matter of unique "faith," and even if most late imperial Chinese were first and foremost involved in their local, territorial religion, all this did not mean that they ignored the three teachings or rejected them. Respect for the three greater traditions was deeply rooted.

Ultimately, it seems, the highest authority was thought to reside in Heaven. This brings us, finally, to the "Son of Heaven" and the sacred character of the Chinese empire.

State Religion

Although not often emphasized in scholarly studies, the Chinese empire was organized as a religious state. As the "Son of Heaven" (*tianzi*), the emperor was a sacred

monarch whose primary responsibility lay in the correct performance of ritual procedures that were thought to uphold the cosmic order. First among these ritual responsibilities was the sacrifice to Heaven. Each year the emperor presided over the ritual sacrifice of a bull, a goat, and a pig at the magnificent round Altar of Heaven. This sacrifice was the ritual core of the religion promoted by the heirs of Master Kong (Confucius); it was also the religious foundation of the civil bureaucracy over which the emperor presided.

The emperor could only claim rightful rulership over the Chinese empire thanks to the cosmic authorization that he had received from Heaven, the so-called "Mandate of Heaven." Without it, the throne would only represent an individual's aspiration to control the political scene. With it, the throne was the blessed center of a sacred order; it made the ruler into a being of divine grandeur. Beyond the divine charisma that an emperor obtained from the Mandate of Heaven, it made him into the guardian of the myriad of spirits and gods that inhabited his lands, so that he was sometimes designated as the "Chief of the Hundred Gods" (*baishen zhi zhu*). It was the Mandate of Heaven that transformed a mortal being into a divine monarch, into an earthly embodiment of the holy spirit of Heaven. As such, the powers of the "Son of Heaven" were profoundly hallowed.

In addition to worship of and sacrifices to Heaven, the registers of state sacrifices further included sacrificial proceedings for the Earth (on a square altar), Sun, and Moon; the imperial ancestors; and the great altars of Soil and Grain. These formed the most important level, the so-called "great sacrifices," crowning a much longer list of middle- and lower-level sacred powers including the Great Year, the Generals of the Lunar Cycle; Wind, Clouds, Thunder, and Rain; the Sacred Peaks and Mountains; and the Oceans and Rivers. The official religion of imperial China attempted to present itself as universal and not personal: gods were predominantly represented as abstract and impersonal divinities, different from the "orphan souls" of Chinese territorial religion.

However, to a certain extent this tendency toward worship of impersonal gods was typical of the Ming and after. Halfway through the Ming Dynasty, an imperial decree was issued to replace the statue of Kongzi in Confucian temples with a simple wooden tablet (as mentioned above), parallel to the wooden tablet of the ancestral cult. Only the temple in Kongzi's hometown, Qufu, was allowed to maintain its anthropomorphic statue. Most local gazetteers of the Ming also make mention of the wooden tablet in the Temple of Walls and Moats, which substituted the statue of its main god (often referred to as the "City God").

Conclusion

The official picture presented by the court historiographers of imperial China is not always useful for understanding late imperial Chinese religion. Official sources usually speak in pejorative terms about emperors who were closely involved in other

types of worship than that of Heaven alone, yet most of the Ming and Qing emperors were almost without exception intimately involved in various religious activities. The first Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–1398), was strongly interested in Daoism. He wrote a commentary to the *Daode jing* (*Classic of the Way and the Power*) and regularly consulted Daoists about demons and spirits. Zhu Yuanzhang further hired Buddhist priests for the performance of salvation rituals. Zhu Di, the third Ming emperor, better known as Yongle (r. 1402–1424), wrote a pious commentary to the *Diamond Sūtra*, a central Buddhist scripture. He further had Daoist exorcists accompany him on his military expeditions. The Zhengtong emperor (r. 1436–1449) even allowed a Daoist, Shao Yizheng, to compile the *Daoist Canon* of 1445 inside the Forbidden City. The Jiajing (r. 1522–1566) and Wanli (r. 1572–1620) emperors were barely interested in the impersonal religion of the state. They were, in fact, so devoted to Buddhism, Daoism, and sponsorship of local saints that Confucian historiographers often described these emperors as "wicked and depraved."

Although the Manchu emperors of the Qing Dynasty, who invaded China from the North, continued the sacrifice to Heaven, as well as most of the other sacrifices prescribed in the registers of state sacrifices, they had other preferences, too. They brought some of their own religious customs with them, such as the court shamans, who never seem to have played a prominent role in public. During the Qianlong reign (1736–1795), however, the emperor forged strong ties with Tibet and overtly fashioned himself after the model of the *cakravartin*—the proverbial Buddhist ruler who spreads the law of Buddhism. Further, although Christian missionaries had already been a conspicuous presence during the late Ming, the Qing Dynasty was the time when missionaries were allowed into court circles. Finally, while Buddhism was largely supported by the imperial house, the Qing Dynasty witnessed a suppression of Daoism: the Celestial Master was no longer admitted to court after 1740, and in 1742 Daoists were no longer allowed to perform as court musicians during rituals or ceremonial festivities—a customary position that Daoists had held at least since the early Ming. After 1821, the Celestial Masters were not only banned from the imperial court but also even from the capital, Beijing.

More generally speaking, the upholders of Kongzi's legacy underwent a certain radicalization. Whereas the official curriculum of the examination system during the early to mid Ming had maintained the earlier kind of ideological plurality that had allowed thinkers such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming to absorb notions from Buddhism and Daoism, the late Ming and early Qing witnessed a new and unprecedented conservatism among those who were affiliated with official institutions. Literati with more conservative inclinations such as Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu, and Liu Zongzhou denounced the ideological impurities of their predecessors and stood at the beginning of a radical return to the letter of the Confucian scriptures. When the Manchus conquered the Ming Dynasty, many of these conservatives committed suicide in order to avoid the blemish of moral conflict.

The modernization of China after the fall of the Qing empire was detrimental to the various forms of religion that had developed over the course of many centuries.

The great sacrifices to Heaven ended when the imperial house was abolished. Intellectuals joined hands with warlords, republicans, and communists in their zeal to reform everything that was associated with the traditions of local religion, which they reformulated as "superstition" (*mixin*). Ironically, the anti-religious ideology that came to predominate throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, namely Communism, revolved around two terms that were of distinctly religious origin. "Socialism" (*shehui zhuyi*) literally meant "the ideology of the congregation around the local altar," while the term "revolution" (*geming*) was entirely based on the belief in a Mandate of Heaven through its literal meaning of "uprooting the mandate." Nevertheless, the post-imperial period of the twentieth century was clearly a time in which traditional religious forms and practices were subjected to significant and at times cataclysmic persecution by the state.

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PART II

The Traditions

CHAPTER 7

The Confucian Tradition in China

Keith Knapp, The Citadel

Too often the *Ru* tradition, which is known to Westerners as Confucianism, is presented as a parade of philosophers, such as Confucius, Mencius, Dong Zhongshu, and Zhu Xi. Since the historical record does not have much information about many of these figures, most of what we know about them comes from the philosophical texts that either they or their disciples composed; hence, where the historical man ends and the philosophical text begins is hard to discern. Many accounts of Confucianism are thereby based on a collection of texts rather than flesh-and-blood people. Little wonder that most Westerners view Confucianism as stodgy and dry. Since scholars are principally concerned with the tradition's most prominent advocates, they have largely ignored those periods of the Confucian tradition in which there were no major thinkers—a number of accounts make a huge leap from the end of the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) to the Song (960–1279) Dynasties, as if the *Ru* tradition was in hibernation during the medieval period. This chapter will argue that Confucianism was much more than its prominent thinkers and texts—it was often promoted and articulated through popular tales, history books, community compacts, images of exemplars, morality books, and ritual practices. Moreover, the Confucian conceptual framework was flexible enough that it was always possible to incorporate opponents' ideas and practices.

To get a quick glimpse of Confucianism in action, let us look at one of the thousands of accounts of Confucian exemplars. The following biographical sketch concerns a filial son named Jiang Bi who was prominent during the Southern Qi period (479–502).

> By nature, [Jiang Bi's] conduct was benevolent [*ren*] and righteous [*yi*]. His upper garment was tattered and the lice infesting it were many. He hung its inner padding on

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> the wall, but since he feared that the lice might starve to death, he put them back into his clothing. Within several days, his whole body was completely free of lice. After his mother died, owing to the fact that he failed to respectfully care for her while alive [i.e., to provide her with delicacies], upon having occasion to eat fresh-water porpoise, he could not bear to taste it. When eating vegetables, he would never eat their center. This is because he viewed [the plant] as living; as a result, he would only eat its old leaves. (*History of the Southern Dynasties* 73.1827–8)

This is an early medieval account of a typical Confucian hero—a son who manifests the virtue of *xiao* ("filial piety"), which means he will do anything to serve his parents. His filiality is especially apparent in that he denies himself a delicacy that he was unable to provide his mother. In addition to filial piety, Jiang Bi also embodies the important Confucian virtues of benevolence and righteousness. He plainly expresses the former in his compassion for the lice. Nevertheless, since Confucianism is centered on people, this care for insects seems a bit odd. After all, the *Analects* tells us that, "When the stables were burning down, the master retired from the court room and asked 'Was anyone hurt?' He did not ask about the horses" (*Analects* 10.11). Equally strange is his desire not to harm plants. Both of these concerns seem more in line with Daoism or Buddhism. Here we see one of the most important characteristics of Confucian vitality—its ability to absorb other religious conceptions, beliefs, and practices while still maintaining its core ethical teachings.

Kongzi and the Analects

Nearly everyone has heard of Confucius, or Master Kong (Kongzi), and appreciate that he was a wise man. In the Chinese-speaking world no one is more revered. But who was Confucius and what exactly did he accomplish? Much like Socrates, he was a man famous for being a philosopher and teacher, but he left no writings from his own hand. Nearly everything we know about him and his teachings comes from records assembled by his students and their disciples. Perhaps as late as 140 BCE, these records were organized into a book named the *Analects* (*Lunyu*). What does this book reveal about Confucius? Despite the fact that he attained high office in his home state of Lu, it focuses on the later part of his life, in which he wandered from state to state with his disciples, seeking employment as an advisor to a ruler. He answers his students' questions wisely, shows keen interest in their progress, prepares them for government service, displays little patience with moral laxity and laziness, and is deeply steeped in ritual knowledge.

Like most Chinese thinkers, Confucius looked to the past for guidance. The contemporary world he lived within was a topsy-turvy one in which ministers overthrew their rulers and sons usurped their fathers' thrones. Confucius looked to re-establish the perfect order that supposedly was in effect during the reigns of the sage-kings, Yao, Shun, and Yu, and the early Zhou Dynasty (1045–771 BCE) rulers,

King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. When these men were in power, harmony and stability prevailed: martial force was restrained by the civil arts; each person was content with his/her place within the social and political order; gentlemen yielded to rather than contended with each other; sons and daughters deferred to their parents and fulfilled the latter's wishes; and rulers governed through example rather than the implementation of laws. In many ways, one could sum up Confucius' views as the Way of the Former Kings.

To once again realize this perfect state of things, leaders had to become what Confucius called a *junzi* ("gentleman" or "exemplary man," or literally "the son of a prince"). One achieved this state of being through the perfection of a number of virtues. The most important of these was *ren*, which has variously been translated as benevolence, humanity, human-heartedness, and goodness. What it means is that one constantly thinks of others before thinking about oneself. In his own words, Confucius defined it in this way: "When leaving home act as if you were seeing an important guest; in employing the people treat them as if you were presiding over a huge sacrifice. Do not push onto others that which you do not want" (*Analects* 12.2). No matter what their social position, one must always treat others with respect and consideration. Indeed, it is only through helping others that we help ourselves, because doing so develops our moral self. Confucius noted that "One who is benevolent endeavors to establish himself through establishing others" (*Analects* 6.30). Nevertheless, Confucius acknowledged that always trying to put the interests of others before one's own is truly a difficult task; thus, an exemplary man was one who never let his attention wander from *ren* even for the short amount of time it takes to eat a meal (*Analects* 4.5).

But how does one become benevolent? Practicing benevolence is a lifelong process that begins at home. Sons and daughters become benevolent through realizing the virtues of *xiao* ("filial piety") and *ti* ("brotherliness"). What that means is that they always place their parents' and brothers' interests before their own. While his/her parents are still alive, a filial son or daughter endeavors to fulfill all of his/her parents' wishes and take care of all of their needs. He/she never causes them undue stress or anxiety; as a result, filial sons do not stray far from home or stand under the eaves of buildings, lest they be injured by falling roof tiles. Nevertheless, that does not mean that filial children meekly comply with all of their parents' orders. Since *xiao* consists of taking care of one's parents' needs, if a parent's behavior threatens his/her own welfare, a filial son or daughter must gently object and lead the parent to act in a way that is in the parent's own best interests.

These views were put into practice through centuries of Chinese history. Upon one's parents' death, one had to mourn them for three years (actually twenty-five or twenty-seven months). To express one's grief and longing for one's parents, filial children underwent extreme deprivations: they lived in a mourning hut, wore scratchy hemp robes (instead of silk), and avoided meat, alcohol, music, and sex. The reasoning behind this was that when children are infants parents devote three years to constantly taking care of them, so children should return the favor when their

dead parents are most in need of help. After the completion of the three-year rites, children must at specific times provide their parents with sacrifices. One's entire lifetime was dedicated to serving one's parents; thus, filial piety was an important training ground for practicing benevolence. No wonder Confucius' disciple Youzi stated, "As for filiality and brotherliness, they are the foundation of *ren*" (*Analects* 1.2).

What is the best way to ensure that one's behavior is for the benefit of others rather than oneself? Confucius' answer was that one should live one's life according to the rituals furnished by the early Zhou kings. Confucius designated these rituals as *li* ("the rites," "social norms," "propriety," "ritual appropriateness," or "ordered behavior"). If one faithfully followed the scripts set down by the Zhou kings for daily life, there would be no way that selfishness could creep into one's actions. Confucius' most beloved disciple, Yan Hui (or Yuan) asked him about benevolence:

> The master replied, "Overcoming the self and following the rites is benevolence. On the day that a person overcomes his self and follows the rites, all under Heaven will submit to his benevolence. Being benevolent comes from the self; how could it come from others?" Yan Yuan asked him to explain. The master said, "If it is not ritually appropriate, do not look at it; if it is not ritually appropriate, do not listen to it; if it is not ritually appropriate, do not speak it. If it is not ritually appropriate, do not do it." (*Analects* 12.1)

By this Confucius meant that one's actions are not self-willed and one is following the example of the best people. *Li* are also important because they produce harmony. By telling a person exactly what his/her role is and what to do, the rites make the social order manifest. Each person knows what he/she is supposed to do and his/her place in the overall hierarchy. Thus, by living life as a series of rituals one cooperates with others to achieve a common goal, rather than competing with others for one's own benefit alone. Rituals thereby order both one's behavior and also society.

A person who constantly manifests benevolence and controls his/her behavior by following the rites is an exemplary person (a *junzi*). This type of person is a natural leader: through his/her example, he/she transforms the behavior of the people around him/her. When a ruler can make himself into an exemplary person, everyone in the kingdom strives to emulate his example. Thus, a leader's most important duty is to cultivate his behavior; his most important means to govern effectively is to manifest his virtue. Inspiring people with one's own conduct is a much more effective way to rule than using fear to intimidate the people. Thus, when asked about governance, Confucius said, "In governing what use is there in executing? If you desire goodness, the people will be good. The virtue of the exemplary person is like the wind; the virtue of petty men is like grass. The wind on top of the grass will always bend it to its direction" (*Analects* 12.19). Rulers, then, should rule through virtue rather than through laws.

From the preceding discussion, it may seem as though Confucius was only interested in morality; indeed, his focus was on people and the here and now. When asked

how we should serve the dead, he responded that we do not even know how to serve the living, so how can we talk about serving the dead? When the same student asked him about death, he replied that we do not understand life, so how can we try to understand death (*Analects* 11.12)? That is not to say, though, that Confucius did not believe that the spirit world was unimportant. *Tian* ("Heaven") as an all-seeing supernatural entity was immensely significant to him; as a result, when he had to prove he had not committed a wrong, he cited Heaven as a witness. Further, Heaven plays a key role in determining one's fate. To some extent, one's virtue is produced by Heaven; thus, the path we take is determined by it. Once, when Confucius was in danger of persecution by a warlord named Huan Tui, he reasoned that "Heaven has produced virtue in me. What can Huan Tui do to me?" (*Analects* 7.23). Hence, even though Confucius was not overly concerned with deities, he looked to Heaven for justice and inspiration.

Mencius and the Guodian Texts

The second great formulator of the tradition was Meng Ke (c. 390–305 BCE), known to history as Master Meng, Latinized as Mencius. He perhaps studied under the disciples of either Zengzi, one of Confucius' disciples, or Zisi, Confucius' grandson. Like Confucius, Mencius is more famous for his teachings, which were put forth in the book *Mencius* (*Mengzi*), than anything he did as an official. Also like Confucius, he spent much of his later life traveling with his disciples from state to state looking for employment. His book documents a number of discussions that he had with rulers of different kingdoms. Unlike Confucius, though, Mencius was more influential in his day and moved about as a man of importance who commanded the respect of rulers.

For Mencius, becoming an exemplary person was no longer the goal; becoming a sage was. Sages are people who have perfected the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. They usually appear once every five hundred years to save the world. They do so by setting an example for mankind: Mencius says that sages are men who teach a hundred generations (*Mencius* 7B.15). Who are these men? The sage kings Yao, Shun, and Yu, the early Zhou kings King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. For Mencius the greatest of these was Confucius, who was an uncrowned Son of Heaven. Interestingly, Mencius hints that he too is a sage; thus, like Yu, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius, he wants to rectify peoples' heart-minds, eliminate heterodox theories, get rid of errant behavior, and dispose of licentious words (*Mencius* 3B.9).

The primary means by which one becomes a sage is through the constant practice of benevolence and righteousness. Benevolence means not harming others; righteousness means doing what is right. Mencius emphasized that benevolence and righteousness are rooted in filiality and brotherliness and that love for others has different levels. Benevolence starts with loving one's parents; righteousness begins

with respecting one's siblings. Building on that love, one should then extend one's filiality to the parents of others; one should extend one's brotherliness to the brothers of others. In this way, one uses one's familial love to benefit everyone. When a ruler does this he is putting into effect a benevolent government. When people discover that a ruler cares about their welfare, they will happily submit to him and migrate to live in his kingdom. This is why Mencius stated that the key to good government is nothing more than filial piety and brotherliness (*Mencius* 6B.2). In practical terms, benevolent government consists of providing the people with land, avoiding war, lessening taxes, furnishing education, and only employing the labor of people in the off seasons.

Of course, the extended love one has for strangers is less intense than that one has for one's parents and siblings, and in this regard Mencius distinguished himself from the teachings of Mozi (c. 470–391 BCE) and the competing Mohist doctrine of universal love or impartial care (*jian'ai*), which means we should treat each person as we would a family member. Though Mencius modeled the ruler–subject relationship on the parent–child relationship, he insisted that familial love was both the most natural and the most intense of all. This is why he attributed so much importance to filiality and brotherliness.

Who could become a sage? Mencius thought that each person was capable of becoming a Yao or a Shun: it just depended upon effort (*Mencius* 6B.2). That is because humans are naturally good: each person has the incipient, inborn virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. These virtues are part of our heavenly nature. However, due to peoples' reactions to external stimuli, they forget about these incipient virtues and fall into self-centered activities. Sages, on the other hand, use their heart-minds to reflect upon these virtues and develop them through their actions. Thus, in terms of their nature, sages are no different from anyone else; they merely differ in that they are better at cultivating their inborn nature.

Why, though, is our inborn nature necessarily good? It is because it is given to us by Heaven in the form of "flood-like *qi*," which if refined can connect us with Heaven and Earth. One cultivates it by realizing the heavenly virtues such as benevolence and righteousness (*Mencius* 2A.2). Mencius tells us that "If he/she concentrates on his/her heart, then he/she will know his/her nature (*xing*); if he/she knows his/her nature, then he/she will know Heaven" (*Mencius* 7A.1). By developing the heavenly *qi* within us through manifesting virtues, we connect ourselves to Heaven. It is for this reason that Heaven gives the throne of the Son of Heaven to a virtuous person—one who manifests what he has received from Heaven. Nevertheless, Heaven does not speak, but it makes known its will through the voices and actions of the people; consequently, if the people are pleased with a ruler's actions, then Heaven grants him his position. However, if the ruler does not benefit the people, then efforts to replace him will have Heaven's approval. In short, Heaven makes its will known through the people; thus, taking care of the people is a benevolent government's foremost charge.

How well known were these ideas of Confucius and Mencius? Were their teachings influential in their time? What was their relationship with other teachings? A tomb excavated in the southern province of Hubei province, which might have belonged to the tutor of the heir apparent of the Chu kingdom, suggests some intriguing answers. Guodian Tomb #1, which was probably sealed around 300 BCE, yielded a cache of texts, some of which have been identified as Confucian. Since the birthplace of Confucius was in modern-day Shandong province, which is in the northeast, the presence of Confucian texts in central China indicates that their ideas were spreading throughout China. Nevertheless, these "Confucian" texts were buried together with Daoist texts, such as the *Daode jing*. Thus, the deceased, who probably used these texts while alive, most certainly did not see himself as either a Daoist or a Confucian—he probably merely saw the texts as related texts that were good for self-cultivation. Nevertheless, the texts from the tomb associated with Confucianism concern themselves with reconciling humanity (*ren*) with righteousness (*yi*), a typical Confucian consideration, and the embodiment of virtue, an idea that can also be found in the *Mencius*.

Xunzi, the Qixia Academy, and the Ru School

The third and last of the classical formulators of Confucianism was Xun Kuang or Xun Qing (316–c. 235 BCE). Much of what we reliably know about him comes from the book that carries his name: the *Xunzi* ("Master Xun"). Like his predecessors, Xun Kuang was renowned as a scholar rather than as an official. He spent a long time at the prestigious Qixia Academy, which was in the state of Qi, and thrice held the position of Libationer. To attract men of intellectual ability, the state of Qi would provide talented teachers with a stipend and include them in court discussions. Xun Kuang also acquired practical administrative experience by serving as a magistrate. Indicative of the fact that boundaries between intellectual traditions were fluid at this point in time is the fact that one of his students was Li Si (c. 280–208 BCE), who was an advocate of Legalism and the mastermind behind the Qin unification of China in 221 BCE. Han Feizi (c. 280–233 BCE), the great synthesizer of Legalist thought, is also said to have been Master Xun's student.

Xunzi disagreed sharply with Mencius. He believed that human nature was evil. Men were driven by desires that led them into conflict with each other over scarce resources. The result was strife and chaos. The only way to improve people's behavior was through education and ritual; indeed, it was these two things that separated people from animals. Xunzi emphasized that, in order for men to better themselves, nothing is more important than having worthy friends and an exemplary teacher. We need a good environment to grow morally; thus, it is necessary to surround ourselves with people whose behavior we admire. Teachers not only set an example through their behavior but also dispel our doubts and guide us through difficulties.

Government serves a similar function. The ruler is the mother and father of the people: he looks after the people's welfare and guides their behavior through his example and decrees. Officials too must act as mothers and fathers to the people. For this reason, no matter what their class background, men who are promoted to public office must be morally worthy and capable. The people can only be corrected by officials who are correct themselves. Early Chinese thinkers believed that the government would be the agent of the moral transformation of the people, whereas in late imperial times Neo-Confucians, as we will see, believed that private individuals working at the community level would perform this task.

For Xunzi, the most crucial tool with which to create order is ritual (*li*) and rites and morality (*liyi*). This is because rituals establish hierarchy by determining who receives honors and resources. Since ritual creates these distinctions based on a person's merit, it dispels competition and engenders order. Simultaneously, ritual regulates desires and feelings. It channels behavior so that people can fulfill their desires and act on their feelings in socially acceptable ways; it also limits the extent to which one expresses one's feelings, so that one does not go to extremes. Following ritual is also the way in which we make ourselves moral; in other words, it is the primary means of self-cultivation. Thus, the sage (*shengren*) is one who perfectly embodies the rituals. Indeed, ritual is so important that Xunzi viewed it as the foundation of the state: rulers who regulated their conduct with the rites would see their kingdoms flourish; those who did not risked witnessing the destruction of their principality. Ritual was more useful to the state than any weapon.

Xunzi sharply differed from his predecessors in that he viewed Heaven and the spirits in a much more agnostic manner: mourning rites and sacrifices were nothing more than forms of remembrance, ways of displaying respect to the departed, and methods of engendering feelings of solidarity among kin—they were not means by which the spirits were nourished. For Xunzi, the dead are without consciousness: they can neither know nor appreciate acts taken on their behalf. His comment on sacrifices can be understood in this light: "Among gentlemen they are considered to be the way of humans; however, among commoners they are considered to be a way to serve spirits" (*Xunzi*, "Lilun"). As for Heaven, Xunzi neither regarded it anthropomorphically nor believed that human actions affected it. Hence, one need pay no mind to inauspicious omens nor bother to make prayers. He tells us that "One performs a rain-inducing ceremony and it rains. Why is that? For no reason. If the rain-inducing ceremony had not been performed, it would have rained anyway" (*Xunzi*, "Tianlun"). Hence, mankind must attend to its own affairs—there is no celestial agency overseeing our lives.

An important characteristic of Xunzi's thought is the extent to which other Qixia Academy intellectual currents shaped his teachings. The goal of his philosophy was to make the state well-ordered and to prevent it from falling into chaos. This is indeed the same goal that nearly all of the Qixia Academy theorists pursued. Xunzi's vision of the true king also betrays extensive Daoist influence. He stresses that the ruler's heart must be empty, impartial, united, and still (not agitated by desires); only by

meeting these conditions can the heart-mind grasp the Way (*dao*). Moreover, the ruler must practice non-action (*wuwei*). Xunzi's ideas also betray Legalist lines of thought in their emphasis on using law (*fa*) to control the behavior of commoners and "distinction and distribution" (*fen*) to establish social order.

Finally the *Xunzi* provides us with a sense of what the followers of Confucius were called. Most importantly, they did not call themselves Confucians, but *Ru*. What this word means when applied to followers of Confucius is not entirely clear. It was probably first applied to them by their enemies as an insult, because it literally means "weak," "moist," or "agreeable." Scholars have thus translated it in various ways, such as "weakling," "cultural expert," "dance master," "shaman incantor," and "non-aggressor." What it probably meant was that the followers of Confucius were envisioned as skilled with their tongues rather than having military acumen. However, for Confucians it probably meant someone who was good with words or ideas, such as a scholar or technician. The term only appears once in the *Analects*, where Confucius tells his disciple that he should be a gentlemanly *Ru* rather than a petty one (*Analects* 6.13). The *Mencius* only mentions the term twice, but these two instances suggest that *Ru* was becoming a label that the followers of Confucius accepted. In the *Xunzi*, it is clear that the followers of Confucius had fully embraced this term. Nevertheless, at this point in time, *Ru* was not exclusively used for Confucians. A case in point is that Xunzi distinguished between "elegant *Ru*," who represent the true followers of Confucius, and "vulgar *Ru*," whose ideas are indistinguishable from those of the followers of Mozi and Laozi. Thus, at the end of the Warring States period, *Ru* is probably best translated as "scholars" or "classicists."

The Faltering Steps toward Institutionalization in the Qin and the Western Han

Although the followers of Confucius were respected during the Warring States period, they were merely one group of scholars vying with many others for power and influence. They reached the nadir of their influence when the Qin kingdom unified China in 221 BCE. That is because the Qin government championed the teachings of the Legalists and suppressed other schools of thought. This suppression took the form of two nefarious acts: a ban on and burning of privately owned classical texts and philosophical works (typically referred to as the "burning of the books") and the burying alive of 460 scholars. Although there definitely was a proscription of classical texts, many modern scholars think that the description of the mass burial of scholars is merely Confucian invective. No matter how negatively the court may have regarded Confucian scholars, the First Emperor saw the need to employ them to take care of ritual matters and his public utterances betray the influence of Confucian moral values.

The first emperors of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) did not view Confucians very highly either. Upon encountering a *Ru* wearing his distinctive headgear, Liu

Bang (256–195 BCE), the dynasty's founder, would knock it off the wearer's head and urinate into it. His immediate successors took a similarly dim view of the *Ru* and were much more partial to Daoist teachings. One should note that the prohibition on privately held books was not lifted until 191 BCE. Nevertheless, even these leaders recognized the worth of Confucian teachings for reaffirming hierarchy and stabilizing social relations; thus, a small number of Confucians were employed as high ministers and as tutors to the crown princes. When the Martial Emperor (Emperor Wu, r. 140–87 BCE) assumed the throne, the fortunes of Confucians gradually improved. Wishing to undermine the influence of the Dowager Empress, who was also his regent, the young emperor gave key posts to Confucians, who endeavored to prevent scholars of different philosophical traditions from taking office. In 136 BCE, the emperor appointed master teachers known as "erudites" to teach five canonical texts. These works are known as the "five classics" (*Wujing*): the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of History*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Book of Changes*, which were the ancient works that the Confucians were experts at interpreting. In 124 BCE, the emperor established the Imperial Academy; its curriculum was entirely based on the five classics. If a man was to become an official he had to master at least one of them. This meant that anyone who wanted a lucrative career in government would have to at least to some extent immerse himself in Confucian teachings.

Part of the growing influence of Confucianism was due to a scholar-official named Dong Zhongshu (197–104 BCE) who gained the Martial Emperor's ear early on in the latter's reign. Dong wanted to alleviate the severity of the Qin laws that the Han Dynasty inherited. He also sought to glorify the emperor's position by stressing his special relationship with Heaven, while simultaneously using this relationship to constrain the ruler's actions. Dong did this by adopting the Daoist notions that Heaven was constant and impartial and that all things were structured by the movement of the cosmological agents of *yin* and *yang*. Since man, particularly the emperor as the Son of Heaven, is an embodiment of Heaven, all of his actions must be modeled after those of Heaven: thus in the growth seasons of spring and summer he promotes agriculture and sericulture and provides education, and in the seasons of decay (fall and winter) he punishes crimes and executes criminals. However, unlike the Daoists, who viewed *yin* and *yang* as complementary and equal, for Dong, Heaven favors *yang*. The ruler thereby funnels his energies into instructing the people rather than punishing them. Society itself is structured by *yin* and *yang*, but these relationships are unequal because *yang* is superior to *yin*; as a result, rulers, fathers, and husbands are *yang*, whereas ministers, sons, and wives are *yin*. Social hierarchy is therefore a heavenly pattern.

Dong also assimilated the Mohist idea of an anthropomorphic Heaven that was keenly interested in the activities of its early counterpart: the emperor. What Heaven esteems is the emperor's efforts to morally transform the people through education and his example. When the emperor neglects his duties or engages in immoral behavior, Heaven warns him through manifesting inauspicious omens. If the ruler

does not pay heed to these warning signs, it will create disasters that will signal that he has lost the Mandate of Heaven. Thus, the emperor is not free to do whatever he wishes; his actions must conform to the heavenly standards of moral behavior, otherwise he will incur Heaven's wrath. One can only understand these standards through reading the five classics. As a result of Dong's influence, in 134 BCE the Martial Emperor ordered that each prefecture put forward as a candidate for officialdom a man who was renowned for his filiality and incorruptibility, and in 124 BCE he established the Imperial Academy—its curriculum was the five classics.

Another important reason for Confucianism's rising influence was the importance that Han rulers placed on filial piety. This bedrock social and moral value predated Confucianism, yet it was the *Ru* who best and most extensively articulated and championed it. Even the early Han rulers, who favored Daoism, highly esteemed this value. The most obvious manifestation of this was that, beginning with Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BCE), after each emperor died, the word "filial" (*xiao*) was added to his posthumous name; in other words, all Han rulers would be remembered for their filiality. From early on, the state also rewarded people who were models of filiality. Indicative of this value's significance was the growing influence of a late Warring States work called the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*). This very brief text—it only has 1799 Chinese characters—was simple to learn and memorize. It was often the first text a student read. Although not philosophically deep, it makes the crucial point that there is no conflict between the family and the state—loyalty is merely an extension of filial piety. Early in life filial piety consists of serving one's parents, but a life of complete filial piety is only achieved when one earns glory for one's parents by serving the state; as a result, filial piety creates loyal servitors—a message that warmed the hearts of Han rulers. The work also stresses the supernatural efficacy of filial piety. It is not merely one among many virtues; it is the foundational virtue from which all others issue forth. Moreover, it is a metaphysical principle that, if perfected, can unite one with Heaven and Earth. When this happens one will be protected from misfortunes and can interact with the spirit world. Soon every government school had a teacher who specialized in this classic. The most basic Chinese virtue with its *Ru* interpretation became a vehicle whereby Confucianism started to dominate Chinese thought and government.

An important aspect of the tradition during the Han was the elevation of Confucius. Late Warring States and Han authors created a new image of him as the "uncrowned king," an ideal ruler who would transform the world through his teachings and example, thereby preparing the way for the establishment of the Han Dynasty. As the uncrowned king, he was no ordinary human; instead, his mother was impregnated by a deity and gave birth to Confucius in a hollow mulberry tree. His body was also marked by auspicious physical characteristics. Here is a Han Dynasty description of him:

> Kongzi was over ten feet high. He had a head shaped like a hill, a square face, a moon-like protuberance on the right side of his forehead, a solar nose, eyes that are straight

> and long, a dragon-like forehead, lips like the Dipper, a bright face, an even chin, a supportive throat, joined teeth, a dragon frame, a tortoise's spine, and tiger paws . . . When standing he looks like a phoenix perched bolt upright; when sitting he is like a crouching dragon. On his chest there are words that say "The talisman of creating regulations to stabilize the world."

Although these features' symbolism is not precisely clear, they evidently show that Confucius had the distinguishing marks of a sage-ruler. He was also thought to have transmitted his secret teachings in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which he supposedly wrote, and supplements to the classics that we now call the Confucian apocrypha (*chenwei*). These works provided an ideology for a united empire and absorbed many of the beliefs of popular religion. One scholar has even suggested that the apocrypha were written by Masters of the Occult (*fangshi*), who were the chief opponents of the *Ru* in religious matters.

Nevertheless, just because the Martial Emperor made the five classics the basic knowledge that all officials had to master does not mean that Confucianism's domination started at this time. In fact, its influence only grew slowly. In actual governance, the Martial Emperor himself favored officials who were expert in state-strengthening laws and economics. It was only in the last fifty years of the Western Han (206 BCE–25 CE) that more and more high officials were committed adherents to the *Ru* teachings. The book *Discourses on Salt and Iron*, which was compiled from records of a court debate held in 81 BCE, makes this plainly evident: the high ministers who defend the government's revenue-generating policies have high regard for the centralizing measures of the First Emperor of the Qin and Legalist economic views. Their critics are moralistic Confucians who do not hold government office and are condemned as impractical dreamers by their opponents.

Confucianization in the Eastern Han and Period of Disunity

The real turning point in *Ru* fortunes came at the end of the Western Han. When Wang Mang (r. 9–23 CE) usurped the throne and established the Xin ("New") Dynasty, he justified his actions through the use of Confucianism. Likewise, the founder of the Eastern Han, Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57), employed the Confucian apocrypha to legitimate his regime. From this point on, Confucianism became the government's predominant ideology. It also became the basis of the state religion. The suburban sacrifice, which is the defining sacrifice of Confucian kingship, is one in which the emperor offers a sacrifice to Heaven, which he treats as his father. Wang Mang was the first emperor to perform this rite. He was also the first emperor to construct the Confucian ritual structures known as the Hall of Light (*Mingtang*) and the Circular Pond (*Biyong*). It was only late in Guangwu's reign that the emperor began to worship his ancestors in accordance with the regulations stipulated in the *Ru* ritual texts. It was also during the Eastern Han that government schools were

ordered to make sacrifices to Confucius; several emperors even traveled to Confucius' hometown of Qufu, where they personally offered sacrifices to Master Kong.

At the same time that Confucianism was beginning to assert control at court, it also deeply penetrated the upper class. During the Eastern Han, Confucian education became widespread among the educated elite. This is nowhere more evident than in the number of students at the Imperial University: in 124 BCE there were fifty but by 130 CE there were thirty thousand. Both government and private schools rapidly multiplied—Confucian masters often had thousands of students. Another measure of Confucianism's growing influence on the upper class is the practice of the onerous three-year mourning rites. In the Western Han, completion of these rites was so rare that it was noteworthy; in the Eastern Han, it was so common that elite men had to "exceed the rites" in a spectacular fashion to be noteworthy. One can also see vivid testimony of Confucianism's impact on the walls of elite tombs and funerary shrines. There one finds illustrations of Confucian ideology in the form of auspicious omens, sage kings, Confucius and his disciples, and narratives about exemplary women, filial children, and loyal retainers. Thus, the Eastern Han was the period in which the government and the educated elite began the process of Confucianization in earnest.

Although scholars often envision the Period of North–South Division (220–589) as the nadir of *Ru* influence, the Confucianization of the court and upper class continued largely unabated. Emperors began to sacrifice to Confucius more regularly and at the capital's Imperial University. During the Liu-Song Dynasty (420–479) in the south, the state constructed the first Confucian temple outside Qufu. Confucius' greatest disciple, Yan Hui, was offered sacrifices as an associate deity. When the Turkish Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei (r. 477–499) moved his capital from the steppe to Luoyang, he ordered that the *Classic of Filial Piety* be translated into his native tongue so that it could be taught to his people—his successors often presented lectures on it. Within the northern dynasties, funerary couches, grave goods, and sarcophagi were often adorned with Confucian moral stories. Confucian values even began to be encased in the law. Members of the upper class now performed their ancestral sacrifices according to the *Ru* regulations (they sacrificed to them four times a year, plus at the New Year); moreover, they increasingly excluded shamans from the proceedings.

It was also during this period that Confucianism was plainly viewed as a distinct religious tradition in competition with others, especially Daoism and Buddhism; at the same time, other thinkers were attempting to reconcile these religions. It was during the Period of North–South Division that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were first described as the "three teachings" (*sanjiao*); and, in an effort to determine which was superior, *Ru* representatives were called to court to debate with Daoists and Buddhists. Nevertheless, many people sought to reconcile the three teachings. The earliest attempts were made by advocates of the Mysterious Learning (*Xuanxue*), also known as "Neo-Daoism." These philosophers, such as He Yan, Wang Bi, and Guo Xiang, combined Daoist metaphysics with Confucian ethics. What that meant was that they would look at abstract matters through the lens of Daoist

philosophy and concrete ones through Confucian conceptual frames. In other words, one could internally embody the ideals of Daoism but externally behave as a Confucian. Thus, these philosophers viewed Confucius as a greater sage than Laozi because, unlike the latter, he embodied non-being or emptiness (the *dao*) by not speaking about it. A number of men in government thereby considered themselves to be "recluses at court" (*chaoyin*): even though they were officials, they were mentally detached from the desires of the mundane world. Writers such as Ge Hong (284–363) and Yan Zhitui (531–591) could thereby deem Buddhism or Daoism to be the superior inner teachings and Confucianism to be the inferior, but still necessary, outer teachings. This synthesis in practice can be seen in Zhang Rong's (444–497) death testament, in which he asks to have the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Laozi* in his left hand and the *Lotus Sūtra* in his right hand when he is buried.

One of the means by which the basic ideas of Confucianism were popularized was through the dissemination of filial piety stories, which were both striking and memorable. In this era, stories about filial heroes became widely known and loved, to the extent that even emperors collected and published their biographies. These narratives stressed a theistic understanding of religious life. When a man or a woman practiced impeccable filiality, he/she stimulated (*gan*) the heavenly spirits who would respond (*ying*) by producing a miraculous reward. For example, a filial hero named Dong Yong provided his elderly father with unstinting care. After his father's death, he sold himself into servitude to pay for the funerary expenses. On his way to his master's house, he met a woman who wanted to become his wife. In ten days time, she miraculously wove enough cloth to redeem his freedom. He only then learned that she was the Weaving Maiden of Heaven, who had been sent down to reward Dong Yong for his exemplary filiality. Tales like these emphasized that the spirit world was keeping track of people's ethical conduct; if one was a good son or daughter, one could expect to reap supernatural rewards.

Confucianism in the Tang

During the prosperous Tang Dynasty, Confucianism became well entrenched as the state's ideological framework. With the dynasty's emphasis on literary excellence, Confucian scholars, with their vast erudition, became indispensible to the workings of government; they were soon in control of the state's educational system, sacrifices, and historical records and often served as key advisors to the throne. Their reach became even greater with the establishment of six colleges in the capital and state schools in every prefecture and district. The civil service examinations, which the schools were supposed to prepare students to pass, now became the most prestigious means into office: to pass these tests one had to have an extensive knowledge of the Confucian classics and their commentaries. It is indicative of the importance of *Ru* teachings that Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–755) even wrote a commentary on the *Classic of Filiality*.

During the Tang, the state cult to Confucius became more important and institutionalized than ever before. Merely a year after the dynasty was established, Emperor Gaozu (r. 618–626) established a temple in the capital to both the Duke of Zhou and Confucius, with the former being the more important personage. In 623, Gaozu personally sacrificed to both. His famous successor, Emperor Taizong (r. 627–649), heeding the advice of his Confucian ministers, removed the image of the Duke of Zhou from the temple and made Confucius the main deity, with his disciple Yan Hui as an associated deity. Emperor Taizong also ordered each state school to set up a shrine to Confucius. He thereby ensured that throughout the empire Confucius would become the patron deity of learning and government. In 647, he further ordered that twenty-two famous interpreters of the Confucian canon should also be worshipped within the temple. In 739, Emperor Xuanzong honored Confucius with the title of "king." Given that both Confucius and Yan Hui were represented by images, John Shryock makes the keen observation that the Confucian shrine would not have looked much different in appearance from Buddhist temples, by which its design was probably inspired. An important difference is that this was a cult in which only members of the educated elite could participate. Confucius and other Confucian worthies would be worshipped in the form of images until 1530, when they were replaced with wooden spirit tablets that had their names inscribed on them.

At the local level, Confucianism was increasingly being adapted to popular tastes. A number of the popular texts recovered in the cave caches of Dunhuang are dedicated to filial sons and outstanding women; for example, the *Dong Yong Transformation Text* (*Dong Yong bianwen*). Popular encyclopedias, such as *A Collection of Carved Jade* (*Diaoyu ji*), presented readers with basic Confucian knowledge. The mid to late Tang witnessed the emergence of the popular Confucian works that later came to be known as *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Ershisi xiao*). These works betray a certain amount of Buddhist influence, from the vocabulary they employ to the fact that some of their exemplars are Buddhist figures. They also include many tales about filial women. Obviously, the Confucian message was being conveyed to a larger, more female, and less educated audience. Buddhism even affected how Confucianism was practiced. Inspired by the Buddhist Jâtaka tales in which Buddha in his previous births gives away his body for the benefit of others, Chinese began practicing filial cannibalism; that is, if one's parent had an incurable malady, a filial child would slice flesh from his/her body, cook it in broth, and have his/her parent eat it. While some Tang literati disparaged this custom, others defended it as a new form of filiality. A Tang woman who supposedly cut off her flesh to cure her mother-in-law became one of the "twenty-four filial exemplars" (this practice is discussed at length in Chapter 21, SELF-INFLICTED VIOLENCE).

Nevertheless, after the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) shook the foundations of the dynasty and considerably weakened the strength of the central government, a number of intellectuals began to articulate a new vision of Confucianism. The most important of these thinkers were influential writers and officials, such as Han Yu (768–824), Li Ao (c. 733–836), and Liu Zongyuan (773–819). In an effort to

correct the ills of his time, they not only attacked Daoism and Buddhism but also the then-prevalent understanding of Confucianism. Han Yu's most famous criticism of Buddhism occurred in 819, when he publically criticized the emperor for participating in a ceremony honoring a Buddhist relic; exile in the south was the price he paid for this bold remonstration.

In regard to Confucianism, Han Yu and the others believed that students should learn what they termed "the Way of the Sages" (*shengren zhi dao*). This should be done not through reading commentaries on the classics but through reading the classics themselves. Most particularly, one should look to the *Mencius* for guidance, especially its discussions on the heart-mind (*xin*) and human nature (*xing*). The way to transform society was not through providing sagely advice to the emperor but by transforming one's moral self first. In other words, these writers viewed moral transformation of the self as fundamental; ordering society was secondary. Nevertheless, a true sage was a man of action who perfected himself and then perfected society—he neither lived in isolation nor was he merely concerned with his own spiritual welfare. Many of the ideas laid the basis for later Neo-Confucian thought. Interestingly, many of these ideas were inspired by Buddhism. For example, "sincerity" (*cheng*) is the principal characteristic of a sage; according to Li Ao, a man who is *cheng* becomes united with Heaven and Earth; in other words, he attains a form of enlightenment in which he embraces the all-encompassing oneness. Han Yu and Li Ao's sage is also very much like a Buddhist enlightened being (a bodhisattva) who perfects him/herself so that he/she can save others.

The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Yuan

During the Song Dynasty (960–1279), Confucianism went unchallenged as the ideology of both the state and the elite; the political influence of both Buddhism and Daoism waned. Monarchs took a back seat to groups of Confucian bureaucrats who dueled over the control of the government. More officials than ever before or since were selected through the civil service examinations, which tested candidates on their knowledge of the Confucian classics. Yet, since Confucianism was so prevalent, many thinkers became disenchanted with how it was defined and practiced. Building on the foundation laid by their mid-Tang predecessors, these men reinvented the *Ru* teachings, thereby creating a new form of Confucianism that would hold sway over East Asia for nearly eight hundred years.

The founders of the Song, Zhao Kuangyin (r. 960–976) and his younger brother, Zhao Jiong (r. 976–997), generals themselves, realized that the political chaos of the Five Dynasties period (907–960) was the result of power being concentrated in the hands of the military. To remedy this situation and stabilize their regime, both men emphasized the importance of civilian rule and learning—they placed special emphasis on rewarding examination success with government office. These changes allowed *Ru* scholars to dominate the government. Indeed, during the Northern Song

(960–1127), two Confucian scholars vied to remold the country. Based on his interpretation of the classics, Wang Anshi (1021–1086) believed that a perfect social and political order could be achieved by the government unifying society through educational and social reforms that realized the intentions of the sages. When he came into power in 1068, he instituted a number of reforms known as the "New Policies" that were designed to strengthen the government's control of society, create wealth, and lessen social inequality. These reforms included providing loans to poor farmers, increasing the money supply through the use of paper bills, organizing the population into mutual surveillance groups that provided men for the militia and collected taxes, making the civil service examinations test a student's understanding of the classics rather than his literary ability, and establishing an integrated school system in which government schools at the county and prefecture level would feed the best students into the capital's imperial university. The graduates of this college who were thoroughly versed in the Confucian classics would be given government posts. Wang's policies nearly doubled the number of officials in the government. Opposed to him was the great scholar and historian Sima Guang (1019–1086), who believed that the classics taught that less is more. For Sima Guang, the good order of antiquity was not to be generated through massive government action but rather through making sure that the government selected worthy and capable men as officials to fulfill their roles and to be subservient to their superiors. If one selects men who know right from wrong and who recognize the importance and naturalness of hierarchy, then everything will correctly fall into place. When Sima Guang was in power (from 1085 to 1093), he quickly dismantled most of Wang's reforms. Despite this setback, Wang Anshi's partisans set the tone for government until 1155. What is important to note here is that these men shaped government policy on the basis of their commitment to and understanding of the Confucian classics.

The formulators of what we commonly call Neo-Confucianism were Song men who were opposed to the New Policies. They looked to the self rather than the government for answers. Two brothers, Cheng Hao (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107), were the true founders of this school of thought. However, the man who systematized and most effectively propagated Neo-Confucian teachings was Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Because the advocates of this new learning criticized many aspects of the New Policies, the court often proscribed Neo-Confucianism as a "false teaching." It was not until well into the thirteenth century that the government finally recognized the Neo-Confucian masters' contributions. Neo-Confucianism's ultimate vindication came in 1315, during the Yuan Dynasty (1235–1367), when the Mongol court ruled that Zhu Xi's writings would become the basis of the imperial civil service examinations. From that point until the end of the civil service examinations in 1905, all men taking the tests had to be thoroughly versed in the teachings of Neo-Confucianism.

This movement had a number of names, which included *Daoxue* ("Learning of the *Dao*"), *Lixue* ("Learning of the Principles"), and *Shengxue* ("Learning of the Sages"). Western scholars, though, have simply called it "Neo-Confucianism"

because it was a significant reformulation of traditional Confucianism. What, though, made Neo-Confucianism so different from its predecessor? Early Confucians showed little interest in man's relationship to the natural world and the cosmos. Neo-Confucians, on the contrary, viewed metaphysical knowledge as essential to self-cultivation and even social harmony. Neo-Confucians believed that all things within the cosmos were made of *qi*: "energy," "ether," or "psychophysical stuff." Lighter *qi* becomes the heavens and spirits; heavier *qi* congeals and becomes the earth and the ten thousand things. The *qi* of each thing varies, which makes it have unique traits.

The form that *qi* takes is based on its inherent *li* ("pattern," "principle," or "coherence"), which cannot be perceived through the senses. Everything has a *li*—it is innate in things and creatures; moreover, each *li* is a reflection of the organic oneness, otherwise known as the *Dao*, from which all things issue forth and return. In other words, *qi* is physical and particular, whereas *li* is spiritual and universal. As a result of its origin in Heaven and Earth, *li* indicates how things should be. Through his/her innate nature, each person has a *li* that connects him/her with everything else in the world. Through his/her *xin* ("heart-mind"), each person can see the *li* within him/herself and in all things. However, one's *qi*'s physicality gives rise to desires that cloud or obscure one's view of the *li*. The most important task at hand then is self-cultivation. Through learning one discovers the innate pattern within that connects one to the whole world and cosmos. The person who can perceive the coherence of his mind and the unity of all things is a sage. One of the means to discovering the *li* in oneself and things is through "quiet-sitting"—that is, meditation.

All of this sounds very similar to the religious process and goals of a Buddhist: a practitioner endeavors to eliminate desire so that he/she can realize his/her pre-existing unity with the immanent oneness that pervades everything. The difference was that, whereas a Buddhist views this world as illusory and ideally withdraws from it, the Neo-Confucian sage uses his newly gained insight to morally transform this world that truly does exist. That is, the Neo-Confucians maintained the optimistic view that, when one can perceive the inherent patterns within oneself and thereby perfectly fulfill one's social roles as a son, friend, and official, then one can transform one's family, community, and even country. In other words, hope for changing the world for the better does not depend on winning the favor of a ruler; rather, it depends on finding the universal pattern that resides within ourselves and manifesting it to others. By doing so, one restores the world to the pristine state that it enjoyed during the time of the early sage-kings.

The places where one learned how to train one's mind to see the *li* inherent within oneself were private academies, which were established in large numbers especially during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). These academies were not meant to prepare students for examination success; instead, much like a monastery, they were meant to teach self-cultivation. This was an education designed to produce sages, not government officials. Education at the academies concentrated on improv-

ing the student's moral conduct through daily rituals that emphasized deference and a curriculum that focused on personal moral cultivation. The works studied were a new configuration of the classics called the "four books." They consisted of the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. These last two works were two chapters taken from the *Classic of Rites*. The main focus of students' studies would no longer be the hoary classics of early antiquity but the philosophical works that highlighted self-cultivation. Academies often included shrines to Confucian worthies; that is, the patriarchs of the Neo-Confucian movement. Records from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1643) show that zealous Neo-Confucian officials sometimes confiscated Daoist and Buddhist monasteries and converted them into private academies: images of Confucian worthies replaced those of Daoist and Buddhist deities. Soon the Neo-Confucian ideology and curriculum of the private academies were influencing those of state schools. Neo-Confucians also organized "community compacts" (*xiangyue*), which were voluntary organizations in which the participants devised and subscribed to a set of moral rules to improve their behavior. During their monthly meetings, they recounted their deeds, which were judged for their merit or demerit and recorded. Members were also obligated to help each other. In many ways these organizations shared many similarities with lay Buddhist associations.

Wang Yangming and Popular Confucianism in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

By the Ming Dynasty (1368–1643), Zhu Xi's formulation of Neo-Confucianism had already become entrenched as the state's orthodox ideology and the imperial civil service examinations had ossified into the rigid "eight-legged essays." At the same time, as a result of the increasingly commercial and affluent economy of the mid to late Ming Dynasty, merchants were rapidly gaining in social and economic importance. Wang Yangming (1471–1529), who was born into this milieu, struggled in this world: for a week he unsuccessfully tried to understand the *li* of a clump of bamboo; he twice failed the highest civil service examination (*jinshi* "presented scholar"); he even spent two years in the Yangming mountain valley trying to gain Daoist immortality.

Yet, during his time in the valley, he realized that he could not abandon his father and grandmother—filial piety was part of his essential nature. In 1508, while in exile in the deep south for criticizing a powerful eunuch, Wang Yangming came to the realization that to find *li* one had to look no farther than one's own heart-mind. One did not discover *li* in external things but in one's self—indeed, one's heart-mind was *li*. This is why Wang Yangming's teachings are often known as *Xinxue* ("Learning of the Heart-mind"). Since one's heart-mind is *li*, morally good actions issue forth from our own nature—we all have an innate understanding of what is good and bad conduct, which Wang Yangming labeled "innate good knowledge" (*liangzhi*). A sage was someone who was aware of his innate good nature through his heart-mind and

acted spontaneously according to it. For Wang Yangming, "innate good knowledge" automatically generated benign actions. Only when people become greedy or selfish does a gap between their innate knowledge of goodness and action develop. For Wang, since all things share this innate good nature, man has responsibility to cherish all things as he does his body. He stated that

> The mind of the sage regards heaven-and-earth and the myriad things as one body. He looks upon all the people of the world, whether inside or outside his family, or whether far or near, but all with blood and breath, as his brothers and children. He wants to secure, preserve, educate, and nourish all of them, so as to fulfill his desire to form one body with all things. (Bol 2008)

Because of one's shared identity with all things, the sage works tirelessly to benefit everyone. In this vein, Wang himself held a number of offices; at the end of his life, he even suppressed the rebellion of a prince.

What truly was important about his teachings was that, to understand *li*, one no longer had to engage in extensive study; one merely had to meditate on one's own mind. This made sagehood available to everyone. One of the most important aspects of Wang Yangming's teachings is that they were the means by which Neo-Confucianism was spread to commoners. However, in so doing, Wang Yangming's disciples radically reformulated Neo-Confucianism and blurred its boundaries with Daoism and Buddhism. Wang Yangming's disciple Wang Ji (1498–1583) maintained that the heart-mind was beyond good and evil; thus, if a person follows the dictates of his heart-mind, he can never do wrong. Further, the three religions (*sanjiao*) were only important insofar as they led to the discovery of one's "innate good knowledge" of right and wrong. To demonstrate his commitment to the way of the sages, the self-educated salt merchant Wang Gen (c. 1483–1540), after studying the *Book of Rites*, armed himself with a ceremonial tablet and made for himself "sage" clothing: a special hat and long cotton robe. His way was open to anyone who had a sincere desire to learn, no matter whether they were male or female, young or old, rich or poor. The way of the sages was no different from the daily practices of commoners; consequently, the most important act was to love oneself and preserve one's body. One who did this would also love and protect others. True to his word, in his hometown, he started an institution known as the Taizhou School, which welcomed students without regard to their status.

Wang Gen's Taizhou School, which emphasized that anyone could become a sage, produced a number of radical thinkers who attacked the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Many of these thinkers promoted their ideas through public lecturers given at private academies. Their views were seen as so un-Confucian that their enemies labeled them "wild Chan Buddhists." One important proponent of this school, He Xinyin (1517–1579), thought that kinship should be extended to all things that have "blood and breath." Making everyone and everything part of the same family was the means to social and political peace; moreover, the most important of the "five

relationships" was the only egalitarian one—that between friends. He also believed that one's desires were part of human nature—suppressing them was unnatural; instead, one merely had to choose between them. As a result of He Xinyin's participation in a plot to overthrew a corrupt chief minister, his life ended in a prison cell. The most extreme proponent of the Taizhou School was Li Zhi (1527–1602), who came from a Muslim merchant family. He long served as an official, but later in his life he lived in a monastery, cut off his hair, and declared himself a "monk," even though he neither followed monastic discipline nor was licensed to be a monk. He maintained that desires were natural and spontaneously following one's desires and expressing one's self were the only means to manifest the way. He viewed the three religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism) as the same in that they all aim at transcending a world that is obsessed with rank and wealth. He considered the husband-and-wife relationship to be the most important; he even thought women were equal to men. He so well knew his ideas were threatening to the established order that he entitled his works *Book to be Burned* and the *Book to be Hidden*. As a result of his heterodox ideas, Li too died in prison, but at his own hand.

The Taizhou School promotion of the idea that every person can become a sage by understanding his/her own universal morally good nature inspired the spread of Confucianism into other cultural forms. A student of Wang Ji, Yuan Huang (1533–1606), because of a Daoist prophecy thought he was fated to never pass the highest exam, have a child, or live to see the age of fifty-four. On the advice of his master, a Buddhist monk, he began using books called "ledgers of merit and demerit" (*gongguo ge*) that set out good and bad deeds and assigned them numerical value. He accumulated good deeds. Soon he passed the "presented scholar" examination, his wife gave birth to a son, and he lived well past fifty-three. He then propagated the ledgers, maintaining that the accumulation of good deeds allowed people to control their own fates; moreover, by doing good deeds, the spirit world would reward them in this life. The moral injunctions propagated in his "morality books" (*shanshu*), which originally stemmed from the Daoist and Buddhist traditions, were overwhelmingly Confucian in nature; moreover, they were aimed particularly at scholars, but they could also be used by anyone who aspired for official status. In the commercially vibrant area of Huizhou, ambitious commoners (i.e., gentrifying merchants) transformed their most popular form of entertainment—operas—to advocate a popular form of Confucianism, one in which gods and ghosts watch over people's behavior and enforce Confucian norms. Huizhou's businessmen did this because they wanted to enhance their social standing by embracing the upper-class ideology of Confucianism.

Conclusion

Upon their arrival in China at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jesuits at first clothed themselves in Buddhist cassocks thinking that this would purchase them

respectability as religious men. They quickly learned that wearing the scholarly robes of the *Ru* and mastering the four books and the five classics gained them far more respect. They realized that China's most prestigious and preeminent religion was Confucianism. By the time of the full onslaught of Western imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though, Confucianism had lost its intellectual vigor and could no longer furnish satisfying solutions.

Confucianism owed its long predominance in China to two factors. First, it was uniquely successful as the state's religion and ideology. Its proponents were able to practice it because they convinced rulers that the *Ru*'s emphasis on respecting hierarchy added to the rulers' majesty and showing concern for the people's welfare generated social and political stability. By being mother and father to the people, rulers were able to enhance their authority and convince people that they had their best interests at heart. After all, a Confucian ruler (supposedly) puts the interests of others before his own. Second, one of Confucianism's greatest strengths was it adaptability. Its proponents continually incorporated the beliefs and practices of their opponents. *Yin-yang* and Five Phase cosmology, a spirit world dispensing reward and punishment, sacred images, meditation, lay associations, morality books—all these things were originally alien to Confucianism. Yet, *Ru* were able to incorporate these features into a Confucian framework and use them to their advantage. By this means, the advocates of Confucianism constantly updated and strengthened the tradition. At the same time, though, Confucianism still pulled on the heartstrings of Chinese society by emphasizing the importance of one's ancestors, the family, and being good to one another.

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CHAPTER 8

The Daoist Tradition in China

Louis Komjathy, University of San Diego

This chapter presents Daoism (spelled Taoism in the older Wade-Giles romanization system) as a multifaceted religious tradition. How does one understand the tradition in all of its aspects? Considered from an integrated and more comprehensive perspective, what are its defining characteristics? In this chapter, I first present some philosophical reflection on perplexities that surround Daoism as well as alternative interpretative models. The latter center on historical periodization and models of Daoist practice and attainment. This is followed by a historical overview based on a simple four-part division: classical Daoism, early organized Daoism, later organized Daoism, and modern Daoism. Finally, I offer a general discussion of "Daoist religious culture," which includes major doctrines and values, personages and teachers, communities and movements, sacred sites, scriptures, and gods. Taken as a whole, Daoist religiosity has been expressed through various forms of material culture, including architecture, calligraphy, clothing, epigraphy, painting, poetry, scriptures, and statuary. The consideration of these dimensions of Daoist religious culture enables us to better understand Daoism as a lived and living religious tradition.

Briefly stated, Daoism is an indigenous Chinese religious tradition in which reverence for the *Dao*, translatable as "the Way," is a matter of ultimate concern. In the contemporary world, Daoism has, of course, become a global religious movement characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity, with tradition-based priests and communities spread across the globe. However, this chapter is not about "trans-Chinese" forms of Daoism, nor is it about popular Western constructions of "Daoism." Rather, we aim to understand the historical contours and defining characteristics of the Chinese religious tradition, including key personages, movements, sacred sites,

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religious models, and so forth. While one may find the above definition too vague, imprecise, and simplistic, throughout Chinese history Daoists have, in fact, consistently focused on the *Dao* as sacred. This is expressed in indigenous Chinese designations, including *daojia* (family of the *Dao*), *daojiao* (teachings of the *Dao*), *daoshi* (adept of the *Dao*), and *xuanfeng* (Mysterious Movement).

From a Daoist perspective, as expressed in classical Daoist cosmology and theology, the *Dao* has four primary characteristics or aspects: (1) source of all that exists; (2) unnamable mystery; (3) all-pervading numinosity (sacred presence); and (4) cosmological process identified with the universe as a whole. The *Dao* is impersonal and simultaneously immanent and transcendent. So, we may say that the foundational Daoist theology is monistic (one, impersonal reality), panentheistic (in and beyond the world), and panenhenic (manifest as nature). The secondary Daoist theology is polytheistic, but Daoists see no necessary distinction or contradiction between these views. Why? Because classical Daoist theology emphasizes emanation:

> The *Dao* generated the One;
> The One generated the two;
> The two generated the three;
> The three generated the myriad beings.
> The myriad beings carry *yin* and embrace *yang*.
> It is the empty *qi* that harmonizes these. (*Daode jing*, ch. 42)

The *Dao* in its own suchness (*ziran*) is an unrepresentable force, a primordial non-differentiation. Through a spontaneous, impersonal process, the *Dao* became manifest in and as differentiation. Generally speaking, Daoists understand this process of differentiation to have unfolded in stages, with each later stage characterized by increasing degrees of differentiation. However, what must be emphasized is that the *Dao*'s numinous presence is immanent in all things. For members of organized Daoism, this includes multiple gods in multiple sacred realms. Here I would also add that there is clear evidence of both a received pantheon and a polytheistic context for the texts of the Warring States period (480–222 BCE). There is simply *no evidence* that any form of the earliest Daoism was non-religious, corresponding to something like modern secular humanism or spiritual intellectualism.

Classical Daoism

Traditional Western scholarship on Daoism portrayed early Daoism as a "philosophy" rather than a religion. But more recent scholarship has shown that, if a Daoist community existed before the second century CE, it was "religious," not "philosophical." That is, classical Daoism was not principally concerned with "ideas" or "thought." A nuanced reading of the earliest Daoist texts reveals a religious

community—composed of master–disciple lineages orienting themselves toward the *Dao*—that expressed a sophisticated soteriology and theology. At present, the received textual corpus of classical Daoism includes the *Laozi* (*Book of Venerable Masters*), also known as the *Daode jing* (*Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*), and the *Zhuangzi* (*Book of Master Zhuang*), also known as the *Nanhua zhenjing* (*Perfect Scripture of Master Nanhua*). To this list, some scholars would add sections from the *Guanzi* (*Book of Master Guan*), *Huainanzi* (*Book of the Huainan Masters*), *Lüshi chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*), and other ancient Chinese texts previously presented under different categories. In the present section, I will focus primarily on the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*, as these are the most influential, well-known, and frequently utilized texts in discussing classical Daoism.

The traditional view of these texts is as follows: the *Daode jing* was composed by Laozi (Master Lao), also identified as Li Er or Lao Dan, and the so-called "inner chapters" (chapters 1–7) of the *Zhuangzi* were written by Zhuang Zhou. This account and perspective is no longer tenable. Based on extant historical sources are concerned, Laozi was pseudo-historical, perhaps even mythological. The late A. C. Graham has demonstrated conclusively that the traditional "biography" of Laozi, as appearing in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*), contains multiple layers from distinct historical sources and represents a conflation of various legends. More importantly, the *Daode jing* was not written by a single person named Laozi; rather, as will be discussed below, it is a multivocal anthology. By contrast, scholars generally agree that Zhuang Zhou existed, living from c. 370 to c. 290 BCE, and that the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* do, in fact, contain his teachings. Assuming that the attribution is true, one is nonetheless faced with the difficult work of understanding the remaining twenty-six chapters of the received text.

While for centuries the *Daode jing* was seen to be a single work by a single author, scholars now believe it to be an anthology with a variety of textual and historical layers that had no single author. Recent archeological finds, specifically the manuscripts unearthed at Mawangdui (Hunan) and Guodian (Hubei), support this view. The two Mawangdui manuscripts, discovered in 1973 and datable to at least 168 BCE, contain a text similar to the received version, except that they begin with the *dejing* section (chapters 38–81) and end with the *daojing* (chapters 1–37). The Guodian bamboo strips, discovered in 1993 and datable to at least 300 BCE, represent the oldest extant version of the *Laozi*. The arrangement of the passages differs significantly from the received versions, and there are numerous variant and archaic characters. At least as late as the end of the fourth century BCE, then, the organization and content of the received text was in flux. We may tentatively identify at least five phases in the historical compilation of the received *Daode jing*: (1) oral traditions, including mnemonic aphorisms; (2) collections of sayings; (3) early anthologies; (4) codified, classified, and edited anthologies; and (5) fully integrated and standardized editions. The title *Laozi* might then be translated as *Book of Venerable Masters*, rather than *Book of Master Lao*, in keeping with the view that the text is an anthology, a collection of teachings from various teachers and communities living between the

fifth century BCE and the second century BCE Following parallel research on the *Zhuangzi*, specialists are now attempting to identify the specific lineages or "schools" documented in the received *Daode jing*.

Similarly, the received thirty-three-chapter *Zhuangzi*, which was compiled by Guo Xiang (d. 312 CE) from an earlier, lost fifty-two-chapter version, is an anthology containing a variety of distinct historical and textual layers. Traditionally speaking, the text is most often divided into three sections: (1) inner chapters (1–7), (2) outer chapters (8–22), and (3) miscellaneous chapters (23–33). The inner chapters are associated with the actual teachings of Zhuang Zhou. The remainder of the text may be divided as follows:

1. *Primitivists* (chapters 8–10; parts of 11, 12, and 14): influenced by the "old masters"; active around the end of the Qin Dynasty or in the early Han.
2. *Hedonists* (chapters 28–31): associated with Yang Zhu (c. 370–c. 319 BCE); active around 200 BCE.
3. *Syncretists* (chapters 12–16, 33): eclectic thinkers who may have been responsible for compiling the text, sometime between 180 and 130 BCE.
4. *Zhuangzians* (chapters 17–22): strove to imitate the style and themes of the inner chapters.
5. *Anthologists* (chapters 23–27, 32): collected fragmentary materials, including some that may derive from Zhuang Zhou himself and that could therefore also be placed in the inner chapters (Mair 1998).

In other words, both the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi* are polyvalent texts, only certain portions of which are of Warring States provenance. Moreover, we can construct a tentative historical outline of classical Daoism, with the "*Neiye*" ("Inward Training") chapter of the *Guanzi*, the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, and sections of the *Laozi* being the earliest, datable to around the middle of the fourth century BCE.

From these various historical details, we can say that there are no "original teachings of Daoism" and there is no unified classical Daoist perspective. What we have instead are fragments from the Warring States period, some of which are contained in layers of the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and other lesser-known texts. From these fragments, one can reconstruct a "foundational Daoist worldview" that informed many later Daoist movements. This foundational Daoist worldview centered on the *Dao* as a sacred, ultimate concern, with a monistic, panentheistic, and panenhenic theology. The primary religious practice was quietistic or apophatic meditation aimed at mystical union with the *Dao*. This practice utilized a psychosomatic understanding of the "heart-mind" (*xin*) that would become the foundational psychology of many later Daoist systems. The corresponding experience had an introvertive and extrovertive dimension—namely, inner silence and outer freedom. There were also a variety of tangible benefits, personally, interpersonally, and cosmically. Later Daoists drew from the classical texts to find models of practice and attainment, including emptiness-based meditation aimed at mystical union with the *Dao*. Much of the

technical terminology of the fully developed tradition also originates in the classical texts: centrally important and influential terms include *wuwei* ("nonaction"), *ziran* ("suchness" or "naturalness"), *pu* or *su* ("simplicity"), *xiaoyao* ("being carefree"), *kong* or *xu* ("emptiness"), and so forth.

The *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* became seminal in the formation of a fully organized religious tradition, so much so that they were eventually canonized as the *Daode jing* (*Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*) and *Nanhua zhenjing* (*Perfect Scripture on Master Nanhua*), respectively. The former occurred during the Latter Han Dynasty, with the *Daode jing* becoming part of the imperial examination system during the Tang, while the latter occurred during the Tang Dynasty. There are various categories of Daoist texts, with *jing* ("classic" or "scripture") being the highest. The *jing* classification indicates profound importance and deep veneration; it often also designates revelation and/or divine inspiration. Among later Daoists and Daoist communities, the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi* (*Nanhua zhenjing*) are considered sacred, religious texts.

Early Organized Daoism

Taoism emerged as a fully formed, institutional movement in the early medieval period (second to fourth centuries CE). While one might point toward various dimensions of early Han Dynasty religion—such as earlier medical and hygiene practitioners as well as Han-Dynasty "formula masters" (*fangshi*) and seekers of immortality—the next major development in the Daoist religious tradition occurred during the Latter Han Dynasty and Period of North–South Division. At this time, Daoists developed enduring social and institutional structures as well as more systematized religious models. This was the period of the *Tianshi* (Celestial Masters), *Taiqing* (Great Clarity), *Shangqing* (Highest Clarity), and *Lingbao* (Numinous Treasure) movements.

Tianshi *(Celestial Masters)*

Of the new religious movements that emerged during the Latter Han Dynasty, the Celestial Masters proved most significant for the formation of a viable Daoist religious tradition and institution. According to traditional accounts, in 142 CE, Zhang Daoling received a revelation from *Laojun* (Lord Lao), the "deified" form of Laozi and personification of the *Dao*, on Mount Heming (Crane Cry). This occurred in the land of Shu, present-day western Sichuan. The Celestial Masters are sometimes referred to as *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity), because of a description of the movement's founding revelation as the "covenant of orthodox unity" (*zhengyi mengwei*); the movement is also known as the *Wudoumi dao* (Way of Five Pecks of Rice) because of its supposed requirement of an annual donation of "five pecks of rice" for religious membership. During Lord Lao's revelation, Zhang Daoling was appointed as terrestrial representative, the "Celestial Master," and given healing powers as a sign of his empowerment.

The movement in turn became patrilineal, passing from Zhang Daoling to his son Zhang Heng and then to his grandson Zhang Lu. The Celestial Masters established "parishes" with hierarchically ranked followers, wherein the so-called "libationers" were highest. The intent was to establish "seed people" that would populate an earth made ritually and morally pure. If a moral transgression occurred, a purification rite was performed. This consisted of an officiating priest utilizing his "registers," which gave him/her power over specific spirits, and submitting "petitions" to the so-called "three bureaus" of heaven, earth, and water. This was done through burning, burial, and submersion. In addition, the transgressors were secluded in "pure rooms" or "chambers of quiescence," where they were supposed to reflect upon their actions and repent. Little original source material survives from this formative phase of the Celestial Masters. We do have the *Thinking Through* (*Xiang'er*) commentary on the *Laozi*, perhaps composed by Zhang Lu, and its related precepts as found, for instance, in the first section of the *Scriptural Statutes of the Great High Lord Lao* (*Taishang laojun jinglü*). However, as there is some doubt concerning the date of the *Xiang'er* and as so little early Celestial Masters material survives, claims concerning this tradition must remain tentative. Based on current research and utilizing the above-mentioned models of Daoist practice and attainment, the Celestial Masters may be understood principally as a communal, cosmological, ethical, ritualistic, and utopian movement.

Taiqing *(Great Clarity)*

A wide variety of Daoist sub-traditions also developed during the so-called Period of North–South Division (221–581 CE). First, we know of a southern tradition with its roots in the Han Dynasty *fangshi* and immortality seeker movements. This is *Taiqing* (Great Clarity), a tradition of laboratory or operational alchemy. Great Clarity is known to us principally because of the efforts of its most well-known member, Ge Hong (287–347 CE). Ge Hong came from an aristocratic family based near Jiankang (present-day Nanjing) in southern China. His grand-uncle Ge Xuan was a renowned *fangshi*, whose presence would play a major role in the later *Lingbao* (Numinous Treasure) tradition. Ge Hong wrote two seminal works: the *Book of Master Embracing Simplicity* (*Baopuzi*) and the *Biographies of Spirit Immortals* (*Shenxian zhuan*). The latter is a collection of over one hundred hagiographies (biographies of saints), while the former is a wide-ranging collection of fourth century religious traditions and related methods, and provides information on the production of elixirs through laboratory alchemy. This practice of laboratory alchemy, primarily for the purpose of attaining long life or immortality, is abbreviated in the early Chinese sources as *waidan* ("external elixir"). Great Clarity emphasized levels of attainment and involved the concoction of a mineral elixir, which consisted of highly toxic elements such as realgar, mercury, cinnabar, and so on. The early tradition of laboratory alchemy, including the famous *Token for the Kinship of the Three According to the*

Zhouyi (*Zhouyi cantong qi*), continued to play a significant role even into the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). So, the Great Clarity Daoist tradition emphasized an alchemical, cosmological, dietetical, literary, solitary, and therapeutic model of Daoist practice and attainment.

Slightly later, with the forced migration of the Celestial Masters, many of its leaders began a gradual movement south. This eventually led to a division into what are commonly referred to as the "Northern Celestial Masters" and the "Southern Celestial Masters." The establishment of the Northern Celestial Masters centers on Kou Qianzhi (365–448 CE), who was trained in a Celestial Masters family and received a direct revelation from Lord Lao when he was fifty years of age. According to this revelation, Kou was empowered to replace the Zhang lineage as Celestial Master and to reform many of the tradition's earlier practices. He was eventually recognized by the rulers of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534), and in the year 440 the emperor received Daoist initiation and changed his reign title to *Taiping zhenjun* (Perfected Lord of Great Peace). His reign is often described as a "Daoist theocracy," as it marked the first time that Daoism became state orthodoxy. Kou also established guidelines for Daoist conduct known as the "new code" (*xinke*), which are still partially extant in the *Precept Scripture of Lord Lao for Recitation* (*Laojun yinsong jiejing*).

Shangqing *(Highest Clarity)*

Simultaneously, the members of the Celestial Masters who had migrated south began their interaction and competition with more firmly established southern traditions. As the Celestial Masters movement gained a foothold, new revelations and textual traditions emerged. The first was *Shangqing* (Highest Clarity). In the 360s, members of the aristocratic Xu family, Xu Mai, Xu Mi, and his son Xu Hui, hired the spirit medium Yang Xi to establish contact with Xu Mi's wife, Tao Kedou. Through a series of revelations from underworld rulers, divine officers, denizens of the "Grotto of Brilliant Yang" (*Huayang dong*), and former leaders of the Celestial Masters, Yang Xi described the organization and population of the subtle realms of the cosmos, particularly the heaven of *Shangqing*. Also deserving of note is the presence of a deceased female Celestial Master libationer, Wei Huacun (251–334), as a central figure in the early *Shangqing* revelations. These various celestial communications included specific methods for spirit travel and ecstatic excursions, visualizations, and alchemical concoctions. A wide variety of texts are important for understanding the religious worlds of Highest Clarity, two of the most important being the *Perfect Scripture of Great Profundity* (*Dadong zhenjing*) and the *Scripture on the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing*). The revelations were, in turn, written down by Yang Xi and the Xu brothers in a calligraphic style that seemed divine. After some generations, the texts were inherited by Xu Huangmin (361–429), who disseminated them throughout the region. Then, Tao Hongjing (456–536), a descendent of Tao Kedou and an

advanced *Shangqing* adept, came across an original manuscript and became inspired to collect them. Tao Hongjing had established a religious center on Maoshan (Mount Mao, near present-day Nanjing in Jiangsu Province), where he pursued alchemical and pharmacological studies. From there he traveled throughout southern China in search of the original *Shangqing* manuscripts. In the process, he developed a critical analysis of calligraphic styles for determining textual authenticity. His efforts resulted in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao*). Highest Clarity Daoism utilized a cosmological, ecstatic, eremitic, literary, meditative, mediumistic/shamanic, and mystical model of Daoist practice and attainment.

Lingbao *(Numinous Treasure)*

Partially in response to these *Shangqing* revelations, in combination with the more pervasive influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism (including its bodhisattva ideal and vision of universal salvation), the *Lingbao* (Numinous Treasure) tradition developed. "Numinous Treasure" refers to a central belief that precious talismans emanating from the heavens created and maintain the cosmos. *Lingbao* Daoism refers to the tradition established by Ge Chaofu (fl. 390s), a *Shangqing* adept and relative of Ge Hong. Ge Chaofu, who inherited the library of Ge Hong, claimed that the original *Lingbao* revelations went back to Ge Xuan and were thus older (and therefore more authoritative) than the *Shangqing* revelations. The *Lingbao* revelations described a cosmic ruler and magical manipulation of the cosmos. This cosmic ruler, who resembles Mahāvairocana of the Buddhist Tantric tradition, was named "Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning" (*Yuanshi tianzun*). Later, *Yuanshi tianzun* would become the center of a three-part pantheon known as the "Three Pure Ones" (*Sanqing*), also including Celestial Worthy of the *Dao* and Inner Power (*Daode tianzun*) and Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao tianzun*). The *Lingbao* revelations went on to describe various levels of celestial realms, celestial administrators, and a host of divine beings, in combination with Han Dynasty correlative cosmology, *fangshi* ideas and practices, and Celestial Master ritual. Perhaps most importantly for Daoist religious history and practice, the *Lingbao* systematization of ritual became the foundation for Daoist ritual as a whole. A representative work documenting the magical dimension of Numinous Treasure is the *Explanation of the Five Numinous Treasure Talismans* (*Lingbao wufu xu*). These "five talismans" were the foundation for harmony and control, whether personal, communal, sociopolitical, or cosmological. *Lingbao* Daoism also promoted grand soteriological aims—namely, the salvation of humanity as a whole. Members of the *Lingbao* tradition employed and advocated a cosmological, ethical, ritualistic, and syncretistic model of Daoist practice and attainment.

The *Lingbao* scriptures were codified by the Daoist ritualist and bibliographer Lu Xiujing (406–477) in the so-called "Lingbao *Catalogue*." It was also Lu Xiujing who

compiled the earliest known catalogue of Daoist texts, namely the *Catalogue of the Scriptures and Writings of the Three Caverns* (*Sandong jingshu mulu*). As the name suggests, the central organizing principle of the Daoist canon was a tripartite classification system known as the "three caverns," a system still used today. Dating from at least as early as the fifth century, this system originally referred to three distinct or revelatory traditions: (1) Cavern Perfection (*dongzhen*), corresponding to the *Shangqing* tradition; (2) Cavern Mystery (*dongxuan*), corresponding to the *Lingbao* tradition; and (3) Cavern Spirit (*dongshen*), corresponding to the *Sanhuang* (Three Sovereigns) tradition, which has yet to received detailed scholarly attention.

Monastic Daoism

The early medieval period also witnessed the development of monastic Daoism, again under the influence of Buddhism. At the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty, members of the Northern Celestial Masters congregated in a newly established center in the Zhongnan mountains (near present-day Xi'an). This was Louguan (Lookout Tower Monastery), which was founded by Yin Tong (fifth century CE) and which became the first Daoist monastery. Yin Tong claimed descent from Yin Xi, the "guardian of the pass," who legend tells us received the *Daode jing* from Laozi as the Old Masters left China for his western travels. Louguan eventually grew significantly and rose to prominence under the leadership of Wang Daoyi (447–510). A number of visions of Lord Lao appeared there, which also helped to solidify the temple's place of importance in the geopolitical landscape. Some representative works from Louguan include the *Scriptural Precepts of Lord Lao* (*Laojun jiejing*), the *Scripture on Western Ascension* (*Xisheng jing*), and the *Transmission of Scriptures and Precepts* (*Chuanshou jingjie*). Louguan Daoists also compiled encyclopedias, including the important *Esoteric Essentials of the Most High* (*Wushang biyao*).

Buddhist–Daoist Debates

Early Daoism gained renown as a result of a series of Buddhist–Daoist debates, sponsored by the emperor during the sixth century with the intention of determining which religious tradition was doctrinally superior and which was most applicable to sociopolitical concerns. One debate occurred in 520 under the Toba-Wei Dynasty (386–535) and the other in 570 under the Northern Zhou Dynasty (577–581). In terms of the motivations of the Buddhists and Daoists, these debates were clearly attempts to gain imperial patronage and acquire political authority. Imperial sponsorship entailed increases in financial viability and cultural capital. The debates centered on the so-called "conversion of the barbarians" (*huahu*) theory, and the related text of the *Scripture on the Conversion of the Barbarians* (*Huahu jing*), which is attributed to a certain Celestial Master libationer named Wang Fou (fl. 300). The

Daoist *huahu* theory held that after Laozi left China on his Western travels he eventually arrived in India where he became Śākyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha.

The first set of debates centered on the issue of dating. The Buddhists emerged victorious, making a convincing argument that the Buddha was in fact older than, and thus different from, Laozi. The second set of debates developed because of a proposal by a disenfranchised Buddhist monk named Wei Yuansong (fl. 570); Wei argued for a new Buddhist world order with the emperor as divine Buddhist ruler, the officials as the *sangha* (Buddhist community), and the people as the congregation. This entailed the dissolution of independent religious communities and the laicization of the clergy. Understandably, the Buddhists and Daoists scrambled to show the ways in which their present systems already supported and could be used to further uphold the state. Debates were held to determine whether or not to adopt Wei's proposal. The emperor in turn ordered reports evaluating the teachings, which resulted in the *Discourse on the Two Teachings* (*Erjiao lun*) and the *Discourse on Laughing at the Dao* (*Xiaodao lun*). The latter was written by the ex-Daoist Zhen Luan (fl. 570) and criticized various aspects of Daoist belief and practice. The critique of Daoism that occurred within the debate did not persuade Emperor Wu (r. 561–578) of the Northern Zhou, who imagined a Daoist theocracy as a viable sociopolitical model. He established Tongdao Guan (Monastery for Pervading the *Dao*) as an official Daoist research center and supported Louguan research efforts. It was here that the first Daoist encyclopedia, the *Esoteric Essentials of the Most High* (*Wushang biyao*), and a canonical collection of scriptures, the *Scripture Catalogue of the Mysterious Metropolis* (*Xuandu jingmu*, now lost), were compiled. Such debates established one pattern of interaction between Daoists, Buddhists, and the state, including the devastating Yuan (1279–1368) debates of 1255 and 1258, which resulted in the burning and destruction of Daoist texts, textual collections, and printing blocks in 1281.

Early organized Daoism—namely, the Celestial Masters, *Shangqing*, and *Lingbao* movements—established the first viable Daoist religious communities, including foundations for an enduring institution. They created models for regional communities, temples, and sacred sites. Members of early organized Daoism, such as Zhang Lu, Ge Hong, Yang Xi, Ge Chaofu, Lu Xiujing, and Tao Hongjing, as well as innumerable local Daoists whose names are lost to history, inscribed the first textual canons and enacted the first Daoist rites. They also established patterns of revelation and the first standardized pantheons. Toward the end of the early medieval period, Daoists began to codify an ordination system and to experiment with Buddhist-inspired monasticism. These various dimensions of early organized Daoism set parameters of inclusion and affiliation that influenced subsequent movements.

Later Organized Daoism

We can identify a major historical shift in the Daoist tradition during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). During the Tang, Daoists created more fully integrated ordina-

tion systems, scriptural traditions, and monastic models. The later Tang was also the time when the first systems of "internal alchemy" (*neidan*) were codified. Later still, the Song-Jin period (960–1279) and Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) are most well-known for the emergence of Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) Daoism, an eventual monastic order that came to compete with the *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity) householder tradition for Daoist religiopolitical supremacy. Daoism during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368 to 1911) is relatively understudied, but major developments did, in fact, occur. This included the compilation of the *Daoist Canon* (*Daozang*), first compiled in 1445 and re-edited in 1607, and the systematization of the *Longmen* (Dragon Gate) branch of Complete Perfection. "Later organized Daoism" thus describes the Tang Daoist ordination system, Complete Perfection, the later Celestial Masters, and lesser-known ritual and internal alchemy lineages.

Many Tang emperors and their courts showed imperial favor for the Daoist tradition. As noted above, Lord Lao as the deified Laozi became central to the Chinese state as early as the Han Dynasty. Similarly, the patterns of millenarian prophecy were also well established. At the beginning of the Tang, the rulers embraced a prophecy centering on a figure with the surname Li as the future Lord of Great Peace. Coincidentally, Li was the surname of both Laozi (Li Er) and the founders of the Tang Dynasty. Thus, the Tang rulers became linked with both Laozi, the preeminent figure in the Daoist tradition and now the Tang's own original ancestor, and the vision of a Daoist utopia. Numerous miracles centering on divine appearances of Lord Lao occurred. One such vision took place at Bozhou, Laozi's supposed birthplace, where Lord Lao caused a withered cypress tree to bloom again. Miraculous material signs were also discovered throughout China and at various Daoist sacred sites; these included inscribed stones, divine statues, and images on walls and cliffs. Such discoveries helped to ensure continued imperial patronage for places such as Louguan. Tang emperors gave extensive privileges to the Daoists, offered lavish gifts to temples and monasteries, established a Daoist track in the imperial bureaucracy, sponsored Daoist collection efforts, honored Lord Lao with the title *Xuanyuan huangdi* (Sovereign Thearch of Mysterious Origin), and aided the success of the tradition in general. Especially under Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–755), Daoism flourished and membership grew extensively. A number of imperial princesses were given Daoist initiation in elaborate ceremonies. Monasteries (*guan*), first established between the fifth and sixth centuries, were staffed by Daoist priests and priestesses (*daoshi*), who performed *jiao* ("offering") and *zhai* ("purification") rituals for integrating society and cosmos. The Tang Dynasty also established a system of official control, including a state-controlled ordination system and legal codes governing religious behavior. It was in this context that the *Laozi* (Book of Venerable Masters) was formally elevated to the status of a *jing* ("classic" or "scripture"), what we know today as the *Daode jing* (*Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*). In addition, the *Daode jing* became required reading for the imperial examinations.

With regard to major figures in Daoist history, a few important and representative ones will be discussed here. One such person was Sima Chengzhen (647–735), the twelfth patriarch of *Shangqing* Daoism. Highly respected and supported at the Tang

imperial court, Sima Chengzhen is best known for his systematic discussions of meditation and personal refinement. Sima Chengzhen's writings place primary emphasis on the mind and evidence a synthesis of Daoist and Buddhist meditation practices. In particular, we find the influence of Buddhist insight (*vipaśyanā*) meditation and a concern for the development of wisdom (*prajñā*). For instance, Sima's *Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness* (*Zuowang lun*) maps out Daoist meditation in terms of seven stages: (1) respect and trust, (2) interception of karma, (3) taming the mind, (4) detachment from affairs, (5) perfect observation, (6) intense concentration, and (7) realizing the *Dao*. Although one notes much Buddhist influence, Sima Chengzhen clearly had a Daoist orientation: the reference in the title of the *Zuowang lun* to "sitting in forgetfulness" refers to a passage on Daoist meditation that is found in chapter six of the *Zhuangzi*.

In addition to such models of self-realization, Daoism during the Tang Dynasty maintained ritualistic and scholastic concerns. In this respect, Du Guangting (850–933) stands out. Du Guangting lived at the end of the Tang Dynasty, a time of radical sociopolitical upheaval. In the gradual disintegration of a unified Chinese empire that followed from the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), Du set out to preserve and systematize earlier Daoist traditions. He compiled ritual compendia that became the basis for later forms of Daoist liturgy and hagiographies of outstanding Daoists, including the first hagiographical collection on female Daoists, the *Records of Assembled Immortals from the Walled City* (*Yongcheng jixian lu*). In addition, Du Guangting had a profound interest in the *Daode jing* and its commentarial tradition. He reviewed and collated more than sixty previous commentaries, dividing them into five groups. In the process, Du became the leading codifier of the *Chongxuan* (Twofold Mystery) hermeneutical school. Drawing inspiration from the Buddhist Mādhyamika or Three Treatises (*Sanlun*) school, Twofold Mystery emphasized the realization of an ontological condition where neither being nor non-being exists. This is the state of "oneness," and Twofold Mystery adherents such as Du Guangting equated this with realization of the *Dao*. This is evident in the name "Twofold Mystery," which is a reference to chapter one of the *Daode jing*. Du's commentary is found in his *Expansive and Sagely Meaning of the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power* (*Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi*).

With the fall of the Tang Dynasty, China eventually came to be divided into three distinct states: the Khitan state of Liao (907–1125) in the northeast, the Tangut state of Xixia (990–1227) in the northwest, and the Chinese state of Song (Northern: 960–1126; Southern: 1127–1279) in the middle and south. Under the Northern Song, Daoism continued to receive imperial support. The Song emperors in general viewed their mandate as a reflection of a larger Daoist dispensation, with legitimacy partly based on Daoist revelations at Louguan. The ideal of Great Peace (*taiping*) also formed the basis of Emperor Taizong's (r. 976–997) consolidation of the empire. A number of Northern Song emperors also initiated and supported the compilation of Daoist textual collections. Moreover, Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126) recognized two Daoist sacred sites in southern China: Maoshan,

associated with *Shangqing* Daoism, and Longhu shan (Dragon-Tiger Mountain), associated with the Celestial Masters, whose school was now known as *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity) Daoism.

It was also during the Song Dynasty that Chan (Zen), a Buddhist monastic tradition, reached national prominence. Chan was a monastic and meditation movement focusing on realization of one's inherent Buddha nature (*tathāgata-garba*). Traditionally speaking, this tradition focuses on a lineage of "patriarchs," beginning with Bodhidharma, a legendary Indian meditation master, and culminating in the well-known division between the so-called "Northern School" and "Southern School." The Southern School in particular was known to Daoists for its "rhetoric of immediacy" and claims of "sudden enlightenment." Chan became a nationwide monastic tradition during the Song Dynasty; its emphasis on monasticism and intense meditation would have a major influence on later Daoist traditions. Chan Buddhism is also indebted to the Daoist tradition, especially the *Zhuangzi* and earlier precedents for the "recorded sayings" (*yulu*) genre of literature that became popularized through Chan. Moreover, it is clear that Daoists and Buddhists cohabitated and commingled at various sacred mountains such as *Tiantai* and Zhongnan.

Toward the end of the Tang and beginning of the Song, traditions of internal alchemy (*neidan*) became systematized. The roots of these movements can be found in a number of earlier Daoist movements such as "inner observation" (*neiguan*) meditation practices, longevity techniques (*yangsheng*), laboratory alchemy (*waidan*), and *Yijing* (Classic of Changes) symbolism. Internal alchemy, alternatively referred to as the "golden elixir," uses a highly symbolic language to describe a process of spiritual refinement whereby a shift occurs from an ordinary human being to a more cosmological being. The goal was the attainment of "immortality" or "transcendence" as a form of ecstatic otherworldly existence through a series of energetic mutations of the body, which would transform it into a spiritual entity known as the "immortal embryo." Generally, internal alchemy traditions emphasize the so-called "three treasures"—namely, vital essence, subtle breath, and spirit. These psychophysical "substances" are utilized in a three-stage process of self-transformation: (1) refining vital essence to become *qi* (cosmic energy or "breath"), (2) refining *qi* to become spirit, and (3) refining spirit to return to emptiness.

The earliest-known tradition of internal alchemy is referred to as the "Zhong-Lü tradition." This is a textual tradition associated with Zhongli Quan (second century CE) and Lü Dongbin (ninth century CE), with the latter eventually becoming the patriarch of internal alchemy traditions in general. The related texts center on dialogues between these two immortals; two representative works are the *Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao* (*Chuandao ji*) and *Treatise of One Hundred Questions* (*Baiwen pian*).

The Zhong-Lü textual tradition provided the foundations for later, more anthropologically real movements. Conventionally speaking, a distinction, which follows Chan Buddhism, is made between the so-called *Beizong* (Northern Lineage) and *Nanzong* (Southern Lineage). The Northern Lineage refers to the *Quanzhen* (Complete

Perfection) movement, founded by Wang Zhe (1113–1170), while the Southern Lineage refers to a textual tradition (but this time with historically identifiable persons) that revolves around "five patriarchs" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These include Liu Cao; Zhang Boduan, author of the seminal *Chapters on Awakening to Perfection* (*Wuzhen pian*); Shi Tai; Xue Shi; and Chen Nan. The well-known Bai Yuchan was a disciple of Chen Nan. Both of these internal alchemy lineages owe a great deal to the slightly earlier textual tradition known as the "Zhong-Lü tradition."

Although traditional Chinese historiography and Western Sinology tend to exclude "non-Chinese" states from "Chinese history," Daoist history in general and the late medieval period in particular cannot be understood without their inclusion. The Khitan-Liao kingdom was eventually conquered by the Jurchens, a semi-nomadic people from an area in the far northeast (previously called Manchuria) and ancestors of the later Manchus. The Jurchens established the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) and in the process conquered the Northern Song, forcing the court elite to flee south and establish the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). It was under the Jurchen-Jin Dynasty that one of the most important sub-traditions in Daoist history emerged. This was the *Quanzhen* (Complete Perfection) movement, which is the only Daoist monastic tradition to survive into the modern world, primarily in the modified branch known as *Longmen* (Dragon Gate). The *Quanzhen* school was founded in the twelfth century by Wang Zhe, also named *Chongyang* (Redoubled Yang), a solitary ascetic and mystic who after years of intense seclusion began accepting disciples. The most well-known of these disciples are the so-called Seven Perfected. Their religious sobriquets describe their spiritual accomplishments:

1. Ma Yu (*Danyang*, "Elixir Yang")
2. Tan Chuduan (*Changzhen*, "Perpetual Perfection")
3. Qiu Chuji (*Changchun*, "Perpetual Spring")
4. Liu Chuxuan (*Changsheng*, "Perpetual Life")
5. Wang Chuyi (*Yuyang*, "Jade Yang")
6. Hao Datong (*Taigu*, "Great Antiquity")
7. Sun Buer (*Qingjing*, "Clear Stillness"), a woman who became centrally important in later female alchemical traditions

Over time, *Quanzhen* Daoism attracted more and more followers and eventually established "associations" or "meeting halls," sometimes rendered as "congregations," throughout northern China. In 1222, Qiu Chuji met Genghis Khan and received de facto control of the whole of north China's organized religious communities. An account of Qiu's travels may be found in the well-known *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*). This period was followed by *Quanzhen*'s rise in status and membership to become a fully established and widely disseminated form of monastic Daoism. This privileged status was short-lived and a number of anti-Daoist edicts were issued under Kubilai Khan, a warlord of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, which was the first

non-Chinese dynasty to control the whole of China. The anti-Daoist edicts culminated in the burning and destruction of Daoist texts, textual collections, and printing blocks in 1281. The *Redoubled Yang's Fifteen Discourses to Establish the Teachings* (*Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun*) is frequently held up as a representative text concerning early *Quanzhen* beliefs and practices.

The Song and Yuan Dynasties also saw the emergence of more popular forms of religiosity. In particular, deity cults and new ritual lineages became established. As noted, Lü Dongbin received much veneration and devotion, with various patrons and believers characterizing him differently depending on their socioeconomic position. In terms of ritual lineages, five in particular are currently known:

1. *Qingwei* ("Pure Tenuity")
2. *Tianxin* ("Celestial Heart")
3. *Shenxiao* ("Divine Empyrean")
4. *Tongchu* ("Youthful Incipience")
5. *Jingming* ("Pure Brightness"), also known as *Zhongxiao dao* ("Way of Loyalty and Filiality")

Generally speaking, these lineages emphasized moral purity, ethical rectification, and ritual intervention as efficacious for communal wellbeing. They tended to concentrate on securing good fortune and healing disease (including exorcism). It was also in the context of such ritual lineages that "thunder magic" (*leifa*) developed. This type of atmospheric magic involved harnessing and channeling the power of thunder and lightning for self-transformation and healing. There was also a new celestial Department of Thunder, to which petitions and memorials were submitted by the ritual master (*fashi*). These forms of Daoist ritual eventually became incorporated into a fully standardized and officially disseminated system.

The Mongol Yuan Dynasty was conquered by a native Chinese nationalist rebellion, which resulted in the founding of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Unfortunately, research on Daoism in the periods following the late medieval period is just beginning. Thus, this section and those that follow must be understood as fragmentary, preliminary, and provisional. The cultural trend of "syncretism," fully established as normative during the late medieval period, continued during the late imperial period. Syncretism, an approximation of the Chinese *sanjiao heyi* ("the three teachings made one"), refers to the tendency of distinct religious traditions to adopt and adapt aspects from other distinct traditions. In the case of Daoism, this meant borrowing and transforming various beliefs and practices from Buddhism and Confucianism in particular. A good example of the syncretistic tendency is found in Lin Zhaoen (1517–1598), a Confucian scholar who had affinities with both Chan Buddhist theories of mind and meditation practice as well as Daoist internal alchemy. Lin Zhaoen simplified internal alchemy, in some sense psychologizing it and emphasizing "nine stages of mind-cultivation." He eventually founded a school that focused on healing and public relief efforts.

Two characteristics of the late imperial period—simplification and popularization—in turn deserve note. During this historical phase, internal alchemy became simplified, with much of its esoteric language either systematically defined or discarded. Similarly, Daoist beliefs and practices were mingled with and appropriated by folk religious traditions. In terms of the Daoist tradition itself, popularization involved a greater attention to the needs and activities of the common people. Thus, a number of local and popular deities were incorporated into the Daoist pantheon. In addition, new and powerful gods entered the scene. Some of these included

- Xuanwu ("Mysterious Warrior"), also known as Zhenwu ("Perfect Warrior")
- Wenchang ("God of Literature")
- Tianfei ("Celestial Consort"), also known as Mazu ("Mother Ancestor")
- Bixia yuanjun ("Primordial Goddess of Morning Mists")
- Doumu ("Dipper Mother")

Also deserving of emphasis is the fact that the Daoist mountain Wudang shan achieved national prominence during the Ming. This was partially a result of its association with the efficacious god Zhenwu. Wudang shan was later mythologized as the residence of Zhang Sanfeng, a pseudo-historical figure, and associated with the development of "internal style" (*neifa*) martial arts such as T'ai Chi shadow boxing (*Taiji quan*). The increased popularization of Daoism is also evident in the expanded practice of "spirit-writing" as well as in the production of "precious scroll" (*baojuan*) literature and morality books (*shanshu*). With regards to spirit-writing, it is interesting to note that many contemporary cults in southern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan channel Lü Dongbin during séances and identify themselves as *Quanzhen* lineages.

Other significant developments also occurred during the Ming Dynasty. Of particular note is the imperial sponsorship of the *Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign* (*Zhengtong daozang*), the earliest surviving Daoist textual collection and the basis for the development of modern Daoist Studies. Containing some 1400 texts, this "canon" was overseen by *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity) priests and was completed in the early 1440s.

The final imperial dynasty was the Manchu Qing (1644–1911), a time of non-Chinese rulers who were the descendents of the Jurchens. The Qing Dynasty saw the *Longmen* (Dragon Gate) lineage of the *Quanzhen* school rise to national prominence. Although traditionally associated with Qiu Chuji of early *Quanzhen* Daoism, recent research suggests that the established *Longmen* lineage goes back to Wang Changyue (1622–1680), abbot of White Cloud Abbey (*Baiyun guan*) in the mid-1600s. In the Qing, a variety of energetic and charismatic leaders helped to secure recognition for the *Longmen* school. These included such figures as Min Yide (*Lanyun*, "Lazy Cloud"), an eleventh-generation lineage holder and compiler of major textual collections, and Liu Yiming (*Wuyuan*, "Awakening to the Origin"), another eleventh-generation lineage holder and author of the *Twelve Daoist Books* (*Daoshu shier zhong*). The *Daoshu*

shier zhong has become highly influential in the West through Thomas Cleary's (b. 1949) various translations of texts contained therein. The *Longmen* branch of the *Quanzhen* school and the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi*) school, most likely established on Mount Longhu in the eleventh century, are the only two distinct traditional Daoist lineages that survive into the modern and contemporary periods.

The late-imperial trends of simplification and popularization are also evident in the increased volume of internal alchemy literature during the Qing. Such texts include the *Secret of the Golden Flower* (*Jinhua zongzhi*), *Illuminating Pointers to the Methods and Instructions of Innate Nature and Life-destiny* (*Xingming fajue mingzhi*), both composed by Zhao Bichen, and the *Scripture on Wisdom and Life-Destiny* (*Huiming jing*) by Liu Huayang. The latter is associated with a new internal alchemy lineage that emerged during the Qing. This was the Wu-Liu lineage. It centers around two historical figures: Wu Shouyang (1563–1644), a Ming Dynasty Daoist master, and Liu Huayang (fl. 1736), a Chan monk. This school draws on internal alchemy traditions of the Song and Yuan, combining them with aspects from Chan and *Huayan* Buddhism.

Later organized Daoism systematized internal alchemy and public ritual as the defining forms of Daoist religious practice. They more fully embraced ascetic, eremitic, and cenobitic models of community, including a nationwide monastic system. Members of later organized Daoism, such as Sima Chengzhen, Du Guangting, Zhang Boduan, Wang Chongyang, Qiu Changchun, Wang Changyue, and countless others, put forth the quest for immortality via personal transformation as primary. They more fully incorporated aspects from Buddhism and Confucianism into a syncretic approach to religiosity. They also compiled the earliest surviving extant *Daoist Canon*, which inspired the formation of Daoist Studies as a modern field of inquiry.

Modern Daoism

The emergence of modern Daoism is entwined with the history of Western (British, Dutch, French, German) and Japanese colonialism, Christian missionization, and sinological orientalism. Major watershed moments include the arrival of Jesuit missionaries (late 1500s), the Rites Controversy (1630s to early eighteenth century), the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Sino-Japanese Wars (1894–1895 and 1937–1945), the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), the establishment of the Republic of China (1912–1949 and 1949–present), the Second World War (1939–1945), the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949–present), the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and Deng Xiaoping's socioeconomic reforms (1978–1980s). The modern period of Daoist history was thus a tumultuous one. In my periodization model, "modern Daoism" technically begins with the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, which represents the end of dynastic rule and the beginnings of a modern, "secularized" nation-state structured along Western sociopolitical ideologies. However, one must

remember that the events leading to and through this period are complex and that major transformations continue to occur in the contemporary world. This includes a global Daoist community that exists in most of the countries of East Asia, Europe, and North America, and that consists of people from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. That is, Daoism is no longer merely a "Chinese religion"; there are "trans-Chinese" forms of Daoism, including ordained Daoist priests and their communities from a wide variety of backgrounds and geographical distributions. However, this chapter focuses solely on "Chinese Daoism," specifically within the geopolitical confines of China, so we are most interested in Chinese developments, including those in Hong Kong and Taiwan. As mentioned, this period of Daoist history continues to the present day, including the recent liberalization of Chinese society, and it deserves its own book-length study.

On an institutional level, modern Daoism is dominated by *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity) and *Quanzhen* (Complete Perfection) Daoism, specifically the latter's *Longmen* (Dragon Gate) lineage. In the modern world, *Zhengyi* Daoism is most prominent in rural, especially southeast, China and in Taiwan. It is a householder tradition, with married clergy, that places primary emphasis on ritual performance, usually through the support and patronage of local families and village communities. That is, in a more traditional context, *Zhengyi* rituals are community-sponsored events, and Daoist families provide an important function within the overall social life and economy of the given community. This form of Daoist organization has enabled *Zhengyi* priests and communities to remain more independent of larger Chinese sociopolitical events, including governmental control, than their *Quanzhen* counterparts.

In contrast to the diffused, community-based ritual tradition of *Zhengyi* Daoism, *Quanzhen* Daoism is a monastic order, which also recognizes lay adherents. The laypersons can be either "ordinary" supporters or more committed practitioners—individuals who follow a Daoist religious path without being monastic. *Quanzhen* monasteries and temples exist throughout mainland China, and the order, as the officially sanctioned form of Daoism, controls most of the major Daoist sacred sites. It receives its primary support from the government, especially through the Bureau of Tourism and Bureau of Religious Affairs; on a fundamental level, the Daoist monastic order is now part of the Chinese (Communist) bureaucracy, though that pattern was already established in the Ming and Qing. *Quanzhen* Daoism, at least in name, also exists in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where it tends to be a householder tradition. Although Daoism in Hong Kong and Taiwan has yet to be the subject of substantial research, recent studies have shown that many, if not most, of the Hong Kong "Dragon Gate" family lineages outside the monastic order originate in southern spirit medium and spirit-writing cults, especially those revolving around Lü Dongbin, the famous immortal and internal alchemist. In its institutional form, *Quanzhen* Daoism is divided into various lineages, each with distinctive characteristics. Taken as a whole, *Quanzhen* monastics abstain from alcohol, meat consumption, and sexual activity. The dominant religious practice includes daily recitation of the

morning and evening liturgy as well as the practice of internal alchemy, usually under the guidance of a master-father (*shifu*).

Here it should also be mentioned that various Chinese *Taiji quan* and *Qigong* practitioners, both in China and abroad, identify their practice as "Daoist." They and other individuals with an interest in Daoism (such as Hu Fuchen and Liu Xiaogan) have established and perpetuated various popular constructions and appropriations of the tradition. These individuals most often conceptualize "real" Daoism as a nonreligious or "transreligious" tradition. In the process, they disempower actual Daoists and deny the validity of their ways of life. There is a corresponding denigration of Daoist religiosity and loss of socioeconomic support for members of the Daoist tradition. We must also recognize the equally complex and problematic phenomenon of modern Chinese nationalism, with its associated political utilization of Daoism. In certain respects, this parallels the Hindutva movement in India and the Zionist movement in Israel, among others. It is increasingly evident not only in mainland China but also in Hong Kong (see, for example, the Centre for the Study of Daoist Culture). Representatives of such nationalist constructions tend to see Daoism as the "essence" of Chinese culture, a tendency also evident in the scholarship of some earlier European scholars. They most often understand Daoism to be intricately connected with Chinese culture and society, which of course it is. However, they fail to understand the ways in which Daoists challenged and transcended certain fundamental, received "Chinese values" and lifeways. In their search for power and legitimacy, many socially prominent Daoists have also aligned themselves with this modern movement.

Regarding Daoism in contemporary Chinese society, the geopolitical landscape is dominated by the Chinese Daoist Association (*Zhongguo daojiao xiehui*) and its associated regional and local Daoist associations. The Chinese Daoist Association was first established in 1913, was eventually disbanded, and then was re-established in 1956 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Its first president under the Chinese Communist regime was Yue Chongdai, a twenty-sixth-generation *Longmen* liturgy master and the abbot of *Taiqing gong* (Palace of Great Clarity) in Shenyang (Liaoning Province). The Chinese Daoist Association is, first and foremost, a political organization. As part of the Chinese Communist bureaucracy, it oversees the activities of Daoism's major sacred sites and religious communities. Its political function comes into high relief when considering the Chinese Daoist Seminary at White Cloud Monastery (*Baiyun guan*) in Beijing, where Daoist novices and potential ordinands are required to take courses in the history of Marxist and Maoist thought. There are also Daoist associations in various other countries, including Taiwan (established in 1950) and Hong Kong (established in 1961).

Daoist Religious Culture

In his *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996), Ninian Smart has identified "seven dimensions of religion": (1) ritual and practical, (2) doctrinal or philosophical, (3) mythic

or narrative, (4) experiential or emotional, (5) ethical or legal, (6) organizational or social, and (7) artistic or material. In its fully developed forms, Daoism includes all of these various dimensions. Daoist religiosity is expressed in specific doctrines, ethics, narratives, practices, experiences, organizations, and arts. Comparatively speaking, Daoism is a more strongly world-affirming and embodied form of religiosity, with some parallels with Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Shinto, and certain Native American religions.

With respect to central Daoist doctrines, values, and religious concerns, it is important to recognize some key beliefs. First, Daoists revere the *Dao*, which is considered sacred or ultimately real. Daoists generally believe that the *Dao*, as primordial Source, unnamable mystery, numinous presence, and cosmological process, is manifest in and expressed through differentiated being, in the phenomenal world. This includes a spectrum of being: from gods and immortals, through humans and animals, to mountains and trees. The numinous presence of the *Dao* pervades all of these, though in varying degrees of manifestation. Throughout Chinese history, Daoists have, in turn, developed diverse practices to "realize the *Dao*"; that is, to become *embodiments of the* Dao. Many of the foundational Daoist values and beliefs derive from the classical texts. A concise and influential expression of these values appears in the Nine Practices of the early Celestial Masters:

1. Practice nonaction
2. Practice softness and weakness
3. Practice guarding the feminine
4. Practice being nameless
5. Practice clarity and stillness
6. Practice being adept
7. Practice being desireless
8. Practice knowing how to stop and be content
9. Practice yielding and withdrawing

Although "court Daoists" have often participated in imperial and bureaucratic affairs and been involved in power-based relationships, frequently with the intention of gaining imperial patronage for the tradition, the more normative Daoist ideals focus on invisibility and unknowability.

Some key figures and movements in Daoist history include, in chronological order, the pseudo-historical Laozi (Master Lao), associated with the teachings found in the anthology called the *Daode jing* (*Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*) and later deified as the high god Laojun (Lord Lao); Zhuang Zhou (c. 370–c. 290 BCE), associated with the teachings in the inner chapters (one to seven) of the *Zhuangzi*; Zhang Daoling (fl. 140 CE), the founder of the Celestial Masters movement, and his grandson Zhang Lu (fl. 190 CE), who helped to create the first viable Daoist religious community; Ge Xuan (164–244), a key figure in the formation of the *Shangqing* movement, and his grand-nephew Ge Hong (287–347), the author of the *Book of*

Master Embracing Simplicity (*Baopuzi*) and the Biographies of Spirit Immortals (*Shenxian zhuan*); Wei Huacun (251–334), a female Celestial Master libationer and a central divine figure in the early *Shangqing* revelations; Yang Xi (330–c. 386), the spirit medium who was pivotal in the establishment of the *Shangqing* movement; Ge Chaofu (fl. 390s), a *Shangqing* adept and relative of Ge Hong who was instrumental in the establishment of the *Lingbao* movement; Lu Xiujing (406–477), who compiled the Lingbao *Catalogue*, organized the emerging Daoist canon, and presented a more integrated vision of Daoism as a religious tradition; Tao Hongjing (456–536), who compiled the earlier *Shangqing* revelations in his *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao*) and who established the first Daoist proto-monastic community on Maoshan (present-day Nanjing); Du Guangting (850–933), who helped to systematize Daoist ritual through his compilation of ritual compendia and who penned the first hagiographical collection on female Daoists, known as the *Records of Assembled Immortals from the Walled City* (*Yongcheng jixian lu*); Zhongli Quan (second century CE?) and Lü Dongbin (ninth century CE), two famous immortals who became associated with the so-called Zhong-Lü textual lineage of internal alchemy; Zhang Boduan (d. 1082), author of the seminal *Chapters on Awakening to Perfection* (*Wuzhen pian*); Wang Zhe (1113–1170), the nominal founder of the *Quanzhen* school; Sun Buer (1119–1182), the only female member of early *Quanzhen*, who became elevated to the position of Matriarch in many later female alchemy lineages; Qiu Chuji (1148–1227), the third *Quanzhen* Patriarch, who was instrumental in the institutionalization of the monastic order; Bai Yuchan (1194–c. 1227), a central figure in the emergence of the so-called Southern School of internal alchemy; and Wang Changyue (1622–1680), abbot of White Cloud Monastery in the late 1600s, who systematized the *Longmen* lineage.

Key temples, monasteries, and sacred sites include Bozhou (Anhui), the mythical birthplace of Laozi; Heming shan (Crane Cry Mountain, Sichuan), where Zhang Daoling supposedly received a revelation from Lord Lao and was appointed as the first Celestial Master; Maoshan (near present-day Nanjing, Jiangsu), where Tao Hongjing engaged in intensive religious practice and established a *Shangqing* religious community that served as the movement's headquarters; Louguan tai (Lookout Tower Monastery, Shaanxi), where Laozi allegedly transmitted the *Daode jing* to Yinxi, and the site of the earliest Daoist monastery; Chongyang gong (Palace of Redoubled Yang, Shaanxi), the site of Wang Zhe's early hermitage and where his body was interred; Kunyu shan (Shandong), where Wang Zhe trained many of the first-generation *Quanzhen* adherents; Longmen dong (Dragon Gate Grotto, Shaanxi), where Qiu Chuji engaged in intensive religious practice; Baiyun guan (White Cloud Monastery), first established during the Tang and the eventual monastic headquarters of the *Quanzhen* school; and Longhu shan (Dragon-Tiger Mountain, Jiangxi), the later headquarters of the Celestial Masters movement. Some other important contemporary Daoist sacred sites include Baxian gong (Palace of Eight Immortals, Shaanxi); Huashan (Shaanxi); Qingyang gong (Azure Ram Palace, Sichuan); Qingcheng shan (Azure Wall Mountain, Sichuan); and Wudang shan (Hubei).

Each Daoist school or lineage tends to emphasize different scriptures and texts, although the *Daode jing* has been especially influential. The Ming Dynasty *Daoist Canon*, in fact, includes over a hundred Daoist commentaries on the *Daode jing*, in both complete and fragmentary form. Here it should be noted that Daoist literature is complex in terms of content, genres, intended audience, and so forth. Technically speaking, only *jing* ("scriptures") are considered sacred and, at times, revealed.

In its early form, the Celestial Masters privileged the *Daode jing* as well as specific precepts, including the Nine Practices and Twenty-Seven *Xiang'er* Precepts. While the later movement continued to emphasize precept study and application, notably the 180 Precepts of Lord Lao, the Southern Celestial Masters revered texts such as the anonymous *Scripture on Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens* (*Santian neijie jing*) and Lu Xiujing's *Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community* (*Lu xiansheng daomen kelue*). The Northern Celestial Masters emphasized Kou Qianzhi's *Precepts of the New Code, Recited in the Clouds* (*Yunzhong yinsong xinke jiejing*), among others. Early *Shangqing* Daoism elevated the *Perfect Scripture of Great Profundity* (*Dadong zhenjing*) and *Scripture on the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing*), while the later community especially revered Tao Hongjing's *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao*). The *Lingbao* movement came to venerate the texts contained in Lu Xiujing's Lingbao *Catalogue*, with the anonymous *Explanations of the Five Lingbao* (*Lingbao wufu xu*) being especially influential. Early *Quanzhen* Daoism gave pride of place to the *Daode jing*, the anonymous sixth century *Scripture on the Hidden Talisman* (*Yinfu jing*), and the anonymous eighth century *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness* (*Qingjing jing*). The later monastic order continued to revere these scriptures, but also elevated the writings of the early adherents to a higher status. This brief overview is, of course, a gross simplification, as the received Ming Dynasty *Daoist Canon* contains over 1400 texts, not to mention later "extra-canonical" collections. With respect to contemporary Daoism, Celestial Masters communities tend to identify family-transmitted ritual and exorcistic texts as the most important. For *Quanzhen* monastics, the early textual corpus remains important, but the *Longmen* lineage also emphasizes the precept texts compiled by Wang Changyue.

The Daoist pantheon is among the largest and most diverse of the world's major religious traditions. Although Daoists understand the *Dao* as source and unnamable mystery to be ultimately real, they also revere a wide variety of gods, immortals, and perfected beings. Here one needs to remember a number of things. First, even though the primary Daoist theology is monistic, there is a strong emanationist and immanent dimension. This makes way for auxiliary Daoist theologies, including panentheistic, panenhenic, and polytheistic ones. From a Daoist perspective, there are multiple sacred realms inhabited by multiple gods, and there is no necessary contradiction between revering the *Dao* in its undifferentiated form and worshipping individual deities. Like nature, gods (in one respect or another) embody and express some aspect of the *Dao*. Moreover, different Daoist adherents and communities tend to revere different gods and immortals. Generally speaking, the ontological distinction between these types of divine beings centers on their place in the cosmos and divine hierarchy: gods tend to be functional, having specific roles and responsibilities to

fulfill, while immortals tend to be free of these bureaucratic constraints. Immortals and perfected beings are humans who have attained some transcendent state; that is, from a Daoist perspective, self-divinization is possible, and humans only differ from gods by a matter of degree. The borders are permeable.

Historically speaking, some important Daoist deities include Laojun (Lord Lao), the deified Laozi; the Sanqing (Three Purities), three "gods" (Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning, Numinous Treasure, and *Dao* and Inner Power) who represent the earliest cosmogonic moments and primordial, cosmic ethers and who inhabit the Three Heavens of Jade Clarity (highest), Highest Clarity (middle), and Great Clarity (lowest); Xiwangmu (Queen Mother of the West), a goddess who oversees the western paradise of Mount Kunlun; Zhenwu (Perfected Warrior), a marshal deity associated with Mount Wudang who figures prominently in Daoist exorcistic rituals; and so forth. Significant immortals and perfected beings include Wei Huacun, a female Celestial Master libationer who was central in the early *Shangqing* revelations; Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, two immortals who became central in early internal alchemy lineages; the Eight Immortals, a motley troupe of spiritually realized beings who became especially prominent from the Yuan Dynasty onward in popular novels and plays; and so forth. In the contemporary world, one most often encounters the Sanqing, Lü Dongbin ("Ancestor Lü"), and Yuhuang dadi (the Jade Emperor), who is the high god of the popular pantheon.

In addition to people, movements, places, scriptures, and gods, "Daoist religious culture" also includes diverse forms of material expression: architecture, calligraphy, clothing, epigraphy, painting, poetry, scriptures, statuary, and so forth. It is beyond the confines of this chapter to explore these, so one example must suffice. For most tourists entering Yuquan yuan (Temple of the Jade Spring), the base monastery at Huashan, the temple compound is simply a place to pass through in order to ascend the mountain. However, for committed monastics the temple is a vast religiocultural system that they inhabit and in which they participate. This system includes stele engravings of important Daoist scriptures and temple boards with poetic couplets on spiritual cultivation penned by prominent Daoists and calligraphers. There is a pond where large koi play in sunlight and shadows, embodying the "joy of fish" (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 17). In addition to altars to the Seven Perfected, Chen Tuan, and Hao Datong, the monastic compound is filled with the remnants of previous inhabitants, including stories shared during afternoon tea conversations.

"Daoist religious culture" is thus one way to frame the study and understanding of Daoism. It encourages us to consider the diverse dimensions of Daoist religiosity considered from a nuanced, integrated, and more comprehensive perspective. At the same time, it reveals the way in which every interpretation is a construction. Most (re)presentations of Daoism have been penned by "non-Daoists" based on historical reconstruction, specifically through texts. We must recognize the inherent limitations of a historical and textual approach. Here I am *not* suggesting that Daoists are the best interpreters of their tradition; one need only listen to contemporary Wudang Daoists talk about the history of shadow boxing (*Taiji quan*) to learn this lesson! What I am suggesting is that a postcolonial approach to Daoist Studies must ask more

difficult questions: How have and do Daoists construct their tradition? How have Daoists organized themselves communally and socially? Is there something important about this from a Daoist perspective? How have Daoists established patterns of inclusion, including religious identity and affiliation? In short, we need to include the voices of Daoists and Daoist communities, whether historical or contemporary, in the study of Daoism. This involves making space for *actual* representatives of the tradition, especially those with formal religious standing (ordination and lineage). For example, Tang Dynasty Daoists created fully integrated ordination systems, with corresponding texts, ranks, and schools. There was also an increasing systematization and elevation of monasticism, with one system involving seven ordination ranks:

Rank	School	Affiliation/ Adherence
1. Register Disciple	Celestial Masters	Lay/Householder
2. Disciple of Good Faith	Great Mystery	Lay/Householder
3. Disciple of Cavern Abyss	Cavern Abyss	Lay/Householder
4. Disciple of Eminent Mystery	Laozi	Transitional (either)
5. Disciple of Cavern Spirit	Three Sovereigns	Monastic
6. Preceptor of Highest Mystery	Numinous Treasure	Monastic
7. Preceptor of Highest Perfection	Highest Purity	Monastic

The first three ranks were those of lay masters, while the last three were monastic, and the middle rank (Disciple of Eminent Mystery) signified a transitional stage that could be held either by a householder or a renunciant. Ordinations into these ranks began very early, with some children of Daoist families being initiated first into the Celestial Master level and receiving registers of protective generals. After that, each level required extended periods of training, the guidance of an ordination master, and several sponsors within the community. Once established in their ranks, Daoists could serve as priests in larger communities; take up residence in a hermitage to pursue self-cultivation; remain in a monastic institution to perform rituals either in-house or for lay donors; pray for the empire; or continue to strive for greater purity and immortality. That is, to be a Daoist in the late medieval period meant to participate in a tradition, to have commitments to the religious community, and to locate oneself in a hierarchically ordered training regimen. One's authority and affiliation were partially determined by this. The same is true with respect to lineage connections (proximal relationship to one's spiritual ancestors) in the larger tradition.

Daoism as Lived and Living Tradition

Daoism has been and continues to be a lived and living religious tradition. As such, it consists of committed adherents and religious communities dedicated to preserv-

ing and transmitting the *Dao*. Historically speaking, we must endeavor to reimagine and reconstruct Daoist religiosity in its varied aspects. The historical and textual study of Daoism may thus be informed by an ethnographic approach. What were the contours of Daoist life at Louguan tai in the sixth century? What was it like to live at Baiyun guan in the sixteenth century? These types of questions, informed by fieldwork and participant observation of contemporary Daoist religious life, help to inspire a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the religious tradition that is Daoism. In certain cases, especially in terms of extant literature, these questions may be unanswerable, but that unanswerability is pregnant with meaning. It deserves careful reflection, as does the question of whether or not scholars are studying Daoism *as Daoism*, as a religious tradition with its own values, concerns, and conceptions of reality. Daoism as a lived form of religiosity, as an intact religious culture, encompasses architecture, astro-geomancy, calligraphy, community, cosmology, dietetics, ethics, history, language, lineages, literature and poetry, meditation, models of being, movement awareness, music, mythology, painting, philosophy, principles, psychology, ritual, sacred sites, scriptures, spiritual direction, statuary, stories, symbology, teachers, theology, values, and so forth. Such are the dimensions of Daoist practice, community, and ways of being considered from a comprehensive and integrated perspective. The study of Daoism must, in turn, utilize varied approaches, including anthropology, art history, comparative religious studies, history, material culture studies, sociology, textual study and translation, and so forth. In its fullest expression, Daoist Studies is interdisciplinary. Scholars, educators, and students may thus be inspired to understand Daoism as a lived and living religious tradition.

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CHAPTER 9

Chinese Buddhism

Mario Poceski, University of Florida

Over the course of its long and multilayered history in China, which spans the last two millennia, Buddhism established itself as one of the most important religious traditions and exerted lasting influence on Chinese culture and society. The origins of Buddhism go back to the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (c. 480–400 BCE), commonly known as the Buddha ("the Awakened One"), whose universalist message of personal spiritual transformation and compassionate concern for others left an indelible mark on the religious and social terrains of ancient India. After the establishment of the early Buddhist community in northern India, over the centuries Buddhist teachings and practices were transmitted to diverse cultural milieus and varied geographical areas. In the process, Buddhism underwent manifold transformations and become one of the world's great religions. As Buddhism spread across large parts of the Asian continent, it developed extensive and varied assortments of texts, doctrines, practices, institutions, and traditions. Consequently, the history of Buddhism, in India and elsewhere, involves numerous minor variations as well as far-reaching changes in a number of key areas, including doctrinal elaboration, spiritual practice, artistic representation, and institutional configuration. Generally, these changes were at least in part reflections of ongoing adaptations to fluid and continuously evolving social or political predicaments.

Within the Chinese context, Buddhism is ordinarily described as the most influential among the religious traditions that were imported from abroad. The introduction of Buddhism and its incorporation as an integral part of China's intricate religious landscape involved a large-scale transmission and acculturation of beliefs, ideals, and institutions that had foreign origins; in scope and impact this was without

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parallels in Chinese history, until the onset of the modern era. In the course of the extended encounter between the Chinese people and Buddhism, the contours of Chinese civilization were expanded and its contents were enriched in a number of key areas, including philosophical ingenuity and artistic creativity. At the same time, as it adapted to native religious predilections and dominant cultural values, Buddhism also found itself profoundly transformed. The gradual process of sinification of Buddhism eventually led to the emergence of enduring patterns of piety and influential traditions that were unmistakably Chinese, in the overall tenor of their worldview as well as the subtle texture of their rituals and practices. Consequently, what was initially a foreign tradition became a paradigmatic embodiment of key aspects of Chinese religiosity, even if in the eyes of some of its xenophobic detractors Buddhism retained a certain stigma based on its non-native origins.

The first four sections of this chapter provide a brief historical overview of the growth and development of Buddhism in China, from its earliest introduction to the present. The next five sections examine in a bit more detail five major areas or aspects of Chinese Buddhism: ethical observance, contemplative practice, doctrinal systematization, popular devotion, and interaction with other religious traditions. Throughout the chapter I have avoided discussing Buddhism primarily in terms of specific schools or traditions, such as Chan and Pure Land, although when appropriate I have made note of such distinctions and other related developments.

Early Transmission of Buddhism into China

Buddhism initially reached China around the beginning of the Common Era, during the middle part of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). By that time Buddhism in India and Central Asia had already branched into a number of separate schools or traditions, with their own distinctive doctrines, canons, and codes of monastic discipline. During this period of innovative growth, the developmental trajectories of Buddhism were driven by a host of forces and impulses, as the religion was still undergoing significant transformations that at certain junctures coalesced into notable paradigm shifts. These included the emergence and growth of the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) tradition, which had significant ramifications for the subsequent history of Buddhism. Eventually, Mahāyāna became the predominant tradition in China and the rest of East Asia. Among the major features that captured the religious imagination of its Chinese adherents were the Mahāyāna's lofty conception of the bodhisattva ideal, the astute reinterpretation of Buddhahood, and the unwavering stress on universal compassion.

Early Chinese sources provide a number of quasi-historical or legendary accounts of the initial introduction of Buddhism into China. Perhaps the best-known story of that kind is the one that features the dream of Emperor Ming (r. 58–75 CE) of the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). The emperor allegedly dreamt of a mysterious deity with a golden hue coming toward his imperial place in Luoyang. After one of

the imperial advisors identified the enigmatic divinity as the Buddha, the intrigued emperor is said to have sent an expedition into the "Western regions," which came back with a Buddhist scripture. Later the story was embellished to include the arrival of two monks, who came to be celebrated as the first Buddhist missionaries to enter China. That prompted the building of the earliest Buddhist monastery, White Horse Monastery (*Baima si*), located in the vicinity of Luoyang.

Later on, various Buddhist tracts, typically with apologetic bent and propagandist objectives, introduced a number of other stories, presumably with apocryphal origins, that tried to push the arrival of Buddhism further back in Chinese dynastic history. According to one legend, a group of monks arrived at the court of Qin Shihuangdi (r. 221–210 BCE), the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty. There are also stories that link the arrival of Buddhism with the reign of the Indian emperor Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE), who was renowned for his patronage of Buddhism as well as for sending Buddhist missionaries abroad. According to another story—which within the Buddhist community in mainland China recently become widely accepted as the official historical beginning of Buddhism in China—Buddhism first arrived at the Chinese court in 2 BCE, where it was brought by an envoy from the Central Asian kingdom of Yuezhi.

We cannot be sure about the exact time when the first Buddhist missionaries arrived on Chinese soil, although it is safe to presume that there was at least some Buddhist presence by the beginning of the Common Era. There is little doubt, however, about the main route that was used during the initial transmission of Buddhism. The earliest Buddhists arrived into Han China via the "silk road," the fabled network of trade routes that linked northwestern China with Central, South, and West Asia. Most likely they were merchants, envoys, and other kinds of travelers from Central Asia, where by that time Buddhism had established a strong presence. Eventually Buddhist monks also started to arrive with the merchant caravans, with some of them putting down roots in China and establishing the earliest monastic communities. While initially many of the early Buddhists that settled in China were of Central Asian origin, with the passage of time increasing numbers of Chinese became attracted to the exotic new religion. Some of them decided to join the monastic order, which traditionally played a central role in the transmission and growth of Buddhism, while an even larger number became lay followers. The early missionary monks brought with them various Buddhist scriptures. Some of them translated selected canonical texts into Chinese, often with the help of Chinese collaborators. These early translations became the foundation for the formation of the Chinese Buddhist canon, which over the centuries grew exponentially in scope and size, eventually becoming one of the largest collections of religious literature the world has ever seen.

With the increased acceptance and growing influence of Buddhism, the foreign religion attracted a legion of detractors. The most vocal among them were officials and literati with Confucian backgrounds. A major target of attacks was the monastic order, the *sangha*, which represented a new kind of institution that had no clear

counterpart in traditional Chinese society, and was therefore perceived as being potentially incompatible with the established sociopolitical order. Certain aspects of monastic life, such as the practices of renunciation, celibacy, and mendicancy, were at odds with a prevalent Confucian ethos that placed emphasis on familial relationships and exalted the virtue of filial piety. Consequently, monks were accused of being unfilial, as well as of being economically unproductive and thus an unwarranted economic burden on the state and the general populace. The monastic order was also criticized on political grounds, especially regarding its insistence on institutional independence, which clashed with prevalent Chinese assumptions about the absolute authority of the emperor and the imperial state.

Buddhism was subjected to additional critiques on account of its foreign origin, which in the eyes of some xenophobic officials made it unsuitable as a religion for the Chinese people. Conversely, though, many Chinese were attracted to various aspects of Buddhism, including its colorful and varied rituals, its multilayered systems of abstruse doctrines, its fecund arrays of spiritual practices, and its hopeful promise of spiritual salvation. In the end, the enthusiastic responses and broad religious appeal of Buddhist teachings largely outweighed the trenchant critiques and the prevailing cultural barriers. As a result, Buddhism gradually increased its presence and influence in medieval Chinese society, attracting numerous followers from all social strata, from emperors to commoners. By the late medieval period, even before the reunification of China by the Sui Dynasty (581–618) after centuries of division, Buddhism had become firmly established as the dominant religious tradition in China, although other traditions such as Daoism and Confucianism were also flourishing at the same time.

Growth and Proliferation during the Medieval Period

During the formative phases of Chinese Buddhist history, one of the primary tasks faced by the Buddhist community was the translation of the Buddhist canon. Indian Buddhists, especially those associated with the Mahāyāna movement, were prodigious writers and they produced a vast body of scriptures and other types of religious literature. Accordingly, the project of translating those texts into Chinese was a huge and complex undertaking, on account of both the sheer size of the canonical literature that was brought into China and the large linguistic differences between Chinese and Sanskrit, the main canonical language of much of Indian Buddhism. Further, even as numerous texts were being rendered into Chinese, new texts were still being composed in India and elsewhere, and before long many of them found their way into China. Therefore, for almost a millennium there was an ongoing influx of new texts with foreign provenance that were brought into China. These included the many Tantric texts that began to arrive in large number around the early eighth century.

Many of the translation projects were large-scale undertakings, often carried out under imperial auspices. Typically they were led by famous monks, but they also involved the collaboration of numerous other monks and laypeople, who helped with various aspects of the translation work. Arguably the best-known translator in the history of East Asian Buddhism is Kumarājīva (344–409/413), who after his arrival in Chang'an in 401 assembled a large translation bureau staffed with many talented monks. Kumarājīva and his assistants produced a large number of translations, many of which remained standard renderings of important texts throughout the subsequent history of Chinese Buddhism. Another famous translator was Xuanzang (c. 600–664), who became widely celebrated as a cultural hero on account of his epic journey to India, which lasted for almost seventeen years. After his triumphant return to China in 645, Xuanzang secured the generous patronage of Emperor Taizong (626–649), who, besides being fascinated by the compelling story about the eminent monk's heroic travels to distant and exotic lands, was also moved by Xuanzang's personal charisma. Xuanzang attracted a large group of talented disciples, and for the rest of his life he dedicated himself to translating the numerous manuscripts that he brought back from India. He also wrote philosophical works and a popular record of his travels, which to this day remains an important source of historical information about India and Central Asia.

The canonical texts that were translated into Chinese by Kumarājīva and others included a number of influential Mahāyāna scriptures. Among the most prominent scriptures in China are the *Lotus Scripture* (*Lianhua jing*), with its seminal notions of "one vehicle" and universal Buddhahood; the *Flower Ornament Scripture* (*Huayan jing*), with its striking vision of a boundless cosmos in which everything is perfectly interfused, thus forming a vast web of causal relationships; the *Vimalakirtī Scripture* (*Weimo jing*), with its ideal of an enlightened layman; and the *Amitābha Scripture* (*Amituofo jing*), with its promise of rebirth in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha. The Mahāyāna scriptures contain elaborate depictions of otherworldly realms populated by numerous Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other kinds of divine beings, alongside practical guidelines about various aspects of spiritual life, including ethical injunctions and ritual observances. They also include intricate elaborations and inspired accounts of the bodhisattva path of practice and realization, which purportedly culminates in the attainment of the infinite wisdom and compassion that are characteristic of supreme Buddhahood.

A number of popular scriptures were widely read and lectured upon throughout the medieval era and subsequent historical periods, and they inspired a variety of devotional acts and cultic practices. These included elaborate repentance rituals, copying of texts by hand, and vegetarian feasts. Besides the scriptures translated from Indic and Central Asian languages, a fair number of apocryphal scriptures and treatises were composed in China. Many of these texts reflected native religious concerns and cultural sensibilities—the observance of filial piety, for example—and they often crossed the porous lines that separated Buddhism from Daoism and popular religion.

A number of canonical texts translated into Chinese contain discussions of a range of abstruse doctrines, which by means of sophisticated philosophical analyses were meant to shed light on key aspects of conventional and ultimate reality. The two main systems of Buddhist doctrine introduced from India were those of the Madhyamaka ("Middle Way") and Yogācāra ("Practice of Yoga") traditions. Madhyamaka's essential doctrine centered on the notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which highlights the absence of unique identity at the level of each individual person (the lack of a substantive self or soul) as well as in the instance of each separate thing or phenomenon. In contrast, to a large extent Yogācāra teachings focused on mapping or explicating the structure and functioning of consciousness. They also explained the mind's tendency to misconstrue everyday reality and elaborated on the essential process of spiritual transformation that led to a clear vision or knowledge of reality, perfected at the final stage of Buddhahood.

To these two principal doctrinal systems of Indian Mahāyāna we can add the doctrine of Buddha nature, which postulates the immanence of Buddhahood in each person. While this doctrine was not particularly influential within the context of Indian Buddhism, the notion that each person has Buddha nature—and thus has the potential to become a full-fledged Buddha—became one of the hallmarks of Chinese Buddhism. Over time, especially from the sixth century onward, Chinese Buddhist scholars mastered the whole range of doctrinal systems imported from abroad. They wrote about them in well-ordered and multifaceted exegetical works, a number of which are remarkable for their breath of scholarship and intellectual sophistication. This was accompanied with increasingly creative philosophical elaborations, which eventually led to the development of novel systems of Buddhist doctrine that were uniquely Chinese.

Buddhism reached the high point of its development in China during the cosmopolitan Tang Dynasty, which is widely considered to be the golden age or high point of traditional Chinese civilization. During this period Buddhism was widely accepted and practiced throughout the vast empire by members of all social classes. Besides its position as the most powerful and pervasive religious presence throughout China, Buddhism also exerted significant influence in the cultural sphere, having an especially notable impact on intellectual life and artistic expression. Copious examples of Buddhist themes and ideals are readily observable in the literature and poetry composed during this period. For instance, the collected works of famous poets such as Wang Wei (701–761) and Bo Juyi (772–846), both of whom were renowned for their Buddhist piety, are infused with Buddhist imagery and ideas. Among the lasting testimonies to the great heights of religious fervor and artistic creativity inspired by Buddhism are the numerous statues, frescoes, and reliefs found at the various complexes of cave art, including those at Longmen and Dunhuang.

Another feature of the Tang era was the development of new Buddhist schools or traditions that came to be widely regarded as paradigmatic exemplars of key trends or orientations within Chinese Buddhism. The major schools of Chinese Buddhism were formed during the Tang era, with the partial exception of the *Tiantai*

school, whose founding patriarch, Zhiyi (538–597), was active during (and before) the preceding Sui Dynasty (581–618). Among them, the best known and most influential, in addition to *Tiantai*, were the *Huayan*, Chan, and Pure Land (*Jingtu*) traditions. *Tiantai* and *Huayan* are best known for their rarefied systems of Buddhist philosophy, which were inspired by the *Lotus Scripture* and *Huayan Scripture* respectively. Early *Tiantai* also formulated highly developed systematizations of contemplative practice, and was distinguished by its comprehensive integration of doctrinal learning and spiritual practice. In contrast, the Chan school and the Pure Land tradition are best known for their methods of spiritual cultivation. The Pure Land tradition is primarily associated with various devotional practices, such as invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha. In the case of Chan, what usually first come to mind are certain forms of meditation, although of course all these traditions are multifaceted and encompass a number of other overlapping elements.

Unlike some of the other Buddhist schools that thrived in medieval China, these four new schools, which are closely associated with the Sui-Tang period, were all without clear precedents in Indian Buddhism. They represent ingenious syntheses of uniquely Chinese forms of Buddhist doctrines and methods of spiritual cultivation, often considered to epitomize a culminating phrase in the sinification of Buddhism. The establishment of these schools also gave impetus to the growth of novel types of religious art and literature, as well as to the development of new institutional forms, exemplified for instance by the Chan school's comprehensive codes of monastic regulations.

Decline During the Late Imperial Period

The history of Buddhism in late imperial China is usually told as a story of slow and protracted decline, devoid of major paradigm shifts and punctuated by occasional attempts at revival, which typically tried to recapture some of the glories of bygone eras. Often the beginning of that decline is traced back to the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Most historians characterize the Song as an important period in which culture flourished, when a reformed and reinvigorated tradition of Confucianism recaptured the intellectual, educational, and political centers of Chinese life. Notwithstanding the Confucian rise to preeminence under the Song, Buddhism still flourished during that period and made important contributions to Chinese culture and society, even if it lacked some of the religious vitality and intellectual creativity that characterized Tang Buddhism. In many ways, the Song was a key period of consolidation and standardization of Buddhist teachings, practices, and institutions. This led to the formation of general attitudes, soteriological paradigms, and institutional patterns that remained dominant for the remainder of the imperial era, and many of them are still reflected in contemporary Chinese Buddhism.

At the elite level, a key aspect of the Song synthesis was the preeminence of the Chan school, with its peculiar notion of *dharma* lineage and its ideological claims to

uniqueness and singularity. At the time, the Chan school introduced the popular meditation practice of "observing the critical phrase" (*kan huatou*), which had its textual foundations in the discourse records (*yulu*) and *gong'an* anthologies compiled during the Song period (see below). The practice was complemented with assorted varieties of devotional piety, prime examples of which were subsumed within the somewhat amorphous Pure Land tradition. These themes and traditions, along with other aspects of Song Buddhism, continued to be influential throughout the subsequent history of Chinese Buddhism, and they also affected religious developments in Korea and Japan.

Generally speaking, Chinese Buddhism of the late imperial period is characterized by a pervasive sense of institutional and intellectual conservatism. After the Song period, there was little new in terms of innovative forms of doctrinal discourse or canonical exegesis. There were also no significant introductions of novel styles of ritual or methods of spiritual practice. While Buddhism remained a major presence on the Chinese religious landscape, in a number of important ways it was eclipsed by Confucianism. The Buddhist community was primarily concerned with preserving long-established norms and traditions, although at times its leaders instituted relatively minor adjustments and modifications, often in response to changing social or cultural predicaments.

A notable development during this period was the entry of Tibetan strains of Buddhism into China, which brought various kinds of Tantric rituals and practices. That first introduction of Tibetan Buddhism into China occurred during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), after the Mongol rulers decided to convert to Tibetan Buddhism. The presence of Tantric forms of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism—especially noticeable in the capital, Beijing—was also a feature of religious life during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). In large part this was due to the patronage that was extended to Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism by the dynasty's Manchu rulers, although traditional forms of Chinese Buddhism remained predominant among the Han Chinese.

Buddhism in Modern China

The fortunes of Buddhism during the tumultuous twentieth century were, on the whole, closely linked with and influenced by the broader social and political predicaments that characterized China's frustrated encounter with modernity. Chinese Buddhists found themselves embroiled, often as relatively marginal participants or as innocuous bystanders, in a series of inept attempts to transform China into a modern nation that was economically developed, socially stable, and politically strong. During the Republican period (1911–1949), the unstable sociopolitical environment presented the Buddhist community with a number of challenges, but it also served as an impetus for notable attempts to revive and reform Buddhism. Buddhist

monks and monasteries were faced with occasional harassments and discriminatory policies enacted by the heavy-handed Nationalist government, which on a number of occasions confiscated monastic lands and buildings, and forced monks to serve in its army. In addition, Buddhism was vocally denounced by Christian missionaries, who at the time enjoyed privileged status in China. It was also criticized by numerous educated Chinese, who were influenced by an increasingly dominant modernization narrative, which adopted a materialistic stance and placed emphasis on social progress and scientific advancement. In the eyes of many progressive intellectuals, Buddhism was a dated superstition that had lost its relevance, being part of an oppressive traditional order that had to be eliminated in order to pave the way for the creation of a new modern society.

Despite these challenges, monks and lay Buddhists made concerted efforts to revitalize their religion and to make it relevant to life in modern China. Many of their endeavors, which were aimed at bringing about a Buddhist revival of sorts, revolved around renewed commitments to a host of traditional beliefs and practices. This entailed the printing of various publications, the study of Buddhist philosophy, the organization of meditation retreats, the forming of various associations, the performance of charitable activities, and participation in time-honored rituals and other devotional practices. Besides this kind of traditionalist approach to religious renewal, vocal segments of the Buddhist community advocated a more radical transformation of Buddhist teachings and institutions, which in important respects was tantamount to a comprehensive program of sweeping modernization. In the eyes of Taixu (1890–1947) and other prominent proponents of reform and modernization, Buddhism had to change in order to adapt to the new conditions and meet the needs of people living in modern society.

In order to accomplish their objectives, the reformers created new educational institutions, including seminaries with a new style of instruction and a modern curriculum. These seminaries were meant to educate a modern type of clergy, in preparation for the assumption of leadership roles in the pursuit of the reformist agenda. In addition, some of the reformers became involved in politics, and efforts were also directed toward the internationalization of Buddhism. The world-affirming religious ethos propounded by Taixu, which came to be known as "humanistic Buddhism," was aimed at turning Buddhist followers away from the kinds of otherworldly concerns, ritual obsessions, and fixations on the afterlife that were characteristic of popular forms of Buddhist piety. Instead, the clergy and the laity were both encouraged to work toward making this world a better place, in a manner that echoed the activist stance of Protestant missionaries. Reformist leaders issued calls for active participation in various charitable endeavors and other activities directed toward betterment of the everyday human condition of their compatriots.

Like all other religions, Buddhism suffered greatly during the early decades of Communist rule. During the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the wide-ranging controls on religion that were instituted by the new government

during the 1950s gave way to a wholesale persecution that was remarkable for its ferocity and comprehensiveness. The fierce denunciations and violent attacks against all "bourgeois" and "superstitious" elements linked with traditional Chinese society, inspired by Mao Zedong's (1893–1976) radical ideas and revolutionary invectives, were spearheaded by Mao's fanatical followers, especially the youthful "red guards." As a result, there was a large-scale devastation or closing of Buddhist monasteries and temples, harassment and forced laicization of monks and nuns, and destruction of innumerable statues, paintings, manuscripts, and other Buddhist artifacts. For a while, it seemed as if the two millennia of Buddhist history in China were coming to an end.

The institution of more open and liberal policies after Mao's death in 1976 paved the way for a gradual revival of Buddhism. Starting from the late 1970s, many Buddhist monasteries were restored, often on a grand scale and with some governmental support. They were once again opened to the public, which was free to worship and engage in other traditional Buddhist practices. There was also a steady growth in the number of the ordained. Many of them are now educated in officially sanctioned Buddhist academies or seminaries, where an element of political indoctrination remains a part of the curriculum. Amid the renewed interest in traditional teachings, rituals, and practices, Buddhism is currently undergoing a quiet and modest revival. On the whole, it seems well-positioned to increase its influence, as it solidifies its position as a key presence on the Chinese religious scene.

Significant revivals of Chinese forms of Buddhism are also underway outside mainland China, especially in Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. To some extent these Buddhist resurgences reflect renewed interest in traditional practices and observances, but in many instances they incorporate diverse elements and strategies that are intended to effect the modernization of Buddhism. Among other things, the reformist or modernizing trends include the development of new teaching styles and institutions, which are more in tune with contemporary urban values and lifestyles. These trends are exemplified by the growth of large, highly organized, and multifaceted Buddhist organizations such as *Foguangshan* (Buddha Light Mountain) and *Ciji* (Tzu Chi Foundation), both of which are based in Taiwan. As part of their comprehensive public ministries, which are inspired by the world-affirming ideals of humanistic Buddhism, these kinds of organizations are involved in a wide range of activities. These include a variety of charitable outfits, schools and other kinds of educational institutions (including universities); publishing houses and other types of media outlets (including TV stations); and various medical facilities, from local free clinics to large hospitals. Among the key characteristics of these organizations are their relentless efforts to expand the scope of their activities and to establish strong global presence, which are made possible by their vigorous fundraising activities. This kind of assertive institutional growth, along with other related developments, is contributing to the increasing globalization of Chinese Buddhism, which presently has at least some presence in a large number of countries, on all major continents, including Australia, Brazil, Germany, South Africa, and the United States.

Ethical Ideals and Observances

Rigorous observance of assorted ethical rules and injunctions is an integral part of the canonical elaborations of the Buddhist path of practice that were introduced into China, both within and outside the confines of the dominant Mahāyāna tradition. For instance, among the well-known schematizations of the Buddhist path, morality (*śīla*) is the first of the so-called "three trainings" (the other two being meditation and wisdom, which are addressed in the next two sections). Morality is also the second of the six perfections (*pāramitā*) that have to be cultivated by all bodhisattvas in the course of their progression on the path toward complete Buddhahood. Consequently, the observance of proper moral conduct is expected from both the clergy and the laity, although, as with all religious traditions, throughout history there have been many examples of Buddhists who have failed to uphold the lofty ethical standards of their religion. For the laity, an important mark of personal commitment to the Buddhist path is the observance of the "five precepts," which codify the basic principles of Buddhist morality. The five precepts consist of avoidance or abstention from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and consumption of alcohol (which can be extended to include other intoxicants and mind-altering substances).

Since the five precepts are basic ethical guidelines or prescriptions about daily conduct, rather than divinely ordained commandments of the kind we find in other religions, the adherence to some or all of them is a matter of individual choice. Consequently, during formal precept transmission ceremonies some laypeople choose to opt out of certain precepts. The transmission of the precepts is typically accompanied with the formal receipt of the three refuges, which entail reverence and reliance on the Buddha (the awakened one), the *dharma* (his teachings), and the *sangha* (the monastic community). While adherence to the three refuges and the five precepts implies commitment to the Buddha's teachings, many or even most people who actually come to worship at Buddhist temples are not hardcore believers. A good number of them assume the kinds of fuzzy or hybrid religious identities that are typical of Chinese religiosity; among other things, that can mean that many of them also worship at Daoist temples or shrines associated with popular religion. This is one of the reasons why it is very difficult to arrive at reliable data about the number of "Buddhists" in China.

Monks and nuns are supposed to uphold higher standards of Buddhist morality, as stipulated by the various monastic rules or precepts included in the Vinaya (*lü*), the code of monastic discipline that forms a part of the canon. The dominant collection of monastic precepts in China is known as the *Four Part Vinaya* (*Sifen lü*), which is a Chinese translation of the Vinaya portion of the canon produced by the Dharmaguptaka, one of the early schools of Indian Buddhism. Containing 250 rules for monks—and 348 for nuns, who have additional rules that are only applicable to them—this is one of the four complete sets of Vinayas that were translated into

Chinese during the early fifth century. The monastic precepts are supposed to serve as a communal charter that structures monks' everyday activity and practice, thus creating an institutional framework that is conducive to genuine pursuit of a religious way of life. They also set behavioral parameters and ethical standards that are supposed to guide the individual conduct of each monk or nun, thereby reinforcing his/her commitment to the Buddhist path.

While all Chinese monks receive the full precepts during their ordination, the level of adherence to specific rules varies considerably. In the course of the development and acculturation of Buddhism in China, many Vinaya rules were found to be culturally irrelevant or unsuited for local conditions that obtained on the ground. Consequently, while ordinations are conducted on the basis of the Vinaya, many relatively minor rules, such as the prohibition on eating after noon, are habitually broken by most members of the monastic order. Throughout history there have also been numerous documented instances of more serious breaches of monastic norms and decorum, along with recurrent departures from hallowed religious ideals. Assorted levels or types of monastic corruption and incompetence have always been, and still remain, an integral part of institutional Buddhism, in China as well as elsewhere.

In response to widespread perceptions that the ancient Vinaya precepts are at least partially inadequate for regulating monastic life in China, from early on leading Chinese monks composed a number of monastic codes, although typically they were meant to supplement rather than replace the Vinaya. Among the best-known examples of such codes are the Chan school's "rules of purity" (*qinggui*), of which a number of versions are still extant, although none of them is followed closely by present-day monastic communities. Another pertinent example of a significant effort to provide a viable alternative to the Vinaya is the codification of a Mahāyāna code of discipline, which contains the so-called "bodhisattva precepts." Based on the apocryphal *Brahmā's Net Scripture* (*Fanwang jing*), which was probably composed in China during the fifth century, to this day the bodhisattva precepts are widely transmitted within Chinese Buddhism. One of their distinguishing features is their universal applicability, which means that they can be followed by both monastics and the laity.

A notable feature of Chinese Buddhism that distinguishes it from many other Buddhist traditions and that is closely related to the ethical underpinnings of the bodhisattva path is the widespread practice of vegetarianism. While strict adherence to a vegetarian diet is not prescribed by the Vinaya, a number of Mahāyāna scriptures, including the influential *Laṅkāvatāra Scripture* (*Lengqie jing*), make forceful arguments about the incompatibility between meat eating and the cultivation of the core Mahāyāna virtue of universal compassion. Consequently, the consumption of meat is commonly banned in all Buddhist monasteries and temples; all monastics are expected to observe at all times a vegetarian diet that also precludes the eating of eggs, diary products, and certain types of leeks. Many Buddhist monasteries also have vegetarian dining halls or restaurants that are open to the general public, while

vegetarian feasts are common elements of popular Buddhist festivals and celebrations. Many lay Buddhists also adopt the practice of vegetarianism, either full-time or only during specific observance days.

Contemplative Practices

Ever since the Chan school established itself as a dominant tradition of Chinese Buddhism during the Tang-Song transition, contemplative practices have been chiefly discussed under the general rubric of Chan methods of meditation. Arguably the best-known method or approach to Chan meditation is the aforementioned practice of "investigating the critical phrase," which was initially developed during the Song era. This involves meditation on a conversation, saying, or phrase known as a *gong'an* ("public case"), better known in the West by its Japanese pronunciation, *koan*. This type of contemplative practice is closely related to the various *gong'an* collections that were compiled in the Song Dynasty and after. At the center of this genre of Chan literature are pithy and animated exchanges, typically featuring famous Chan teachers who lived during the Tang and Five Dynasties (907–960) eras. These pseudo-historical anecdotes convey a classical image of Chan as an iconoclastic tradition that makes copious use of unconventional modes of communication and idiosyncratic pedagogical techniques, including beatings, shouts, and seemingly nonsensical or paradoxical utterances. While most of these anecdotes are of uncertain provenance, by the Song period they became the most popular part of traditional Chan lore, as the religious imagery and symbolism associated with them became ideological linchpins of a new form of Chan orthodoxy that was formulated at that time.

The practice of investigating the critical phrase involves meditation on a particular story or exchange that is selected from a predetermined repertoire, usually included in well-known *gong'an* collections such as *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyan lu*). Among the best-known stories of that kind is the one that features Zhaozhou's (778–897) *wu* (lit. "no"), which was his famous response to the question "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" At the initial stage of practice, the Chan adept might try to probe the meaning of the story, but eventually he/she realizes that the story defies all attempts at logical or rational interpretation. This paves the way for a higher order of contemplation, where the focus of attention shifts to the "critical phrase," which is the focal element that purportedly captures the essential purport of the whole story. In the case of Zhaozhou's exchange with the anonymous student, the critical phrase is the word *wu*.

After an extended period of practice, the Chan adept is supposed to be able to attain a unified state of mental absorption; as all extraneous thoughts and feelings come to an end, there is only single-minded focus on the main object of meditation. A unique aspect of this type of meditation is the utilization of doubt, which is initially engendered by the adept's inability to arrive at a rational resolution to the

fundamental quandary posed by the *gong'an*. As the feeling of doubt gradually assumes deeper existential dimensions, it facilitates the focusing of all mental energies and the abandonment of conceptualization. The whole process is said to culminate in the realization of a sublime state of spiritual awakening, as the adept obtains an intuitive insight into the ultimate truth, which is not separate from his/her essential nature.

Within the soteriological framework of this kind of Chan practice, the original story that is told in the form of a *gong'an* is primarily intended to serve as a direct pointer to a timeless reality. That reality is believed to have been realized by earlier generations of Chan teachers and patriarchs, but ultimately it is believed to be located within the mind of each person. The meditative technique is therefore simply an expedient tool that facilitates the aforementioned process of spiritual transformation. Often, instead of using well-known stories derived from *gong'an* literature, Chan teachers assign to their students carefully chosen questions that point to the basic existential ground of being that underscores the Chan quest for self-understanding, which on a deeper level involves thoroughgoing self-transcendence. The best-known examples of such questions—"What is it?" and "Who is repeating the Buddha's name?"—both point to the underlying substratum of reality that according to Buddhist doctrine constitutes the true nature of each person, which is none other than the universal Buddha.

Prior to the Chan school's popularization of a narrow range of meditation techniques, exemplified by the "investigating the critical phrase" style of practice, the medieval traditions of Chinese Buddhism adopted and developed a rich array of contemplative practices. Some of those practices involved a variety of visualizations, which often included the conjuring up of eidetic images of particular Buddhas or bodhisattvas, such as Maitreya and Amitābha. A good sampling of such approaches to spiritual cultivation is available in the comprehensive systematization of contemplative practices that was undertaken by Zhiyi during the later part of the sixth century. Zhiyi adapted and reinterpreted the two basic categories of Buddhist meditation, calmness (*zhi*) and insight (*guan*), and applied them in several innovative ways to a broad range of contemplative practices. The assorted techniques described in Zhiyi's meditation manuals represented a variety of approaches to contemplative practice, tailored to meet the spiritual needs and abilities of various types of practitioners. Some of these practices were cultivated in the course of extended meditation retreats, which took place in a specially designated sanctuary or a meditation hall.

Some of the contemplative practices described by Zhiyi make liberal use of sounds, in the form of various chants and invocations, while in others there is focus on silence and tranquility. The same is true of motion and stillness: some practices revolve around complex rituals that incorporate a variety of stylized gestures and movements, while others involve extended periods of quiet sitting in a formal meditation posture. There is also the formless practice of "being attentive to whatever the mind is directed toward at a given moment," which has no fixed procedures or constraints but simply involves the adept's contemplation of the underlying mental

processes that initiate and guide all mental, physical, and verbal actions. While Zhiyi presented his audiences with a broad selection of contemplative approaches and an assortment of distinct meditative techniques, in the final analysis all of them pointed toward the all-encompassing and sublime nature of ultimate reality. In accord with the central doctrine of the Madhyamaka tradition, the perfection of the path of practice implied profound insight into emptiness: of the mind as well as of the multitude of things (or events) that constitute phenomenal reality.

Doctrinal Systematization and Exegesis

As numerous canonical texts were introduced into medieval China and translated into literary Chinese, certain segments of the Buddhist community were faced with the daunting task of making sense of the exceptionally rich and varied plethora of teachings and doctrines that were contained within them. Not only was the Buddhist canon huge in scope—and growing constantly—but the copious texts contained in it were introduced in a haphazard manner. Moreover, the assorted articles of faith and systems of doctrine, elaborated in numerous scriptures and treatises of Indian provenance, were often difficult to reconcile. Although particular doctrines seemed to be mutually contradictory or incongruous, they also were believed to be traceable back to the same person: the Buddha himself. In response to this predicament, Chinese Buddhist scholars developed a number of hermeneutical strategies that tried to impose a sense of order and coherence on the canon as a whole, as well as to interpret the meaning and significance of its component parts in relation to each other.

Certain guidelines for such exegetical exercises were already contained in specific canonical texts. For instance, the *Lotus Scripture* presents the notion of "three vehicles"—of hearers, solitary Buddhas, and bodhisattvas—alongside its often-quoted assertion that they are all superseded by the "one vehicle," which is the only one that leads to perfect Buddhahood. Other canonical texts provide explicit guidance for interpreting particular scriptures or teachings. One such example, coming from the Yogācāra tradition, is the distinction between texts or teachings that convey a "provisional meaning" and those that reveal a "definitive meaning." In its classical formulation, presented in the influential *Scripture of Unfolding the True Meaning* (*Sandhinirmocana sūtra*, or *Jie shenmi jing* in Chinese), this dichotomy is integrated into the theory of the "three turnings of the *dharma* wheel," which postulates that Yogācāra is the third and final turning of the *dharma* wheel. Needless to say, within this interpretative framework, Yogācāra teachings are deemed to be definitive, while those of the various "Hīnayāna" ("small vehicle") traditions and the emptiness doctrine propounded by the Madhyamaka tradition are relegated to the inferior status of provisional teachings.

A number of brilliant Chinese scholars and exegetes have elaborated on the hermeneutical strategies presented in canonical literature. Building on those

intellectual foundations, they created their own methods of textual classification and interpretation. Prime examples are the various doctrinal classifications or taxonomies of teachings (*panjiao*) that were produced during the medieval period. The hierarchical orderings of specific texts or teachings into carefully constructed taxonomies were based on the ecumenical assumption that there are close and organic links between them; in the final analysis, they were all believed to be subsumed into a larger, all-inclusive whole. All teachings purportedly point to the same sublime and ineffable reality, which is beyond conceptualization; their differences primarily result from the varied spiritual aptitudes of their target audiences and the actual circumstances under which they were initially enunciated. There were, however, also implicit polemical aspects to virtually all doctrinal taxonomies. As they were each created from a particular point of view, they promoted specific hierarchal rankings or vertical orderings among select teachings. That could easily lend itself to the advancement of implicit quasi-sectarian agendas, even if such hermeneutical formulations were usually shaped by prior intellectual commitments and deeply felt religious convictions. Not surprisingly, the texts or teachings that were promoted or endorsed by the authors of particular classificatory systems were usually placed at the top of their taxonomies.

For specific examples of influential doctrinal taxonomies, we can turn again to the writings of Zhiyi. As he approached the complex problem of ordering and systematizing the canonical texts and teachings of Buddhism from a variety of angles and perspectives, Zhiyi created three separate taxonomic schemes. Collectively known as the "eight teachings and five periods," Zhiyi's three doctrinal taxonomies differ from each other on account of the distinct sets of classificatory principles he separately applied to each of them. For instance, the "five periods" scheme was based on a legendary chronology of the Buddha's life and his preaching ministry. Starting with the basic premise that the Buddha was the author of the various scriptures included in the canon, Zhiyi situated the preaching of specific scriptures or doctrines into particular periods of the Buddha's life. According to Zhiyi, immediately after his supreme awakening the Buddha preached the immensely profound *Huayan Scripture*. However, after he realized that his disciples were unable to fathom its subtle principles and recondite truths, he devised a graduated system of instruction, which started with his preaching of elemental Hīnayāna doctrines. As his disciples' spiritual abilities and level of comprehension gradually improved, the Buddha supposedly started to teach the Mahāyāna scriptures. Eventually, during the final eight years of his life, he focused on the teachings of the *Lotus Scripture*, which for Zhiyi and his *Tiantai* school represented the highest and purest expression of Buddhist wisdom; this was followed by the preaching of the *Nirvana Scripture*, just before his passing away. In an analogous manner, the other two sets of criteria used by Zhiyi, the means of instruction used by the Buddha and the doctrinal contents of the major categories of teachings he introduced, yielded two additional sets of doctrinal taxonomies, each of which comprised four distinct teachings.

Chinese Buddhist scholars also wrote exegetical works, including comprehensive commentaries on important Mahāyāna scriptures, as well as original works that contained wide-ranging philosophical analyses and ingenious systematizations of Buddhist doctrine. In numerous treatises and commentaries, some of which are of truly encyclopedic proportions, medieval Buddhist scholars presented intricate metaphysical elaborations, along with imaginative reformulations of canonical tenets and philosophical principles. At times they also took the additional step of formulating new doctrinal themes or unique theoretical templates, some of which became the crowning intellectual achievements of Chinese Buddhism. As they showcased their intellectual prowess and academic virtuosity, they also expanded the fields of Chinese religious and philosophical discourse.

While for reasons of space I cannot survey the major philosophical trends and doctrinal systematizations of Chinese Buddhism, let me briefly introduce an example of the manner in which Indian canonical formulations were reframed and expanded as part of the development of novel systems of doctrine that were uniquely Chinese. The case in question involves creative reformulation of the Madhyamaka doctrine of "two truths." It comes from the writings of Jizang (549–623), who was one of the leading Buddhist scholars of the early Tang period. He is traditionally recognized as the "founder" of the Three Treatises (*Sanlun*) school, often labeled as a Chinese version of the Madhyamaka tradition.

In standard Madhyamaka philosophy, the two truths, conventional truth (*sudi*) and ultimate truth (*zhendi*), point to two levels of truth or reality. Often they are presented as two complementary facets or aspects of the same underlying reality, which is whole and ubiquitous, each truth implicating the other. In terms of its essential purport, the two truths doctrine is primarily epistemological in orientation, being concerned with explicating the ways in which individuals experience or perceive reality. Nonetheless, at times it also assumes ontological connotations; namely it is understood—or misunderstood, according to Jizang—as describing two separate realms of reality. In his formulation of an innovative theoretical model that mapped the bodhisattva path of practice and realization, Jizang postulated three distinct phases in the dialectical ascent to increasingly more refined levels of understanding the two truths. In essence, the three phrases served as a heuristic model that charted a process of spiritual transformation, through which the kind of unsophisticated misapprehension of reality that is characteristic of ordinary persons is gradually transformed into the pristine form of non-conceptual awareness realized by Buddhist saints, which entails deep insight into the non-dual nature of reality.

Within Jizang's conceptual scheme, conventional truth is primarily associated with everyday existence, while ultimate truth is linked with emptiness. The three phases can be thought of as three increasingly subtle levels of comprehending reality, or as three increasingly elevated stages in a spiritual path that revolves around the perfection of ever more subtle forms of detachment and transcendence. At the first level, both truths, conventional and ultimate, are affirmed as two different

ways of looking at reality. At the second level, both truths are viewed as belonging to the sphere of conventional truth, while their negation or transcendence is treated as the ultimate truth. Finally, at the third and highest level, the duality and nonduality of the two truths are both placed at the level of conventional truth, while the simultaneous transcendence of both propositions (duality and nonduality) is identified as the ultimate truth.

Popular Devotion

While throughout history doctrinal reflection and contemplative practice remained central aspects of Chinese Buddhism, especially within the elite milieus of the monastics and the literati, for most ordinary people prevalent expressions of Buddhist piety were (and still are) channeled via a variety of popular modes of worship and ritual observance. Common forms of worship or veneration include the performance of ceremonial bows and the making of offerings, especially of incense. There is also an extensive liturgical repertoire. In addition to the daily liturgies that are performed at most Buddhist establishments—namely the morning and evening services that involve the chanting of select scriptures and invocations, which are often complemented with a shorter service that marks the midday meal—this repertoire also includes a variety of rituals that are performed at particular occasions or in response to specific needs. Examples of such rituals are the various repentance ceremonies, the rites for the procurement of practical benefits such as good health and long life, and memorial services for the dead, which are linked with traditional Chinese notions about filial piety and ancestor worship.

The central objects of worship and cultic practice in Chinese Buddhism include a wide array of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, along with other divinities such as the various guardian deities. Besides the historical Buddha, popularly known as Śākyamuni (*Shijiamoni*, "sage of the śākyas"), popular celestial Buddhas that populate the Buddhist pantheon include Vairocana, the cosmic embodiment of the essence of Buddhahood, who is prominently featured in the *Huayan Scripture*; Amitābha (*Amituofo*), the Buddha of the western pure land, who is the main object of faith and devotion within the Pure Land tradition; and Bhaiṣajyaguru (*Yaoshi*, or Medicine Master), who as his name indicates is the Buddha of healing and medicine. Any of these Buddhas can be installed as the central image in the monastery's main hall of worship. Buddhist monasteries in China typically follow the traditional architectural layout of palaces, as do their Daoist counterparts. They consist of a series of halls and courtyards that are arranged symmetrically around a central axis, which usually runs from north to south. The main hall is typically a large building that is centrally located along the main axis. In larger monasteries or temples, a number of ancillary halls also house the images of lesser Buddhist divinities, giving residents and visitors alike a wide choice of objects of worship and supplication.

In Buddhist iconography it is most common to represent the Buddha sitting cross-legged in the familiar meditation posture, but he can also be depicted in the standing and reclining postures. Another common alternative is to have a Buddha trinity in the monastery's main hall, which usually comprises three of the aforementioned Buddhas. A common version of the Buddha trinity consists of Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Bhaiṣajyaguru, but there are other variations as well. Another conventional option is to have the central Buddha image surrounded by two bodhisattvas. In the case of Śākyamuni Buddha, it is also common to have him surrounded by two standing disciples, Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa, who in that kind of stylistic arrangement serve as his attendants.

Among the numerous celestial bodhisattvas that are featured or mentioned in the Buddhist canon, in China the most popular ones are Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), the embodiment of compassion, who is usually represented in a female form; Wenshu (Mañjuśrī), the embodiment of wisdom; Dizang (Kṣitigarbha), who in traditional iconography assumes the guise of a monk and is said to descend into the hells in order to save those who suffer there; Puxian (Samantabhadra), the embodiment of practice; and Milefo (Maitreya), the Buddha of the future, who is believed to reside in the Tuṣita heaven. Besides serving as anthropomorphic personifications of key virtues or spiritual qualities that are supposed to be cultivated by aspiring practitioners, commonly the devout also conceive of the celestial bodhisattvas as divine beings with great power and ability to bestow a variety of blessings. The celestial bodhisattvas are believed to be responsive to the fervent prayers and the sincere supplications for supernatural intervention that are directed toward them by the faithful. The first four of the aforementioned bodhisattvas are objects of the practice of pilgrimage. For centuries each of them has been associated with a different mountain, which are regarded as sanctuaries for each particular bodhisattva. Collectively known as the four great Buddhist mountains, these sacred sites continue to be visited by throngs of pious pilgrims (as well as numerous tourists) hoping to experience some of the spiritual power or sacred presence of the bodhisattva that allegedly resides there. These mountain pilgrimage centers are

- Mount Puto (Zhejiang Province), associated with Guanyin
- Mount Wutai (Shanxi Province), associated with Wenshu
- Mount Jiuhua (Anhui Province), associated with Dizang
- Mount Emei (Sichuan Province), associated with Puxian

The worship of various Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other divinities, along with the performance of related cultic practices, is influenced by a wide range of beliefs and considerations. Often acts of worship are shaped by heartfelt feelings of respect and devotion. Time and again, they are also integrated into larger templates of meaning or grafted into spiritual technologies or procedures that may include assorted contemplative practices. In virtually all instances, such acts are also seen as means for the accumulation of merit and blessings, which in accord with the law

of karma can bring about positive results, in both this and future lives. Frequently such acts or practices are informed or driven by utilitarian concerns, being directed toward the achievement of mundane benefits, such as the accumulation of wealth, the acquisition of social status or position, the securing of health and long life, or the birth of a child.

Intra- and Inter-religious Interactions

Chinese Buddhism lacks clear sectarian divisions of the kind we find in other Buddhist traditions, such as those of Japan and Tibet. Generally speaking, all Chinese monks and nuns are ordained according to the same Vinaya precepts and procedures, and they are all members of the same monastic order. Accordingly, in a narrow institutional sense it is largely pointless to talk about "Chan monks" or "*Tiantai* monks" as members of separate sects, as the term is understood in the sociology of religion. Chan, *Tiantai*, and other schools of Chinese Buddhism are rightly recognized for their distinctive teachings, texts, or practices. However, they lack institutional independence and are all subsumed within a larger Buddhist tradition, which is characterized by broad-minded acceptance of a variety of styles of discourse, modes of worship, and approaches to spiritual cultivation. Moreover, most monastics and laypeople do not exclusively identify themselves with a particular school, and there is a longstanding tradition of Buddhist syncretism. That of course does not mean that there are no doctrinal debates and disagreements within the Buddhist community, or competitions for power and influence. On the whole, however, ecumenical embrace of diversity and acceptance of differences are among the hallmarks of Chinese Buddhism.

A similar sense of ecumenism is also observable in the complex patterns of interaction between Buddhism and other religious traditions, especially Daoism, but also Confucianism and popular religion. Generally speaking, the embrace of religious pluralism is among the salient characteristics of traditional Chinese civilization. Accordingly, we must keep in mind that Buddhism has always shared common social and cultural spaces with a number of other traditions. Throughout history, the growth and transformation of Chinese Buddhism were influenced by wide-ranging contacts and multifaceted intersections with other religious and intellectual traditions. Likewise, Daoism, Confucianism, and other traditions were affected, often profoundly, by their encounters with Buddhist doctrines, practices, and institutions. As a result, Buddhism in China—past as well as present—cannot be neatly separated from the broader religious and cultural milieus into which it was integrated. It is undoubtedly true that with its unique canon and distinctive monastic order Buddhism was able to establish its own separate religious and institutional identities, but the lines of demarcation and the parameters of orthodoxy were never rigidly fixed.

Copious examples of Buddhist influences are readily observable in the teachings and practices of both Daoism and Neo-Confucianism. For instance, medieval Daoism adopted many elements from Buddhism, including the notions of reincarnation,

karma, and universal salvation. Daoist cosmology also incorporated a number of Buddhist components, including the threefold division of heavens, along with the giving of Buddhist-sounding names to the various heavens and celestial divinities featured in Daoist scriptures. Further, the original threefold division of the Daoist canon was modeled on its Buddhist counterpart and some Daoist scriptures included extensive passages that were copied from Buddhist literature, while Daoist monasticism was to a large extent modeled on the Buddhist *sangha*. Neo-Confucians did not share the overall sense of ease and open-mindedness that characterized Daoist assimilations of Buddhist themes or elements. But, even as major Neo-Confucian thinkers of the Song and later periods, including Zhu Xi (1130–1200), were prone to harshly criticizing Buddhism, they were also greatly indebted to Buddhist concepts and ideas, which were influential in their systematizations of Neo-Confucian philosophy and praxis.

Within the overall context of the Chinese religious landscape, the porous and tentative nature of the religious boundaries that separate Buddhism from other traditions is especially noticeable as we move away from the center, traditionally dominated by monastic elites, and enter the world of popular beliefs and practices. For instance, Guanyin is not only the most popular bodhisattva, with a ubiquitous presence in virtually all Buddhist temples and monasteries, but is also widely worshiped in a variety of other religious milieus, especially Daoist temples, popular shrines, and private homes. Moreover, it is not uncommon to have separate Buddhist shrines in temples that are associated primarily with Daoism or popular religion. Similarly, we can also easily find images of some popular Chinese deities in most Buddhist establishments. An example is Guan Yu, the immensely popular god of war, who in different contexts assumes a number of additional roles and functions, including that of a bodhisattva who protects the Buddhist *dharma*. There is also the prominent notion of the "unity of the three teachings" (of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism), which, besides reflecting common attitudes toward religious pluralism, also found concrete expressions in syncretic forms of religion that developed in late imperial China and during the twentieth century. A pertinent example of such trends is the "three-in-one teaching" (*sanyi jiao*), which became a distinct sectarian tradition during the sixteenth century and continues to exist to this day.

Notwithstanding the general openness toward syncretism and the prevalence of a pluralist outlook, Chinese history also provides us with occasions of religious intolerance and fanaticism. Prime examples are the anti-Buddhist persecutions that occurred during the medieval era and the violent suppression of all religions during the Cultural Revolution. The first of the major medieval anti-Buddhist persecutions occurred in 446, under the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534), which controlled a large area of northern China. A major reason for this relatively short-lived persecution was the intent of the dynasty's Toba rulers to establish Daoism as the de facto state religion. The influence of Daoist and Confucian advisors is also usually identified as being among the reasons that prompted Emperor Wu (r. 840–846) of the

Tang Dynasty to initiate the most comprehensive anti-Buddhist persecution in Chinese history, although there were other contributing factors as well, including important economic and political considerations.

Further, there was an ongoing competition for patronage between Buddhists and Daoists, although typically the focal points of their rivalry were expressed via debates between proponents of the two religions instead of the kinds of interreligious conflicts and wars that have marred much of human history. Other examples of interreligious rivalry or hostility are the Confucian critiques of Buddhism, which assumed an especially acrimonious tone and became tinged with exclusivist attitudes with the rise of Neo-Confucianism. Buddhists have also been prone to asserting the superiority of their religion, even if they are usually able to recognize certain value in the religion of others. On balance, however, it is fair to say that during most of Chinese history the dominant response toward religious diversity has been a restrained embrace of pluralism, somewhat similar to the attitudes that are presently prevailing in most modern liberal democracies, in contrast to the exclusivist attitudes that have often been prevalent in many parts of the world.

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CHAPTER 10

Chinese Popular Religion

Philip Clart, University of Leipzig

Conceptual Issues

While the problematic labels "Confucian," "Daoist," and "Buddhist" at least have more-or-less clearly identifiable counterparts in traditional Chinese usage, the term "popular religion" smacks of Orientalist imposition, as it does not correspond to any immediately apparent premodern Chinese conceptual construct. Modern Chinese usage does have a variety of corresponding terms, most of which were imported as translations of Western terminology via Japan from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onward. Yet none of these terms provides a perfect match for the notion of "popular religion" as it is employed by Western students of Chinese religious life. This disconnection is one of the reasons why the very notion of "popular religion" has been and still is hotly debated among specialists, with various alternatives being proposed, such as "folk religion," "common religion," and "local religion."

Though a detailed discussion of these issues would go beyond the scope of the present work, they needed to be mentioned merely to alert the reader to the fact that "popular religion" is primarily a heuristic concept and not an unambiguous empirical phenomenon. Heuristically, it allows the researcher to group together data that indicate systemic cohesion without being clearly identifiable with an (emically or etically named) cultural subsystem. Its purpose, at least as it is employed in the present overview, is not to serve as a residual category for the religious odds and ends that do not fit under the heading of one of the "great traditions," but to direct attention to the "lived religion" of Chinese people in different time periods and different

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regions of the Chinese cultural sphere. It is the religion of people of all classes beyond the institutional contexts immediately controlled and run by professional clergy or the central state authorities, yet these contexts may still play various roles in the sphere of popular religion.

The heuristic key of "popular religion" opens up vistas of a vast religious landscape that includes diverse phenomena such as the ancestral cult at house altars and lineage halls, the worship of tutelary deities at roadside shrines and village temples, the lifecycle rituals of families, the seasonal festivals of communities, and the beliefs and practices of numerous so-called "popular sects" (i.e., lay-based religious movements with their own scriptures, traditions, and leadership separate from the major religious traditions). Buddhism and Daoism as well as the Chinese state have always featured in this "lived religion" in some fashion or other. For example, in many areas of China, the state tried to prohibit cults to certain deities while promoting those of others; religious specialists affiliated with one of the three teachings played important roles in familial death rituals; and Buddhist monks and Daoist priests often served as hired care-takers in local temples. Yet, in such instances religious specialists usually served specific roles within popular religion without controlling it or significantly changing its underlying logic; state influence, too, usually did not succeed in transforming local cults according to some government-decreed standard of ritual practice and ethical value.

To return to the image of the religious landscape, in the following sections we will endeavor to explore the principal topographic features of Chinese popular religion by focusing on key notions of divinity, types of religious specialists, channels for the transmission of religious knowledge, and four major social contexts, namely family, local community, voluntary associations, and the state. This is not the only possible way of organizing the material, but it is a viable approach that allows us to construe an overview of key features of Chinese popular religion without claiming comprehensive coverage.

The sources for the following account are both historical studies and twentieth and twenty-first century field research. As a result of the prevailing political conditions, much of the ethnographic field research up to the late 1980s was conducted outside mainland China; thus, our picture of modern popular religion is somewhat skewed toward the specific cultural contexts of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and (to a lesser extent) Southeast Asian Chinese communities. Since field research became possible again in the People's Republic in the 1980s, we are beginning to get a better idea of the regional variation in religious beliefs and practices, but also of underlying trans-regional and even pan-Chinese commonalities. Still, at present a certain regional bias is unavoidable in a generalizing survey such as ours. In terms of time frame, unless otherwise indicated the picture painted here depicts general features typical of popular religion since the Song Dynasty (960–1279), a period when the social and cultural structures of early modern China began to emerge, and with them key elements of popular religion that have lasted to the present day, albeit of course not unchanged. In fact, it may be argued that popular religion is one of the most variable

and sensitive barometers of changes in the climates of Chinese history and cultural geography. These clarifications serve to emphasize that popular religion is neither timeless nor homogeneous across China and that generalizing statements across vast expanses of time and space, while necessary, cannot hope to capture the full complexity of unity and diversity in Chinese popular religion.

Gods, Ghosts, Ancestors, and the Cosmos

In the classical period a correlative cosmology took shape that remains influential to the present day. *Yin* and *yang*; the Five Phases, the Eight Trigrams, and Sixty-four Hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*; and the Ten Celestial Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches are key elements of a worldview based on the notion of an ordered cosmos whose laws and structures are intelligible and to some extent amenable to being employed for human purposes. Traditional sciences such as medicine, astronomy/astrology, agriculture, calendrics, alchemy, and various mantic arts are based on this correlative cosmology, which continues to shape the basic worldview of Chinese popular religion. It is ubiquitously present in this cultural sphere in the shape of the almanac, a handbook that includes a calendar of the current lunar year, indicates the constellations of cosmic forces for each day of that year, and provides practical advice on the consequences of these constellations in terms of auspicious and inauspicious activities. Few temples and traditionally minded homes go without this crucial cosmological reference source.

Of the mantic arts mentioned, geomancy shall here exemplify the role and importance of correlative cosmology within popular religion. Also called *fengshui* ("wind-and-water"), geomancy analyzes the streams of cosmic forces crisscrossing space so as to locate human dwellings (both for the living and for the dead) in such a way that they profit from these force constellations rather than are harmed by them. The earliest surviving geomantic texts date from the fourth century CE and since then this traditional science has diversified into several different schools with different methods and theories. However, basic notions are shared and a consensus exists on the fundamental features of desirable locations. Thus, a geomantically favorable location for a tomb should face south (ideally toward a water current) and be protected toward the north by an elevation, with ridges flanking the tomb site on its eastern and western sides. Such a location concentrates positive energies in the tomb, benefiting both the deceased and his/her descendants. Innumerable stories tell of riches, progeny, and success in the civil examinations resulting from the superior qualities of the ancestors' tombs; conversely, setbacks and streaks of misfortune may be corrected by resituating the dwellings of both living and dead family members. Sometimes criticized by Confucians for its underlying profit motive, the basic validity of geomancy was rarely questioned in traditional China. In imperial China, professional practitioners of geomancy were often failed examination candidates; to the

present day, the geomancer is often endowed with an aura of traditional erudition and is hired as a technical expert rather than a religious specialist.

However, this cosmos, which operates by the interplay of abstract forces, is also populated by personal beings who interact with humans and influence their existence. In popular religion, there are three major types of such beings: gods, ghosts, and ancestors. Most of these are not only imagined and depicted anthropomorphically but are in fact human in origin. This is most easily understood in the case of ancestors, who in life were human beings and now exist as spirits honored and cared for by their living descendants. Ghosts are spirits of the dead as well, except that they have no descendants to look after them; hence, they roam around unattached to a kin group and may create all kinds of troubles and misfortunes. Gods are powerful spirits representing public order and values and are imagined to be organized into a celestial bureaucracy headed by the Jade Emperor. Many gods were once human, but ascended to divine status after their deaths because of their extraordinary merits or powerful reputation. One of the most commonly worshipped deities of popular religion, the red-faced Guangong ("Lord Guan"), whose shrines are found in many Chinese restaurants across the world, was in his lifetime the famous general Guan Yu (d. 219 CE), whose martial exploits were immortalized in the famous sixteenth century novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*).

Just as humans can after death join the ranks of the gods, ghosts, or ancestors, so is it possible for spirits to move from one category into another. Ancestors become ghosts when their line of descendants dies out or ceases to worship its ancestors. Ghosts may become ancestors by posthumously adopting descendants who will perform sacrifices to them. Ghosts may rise into the ranks of the gods when they prove themselves to be powerful and willing to use their powers for the benefit of humans. The most widely worshipped deity in Taiwan (and in many, mostly coastal, areas of mainland China) is Mazu, also known by her title of Tianhou ("Empress of Heaven"). She was the daughter of a fisherman in the southeastern province of Fujian who died unmarried (i.e., without descendants) but whose spirit soon acquired the reputation of protecting fishermen and other seafarers against the dangers of the oceans. She thus attracted worshippers who spread her stories and increased her reputation for efficacy (*ling*)—that is, her willingness and ability to fulfill requests put to her in prayers. If a deity loses its *ling*, the number of worshippers will dwindle and its cult will eventually vanish. Thus there exists a close reciprocal relationship between spirits and humans, each side depending in some way on the other.

Gods, ghosts, and ancestors are distinguished ritually by the different kinds of sacrifices offered them and the different locations at which these sacrifices are performed. Thus, in many areas of Taiwan gods receive odd (equivalent to *yang*) numbers of incense sticks, while ancestors receive even (equivalent to *yin*) numbers. Gods are offered gold "spirit money," while ghosts and ancestors are given silver money. Food offerings for gods are uncooked and uncut, while those for ghosts are cooked but uncut, and those for ancestors are cooked and cut. Thus, ritual serves as a code by means of which categorical distinctions are expressed. The code may be used crea-

tively to shift the recipients from one category to another. This happens, for example, when a ghostly entity acquires more and more divine characteristics and begins to receive offerings proper to gods from some worshippers, while others may still be continuing to treat it ritually as a ghost.

This tripartite categorization parallels the three social worlds relevant to ordinary Chinese past and present: family and kinship (ancestors), state and public order (gods), and the forces of disorder and anti-structure (ghosts). The spirit world as Durkheimian mirror of social realities, however, is not static, but changes with the shifting social experiences of humans. An important study has shown, for example, that the significance of ghosts has shifted in northern Taiwan from threatening entities akin to bandits and marauders within the unsettled sociopolitical conditions of the nineteenth century to pitiful beggars and outsiders in the largely stable and prosperous Taiwanese society of the late twentieth century. This shift is traceable in the changing style and intensity of rituals performed annually for the propitiation of hungry ghosts. Further, the bureaucratic metaphor does not completely explain the complexity and flexibility of the popular pantheon. While many gods are viewed and addressed as celestial functionaries and are organized into a bureaucratic hierarchy from the lowly local earth god ruled over by the city god all the way up to the Jade Emperor, other deities stand outside these official structures of power. The goddess Mazu, mentioned above, is a case in point, as are all female deities, who are by their gender excluded from participation in the patriarchal imperial bureaucracy and wield their powers through unofficial, but by no means less efficacious, channels. Other deities are unconventional mavericks whose assistance is often sought by marginal (and sometimes shady) individuals and groups. Thus the interrelationship between religious and social realities is complex and varies over time.

In an orderly and intelligible cosmos there can be no omnipotent deity. Instead, the role and function of both humans and spirits are those of actors on a cosmic stage. The stage and the play set limits on their actions, but they have different degrees of freedom to improvise and develop their parts. The resultant interactions of the players create much of the drama that is Chinese popular religion.

Religious Specialists

Professionals affiliated with the three teachings function as ritual service providers in popular religion; examples of the roles of Daoist priests and Buddhist monks and nuns are given in the following sections. While these types of clergy are in a sense "in but not of" popular religion, there are other specialists proper to the popular religious sphere—though, as we will see, there are no firm borderlines. Here we should first of all mention the strong shamanic and mediumistic tradition in Chinese popular religion. In common scholarly usage of these two terms, it is characteristic of the shaman to actively project his soul outwards and engage in spirit travels to the worlds of the gods and of the dead; the medium, by contrast, is passively

possessed by an incoming spirit and serves as its speaker. While arguments have been made for a strict differentiation of these terms in the Chinese context, in my view this is not warranted for more recent periods of Chinese history as the ethnographic data do not demonstrate any consistent separation in practice. One and the same person may communicate with the spirits in both modes. Therefore the terms "shaman" and "medium" will here be used interchangeably, unless indicated otherwise, but with a preference for "medium" simply because mediumistic functions are more prevalent in practice.

Mediums play central roles in local religion as sources of information on the spirit world and on the will of the gods, and as conduits for divine power in rituals of healing, purification, and exorcism. Temple processions often contain at least one medium possessed by its main deity or its attendant spirits who clears the path of evil spirits and serves as the deity's spokesperson and representative at stations along the way. In contrast to, say, a Daoist priest, a medium does not undergo formal training; mediumship is not a profession that needs to be learned but a calling for which one is chosen, often involuntarily. A sign that a person, man or woman, has been chosen by a deity as its medium is the onset of sudden und uncontrollable trance states during which the deity attempts to take control of the prospective medium's body and to speak and act through him/her. Many try to avoid the social stigma attaching to mediumship, but if the trance experiences do not cease and if the community regards them as authentic demands of a deity, the chosen one may have no other option than to accept his/her role. As the deity's tool, a medium speaks and acts with the god's authority and power while in trance but remains an ordinary person outside it. Their role gives mediums no enhanced position in the community.

In Taiwan, mediums often cooperate with so-called "ritual masters" (*fashi*), performing combined rituals for various purposes. Comparable types of specialists are found in many areas of China, where they represent local ritual traditions that straddle the Daoist and popular spheres. In Taiwan, fully ordained Daoist priests (*daoshi*) base their craft on complex rites formulated in the literary language, which are taught during many years of apprenticeship. A *daoshi* will usually have an understanding of the *fashi*'s non-canonical rituals performed in the vernacular language, but will regard them as part of a separate liturgical system. These local ritual traditions are a primary interface between Daoism and popular religion, as symbolized in the liturgical cooperation of the *fashi* and the medium.

My previous declaration about the low social prestige of mediumship needs to qualified by reference to the practice of spirit-writing (*fuji*). Here a medium communicates a deity's statement not by spoken words but in writing. Traditionally, such "literate" mediumship carried considerable prestige and was employed by many groups and classes. A significant portion of scriptures in the Daoist canon were revealed in spirit-writing séances, while many literati of the late imperial period patronized spirit-writing groups, where they could communicate and exchange poetry with the spirits of great thinkers and poets of the past. Spirit-writing serves

to the present day as an important mode of communication between humans and gods, and as a source of scriptural revelation in popular religion.

The Transmission of Religious Knowledge

Chinese popular religion is a religion without a fixed canon of sacred texts and without a formally trained clergy that would control and transmit such a canon. Hence, the channels for the transmission of religious knowledge across generations must be sought elsewhere. Of key importance is, of course, *oral tradition.* Ancestral practices, stories about local deities, notions of ghosts, demons, and their interactions with the human world—all of these are transmitted orally within families and communities. Each family and community thus shares in and owns a part of the total "canon" in the shape of its own traditions and stories. Possessed mediums are sources of new knowledge about nether realms and their denizens and must be regarded as playing a key role in the creation and transmission of popular beliefs and practices.

Oral traditions are accessible to the modern ethnographer and folklorist, but only come to the attention of the historian in cases where they have acquired written form. Stories about ghosts and supernatural events (*zhiguai*), which have been widely collected by elite authors since the second century CE, thus are important sources of past popular religious beliefs. By the Song Dynasty, oral and written stories already existed in a complex interrelationship in which storytellers would use written prompt books for their oral performances, and popular themes would be transformed into drama scripts that would then be fed back into oral literature by theatrical performances. As a result, we can witness in the late imperial period mutual flows of influence between written and oral tales, which on the one hand allowed local lore to reach national audiences in written form while on the other hand standardized local folklore to some extent by exposing it to themes from far-away regions of the empire. Stories about, for example, fox spirits and the mischief they commit traveled widely and shaped popular beliefs in many areas of China, especially its northern regions.

In between local oral lore and written adaptations for a discerning elite audience we find a vast area of written forms that are closer in language, style, and content to regional oral traditions. The last imperial dynasty, the Qing (1644–1911), especially, yields a vast treasury of popular literature in the forms of local operas, religious tales, hagiographic accounts, morality books, almanacs, and ballads that demonstrate the important role of the written text within popular religion. If we add to these the numerous texts inserted into popular practice by religious specialists (e.g., the liturgical manuals of Confucian ritualists or widely consumed Buddhist devotional literature) or created within popular ritual contexts (such as in spirit-writing séances), then it becomes clear that Chinese popular religion is transmitted through a wide variety of communication channels, both oral and written. The interplay between the oral and the written, as well as between different registers and

types of written text, is a major source of the constant shifts along the spectrum of local particularities and transregional cultural unities in popular religion.

Social Contexts I: Family

The Confucian tradition views the family as the basic social unit and the primary context of socialization. Three of the five cardinal relationships are located within the family: father–son, husband–wife, and elder brother–younger brother. Filial piety (*xiao*) is the root virtue from which grow all others, including of course loyalty toward one's ruler, who in turn is expected to exercise parental care toward his subjects. Thus, at least in its ideological representation, the traditional state took on the features of a family writ large; the highest praise for a competent local magistrate was that he was the people's "father and mother."

The earliest textual documents in Chinese history show us that notions of family never were restricted to living kin but always included the ancestors to whom descendants owed regular sacrifices. While family, including the concomitant ritual obligations, can be regarded as a constant in Chinese social and cultural history, family structures and ancestral practices underwent numerous transformations. What were regarded as "traditional family structures" in the twentieth century had begun to take shape in the early modern period (Song Dynasty). The most complex form of family organization was the lineage, a large descent group of several lines tracing their origin back to a single founding ancestor. Within the lineage, most authority was centered in the main line of descent, which was constituted by the oldest direct male heir of each generation (i.e., the apical ancestor's first surviving son, that son's first son, etc.). The main line played the leading role in the lineage's ancestral sacrifices and often controlled the lineage's corporate property, which was used to fund collective undertakings, such as the education of the lineage's children or charity for its needy members. The largest expenditures usually were occasioned by the upkeep of the ancestral hall and the conduct of the ancestral sacrifices. In the ancestral hall were displayed the spirit tablets of the lineage ancestors, arranged hierarchically by generation and line of descent. The ancestral hall thus put on view the internal structure of the lineage, though strict descent criteria were only one factor involved—internal power relationships also played a role in deciding the positioning of individual tablets and descent lines. Major collective sacrifices were held several times a year and were usually conducted by the lineage elders according to rules laid down in Confucian ritual manuals, such as the *Family Rituals* of the famous Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Neither Buddhist nor Daoist clergy were involved in rites at the ancestral hall. These formal and ceremonious rites helped to maintain lineage identity and solidarity internally and demonstrated unity and power toward society. In many regions local communities were dominated by large, wealthy lineages that owned much of the land and local resources. However, such complex kinship groups did not develop everywhere. In the frontier society of

Qing Dynasty Taiwan, for example, complex lineages were not the rule; various less complex kinship structures evolved instead, often without significant corporate property and hence frequently also without shared ancestral halls.

Irrespective of the size and complexity of kin groups, there existed some fundamental constants in their ritual life. Rites of passage such as coming of age ceremonies, weddings, and funerals; the ancestral sacrifices; and seasonal observances were carried out by most families and showed transregional continuities. At the level of a typical traditional household, daily practices focused on the household shrine, which may have included the spirit tablets of ancestors and the images of tutelary deities. It was usually the task of the oldest son's wife to ensure that the shrine was daily supplied with sacrifices of tea and incense; frequently additional incense sticks were placed outside the back door to appease any passing ghosts. Special sacrifices were offered to the ancestors on their death days, at seasonal festivals (e.g., at New Year), and during familial rites of passage (e.g., weddings). A major occasion focused on the ancestors was the annual Qingming ("clear-and-bright") festival on April 5, in the course of which families would clean the ancestral tombs and present sacrifices there. All of these observances took place without the involvement of any religious specialists. Within the complex array of ancestral rites, the only ones that typically required the participation of hired specialists were those related to death and burial. Astrologers and geomancers helped to choose the day and location of burial; Buddhist monks and/or Daoist priests conducted rituals to guide the deceased's soul through the underworld; Confucian ritualists (*lisheng*) acted as masters of ceremony; and opera troupes performed on their temporary stages dramatic pieces to complement the specialists' rituals. There exists a large repertoire of such "ritual operas"; one of the famous themes is that of the Buddhist monk Mulian, who descended into the underworld to rescue his mother.

A number of non-ancestral spirits and deities also played a role in the life of the household. Aside from the individually selected tutelary deities that shared the shrine with the ancestors, a typical traditional household would have a picture of the stove god placed in the kitchen. This deity acted as the family's divine supervisor and reported on its moral strengths and failings to the Jade Emperor. As part of the New Year cycle of activities the stove god was formally seen off at the end of the old year as he went to the celestial court to deliver his report. In the new year he was welcomed back into a new picture freshly affixed in the kitchen. In addition, households honored a variety of other spirits involved with daily life, such as the door gods, the "bed mother," the goddess of the latrine, and the masters of the foundations.

The roster of seasonal festivals is long and varies significantly from region to region. Examples of occasions celebrated across China are the already-mentioned New Year and the Qingming festivals. Others are the Dragon Boat festival on the fifth day of the fifth moon, the Hungry Ghost festival in the seventh moon, and the Mid-Autumn festival in the eighth moon. As these dates indicate, most feast days are calculated according to the lunar calendar, which is synchronized with the solar year by the periodic insertion of intercalary months. Many of these festivals go

beyond the familial context and are part of community celebrations that integrate individual households into the larger local community. Thus, the largely family-centered New Year celebrations end with the Lantern festival on the fifteenth day of the first moon, when families visit local temples to sacrifice to the gods and ask after their fortunes for the coming year.

Social Contexts II: Local Community

"Local community" signifies a territorial unit that demarcates itself from others by reference to a shared cultic center. Typically this would be a village or a city quarter, which may or may not have coincided with a government-defined administrative unit. The religious life of such a local community shall be illustrated by means of a fictional and ideal-typical village, based mostly on ethnographic data collected in Taiwan but applicable at least in its basic features to other areas of China.

The religious center of our hypothetical village is a temple devoted to the goddess Mazu. This deity was brought to the village soon after its founding as an offshoot of an existing Mazu cult in the next market town. For this purpose, some ashes from the older temple's incense burner were transferred to the burner of the new village temple; such "divisions of incense" (*fenxiang*) create ritual hierarchies among temples that are reflected in pilgrimages of delegations from lower-ranking temples to their mother temples to recharge the spiritual powers of their gods.

The temple is open during the daytime and is frequented by villagers on an individual basis who offer sacrifices and prayers to Mazu and the many secondary deities enshrined there and ask them for advice. Advice is obtained through various oracles, most commonly by throwing two half-moon-shaped wooden blocks; from the way they land a yes or no answer is read. Alternatively, a numbered stick may be drawn randomly from a cylindrical container on the temple altar that corresponds with a numbered slip of paper obtainable from the temple caretaker. This contains a poem that needs to be interpreted in such a way as to yield an answer to one's question. While the temple serves as our village's social center by providing a meeting place to chat, drink tea, and play chess, ritual activity is fairly low-key on most days, but picks up on the first and fifteenth of each moon—that is, on new and full moons. On these days, most households in the village send at least one representative to honor the gods.

The highlight of the liturgical year is Mazu's birthday celebration in the third moon. This large-scale festival involves the whole village; each year a new "master of the incense burner" (*luzhu*) is selected by a throw of the moon blocks to be the main organizer and supervisor of the festivities. He is responsible for collecting contributions from all villagers, hiring an opera troupe, and drawing up the whole roster of events. As the success of such celebrations depends on the cooperation of all villagers, their scale and quality is an important yardstick of the solidarity and cohesion of the village community.

The temple is run by a committee of local notables responsible for its day-to-day upkeep and for fundraising for renovations and rebuilding projects. No Buddhist or Daoist specialists are attached to the temple; if their ritual services are needed, they are hired from outside the village. In most years, for example, Buddhist monks and nuns are brought in to celebrate a "universal salvation" rite for the benefit of hungry ghosts in the seventh moon; Daoist priests are hired when demons causing epidemics need to be exorcized or when a "rite of renewal" (*jiao*) needs to be celebrated to recharge the temple's spiritual potency. While the temple committee and ordinary villagers understand the general purpose of these rituals, they rarely understand their details or their tradition-specific frame of reference. Thus, Buddhist and Daoist professionals perform their rituals within the social context of local religion, but interpretations of the meaning of these rituals tend to diverge significantly between clergy and laypeople.

Apart from the Mazu temple, our village also possesses two Earth God shrines, one for the village's northern section and the other for its southern counterpart. The Earth God (*tudi gong*) is the lowest functionary of a divine bureaucracy reaching via the City God (Chenghuang) all the way up to the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi). The Earth God is a kind of divine village headman who polices the community, protects it against ghostly intrusions, and keeps track of births and deaths in his village section. Earth God shrines are usually fairly small in scale, some not larger than a dog house, and are often located at crossroads or under big trees. The Earth God is not regarded as a single deity but as a divine office held by the spirits of meritorious dead whose identity may be revealed via trance by spirit mediums. The worship of such chthonic deities reaches back into the earliest documented periods of Chinese history and thus links modern popular religion with antiquity.

This sketch highlights some basic features of the religious life of local communities. What needs to be stressed is its largely autonomous nature: the temple and collective ritual events are administered and organized by the villagers themselves. The state may set limits with its laws and regulations but does not control the social organization of local religion directly. The local cult community also is not part of a larger religious organization in the manner that local European parishes are integrated into a national church structure. Even the mentioned "division of incense" hierarchy is largely symbolic in nature and does not entail financial or administrative subordination or dependence for lower-ranking temples. This relative autonomy of local religious life led some scholars to locate here a social sphere akin to the third realm of "civil society," a realm beyond the control of kin groups and imperial state, where the *res publicae* can be negotiated.

Social Contexts III: Voluntary Associations

So far we have focused on social groups whose membership is largely ascriptive: the family into which one is born and the local community in which one becomes

a member simply by one's residence. Involvement in the religious activities accompanying family and community life is regarded as a function and duty of group membership and not as an individual religious choice. This creates problems for persons who make individual religious choices that force them to decide between loyalty to the demands of their chosen religion and their religious duties to family and community. Converts to Christianity are commonly faced with such dilemmas. Christian monotheistic exclusivism and injunctions against idol worship do not mesh well with sacrifices to ancestors or participation in village temple festivals. By refusing to carry out such religious duties, Christians symbolically separate themselves from family and community and may be regarded askance or even be ostracized by both. One historical mission strategy aiming to address this problem was to try to convert whole villages rather than individuals so as allow the converts to recreate a new religious community structure on Christian terms. Chinese Islam has followed a similar trajectory in forming separate Muslim communities to resolve the conflict between familial and civic duties on the one hand and religious obligations on the other.

The cases of Islam and Christianity represent one extreme end of the range of relations between family, community, and religious associations based on voluntary religious choice and membership. There existed in imperial China a range of other religious options that occasioned different degrees of tension between family, community, and state. Lowest on that tension scale were various pious associations formed by individual believers for the worship of popular deities. One example is provided by pilgrimage associations ("incense societies," *xiangshe*), whose main purpose is the organization of regular pilgrimages to important sacred sites for its members. The temple of the goddess Bixia Yuanjun on top of Mount Tai (Taishan) in the northeastern province of Shandong is one such objective of many "incense societies" across north China. Another example might be a spirit-writing group (organized around a gifted medium) that holds its séances in the local temple. The duties deriving from membership in such associations usually do not interfere or conflict with the obligations owed to family and community and are best conceptualized as supererogatory rather than competitive.

A potentially higher level of tension may arise from membership in so-called "popular sects." Founded in the Song, Yuan, and late imperial periods, such popular sects were voluntary religious associations that developed a salvation idiom of their own out of a syncretic mixture of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and popular elements. They had their own system of doctrine, sacred scriptures, and specific liturgy that marked their practices out as different from the ordinary religious practices of the local community. Their founders often were religious virtuosi who set about constructing a meaningful religious perspective for themselves that fit in with their particular position in life. If the religious virtuoso managed to persuade others of the validity of his/her views there were the beginnings of a popular sect. A well-known example is provided by the sect founder Luo Qing (alias Luo Menghong, 1443–1527), whose *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce*) is a rare and fascinating

document of lay religiosity. Orphaned early, Luo Qing was raised by relatives and became a soldier. At age twenty-eight he went on a spiritual search and studied with several teachers, but it was only at age forty that he experienced enlightenment. He began to gather disciples and wrote the *Five Books in Six Volumes*, which was first printed in 1527. This work is composed in a lucid and direct vernacular language by an author who obviously had not enjoyed a formal education but who had the self-confidence to record his spiritual insights and to claim for them the status of ultimate truth. His thinking was strongly influenced by Chan Buddhism, but he rejected the authority of the ordained *sangha* and insisted on the ability of laypeople to reach enlightenment outside the monastic context. A marked egalitarian tone characterizes Luo's texts, leveling differences between lay and clergy, upper and lower classes, and men and women. Drawing on his own experience as an orphan, Luo describes the human condition as being lost and in search of one's true home and refuge. In highly visual language, he speaks of this final destination variously as "home," "mother," "true emptiness", and the "Limitless." Thus, he became the founding patriarch of a religious lay movement that was eyed with suspicion both by the Buddhist establishment and by the state. Luo Qing himself spent some time in prison for his proselytizing activities, and later sects that continued the teachings of "Patriarch Luo" were often persecuted by the authorities as heterodox threats to public order and morality.

Official concern about the destabilizing potential of popular sects was indeed justified in some cases. There existed a strong millenarian strand among some sects focused on the figure of the Buddha Maitreya, the Buddha of the next world age. Given the right social and political conditions, such millenarian expectations could be translated into political action; as a result, Maitreyan millenarianism played a role in a number of popular uprisings in Chinese history. By the seventeenth century, millenarianism and the teachings of Patriarch Luo combined with other sectarian currents to form a great mythical narrative that continues to shape the popular sectarian milieu to the present day: Human beings are the children of a primordial goddess, the Unborn Venerable Mother. Confused by the desire for the things of this world, humans have forgotten their celestial origin, and so the Mother keeps sending emissaries into the human world to remind her children of the possibility and need to return to her side before the present world age reaches its cataclysmic end. The Buddha Maitreya figures here as one of the Mother's messengers and takes the physical shape of various sectarian leaders.

Sectarian groups involved in violent revolts of course get a lot of attention in official historiography and thus the historical records present a skewed picture of the world of popular sectarianism. The overwhelming majority of such groups were peaceful and provided individuals with a venue for religious cultivation within lay life that was not otherwise available. Sometimes sects created social support networks for marginal individuals without access to the structures of kinship and local community. A well-known example from the eighteenth century is the Luo sect's maintenance of temples-cum-hostels for sailors and soldiers involved in the official

grain transports on the Grand Canal linking North and South China. For this migrant population, far removed from their lineages and home communities, the Luo sect provided both spiritual and material support, the latter in the shape of room and board in sect temples while alive and a coffin and grave plot after death. Even such mutual aid functions, however, aroused official suspicion as they indicated structures of social organization beyond the control of the state. Such structures, especially when they involved unsettled populations such as the canal boatmen, always carried the potential to serve as mobilization bases for purposes other than innocuous social service provision.

Popular sectarianism has continued to function as an important reservoir of religious creativity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but it also continues to be the subject of state control and persecution. Many such groups can nowadays operate freely in Taiwan, and one of them, the "Way of Unity" (*Yiguandao*), a modern descendant of the Ming/Qing Dynasty sectarian tradition focused on the Venerable Mother, has indeed grown to become one of the largest religions on this island of twenty-three million inhabitants. However, the People's Republic of China, on the Chinese mainland, continues the restrictive policies of its imperial predecessors, coming down especially hard on sectarian movements. These were virtually eradicated in the 1950s in the struggle against "counter-revolutionary sects and secret societies" (*fandong huidaomen*), and attempts to establish new ones meet with harsh government crackdowns, as was made clear once again with the prohibition and persecution of the Falungong movement starting in 1999.

Social Contexts IV: Popular Religion and the State

The previous section addressed the tension-laden relationship of the traditional state with popular sects, which was conditioned on the one hand by concerns about the potential of religious groups to serve as bases for anti-government mobilization and agitation, and on the other hand by concerns about orthodoxy in relation to the state's own religious and ideological positions. In this section the implications of this official attitude for local community religion will be sketched.

The relationship between politics and religion in late imperial China differed from the European experience in that secular and spiritual power were never split between the state and an autonomous church. Instead, the state monopolized both functions, legitimizing its rule by reference to a state religion strongly shaped by Confucianism. It advocated a tripartite cosmology in which the emperor mediated the cosmic relationship of humanity with Heaven and Earth by means of a complex system of rituals and sacrifices. Imperial rule was legitimized by the conferral of the "Mandate of Heaven" upon the emperor, who was regarded as the "Son of Heaven." A concept of sacral kingship thus endowed the state with cosmic significance and gave the social and political order upheld by it a sacred and inviolable quality. This state religion ideally was to structure all of society, defining the social, moral, and

religious obligations of every class from the emperor down to the commoners. However, the traditional state was not strong enough to enforce its orthodoxy throughout the empire, nor was this orthodoxy, geared as it was toward the state and the collective, ever able to satisfy the religious needs of the individual. Thus the state always had to deal with the presence of religious alternatives within Chinese society. These alternatives can be grouped into two basic categories: on the one hand, there existed institutional religions with their own sacred literature and professional clergy, such as Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Christianity; on the other hand, we find a popular religion whose beliefs and practices were diffused through the secular institutions of commoner society. Toward both religious categories the state approach was a combination of control and cooptation. The state's relationship with local religion was predicated upon the same assumption of official orthodoxy, and the state could move against any popular cult that it classified as "licentious" or "excessive" (*yinsi*)—that is, in violation of the ethicopolitical codes established and defended by the government.

A basic problem faced by the state in this domain, however, was that most of the deities and religious practices of popular religion were, strictly speaking, noncanonical and thus theoretically heterodox. They grew out of and answered the religious needs of commoners, for whom little provision was made in the official rosters of permissible and prescribed sacrifices. Further, the deities at the center of village and township temples were foci of local identity and the determination of their status vis-à-vis the official orthodoxy thus always involved the balancing of local and national interests. As markers of local identities and interests, the status of local deities often became a matter of negotiation between state authorities and local elites. The latter championed the local cults that defined their powerbase, while trying at the same time to interpret the cults' meaning in a manner compatible with the state orthodoxy from which these elites also drew their legitimacy. The state, conversely, was interested in coopting local society into its ritual hierarchy by giving its gods the stamp of official approval and weakening their status as carriers of local identity by transforming them into representations of national values.

This process has been studied in the case of the goddess Mazu, whom we have already mentioned a number of times. Throughout the late imperial period, her cult was subject to state attempts at cooptation via granting her honorary titles, according her a place in the official roster of state sacrifices, and funding temple building projects out of public coffers. This support was accompanied by a drive to "standardize" her cult and define the deity's identity in terms that supported official orthodoxy and public order at the expense of popular and potentially subversive interpretations. Scholars are still debating how successful this policy of standardizing popular cults actually was; there are numerous counter-examples of official versions of popular deities being either rejected by the populace or adopted as an orthodox veneer beneath which the original cult activities and beliefs continued (see the special issue of *Modern China* edited by Sutton in 2007). An alternative model has been proposed in which the different versions of a deity promoted by different

interest groups (state, local elites, etc.) are seen as "superscriptions" whereby a deity acquires successive layers of meanings without losing earlier, superscribed interpretations (Duara 1988).

While the traditional state thus interacted with local religion in complex ways, the growing ability of modernizing regimes in the twentieth century to impose their agendas on local society has shifted the balance of power in favor of the central state. Already before the formal end of imperial rule in 1911, attempts were under way to wrest control of local temples from local communities and convert them into schools, barracks, and other institutional support structures of the state's modernizing agenda. This approach was enhanced under the Republican government, when innumerable temples were destroyed or converted to secular uses. It reached its climax in the People's Republic of China, where popular religion did not fall under the (limited) constitutional protection accorded the five officially recognized religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestant and Catholic Christianity) but was relegated to the hazy residual category of "feudal superstitions." Most local temples were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, but since the beginning of the reform period in 1978 a gradual resurgence of both ancestor worship and local cults has been observed. It began in the southern and southeastern areas, but by now temples and ancestral halls are being rebuilt all over China. The official agency in charge of religious affairs has taken notice and has recently established a department for the supervision of popular religion. Patterns of control, accommodation, and cooptation seem to be re-establishing themselves in the relationship between local society and state.

In Taiwan, the political impact on popular religion since 1949 has been less dramatic. While remaining disdainful of the "irrationalism" of Taiwanese popular religion, the mainlander-dominated Kuomintang government never suppressed it violently but instead followed the only moderately successful approach of administrative control and interpretive cooptation. In the absence of genuinely democratic political channels of expression during the Martial Law period (which ended only in 1987), Taiwanese popular religion played an important role as a realm of symbolic protest, where Taiwanese identity could be expressed, for example, by holding lavish traditional temple festivals in the face of government efforts to curb the attendant "superstition" and "waste of resources." In addition, while throughout the Martial Law period secularism dominated at the national level, popular religious cults have continued to figure prominently in village- and township-level politics, where they frequently serve as powerbases for rival factions.

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CHAPTER 11

Chinese Islam

James D. Frankel, University of Hawai'i

Introduction: Muslim Diversity in Contemporary China

The population of China combined with the number of Muslims in the world total approximately 2.5 billion people—over one third of humanity at the outset of the twenty-first century. Given this fact, it is not at all surprising that China and global Islam figure so prominently in international affairs, capturing headlines every day. Today, many observers perceive collaboration between the People's Republic of China and Muslim countries, particularly the exchange of military technology from the former for oil from the latter, to be a significant force in a shifting global balance of power. In fact, relations between China and the Muslim world have a long history, one nearly as old as Islam itself. Historical contacts between Islam and China have resulted in a Muslim population of considerable size living in China—a minority, or more correctly a number of diverse minority communities, easily overlooked in surveys of the world's most populous country.

The Muslims of China are often maligned or misunderstood by the enormous majority Han Chinese population that surrounds them. Moreover, most of their coreligionists in the central Islamic world know little about them beyond the fact that they exist. Yet even this exceeds the knowledge of the majority of people in the wider world, who are only now receiving bits of information about some Chinese-born Muslims in side stories to the ongoing epic of the "global war on terror" and the struggle against radical Islam. Nevertheless, the Muslims of China are an incredibly diverse population—or, rather, multiple diverse populations. Though they all reside within the borders of the People's Republic of China, they live throughout the

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vast country as members of distinct solidarities separated by geography. They are and have also historically been divided along ethnic, linguistic, economic, educational, sectarian, and kinship lines, besides many other factors. This diversity defies attempts to group them as a single collective; most of these attempts are artificial and ill advised. Indeed, beyond their residence within these contemporary geopolitical borders, there is little more that can be said of Muslims in China as a single group; rather, the story must be told in terms of this "group's" diversity.

Both China and Islam, sometimes regarded, inappropriately, as monolithic historical entities, encompass a high degree of internal diversity. The tendency to reify either monolithically leads to a host of problems, including an imperious perspective that looks at civilizations from the top down, focusing upon a façade of homogeneity while overlooking a complicated understructure replete with heterogeneous elements. In a way that is in many aspects a microcosm of global Islam, Muslims in China include among their numbers devout believers and secularists, even atheist communists. Among the "religious" we also see great diversity: traditional Sunnis (of the Hanafi school of law), Sufi mystics, and even followers of the puritanical Wahhabi ideology. There are political Islamists in China, though many more of China's Muslims are conspicuously apolitical lest they be branded extremists by the government in Beijing. The present study focuses on some of the problems associated with diversity among China's Muslims before examining in greater detail some historical and contemporary "solutions" to this problem of diversity put forward both by certain Muslims in China and by the Chinese state.

The problem with Muslim diversity in China today, from the perspective of the People's Republic of China, is that ethnic groups with widely different cultural and historical backgrounds may not easily fall into lockstep with a single party in its pursuit of a rigidly conceived national destiny. Difference in China, as elsewhere, leads to strife. This is especially so when a group self-identifies in terms of cultural traditions in which religion figures prominently, thereby opposing the ethnic and demographic categories imposed by a radically secular government. The mixing of ethnic and religious elements creates a particularly combustible combination for a population under pressure. Most recently, beginning in July 2009, ethnic tensions between Han Chinese and Turkic Muslim Uyghurs in Ürümqi, the largest city in China's westernmost Xinjiang province, erupted in deadly riots that led to a military crackdown in the region. The key fact in this event is that the Uyghurs are different from their Han Chinese neighbors in numerous ways, with their Islamic identity playing a significant role in this difference, even though many Uyghurs are only moderately religious, or are even secular.

In 2004, in Henan province, ethnic tensions involving another Muslim community sparked violence when a Hui, or ethnic Chinese Muslim, taxi driver struck and killed a six-year-old Han Chinese girl, sparking anti-Muslim riots and Muslim counter-riots that left seven dead and dozens wounded. Hui Muslims from around the country came to the support of their brethren. The protests never took on an overtly religious mien, but were rather perceived on both sides as a national ethnic

controversy, and by social commentators as an attempt by a disadvantaged group to seek redress from the authorities gone awry. Yet, even so, we cannot dismiss the role played by Islam, the ancestral religion of the Hui, in the Hui's communal solidarity and identity negotiation in relation to the Han majority. Indeed, to the uninformed observer, with the exception of cases where Hui individuals deliberately distinguish themselves by outward signs of Islamic religiosity (e.g., skullcap and/or beard for men, head covering for women), average Han and secularized Hui citizens are virtually indistinguishable in appearance from each other. Yet, in terms of each community's sense of belonging in Chinese society, Hui and Han alike cite mutually irreconcilable differences based on Islamic custom, if not belief and practice.

As the two cases cited above bear witness, Muslim difference and diversity in China are not only matters of a single non-Chinese ethnic group of Muslims confined to one region of the country. The situation is considerably more widespread and complex, with multiple Muslim ethnicities adding to the multicultural tapestry of China, and diversity even among the members of respective Muslim communities. The Uyghurs and Hui are, in fact, but two of ten Muslim minority nationalities officially recognized by the People's Republic of China, making up an overall Muslim population in China of indeterminate size. According to Chinese census statistics, approximately 91.5 percent of China's people are members of the Han Chinese majority nationality, leaving all minorities to round out the population at 8.5 percent. Of the officially estimated twenty to twenty-five million Muslims, nearly half are Hui, with an estimated forty-five percent made up of the Uyghur population and roughly five percent belonging to other Muslim minority nationalities. While those proportions are credible, the overall number of Muslims in the People's Republic of China is disputed. Other estimates have the Muslim population of China exceeding fifty million, perhaps reaching as many as one hundred million. The higher numbers are often cited by Muslim groups with the motive of inflating population statistics, and are therefore suspect. However, survey criteria that do not clearly distinguish religious, cultural, and ethnic self-identification from externally imposed identities lead many to suspect that the official count is underestimated. The diversity of China's Muslims thus contributes to our statistical uncertainty regarding the size of the population.

The Classification of Muslim Identity in the Communist Era

Before examining more closely the "problems" associated with Muslim diversity in China, and some of the "solutions" attempted both by Muslims and the Chinese state in its various incarnations from dynastic empire to People's Republic, it would be helpful first to attempt to obtain some grasp of how this diversity is manifested, and how it came to be. Efforts to "manage" ethnocultural heterogeneity in the mid twentieth century by the nascent Communist state borrowed heavily from Stalinist-era Soviet social science, leading to a system of classification whereby China's fifty-six

minzu ("nationalities" or ethnicities) were identified (i.e., the Han majority and fifty-five minority nationalities). According to this system, ten minorities are recognized as having Islam as part of their ethnocultural heritage (use of the term "religion" is avoided here as it was not one of the original criteria used to distinguish minority nationalities in the formative period of the *minzu* system).

With the exception of the Hui, the various Muslim nationalities—Uyghur, Khazakh, Khirghiz, Uzbek, Tatar, Salar, Bonan, Dongxiang, and Tajik—are neither ethnically nor linguistically Chinese; they all speak Turkic or other Altaic languages (except for the Tajiks, who speak a form of Persian, an Indo-European language). Today, most of these various Muslim minorities live in Xinjiang and neighboring western provinces (again with the exception of the Hui, who are dispersed throughout the country). Apart from their common religious identity as Muslims, the Muslims of Xinjiang and western China are distinct from one another in several ways. They speak different, albeit in many cases related, languages. In terms of lifestyle, some of these communities maintain the nomadic-pastoralist traditions of the steppe, while others, most notably the Uyghurs, have been sedentary for centuries. These lifestyle differences also led to differences in the sociopolitical organization of communities, different means of livelihood, and (often in the context of the urban–rural divide) varying degrees of religiosity versus secularization and cultural traditionalism versus the assimilation of mainstream Han-centric Chinese customs and values. With the exception of language and other ethnic markers, these same differences may be found not only between the various Muslim minorities in China but within them as well.

The History of Islam in China

The makeup of the Muslim population of China challenges those who attempt to study it, as well as the governments that have sought to bring it under hegemonic control, with its layer upon layer of perplexing diversity. But how did this situation arise? That is, whence came the Muslims of China, and how and when was Islam introduced to China? Not surprisingly, these questions also have diverse answers. There was no single entry point of Muslims, no single moment, nor, despite Chinese Muslim perpetuation of origin myths to the contrary, a single, definable event whereby Islam was brought to the Middle Kingdom. The diverse Muslim population of China today, which we have already determined that it is best to regard as a number of distinct populations, traces its roots to two main historical phenomena: immigration and the subsequent naturalization of immigrant Muslims in China, and the absorption of Central Asian Muslim populations due to imperial expansion and the annexation of Muslim regions. The first of these phenomena (immigration and naturalization) produced the ethnic Chinese Hui population, whereas the second (territorial expansion and annexation) accounts for the inclusion of the nine non-Chinese Muslim nationalities, chief among them the Uyghurs.

Under numerous dynasties during most of the past two millennia, China was a multicultural empire, incorporating large minority populations of indigenous peoples, some of whom have become almost entirely assimilated into the mainstream Han Chinese culture while others have remained more culturally distinct. Various Chinese regimes welcomed foreigners to come and trade their commodities and ideas within the Empire, making certain Chinese cities magnets for international commerce and immigration. These historical factors, including both imperial expansion and the allure of cosmopolitan centers, explain not only the existence of Muslims in China but also their tremendous diversity—a diversity that persists even today and has variously been seen both as an asset and as a liability to China's national interests, and sometimes, paradoxically, both. When foreign influences and foreign trade benefited the Empire, the presence of non-Chinese foreigners within China's borders was tolerated and foreign fashions and products, even foreign ideas and religious beliefs, enticed the indigenous population. However, because foreign trade was perceived by some Chinese as a threat to local commerce, foreigners and immigrants in imperial China were often the targets of popular prejudice and persecution. Moreover, because China was often the victim of foreign invasion from Inner Asia, at times xenophobic government attitudes and policies regarded foreigners and even residents descended from immigrants with suspicion.

Various groups of Muslims entered China in different historical epochs, as the Muslims of annexed territories were incorporated gradually under different regimes in a process of consolidation that continues in China's far west even today. The history of China's Muslims must, therefore, not be viewed synchronically. A diachronic approach not only leads to more accurate historiography but also better accounts for the degree of diversity described above. Nor can we overlook the geographic complexity behind this story; all histories (like all politics), no matter how global their consequences, are, after all, local. As Jonathan Lipman has correctly cautioned, "the wide distribution of Muslims . . . took place in a bewildering variety of contexts," calling for "careful research, which must be *local* rather than generalized" (Lipman 1997). The Muslim population of China is the product of waves of immigration in various periods (which deposited Muslim sojourners and settlers in various parts of the country) as well as the vicissitudes of Chinese and Central Asian political, economic, and military history. And, depending on where these Muslims lived and when they arrived, different degrees and combinations of both "Muslimness" and "Chineseness," including varying expressions of Islamic religiosity, have emerged and developed among various populations.

While we must be cautious to avoid sweeping statements about all Muslims in China, an overview of the history of this diverse population does allow us to observe certain patterns concerning the distribution and development of Muslim communities in China. On the global level, we see Muslims in China straddling two worlds, acting as mediators between the Chinese and Islamic civilizations along sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical, frontiers. A closer look reveals a predictable pattern based on the historical geographic distribution of China's Muslims. Muslims in the

western provinces of China, owing to greater proximity and stronger lines of communication and transportation to the heartlands of Islam in Central Asia and beyond, commonly demonstrate a deeper connection to Muslims living outside China than do co-religionists elsewhere in China. Likewise, these Muslims tend to display fewer marks of sinicization, or assimilation of Han Chinese culture. Consequently, Muslims originating in western China have often drawn their religious and cultural inspiration more directly from the Islamic world, making them markedly different in significant ways from the vast majority of China's population. This generalization applies mainly to the Uyghurs and other non-Chinese Muslims of Xinjiang and neighboring provinces who, though influenced by centuries of contact with Chinese culture and efforts by central Chinese governments to promote their assimilation, have largely retained their distinct cultural characteristics.

By contrast, other Muslims have, over the course of history, come to live lives more remote from their Islamic brethren outside China, and have seen their existence and their future as being intimately and inextricably linked to the fortunes of the Chinese state and society. Muslims living in the central and eastern parts of the country, mainly of the Hui minority, have responded to the centripetal pull of the hearth of Chinese tradition and culture by becoming assimilated, to varying degrees, and blending to some extent into the mainstream of Chinese society. Observation of these differences among various Muslim communities within the borders of China, in both late imperial and modern times, uncovers fissures, which have at times put some Muslims at odds and in open conflict with other Muslims in China, not only on ethnic grounds but also based on regional, political, economic, and even intra-sectarian religious differences. In the complicated story of Muslims in China, differing communal interests have not only pitted Han Chinese against Muslims but also at times set Uyghur against Hui, and sometimes some Hui against other Hui who have found themselves allied with Han Chinese in specific instances.

In order to grasp the unwieldy subject of Muslim diversity in China, we begin here by narrowing our focus to the two largest Muslim populations in China, the Uyghur and Hui minorities, not only because of their numbers but also because they make for interesting comparisons, and also demonstrate the highest degree of internal diversity among themselves. In order to trace the evolution of these diverse populations, a brief narrative of the arrival and early development of Islam in China is in order. Chinese Muslim tradition (with several versions and variations) attributes the arrival of the first Muslims in China to a supernatural event. As the story goes, the Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649) of the Tang Dynasty had a dream in which a monster (in some versions a demon or dragon) threatened to destroy his realm. In the dream, the Emperor saw a bearded man wearing a turban who had the power to quell the monster. Upon waking, the Emperor asked his advisors to interpret the dream's meaning, and they told him it depicted a great "sage" who had recently appeared in the West. The Emperor dispatched emissaries to go and fetch this western sage and bring him back to China. The sage was none other than the Prophet Muhammad, who, upon receiving the Chinese delegation, declined to go to China himself but sent a contingent led by one of his close companions (and maternal

uncle), Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. According to the Chinese Muslim tradition, the Prophet's companions remained in China, where they served the emperor and helped to restore peace and harmony to the Tang Empire. They settled in China and married Chinese women, thus making them the progenitors of the Hui people.

Several details of this legend are completely implausible, especially because Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas is known to be buried in Medina. Nevertheless, anachronisms and errors aside, a religious myth that links China's Muslims to the genetic and spiritual lineage of Muhammad serves to give them a sense of Islamic legitimacy; if the Prophet planted the seeds of Islam in Chinese soil then the existence of Muslims in China is divinely ordained. Thus, we can understand the importance of perpetuating this narrative even when its historicity is dubious.

Nevertheless, Islam did indeed arrive in China during the Tang Dynasty, carried with the caravan trade along the overland Silk Road from the West; via maritime trade from the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean to southeastern Chinese coastal cities; and on horseback by military mercenaries, who fought in skirmishes along China's western frontiers. Muslims also came to the Tang Empire on diplomatic missions sent by both the Umayyad (661–650) and Abbasid (751–1238) caliphates. The foundations of the Muslim population of China were laid by some of these early arrivals, who settled in Chinese cities, intermarried with Chinese women, and established permanent Islamic enclaves in various parts of the country, principally in port cities and inland commercial centers. However, Islam, as the religion and culture of the early settlers, remained a distinctly foreign entity in China, kept apart from the mainstream of Han Chinese society by differences of language, custom, and faith. As long as Muslims continued to generate revenue for the empire and did not violate its civil laws, they were permitted to conduct internal affairs within their communities as they saw fit. This included the ability to appoint their own religious authorities, including, as in the case of the community in Quanzhou, a *Shaykh al-Islam* to preside over religious matters and a *qadi* to rule according to *Shari'a* law on intra-communal civil matters. This autonomy helped to preserve Islamic orthopraxy in China over generations, but also contributed to the divide between the Han and Hui communities.

The ideal of the Confucian meritocracy ensured that foreigners who were willing and able to acculturate could find a place, even elite status, in Tang society. Yet, even if they could overcome cultural obstacles, the fact that most Muslim immigrants to China were engaged in commerce automatically placed them at the bottom of a Confucian social hierarchy that disdained merchants. This economic reality, perhaps more than Chinese xenophobia, excluded most Muslims from full integration in society. Thus, even after generations of residence in China whereby the descendents of early Muslim sojourners rose to the status of *wushi fanke* (fifth-generation "familiar strangers"), these naturalized Muslims in China were still perceived as foreign. The influx of foreign Muslims continued into the Song period (960–1279), and was made up particularly of Muslim immigrants seeking economic opportunity, or refuge from political turbulence in the Islamic world. Yet, even with the inroads made by Tang *wushi fanke* communities and the Muslim families successfully naturalized

during the Song period, with their participation in various areas of Chinese society, Islam in China had yet to be sinicized and thus remained stigmatized as irredeemably "different."

The Mongol conquests and the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) linked China with the vast Mongol Empire. This multinational and multiethnic empire encompassed all of Central Asia and parts of the Middle East and, therefore, contained a large Muslim population. The Mongol policy of bringing in soldiers and bureaucrats from their distant domains to preside over local conquered peoples meant that Muslims, including Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, were imported to serve as civil and military administrators in China. Mongol policy placed Muslims in the second highest *semu* (lit. "mixed categories") class of a social hierarchy divided along ethnic lines. This status allowed certain prominent Muslims to rise to positions of considerable power and wealth under Mongol rule. The political climate also drew large numbers of Muslims from the Mongols' western territories to China, where they sought economic opportunity and often settled among the Muslim communities that already existed there, or pioneered the settlement of frontier territories, such as the southwestern province of Yunnan. For the most part, Mongol policies of religious tolerance afforded Muslims in China a significant degree of autonomy in the administration of their own communities. Thus, while the Muslim population of Yuan China grew, both in size and prosperity, it largely continued to function separately from Han Chinese society, and retained its foreign stigma.

When the founder of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) overthrew the Mongols and restored native rule to China, there was no backlash against Muslims, many of whom had supported the Yuan regime. The early Ming emperors were wary of Mongols living in China, but members of other non-Han groups who had served in the Yuan administration were retained. Muslim military officers, architects, astronomers, and engineers, among others, played an important role in helping to build the Ming Empire. Yet popular resentment of Muslims among the Han Chinese majority—which had existed since the Tang Dynasty and only grew in bitterness as the result of Muslim collaboration with the Mongols—reached dangerous heights. Fearing social discord in their realm and any negative foreign influence in China in the wake of the expulsion of the Mongols, the Ming rulers, through much of the period, pursued a foreign policy that was isolationist and protectionist. A companion domestic policy sought to homogenize Ming society, encouraging the rapid acculturation of heterogeneous communities, including Chinese Muslims. These policies, and those of the subsequent Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), will be examined more closely below.

Hui Muslims

As a consequence of this history, the Hui, who are ethnically and linguistically Chinese, are a Muslim population scattered across the country in both rural and

urban areas. The Hui exhibit great diversity in terms of religious practice and integration into the cultural mainstream of Han Chinese society. Yet collectively they embody what can be referred to as "simultaneity," being both Chinese and Muslim at the same time. The historical development of various communities that would later be brought under the rubric of Hui nationality in modern times is the history of the naturalization of Islamic culture and religion, the process whereby Islam in China has been transformed into a hybrid Chinese Islam. This notion of a "Chinese Islam" must not be thought of as monolithic, for there is a wide range of Hui acculturation and religiosity. What distinguishes the Hui from other Muslim populations in China is the fact that they embody, to a greater or lesser degree, a mixture of Chinese and foreign Islamic heritage.

Uyghur Muslims

The history of Uyghur Muslims in China differs significantly from that of the Hui. While the Uyghurs have been affected by centuries of close contact with and influence from Chinese civilization, their internally diverse culture remains distinct. The Uyghurs are by far the most populous of the non-Chinese Muslims in China, and at the present remain a plurality (approximately forty-five percent) among Xinjiang's population, despite the constant influx of Han Chinese settlers lured by government incentive programs. The recent riots in Ürümqi were the direct consequence of hostilities between the indigenous Uyghurs (thirteen percent of the city's population) and the Han immigrants (seventy-six percent), a clash rooted in the problem of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in the region. Beijing has met the problem with a two-pronged approach: trying to persuade the Uyghurs to assimilate into the Han-centric mainstream culture of "New China" and trying to create a Han majority, via immigration, in Xinjiang. Until the population balance shifts dramatically in favor of the Han Chinese settlers, however, clashes like those in Ürümqi will be inevitable. And, although a few Uyghurs have embraced the idea of a shared national destiny, the majority cling tenaciously to their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness.

Uyghur resistance to assimilation, or absorption, into Chinese culture and society must be understood in the context of the Uyghurs' long and proud history, which predates the annexation of Xinjiang (lit. "new frontier") by the Qing Dynasty. Descended from tribal pastoralists from around the border of present-day Mongolia and Siberia, the proto-Uyghurs were one of many Turkic-Altaic tribes subjugated by the Xiongnu (Huns) around the turn of the fourth century CE. After the collapse of the Xiongnu confederation, several other peoples took up the mantle of nomadic leadership, only to be overthrown by rival tribes. The Göktürks established a new confederation (552–747), under which the Uyghurs emerged as a distinct subject people. The Uyghurs allied themselves with the Chinese Sui Dynasty (581–618) and struggled against the Göktürks for nearly 150 years. In 742, the Uyghur chieftan Khutluk Bilge Köl, after defeating the Göktürks, filled the existing Inner Asian power

vacuum, declaring himself leader of the nomadic tribes and establishing a Uyghur Khaganate that was eventually overthrown by another Turkic people, the Khirghiz, in 848.

For close to a century, the Uyghur Khaganate held sway over most of Mongolia and Central Asia, dominating the eastern Silk Road. In China the Tang Dynasty (618–906) had succeeded the Sui, but by the middle of the eighth century had been weakened by a number of internal crises, including a rebellion. The wealthy and powerful Uyghur state came to the assistance of the Tang Dynasty, defeating the rebel forces of An Lushan (c. 703–757) and liberating the Tang capital. In 757, in a reversal of customary roles, the Emperor of China paid tribute to the Uyghur Khaghan, Tengri Bögü. In 779, during the period of Tang restoration, the Uyghur state held the upper hand in this alliance and was poised to invade China. The Khaghan planned to do just that, but was overthrown by his uncle, Tun Bagha Tarkhan, who thought that keeping the Tang Dynasty intact as a buffer against common enemies and a steady source of tribute (i.e., trade) best served Uyghur interests. Moreover, the new Khaghan Tun Bagha Tarkhan implemented laws intended to maintain Uyghur unity, and opposed the invasion of China for fear that, if successful, the Uyghurs would quickly be assimilated into Chinese culture. During their century of dominion, the Uyghurs built a sophisticated civilization—borrowing from other cultures, especially in the arts and sciences—but always tenaciously asserted their distinct identity and independence.

The cosmopolitan Uyghur Khaghanate absorbed influences from a variety of sources. This is readily apparent in the religious flexibility demonstrated by ruler and subject alike. Traditionally, the Uyghurs, like most other Turkic tribes, adhered to Tengriist shamanism, named after the Altaic sky deity, Tengri. Religious influences from Persia entered the Uyghur sphere via the influx of Soghdians. Tengri Bögü converted to Manichaeism and made it the official state religion, while among the Uyghur population there were also followers of Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity. When the Khaganate was defeated by the Khirghiz, the Uyghur population was forced into diaspora, the majority settling in various areas of what is now the People's Republic of China, with others scattered throughout Central and Inner Asia. A group of Uyghurs who settled in present-day Gansu province and established the Guizhou kingdom (870–1036) in western China abandoned Manichaeism and eventually adopted Tibetan Buddhism. Today, their descendants are distinguished from the Uyghurs of Xinjiang and are called the Yugur; they are considered by the government of the People's Republic of China to be a separate minority nationality.

The majority of the Uyghurs who fled into China settled in parts of what is now Xinjiang, and, like the other Turkic peoples of Central Asia, ultimately converted to Islam, though the fragmented Uyghur population did not embrace the new religion *en masse*. The Uyghur diaspora made any kind of significant reunification extremely difficult, as some of the population settled in various oases scattered throughout the vast Taklamakan desert: Hami, Kashgar, Kotan, Kuqa, Marin, Niya, Turfan, and

Yarkand. There they pursued agriculture as a livelihood, and provided hospitality to Silk Road travelers. Yet each of these towns fell under separate rule. The Karakhoja state, for example, was based in Turfan and Ürümqi, which remained a center of Uyghur culture and survived as an independent Buddhist-Manichaean society until the Mongol invasion of 1209. The Karakhoja regime finally fell in 1335. Another population of Uyghurs, who settled in the Chu river valley, converted to Islam in 934. Thence, they established the Karakhan state, which was built upon Islamic institutions. The Karakhan state allied itself with other Islamic states, such as the Samanid Emirate of Samarkand, and lasted from 940 to 1212, when it too was overrun by the Mongols. The Kharakhans built their capital at Kashgar, which, along with Samarkand and Bukhara, became an important center of Turkic Islamic culture and learning. It was thus that Islam first penetrated Uyghur society. While the Uyghurs were never able to regain the unity of their imperial past, they were reunified de facto by Mongol rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This unity helped to facilitate the spread of Islam among Uyghurs from one oasis to another. By the fifteenth century, the expanding influence of the Uyghurs of Yarkand led to the Islamization of the residents of Turfan and Ürümqi—among the last Uyghurs to become Muslims.

After the decline of the Ghengizid Mongol Empire, the Uyghurs and other peoples of the region came once more under the rule of Mongols coming from the East. This time, a confederation of nomadic Oirat Mongols from Dzungaria in the seventeenth century established the Dzungar Empire, which absorbed most of northern Xinjiang. The rise of the Dzungars preceded by a few decades the rise of the Manchu tribes to the East of Mongolia, who would conquer China and establish the Qing Dynasty in 1644. Within decades, the Qing rulers embarked on a westward expansion of their empire that would lead them into a protracted conflict with the Dzungars, whom they defeated and utterly eradicated from Xinjiang by the mid eighteenth century, opening the door to a process of Han Chinese migration and settlement in the region that continues to this day.

The scattered distribution of the Uyghurs across present-day Xinjiang and their historically staggered conversion to Islam have resulted in a tremendous amount of diversity among the population. We may generalize and postulate that the Uyghur communities that were Islamized last have the least-entrenched Islamic traditions and Muslim identities. Thus, many Uyghurs from Turfan to Ürümqi to Hami in modern times are more secularized than their brethren further to the east; whereas the western Uyghurs of Kashgar and its environs tend to look westward for their cultural and religious influences (to Samarkand, Bukhara, and even Istanbul), eastern Uyghurs have been more heavily influenced by contact with Chinese culture (especially material culture). But that is not to say that among them there are not devout Muslims, or that their Turkic cultural identity is weak. On the contrary, mosques in Ürümqi are often full for Friday congregational prayers, as Islam is integrated into Uyghur nationalism, which is strongly represented in western Xinjiang, a fact that is often cited in response to increasing Chinese hegemony.

The Qing incursions into and subsequent annexation of Xinjiang brought the vast majority of the Uyghur population, scattered as it was among the various oases, under Chinese imperial rule. Other Turkic Muslims were similarly absorbed into the Qing empire, and this existing population was added to by an influx of Han Chinese and Hui Muslim settlers seeking opportunities. The Qing annexation of Xinjiang therefore created the conditions for ethnoreligiously based social, economic, and political conflict among the various communities and between the regime and its subjects.

The Qing Dynasty first attempted to control Xinjiang by installing friendly local rulers: the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722) installed a Uyghur chief in Xinjiang's westernmost oasis city of Hami in the early eighteenth century. After the Qing defeat of the Dzungars, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796) tried to follow his grandfather's example with disastrous results: dividing the entirety of Xinjiang into four sub-khanates under Qing rule led to unrest and rebellion throughout the territory. As a consequence, the Qing government was compelled to deploy troops to control Xinjiang, resulting in an ongoing military occupation. This commitment of forces left the government ill-prepared to deal with a rash of rebellions across the country, some of them led by Muslims, that plagued the dynasty through much of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Islam and the State

The various Muslim rebellions are often spoken of as though they were a single unified campaign against the central government, but they were anything but that. In fact, they reflected the very "problem" of Muslim diversity in China in the challenges they posed to Qing authority on a local level. After the Uyghur uprisings in the wake of the annexation of Xinjiang, Hui Muslims rebelled in Gansu province in the 1780s. But, rather than a unified movement against the Qing government, this rebellion was actually sparked by a conflict within the local Hui community. For generations, Hui Muslims from western China had been traveling westward into the central Islamic lands for trade, to perform the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca, or *Hajj*, and also in search of Islamic teachings that they could not find in their native land. In the early part of the eighteenth century, a number of religious teachers from Gansu made their way to Arabia, traveling through most of the Muslim world. In their travels they were exposed to, among other things, teachings of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism.

In particular, several prominent Hui religious leaders were initiated into the Naqshbandi Sufi order, which was dominant throughout Central and South Asia at the time. Highlighting the diversity, and disunity, found throughout the Muslim world, the Naqshbandi order, one of numerous Sufi brotherhoods that had proliferated in Islamic countries, had itself divided into two rival sub-orders: the Khafiyya and the Jahriyya. These two groups were divided by a difference in the way they

performed one of the central practices of Sufism: *dhikr*, or the ritual remembrance and invocation of the Quranic names of God. In many Sufi orders, the practice of *dhikr* takes the form of rhythmic chanting, accompanied by breathing techniques that often lead to ecstatic experiences of union with the divine, which are often compared to the feeling of drunkenness. Other Sufi orders have advocated a more "sober" practice; in fact, their practice of meditation and *dhikr* emphasizes the interiorization of religious experience, and so their *dhikr* is performed in silence, the repetition of the divine names being done internally by the devotee. Traditionally, the Naqshbandi have been considered one of the more sober Sufi orders. As the order expanded and developed, however, a group within the brotherhood that preferred the vocalized *dhikr* emerged and came to be known as the Jahriyya. To distinguish them from the others, the practitioners of the original silent *dhikr* were then called the Khafiyya.

These Naqshbandi sub-orders, with their divergent practices, were introduced into China by different Hui teachers. Ma Laichi (1673–1753) brought the Khafiyya teachings and practices to China. In Gansu, and the neighboring Qinghai and Shaanxi provinces, he attracted followers among the local Hui who found the Khafiyya practices consonant with the prevailing Sunni traditions that had already been in China for nearly a millennium. Thus, the Khafiyya *menhuan* ("brotherhood") was established. The Jahriyya *menhuan*, on the other hand, was founded in China by a charismatic teacher by the name of Ma Mingxin (1719–1781), who had studied under a Sufi master in Yemen before bringing the vocalized *dhikr* back to his native land. Ma Mingxin's order began in Gansu, but gained a following that eventually would penetrate Hui communities from the southwestern province of Yunnan all the way to Manchuria in the northeast of China.

As popular as the Jahriyya became, the more traditional Hui, both non-Sufi and Khafiyya, objected to its unorthodox practices, which they accused of being disruptive of social harmony. The Khafiyya labeled their own doctrine the "old teaching" (*laojiao*), thereby conferring upon it the air of established, orthodox tradition, though it had been established in China only a few years before Ma Mingxin's "new teaching" (*xinjiao*), which was considered an upstart heterodoxy. By invoking the notion of heterodoxy, the critics of the "new teaching" got the attention of the Qing authorities, who, like any imperial government, were ever vigilant against potentially seditious religious movements. As the rivalry between these two Naqshbandi sub-orders in western and central China grew increasingly hostile, local Han Chinese officials were thus drawn into the conflict. The Qing government tolerated non-Sufi Hui Muslims, as well as the Khafiyya practitioners, but their constant scrutiny of the Jahriyya community eventually caused followers of that community to rise up in violence against both Khafiyya Hui Muslims and the Qing authorities, whom they accused of corruption and anti-Muslim bias, which led to two full-blown rebellions in 1781 and 1783. These rebellions were summarily put down by Qing forces, but in many ways showed a fundamental weakness of the ability of the regime to deal with the complicated diversity that characterized much of its realm.

Underscoring this problem, the Muslim rebellions of the 1780s were based on a localized conflict between two groups of Hui Muslims, but also drew in Han Chinese officials and civilians, under the rule of a Manchu Dynasty. Muslim diversity proved to be a thorn in the side of the central government in a way that echoes today's ethnic conflicts in the People's Republic of China.

Given this history of rebellions alternating with periods of peaceful coexistence, scholars have generalized about the interactions with Chinese culture and society in terms of either retaliation or assimilation. This "conflict or concord" interpretation of the encounters of China's Muslims with the dominant Chinese civilization around them is a generalization that seeks to reduce complex and dynamic historical circumstances and events to a simple binary choice. It is flawed not because it is altogether untrue but because it is incomplete. It is unable to depict, let alone explain, the individual and communal motivations that produced the diverse responses of Muslims in China to the social and cultural contexts in which they lived. We have already seen how internally diverse China's Muslim population is. The "problem" of Muslim diversity in China has been exacerbated by a failure on the part of the Chinese state to recognize this diversity, and, worse yet, has led the government to attempt to impose homogeneity upon this diverse population by heavy-handed policies. China's diverse Muslims have offered diverse "solutions" to the problem of finding their proper place in Chinese society, and different Chinese governments have also taken a variety of approaches to the problem.

In the early centuries of Muslim immigration to China, going back to the Tang period, Muslims were afforded a measure of autonomy, provided that they obeyed the law of the land and contributed to the empire's prosperity, and essentially lived separately from the mainstream Han Chinese population. In this regard, Muslims were not treated especially differently from other foreign ethnoreligious communities that had also established a presence in China, be they Jews, Zoroastrians, or Nestorian Christians, among others. This *laissez-faire* attitude toward foreign settlers on the part of the government, however, could not shield these immigrant communities from the resentment and animosity of Chinese commoners, as witnessed during the Tang period by the Huang Chao rebellion (874–884), during which, by some accounts, tens of thousands of foreign residents of the port city of Guangzhou were massacred.

Even in these early centuries of Muslim residence in China, the fact that Muslims were perceived as a foreign presence fueled xenophobic popular prejudices. As we saw above, the fact that more Muslims entered China with the Mongol conquest only worsened this situation. Therefore, along with the restoration of native Chinese institutions, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty had to contend with the potential for ethnic strife, and therefore enacted policies intended to accelerate the "civilization" of "barbarian" minorities, including laws to help accelerate the natural process of acculturation of ethnic and cultural communities. The daily force and inevitability of acculturative processes had certainly shaped the history of the Muslim community in China even before the Ming period, but never before had a regime taken such

concrete steps to oversee Muslim assimilation into mainstream Chinese culture and society. While the widespread adoption of Chinese language and material culture by the ancestors of today's Hui Muslims living in eastern and central China would have occurred anyway, the Ming policies certainly catalyzed a more rapid naturalization. The Ming government even enacted a law requiring "foreigners" to intermarry with Han Chinese; however, in a move that highlighted their "difference," Muslim subjects were exempt from this law because the government acknowledged that Muslims might be spurned and have difficulty finding prospective Chinese spouses; they were therefore allowed to marry within their own community.

From the Ming imperial perspective, this domestic ethnic policy was based primarily on foreign policy concerns. After a century of foreign rule, the Ming government sought to define and secure Chinese identity and patrimony via methods that, at least under the reign of several Ming emperors, verged on protectionism and isolationism. That is not to say that the three-hundred-year Ming Dynasty was altogether consistent in its worldview. The dynasty's founder, Ming Taizu (r. 1368–1398), was somewhat erratic in his policies concerning Muslims; while tolerant, and even solicitous at times, the emperor nevertheless also limited his empire's contacts abroad. By contrast, his son, the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424), was incredibly outward-looking in his perspective, and actually reversed most of his father's policies toward Muslims. However, through much of the period, a more inward-looking foreign policy greatly reduced Chinese contact with the outside world, including Islamic Central Asia. One of the effects of this policy was to cut off Chinese-speaking Muslims from the central lands of Islam, leaving them to negotiate their way amid a vast non-Muslim majority with very little support or influence from outside China.

By the sixteenth century, many among the highly sinicized Muslim communities of central and eastern China pursued a classical Confucian education in order to take the official examination—a means to social advancement. Chinese had become the mother tongue of assimilated Muslims, and a significant portion of this population were also literate in classical Chinese. By contrast, Arabic and Persian had dwindled in use among these Muslims, except for the liturgical Arabic used in daily religious observances. For these purposes, rudimentary instruction in the Islamic languages, for the purposes of fulfilling basic ritual obligations, was often given to Muslim children at informal schools in local community mosques. There were, however, some Muslims in central and eastern China who were concerned about the possible erosion, or even disappearance, of Islamic knowledge and identity that accompanied assimilation.

One such individual, Hu Dengzhou (1522–1597), had been educated in his youth in the Confucian curriculum, but also craved a deeper understanding of Islam than was available from the mosque school he attended as a child in Shaanxi. Realizing that such learning was impossible to find in China, Hu Dengzhou did what few others in his time dared. He traveled for years through Central Asia, and eventually to Mecca, seeking instruction and Islamic texts he could bring back with him to China. Upon returning to China, he undertook the reform of existing mosque-based

education, and instituted a new system known as *Jingtang jiaoyu* (lit. "scripture hall education").

Hu Dengzhou's innovations included the expansion of the curriculum to include newly introduced Arabic and Persian texts, which required more intensive language instruction than had previously been standard in Chinese Muslim schools. He also implemented the practice of training teachers who could then go out to communities in different locales to train others in the new curriculum and pedagogy. In so doing, Hu Dengzhou laid the foundations of the scholarly network that would blossom at the end of the Ming period into the early Qing period. Perhaps the greatest innovation introduced by Hu Dengzhou was the use of Chinese texts in the curriculum. In the early days of the educational system, Islamic texts were scarce, so Hu Dengzhou and his followers translated those they had into classical Chinese. Eventually, this practice led to the production of a sizeable Chinese Islamic literary canon, and the gradual blending of Confucian and Islamic ideas that would gain its fullest expression in works collectively referred to as the *Han Kitab* ("Chinese-language Islamic books")—a term composed of the word *han*, meaning "Chinese," and the Arabic word (also used in Persian and Turkish) *kitab*, meaning "book." As the educational system, curriculum, and burgeoning scholarly network grew in sophistication, so too did the teachers and students take on the appearance of a true sub-class of Chinese literati, which eventually gave rise to individuals who would write the Han Kitab, the production of which began with literal translations of Islamic texts into Chinese. The scope and breadth of the Han Kitab evolved eventually to encompass commentaries and comprehensive treatises, including the original works of prominent Chinese Muslim scholars such as Wang Daiyu (c. 1570–1658), Ma Zhu (b. 1640), and Liu Zhi (c. 1660–c. 1730).

The *Han Kitab* scholars went from translating Arabic and Persian books, in order to serve the needs of monolingual Chinese-speaking Muslims, to producing an impressive array of original works in Chinese on a range of topics including Islamic history, practice, and theology. These Chinese Muslim scholars were erudite and cosmopolitan, and synthesized diverse religious and philosophical influences. Their work was both steeped in tradition and, yet, exceedingly innovative, shaping the way future generations of Chinese Muslims would be perceived and would come to understand their own ancestral tradition. In effect, they were translating Islam, in its many facets, into Chinese, employing the highly syncretic language of Neo-Confucian philosophy and metaphysics, transposing an entire religious worldview from one cultural, linguistic context to another. The challenge of expressing Islamic religious concepts in a cultural context devoid of any clear monotheistic principle tested the limits of their scholarship and linguistic finesse.

The *Han Kitab* authors addressed a dual audience made up on the one hand of sinicized Muslims and on the other of non-Muslim readers among the Chinese elite who may have wished to learn something of Islam. For the former group, the texts were intended to help them cultivate an appreciation for their native religion and to stem the tide of assimilation that had led many Muslims in China to all but abandon

their Muslim identity. For non-Muslim readers, the Chinese expression of Islamic beliefs and values was intended to dispel anti-Islamic preconceptions and to demonstrate not only that Muslims were not threatening to Chinese social harmony but also that Islam was consistent with the Neo-Confucian ideals. Thus, with respect to the "problem" of Muslim diversity in China, the *Han Kitab* affirmed the distinctiveness of Islam and Muslims while also presenting them as seamlessly fitting within the fabric of Chinese society, in essence reflecting the cultural simultaneity of the forebears of Hui Muslims in the People's Republic of China.

The urbane, acculturated *Han Kitab* schlolars thus assisted in the promotion and maintenance of a positive image for their community at large. Liu Zhi (c. 1660–c. 1730), regarded as the pinnacle of Chinese Islamic scholarship, was even able to get members of the Confucian elite to write laudatory prefaces to one of his works, the *Tianfang dianli* (*Ritual Law of Islam*). Other prefaces were written by fellow Muslims, who also enjoyed high social rank. One of these, Yang Peilu, used his preface, composed in 1710, to flatter the imperial throne as he praised the Kangxi emperor's handling of the annexation of the Xinjiang oasis city of Hami:

> The sage Son of Heaven has presided over the empire for forty-eight years. Virtue covers the realm, benefiting areas both inside and outside China. The emperor first installed a ruler in Hami, thereby giving that country a new lease on life . . . our emperor's way of showing kindness to people from far-off lands . . . Thus, it may be said that Muslim people heard about and admired the Emperor's reputation for righteousness.

As an astute politician, the Kangxi emperor was well aware of the value of maintaining good political relations with friendly Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims on the western frontier of the expanding Qing Empire. It was from among the Muslim population in the vicinity of Hami that the early Qing rulers conscripted soldiers to conquer and control Central Asia, particularly to wrest it from the grasp of Galdan, the Dzungar Mongol khan. The Kangxi emperor did not underestimate the value of Muslim cooperation, nor the potential for Muslim unrest; anti-Qing hostility had plagued the dynasty soon after its establishment, and would again be a source of trouble in Xinjiang. Thus, the attitude of the Kangxi court toward Muslims in the realm alternated between paternalistic solicitude and cautious circumspection.

Concern over the outbreak of Han–Hui quarrels that could destabilize frontier territories helped to shape early Qing ethnic and religious policies, as summarized by Donald Leslie: "Autocratic rule was to be tempered by imperial benevolence; and religious freedom was allowed so long as it did not interfere with good order and obedience to the state" (Leslie 1986).

The Kangxi emperor demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of ethnic politics and minority affairs, and did not make the mistake of painting all Muslims with the same brush. The law-abiding, sinicized Hui of eastern China were to be distinguished from the Turkic Muslims, most notably the Uyghurs, of the frontier. Indeed, even today, the Hui commonly distinguish themselves from these Uyghurs, whom

they regard as un-Chinese, unruly, and even uncivilized, despite their common bond of Islam. But even among Hui Muslims there were distinctions; the Chinese Muslims in Gansu and other western provinces were far less sinicized than those living in the central and eastern provinces—the cultural heart of China. The Emperor was able to discern a difference between his "good" and "bad" Muslim subjects.

In 1694, in response to an unsubstantiated accusation by a Chinese official of seditious activities on the part of the Hui community in Beijing, the Kangxi emperor issued an edict ordering the fair treatment and protection of the lives and property of Muslims. Yet one should not infer from this that he felt a strong personal affinity to Islamic doctrine or Muslim culture. The edict was surely motivated in part by the need to "juggle constituencies," pitting rival groups against one another as part of early Qing ethnic politics. We may glean from the edict strong political motivations, probably more concerned with checking the power of Han Chinese officials than elevating the status of Muslims.

The Kangxi emperor's policy of distinguishing between constituencies and offering benevolence in exchange for obedience became the model for his immediate successors. His son, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722–1735), issued four edicts concerning Muslims between 1724 and 1730. His 1729 edict averred that the "Hui people . . . are all children of our country" and "cannot be regarded as separate. As long as they peacefully keep their customs, they are not to be compared with traitors, lawbreakers or those seeking to delude and lead people astray." A 1730 edict recognized the merits of good Muslim subjects—"There is no lack among them of loyal servants of the country"—but also warned that if "the Hui people indeed transgress, laws and statutes exist under which they will certainly be punished" (trans. Leslie 1986).

The limits of imperial tolerance were tested under the Qianlong emperor (1736–1796), who, as we saw above, implemented a military occupation of Xinjiang and put down significant Hui Muslim-led rebellions in the 1780s in Gansu. In the midst of the rebellions, the Emperor made a sweeping generalization about Muslims in an edict, declaring that "these sorts of people put violence before everything and have no loyalty to the state." Obviously, the emperor and his advisors felt as though all Muslims were a threat, having recently witnessed both Uyghur and Hui uprisings in the western provinces. Under these circumstances, the subtleties of Muslim diversity were lost on the regime. However, in a 1781 edict, taking a more nuanced stance and returning to the Kangxi-era distinction between lawless and law-abiding subjects, the emperor described the Muslims of the Chinese interior (as distinguished from those in Xinjiang) as "being really no different from the native [Han] inhabitants. There are good and bad among them." In 1782, another edict warned of overly constraining Chinese Muslims in the practice of their religion, and expressing sensitivity to the condition of "good" Hui subjects: "If there is excessive inquisition and interference, then law abiding Hui people will be deprived of peace of mind," potentially leading to "immense trouble" (trans. Leslie 1986).

The Qianlong court, obviously aware of the need for a nuanced policy, recognized the differences between various Muslim groups. We should note again that the Muslim rebellions against the Qing Dynasty of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in northwestern China were largely based on local disputes, sometimes between Muslims (both Hui and Uyghur) and sometimes between Muslims and non-Muslims. When Muslims rose up against imperial authority, it was often because they felt bullied by local officials, who abused their authority to side with local non-Muslims in acts of anti-Islamic bias. In these conflicts, Muslims could sometimes be found siding with the authorities against other Muslims. So, we must not imagine a unified Islamic front against the regime, nor should we forget that most of the disputes at the heart of the rebellions were based on local economic and civil issues.

In the extremely sinicized communities of eastern China, as opposed to the less assimilated communities of the northwest, both in imperial times and under the Communist regime, Hui Muslims have never organized themselves with the intent of toppling the central government to set up an Islamic state. Such ideas are beyond the purview of a minority that knows, even without the overt threat of suppression, that their survival depends on maintaining good relations and a peaceful, positive image in the eyes of the authorities and their non-Muslim neighbors. We should note the absence of a pan-Islamic notion of *jihad* in the Hui context. Among the ethnically distinct Muslim communities of the frontier, however, a sense of distinct identity, and a yearning for independence, has occasionally appeared. As Jonathan Lipman explains concerning this hot-button term, and its usage in Chinese Muslim history,

> The idea of a war to convert Qing territory into Islamic territory could almost never be entertained by a Sino-Muslim leader, as compared to the Turkic-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang, who often did declare *jihad* against the Qing. Indeed, virtually all of the . . . Sino-Muslims . . . shared a strong sense of *belonging* in China and of the Qing state's legitimacy. (Lipman 1997)

In the twentieth century, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the restoration of Han Chinese rule, the government of the Republic of China followed the policy of recognizing the importance of the Muslim contribution to China by including the Hui (along with the Han, Manchurians, Mongolians, and Tibetans) among the core peoples of the new republic. The People's Republic of China's ethnic policies are far more complex, and at their inception were largely based on categories and ideas borrowed from Stalin's Soviet Union. Just as in imperial times, most Hui today understand that their fortunes are inextricably bound to those of mainstream Han society.

The same cannot be said unequivocally of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, who are still a thorn in Beijing's side, as they include a number of separatist factions, some purely nationalist and secular but others more explicitly religious. These groups do invoke *jihad* and religious unity with Muslims abroad in their struggle for independence. When we have heard of foreign fighters in Afghanistan or Pakistan coming from

China, or being detained at Guantanamo Bay, they have invariably been of Uyghur ethnicity. After more than a millennium of fragmentation and subjugation under various conquest regimes—Mongol, Manchu, and Chinese—Uyghur nationalism emerged just as other peoples around the world sought self-determination between the world wars. These stirrings were supported by Stalin's Soviet Union, who helped Uyghur nationalists to establish a short-lived independent East Turkestan Republic, from 1933 to 1934. A second East Turkestan Republic was established in 1944, but fell when the People's Liberation Army entered Xinjiang in 1949, the People's Republic of China declaring that it had successfully brought to fruition on behalf of the Uyghur people the revolution that their independence movement had initiated. Post-1949, some Uyghurs have argued for greater political, cultural, and religious autonomy with continued ties to the "New China." Others have even advocated outright secession from China and since as early as 1933 there has been an organized movement aiming to create an independent Uyghur state. Activists of this movement generally operate within the Uyghur diaspora community outside China because, since the 1950s, the People's Republic of China has increasingly cracked down on Uyghur separatism within China, imprisoning dissidents and executing "traitors." A small number of Uyghurs have framed their struggle for self-determination in explicitly religious terms, some invoking the language of jihadist movements.

In the face of Muslim diversity in China, the People's Republic of China has not articulated a consistent policy regarding Islam and Muslims. Its constitution, modeled after the 1936 Soviet Constitution, proclaims the equality of all of China's nationalities, with one important exception: the Soviet constitution (on paper, at least) gave republics the right of secession, whereas the constitution of the People's Republic of China strictly forbids it. As Article 4 explicitly states:

> The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China similarly guarantees religious freedom to its citizens, though religious persecution and the curtailment of religious rights have occurred frequently over the fifty-five years since it was ratified. The constitution was updated in 1982, with little change in the language outlining the official policy on religion. Yet, with specific regard to Islam and Muslims, the Communist government has proudly publicized gestures of tolerance and benevolence in a series of white papers during the 1990s and 2000s, including statistics on how many mosques are maintained in the country; how many government-trained imams are serving; and, especially, how many Chinese Muslims have been permitted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca each year. Such statistics are intended to promote

goodwill among China's Muslim population but also have value beyond China's borders. Celebration of Beijing's generosity to its Muslim citizens is also used to impress on foreign Islamic nations, including regimes that supply the oil necessary for China's economic growth, that the People's Republic of China treats its Muslims well and respects Islam. In a similar effort to curry favor with Muslim countries, the People's Republic of China has encouraged the influx of petrodollars from the Persian Gulf for the construction of mosques and madrasas where elements of the Wahhabi doctrine are promulgated.

Both the constitution and the white papers dealing with matters of religion and minority rights affirm religious tolerance within a context of tight government control. Even when specific language intended to show the government's appreciation of each religious community's distinctiveness is invoked, it is overshadowed by platitudes asserting the duty of each community to subjugate their beliefs and practices to the interests of the state:

> It is traditional for Chinese religious believers to love their country and religions. The Chinese government supports and encourages the religious circles to unite the religious believers to actively participate in the construction of the country. The various religions all advocate serving the society and promoting the people's well-being, such as . . . Islam's "praying to Allah to give great reward in this world and hereafter." ("Freedom of religious belief in China" 1997)

Such general statements about Islam appear to reflect an official perspective in the People's Republic of China that is not at all concerned with Muslim diversity. Muslim diversity, like ethnic and cultural diversity in general, is celebrated both officially and publically, and suppressed in practice. In reality, apart from its official positions, the People's Republic of China pursues a variety of responses to the "problem" of Muslim diversity in China, some of them at odds with one another, as dictated by the exigencies of the "situation on the ground."

Diversity poses a challenge to empire builders and imperial administrators; homogeneity is far more conducive to hegemony. To political historians and contemporary political theorists—those who study empires and other hegemonic states—diversity often proves inconvenient in terms of constructing comprehensive theories. However, diversity can be a boon to sociologists and anthropologists, for whom it provides evidence to fuel theories about human adaptability to changeable social and cultural circumstances. For historians of religion, diversity is an inevitable reality of the field, as religious beliefs and practices tend to morph according to the norms of a given cultural context as easily as human beings adapt to different physical environments. Whether one welcomes or disdains political, social, cultural, and/or religious diversity, it is a phenomenon that cannot be swept under the proverbial rug, regardless of the size of that rug. Attempts to whitewash, overlook, or cover up diversity, whether in policy initiatives or scholarly theories, generally fail. This has certainly been the case in certain policies aiming to deal with the Muslim population that have

been implemented by various Chinese governments over the course of Chinese history, as well as in studies of Islam and China.

Toward the end of an eventful and war-scarred twentieth century, scholars theorized and laypeople speculated about the much-heralded "new world order" of the coming millennium. Samuel Huntington, a political theorist, referred to a "Confucian–Islamic connection" in his ominous forecast for the geopolitical future, *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996). Huntington hypothesized that, in the twenty-first century, civilizational identities will replace ideologies as the principal force behind global conflict. The Christian West, led by the United States, will find itself at odds with various other civilizations around the world. Most notably, the so-called Islamic and Confucian civilizations will be pushed into a utilitarian alliance, cooperating—technologically, economically, and militarily—to create a foil to American hegemony.

There is no denying the reality of collaboration between China and Muslim countries, including a nuclear-armed Pakistan and a nuclear-aspirant Iran, nor the fact that relations between China and global Islam will have an important role to play on the international stage in the coming decades. But the idea that there exists in the world a Confucian and Islamic "civilization" is highly questionable. Huntington seems to wish for the convenience of monolithic blocs, separated by borders drawn with bold lines. Such an approach mirrors the attempts by empires to impose unity from above by whitewashing complexities and diversity. Even more neglected by this theory of civilizations is the micro level, on the ground, where individuals within a society hold hybrid identities and multiple allegiances. Even Huntington must admit that there are cracks in his blocs and fissures in his lines. Thus, he refers to "fractured states" whose multicultural, multilinguistic, and/or multireligious populations include representatives of different "civilizations." The wish to reduce humanity to a collection of monolithic blocs may be appealing, but the reality of diversity and complexity is ineluctable. Indeed, if we look closely enough, it becomes obvious that all states are "fractured" by internal diversity, just as most individuals assume different identities depending on the situation at hand. Diversity cannot simply be homogenized or hegemonized, as the tenacious diversity of Muslims after nearly twelve centuries in China bears witness.

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CHAPTER 12

Chinese Christianity

Ryan Dunch, University of Alberta

Any discussion of Christianity in China must begin by recognizing the tremendous diversity and change encompassed by both terms over the nearly 1500 years of their interaction. The history of Chinese Christianity is in effect a story of many Chinas and many Christianities. The most obvious sign of this is the fact that, for most Chinese, Roman Catholic Christianity (*Tianzhujiao*, "the teaching of the Lord of Heaven") and Protestant Christianity (*Jidujiao*, "the teaching of Christ") appear as two separate religions rather than two branches of one religion, with different religious vocabularies, institutions, and modes of worship. Chinese Christianity has been growing very rapidly since 1979, when the Chinese government restored the policy of freedom of religious belief, and today it includes a bewildering array of forms and expressions. Indeed, the very diversity of its manifestations across Chinese societies in the twenty-first century is perhaps the clearest indication that Christianity is now incontrovertibly a Chinese religion. It also means that a general overview such as this one can only be an approximation of the reality, and the generalizations and conclusions offered herein should be taken as provisional and debatable. After a brief historical overview, this chapter will outline the main features of Catholic and Protestant Christianity in contemporary China, and then discuss some key themes, including the tension between popular fervor and church institutions; the effects of the Chinese state on the forms of Christianity; foreignness and the question of authenticity; and the multiple dimensions of Chinese Christianity today.

Streams Within Chinese Christianity

Although there were Christian communities in China in earlier periods, Christianity as a continuing presence in Chinese society dates back to the entry of Roman

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Catholic missionaries belonging to the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in the late sixteenth century. In 1601, the most famous of these, Matteo Ricci (Li Madou, 1552–1610), secured permission from the Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620) to reside and establish a church in the capital, Beijing. This began a century of Christian expansion in China, first under the Jesuits, who were joined after 1631 by the Franciscans and Dominicans, with other Catholic orders following after 1680. The total number of missionaries was small in comparison to later times: around thirty to forty through the middle of the century, increasing to about 140 between 1680 and 1701 as the new orders entered the field. Growth in Chinese Christian numbers accelerated after 1630, reaching around two hundred thousand by 1700. By that time, Christianity was firmly embedded in the lives of its Chinese followers, and the Chinese Catholic community persisted through the era of suppression that followed between the 1720s and 1840s, when missionaries were mostly prohibited from residing in China.

The Protestant missionary presence in China began with the arrival of Robert Morrison (Ma Lixun, 1782–1834) on the China coast in 1807, and expanded after the "unequal treaties" between China and the Western powers secured the right for missionaries to travel and preach throughout the empire. Over the century between the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) and the Chinese Communist Revolution (1949), literally hundreds of distinct missionary societies operated in China for short or long periods (around 140 Catholic and over 260 Protestant organizations in all), with personnel totaling in the thousands by the early twentieth century. Collectively, this represented an enormous social and financial investment that affected Chinese society in multiple ways, reaching far beyond the strictly religious. For example, some of the missions placed particular emphasis on establishing and running schools and (eventually) universities, and through the Republican period (1911–1949) around fifteen percent of total university enrollment in China was in the Christian universities. The educational efforts of the missions had special importance for Chinese girls and women, who had limited access to formal schooling compared to males. Western medicine and surgery was another area of emphasis, and missionary hospitals were often the first and sometimes the only such facilities in major and minor cities throughout the early twentieth century. Some missions established orphanages and other charities or associations for social amelioration, such as schools for the blind or literacy classes for factory women. Missionary publications were important in introducing some elements of Western science and technology as well as religion to Chinese readers, and in interpreting Chinese society to the West. Missionary publishing also stimulated technological innovation in the publishing industry, by devising a workable method for movable-type printing in the Chinese script. The missionary presence also intersected with Chinese politics in important ways, particularly under Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975), who married an American-educated preacher's daughter, Song Meiling (May-ling Soong Chiang, 1897–2003), and was baptized into the Methodist church in 1930.

Despite the multifaceted complexity of this activity, in religious terms the results of the missionary effort were modest: by 1949, out of a total Chinese population

exceeding four hundred million, the number of Catholics was just over three million and the number of Protestants approached one million, in addition to a few thousand Chinese Orthodox Christians. The Catholic Church was united into a structure of ecclesiastical provinces and 139 dioceses and prefectures apostolic (although there were important regional differences depending on which religious orders had ministered in the region). By 1948, there were over 3000 Chinese priests and around 2700 foreign ones working in the Chinese church, but the majority of bishops and archbishops remained foreign. On the Protestant side, the diversity was much more obvious. The largest churches were Chinese branches of the principal denominational families in European and American Protestantism: Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Reformed, and Congregationalists, the latter three mostly merged into the ecumenical Church of Christ in China (*Zhonghua jidu jiaohui*), formed in the 1920s. However, there were also smaller groups connected to the Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and other newer missions, as well as a large number of congregations associated with the non-denominational China Inland Mission. In addition to these churches originating in the foreign missions, there were several important indigenous Chinese Protestant sects, formed from the 1910s onward in reaction against the formalism and foreign domination of the mission churches, and often highly critical of them. The largest of these were the True Jesus Church, a Chinese Pentecostal movement founded in 1917, and the Assembly Hall or "Little Flock" movement, established by Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng, 1903–1972) in the 1920s. Together with other indigenous sects and independent congregations, these movements probably accounted for twenty to twenty-five percent of Chinese Protestant adherents in 1949.

The first three decades of the People's Republic were difficult ones for Christians of all stripes, as they were for adherents of all religions in China. The new government regarded all religion as a negative byproduct of class society that would disappear as socialism became established, but in the case of Christianity this general antipathy was compounded by the association of Christianity with foreign imperialism. Over the first five years of the regime, the ties of Protestant churches to the missions were severed and the schools and hospitals run by the churches were nationalized. Church leaders were encouraged to denounce missionaries for their alleged misdeeds, and a new organization, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (or TSPM), was formed to purge the churches of their ties to imperialism and to unite Protestants in support of the "new China." The "three selves" of the name stand for self-support, self-government, and self-propagation—that is, no foreign finances, foreign control, or foreign religious workers. Under the leadership of the TSPM, the number of churches in the cities was reduced in the name of rationalization and unification from the late 1950s, while in the countryside churches were closed in the process of collectivization, with few reopening until after 1979.

The ties between Chinese Protestant denominations and their overseas counterparts were fraternal not hierarchical ones. Thus, although severing those ties was personally painful for many Protestants and financially damaging for the major

denominations, it did not pose a fundamental crisis of religious authority. Ironically, the Protestants treated with the most severity by the new regime were the leaders of the indigenous Protestant sects, who did not have ties to foreign missions to be severed but were religiously conservative and/or unwilling to unify with the denominational mission-founded churches under the leadership of the TSPM. Many of these were arrested and tried as counter-revolutionaries, including Watchman Nee, who died in prison in 1972, and others who remained imprisoned for twenty years or more. Some of their congregations maintained their independence by ceasing to meet or by meeting in smaller groups in homes, although in a few regions the sectarian congregations did cooperate with the TSPM, as in Fuzhou where some Little Flock leaders agreed to join the TSPM and accept the new order.

For the Roman Catholic Church, however, the foreign ties were to the Vatican and the Pope himself, and the questions raised by the new government's insistence on the "three selves" were therefore much more fundamental. Catholic clergy and laity resisted efforts to force them to break with Rome, and many were arrested and sentenced as counter-revolutionaries. It was not until 1957 that the authorities succeeded in convening the first national meeting of the Catholic Patriotic Association, the Catholic equivalent of the Protestant TSPM. The next year, the independence of the Chinese Catholic Church from the Vatican was taken a step further with the election and consecration of new Chinese bishops without Papal approval. These measures were unacceptable to many Catholics, and they showed their dissent by only going to Mass when a priest loyal to Rome was officiating, or by organizing clandestinely into an alternative "underground" church.

Thus, by the time of the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, during which all overt religious activity was suppressed, the basic streams of Chinese Christianity that would continue into the present had been established. On the Catholic side, this included the "patriotic" Catholic Church, which maintained the doctrines, organization, and Latin liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church but rejected the authority of the Vatican and played no part in the global Catholic Church beyond the borders of China, and an "underground" or unofficial Catholic Church, which maintained itself in secret, also mostly out of contact with Rome until the open door policy after 1979 enabled the re-establishment of sporadic contact. For lay believers the boundaries between these two could be relatively porous, and the relative strength of each varied by region and over time. Since the 1980s, the Vatican has been seeking to reach out to both sides and to find a way toward reconciliation. However, these efforts have been hampered by the continuing difficulty of rapprochement on the diplomatic level between the Vatican and the People's Republic of China, which do not have diplomatic relations, partly because of China's "one-China policy," which would require the Vatican to sever its diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to establish relations with China.

On the Protestant side, the chief division was between the open churches affiliated with the TSPM, most of which derived from the old mission-affiliated denominations, and the "house churches," many of which had roots in indigenous sects, although

here again the porousness of the boundaries varied across time and between regions. An important change after the Cultural Revolution was that the open church announced itself to be "post-denominational" and established a new national body, the China Christian Council (CCC), in place of the old national denominations; in practice, the two bodies have operated in tandem, and are often referred to collectively as the TSPM/CCC. On the unofficial or house church side, the situation was further complicated by the development of new indigenous Protestant sects in rural China during the suppression of the Cultural Revolution decade, particularly in the central China provinces of Henan and Anhui. These new house church networks have emerged as an important new element in the Chinese Protestant amalgam since the early 1980s.

The terminology employed to designate these different streams varies widely, and each choice carries political inflections that tend to over-simplify the picture. "Underground" implies secrecy and all-out opposition to the state, for instance, which is true of some Christian groups but not the majority. Leaders of the state-recognized Christian bodies object to the term "official," asserting quite rightly that the Catholic Patriotic Association, the TSPM, and so on are non-governmental organizations and not organs of the state. Referring to Protestant churches not affiliated with the TSPM/CCC as "house churches" gives the misleading impression of small groups meeting in private homes, when some of these are vast networks of congregations spanning many provinces, and the congregations themselves meet in all sorts of settings and can number in the hundreds or more. This chapter employs a variety of terms rather than a standard terminology, because all of the options are misleading on some level.

The number of Christians in China today has been a topic of debate and controversy going back to the 1980s, and remains very difficult to estimate reliably. For one thing, the Chinese state remains deeply uncomfortable with the continuing vitality of Christianity and other religions in Chinese society, and reports in the state-controlled media tend therefore to underestimate the numbers of religious adherents. Similarly, the officially-recognized religious organizations (the TSPM/CCC for Protestants and the Catholic Patriotic Association for Catholics), mandated by state policy to lead and speak for all Chinese Protestants and Catholics respectively, have been reluctant to acknowledge the existence of large bodies of believers outside their auspices (although this reticence has loosened since the 1990s). To these political structural factors we can add the practical difficulty of collating statistics across the vastness and variability of China; the complexity of deciding what constitutes religious adherence, and thus who should be counted; and the tendency of some Protestant mission groups outside China to propagate very high estimates of the number of Chinese Christians in order to emphasize the importance of their ministry activities.

Notwithstanding these difficulties in arriving at a solid number, all estimates agree that Chinese Christianity has grown and is growing very rapidly, at a rate far outstripping population growth.

Recent estimates of the Catholic Church put the total number around twelve million, or about four times the number in 1949, split about evenly between the official and underground churches, although some estimates have the underground alone numbering twelve million (*China Church Quarterly* 2009). A survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences from 2008 to 2009 estimated that there were twenty-three million Protestants in China, more than twenty times the number in 1949 and eight times the first official estimates after churches began reopening in the early 1980s. This estimate is considerably higher than estimates previously released by the TSPM/CCC, which were running at eighteen million, but well under the high-end figure of around one hundred million sometimes given for Chinese Protestants, or the more plausible estimates of forty to fifty million (Chen 2010 and analysis in Wickeri 2010). This rapid growth has occurred in the context of the extraordinary economic expansion and urbanization that have transformed Chinese society since 1979, as well as the political context of a one-party state determined to "manage" religion in Chinese society, and both these factors have shaped Chinese Christianity in significant ways. Further, there are also important Catholic and Protestant constituencies in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and among the overseas Chinese, which are institutionally and culturally distinct from Christianity within the People's Republic and interact with it in complex and expanding ways, further contributing to the complexity and diversity of Chinese Christianity today.

Chinese Christianity Today: Catholicism

According to 2009 statistics from the Chinese government, China's Catholics are served by over three thousand priests and a similar number of women religious in ninety-seven dioceses and five thousand churches. The twelve seminaries operated by the open church have graduated around 1500 priests since 1981, and Chinese are joining the church at a rate of around fifty thousand per year. These numbers would be significantly higher if Catholics outside the official church were taken into account. The largest concentrations of Catholics are in north China, particularly in Hebei Province and the cities of Tianjin and Beijing, followed by Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, and Shandong. The Shanghai area and the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, and Sichuan also have large Catholic populations.

The religious identity of Chinese Catholics has been deeply entangled with family, community, and ethnic identities, and the transmission of faith down the generations within families has been more important than the evangelism of those outside the church, at least in comparison to the Protestant situation. Although more urban and intellectualized versions of Catholicism flourished in late imperial and republican China, the Catholic population was often concentrated in all-Catholic villages, such as the Hakka town nicknamed "Little Rome" in Guangdong (Lozada 2001), or those scattered all across Hebei Province (Madsen 1998). This embedded identity in families and village communities helped to ensure the survival of the church through

the persecutions and suppression of the Maoist period, although it has also contributed to the persistence and acrimony of the divisions between the unofficial and patriotic churches.

Whether in the unofficial or patriotic churches, one obvious implication of the statistics outlined above is that there is a shortage of trained and recognized leadership (as is also the case for Protestants), with perhaps one priest per every ten thousand Catholics and a combined total of only ninety bishops in 2010 (often with overlapping jurisdictions) for the one hundred dioceses. Since the 1980s, the Vatican has been working toward reconciliation between the open and unofficial churches, in particular by establishing contact with the Chinese bishops who had been ordained without Vatican approval, and in many cases endorsing their ordination. The Catholic church in Hong Kong was an important bridge in these efforts, and the elevation in 1988 of the late Hong Kong bishop John Baptist Wu Cheng-chung (1925–2002) to Cardinal, the first Chinese cleric outside China so honored, was a significant encouragement to Chinese Catholics. By 2010, all but ten or so of the "patriotic" bishops still active had received Papal endorsement, and a number of previously underground bishops had been appointed to lead dioceses in the open church, although around thirty-eight underground bishops not recognized by the Chinese state and the Catholic Patriotic Association remained active. Just as significantly, by informal practice, all new bishops consecrated in the open church from 2006 until late 2010 had both official Chinese church approval and Vatican endorsement, including a bumper crop of ten new bishops, eight of them in their forties, in 2010. However, that uneasy equilibrium disintegrated without warning in November 2010 with the ordination of government-appointed forty-two-year-old Guo Jincai as bishop of the newly created diocese of Chengde in northeastern Hebei, overriding the Vatican's opposition to his candidacy. Reports indicated that the consecrating bishops were coerced into participating in the ordination rite, and for the first time in the long history of the dispute over the ordination of bishops, dating back to 1958, the Vatican directly questioned whether Guo's ordination was valid under canon law. Time will tell, but, in the context of the Chinese government's new assertiveness in foreign policy and its renewed repression of domestic dissent after the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo late in 2010, we may wonder whether these events signal a longer-term setback for the normalization of relations between Catholics in China and the Roman Catholic Church worldwide.

Given the predominance of rural believers until the last couple of decades, it is not surprising that the religious practice of Chinese Catholics "is completely melded with the structures of family and village life," as Richard Madsen has put it (Madsen 2001). He and other scholars have noted the similarities between village-based Catholicism and Chinese popular religion: a community-wide shared religious deity and sites, a common ritual calendar, and membership by birth into the community rather than by voluntary affiliation. Catholic villages are, to quote another expert, "communities of effective rituals" structured around the rituals of the liturgical year and the life cycle, which collectively express and construct the community's religious

identity (Standaert 2008). Other similarities with village-based Chinese religion include the importance of women's piety and women's ritual observance; de facto lay leadership, with religious specialists (priests) only present intermittently for important ceremonies; the importance of miraculous elements such as healing and exorcism; a simple doctrine maintained through recitation of memorized prayers (e.g., the rosary); and uncomplicated moral principles with broad social acceptance. Along with these elements, shared religious narratives, in the family and community but also re-enacted in the Mass and celebrations of the church year, contribute to the religious identity of Catholic communities.

From a village-level perspective, Chinese Catholicism can be regarded as a form of Christian practice that has been implanted into the patterns of Chinese folk religion, and Catholics may even seem "indistinguishable in terms of mentality, morality and lifestyle from non-Christian villagers, the only major difference being the performance of different rituals to mark important events in the life cycle" (Madsen 2001). At the same time, however, looking beyond this somewhat idealized picture of the Catholic village community, it is clear that Chinese Catholics see themselves as belonging to the universal church, understood as transcending not only community and kin but also national boundaries, and indeed time and space themselves. The importance of pilgrimage in Chinese Catholicism is one indication of this, as is the related importance of devotion to the Virgin Mary, to whom the most important Catholic pilgrimage sites in China are dedicated. The best-known is the shrine at Sheshan outside Shanghai, which receives at least sixty thousand pilgrims each May, and lesser numbers at other times of the year. A fascinating recent study by Richard Madsen and Lizhu Fan has traced the changing meanings of this site, and the changing aspects of the Virgin Mary associated with it, from its origins under the missions to the present. For the French Jesuits, Sheshan was a shrine to Our Lady of Victories, an affirmation of French colonial power, but the poor fishing families who made up the majority of Chinese Catholics around Shanghai at the time probably venerated her more in her role as patron of seafarers than in triumphal mode as Our Lady of Victories. In the early twentieth century, the Vatican funded a new church and rededicated the site to Our Lady, Queen of China. In the 1950s, however, this identity became associated with Catholic resistance to Communist efforts to bring the church under control. Thus, when the Marian shrine reopened in the early 1980s, the new "patriotic" bishop of Shanghai, Jin Luxian (b. 1916), ensured that it was gradually reinscribed as the Blessed Mother of Sheshan, with a new statue showing Mary as a socialist mother, without some of the more martial elements of the earlier iconography at the site. (By contrast, in 1996, another important Marian pilgrimage site, at Donglü near Baoding in Hebei, was desecrated and closed down by government forces alarmed at the numbers of underground Catholics who had been coming there, and the overtones of resistance to state power and the official church that had been expressed in the activities there.) Nevertheless, for the pilgrims at Sheshan, most of whom are elderly and female, their devotion is probably still to the Queen of China (Madsen and Fan 2009).

This example demonstrates the obvious point that Chinese Christians, especially Catholics but Protestants also, draw on a complex symbolic repertoire in constructing their religious identities—one that is both ancient and international, yet capable of being accepted as fully "ours" by Chinese believers and of bearing multiple meanings simultaneously. It also shows (as scholars of Catholicism elsewhere have also shown) that hierarchies, whether of church or state, may be able to influence the symbols and expressions of Catholic devotion, but that they cannot control them. After all, for over sixty years lay Chinese Catholics have had to judge the spiritual credentials of different priests and bishops and decide whether to worship in the open churches or outside them, and these judgments involve negotiating difficult questions of loyalty, identity, and faith at the micro level of the family and the individual.

The religious culture of Chinese Catholicism has been changing with economic development, urbanization, and the increasing importance of transnational ties. Now, a growing proportion of Catholics live in the cities, and older church leaders frequently express concern about the piety of the younger generation as they become increasingly disconnected from the stability provided by village-based Catholicism. In Guangdong in the late 1990s, Catholic weddings included all the commercial elements found in non-Catholic weddings, only differing in the inclusion of a church ceremony, indicating Catholic participation in an emerging Chinese modernity shaped by urban values and the market economy, to which Catholic identity might be less central than for previous generations. Urban Catholics face opportunities for personal advancement that may seem at odds with the faith of older generations, particularly if they decide to pursue an official career, which usually means joining the Communist Party and thus professing atheism. New amusements such as gambling and television have spread, and, unlike in previous times when Catholics were educated in parochial schools, all Chinese now pass through a state education system that propagates atheism. Of course, in addition to these challenges, the new environment offers opportunities, for instance for obtaining support for the church through transnational networks, such as the Hakka Catholic communities abroad, which contributed seventy percent of the cost of the new church in Little Rome, built in 1995 (Lozada 2001).

The changing religious culture includes adaptations to the conduct of worship services, particularly the Mass. Being out of contact with Rome, the Chinese Catholic Church, official or underground, was not party to the reforms flowing from the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which included encouragement to translate the liturgy of the Mass and other services into vernacular languages. Thus, when the Chinese Catholic churches began reopening, the form of worship remained centered on the priest, standing in his rich robes at the altar and reciting the liturgy in the ancient Latin. Since the 1990s versions of the liturgy translated into the Chinese dialect of the region have been employed in some regions, such as among Hakka Catholics in Guangdong and in the Shanghai Diocese, where the press of other church business delayed the development and approval of a translated liturgy until around 2000.

Chinese Christianity Today: Protestantism

When Protestant churches began reopening in 1979, the person who emerged as the leading figure in the restored TSPM and the newly established CCC was Bishop K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun, b. 1915). An Anglican bishop and theological educator with graduate degrees from the United States, Ting was better equipped than the more political leaders of the 1950s to represent Chinese Protestants to the outside world, to advocate for the church with Chinese state and party bureaucrats, and to reach out to the theologically conservative believers who comprised the majority of Chinese Protestants, within and outside the official churches. Over the course of the 1980s, Ting became an increasingly vocal advocate for a fuller realization of the independence from the state nominally granted under the Communist Party's religious policy, including for Protestants not affiliated with the TSPM/CCC. He also oversaw the slow and difficult process of reclaiming the church property expropriated during the 1950s and 1960s, the restoration of a functioning system of theological education to supply a new generation of pastors for the "post-denominational" open churches, and the stabilization of church finances based on voluntary giving by church members. In addition to these measures to restore normal church life, Ting was instrumental in claiming a role for Christianity in working for the welfare of the wider society in the form of the Amity Foundation, an independent voluntary association founded by Protestants in 1985 that has become the largest charitable organization in China. The Amity Foundation has overseen the printing and distribution (by late 2010) of over eighty million copies of the Bible in Chinese at its press in Nanjing.

All of this occurred in a context of rapid and accelerating numerical growth. As of 2004, there were around thirty-two thousand churches, sixteen thousand other registered meeting points, and eighteen million worshippers connected with the TSPM/CCC, making it larger than any single denomination in the United States, and more diverse than any of them due to the great variety of Protestant traditions encompassed by it. Protestants were most numerous in three general regions of the country: the coastal provinces, which had seen the most missionary work before 1949 (Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong); the central China provinces of Henan and Anhui (where the new house church movements also had their strongest followings); and among some of the minority nationalities of southwest China. Like the Catholics, the officially sanctioned Protestant church faced a dire shortage of trained clerical personnel, with only 2600 ordained ministers working (two thousand men and six hundred women), or around one per twenty congregations. This shortage increased the importance of a secondary tier of non-ordained evangelists, lay workers, and deacons (Vala 2009). Bishop Ting retired in 1997 in his eighty-second year, and most of the other veteran leaders who took charge in the 1980s and 1990s also retired over the following years. In January 2008, the Eighth National

Conference of the TSPM/CCC elected a new generation of leaders, drawn for the first time mostly from the generation who came to adulthood after 1949.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were three principal types of Protestant church operating outside the aegis of the TSPM/CCC. The most visible were the large semi-public urban "house church" congregations led by charismatic independent pastors who had spent decades in the Maoist period imprisoned for their faith. The best-known of these was the church in Guangzhou run by Lin Xiangao (Lam Hin-ko/Samuel Lamb, b. 1924), which had four or five thousand regular attendees in the 1990s and hosted high-profile visits from foreign visitors including Billy Graham and the astronaut Jim Irwin. Lin and other urban pastors like him were generally fundamentalist in doctrine and refused to join with the TSPM/CCC because they regarded it as both theologically liberal and politically subservient to the Chinese state (Anderson 1991).

The second type was the extended house church networks that developed during the Cultural Revolution, particularly in central China. Essentially, these amounted to new indigenous sectarian church movements, similar in dynamic to those of the Republican period but with the TSPM/CCC church replacing the mission churches as the "impure" Christianity against which their movements were distinguished. A recent book (Xin 2009) has made new details available in English on one of these movements, the "Word of Life Movement" (also known as the New Birth Church, the Full Scope Church, and, pejoratively, the Weepers), based in part on interviews with its founder and leader Peter Xu Yongze (born 1940), who left China in 2001 following his release from a reform-through-labor camp—his fifth time in state custody. The movement developed out of meetings for worship in Christian homes in rural Henan, which then expanded and were linked together through itinerant preachers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The network organized more formally from 1982 onward, and developed a training program and a system of commissioning full-time evangelists who would spread the gospel to other provinces. Despite state suppression and the arrest of Xu himself in 1983 and 1988, by the end of the decade the movement comprised a claimed 3500 congregations in twenty provinces. In the mid 1990s, leaders of Xu's movement and four other influential house church networks met in person to formulate a framework for cooperation, which led to a joint statement of faith. While some of these house church networks have been designated heretical cults by government organs and/or Three-Self leaders, the document indicates a standard conservative evangelical Protestantism. At the same meeting, the leaders issued a statement explaining that they refused to register with the government or affiliate with the TSPM/CCC on the grounds that doing either would be an unacceptable compromise of Christ's authority over the church, but affirming that they accepted the authority of the government as mandated by God and appealing for an end to state persecution of the house churches. They also agreed to work together to send Chinese house church evangelists abroad, aiming to fulfill the Great Commission and facilitate the Second Coming of Christ by taking

the gospel through the Muslim countries of Asia and "back to Jerusalem" (see Aikman 2003: appendix B).

The third type was the wide array of independent congregations and regional networks of congregations in rural and urban settings that were neither as visible nor as organized as the first two. Some of these were offshoots of the independent churches from before 1949, while others had developed out of home-based worship during the years of suppression in the 1960s and 1970s. Some were decidedly opposed to cooperation with the TSPM/CCC, while others were independent simply because they predated the reconstitution of the TSPM/CCC committees in their areas, and affiliated with them once the organization was in place (or affiliated then left again, in some cases).

On the fringes of Chinese Protestantism was the growing number of new religious movements that the Chinese state has branded "evil cults" (*xiejiao*) since the late 1990s. While some of these originate in *qigong* practices or Chinese popular religion, a large number incorporate Christian millenarian elements and compete for members with the Protestant churches. A well-known example is the "Lightning from the East" movement, which teaches that Christ's Second Coming has already occurred in the person of a Chinese woman in Henan. In the case of "Lightning from the East," house church leaders and the national TSPM/CCC concur with the Chinese state in labeling it a cult, but in other instances the "cult" label has been applied to house church movements within recognizably Protestant doctrinal parameters, and therefore precise delineation between churches and heretical sects is even more difficult and perspective-dependent in China than it is in Protestant settings elsewhere.

Rapid numerical growth and generational turnover in the context of economic growth and urbanization have been defining influences for the Protestant churches, whether affiliated with the TSPM/CCC or not. The 2008–2009 survey cited earlier found that an astonishing seventy-three percent of respondents identifying themselves as Protestants had converted after 1993, meaning that generalizations about the Protestant community from the 1980s and 1990s might well have become outdated a decade later. The new century has seen a new wave of social science research into Chinese Christianity that is modifying some aspects of the previous picture while confirming others.

Chinese researchers in the 1980s coined the term the "four manys" to describe the composition of Protestant congregations: many old people, many women, many sick, and many illiterate. Partly this was based on field research, although that was very limited, and partly it reflected residual Marxist assumptions about religious belief being a function of ignorance and a remaining vestige of class society. It also reflected the legacy of the educational breakdown of the Cultural Revolution, the dismantling of the church school systems, and the impediments placed by state policy on the religious participation of young people. Notwithstanding these qualifications, however, the "four manys" observation pointed to some important features of Chinese Protestantism in the first two decades of the reform period, and to a

certain extent more recently also. The 2008–2009 survey found that women made up nearly seventy percent of church members, and a quarter of all Protestants were over age sixty-five, while those under twenty-five accounted for just over four percent. Nearly fifty-five percent had no higher than a primary-school education, while only 2.6 percent had a post-secondary diploma. Remembering the prevalence of recent converts, the survey's findings on age at conversion were also significant: nearly half (44.4 percent) of the respondents had joined the church between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-four, compared to 15.4 percent who had converted as young people (up to age twenty-four). This growth has occurred in a context of state limitation and repression, and without most of the elements that are associated with recent church growth in other societies (including Taiwan and Singapore)—such as Christian publishing and marketing, big conventions and revival meetings, celebrity preachers, or television evangelism—making the Chinese case all the more interesting in comparative terms.

The "many ill" component of the "four manys" is highly significant, as it points to the importance of prayer for healing as a motive for religious participation in contemporary China, for Christianity and other religions. Belief in divine healing through prayer has been a key factor in the spread of Protestant Christianity, whether in the open church or the unofficial churches. According to the 2008–2009 survey, nearly seventy percent of Protestant conversions were motivated by illness, either of the convert or a family member. Based on research in the 1980s, Hunter and Chan (1993) interpreted the importance of belief in healing as a sign that Chinese Christianity at the popular level was drawing on the established cultural patterns and expectations of Chinese popular religion, in which calling on gods for healing and exorcism (as well as other tangible benefits such as prosperity, examination success, and sons) have long been important. They also pointed out, as have other researchers, the apparently Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual healing and other manifestations of divine power in Chinese Protestantism, while puzzling over the limited channels of contact between global Pentecostalism and the Chinese churches, and the relative unimportance of speaking in tongues (glossolalia)—which is a principal distinguishing mark of Pentecostalism elsewhere—in China (aside from in the True Jesus Church, which incorporates speaking in tongues into its worship services).

The extraordinary growth in Protestant membership has coincided with rapid economic development, and this has had important implications for the Protestant churches. Recent social science research by Fenggang Yang, Nanlai Cao, and others has added immensely to the empirical depth and theoretical sophistication of the emerging scholarship on contemporary Chinese Christianity. Yang has examined Protestant adherence among educated young urban professionals, using the example of a discipleship training course that held its meetings in a McDonald's restaurant in a southern Chinese city. Yang interpreted Protestant belief as a response in part to life's uncertainties in the context of rapid economic transformation in a globalizing market economy, and noted that these converts associated Christianity with

cosmopolitan modernity. Cao's fascinating study focused on the coastal city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, sometimes dubbed "China's Jerusalem," which is renowned both for its entrepreneurial business culture and for its very high rates of Protestant adherence. Cao highlighted the importance of "boss Christians," entrepreneurs who used their business acumen and their good standing with government cadres to sponsor churches and spread Christianity along with their business interests. These leaders were not usually connected to the TSPM/CCC, nor did they stand in opposition to the state, and they rejected labels such as "underground" as offensive. Cao argued that the Wenzhou Christian entrepreneurs were partners with state actors in constructing the "socialist market economy," and that Christianity also helped to legitimate their newfound wealth amid the moral ambiguities of commerce in today's China. Based on the Wenzhou case, Cao criticized the domination–resistance dichotomy in much previous work on Christianity in the People's Republic of China, arguing for a more complex model of evangelical Protestant revivalism as a "moral discourse of modernity." With regard to the earlier scholarship on the "four manys," Cao drew attention to the importance of the discourse of *suzhi* ("quality"), which educated Christians employed to distinguish their versions of Christianity from the faith of the less educated rural believers who continue to make up the majority of Chinese Protestants. A similar concern for what amounts to a kind of class differentiation vis-à-vis other Christians is also evident in work on other upscale urban independent congregations in contemporary China, and in a different way in calls by the TSPM/CCC leadership to raise the theological level of the open church congregations.

Common Threads in Chinese Christianity

Popular Religion and the Question of Syncretism

As we have seen, scholars have noted important connections between Chinese religion and the lived religion of Chinese Christians. These include an emphasis on prayer in the expectation of this-worldly benefit, in which the Christian God (and the Virgin Mary for Catholics) performs similar roles to the deities in Chinese popular religion, and wins adherents by proving to be more efficacious (*ling*) than the alternatives. Demonstrations of divine power through healing and of deliverance from danger or affliction by evil spirits, passed on as narratives through informal networks of religious transmission, are common among both Catholics and Protestants. Among Catholics, family and community ties are especially important, and Catholic faith fulfills some of the same roles in Catholic villages as communal popular religion does in other Chinese villages. Among Protestants, the emphasis on the Bible as religious knowledge accessible to all believers and on immediacy and fervor of religious experience show similarities to some types of Chinese popular religion (particularly in its more sectarian forms). Also reminiscent of sectarianism is the importance of women's participation and women's leadership in Chinese Christian-

ity. Women's leadership is an important feature in both Catholic and Protestant settings (although taking different institutional forms), and among Protestants, including in the house churches, women's leadership does not seem to have generated the controversy that has surrounded the issue in Anglo-American Protestant churches.

An example showing all these elements is the case of one village where the first Christian was a woman who converted in 1980 after being delivered from a "fox spirit," which led over time to about ninety households out of four hundred becoming Christian. According to the scholar who interviewed her and other community members, "a Protestant breakthrough in this village was only possible because of existing religious beliefs, specialists and supernatural beings" (Kao 2009). Some have interpreted this as evidence that popular Christianity is a type of Chinese Christian syncretism, but Kao points out that Chinese Protestants accept the reality of spiritual beings but regard them as manifestations of the devil, to be overcome and transformed, which is typical of global Pentecostalism and should be seen as a kind of anti-syncretism rather than syncretism.

Lay Initiative

The experiential orientation of Chinese Christianity points to the importance of lay initiative. For Catholics, as Madsen points out, the institutional church with its priests and bishops is not only remote and authoritarian but also politicized. Devotion to Mary, whose image is commonly found in Catholic homes, provides ordinary lay Catholics with a source of spiritual help and salvation that is both more accessible and purer than the church hierarchy, the sacraments, and even God the Father (Madsen 1998). This amounts to a de facto lay empowerment that can also be seen, albeit in different forms, among Protestants, most obviously among the house church networks, where leadership is internally generated and disconnected from both educational criteria and formal validation by a religious authority. While there are reasons for this that are specific to the Chinese situation—most obviously the fact that the growth began in a period when the structures of religious authority had been dismantled entirely by the Maoist state—it also parallels developments in Christianity globally in recent decades, as well as the tension between church hierarchy and lay piety that has been a recurrent theme in the history of Christianity in many periods and cultural settings.

Flexibility and Rapid Growth

The flexibility of lay-centered Christianity is of course a key reason for the rapid growth of Christianity (and Protestant Christianity in particular) in China. Christianity includes a mixture of communal and individual elements that makes it highly

portable and adaptable, and this is especially true of the Bible-centered lay-led Protestantism that has seen the fastest growth in China. This kind of Christianity emphasizes spiritual self-cultivation through personal prayer and Bible reading, with each believer communicating with God in his/her own heart and home, through God's spirit residing within. At the same time, in its communal aspect, Chinese Protestantism inculcates a strong group identity, with believers referring to each other using kinship terms such as "brother/sister" (*dixiong/zimei)*—these designations are used throughout Chinese Protestant Christianity, in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas as well as within the People's Republic of China. The dynamics are different for Catholics, with devotional practices such as the rosary being more important than individual Bible reading, for example, but a parallel combination of strong communal identity with emotionally significant individual devotional practices that can be carried out anytime and anywhere is characteristic of Chinese Catholicism also. The majority of believers see Christianity as a more effective alternative to other religions, one that can answer the life questions of the Chinese individual and that can provide a moral and spiritual refuge in a corrupt and degenerate age. Maintaining one's moral integrity through separation from the world, in expectation of the imminent return of Christ, is a common emphasis in Chinese Protestantism, especially among the indigenous sects (Lian 2010), as is the dichotomy in Catholicism between the "world of God" and the ambiguities of city life in the market economy (Madsen 1998). While there are important counter-trends that will be discussed below, the majority of Chinese Christians see their faith primarily in terms of personal morality and separation from the world, and remain apolitical except on the specific matter of state control of the church.

Church–State Tensions

The religious policy of the post-Mao state has been founded on recognizing freedom of religious belief as a right of the individual citizen, while regarding the social and collective expressions of religion as subject to administrative management by the state. That administrative management has a paternalist side, protecting what the state deems to be "normal religious activities," and a punitive one, suppressing religious activities deemed undesirable, through measures ranging from fines to administrative detention to trial and sentencing under China's criminal law. The promulgation in 2005 of the first national "Regulations on Religious Affairs" formalized the paternalist side of this system, spelling out the respective roles of the state organs and the recognized religious organizations, and providing specifications for registration of religious venues and expectations for the appointment of religious professionals. Underlying the post-Mao state's religious policy and regulations is a modernist concept of religions as institutional structures with a defined hierarchy and doctrines and a full-time professional clergy. As will be clear by now, this concept is out of step with the reality of Chinese Christianity (and also with community-

based popular religion in China, historically and now). More positively, the Chinese leadership has officially acknowledged that religion (of the right sort) can contribute to the "harmonious society" now touted as the goal of government, a modification of classical Marxism that opens up a legitimate social space for the continued existence of religion under socialism (Dunch 2008). This has been welcomed by leaders of the official churches, including Bishop Ting, who has advocated vigorously for "theological reconstruction" within Chinese Protestantism, and in his own writings has articulated a theology of reconciliation that he saw as more fitted for socialist China than the clear distinctions between faith and unbelief and between church and world that were typical in Chinese Protestantism (Wickeri 2007).

The asymmetry between state policy and religious reality has shaped Chinese Christianity in several important ways. First, it has exacerbated the severe shortage of clergy within the official churches and, moreover, by subjecting clerical appointments to state vetting and approval, has contributed to the reservations that many Christians (Catholic and Protestant) have about the clergy. That in turn strengthens the reliance on unordained leadership and reinforces the difficulty that the official Christian organizations face in uniting the believing masses, which is their primary purpose from the perspective of state policy.

Second, especially among the unregistered and underground churches, the perennial experience of state persecution has entrenched a theological emphasis on endurance of suffering and faithfulness under persecution that is generally linked to eschatological concerns and separation from the world—far removed from the emphasis on good citizenship, hard work, and right living that the Chinese state would like to encourage in the service of the "harmonious society." There is also considerable irony in the fact that, even as it calls for religion to be "compatible with socialism," the state constricts the possibilities for the social expression of Christianity. That does not prevent grassroots charity, localized initiatives for social welfare, and the manifold activities of the Amity Foundation, but in comparison to the Republican period or to the range of church-related philanthropy in Taiwan and Hong Kong this is still a relatively narrow range of activity, and by blocking off avenues for growth in social service activities this constriction may also contribute to the other-worldly orientation that dominates among Chinese Christians.

Lastly, state repression arguably also contributes to the strength and variety of heterodox movements at the fringes of Chinese Christianity. On the one hand, these borrow from the house church strategies of lay leadership—clandestine networking and organizational flexibility—and employ a similar theological language of perseverance under persecution in expectation of the end of the world. However, in other societies, even highly atomized evangelical and fundamentalist churches generate a de facto consensus about where the line lies between legitimate versions of Christianity (however bitter the disagreements between them) and heterodox or heretical cults. State suppression makes the development of this type of consensus very difficult within China, and condemnations of cults by the TSPM/CCC leadership have been rendered less credible by the inclusion of some groups that house church leaders or lay Protestants consider legitimate.

Foreignness and the Problem of Authenticity

Like Buddhism and Islam, Christianity came into Chinese society from outside. Whereas Buddhism became deeply embedded in Chinese civilization and Islam is integral to the distinct identity of Muslim ethnic groups within China, Christianity has not for the most part been identified with particular ethnicities, nor has it penetrated popular culture in the ways or to the extent that Buddhism has. That does not mean that Christianity is still and will always be "foreign" to Chinese society; rather, it means that the *issue* of its alleged or felt "foreignness" runs through the history and contemporary realities of Chinese Christianity, and foreignness has been invoked or deployed in the service of competing theological, ideological, and even political goals. For example, the indigenous Protestant sects of the Republican period presented themselves not simply as an alternative to the mission churches but as a truer, better, and more authentically Chinese type of Christianity. On the other side, the Communist Party's approach to Christianity in the 1950s was shaped in part by the ties of the churches to foreign countries, and this remains an important concern for the state and the state-sanctioned religious organizations, seen most obviously in the tensions over the ordination of Catholic bishops, and over links between house churches and mission organizations outside China. The perception of foreignness has also been a factor in liturgical reform in the Catholic Church, and in debates about forms of worship and hymnody among open-church Protestants (most of the hymns in the standard hymnal in use in the open churches are translated from English-language hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).

The relationship between foreignness and authenticity in Chinese Christianity is a complex topic that cannot be treated in detail here. Fundamentally, Christianity's claim to be a universal religion generates an inherent tension between that universality and particular expressions of Christianity, in China and elsewhere. In the Chinese case, the perceived slowness of the missionary societies and mission personnel to yield control of the church to their Chinese colleagues in the early twentieth century was a source of frustration to many Chinese Christian leaders, and the visibility of the missionaries contributed to external critiques of Christianity as a foreign implant unsuited to China. Some of that critique persists today: in late 2010, plans to build a Protestant church in Qufu, the home town of Confucius, generated an open letter of objection from some Chinese intellectuals, along with an ongoing debate about Confucianism and Christianity in Chinese culture and what if any role the state should play in relation to them.

If we consider the question from the internal perspective of Chinese Christians, however, ever since the Jesuits Christianity has been presented in the Chinese idiom using terms drawn from Chinese culture, and Christian soteriology (the history of salvation) has been grafted into Chinese history, or vice versa. Madsen tells a fascinating story of an elderly Catholic who had hand-copied a large chart showing the milestones and dates of salvation history in one column with Chinese history in

parallel down the other column (Madsen 1998). Similar examples can be found among Protestants. Chinese Christianity has now been independent of the missions for over sixty years, and its recent startling growth has been an all-Chinese affair, through Chinese people encountering Christianity in Chinese terms. Some scholars have sought to determine "when" Christianity became (or may yet become) Chinese, as if there were an external litmus test for Chineseness as opposed to depending on the self-understanding of the individual concerned. Today, with China increasingly enmeshed in a globalizing market economy, and the Chinese Communist Party rebranding itself as the party of Confucius while an anti-Communist new religious movement (Falungong) sponsors music and dance spectacles across the Western world in the name of the "five-thousand-year-old Chinese civilization," we can easily see that claims to authenticity and accusations of foreignness are ideologically driven, and can accept that Chinese Christianity is Chinese because Chinese Christians think it is.

Conclusion: New Trends Since 2000

This chapter has sketched a picture of Chinese Christianity today, emphasizing the diversity of streams within it while also identifying some common themes and trends. The sketch is a rough and provisional one, inevitably so given the size and diversity of Chinese Christianity and the relative paucity of fieldwork-based scholarship on it. Nevertheless, we have identified some important general features of Chinese Christianity, including the ways in which Christianity has drawn on the familiar patterns of popular religion, the importance of lay initiative and leadership, the widespread concern about the integrity and purity of institutional church structures, and the ways in which state pressure has contributed to the emphasis on individual piety and separation from the world that tends to be typical in Chinese Christianity.

There are also significant countertrends to this general picture, particularly since the late 1990s. Some of these we have already identified, such as the emergence of a decidedly middle-class Christianity in the cities, both within the official churches and in independent congregations. Among the latter are large congregations that have met in parks, restaurants, and other public spaces, such as the Shouwang Church in Beijing, an independent church that received significant news coverage in 2009 after government pressure led to its landlord cancelling the lease for its worship space (the church has since found other premises). Some of these churches have produced their own publications—one published fifteen issues of an online journal between 2002 and 2008, despite the arrest of its founding pastor and web editor in 2003 (Wielander 2009). Also, significantly, some independent urban churches have been linked with social and political activism, specifically with Christian lawyers who have undertaken high-profile defense cases involving underground Christians, Falungong adherents, and others accused of ideological crimes under

Chinese criminal law. The worsening repression over 2009 and 2010 has hampered these developments, and the best-known of the Christian lawyers and human rights advocates, Gao Zhisheng (b. 1966), has been illegally detained and tortured, and at the time of writing is still under detention, without charge, his whereabouts unknown. For these "Christian liberals," Christianity is not only associated with cosmopolitan global modernity but also provides a supra-national standpoint for social critique and the pursuit of political reform and the rule of law (Feng 2010).

Another important development has been the emergence of "Sino-Christian theology" (*hanyu shenxue*) as an area of scholarly exploration. This term encompasses a broad range of philosophical and historical interests at the interface of the Chinese and Christian cultural traditions, pursued by university-based intellectuals within China as well as some Chinese academics and theologians in Hong Kong and abroad. The intellectuals involved may not themselves be Christian, or may self-identify as "cultural Christians"—intellectual fellow-travelers with Christianity, but not baptized church members. For these thinkers, Christianity provides a framework for comparative inquiry into the legacy and contemporary challenges of Chinese civilization, and "Sino-Christian theology" has proven a fertile and interesting new intellectual field, as well as a platform for dialogue between Christian theologians and other intellectuals.

What weight to give to these new developments within the overall spectrum of Chinese Christianity is a matter of debate. One recent work comments that the well-heeled urban Christians are about as common in China as the BMWs they drive, and predicts that the other-worldly Christianity of the masses—eschatological, individualist, and politically passive—will remain the dominant paradigm (Lian 2010). That may be, yet when one looks at Chinese churches outside China—in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and North America—the association of Chinese Christianity with upward mobility, education, and middle-class prosperity is actually quite widespread. Further, the potential for a socially progressive Christianity to connect powerfully to popular Christian piety cannot be discounted: consider the case of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, which blends grassroots faith with political activism in support of Taiwanese nationalism.

Rather than trying to decide what "the" direction of development is, we should recognize that the irreducible diversity of Chinese Christianity today is itself the point. Christianity in various forms animates the lives of many millions of Chinese, whether they are venerating the blessed Virgin, praying for healing and children, smuggling imported Bibles in striped nylon bags on "hard seat" trains through the hinterland, singing translated Western hymns in the open churches, or using their business interests to serve the Lord, like the self-confident "boss Christians" of Wenzhou. Chinese Christianity today mirrors the diversity of Chinese culture itself. It encompasses inward piety, millenarian intensity, regional and kin identity, arcane philosophical inquiry, political action and social melioration, and transnational connections. Indeed, the scope of Chinese Christianity today resembles the varied roles that Buddhism has come to play in Chinese civilization (in less depth, admittedly, and with less emphasis on sacred space), or indeed the complex reality of contem-

porary Christianity in the societies loosely known as Western civilization. This scope and diversity is, in the end, the clearest indication that Christianity is now a Chinese religion.

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PART III

Critical Terms for the Study of Chinese Religions

CHAPTER 13

Sacred Text

Thomas Jansen, University of Wales

"Text" as a cultural phenomenon is not limited to forming words and sentences into larger units. Many factors have a bearing on how a community both construes "text" as a concept and produces a text as a concrete physical object: the nature of a particular writing system, the perceived relationship between the spoken word and writing, the ways in which people use texts and are affected by them in their daily lives, and the technologies they employ to create, reproduce, and consume texts. In other words, attitudes toward text and understandings of textuality can vary greatly.

The same is true for "sacred text," even though the qualifying adjective "sacred" creates the (false) impression that we are dealing with a single, well-defined category of texts. Yet, comparative research involving a wide range of Western and non-Western religious traditions has shown that " 'scriptures' as sacred texts vary widely in terms of the cultural construction of textuality as well as their cultural understandings of sacrality" (Bell 2008). Hence, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a list of defining features of "sacred text." As objects of comparison, sacred texts do not easily fall into a single category. In Daoism, for instance, "sacred texts" would include such diverse genres as written prayers, dispatches, certificates, commands, and talismans, while Chinese Christians in the nineteenth century were exposed to Christian primers, Biblical stories and narratives, Bible dictionaries, selections of scripture sentences, liturgical texts, and outlines of scripture and reading guides (Starr 2008).

Depending on the specific contexts in which they were used, all of these different texts could be referred to as "sacred texts." Hence, generalizations about sacred texts are therefore often misleading and of little explanatory value.

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This chapter starts by outlining some of the more important problems and questions that have been raised by scholars working on sacred texts, as well as how these can be made fruitful for the study of sacred texts in the Chinese context. It then draws upon examples from various religious traditions in China. We will not be limited to one particular Chinese tradition alone, be it Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, or popular religion, because a comparative perspective on "sacred text"—even if it is limited to the Chinese context—will perhaps provide deeper insights into this phenomenon than an insignificantly more comprehensive discussion of only one tradition. For the same reason, we will not attempt here to provide a descriptive summary of the major scriptures of each tradition because such summaries, usually focusing on the texts of one single tradition, can be found elsewhere (Yao 1994, Linke 2000, Reiter 2000, Price 2009). The task of this essay is rather to raise critical awareness of the complexity of the phenomenon "sacred text" and to stimulate further explorations into this fascinating field.

The Chinese Word for "Sacred Text"

The word that is most commonly used across different religious traditions in China to denote the idea of "sacred text" is *jing*. *Jing* is variously translated as "sacred text," "classic," or "scripture." In its original meaning, *jing* denotes the fixed lead thread or "warp" of cloth, especially of silk, into which the weft threads are woven back and forth to create a fabric. As a verb, *jing* can thus mean "to weave" or "to thread." In the period before the invention of paper, the verb was frequently used to describe the stringing together of the bamboo slips used for writing (Yan 2008). Because the warp thread serves as the fixed framework for the entire length of the weaving, *jing* became a metaphor for that which imparted definition, order, and utility to the "fabric" of society by providing the constant principles on which the socioeconomic order was based (Nylan 2001). As a noun, *jing* assumed the extended meaning of "standard" and "statecraft" or "governance."

In the Confucian tradition, *jing* refers to the "five classics" (*wu jing*) or later the "thirteen classics" (*shisan jing*). In Buddhism, *jing* is used to translate the Sanskrit term *sūtra*, a transcription of the historical Buddha's sermons or teachings. Similarly, the Daoist collection of canonical texts, the *Daozang*, contains a large number of texts that have the word *jing* in their titles, the foundational *Daode jing* being the best-known example. Last but not least, many popular religious texts that are commonly known under the generic name *baojuan* ("precious scrolls") call themselves *jing*, obviously in an attempt to imitate and borrow the authority and credibility of the books of the mainstream traditions.

Jing has always been a term of remarkable elasticity. In the Zhou period (eleventh century to 256 BCE), the word could refer to almost any writing on bamboo or silk. Scholars in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) still had a tendency to use the term *jing* to designate all pre-Han literature. It was comparatively late, during the Latter

Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), that *jing* acquired a meaning equivalent to that of the words "classic" or "scripture" in English. Both terms presuppose an elevated status that writing simply did not have in China prior to the Latter Han. The ascendance of *jing* to "classic" or "scripture" in the full sense was the result of a revolution in the Chinese understanding and attitude toward writing, texts, and textualization. Since the *jing* are an integral part of China's literary culture, they cannot be discussed without mentioning important developments affecting China's literary culture as a whole. It is therefore necessary and worthwhile to briefly summarize the developments leading up to this revolution.

The Ascendance of the Written Word in China

In China, as elsewhere, the elevation of the written word to a culturally central position was a long and protracted process. It was not before the first century CE that written texts came to be regarded as the ideal repository of the past and the most genuine transmitter of the ethical truths established by the ancient sage kings, a status they kept throughout the entire Imperial period until the early twentieth century.

In the time of Confucius (c. 551–479 BCE) and his immediate disciples the word *wen*, which later predominantly meant "writing" and "writings," "script" and "scripture," referred almost exclusively to the exemplary behavior associated with the ancients. More specifically, *wen* denoted behavior that went beyond the basic moral obligations to kin and ruler to include wider benefits for society in general. In extension of its original meaning, "criss-cross pattern," *wen* was also used to designate "brilliant ornament" as an outward manifestation of the inner value and quality of a substance or person. In the Warring States period (481–221 BCE), the semantic range of *wen* broadened to include "larger patterns in the cosmos believed to be of supreme significance for the human order" (Nylan 1999). After the establishment of the unified bureaucratic empire in 221 BCE, writing and literacy certainly gained importance as bureaucratic tools necessary for administering the empire. Mastery of the newly unified forms of script—the seal script (*zhuanshu*), the official or clerical script (*lishu*), the regular script (*kaishu*), the grass script (*caoshu*), and the running script (*xingshu*)—and genres of writing used in administration were skills expected of every official. However, as yet no particular emphasis was placed on the value of writing as such. Until the end of the Western Han period (206 BCE–8 CE), leading classical scholars (*Ru* in Chinese) at court generally regarded written texts, including those transmitted from the sages of old, as "too problematic, being liable to loss, misreading, forgery, and falsehoods" (Nylan 1999). Specialists in the five classics, who had first been appointed by Han Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) in 136 BCE, were "probably more concerned with the performance of their political and administrative duties than with the contemplation of the grand unity of the classics as a whole" (Henderson 1991). In other words, the five classics were regarded primarily as

manuals of statecraft rather than as objects of study and exegesis, let alone as texts with a distinctive "god-like" or "divine" status. Only a few revelatory messages directly inscribed in unusual written forms on natural materials such as human or animal body parts or precious stones were regarded as inherently "divine" (Nylan 1999). For most classical scholars, single-minded emulation of the exemplary behavior and glorious deeds of past sages under the instruction of a qualified teacher remained superior to book learning in the cultivation of one's moral judgment and desire to exemplify cosmic and social principles. The revolutionary shift toward a preference for textual transmission and text-based knowledge over long-standing oral traditions first becomes detectable in the first century CE. Many factors helped to bring about this shift, some of which are not yet fully understood.

The discovery of written versions of the five classics in archaic script and of inscriptions preserved on bronze, bamboo, and silk nourished the idea that "at least in some cases, writing had helped to preserve the genuine Way of the Ancients down through the ages" (Nylan 1999). Another, perhaps major, factor was that the study of state-sanctioned texts under the tutelage of acknowledged masters became increasingly intertwined with the social standing and competition for office among members of the elite. Examples of self-promotion via textual genealogies show that affiliation with a particular text or group of texts had an effect on a person's self-understanding, social position, and career prospects in the imperial bureaucracy. Examples illustrating the greatly raised status of written texts are numerous. I can mention only two here: In 132 CE, Emperor Shun decreed that candidates for official posts were no longer to be nominated solely on the basis of their exemplary behavior. Instead, they had to demonstrate knowledge of the written texts of the classics or the ability to draft documents. Likewise, a comparison of the composite biographies of the classicists in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*) by Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 86 BCE) and in Ban Gu's (32–92 CE) *Han History* (*Hanshu*) reveals a dramatic shift in the understanding of classical learning. The *Records of the Grand Historian* identifies appropriate behavior in the context of ritual and musical performance as embodying the exemplary Way of the Ancients. By contrast, roughly two centuries later the *Han History* equates the Way of the former sages with the *texts* of the six classics rather than with ideal conduct. In other words, ritual practice as the highest form of self-cultivation had been replaced by text-based knowledge. At the end of this transformative process the *Ru* (Confucian) scholars had been transformed from ritual masters to specialists in the exegesis of texts. At this historical turning point, some texts had gained the inviolable authority of scriptures.

The Oral and the Written

The protracted evolution of the supremacy of the written word highlights not only the problem of the relationship between textual knowledge and ritual practice but also of that between the oral and the written. When speaking of texts today and in

the occidental interpretation, it is immediately assumed that one is referring to a written text. This is even more so in the case of "scripture," because the word itself refers to writing ("script"). In the Chinese religious context, however, the spoken word never lost its power, despite the elevation of the written word. Rather than writing replacing the power of the spoken word, both existed side by side. Except, perhaps, in the Confucian tradition, there is no general primacy of the written over the oral or over ritual practice in China. On the contrary, scriptures needed to be recited and heard in order to be efficacious. One can see the importance of the aural perception of sacred texts from the fact that Buddhist *sūtra*s begin with the phrase "Thus have I heard." A text associated with the Daoist tradition was known as the "Scripture of Mouth-to-Ear," while another scripture in circulation in the sectarian milieu of the mid eighteenth century had the title *True Scripture Without Characters* (*Wuzi zhenjing*). The titles indicate that the texts' efficaciousness was not predicated on them being written down and read by their users.

Awareness of the limitations of written texts and of the fact that in order to be able to act ritually one does not need a book remained constantly visible in Chinese culture, especially in Daoism. One famous anecdote in the book *Zhuangzi* states bluntly that scriptures "are the dregs of the men of old." The centrality of ritual practice and recitation in Daoist ritual is the reason why, according to John Lagerwey, "Daoism has no scriptures worthy of the name" (Lagerwey 2005).

Canonization and Religious Identity

The question of whether sacred texts were transmitted orally or in writing was not a top priority among Chinese scholars prior to the developments described above. This changed dramatically once the five classics became essential legitimating texts in the construction of the Chinese empire as well as for the emerging class of scholar-officials who claimed exclusive authority as custodians and exegetes of China's literary heritage by authoring a vast commentarial literature on a very small number of canonical texts. The early imperial state had an intrinsic interest in establishing a canon of authorized written texts that could promote the values and behavioral modes favored by the central state and set a normative standard against the many uncontrollable oral traditions that still lived on in all parts of the empire. The formation of the five classics and a culture of textual scholarship surrounding these scriptures on the one hand and the coming into existence of a "Confucian" identity based on service to the empire on the other are inextricably linked to each other. The same interdependence between the canonization of texts and the forming of an identity as a fully structured and organized religion can be seen in the case of Daoism and its interaction with Buddhism. The development of Daoism from various diffused religious traditions to a distinct religion in the fourth and fifth centuries CE is marked, first, by a proliferation of newly revealed scriptures that were collected, ordered, and codified into a set of canonical writings, and, second, by successfully

propagating these writings among the Chinese elite of that time. In 437 CE, the Daoist Master Lu Xiujing (406–477) presented, at the request of the emperor, a list of "genuine" Daoist scriptures entitled *Catalogue of the Scriptures of the Three Caverns* (*Sandong jing mulu*), which laid the foundation for the later *Daoist Canon* (*Daozang*) and evidences the successful transformation of diffused traditions into an institutionalized, nationwide religion that was able to compete with its rival Buddhism (Bokenkamp 1997, Strickmann 1977). This new religion from India, when it was implanted in China, already had a well-structured canon of highly praised "genuine" scriptures that served as a model for the later Daoist compilations as well as indigenous *sūtra*s written directly in Chinese, the so-called "apocrypha" (a word originally employed to describe works that in their title, form, and contents resemble books of the Old Testament and New Testament but are not accepted in the biblical canon).

The term "canon" implies closure for it springs from the desire to create a set of fixed and thus stabilized set of texts that are impervious to change or corruption. However, the history of the canonization of Daoist sacred texts and their encounter with Buddhist scriptures tells a different story. The sacred texts of one religion were not only impregnated with elements from the other but also some Buddhist *sūtra*s had precise Daoist counterparts and vice versa. In other words, the two traditions tried to mirror each other through parallel production of sacred texts:

> The quest, for both religions, was not only motivated so as to achieve scriptural hegemony. Buddhism and Daoism were also aspiring to strengthen their respective liturgical and evangelical monopolies. To integrate one another's favored rituals was undoubtedly viewed as the best means to consolidate the status of their clerical organizations and to attract or keep faithful followers by providing them with the most fashionable religious trends, even if this meant borrowing conspicuously from the opposing camp's heritage. (Mollier 2008)

Thus, the production of sacred texts was at all times intertwined with political and economic power and the construction of authority, organization, and social vision within a group.

"Sacred Text," "Scripture," or "Classic"?

In modern scholarly writings on Chinese religions the three terms "sacred text," "scripture," and "classic" are often used synonymously. Some comments on the specific meaning and explanatory value of each term are thus in order.

When referring to the canonical books of Confucianism, most authors prefer to use the term "classic." For instance, Michael Nylan's magisterial study on the early Confucian canon is entitled *The Five "Confucian" Classics*. The use of quotation marks around "Confucian" indicates that the identification of these texts with a "Confucian" school is anachronistic for the time of the early empires of the Qin (221–

206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–9 CE) Dynasties. Rather, the five classics were used and studied by scholars representing various intellectual orientations that had not yet reified into clearly distinguishable philosophical "schools." Although Nylan does not explicitly justify her choice of the term "classic," one can nevertheless identify several elements that distinguish a "classic" from other contemporary forms of text. First, the term "classic" implies that the text in question is regarded as an ordered whole representative of a no-longer-extant ideal political and moral order. A "classic" invokes reverence for the models of antiquity and is read to preserve and even reinstate those models in the present. Second, the idea of a "classic" is closely connected to that of a canon, a standard collection of texts with claims to remarkable antiquity. "Classics" are texts that have stood the test of time and have an appeal for each new generation.

Some authors, finally, use the term "classic" to give expression to their view that Confucianism is a philosophy or way of life rather than a religion and, thus, to distinguish the Chinese "classics" from supposedly more religious texts such as the Bible or the Qu'ran. Yan Shoucheng, for example, argues that "*jing*, the Chinese equivalent of 'scripture,' actually means a classic," because "*jing* as a word is never limited to religious 'scriptures.'" The Chinese "have neither revealed religion nor the concept of interventionary God" (Yan 2008). Consequently, the *wu jing* should be primarily understood as a social-cultural phenomenon rather than a religious one.

It is not a coincidence that scholars asserting the religious dimensions of Confucianism tend to replace the term "classic" with "scripture," thereby emphasizing the fundamentally religious nature of Confucianism. This claim has been made most explicitly by Rodney L. Taylor. Taylor argues that "scriptures must be related to our basic understanding of religion itself," meaning that they must possess the "capacity for soteriology or ultimate transformation . . . The key to the interpretation of a work as scripture must be its ability to possess and hold authority within a tradition that can be defined in terms of a religious dimension or a soteriological capacity" (Taylor 1990). The religious dimension of Confucianism is defined by Taylor in terms of the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao*) and the Sage, who represents fulfillment of the goal of attaining the Way of Heaven in one's own life. The Confucian canonical texts are part and parcel of this transformative process because they provide a living contact with as well as manifestation of the life and deeds of the sage kings of the past. Hence, "they bear an authority as well as a source that is religious in nature."

The discussion of "classics" versus "scripture" illustrates that choosing a generic term to characterize the texts of a religious tradition is inextricably linked to certain assumptions about the nature of this religious tradition. In this respect, a more neutral term such as "sacred text" has certain advantages. "Sacred text" is less heavily freighted with Protestant notions than "scripture." Compared to "scripture," which usually refers narrowly to "the normative, bounded or semi-bounded written traditions that typically occur in the religions of chirographic cultures" (Levering 1989), "sacred text" is a broader and consequently more inclusive term. It designates the special status of many different kinds of texts, written and oral. According

to the current definitions, neither Buddhist mantras and *dhāranīs* nor Daoist talismans (*fu*) qualify as "scripture" but they certainly would fall within the broader category of "sacred text," thereby becoming an element of comparative study.

The Protestant Bias

It is important to remind ourselves at this point of our own cultural baggage, which unconsciously shapes our understanding of the role of sacred texts in non-Western civilizations. The study of East Asian scriptural traditions is often marred by the assumption that the status and place of the written word in general and of sacred texts in particular are roughly similar to the status and place the Bible occupies in the religious life of Christianity. Western notions of sacred text have been shaped by an understanding of the Bible and its role in religious life that is most pronounced in some branches of Lutheran Christianity. Among the key characteristics associated with the Bible are the idea that a "sacred text" is a written text possessed in its own right of a (usually beneficial) special power that sets it apart from other "profane" objects; that it is a complete source of religious doctrine containing articles of faith that are central to the belief system of a community; that it has authoritative and normative status with regards to all aspects of religious life; that it is fixed and bounded in a canon; and, finally, that it gives evidence of and inspires the experience of an otherworldly reality that is clearly separated from the realm of the "profane."

All these generalizations can be contested on the grounds that they are based on a particular Protestant experience that is not even representative of Christianity as a whole (Folkert 1989, Levering 1989). For example, first, African-American uses of the Bible, Vincent L. Wimbush notes, are "characterized by a non-literalist looseness, a multilayered, multisensory engagement and even a playfulness—sometimes within but often beyond what became the strictly church-defined interests and functions" (Wimbush 2003). For the Chinese context, John Lagerwey has also challenged the idea of Chinese scriptures being predominantly a source of doctrine, on the grounds that Chinese religious life can more adequately be characterized by a "centrality of doing"; the Western emphasis on belief and doctrine is misleading when applied to China (Lagerwey 2005). Second, with regards to the special powers supposedly inherent in sacred texts, Miriam Levering has noted that, whereas for many Mahāyāna Buddhists in China the power to work miracles was an important feature of sacred texts, there were also other groups, for instance within the Chan tradition, who considered such miracle-working powers unimportant or even dangerous (Levering 1989). Third, there is no single text in the Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian traditions, let alone in Chinese popular religion, that could nearly claim the same comprehensive authority and completeness for the whole tradition as does the Bible in Christianity or the Qur'an in Islam. There are many different forms and degrees of authority that can moreover have very different origins and justifications. The authority of a text might be based on the fact that it has divine origins and has been

revealed by a deity. Or a text might claim its authority from the fact that it has been edited by a great master of antiquity, such as Confucius.

Fourth, many Asian religious traditions would also have great difficulties with accepting the clear demarcation between a this-worldly, "profane" realm and a "holy" other-worldly or transcendent realm. Finally, the dominance of the written word over the spoken word and the attendant tendency to equate "sacred text" with written or even printed text is of rather recent Western origin. In most times and places "sacred text" referred to both the written *and* spoken word, as in Martin Luther's characterization of Christian scripture as "the Holy Spirit's own special book, writ, and word" (Graham 1987). In China, too, one can find many examples of books being transmitted orally rather than in writing, as has been shown above.

Approaches to the Study of "Sacred Text"

Despite the marked diversity of the phenomenon "sacred text" and the difficulties in achieving meaningful generalizations that hold true in different cultural contexts, scholars of religion still largely agree that sacred texts are read and used differently from other texts and that the words or texts in question are understood to play a special role in religious life. Therefore, it is important and worthwhile to clarify how scriptures were—and still are—used in different religious communities and how their special status is perceived and justified. Before that, however, I will briefly introduce three approaches that have shaped the discussion of scripture in the past: (1) the textual approach, (2) the functional approach, and (3) the epistemological approach.

(1) Proponents of the textual approach see the textual features of scripture as central to its nature, concluding that "scripture's main role is the transmission of the *meanings* embodied in various textual forms" (Biderman 1995). Scriptural texts are different from other texts in that they have an infinite number of simultaneous meanings. As a result, analysis and interpretation of sacred texts are both necessary and impossible at the same time. The hermeneutic openness of "sacred text" to the interpreter's manipulation is regarded as universal by proponents of this approach.

From the point of view of the textual approach, the eminent position of the commentator in many religious traditions, including Confucianism and Buddhism in China, becomes immediately plausible. Modern theorists and early Chinese commentators share common ground in the sense that for both the world is a system of signs. The key for deciphering this system lies hidden in the canonical texts. The commentator or exegete was thus not only charged with explaining a text but also often had the infinitely more difficult task of deciphering the signs and codes embedded in the text in an effort to disclose its ultimate meaning. In the Confucian tradition, the scriptures themselves were therefore often regarded as less important than the commentaries (Yan 2008). For, if it is true that "texts and literacy mark where power is in the world" (Wimbush 2008), it was the commentator who could

not only determine what a text could mean but who also directly influenced the nature and consequences of interpretive practices and strategies that were at the center of the power relations involved in but often masked in communication and interpretation.

The eminence of the role of the commentator in the Chinese tradition is at least partly a reflection of the ways in which Chinese texts construct meaning, which is considerably different from the predominantly "logocentric" concept of meaning in the West. Logocentric civilizations focus on the objective literal meaning of words and whether their linguistic meaning is actually true. By contrast, the hermeneutics of Chinese texts "concentrates not on what words as such mean, but rather on what people intended to convey by using these words" (Harbsmeier 1998). In other words, "the crucial semantic concept is not that of sentence meaning but of speaker's meaning" (Andersen 2005). Texts are always embedded in a pragmatic context, a personal and social reality that needs to be situated in relation to the text by the commentator. This is what gives the commentator his power.

(2) Scholars working with the functionalist approach emphasize the importance of individual and communal uses to which scripture is put. Understanding "sacred text" as a concept requires the functionalist to "understand the conditions under which a group of texts has gained authority over the lives of peoples and has been incorporated into human activities of various important kinds" (Biderman 1995). In other words, sacred texts are not a literary but a sociohistorical phenomenon. The distinctive features of "sacred text" are not to be found simply in the linguistic structure or the ontology of the texts themselves but rather in the relationships formed around the use of the texts and in the nature of the authority bestowed upon them by the social institutions of religion.

Functionalists do not reject the importance of *meaning*. They would claim, however, that meaning is not tied exclusively to the literal and intellectual content of a text. Instead, non-discursive or *functional* meaning of a text is constituted by the ways in which it is experienced, in the specific quality of the relations between a text and a religious community.

In contrast to the textualists, for whom orality of scripture is merely a historical starting point but not an inherent characteristic of scripture (Biderman 1995), proponents of the functional approach stress that scripture plays different important oral roles in the actual life of religious communities, for instance in the lifecycle rituals of families and communities. In the Chinese case, this approach can be made fruitful by looking at the role of scripture in people's daily lives as well as at the close links between text and ritual performance in China. A functionalist perspective further opens up a vast field of investigation pertaining to the modes of production, dissemination, and consumption of sacred texts and how these modes have influenced the understanding of scripture in different traditions.

(3) The third approach is the epistemological approach, which has been proposed most eloquently by Shlomo Biderman. From an epistemological point of view scriptures or sacred texts constitute a body of knowledge presented mostly in "descriptive

sentences that possess cognitive force" and contain strong truth-claims: "Without its claim to knowledge of the truth, scripture could not be what it is" (Biderman 1995). One of the most important constitutive elements of sacred text as a category is the fact that its knowledge claims are self-justified or self-referential. In other words, scriptures provide both the knowledge and the evidence by which this knowledge and in extension the authority of the text is justified.

Self-referentiality is characteristic in all Chinese scriptures irrespective of the tradition with which they are associated. For, all scriptures contain passages that seek to authenticate the text either by informing the reader that the text in question has been revealed by a god—that is represents the authentic words of a Buddha, bodhisattva, or ancient sage—or that it was made of a special material stuff that conferred certain powers on it.

Proponents of the epistemological approach deplore the relativism of the textual and functional approaches. The textual approach, in particular, is further criticized for having replaced certain and infallible "knowledge" with open-ended "hermeneutics."

Each of the three approaches outlined above highlights different important aspects of sacred text in Chinese religion. The textual approach focuses on the important role of the commentator and exegete in the Chinese tradition and sharpens our appreciation of religious texts as linguistic and symbolic systems, two aspects that are inextricably linked to each other. For example, generations of scholars have studied the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*, fourth century BCE), a classic Confucius himself was supposed to have composed, with the aim of deciphering the arrangement and variation of particular words and phrases in the text, which Confucius allegedly used to pass moral judgment on persons and events and to set a pattern for the future.

The epistemological approach raises questions concerning the nature of the knowledge and truth claims made by sacred texts and how these claims are justified in different religious traditions. Does a text exclusively contain systematizing expositions of religious knowledge or does it also communicate "performative" or "organizational" knowledge? In other words, does a sacred text tell people how to conduct a ritual properly or how to behave as part of a religious community? Many Chinese sacred texts do both.

Sacred Text as Sacred Object

Apart from being perceived as a special class of true and powerful words that have religious meaning for a particular group, "sacred texts" are also often revered and worshiped as religious objects in their own right. In such instances the role of the text as a medium for the transmission of religious truth takes second place to its value as an object of veneration. To put it differently, the *meaning* of the text recedes behind the sheer *materiality* of the text. This veneration manifests itself, first, in the

preciousness of the materials used to produce the text—for example, silk as writing material and for the wrapping, the high quality of the workmanship, and the sophistication displayed in the design and makeup of the text. Second, the special status of a text as a religious object is visible in the special care with which it has to be treated by its users. Religious scriptures across the entire spectrum of Chinese religions contain instructions pertaining to the handling of a text. The following passage from the *Kongwang baojuan*, a sectarian scripture found in Shanxi province in 1946, is a typical example of the preparations necessary before reading from the text can begin:

> First clean the altar area; cease talking; wash your hands; rinse your mouth and eat a vegetarian meal; arrange your clothes; light a lamp; burn high-quality incense; make offerings in front of the Buddha. Worship the Buddha by paying respects to him three times; sit upright; recite (ten times) "Amituofo" with folded hands to purify yourself of [all] thoughts, words, and deeds.

Failure to treat a sacred text reverentially invariably results in some sort of punishment, as one episode from the late fifth century involving a Daoist scripture illustrates:

> [When] Prince Jingling of the Liang [Dynasty] came across the *Lingbao jing* [*Scripture of the Spiritual Treasure*] in one section, he examined [it], immediately took [it] and threw [it] on the ground. A few days later, [his] hand put forth abscesses and sores, the sharpness of its pains being extraordinary. He subsequently sent for Master Feng and confessed [his] fault. The Master made a statement of repentance on his behalf, [but] cautiously increased [his] suspicion [concerning the prince's sincerity]. [The prince's health] only changed slightly, and in the end he died as a result of this ailment. (Bumbacher 1995)

The Confucian tradition shows the same reverential attitude toward texts and the paper on which they are written. At least since the sixth century, educated Chinese were "exhorted to show special care to books and any piece of paper bearing the name of a Confucian sage, a quotation from the five classics, or a Confucian commentary" (McDermott 2006). In the seventeenth century, this custom was taken up by Cherishing Characters Associations (*xizi hui*), which had originally been formed by Buddhist monks. Influenced by the handling of charms and scriptures in some religious cults, members of these societies collected discarded scraps of written paper for cremation in special brick furnaces. The custom, which was believed to accumulate religious merit, continued into the twentieth century.

Textual Traditions and Imagery

While in the Confucian tradition the special status of the classics was based on their being the transmitters of the words of the ancient sages, the holy nature of Daoist

texts was predicated on the idea that sacred writings are endowed with "primordial energy" (*qi*). "Primordial energy" is what existed in the cosmos before creation took place. Heaven and Earth, the highest ranking gods, and the highest Daoist scriptures all emerged spontaneously out of the "primordial *qi*." Hence, the highest Daoist scriptures are, in their original form, celestial books or "heavenly blue-prints" (Bumbacher 1995), coming into existence as spontaneous congealments of cosmic breath. Scriptures are equal to the highest gods and stand in a special relationship with them. They are believed to have been composed in a celestial script that is illegible for humans, and even lesser gods. These texts only become accessible through multiple transmissions down the celestial hierarchy, in the process of which they are transcribed onto less prestigious material until they are finally passed on to select humans in an accessible form. It was a common idea in Daoism and among popular religious groups that, in order to help a distressed mankind, gods or immortals created new sacred texts. These were then passed down to elected humans.

Besides direct transmission of scripture through gods and immortals, Daoist texts were sometimes found in mountain caves or buried in the ground. These texts were regarded as unmediated emanations of cosmic energy; the immediacy with which they appeared on earth made them illegible to common human beings and especially potent.

The idea of scripture as the earthly vessel for a heavenly presence is most clearly pronounced in the Daoist *Lingbao* tradition of the fifth century CE. The terms *ling* and *bao*, which are commonly translated as "numinous treasure," also evoked mediumistic notions of a heavenly presence (*ling*) descending into an earthly receptacle (*bao*), a union of heaven and earth in which the former infused the latter. "In heaven it is *ling*, on earth it is *bao*; in the mysterious void of heaven it is *ling*, in the receptacles it is *bao*. That is why it is called *ling-bao*" (Bell 1988).

Presented as the self-generated talismans by which the universe was created, the *Lingbao* scriptures were ritual instruments of unsurpassed power for the creation and rectification of the universe. The following passage from a central *Lingbao* text, the *Scripture for the Salvation of Mankind* (*Duren jing*), summarizes the physical and phenomenological qualities of scripture:

> The red writs of the turbulent void,
> the highest Perfection of the nothingness of nothingness —
> in the ancestral *kalpa* of the Primordial Beginning
> they transformed and gave birth to all heavens.
> They gave light to the Three Luminaries,
> and these were the roots of the universe.
> Above them there is no further ancestry,
> only the Way constitutes their body.
> The five writs opened up and spread out,
> planting everywhere their spiritual power.
> Without the writs there would be no light;
> without the writs there would be no brilliance.

> Without the writs nothing would be established,
> without the writs nothing would be completed.
> Without the writs there would be no salvation,
> without the writs there would be no life. (trans. Andersen 2005)

The message the text communicates clearly is that it is a sacred treasure, an efficacious, miracle-working talisman, testifying to the spiritual status of its owner.

In contrast to Daoist textual imagery, the Buddhist tradition tends to emphasize a sacred text's function as a vehicle for universal salvation. Buddhist scriptures target a universal audience and encourage unlimited reproduction of scriptures through copying and printing as a means to generate merit. Whereas Daoist scriptures often signify a personal contract with Heaven or with an official in the heavenly bureaucracy—a contract that confers upon the owner of the text special powers or at least access to special powers—Buddhist textual imagery and practices signify the universal availability of scripture and hence of a path to salvation. The inclusion of "cause-and-effect" tales into many scriptures gives proof of the miraculous results of personal acts of devotion.

Finally, Confucian notions of textuality favor a textual imagery and practices that emphasize the importance of daily study and scholarly engagement with a sacred text. The Confucian sacred text is primarily an educational tool, a medium for the inculcation of Confucian values of self-cultivation through ceaseless study and scholarly engagement with China's literary past. The reader is encouraged to "study it daily, recompile or edit it, to compose commentaries or summaries and to explain it to the less educated" (Bell 1996). Inclusion of commentaries, word explanations, text critical notes, and other additional information dramatically inflated the volume of printed versions of the five classics and other Confucian texts centuries after the *jing* were first compiled.

The textual imagery and related practices of the different religious traditions are primarily ideal-types that more often than not appear in a hybrid rather than their pure form. Popular religious scriptures that cannot easily be attributed to one of the major religious traditions but instead incorporate various elements of all traditions within themselves in syncretistic fashion often combine different and sometimes contradictory textual imageries and practices. For example, in a morality treatise on divine rewards and punishments that appeared in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) and initiated the widespread practice of keeping "ledgers of merit and demerit," the *Highest Lord's Tract on Action and Response* (*Taishang ganying pian*), Daoist notions of the text as a sacred treasure were juxtaposed with the Buddhist idea that the *Tract* should be mass produced and thus universally available.

The effect of such syncretistic accumulation of imagery was not to play one tradition off against the other but rather to increase the status and attractiveness of the text by suggesting that each individual copy is a treasure and a contract with heaven (Bell 1996).

Uses of Sacred Texts

Sacred texts involve their users in a wide variety of practices, some of which are closely linked to religious observances of an individual or a group while others are embedded in contexts that are not specifically religious in nature. For instance, the use of sacred charms, talismans, and scripture was part and parcel of the professional repertoire of traditional Chinese healers. Often a treatment was completed by the patient swallowing a piece of paper carrying a spell written in vermillion ink. Certain spells that were used by Buddhist and Daoist disciples alike were said to protect a person from snakebite for seven years, while the recitation of passages from scriptures was believed to avert all sorts of evil. One of the "Confucian" classics, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), was used as a manual for divination throughout history, while other classics such as the *Odes* (*Shijing*) were used as tools for learning and in the training of officials.

Religion and society were always tightly intertwined in China (and still are in certain areas). As a result, the use of sacred texts is firmly embedded in most areas of life beyond what we would call the religious sphere today. In other words, a sacred text should not be approached in isolation or abstraction from the historical milieu in which it was written. The following excerpt from a confession of a man who was interrogated in 1753 for hiding a sectarian religious scripture in the flue of his brick bed gives some interesting insights into how scripture was used among popular religious groups of ordinary people. Popular uses of sacred text are usually overlooked by scholars interested in the use of scripture among educated elites, even though the number of partially literate or illiterate people far surpasses the number of elite users of sacred religious texts. The confession reads thus:

> Normally I cut people's hair, tell fortunes or sell [acupuncture] needles to make a living. I also know how to practice meditation; to recite *gāthās*; to recite the *True Scripture Without Characters* [*Wuzi zhenjing*] [by means of] *qi*-circulation; to prognosticate diseases by burning incense. [. . .] In Wanghuang village there is a certain Zhang Jindou. Those who have entered his teaching call him Patriarch Zhang. He does not recognize a single character, but he is able to preach [*jiangdao*]. His sermons are entirely in verse. Thus, together with Wang Fenglu, I went to visit Zhang Jindou, [. . .]. When I saw how wonderfully and subtly he spoke, Wang Fenglu and I immediately acknowledged him as our teacher. [. . .] As to this [method of] reciting the *True Scripture Without Characters* through *qi*-circulation, that was when I was thirty-five years old, on Five-Dragon Mountain in Lu'an prefecture. There was a certain monk Guangxiu who taught it to me. I gave him four or five-hundred [*wen*] incense-money, so he taught me this method to recite the *True Scripture Without Characters* [by means of] *qi*-circulation. He ordered me to sit in meditation with legs crossed, to close my eyes and clench my teeth, tongue up against the palate, and focus my thoughts on the Original Pass [*yuanguan*]. I inhaled *qi* through my nose [downwards] into my abdomen. When it was filled, I slowly let it go. This counts as the *True Scripture Without Characters*. [My teacher] said that after one

> has practiced this technique to the point of skillfulness, while keeping one's eyes closed the entire room is filled with light and one is able to see marvelous flowers and unusual fruits, the Earth God, the God of the Stove as well as one's ancestors. After having studied [this technique] for a long time, one is even capable of preventing diseases and prolonging one's life. [...] After I had mastered these [*gāthās*] I was indeed able to see the intended effects.

This extraordinarily rich source highlights a number of important points. First, the confession illustrates that the use of religious texts was often part of the professional practice of healers, acupuncturists, midwifes, fortune tellers, and other occupational groups who offered religious services to the local community in addition to other services. Reciting or transmitting texts that were perceived as powerful and efficacious constituted an additional income stream for both individuals and religious groups.

We learn, second, that the *True Scripture Without Characters* was transmitted orally from master to disciple because the master was himself illiterate. Third, the confession confirms a point made by many scholars of Daoism, namely that Daoist scriptures were created first and foremost as a way of transmitting methods of ritual practice. The method taught here is a meditational technique based on the circulation of "breath" (*qi*), which is designed to elicit a physiological response inside the adept's own body through recitation of the text.

Scriptures were not only used in the medical context though, but also at birthday parties, family celebrations, and similar events. The famous sixteenth century novel *Plum Blossom in Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*), for example, contains several descriptions of Buddhist nuns being invited to the house of the main protagonist to recite Buddhist and popular religious scriptures for the women of the household on one of their birthdays. The performances followed a prescribed ritual that could be interrupted in order to provide food and tea for the audience and the performers.

Several scholars have noted the embeddedness of Chinese sacred texts in a performance context defined by opera and ritual, stating that "performance always had priority over text":

> Opera and ritual, the two most important institutions of non-elite community life in traditional China, were profoundly akin because for both, *performance* was fundamental. . . . It goes without saying that opera depends on performance; what is not so obvious is that in China, religion also depended on performance. Performance always had priority over text, except perhaps in the highest reaches of the organized religions, where they were coequal. Scriptures themselves, on the popular level, were intended to be performed—they were scripts as much as they were scriptures. Of the works in the Confucian Canon, those that were the most genuinely scriptural were the ritual texts, which were also scripts in their own way. The centrality of performance in Chinese culture certainly was due to the centrality of ritual. (Johnson 1989)

Chinese sources indeed contain a number of verbs that signify different activities involving sacred texts: "reading" (in a group or individually; *kan*), "listening" (*ting*), "reciting" (*song*), "singing" (*chang*), "explaining" (*jiang*), "speaking" (*shuo*), "reading aloud" (*nian*), "performing" (*yan*), "proclaiming" (*xuan*), and "visualizing" (*cunxiang*). The verb "reading" thus provides only a very incomplete description of the many aspects associated with the uses of sacred text in China, for the additional simple reason that only a minority of users of sacred texts were fully or partially literate. This list of activities would become even longer if we would include other practices associated with sacred texts such as printing, copying, disseminating, citing, and writing commentaries.

The Ritual Context of the Longhua baojuan

In this concluding section, we will focus on one particular sacred text in order to demonstrate what close reading can reveal about the performative aspect of sacred texts. Let us examine a text from the Chinese sectarian tradition, *The Precious Scripture on the Dragon Flower, as Verified by the Old Buddha of Heavenly Purity* (*Gufo tianzhen kaozheng longhua baojing*). The text is illustrative for two reasons: First, because its status among the scriptures of the new religious groups of the Ming Dynasty has been compared to that of the *Lotus Sūtra* among Buddhist texts. The *Longhua baojuan* incorporates elements from all three mainstream religious traditions (Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism). Hence, it is a good example of a syncretistic scripture. The *Longhua baojuan* originated within a group that called itself the *Yuandun jiao* (*Teaching of Complete and Instantaneous Enlightenment*), but it circulated among a much wider audience. The second reason to examine this text is that the *Longhua baojuan* can be read as the story of how the teaching of the *Yuandun jiao* was first revealed to the Patriarch Gongchang, the founder of the *Yuandun* teaching, and how he then distributed this teaching among the people of the world. In other words, the *Longhua* is at the same time part of an actual ritual as well as the record of it.

The *Longhua baojuan* is extant in at least eight different editions. The oldest one, of which there is only the first volume still extant, was printed in 1654 in the traditional *sūtra* folded style.

Through the following analysis of the opening section and first chapter of the *Gufo tianzhen kaozheng longhua baojing* I want to demonstrate that a *baojuan* performance is best understood as a kind of multimedia event, a ritual that involves recitation, song, visual material, bodily movements, and interaction between the various participants in the performance. All these different practices are closely interrelated and form a complex liturgical structure. This structure of the *baojuan* performance is reflected in the text.

The Opening Section

The *Longhua baojuan* has an elaborate opening section, consisting of several different parts composed in prose and verse that precede the first chapter of the text. This section contains formulaic expressions that are easily recognizable and can be transplanted from one text to another. Therefore they were presumably familiar to anyone within the popular religious milieu. Since it is this opening section in which the setting of the performance is laid out, it should be of special interest to us.

The *baojuan* opens with a standard petition directed toward the Buddha-Heavens (*fotian*):

> With a sincere heart, knocking my head [on the ground], I pray to the Buddha-Heavens,
> That there is peace throughout heaven and earth and among the people;
> That wind and rain come at the right time, causing the Buddha's teaching to flourish,
> [And] that the August King (*huangwang*), possessor of the Way, may live ten thousand times ten thousand years.

In later and modern editions, this petition or prayer is included within the text proper and thus appears as part of the spoken ritual. Originally, however, it was most likely represented as an inscription on drawings of steles, the so-called *longpai* ("dragon tablets"). These *longpai* might not even have been part of the original *baojuan*, but may have been part of a kind of screen facing the audience.

Next in the text comes the "Hymn for Raising the Incense" (*juxiang zan*). One has to assume that this hymn was sung at the moment when the incense was actually burned. The hymn may thus be understood as a wish that accompanies the fragrance as it fills the entire universe and reaches Numinous Mountain (*Lingshan*), in the *Longhua baojuan* the dwelling place of the highest deities (*Wusheng laomu*, *Gufo*) as well as the place where the heavenly Dragon Flower Assembly takes place. "Dragon Flower Assembly" is a term derived from Buddhism. It refers to three meetings held by Maitreya Buddha upon his appearance on earth. The burning of the incense is an invitation to the King at the Center of the Law (*Fazhong wang*) as well as to all the Buddhas of the Realm of the Law to descend to the place of worship. The *baojuan*, one can conclude, is thus not only performed in front of humans but also in the presence of the gods.

The closing formula of the introduction, "Praise to the Incense Clouds Bodhisattvas, the Venerable Bodhisattvas," is with great probability spoken by the whole assembly, as is shown by an instruction in another *baojuan* that reads "The multitude joins in three times." This line, spoken by the whole congregation in unison, shows that *baojuan* performances were "interactive" events in which everyone actively participated.

Incantations

Next in the sequence of the performance comes a series of eight "divine incantations" (*shenzhou*). These incantations are of Daoist origin, for we find exactly the same incantations in Daoist liturgy today. They are directed at the spirits residing in the body to purify the body parts (mind, mouth, body) under their control and to protect their respective terrain. Each of the incantations closes with the formula "Promptly, promptly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances." It is possible that this last formula was accompanied by one or more kowtows, as is prescribed by one modern Daoist ritual text. The incantations are followed by a "Respectful Invitation" addressed to thirteen Buddhas, venerable mothers, and bodhisattvas.

"Thus Have I Heard"

The following section is entitled *gaiwen*, "Thus Have I Heard." The title refers to the opening phrase of Buddhist *sūtras*, "Thus have I heard" (*Ru shi wo wen*). It gives an exposition of the creation of the cosmos from undivided chaos in a process of division and subdivision of the original "one *qi* of the former heaven" (*xian tian yi qi*). This section introduces the *Longhua baojuan* as a text that has been kept in the storehouse of the Old Buddha Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen gufo*; referred to in the title) since the time of primordial chaos (i.e., the time prior to the creation of the cosmos, which has appeared in the world in different transformations). The *Longhua* is described as the mother of all scriptures, made out of the stuff of the Former Heaven and therefore establishing a direct connection to this realm. The *gaiwen* closes with another well-known formula, "Praise to the Three Treasures, the Buddha, *Dharma*, *Sangha* of the past, present, and future of the absolutely empty and universal *Dharma*-World."

The last section before the actual proclamation of the scripture is the "Gatha Opening the Scripture" (*kaijing ji*). Again this section is introduced by a standard formula that appears with absolutely no or only insignificant modification in every *baojuan* I have looked at:

> The highest and supremely wondrous law
> Has been difficult to encounter for innumerable *kalpas*
> Today we have the opportunity to receive instruction,
> We vow to understand the Tathagata's true intentions

In a rather long prose section we learn that there are five Dragon Flower Assemblies in which those with a "karmic destiny" (*youyuan*) come together: in the sacred home (*shengjing jiaxiang*), among the Three Buddhas (*san shi zhufo*), in the skies (*tianshang*), inside the earth (*dixia*), and within the human body (*renshen zhong*). The fact that this enumeration of gatherings between humans and gods is part of the

"Verse on Opening the Scripture" suggests that the congregation in which the *Longhua* is performed is also regarded as a kind of Dragon Flower Assembly.

This whole introductory section as well as the last chapter of the text provide what Catherine Bell has called the "frame" of the ritual performance. "Such frames," Bell explains,

> not only distinguish performance as such, they also create a complete and condensed, if somewhat artificial world—like sacral symbols, a type of microcosmic portrayal of the macrocosm. Since the real world is rarely experienced as a coherently ordered totality, the microcosm constructed on stage purports to provide the experience of a mock-totality, an interpretive appropriation of some greater if elusive totality. (Bell 1997)

The special function of the first and last chapters is underscored by their length, both being twice as long as the other chapters of the book.

The Individual Chapters

Within the totality of the work, each of the individual twenty-four chapters (*pin*) of the *Longhua baojuan* constitutes a separate entity of its own, a ritual unit. Each chapter conforms to the same basic format (outlined below) that structures the performance. Passages that first appear in prose are then repeated in verse.

1. "Spoken" (*shuo*) prose outline of the chapter's contents (also called "plain text," *baiwen*).
2. Verse consisting of two or four lines with five or seven syllables each (sometimes with four or six syllables).
3. Hymn (*ji*) in seven or ten syllables.
4. Verse consisting of two or four lines with five or seven syllables each (sometimes with four or six syllables).
5. *Xiaoqu* ("small songs"); occurring only in *baojuan* from the Jiajing (1522–1566) through the Kangxi (1662–1723) reign periods.

Each chapter begins with a "spoken" (*shuo*) outline of its contents in a kind of rhythmically structured prose. This section is introduced by the phrase *jingyun* ("in the scripture it is said"), immediately followed by another formulaic expression, *queshuo*, meaning "let's rather talk about" or "let's now talk about." The first phrase, *jing yun*, usually introduces a commentary to a passage in a canonical text, for example a Buddhist *sūtra* or one of the Confucian classics. It indicates that the *Longhua baojuan* claims a similar status. The phrase *queshuo*, conversely, frequently occurs in the novels *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*) and *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*), where it is used as a connector between paragraphs, indicating that the narrator would like to direct his audience's attention to a new aspect. It is tempting to take a

stock formula such as *queshuo* as an indication of the *Longhua baojuan*'s indebtedness to the techniques of oral storytelling and, therefore, as indication of a primarily oral performance setting. Yet, Vibeke Børdahl has cautioned us about such hasty conclusions with her observation that in living oral traditions of storytelling "the convention of stock phrases of introduction, connection, and conclusion is absent." She therefore wonders "if these expressions were ever part of the oral tradition, or if they were rather a literary convention of simulated storytelling from the very beginning" (Børdahl 1997). However that may be, it is clear that the *Longhua baojuan* combines rhetorical techniques from different literary genres.

In the *Longhua*, each chapter opens with an explanation of the chapter title. Take chapter one as an example:

> In the Scripture it is said [*jing yun*]: Let's now talk about [*queshuo*] the initial partition of chaos. *Hun* ["undifferentiated"] means that clear and turbid are not [yet] differentiated; *dun* means that there is no above and below; *chu* means that in the beginning [all] was guarded in oneness; *fen* means that first darkness was divided, but there was no division into North and South or East and West; this is what is called "The initial partition of Chaos."

It is quite clear that the "commentary" given in this introductory passage is not meant to provide the reader with philologically sound explanations of the characters in the chapter title. Rather, this passage sets out the main themes/symbols of the chapter in abstract terms (undivided chaos, beginning, initial partition) and connects these abstract ideas with pairs of slightly more concrete images ("clear and turbid," "above and below," the four directions) on which the remaining part of the prose section continues to elaborate. The phrase *bu bian qingzhuo* ("clear and turbid are not [yet] differentiated"), for example, is repeated, appearing once in the prose part and once in the verse part. In this way, the text creates what could be termed "associative chains" or "chains of symbols," which enable the listener or reader to establish further links between the individual symbols on his/her own. Consider the following passage from the second chapter:

> *Wu* [nothingness] is the same as the Former Heaven; *You* [existence/being] is the same as the Latter Heaven. Nothingness gives birth to Being. Nothingness is the Buddha, which is the Former Heaven created by the Old Buddha Limitless. This Former Heaven is true emptiness. The Latter Heaven is heavenly truth. Heaven is Emptiness; truth is *qi*; the true *qi* is not born. The Unborn is the mother, she produces *Yin* and *Yang*, originally without name and form. [Later] they are given the names Fuxi and Nüwa, they are the ancestors of humanity.

This passage quickly results in an informational and sensual overload. It is not difficult to imagine that a performance of the entire *Longhua baojuan*, together with music, singing, visual impressions, burning incense, and so on, is a multifaceted and enormously intense sensory experience.

The constant repetition of key symbols and key phrases first in a kind of rhythmically structured prose and then in sections of verse surely has a mnemotechnic function. The message of the *Longhua* is virtually drummed into its listeners' heads, first in prose, then in verse, and finally in a popular song, which always brings the chapter to a close. I am hesitant, however, to regard the participants in the performance simply as passive recipients of a religious message, and I am equally hesitant to interpret this constant repetition simply as a form of "proselytizing" or even indoctrination. Repetition also creates what could be termed "associative chains" or "chains of symbols," which enable the listener to elaborate on these symbols on his own via punning and word play or homophones. Let me give two examples. In the *gatha* section in the first chapter, we read the following two lines:

> The single *qi* of the primordial chaos is like a chicken, originally pure and calm it is the Former Heaven;
> The single *qi* of Former Heaven, [like] a chicken it gives birth to an egg, in the egg grows *ji*, the Ultimate/Apex, and this is the Origin.

Given the homophony between *ji* (chicken) and *ji* (Apex, Ultimate), one wonders whether the average participant in the performance—if he has no text to look into—always thinks of the right thing; that is, the apex instead of a second chicken. However, it seems safe to say that the use of symbols also serves the function of providing tools to visualize the contents of the text.

An example from the Western religious tradition might help to further illustrate how associative chains of symbols are employed to create a multisensory experience in the listeners or readers. In the *Golden Legend* (*Legenda aurea*), a collection of biographies of Christian saints compiled between 1265 and 1266 by Jacob of Voragine (c. 1228–1298), one finds the following pseudo-etymology of the name of Saint Peter Martyr:

> The name Petrus, Peter, is interpreted as knowing or recognizing, or as taking off one's shoes; or Peter comes from *petros*, firm. Hence three privileges possessed by Saint Peter are indicated. He was an outstanding preacher and therefore is called knowing, because he had perfect knowledge of the Scriptures and, in preaching, recognized what met the needs of each hearer. He was a most pure virgin and so is called one who takes off his shoes, because he removed and put off all earthly love from the feet of his affections and inclinations: in that way he was virgin not only in his body but in his mind. Third, he was a glorious martyr of the Lord and so was firm, because he bore martyrdom with constancy in defense of the faith. (*The Golden Legend*, pp. 254–5)

Notice the shift from the level of the very concrete (shoes) to a level of abstract terms (e.g., virgin of the mind) as well as the connection of completely unrelated phenomena: shoes and virginity, feet and affections. These associative links, which create a sort of memory chain between otherwise completely unrelated words, allow the listener or reader to elaborate on the key symbols, to make connections until every

distinction, including that between gods and humans, collapses. Moreover, in the same way as the *Saints' Lives* of Jacob of Voragine were used as an aid to "preachers for composing their sermons" (Carruthers 1998), it is not too far-fetched to imagine that the same could also be true for the *Longhua*—that the text could be used as a tool for visualization during meditation.

Conclusion

The *Longhua baojuan* is not representative of one particular religious tradition. It incorporates elements drawn from across the entire spectrum of Chinese religiosity in an attempt to provide its users with the most fashionable religious trends available at their time. Written down yet performed orally, venerated as a canonical scripture yet open to constant interpretation and reinterpretation by its users, containing soteriological knowledge about the path to salvation *and* performative knowledge about the proper conduct of certain rituals, the *Longhua baojuan* as a whole epitomizes the essential features of Chinese sacred texts: inter-religious syncretism and reverberation, epistemological meaning, and performative action. These are the distinguishing characteristics of Chinese sacred texts as religious scripture.

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CHAPTER 14

Religious Ritual

Joshua Capitanio, University of the West

Ritual is a topic that has been the subject of considerable theoretical discussion, among both premodern Chinese intellectuals and modern scholars of religion. In this chapter, we will characterize some of the most salient features of Chinese religious ritual by examining both indigenous Chinese ritual theory and theoretical approaches developed by modern academic theorists. In adopting such an approach, we hope to demonstrate that in China, just as in the modern West, there has long existed a concept of "ritual" (Chinese *li*) that has, for millennia, been the subject of a great deal of both theoretical and practical speculation. The fact that a notion of ritual that developed largely within the narrow confines of Western intellectual history has been elevated to the status of a universal category of analysis is, largely, coincidental. Modern scholars of religion are becoming increasingly attentive to the various ways in which the history of concepts such as "religion," "ritual," and "magic" in Western thought has influenced the way that modern scholars perceive and study religion in general (Smith 1987, Bell 1992, Asad 1993). Careful examination and consideration of non-Western theoretical literature on analogous topics can perhaps serve as a corrective to these tendencies. Thus, in addition to familiarizing the reader with some important features and forms of Chinese ritual, I hope to also contribute to the larger scholarly dialogue concerning the nature of "ritual" as a descriptive or analytical category, by identifying some of the ways in which Chinese conceptions of ritual both converge with and diverge from traditional scholarly understandings of the concept.

Chinese Interpretations of Ritual

The importance of considering indigenous Chinese perspectives on concepts related to ritual has been identified by a number of scholars studying Chinese religious

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traditions. Poul Andersen, in an important essay examining "indigenous concepts of meaning" in Chinese ritual, has remarked that

> it strikes me as exceedingly odd if outside observers and scholars involved in research on for instance Chinese ritual would deliberately choose to dispense completely with all reference to the age-old traditions of philosophical reflection on the subject of the meanings of ritual *in the culture itself*, as well as to the very rich literature produced throughout the centuries, in which the meanings and functions of ritual are explicated in terms of discussions of specific liturgies and historic performances. (Andersen 2001)

Much of the philosophical reflection referred to here has centered around the notion of *li*, the Chinese term that is most closely analogous to "ritual." *Li* became an important concept in Chinese thought during the Eastern Zhou period of Chinese history (c. 771–221 BCE). It figured heavily in the thought of Confucius (551–479 BCE) as recorded in his *Analects*, and was taken up and elaborated upon by subsequent thinkers in the Confucian tradition, such as Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310–210 BCE). During the Han Dynasty (221 BCE–220 CE), a number of works such as the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji*), *Rituals of the Zhou* (*Zhouli*), and *Ceremonies of Ritual* (*Yili*) were compiled, ostensibly on the basis of older sources, that set out a number of the basic parameters within which the concept of *li* continues to be understood even to the present day. Yet, while much Chinese speculation on *li* is to be found within the writings of Confucian thinkers and "Confucian" works related to the performance of imperial ritual observances, the notion itself has important religious, political, and social implications that transcend Confucianism.

What, then, is this Chinese concept of *li*, and how does it relate to "ritual"? The earliest forms of ritual for which we have historical evidence in China were sacrifices performed by the ancient kings of the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE), offered to various ancestral figures, anthropomorphic nature deities, and the high god of Shang religion, *Di*. This paradigm of sacrificial religion continued beyond the fall of the Shang and into the Zhou period, when the Shang god *Di* was replaced by the central deity of Zhou religion, *Tian* (commonly translated as "Heaven" in modern scholarship). Sacrifice was closely connected with political authority: who could sacrifice to which deities was essentially a matter of hierarchical status. All people could sacrifice to their own ancestors, but only feudal lords and ministers were allowed to sacrifice to local anthropomorphic deities and the great ancestral deities of the state cult (Kleeman 1994). In Eastern Zhou society,

> political authority was derived from the worship of potent ancestral spirits and the gods of locality through regular offerings made at the altars of the ancestral temple and the state. The actions that set the rulers apart from the masses were the "great services" of those altars, and these services were ritually directed violence in the form of sacrifices, warfare, and hunting. (Lewis 1990)

Li was one of several terms used to refer to such sacrificial rituals in ancient Chinese texts, and its meaning still includes the basic sense of "sacrifice." A second century CE dictionary, the *Shuowen jiezi*, defined *li* as "the means by which one sacrifices to divine beings and causes good fortune to arrive." However, the concept became transformed during the Eastern Zhou from a more specific term denoting certain sacrificial rites to a much broader categorical concept—ritual. This transformation is largely reflected in the writings of Confucius and his later followers. Robert Eno has identified three major innovations that Confucius and his followers—whom Eno refers to as "Ruists," from the Chinese term *Ru*, "ritual specialist"—accomplished with respect to the concept of *li*. First was the development of "the fundamental Ruist tenet that *li* is, in itself, a category of intellectual and ethical significance . . . Confucius was, if not the first, then among the first to pay attention to *li* as a universal category to which particular *li* belonged" (Eno 1990).

The second innovation was to imbue the notion of *li* with a particular ethical significance. Confucius lived during a period when the power of the Zhou state had severely declined and Chinese society had devolved (in his opinion) into a decentralized feudalism. He saw the decline of the Zhou paralleled in the decline of its ritual, and looked to ritual as the solution:

> Originally, the stable social order of the Western Zhou provided a consensus value base legitimizing social ritual. This base had disintegrated leaving the significance of *li* in question. Confucius' solution was to treat *li* not as a property of social order but as the genesis of social order. The value of Zhou *li* was not diminished by the decline of the Zhou social order, just the opposite: Zhou *li* was if anything more valuable now, for the perished social order existed latent in the *li* . . . Confucius and his followers promised to replace, through ritual, the stable social order that had been supported by the institutional pillars of kingship and heredity. (Eno 1990)

Third, Confucius shifted the emphasis of *li* from the apotropaic results that rituals were believed to produce to the *performance* of ritual itself, which he believed had an educational value. Thus provided with an ethical significance, *li* also became a vehicle through which morality was taught and perpetuated:

> Confucius and later Ruists claimed that the practice of *li* and its related aesthetic forms was inherently edifying, and could transform individuals into ethical and wise beings . . . In its most positive form, this idea was expressed as the claim that mastery of ritual and ritual style transformed a person into a perfect being: a Sage. (Eno 1990)

Modern scholars have struggled somewhat with this aspect of the Chinese notion of *li*. In some cases, in this broader sense, *li* is translated by Western concepts such as "propriety," "etiquette," or "decorum." Other scholars have characterized *li* in this sense as "paradigms of human relations" (Gimello 1972), a "sense of ritual" (Hagen 2003), or a process of "ritualization" and "humanization" (Tu 1978). Yet these

various senses of the term were not differentiated by Ruists such as Confucius (Eno 1990). The difficulty that scholars have faced in conveying the full sense of Chinese *li* lies not in the concept itself but rather the narrow understanding of its closest English analogue, the term "ritual," which has pervaded the academic study of religion for some time now. "Ritual," in Western scholarship, has been used primarily to refer to *activity* as distinct from *ideology*. Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that an essentially Protestant understanding of ritual as "empty" action, devoid of meaningful content, can be detected in much of early Western academic scholarship on the topic (Smith 1987). Yet, in the Chinese concept of *li*, ritual is much more than empty action, and the activity of engaging in ritual practice and the set of beliefs that both inform and are construed by such practices are not separate.

Fortunately, recent decades have seen a number of scholarly inquiries into the concept of "ritual" itself as it is used in academic discourse, and several interesting new approaches have emerged that may be more conducive to the study of Chinese ritual. One of the leading scholars to approach these issues in recent years was Catherine Bell, who in addition to being a prolific writer on ritual theory was also an accomplished scholar of Chinese religions. In her study *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell convincingly argued that the traditional understanding of ritual, which was particularly influential during the formative period of the discipline of religious studies, was as a type of activity: "Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths" (Bell 1992). The classic expression of this dichotomy in the literature of religious studies is often considered to be Emile Durkheim's formulation in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: "Religious phenomena fall quite naturally into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are fixed modes of actions. These two classes of phenomena differ as much as thought differs from action" (Durkheim 2001).

The model of studying ritual represented in Durkheim's work is to view ritual as secondary to belief. Rituals are "fixed modes of actions," behind which exist the representations that it is the scholar's job to uncover. Thus, ritual action is, like a text, something that must be interpreted in order for its meaning to become clear. In contrast to this notion of ritual as simply communicating or conveying symbolic meaning, a number of recent approaches have developed around the notion of ritual as "practice" or "performative" that instead see ritual as a process of making things meaningful. As Bell has described,

> Practice theory and performance theory attempt to articulate how what is done in a ritual—the gestures, words, and physical delineations of space and time—actually accomplishes what a ritual is thought to do, namely, shape attitudes . . . A practice approach attempts to answer the question why ritual is deemed to be the effective thing to do in a particular situation. An emphasis on the performative aspects of ritual (script, drama, roles) attempts to discern how these qualities can have both social and individual effects. (Bell 2009)

The relationship between practice- and performance-based approaches is somewhat ambiguous in Bell's work; while she differentiates between the two in her early work (Bell 1992), in later writings she uses the rubric of "performative approaches" as a broad, if loose, category that includes her own approach of "ritualization" and other practice-based theories. For the purposes of this chapter, we will follow that characterization, designating as "performative" an approach that is concerned "to deal with action as action" (Bell 1998).

Performative Aspects of Ritual

The remainder of this chapter will consist of a consideration of certain aspects of Chinese ritual from the perspective of a performative approach. We will begin with a quote by the Confucian theorist Xunzi that illustrates two distinct positions on ritual that can be found within the sphere of Chinese religions:

> Only a sage can fully understand ritual. The sage has a clear understanding of it, the gentleman finds comfort in practicing it, the official takes it as something to be preserved, and the common people accept it as custom. To the gentleman it is a way of being human; to the common people it is a matter of serving spirits. (trans. Campany 1992)

Though these two ways of understanding ritual may appear quite different, they both acknowledge a fundamental characteristic of ritual in Chinese religion: it is *efficacious*, whether that efficacy lies in "a way of being human" or "a matter of serving spirits." Regardless of how it is understood, we will argue, this efficacy can be found in the *performance* of ritual.

While a performative approach to ritual has been advocated by a number of scholars, as a methodology it is still somewhat loosely defined (Grimes 2004). A unifying feature among the various different ways of construing ritual as performative, however, is the observation of an analogous relationship between ritual and various performing arts, such as theater, music, and dance. We will first examine the implications of the analogy between ritual and performance for Chinese data, and then consider a specific performative theory of ritual, put forth by anthropologist Roy Rappaport, and its applicability to the Chinese case.

A close examination of Chinese sources reveals that there is indeed an analogous relationship between ritual and the performing arts in premodern China; performing arts have in fact generally been conceived of within the framework of ritual throughout Chinese history. One etymological explanation suggests, for example, that the term *Ru* ("ritual specialists")—by which Confucius and his disciples, and by extension the tradition that Westerners have labeled "Confucian," were known—may have once meant something like "dance master" (Eno 1990). The Chinese term *wu* ("dance") is occasionally used in ancient texts as a transitive verb whose object is the

name of a specific ritual; thus, at least some ancient rituals were literally "danced"—for example, the *Analects* contains several references to "dancing the *yu*," an important rainmaking sacrifice in ancient China. Evidence indicates that the Chinese word *wu*, meaning "dance," was etymologically related to another character pronounced *wu*, which referred to a type of ritual specialist in ancient Chinese society. The *wu*, who modern scholars have described variously as "shamans" or "spirit mediums," were responsible for, among other things, dancing in such rituals as the *yu* rainmaking sacrifice; a Han dictionary glosses the term *wu* as "a woman who can invite spirits to descend by her dancing." Tong Enzheng has described the importance of dance and music in these ancient rituals as follows:

> In ancient China, both in the north and in the south, the religious activities of the *wu* and priests were always associated with music, dancing, and drumming . . . The systematization and regularization of music and dancing in China should be attributed to the *wu*, who used music and dancing as triggers and catalysts to enter into trance and as methods for communication with the supernatural world. (Tong 2002)

Music and dance were also important topics in early Confucian writings, where their relationship to ritual is clear. Training in music and dance would have constituted a considerable portion of the formal education of a *Ru*, a "Confucian" ritual master:

> Ruists studied dance and were dancers. The Zhou ceremonial dances they practiced integrated an artistic mastery over ritual music and song, the bearing of ritual costume, and the ritual dance steps themselves. While ritual dance may not have occupied Ruists daily to the degree that other forms of ceremony did, it stood as the ultimate expression of Ruist aesthetic mastery, combining many aesthetic skills, and exemplifying the basic task of all ritual study: the choreography of ordinary existence. (Eno 1990)

The importance of music for the Confucians lay in the fact that it was a mode of expressing emotional sentiments. Because the Confucian interest in ritual and music was due in part to their capacity to serve as tools for establishing and maintaining social unity, the Confucians were concerned about the potentially subversive function of music. By ritually regulating the type of sentiments expressed through music, the Confucians believed that a ruler could shape the moral attitudes of his subjects. As the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji*) says,

> All tones that arise are born in the human mind. Movement in the human mind is caused by [external] objects. [The mind] is stirred by objects into movement; thus it takes form as sounds. Sounds respond to each other and give birth to changes [i.e., in sound] . . . [The mind] is stirred by objects *and then* moves. Thus the Former Kings were cautious about what they stirred [the people] with. They used ritual to make their wills [conform] to the Way, music to harmonize their sounds, government to unify their actions, and punishments to prevent licentiousness. Rituals, music, punishments, and government are ultimately one: a means to make the people's minds similar and bring about the ordered Way. (trans. Goldin 1999)

Thus, both music and dance were understood to have important ritual functions in ancient Chinese thought. Their relationship to ritual was not merely analogous; in fact, music and dance were forms of ritual activity.

As for theater, the performative art that is most often compared with ritual, most scholars agree that Chinese drama originated in ritual and, even in the modern day, is often performed in a ritual context. Piet van der Loon, in an article on the ritual origins of Chinese theater, has observed that Chinese dramatic performances have traditionally been regarded as serving an exorcistic function, and connects them with the great exorcistic rituals performed in ancient China by the *wu* priesthood. In fact, actors and spirit mediums/shamans played similar, if not overlapping, roles in premodern China; for example, before a theatrical performance, the actors in a troupe would themselves engage in ritual performances designed to purify the stage:

> The fact that the evil spirits at the scene were expelled by the actors must be emphasized. Their role was not secondary; it did not consist in giving meaning to, or illustrating, a rite executed by specialists. The actors themselves led the entire ceremony, which consisted of animating the deity, being possessed by him and exorcising malevolent influences, as if they were mediums and experts in magic . . . Anyone who observes religious practices in China cannot but be struck by the "theatrical" character of the *séances* of mediums during festivals. Do they imitate theatrical actors? Or perhaps, conversely, do actors imitate mediums, and is their acting a survivance of a specialized mediumistic cult? The existence of such a connection between them would provide a satisfactory response to the question of why actors, like mediums, were relegated to the lowest classes of society: in effect, they were generally despised due to their relationships with the spirits they conjured. (van der Loon 1977)

Barbara Ward has made a similar observation in her study of modern Chinese dramatic performances. Noting that, in many cases, public dramatic performances are embedded within ritual festivals and are seen in that context as producing certain auspicious effects, she remarks that "From this point of view, then, the whole set of opera performances in general is a magical act, the very doing of which is supposed (*opus operatum*) to have a general, broad-spectrum, mystical effect for good. It is a rite in the magico-religious sense, and one in which the actors are the officiants" (Ward 1979).

As van der Loon pointed out, the correspondence between actors and ritual officiants goes both ways; in some cases, ritual specialists may take on a dramatic role in their ritual performance. This is particularly true in Daoist ritual, in which large-scale liturgical performances such as the *jiao* (offering) and *zhai* (fast), which can take days to complete, often contain dramatic components. One example of such a component is the "Attack on Hell" (*po diyu*) that may be performed as part of a funerary offering (*jiao*), in which the priest enacts a dramatic journey through the underworld for the purpose of releasing the soul of the deceased, which culminates in a battle where the priest leads his supernatural army in besieging a subterranean fortress (Lagerwey 1987). This performance is often augmented by several smaller

dramatic re-enactments of various Chinese myths centered around the theme of a protagonist's journeys through the underworld to liberate the soul of a deceased relative (Schipper 1993). Just as with the rituals performed by the actors described by van der Loon, these performances are not to be seen as mere symbolic representations; "as ritual acts, they are understood to be actually effecting the release of the soul, not just symbolizing it" (Bell 1997).

Thus, the connection between ritual and the performative arts goes beyond analogy in Chinese society. What can we say, then, of the performative nature of Chinese ritual? Anthropologist Stanley Tambiah has suggested three senses in which ritual action can be seen as performative:

> In the Austinian sense of performative, wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the sense of indexical values . . . being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance. (Tambiah 1985)

In the first sense, Tambiah references philosopher J. L. Austin's notion of "performative utterances," also called "speech acts"—statements such as "I now pronounce you husband and wife," which are not simple true/false statements but rather declarations in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (Austin 1975). These will be further discussed below, as the use of performatives in Chinese ritual is connected with notions of ritual efficacy. The second sense is one that we have already examined; as we have seen, not only were many Chinese rituals "staged performances" but many such performances were also rituals, and the distinction between the two is not exact in Chinese practice. Finally there is Tambiah's notion of indexical values, which relates to his conception of ritual as "a system of symbolic communication" (Tambiah 1985). The idea that ritual communicates indexical values has been elaborated in the work of anthropologist Roy Rappaport, and we will here consider his theory of ritual as it applies to Chinese phenomena.

Rappaport's definition of ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the practitioners" (Rappaport 1999) is deceptively concise, and much of his *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* is devoted to drawing out the significance of the features of ritual identified in that short definition—invariance, formality, and traditionalism. While an examination of Chinese concepts of ritual in terms of Rappaport's notions of invariance and traditionalism would be fruitful, due to lack of space we will confine ourselves to considering one aspect of his concept of "formalism," which leads Rappaport to conclude that ritual's efficacy can be found, partly if not completely, in its communicative nature. Our argument here will be that this is precisely how certain Chinese intellectuals conceived of ritual, and it is in this understanding of ritual that the ideological component of the Chinese concept of *li*, to which we referred earlier, can be found.

Rappaport's notion of ritual formalism comprises two distinct senses. The first, closely related to invariance, is that ritual action is *formal*—that is, characterized by adherence to specified forms. The second sense is that ritual is "formal" as opposed to "functional" or "physically efficacious." Elaborating on this notion, he explains:

> [This view] takes seriously the understanding, made explicit by some people at least, that when they perform a ritual they are not simply "saying something" about themselves but "doing something" about the state of their world. That such an understanding is frequently entertained by performers is implicit in the terms some people use to designate some of their rituals, or even rituals in general . . . But only a portion of what is done *in* rituals and little or none of what is done *by* ritual is accomplished through material techniques directly affecting physical causal processes . . . If ritual (in contrast to technique) does anything at all it doesn't do it by operating with matter and energy on matter and energy in accordance with physical laws of cause and effect, but by focusing agencies or forces of another sort upon whatever is to be affected. (Rappaport 1999)

Following Jack Goody's contention that in ritual "the relationship between means and ends is not intrinsic" (Goody 1961), Rappaport argues that, if ritual does not achieve its stated goals through principles of physical causality, it must do so through what he terms "occult" (i.e., hidden) efficacy, which is found in the performative and symbolic nature of ritual utterances—"the verbal specification of the relationship of act to effect is an important component of the act itself." Thus, "ritual achieves its effects through the communication of meanings," an efficacy that he characterizes as meaningful rather than physical.

In analyzing the communication of meanings in ritual—the "indexical values" that Tambiah referred to—Rappaport identifies two basic types of message that are transmitted in human rituals: self-referential messages, in which "the participants transmit information concerning their own current physical, psychic or social states to themselves and to other participants," and canonical messages, which

> although *transmitted* by the participants, are not *encoded* by them. They are found by the participants already encoded in the liturgy. Since these messages are not encoded by the performers, and since they tend toward invariance, it is obvious that these messages *cannot in themselves* represent the performers' contemporary states.

One final, key aspect of this communication that Rappaport identified is its reflexive or "auto-communicative" nature: whoever else the messages encoded in a ritual performance may be directed toward, the participants themselves are always among the intended recipients. An individual's performance of a ritual may or may not communicate something to other participants, observers of the ritual, or even supernatural entities; however, it *always* communicates something back to the individual him/herself. What is communicated back to the individual, among other things, is the acceptance of the authority of the canonical order of which the ritual is a part.

Thus, "the self-referential and the canonical are united in the acceptance of the canon."

Simply put, when individual practitioners perform rituals, they are indicating to themselves that they accept the authority of that ritual (its canonical message), which is seen as emanating from someone or somewhere else than the immediate participants, and thus to be carrying the weight of tradition ("not entirely encoded by the practitioners"); moreover, they are attempting to internalize and indicate their conformity with that canonical order (the self-referential message). This idea can be found in a number of Chinese writings on ritual. For example, in the following passage, taken from an encyclopedic overview of Buddhism entitled *Essential Readings for the Buddhist Clergy* (*Shishi yaolan*), compiled during the eleventh century by the monk Daocheng, an entire graded hierarchy of Buddhist soteriology is subsumed within a classification of seven modes of worshipping (*li*) the Buddha:

> The first [type of worship] is "arrogant worship." [Though] one takes the proper position and follows the correct procedures, one does so without an attitude of reverence. The mind rushes after external objects and the five limbs do not completely [touch the ground]; one simply moves up and down like a pestle. The second type is "harmonious worship." This means that one roughly conforms to the proper mode of deportment, but mentally, one's thoughts are not at ease. When others are around, one readily and fervently engages in worship, but when they depart, the body slumps and the mind strays. Thus, the mind is scattered, but one's speech is "harmonious." The third is "worship with reverent body and mind." This means that as one hears and recites the names of buddhas, one mentally contemplates the features of a Buddha. Physically and mentally, one maintains a reverent attitude, without boredom or laxity. The fourth is "worship that gives rise to pure wisdom." This means that one has reached the realm of the buddhas and has attained clear perception, which can be directed as one wills. Paying homage [*li*] to one Buddha, one pays homage to all buddhas; making a single bow, one pays homage to all beings within the expanse of reality. The fifth type is "worship that universally penetrates reality's expanse." This means that one observes that one's own body, mind, and other aspects have fundamentally never been separate from absolute reality; self and Buddha are regarded as equal. Paying homage to a single Buddha, one pervasively renders homage to all buddhas throughout the realm of reality. Sixth is "worship with correct understanding." This means to pay homage to the Buddha within oneself, rather than focusing on external buddhas. How is this? All sentient beings each possess Buddha-nature and uniform, correct awareness. The seventh is "worship where the characteristics of reality are equalized." In the previous types, there were still [concepts of] "worship," "understanding," and self and other were differentiated. In this form of worship, there is no self and no other; ordinary people and sages are seen as equivalent. Since form and function are not differentiated, this is called "equalized." (*Shishi yaolan*, *T.* vol. 54, no. 2127: 287b27–287c12)

Here, there is little concern for the formal requirements of worship (though the importance of these is indeed emphasized elsewhere in the text); even when adhering to the proper forms, one can still be performing the ritual improperly. The per-

formative aspect of this passage becomes more evident when we consider that this is a text intended to be read by Buddhist clergy. Though it contains a critique of improper modes of worship, the real purpose of the text is didactic; it can in a sense be regarded as a "script" specifying the proper performance of Buddhist worship.

In fact, a performative approach has been revealed to be fruitful in several recent studies of Chinese Buddhist ritual, particularly that of the Chan (Zen) tradition. While Chan Buddhism has traditionally been regarded as anti-ritualistic, recent scholarship has suggested a layer of ritualistic activity behind the seemingly spontaneous and iconoclastic behavior attributed to Chan practitioners in their sectarian literature. From this perspective, many Chan monastic practices can be seen as "elaborate ritual[s] of identification with the past Buddhas and patriarchs" (Faure 1991). Thus, T. Griffith Foulk has described the ceremony of "entering the abbot's room" for a private interview in Song Dynasty Chan monasteries as a "ritual reenactment of the encounters between Chan masters and disciples" recorded in normative texts such as Chan genealogical histories (Foulk 1993). John McRae has recently gone a step further to argue that these genealogical histories themselves were perhaps records of ritualized exchanges between Chan monastics, and has wondered to what extent Chan "encounter dialogue"—iconic stories of antinomian and often inscrutable encounters between Chan monks, which were the basis for many of the *gong'an* (*kōan*) used as contemplative devices in the Chan/Zen tradition—"[grew] out of a monastic training and ritual context in which students responded to monkish ritual celebrants in thoroughly formalized manners," concluding tentatively that encounter dialogues "derived not (or perhaps not solely) out of spontaneous oral exchanges but rather (perhaps only in part) out of ritualized exchanges" (McRae 2000).

One of the most vocal advocates of this performative position has been Robert Sharf, who has argued that "traditional Chan and Zen practice was oriented not toward engendering 'enlightenment' experiences, but rather to perfecting the ritual performance of Buddhahood" (Sharf 1995), which is "the ability to execute, day in and day out, a compelling rendition of liberated action and speech" (Sharf 2005). Sharf has called attention to the fact that, at least in the case of Chan Buddhist literature, "prescriptive religious texts"—those texts intended for an audience of practitioners, which despite their ostensibly descriptive nature must ultimately be regarded as serving a didactic purpose—should be "treated not so much as practical guides for meditation, but rather as liturgies to be memorized for ritual performance" (Sharf 1995). Like Foulk and McRae, Sharf has suggested that the voluminous body of Chan literature, particularly collections of Chan *gong'an*—"cases" extracted from records of encounter dialogue and genealogical histories—served as models that students were expected to emulate in their performance of enlightenment:

> *Gong'an*, in short, functioned as "scripts" for the performance of mind-to-mind transmission that took place in the abbot's quarters. The study of famous cases [*gong'an*] gave an advanced student of Chan the rhetorical tools required to engage in

> "enlightened repartee" with the master and prepared him for delivering formal sermons and engaging in ritual debate when he himself was ready to assume the role of enlightened patriarch on the high seat. (Sharf 2007)

The work of these various scholars has suggested that, for Chan Buddhists, "enlightenment" was both constituted by, and attained through, performance. Such an understanding—that by behaving as an enlightened being or sage one could attain enlightenment or sagehood—was not unprecedented in either Buddhism or Chinese religion. This performative approach to enlightenment is one of the most well-documented features of Tantric Buddhism, which was brought to China from India during the Tang Dynasty, and whose scriptures taught that one could realize Buddhahood in a single lifetime by acting, speaking, and contemplating as an enlightened being in "a ritualized replication of the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha" (McBride 2008). Some scholars have suggested that Chan practices may have drawn upon this Tantric paradigm to some extent. Yet, there also existed indigenous Chinese precedents to this performative understanding of ritual soteriology in the writings of early Confucian theorists.

For Confucians, the power of *li* was in large part derived from the fact that it was a body of ritual that had been passed down from the legendary sage-kings of Chinese mythological antiquity. Performing the *li* of these sage-kings was seen as a way of internally aligning oneself with the ideal of sagehood, which would have the external effect of producing an ordered, harmonious society, such as existed under the benevolent rule of sage-kings such as the mythological figures Yao and Shun. As Mencius stated when asked what one could do to become a sage like Yao and Shun, all humans possess the potential for sagehood; it is simply a matter of doing: "By wearing the clothes of Yao, speaking the words of Yao, and performing the actions of Yao, you become Yao" (trans. Bloom 2009).

Among Confucian thinkers, the most well-known and outspoken exponent of what we have here construed as a performative understanding of ritual was Xunzi. In his writings, we can find close parallels with several aspects of Rappaport's performative theory of ritual, in particular the notion that ritual's importance is in its reinforcement of canonical messages, and that ritual's efficacy is meaningful, instead of physical. Several times in his writings, he argues specifically that rituals do not produce the effects that they are believed to produce; rather, their value lies elsewhere:

> The *yu* [rainmaking ritual] is performed and it rains—why is this? We say that there is no reason for it; even without the ritual it would still rain. When the sun and moon are swallowed up [i.e., during an eclipse], [rituals are performed] to save them; when there is drought, the *yu* is performed [to bring rain] . . . One should not regard [these rituals] as actually obtaining the results that they seek for; rather, they should be seen as patterns (*wen*). The gentleman sees them as patterns; the common people see them as supernatural. To regard them as patterns is auspicious; to regard them as supernatural is inauspicious. (Xunzi, "*Tian lun*")

The term *wen*, which I have here translated as "patterns," is a multivalent term that can have various meanings. Paul Goldin has described Xunzi's use of the term as follows: "The term originally meant something like 'line' or 'pattern' . . . but in philosophical literature comes to mean a patterned, in particular a literary, response either to urges emanating from human will or to stimuli affecting human nature from outside" (Goldin 1999).

These patterns, according to Xunzi, were created by the ancient sage-kings for the purpose of controlling human emotions and maintaining the authority of a canonical order that was manifested in social hierarchy:

> Whence did rituals arise? I say: People are born with desires; if they desire and do not obtain [the object of their desires], then they cannot but seek it. If, in seeking, people have no measures or limits, then there cannot but be contention. Contention makes chaos, and chaos privation. The Former Kings hated such chaos, and established ritual and morality in order to divide them [i.e., people], in order to nourish people's desires and grant what people seek. They brought it about that desires need not be deprived of objects, that objects need not be depleted by desires; the two support each other and grow: this is where rituals arise from. (trans. Goldin 1999)

One of the simple ways in which ritual successfully "divides" the populace, for Xunzi, was in reminding people of their position within the hierarchy. By performing the rituals appropriate to one's station, he argued, one was both accepting the authority of the hierarchical system (the canonical message) and properly *performing* one's own position within that hierarchy:

> The Son of Heaven alone performs the suburban sacrifice to Heaven; altars of the soil may not be established by anyone lower than a feudal lord; but sacrifices such as the *tan* may be carried out by the officials and high ministers as well. In this way rites distinguish and make clear that the exalted should serve the exalted and the humble serve the humble, that great corresponds to great and small to small. (trans. Watson 1964)

On a large scale, ritual creates social stability; for the individual, ritual is also a means of self-cultivation. Xunzi saw ritual as patterns or models (*fa*) for proper behavior in particular situations; the emulation of these models was the means by which one became a sage. In his discussion of "Cultivating the Self," he wrote:

> Without models (*fa*), a person is lost; possessing models, but lacking apprehension of their meaning, one will be uncertain. To rely on models and also have a deep understanding of their principle, only then can one act appropriately. Ritual is the means by which one rectifies oneself; teachers are the means by which one rectifies the performance of ritual. Without ritual, how could the self be rectified? Without a teacher, how would I know if my performance of ritual is correct? By enacting ritual action, one's emotions become stabilized in ritual; by speaking as the teacher speaks, one's understanding comes to correspond with the teacher's. When emotions are stabilized in ritual

> and understanding has come to equal the teacher's, then one is a sage . . . Therefore, "learning" means to take ritual as a model. (Xunzi, "*Xiu shen*")

Thus, ritual is the model for sagely action; however, for ritual to be performed in a manner that is correct—capable of bringing about a state of sagehood—it must be accompanied by the proper understanding. It is in this light that we must regard Xunzi's statements that "the gentleman sees [ritual] as patterns," as "a way of being human." These are not merely theoretical observations; they are in fact prescriptive statements. Just as one must "speak as one's teacher speaks" in order to attain correct understanding, Xunzi urged his readers to accept his own theoretical understanding of ritual as part of the program that he advocated for cultivating the self. As Robert Campany has suggested,

> If ritual theory is an account of ritual from some point of view outside ritual, it is never a point of view outside *practice*. Theorizing about ritual is no less a mode of practice for being "theoretical": it is a project that takes on a particular shape, adopts a certain set of strategies, and perhaps most importantly, is undertaken for definite reasons. These reasons usually have to do with changing the way people live their lives—often even changing the way they participate in ritual. Ritual theory, in other words, often seeks to alter ritual practice as a social reality. This was certainly true of Xunzi and his contemporaries: those for whom they wrote about ritual were themselves participants in ritual. Paradoxically, Xunzi's aim in gaining an extra-ritual perspective on ritual was to enable his readers to perform and appreciate ritual in a new and better way. (Campany 1992)

Xunzi's understanding of ritual was performative in the sense that for him the value—the meaningful efficacy—of ritual lay in its performance, in which he saw the confluence of individual expression and canonical tradition. Moreover, even theorizing about ritual was to Xunzi, in a sense, performative; in the pursuit of sagehood, one must not only copy the external motions of ritual but also internalize the former sages' understanding of ritual performance:

> He who dwells in ritual and can ponder it well may be said to know how to think; he who dwells in ritual and does not change his ways may be said to be steadfast. He who knows how to think and to be steadfast, and in addition has a true love for ritual—he is a sage. (trans. Watson 1964)

To correctly perform *li* was both to *act* ("dwell in ritual") and to *think* ("ponder it well").

There is a final aspect to Xunzi's understanding of ritual that we will here consider as performative; this is the sense in which Jonathan Z. Smith has written that

> Ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things

> ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things. (Smith 1982)

Xunzi's understanding of the importance of ritual was rooted in a worldview that saw humanity as fundamentally "evil"—that is, naturally disposed to enter into conflict with others in the fulfillment of individual desires. This was just a simple fact for Xunzi, inscribed in human nature—in Smith's words, Xunzi recognized this as "the way things are." To counteract this tendency toward chaos, Xunzi and other Confucians did in fact see ritual, as Smith describes, as "a means of performing the way things ought to be"—in Xunzi's own words, "a way of being human." In a recent study, Seligman et al. have characterized this understanding of ritual as "subjunctive":

> By emphasizing ritual as subjunctive, we are underlining the degree to which ritual creates a shared, illusory world. Participants practicing ritual act as if the world produced in ritual were in fact a real one. And they do so fully conscious that such a subjunctive world exists in endless tension with an alternate world of daily experience. (Seligman et al. 2008)

As these authors point out, such a notion can be observed as underlying a number of Chinese formulations of ritual's value and efficacy. Many Chinese texts on ritual assume "a fractured, discontinuous world. It is up to humans to build patterns of relationships out of this fractured world and thereby create an ordered, ethical way of life. Ritual . . . becomes the repertoire of these patterns."

This notion that ritual provides order to a cosmos that would otherwise collapse into chaos is not only found in the writings of Xunzi and Confucian thinkers. It has also been an important theme underlying much of Daoist ritual practice from its beginnings in the early medieval period down to the modern age. The earliest known organized Daoist religious movement, the Way of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi dao*), developed in Western China toward the end of the Han Dynasty, during the late second and early third centuries CE. This was a period in which the vitality of the Han government was greatly diminished, and that eventually saw the collapse of the Han, the first great imperial dynasty in Chinese history. Early Daoists incorporated a considerable amount of ritual terminology and regalia from late Han imperial ritual, which scholars have suggested is evidence that early Daoists were essentially attempting to ritually recreate the well-ordered society of the Han:

> Without the downfall of the Han Dynasty there would be no Daoist religion as we know it. The emulation, by countless rebel leaders, of imperial prerogatives, and the formation of many small local centers of authority whose followers were organized in a mimicry of the Han administration, were to have a decisive influence on Daoism. The Sect of the Celestial Master grew out of one of these local messianic movements, and messianic hope for the recreation of the great Han empire was to be kept alive in the Daoist church throughout the Six Dynasties [third to sixth centuries CE]. (Seidel 1983)

Daoist cosmology assumes a primordial chaos (*hundun*) that must be brought into order through the transformative power of the *Dao*, a process that recurs cyclically. This cosmogonic process of ordering the universe is reproduced within Daoist ritual in several ways. For example, one of the performative elements that has existed within Daoist ritual since its earliest days is the practice of "pacing the Dipper" (*bugang*), also known as the "steps of Yu," in which the Daoist priest enacts the limping walk of the crippled Yu, one of China's mythological sage-kings, who brought order to chaos by controlling a great flood. As Poul Andersen has described,

> The practice of *bugang* derives, at least partly, from the ritual form of *Yubu*, Steps of Yu, and the concept of these steps is, of course, related to the legends of Yu. In Chinese mythology Yu is known first of all as the one who regulated the waters after the great flood, a fact he accomplished by walking through the world. His steps provide the exemplary model for the ritual form of *Yubu*. The flood may be equated with primordial chaos or, in a more synchronic mode of thought, the chaos underlying the existing state of order. And the cosmic order established by Yu may be identified with the societal order instituted by the emperor in accordance with the patterns of the universe. (Anderson 1990)

This aspect of Daoist ritual—its role in creating an ordered cosmos—is implicit in the terminology that Daoists used to refer to ritual itself:

> Daoist liturgy is called *ke*, a word that originally meant "measure," "scale," "class," "grade," and "to examine." The Chinese word for science (*kexue*) derives from it; it means "systematic, classificatory study." Indeed, Daoist ritual entails the construction of models in which all beings are classified. These models are of a cosmological nature. A service begins with the construction of the model, and ends with its destruction or, in terms of ritual, with its sacrifice or oblation . . . By making cosmological models the very basis of the ritual structure, rituals became the expression of natural processes . . . The oblation of this epistemological model of the universe was, in Daoist thought, not only an act of accomplishment inviting renewal by making way for a new cycle (as a recurrence in keeping with cyclical phases) but also a way to compel the universe to conform to this model: a sacrifice to make the world sacred. To oblate the cosmological canon was to make it work, to transform it . . . into reality. Nature thus became the replica of the model, and this mirror image was embedded in the structure of the ritual action itself. (Schipper and Wang 1986)

Daoist ritual is rich in performative aspects. As has already been discussed, in some Daoist rituals, particularly those that Schipper has dubbed as of the "vernacular" kind (in which the ritual is conducted in the local vernacular), the priest or ritual specialist becomes the commander of a great spirit army, blowing his horn to call up his troops, waving a sword to menace infernal demons, and leading his army to lay siege to the underworld to free a deceased person's soul, or entering into battle with local demons in exorcistic rituals (cf. Schipper 1985). In the "classical" rituals (wherein texts written in the classical idiom of literary Chinese are used), the priests

act in their capacity as officials in a vast celestial bureaucracy, issuing stern commands to their underlings and deferentially addressing their superiors by submitting elaborately worded memorials according to the protocols of courtly behavior. These rituals are replete with performative utterances, which often stand in for the actions they describe. As Schipper has observed:

> Words are more important than deeds. Almost all rituals call for three libations of wine, but when the text says: "Offer incense! A first libation of wine!" normally no incense is offered and the officiant can make (a) a real libation, (b) the gesture of making a libation or (c) do nothing at all. (Schipper 1995)

Such performative statements or gestures are not seen as merely symbolic; rather, they are substitutes that *perform* the actions called for.

Through such public rituals, the Daoist priest performs his role of celestial bureaucrat; in tandem with these public performances, he also performs complex alchemical manipulations within his own body that both imbue the ritual with further efficacy and will ultimately lead him to salvation, the realization of authenticity (*zhen*). Even "operative" or "external" alchemy (*waidan*), as practiced by Daoists and other Chinese literati, though it involved the actual manipulation and compounding of substances, was essentially a ritual action:

> Compounding an elixir is part of a larger process that consists of several stages, each of which is marked by the performance of rites and ceremonies. It is this process, and not merely heating the ingredients in the crucible, that constitutes the alchemical practice. Receiving the scriptures and the oral instructions, building the laboratory, kindling the fire, and ingesting the elixirs all require offering pledges to one's master and to the gods, observing rules on seclusion and purification, performing ceremonies to establish and protect the ritual area, and making invocations to the highest deities. Instead of being seen as mere appendages to the alchemical work, these ritual acts are deemed to be as essential to achieving an elixir as are the ingredients. (Pregadio 2006)

The elixirs produced through such ritual acts of alchemy, which often contained toxic chemicals such as lead and mercury, were considered to be the food by which divine beings were nourished. In some cases they were actually ingested in what amounted to a kind of "ritual suicide." As Strickmann has argued, their ingestion was itself part of an attempt to *perform* as deities in order to attain perfection: "If the postulant wished to behave as they, he must adapt his diet to theirs" (Strickmann 1979). Over time these practices were internalized in meditative practices that came to be known as "inner alchemy" (*neidan*), in which the adept's own body was transformed into an alchemical laboratory. The various internal organs became the different alchemical vessels, the "tripod and furnace"; bodily fluids and subtle energies became raw components, the "lead and mercury," which were compounded into elixir through the fires of the practitioner's cultivation. Such transformations were

not merely symbolic artifices; they were regarded as concrete means of refining the physical body and "cultivating perfection."

A performative approach is particularly illuminating in revealing the ritual aspects of essentially private practices such as meditation (though, particularly in Buddhist monasteries, meditation is often practiced communally), as in the case of the Daoist inner alchemy described above. Viewed performatively, we can see such practices as enactments of particular soteriologies, often replicating the actions that these various traditions' founders were said to have performed in their initial attainment of transcendence. Thus, for example, when Buddhists sit cross-legged in a meditation posture, they are emulating the model of Śākyamuni Buddha, who attained enlightenment seated beneath the Bodhi-tree. One term for meditation in Chan Buddhism is "facing the wall" (*mianbi*), which evokes the well-known legend of Bodhidharma, the putative Indian patriarch of Chan Buddhism, sitting in front of a wall in a darkened cave for nine years. In Daoist inner alchemy, the practice of bodily refinement and transformation culminates in the conception of an "embryo of sagehood" (*shengtai*), enacting the birth of Laozi, the cosmogonic act of production from primordial chaos (Schipper 1993). As Isabelle Robinet has written,

> *Neidan* texts repeatedly allude to *hundun*. Alchemists begin their work by "opening" or "boring" *hundun*; in other words, they begin from the Origin, infusing its transcendent element of precosmic light into the cosmos in order to reshape it. From a physiological point of view, *hundun* is the beginning of embryonic life, the moment when the embryo receives the pneuma; in alchemical terms, it is the time when alchemical Lead and Mercury are still merged with each other. *Hundun* is the elixir, the number 1, and the Original Pneuma (*yuanqi*). As the Center, it is a synonym of the [alchemical] tripod and furnace (*dinglu*) and of the Embryo of Sainthood (*shengtai*). Thus, *hundun* is the origin, the center, and the end. (Robinet 2008)

"Ritual" is often considered to be limited to public performances; however, we may recall Rappaport's statement that the only essential message that must be conveyed in ritual is the performer's self-acceptance of the orders encoded within a liturgy; that is, that the practitioner is sufficient as her own audience; ritual does not necessarily have to be a matter of public pronouncement. Attentiveness to performative aspects allows us to see meditative practices as falling within the boundaries of ritual: they are largely formalistic and invariant; they constitute an internal acceptance of canonical orders encoded in traditions; and their efficacy is realized through the performance of the act itself. And, there is a clearly subjunctive aspect to meditative practice; in meditation, one performs the "ordering" of the self in accordance with some idealized notion of how an enlightened being, a perfected transcendent, or a sage might behave, in explicit contrast to the vagaries of one's ordinary existence. Again, as Xunzi stated, it is a "way of being human"; in the performance of meditation, one enacts the full potential of humanity.

Ritual as Efficacious Power

Up to this point, we have considered a number of examples of Chinese ritual and the broader theoretical ideas concerning ritual that they entail, as well as a few theoretical discussions of ritual by prominent Chinese intellectuals. We have argued that these ways of understanding ritual are performative in the sense that they consist of the construction of an "as-if" reality, a performance of the way things should be rather than the way they are. We have also noted that some individuals, such as Xunzi, seem to have understood their own ritual practice as performative in a similar fashion to modern scholars. However, it must be noted that such a point of view would not necessarily have been universal among premodern Chinese; in fact, such a theoretical understanding of ritual would probably have been limited to a relatively small number of ritual specialists and intellectuals. Even as the Daoist priest performing a *jiao* offering might understand his performance as the ritual creation of an ordered cosmos, others in attendance at such a service would likely view it in different ways—as a (hopefully) efficacious act intended to bring about some sort of felicitous or apotropaic result. To return to our earlier quote from Xunzi, we have observed how regarding ritual as a "way of being human" can be construed performatively, but what of those who see it as "a matter of serving spirits"?

In those presentations of ritual wherein it is seen as being supernaturally efficacious, this efficacy is often explained in terms of the related concepts of *ling* ("numinosity") and *ganying* ("stimulus-response"). Variations of these terms abound; they can even be combined into a single compound, *linggan*, which indicates a numinous (*ling*) ability to stimulate (*gan*) or elicit some sort of supernatural result. *Ganying* can be used to refer to the essentially automatic operation of cosmological forces along a principle that Robert Sharf has described as "sympathetic resonance" (Sharf 2002), as in the ritual manipulation of the energies of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases (*wuxing*) of Chinese correlative cosmology. It can also refer to the principle whereby some sort of human behavior stimulates (*gan*) a supernatural response (*ying*). Such behavior can be moral/immoral action (in which case *ganying* has the ethical connotation of "retribution") or it can be some sort of ritual entreaty or coercion that produces a result.

Ling refers to the numinous power by which the result is produced, which is most often seen as residing in a particular deity. Thus, when rituals are performed with the expectation that they will produce some sort of efficacious result, the expectation is that the supernatural being on whom the ritual is focused will, through its numinous ability, respond to the supplicant's request (or order, as the case may be). When a ritual produces its desired effect, one term used to describe this is *lingyan*, which could be translated as a "proof (*yan*) of numinous efficacy (*ling*)." Collections of such tales of ritual efficacy were compiled and circulated in premodern China by adherents of various cults of worship (including Buddhism and Daoism) as proof of the

efficacy of the religious practices associated with those cults. Circulation of such texts would have served to further reinforce the perception of a particular cult object as *ling*; thus, a deity's *ling* was established through a kind of circular logic, as described by P. Steven Sangren: "one worships a god because it is powerful; one knows a god is powerful because it is worshipped" (Sangren 1987).

We will return to Sangren's theory regarding the construction of *ling*, but first we will briefly consider the important question of exactly *how* Chinese worshipers related with their gods and thereby accessed this numinous power. As Emily M. Ahern has demonstrated, Chinese rituals can generally be divided into two categories: those that involve interpersonal transactions and those that do not (Ahern 1981). Many well-known Chinese rituals fall into the former category. In such rituals, interaction with spirits is seen as governed by essentially the same logic as ordinary interpersonal interactions. This fact has been noted by a number of scholars of Chinese religion, who have observed that a great deal of ritual operates under what is generally referred to as a "bureaucratic paradigm" (cf. Wolf 1974). Chinese deities are often seen as officials in a celestial pantheon, and in such cases ritual interaction with them is effected through bureaucratic channels.

As discussed above, this model is explicitly promoted in Daoism; becoming a Daoist priest (*daoshi*) involves the transmission of registers—lists of spirit-officials and demonic soldiers who, with the transmission of the register, become the priest's subordinates—whose possession invests the priest as an official within that celestial hierarchy. Daoist ritual thus involves the priest engaging divine and demonic beings according to the protocols of bureaucratic interaction. Members of the community also recognize the priest's position within that celestial hierarchy, and thus may call on him to intercede on their behalf in dealing with particular situations. As Ahern has described,

> Chinese ritual acts directed to spirits take their logic from everyday interactions. They are not intended as "naturally causal" and so they cannot be analyzed as such . . . Instead, some are intended to have the sort of effects produced when a government office issues an order forbidding vehicular travel on a certain pathway. On the one hand, the order, issued by the appropriate body, in and of itself makes the regulation come into effect. This kind of effect is what Austin identified in performative utterances . . . On the other hand, the order gives people a reason for acting one way rather than another. (Ahern 1981)

Thus, Ahern suggests that the fact that the relationships characterized by ritual activities are so directly reflective of political and social structures of power endows these activities with an efficacy that proceeds naturally from the concept of bureaucratic hierarchy itself.

> As Chinese see it, the potency of ritual acts performed in this manner, as of government edicts, depends entirely on the power and authority relations involved. Chinese gods have power and authority over ghosts because of the positions they each have in a

> bureaucratic system. People can tap that power and authority if they directly implore the gods to act, obtain orders (charms) written and sealed on the gods' behalf, or hire a Daoist priest to act as the gods' emissary. This potency might be called "bureaucratic efficacy." (Ahern 1981)

This interpersonal logic is not limited to bureaucratic transactions, however; Ahern has also discussed the ways in which ritual actors utilize other interpersonal paradigms such as etiquette to attempt to manipulate supernatural beings—for example, offering gifts in exchange for favors requested, or using stylized forms of polite speech to flatter or cajole spirits into providing what is requested (Ahern 1981).

Ahern has called attention to the performative aspect of such interpersonal rituals, in particular the heavy use of performative speech. As she has noted, in Chinese rituals that are intended by their performers to be efficacious, there is a strong presence of performative or "illocutionary" acts (Ahern 1979). We can regard these interpersonal rituals as performative in another sense as well, in the sense offered by Rappaport—that by performing them the practitioner confirms their acceptance of canonical orders such as bureaucratic hierarchy and social etiquette. Though they may not understand this consciously, as Xunzi urged his readers to, nevertheless, in their practice of interpersonal ritual intended to "serve spirits," performers are still ritually submitting themselves to the authority of important social institutions and thereby contributing to the creation of an ordered universe. Ahern has suggested as much in putting forth the hypothesis that rituals that proceed according to bureaucratic logic may in fact play a didactic role in teaching those outside the political system how to negotiate its complex workings, suggesting that

> it is possible that the formal similarities between the Chinese religious system and the political system made the one an apt tool for understanding the workings of the other. If dealing with the gods could be seen as a rehearsal, or playing out, of skills important in dealing with the earthly power system, this gives us one way of understanding why interactions with gods were fashioned in such detail after ordinary interactions. The more detailed the rehearsal, the more likely the real performance is to succeed. (Ahern 1981)

Finally, there is a subjunctive aspect to these rituals. Ahern has noted that bureaucratic deities generally seem to be much more accessible to the general populace than actual bureaucrats. Additionally, when she asked her informants to describe the type of relationship that they conceived of themselves as having with the divinities to whom they regularly offered devotion, she was surprised that the majority of them seemed to view their gods more as paternal/maternal figures than as bureaucratic overlords. One hypothesis that she has advanced to explain this fact is that "gods are considered to behave the way bureaucrats should ideally behave but seldom actually do behave. Just as parents ideally love their children impartially, benevolently, and

attentively, and children respond with genuinely felt respect and care, so officials should behave and people respond" (Ahern 1981).

I have engaged in this discussion of the logic of Chinese interpersonal ritual and its performative characteristics because this logic is an important part of the complex of beliefs centered around the concept of *ling* (numinous efficacy) in the Chinese understanding of ritual. When an efficacious response is obtained from a deity addressed through bureaucratic channels, the corresponding notion that the deity is efficacious serves to also authenticate that bureaucratic mode of communication. Simultaneously, the ritualized address to that deity in a bureaucratic fashion contributes to the notion that the deity is efficacious; it brings the weight of the hallowed Chinese sociocosmological hierarchy to bear on that particular ritual action.

Sangren, an anthropologist working on modern religious practice in Taiwan, has made similar observations in his analysis of the workings of *ling* in Taiwanese ritual. He has argued that history is an important factor in determining the degree to which a deity is regarded as efficacious, and it is often specific historical events that are related to the reinforcement of crucial social structures that are seen as contributing to a deity's perception as *ling*. As he notes, "The occasions when communities have in fact acted most like corporate entities have been precisely those that are appropriated to the status of miracles" circulated as evidence of a deity's numinosity (Sangren 1987). In other words, the concept of efficacy is used to highlight historical performances in which canonical orders are affirmed and encoded by the individuals who become deified; many of the deities who are the object of both regional and national cult devotion are regarded as having been promoted to their celestial office as a result of their extreme moral virtue. As Ahern has suggested, "By canonizing dedicated and law-abiding citizens and officials posthumously, the government could praise and reward conduct of which it approved" (Ahern 1981). Worshiping deities whose efficacy is thereby constituted becomes an acceptance of the canonical orders encoded in their canonization as deities.

Thus, in the concept of efficacy, where a deity responds to an individual's request, there is the confluence of canonical and self-referential messages. To perform an efficacious ritual whose efficacy is sanctioned by history ("not entirely encoded by the practitioners," and thus possessing canonical authority) is not only to accept what is encoded in this "canon of efficacy" but also to see one's own desires as expressed in the ritual performance (the self-referential message) receive canonical sanction in their realization. At the same time, through the ritual performance, the performer becomes a part of those historical processes by which efficacy is constituted; as one of Ahern's informants told her, "When we say a god is [*ling*] we mean the god really does help us. Word is then spread from person to person, each telling the other that the god helped. So it is really a matter of relations among men" (Ahern 1981). Thus, Rappaport has argued,

> Liturgical performance not only recognizes the authority of the conventions it represents, it gives them their very existence . . . A ritual performance is an instance of the

> conventional order to which it conforms. Conversely, a ritual performance realizes the order of which it is an instance. (Rappaport 1999)

A performative approach to ritual efficacy helps to explain the circular logic of *ling*, which both constitutes, and is constituted by, efficacious ritual performances.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present some important aspects of Chinese ritual, as well as some influential theories regarding the performance of Chinese ritual developed by both premodern Chinese intellectuals and modern academic theorists. We have examined these various aspects of Chinese ritual through the lens of a performative approach such as is advocated by such ritual theorists as Tambiah, Bell, and Rappaport. We have found this performative approach helpful for several reasons. First, it does not presuppose a sharp distinction between thought and action, which is crucial for the study of Chinese ritual: in the Chinese understanding, ritual action is inseparable from beliefs regarding ritual, even to the extent that, for individuals such as Xunzi, second-order theorizing about ritual is viewed as an important part of ritual practice. Second and moreover, we have argued that a performative approach is well-suited to analyzing a range of indigenous viewpoints regarding ritual. Third and above all, we have attempted to demonstrate that the Chinese concept(s) that we translate as "ritual" cannot be understood on the basis of traditional Western assumptions that see it as action divorced from meaningful content. Chinese understandings of ritual are just as subtle and nuanced, and have perhaps a longer pedigree even than those current in Western scholarship. To study Chinese ritual responsibly, one must take into consideration and account for indigenous Chinese perspectives on the topic, in all their variety.

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CHAPTER 15

Material Culture

Julius N. Tsai, Independent Scholar

In the darkness of night, a mirror flashes forth with a brilliant light. Caught in its glare, a benevolent sojourner has turned into a rapacious wolf . . . An adept grasps a talisman upon which a maze-like "blueprint" of a sacred mountain has been drawn. Meditating upon the "true form" of the mountain, he finds hidden grottoes and passageways that link to magical worlds within, illuminated by the light of interior suns and moons and fed by the water of hidden streams . . . A priest and his acolytes labor to sculpt the form of a cosmic dragon out of hundreds of pounds of fine white rice, carefully lain out before the altar upon a grid marking the spatio-temporal coordinates of Eight Trigrams, as articulated in the divinatory class, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*). Dotting the eyes of the creature with blood drawn from a rooster's crown, the dragon comes alive as the animating spirit of the local place. Having appeased the god, parts of the dragon are subsequently secreted in the temple crypt, where they serve as the divine "presence and power" that will anchor the temple and its community in peace and prosperity.

Such scenes are "sensational" in the most basic sense of the word: they quicken the perceptions and force us to rethink the ways in which it might be possible for humans to engage in "material religion," the "objects, images, spaces and visual practices" that comprise lived religion (Goa 2005). Here, we will build upon the recent scholarly move away from generally "Protestantized" bifurcations of spirit/matter, mind/body, and thought/practice that elevate the former and devaluate the latter, and present Chinese religions (and religion, more broadly) as integrally rather than peripherally concerned with embodied (material and sensate) realms of practice.

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Traditional Chinese worldviews recognize a "continuity of being." All things in the universe are seen as being composed of *qi*, the "cosmic breath." The difference between a boulder and god, in this view, is a matter of the degree of grossness or refinement of that *qi* rather than the expression some unbridgeable ontological divide. A material object is not "inanimate." A material object is seen as "alive" not only in a religious sense (as a repository of divine presence and power) but also in a cultural sense as a being endowed—through an investigation of its production, history of use, and interpretation—with a biography, a career path, and even with social, legal, and religious personhood. Seeing the centrality of the material dimensions of Chinese religions entails a contextualizing move that focuses not only on objects *per se* but also on the nested fields of practice and social relationships with which objects are related. An added benefit of such a focus is that it moves away from sectarian-based boundaries of inquiry and toward case-based studies that allow for a more synoptic view of the many traditions that comprise Chinese religions. Here we may cite C. K. Yang's distinction between two modes of religious life in China, the first employing the useful metaphor of the "three teachings" (Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) as three mountains separated at the discrete "peaks" of institutional religion, the second seeing those traditions as interconnected at the foothills of diffused religious practice (Yang 1991).

What follows is a heuristic model for the exploration of material objects and their entailed worldviews and practices. We will examine three dimensions of the interaction between material objects and religious goals and aspirations. First, material objects serve as the "stuff" of religious metaphor-making, both circumscribing and expanding the possibilities of thought. Second, material objects inspire a transformation of sensory experience itself, stimulating "higher" operations of the sense faculties toward religious experience and attainment. Finally, material objects become animate in the context of ritual acts, serving as embodiments of "transitive" properties of divine *presentia* and *potentia*—presence and power.

The "Stuff" of Metaphor

A material object often serves as the very concrete medium of thought, as a metaphor for a more abstract conception. Etymologically considered, a metaphor (Greek *metapherein*) is a vehicle that performs the work of "carrying over" the reader or hearer from one domain of experience to another, shaping the understanding of an otherwise unobservable or elusive entity by means of a more readily experienced object, image, or experience. It is important to note that, far from simply serving as a literary embellishment that leaves an idea essentially unchanged as it is ferried over into another experiential realm, metaphors actually serve as transformers of meaning. Of course, this also opens up the very real possibility of misreading a metaphor as a result of one's misperception of the cultural context of the material

object that has been used to generate it, as features are both added and subtracted in that act of metaphoric transference.

Metaphors may serve as operative mental frameworks within a culture, whether working in a synchronic way to represent a self-conscious notion of the social structure or in a diachronic way to illuminate a "key sequence" of cultural activity (Ortner 1973). Once generated, metaphors behave in a "thing-like" fashion; that is, like a class of objects themselves, albeit they are mental objects that stand in a dialectical relationship with their physical counterparts. For example, one episode of the classic novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*), dating from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), describes Tang Emperor Taizong's death, descent into hell, and return to life. The religious framework of karma is richly presented through the metaphor of capital. The emperor, besieged in hell by hordes of tormented ghosts, is advised to borrow cash from an infernal depository. When asked about the source of this largesse, Taizong is told, "in the world of the Living is a man who has deposited great sums of gold and silver in our Region of Darkness . . . We shall borrow a roomful of money from him and distribute it among the hungry ghosts." The man, an impoverished but devout Buddhist named Xiang Liang, possesses next to nothing in the world of the living but, unbeknownst to him, his acts of charity have resulted in "karmic capital," thirteen rooms of gold and silver in hell:

> It turned out this man made his living by selling water, while his wife, whose surname was Zhang, sold pottery in front of their home. Whatever money they made, they kept only enough for their subsistence, giving all the rest either as alms to the monks or as gifts to the dead by purchasing paper money and burning it. They thus built up enormous merit; for though they were poor folks in the World of Light, they were, in fact, leading citizens for whom jade and gold were laid up in the other world. (Yu 2006)

Back in the world of the living, Taizong seeks to repay the devout Xiang Liang and his wife with an enormous sum of gold and silver from the imperial treasury. When Xiang Liang and his wife refuse, the emperor decrees that the money should be used to erect a grand temple dedicated to them. Further, the emperor orders a great Mass of Land and Water in order to provide a ritual feast and occasion for hearing the *dharma* to lost souls. Though a literary depiction, this narrative of a particular karmic chain of interconnected actions and events shows the way in which the material world was seen as a part of a whole religious economy that permeated other realms of existence as well. Indeed, the metaphor of "capital" for karma opens up rich perspectives into the circulation of numinous power through everyday "economic" as well as ritual activity, revealing the interplay between material objects and their ideation.

Because metaphors are often generated from people's daily experience of material objects, which have their own culturally contextualized fields of perception and use, scholars must conduct a kind of "metaphorical archaeology" in order to "become

aware of the full implications of our own uses and understandings of an image, even as we endeavor to faithfully reconstruct the metaphorical imagery available to its original creators" (Oshima 1983). This means thinking explicitly about the often implicit dimensions of religious worldview and ethos in which a particular metaphorical usage is embedded. Let us proceed by discussing a case—that of magical mirrors in China—that highlights the rich complexities of the dialectic between experienced objects and constructed metaphors.

In both Eastern and Western traditions, the mind has often been likened to a mirror, as Paul Demiéville has masterfully shown (Demiéville 1987). In the modern West, an everyday understanding of a mirror is that it is simply a reflector of whatever is placed before it. The mind is thought to be a faithful, passive speculum of an objective external world, which is a "mirror of nature." However, a question arises: If a culture were to think of mirrors within a vastly different cultural and religious context, what would that do to the metaphor of the mind as a mirror? Let us perform a bit of metaphorical archeology by looking at the portrayal of mirrors in early and medieval China.

Significantly, the two terms often used for mirrors in early China, *jian* and *jing*, may also be used in verbal senses to denote the act of not just *reflecting* but also *illuminating* or *revealing* that which is dark, obscure, or hidden. In Chinese, a distinction was generally made between *jian*, a basin filled with reflective water, and *jing*, a reflecting surface crafted out of burnished metal. We may understand this more active, illuminating aspect of mirrors in light of their cosmic significance. As a passage in one of the treatises in the Latter Han (25–220 CE), the *Huainan zi*, describes them, mirrors were linked with a fundamental cosmological dyad, as seen in the square form of the *fangzhu* and the circular form of the *yangsui* mirrors: "When the *yangsui* sees the sun, there is a burning and fire is produced. When the *fangzhu* sees the moon, there is a dampness and water is produced." Further, the renowned "TLV" mirrors of the Han Dynasty (so named for the angled patterns that adorn the back of such mirrors) represent the cosmic forces of *Yin* and *Yang*, the Five Phases, and the zodiacal animals in cosmic space and time. Such designs reappear in cosmic boards (*shi* or *liuren*) that formed the basis of divinatory arts, locating the user within the dynamic parameters of nested levels of natural and cosmic reality. Mirrors were also used as burial goods to illuminate the soul's journey to other realms (Loewe 1994).

Along with highlighting the illuminating action of mirrors, early Chinese texts speak of the way that magical mirrors could provide truer, better sight. The sick could stand before mirrors and see their internal organs and any maladies within; mirrors could heal through their cooling rays of reflected moonlight; and a legendary mirror of the First Emperor could detect malicious intentions on the part of his concubines, revealing details in the interior physiognomy upon the basis of which a subject might be executed or spared. Mirrors served as armors against demons for mountain journeys in the wild, as related in numerous episodes of the early medieval *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopuzi*). In his fieldwork in nineteenth century

Fujian, J. J. M. deGroot writes of popular traditions in which a mirror reveals the true identity of a pair of shady characters, paralyzing them by means of its gaze and showing them in their demonic forms of a green-haired tortoise and hoary monkey. Further, magical mirrors were said to emit "so brilliant a light, that a glare was visible over every house where it was," such powers being attributed to the indwelling *Yang* element (deGroot 1910).

Given such cosmological and magical associations, the metaphor of the mind as a mirror becomes more intelligible, as it is conditioned by particular contexts of experience and use. In the Warring States (475–221 BCE) classic *Zhuangzi*, an early *locus classicus* of the mirror metaphor, the mirror is associated with a numinous intelligence illuminating all things in full view of Heaven and Earth, serving as a dynamic basis for spontaneous action: "Within yourself, no fixed positions: Things as they take shape disclose themselves. Moving, be like water. Still, be like a mirror. Respond like an echo." And again, "If water is still, its clarity lights up the hairs of beard and eyebrows, its evenness is plumb with the carpenter's level." In addition, the mirror is endowed with a powerful stillness that serves as a descriptor of *de* ("virtue"), a moral or even magical charisma that drives out imperfections in oneself and others. Indeed, "only the still can still whatever is stilled."

To cite another case, the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liuzu tan jing*), a seminal text of the Chan (Zen) tradition, uses the metaphor of the mind in a famous pair of dueling verses. The first verse is a paean to the meditative work of cultivation: "The body is the Bodhi tree, the mind is like a clear mirror. At all times we must strive to polish it, and must not let the dust collect." The second verse appeals to "innate enlightenment": "Bodhi originally has no tree, the mirror also has no stand. Buddha nature is always clean and pure; where is there room for dust?" (Yampolsky 1967). Here, the mirror metaphor is employed to refer to the pristine Buddha nature within. While the metaphor of the mirror refers to the complex relationship between gradualism and subitism in Zen Buddhism, our review of the Chinese mirror as a magical source of light, stillness, and purity gives the metaphor a depth of cultural resonance that goes along with its philosophical use. By exploring the field of experience and use of a material object, we gain new eyes for a central metaphor that is thereby generated, and that plays a critical role in the articulation of a spiritual ideal in Chinese religions.

Truer Sight: Ritual and the "True Form" of Things

Sight is one of the main avenues by which a material object is approached. As scholars have pointed out in traditions that we may profitably compare to the Chinese case, seeing is a complex act that involves the interplay between the object's creator and the act of perceptive experience, understanding, and discernment on the part of the viewer. Nor does the material object simply stand passively between the artisan and the viewer. In her analysis of the Hindu phenomenon of *darśan* ("auspicious

sight"), Diana Eck writes: "The central act of Hindu worship . . . is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity" (Eck 1985). In this analysis, "seeing" is tantamount to a form of handling or touching.

The visual experience of the material world is enhanced and transformed within ritual and meditative settings. In Buddhism as in Daoism, the process of visualization has taken on a number of different dimensions in both spiritual style and soteriological aim. For example, Buddhaghosa's vast compedium of Theravada Buddhist meditation, the *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), speaks of the "ten devices" that may be employed when beginning the path of meditation. Each device, which may begin as a physical object such as a vessel of water, then gives rise to the "eidetic sign," a memorized image that is faithful to the last detail and that may be established in the mind at will. Finally, the eidetic sign becomes a "representational" sign, which stands not only as a duplicate of the physical meditation device but also has become an "abstract visual representation of its 'essence' " with a dynamic presence of its own.

Within the *Shangqing* tradition of Daoism, methods of visualization constituted one of the most highly developed aspects of its religious practice, revolving around the meditative visualization of gods within the body, as well as journeys to fantastic terrestrial and stellar realms. Isabelle Robinet considers visualization to involve the creation of a "third" reality hovering between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, a process that leads to the creation of a newly cosmicized body (Robinet 1989).

One early Daoist text contains a method called "summoning the void" (*zhaowu*). This exercise was to be performed at dawn. The adept was instructed to engage in preparatory motions such as wiping the corners of the eyes, knocking the teeth, and swallowing saliva; then, lying down and with the head covered by a blanket, eyes closed, and ears covered, the visualization into the five directions was to begin. The heart of the visualization consisted of gazing with one's inner sight far into each of the four cardinal directions and upwards, in each case to a fantastic distance of ninety thousand *li* away. The following are directions for the exercise as performed in the eastern direction:

> You will vividly be able to see beyond ninety thousand li to the east. The mountains, rivers, grasses and woods, the birds and the beasts and peoples such as the elders of the Hu people will appear as if right in front of you. Cause their image to be distinct and examine them properly. If their image is not stable, then visualize them again. After a long while, the images will naturally appear. (*Dongzhen taishang zidu yanguang shen yuanbian jing*, HY 1321, 3a)

What is noteworthy about this exercise is the way in which the visualizing adept must labor to construct and maintain the inner world that has been created and populated.

Let us consider the case of a particular class of objects that were used to ritually embody as well as connect the Daoist adept to the "true form" (*zhenxing*) of reality. These are the medieval Chinese talismans known as the *True Form of the Five Sacred Mountains* (*Wuyue zhenxing tu*). Talismans were modeled after imperial tokens in which the ruler and subject would represent their mutual contractual oath by means of a bipartite tally, with each party to the oath keeping one side. In religious terms, the talisman represented not only the link that bound the adept to the divinities in the heavenly realm but also the authority to act as an agent of the celestial imperium here on earth (cf. Seidel 1983).

The talismans represent the configurations of mountains, as seen here:

> The Charts of the True Forms of the Five Marchmounts are the image of the mountains and rivers. They twist and go crooked, turn and return. As for the form and propensity of the hills, their elevation is uneven and their length curls and twists, in flowing waves similar to those of a rousing brush. How the jutting peaks rise up! The peaks and cliff faces, the clouds and forests, the black and yellow have a shape like that of written words. Thus the Lord of the Tao of Heavenly Perfection looked down at their regulated forms and followed the tendencies of the mountains. He followed the script-like rhythms, and following their forms named the mountains. (*Dongxuan lingbao wuyue guben zhenxing tu,* HY 441)

A remark attributed to Ge Hong in this passage demonstrates that later immortals also noted the locations of numinous medicinal plants as well as stone chambers, the latter presumably where scriptures could be located and the gods could be contacted:

> The black refers to the form of the mountains, and the red is for water sources. The white refers to the mouths of caves and grottoes. Lines drawn small refer to the minuteness of the hills and slopes. Lines drawn large refer to the forcefulness of the high and jutting peaks.

One also finds notes regarding points of entry; the locations of medicinal plants such as the "purple stone fungi"; sources of springs of water; and the locations of august past visitors in the stone chambers: "Yu of the Xia was here. The height [of this chamber] is forty-two *zhang* and two *chi*." Such details might be seen as visual cues to guide the journeys of the adept in meditative visualization, not to mention the encounter with the divinities enfeoffed as governing spirits of the place.

In sum, a talisman such as the one described in the *True Form of the Five Sacred Mountains* serves a number of religious functions: a necessary and tangible token of esoteric transmission from master to disciple; an authenticating document that embodies the authority of the celestial empire and that allows access to numinous realms as well as protection from catastrophe and demonic forces; and a meditative

map leading to sacred places in which the distinction between outer and inner worlds is traversed and ultimately obliterated.

A "Body" of Ritual Work

By now it should be apparent that the material object within Chinese religions is understood, experienced, and used within a distinctive cultural context. We may think of the helpful analogy of the "pivoting of the sacred," whereby the sacred is understood not so much as a force *inhering* in any given object, place, or person but rather as a *projected* quality, attributed—as a matter of cultural choice and through the means of ritual transformation—to an endless and shifting array of objects. In this section, we will see how material objects may be liturgically transformed into "substitute bodies" that stand in for vital presences within the human and divine realms.

First, with regard to the ritual animation of objects, much fruitful work has been done in the study of Asian religions, particularly in Buddhist studies, to describe the religious efficacy of relics (the remains of sainted figures imbued with the presence and power of the person themselves) and icons (representational images, both anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic). These relics and icons are ritually "activated" in a consecration ritual called the "dotting of the eyes" (*kaiguang*, "illumining") or through the incorporation of a sacred text or relic into the icon itself. The artisan or presiding ritual specialist performs this most critical ritual action by touching the unpainted eyes with paint, ink, or blood to illuminate the eyes and thus activate a two-way visual communication between observing humans and a far-seeing god. The power of the illuminated eye is great indeed. Cautionary tales of hapless artisans struck dead by the force of divine power point to the danger of looking directly into the eyes of the now-animated icon within this charged ritual atmosphere. Some might even choose to "dot the eyes" by gazing indirectly at the icon through a mirror, in this way obviating the need for direct visual contact.

Second, the activation of the object in question can result in it serving as a substitute body. Early Buddhist traditions spoke of images of the Buddha that would perspire, talk, and even come to life in the absence of the Buddha himself. Zen traditions have historically made use of "living icons"—portraits or even mummified bodies of masters that became vivified presences in miraculous encounters. Statues of former masters within Buddhism and Daoism were known to have been animated by means of a small chamber to the rear of the statue containing a talisman or other sacred text. Within early medieval Daoism, the practice of "corpse deliverance" (*shijie*) involved the projection of the adept's bodily image onto an object such as a staff, sandals, or a robe. While that holographic presence was mourned and buried, the adept would be free to move to a remote place, change his name, and be "off the books" of the otherworldly bureaucracy that otherwise determined mortal lifespans (cf. Cedzich 2001). In what follows, I will build on such studies to broaden our

understanding of concepts such as "substitute body" and "embodiment." I will do this by presenting some observations on a contemporary Daoist practice known as the rite of Pacifying the Dragon (*anlong*).

The Daoist rite of Pacifying the Dragon "pacifies and secures" (*anzhen*) the humanly built environment, typically a temple and its grounds, following major construction or renovation. As practiced today in northern Taiwan, the rite taps into ancient practices that sought expiation from the earth (*jietu* or *xietu*), particularly in order to avoid harm from a malevolent class of ghosts and demons known as the "killers" (*sha*). Through the ritual animation of a dragon constructed for the occasion, this dramatically embodied enactment wrestles with the question of how humans may best take their place within the natural order of things. In paying attention to the highly visible iconography of the rite, I focus on the ritual dynamic by which the body of the dragon, crafted out of grains of rice, functions as a kind of mesocosm (or, perhaps better yet, a "mesocorpus") mediating between the "body" of the earth and the "body" of the architectural structure being pacified.

The dragon's potency as a cosmic animal in the Chinese religious imagination is well known: it stands as the embodiment of *qi*, particularly as the atmospheric essences of the rain and clouds in the heavens above, and the roiling veins of energy that make up the terrestrial topography below. Increasingly elaborate natural philosophies in early and medieval China described the landscape as made up of the configured flow and accumulation of *qi*. Guo Pu's (276–324) *Zangshu* (*Burial Book*), an early medieval classic of geomantic theory, discusses *qi*-infused topography in the form of a coiled terrestrial dragon: a site surrounded by rising terrain, conspicuous topographic features corresponding to a dragon in the east and a tiger in the west, protectively sheltered to its rear (north), and with life-giving water flowing past its front (south). Centuries later we find this conception underlying the construction and ritual appeasement of the rice dragon in the rite of Pacifying the Dragon. A general description of the ritual activation, appeasement, and disposition of the ritualized body of the dragon is offered below, with an emphasis on the significance of the material culture of this practice:

Preliminaries

The monumental icon of the cosmic dragon, which forms the centerpiece of the ritual, is constructed over several hours from hundreds of pounds of rice; it can measure well over thirty feet long and twenty feet wide. Laid out upon the cosmic patterns of the Eight Trigrams of the *Yijing*, at the top the dragon's body, are placed nine lamps to symbolize the nine *qi* of the eastern quarter, the quadrant of incipient *Yang* with which the dragon is associated. Two ducks' eggs form its eyes, with dots drawn to make the pupils, and another egg is inscribed with the character *wang* ("king") to signify the royal status of this deity. Two porcelain soup spoons, around which are wrapped golden offering paper, are used to form the ears, and two other pieces of the

offering paper are used to form its jowls. The mouth of the dragon is formed from two plates: within burns one of the lanterns, sitting atop red paper. The dragon's whiskers are shaped from around twenty incense sticks, bent at various intervals. Scores of coins are placed along the length of the dragon's torso as its scales.

To either side of the rice dragon are placed papier mâché icons along with inscriptions to Lord Dragon (Longjun) and Lord Tiger (Hujun), animal embodiments of the dynamic of *yang* and *yin* that forms all things, life and death, weal and woe. Inscriptions beneath each of the animals promise the bestowal of social advancement and agricultural plenty for the community's inhabitants as a result of the visitation of the dragon and expulsion of the tiger. These blessings are also symbolized by a bushel basket filled with grains, coins, and nails, standing for plentiful harvests, riches, and offspring (*ding* for "nails" is a homonym for "sons"). In front of each are placed offerings of sacrificial meats, tea, wine, and sacrificial currency.

The nine lamps are lit, and the gods are summoned, via twenty-four strikings of the drum, to bring the human community together. The officiating priest walks over to the southeast corner of the dragon, where a tile, inscribed with a crisscrossed pattern of vertical and horizontal lines forming a demonic prison, is wrapped in a black cloth. The outer face of the cloth is inscribed in white chalk with the seven stars of the Great Dipper. The priest crushes the tile with his foot, effecting a ritual purification of the premises. Ritual implements, such as the sword, water, and rooster, are then consecrated.

Animating the Icon

The "eyes of the dragon god are opened" (*longshen kaiguang*). Drops of blood are drawn from a rooster's crown, the animal and its blood signifying vivifying *yang* energies, and mixed with vermillion ink. The priest then "dots" the eyes, head, snout, mouth, whiskers, body, claws, feet, and scales of the dragon, all the while invoking an array of blessings upon the assembled congregants and their descendants. Ritually animated, the dragon becomes a living presence.

Receiving the Descending Gods

The ritual sequences continues with a roll call and triple libation to the divinities, spirits, and sagely masters from the loftiest empyrean realms to the local earth bureaus. A recitation of scriptures invokes the numinous power of sacred texts and their efficacious syllables.

Pacification and Expulsion

Two basic impulses lay at the heart of this ritual, providing a graphic illustration of the human response in the face of the numinous. The first is the desire to "pacify

and secure" (*anzhen*) blessings within the bounds of the communal territory (*jing*). This is the *anlong*, or Pacification of the Dragon. The second is the desire to send off, by means of a sly liturgical mixture of hospitality and muscle, the forces that damage and threaten the community. This is the Sending Off of the Tiger. With the recitation of directional talismans toward the five directions, the dragon gods are pacified and secured. The invocations situate the community within structures of space and time (trigrams, Five Phases, constellational configurations, heavenly stems, and branches), express remorse for possible violations to the earth occasioned during construction, and plead with the dragon gods to set things right. In the expulsive mode, the priest takes a peach bow and, with willow arrows (both peach and willow are apotropaic substances), shoots at the vermin and pests in the five directions to prevent them from harming the structure being blessed. The climax of these acts of expulsion, however, lies in the sending off of the Tiger. In a fearsome, awe-inspiring ritual sequence, the tiger is first propitiated with utmost hospitality and reverence (a piece of broken tile and flesh is placed in its mouth) and then escorted under heavy divine guard from the communal bounds. With the point of his sword inside the tiger's mouth, the priest carries the tiger off to remote mountain wilds far from human habitation, where he burns it. Congregants avert their gazes for fear of being seen by the tiger; it is also taboo for anyone to have their name uttered in the presence of the icon, lest the tiger identify the hapless victim and return to attack that person.

Ritual Emplacement of the Dragon

Finally, the dragon is interred as a vital force within the temple itself. Talismans are placed in the five directions to reinforce the zone of protection now established for the temple and the community. While the papier mâché dragon is offered up via fire, essential parts of the rice dragon, including the eyes (eggs), forehead (egg), ears (porcelain spoons), mouth (lantern), and scales (coins) are placed in a clay vessel and secreted in a special cavity in the temple crypt (*shenkan*) to the rear of the main altar, or in a position in the rear of the temple known as the "dragon's lair" (*longxue*). Through the empowerment of ritual, the rice dragon comes alive as a "substitute body" of the dragon divinity. Extracted parts of the dragon's body stand in for the whole as they are hidden within the temple's "bodily" form. Like the sacred relics and texts placed within icons of Buddhist and Daoist masters as a vivifying "real presence," the dragon's burial within the temple is an act of incorporation that transforms the temple into the body of the dragon itself—in other words, into a geomantically perfect landscape. In the end, the rice that has been used to construct the dragon is distributed among all the gathered believers, an action that symbolizes the dragon's function of drawing together and constituting the communal body. The community subsequently cooks and consumes the rice. The symbolic blessings of grain (harvest), coins (prosperity), and nails (posterity) reincorporate and recirculate the corporeal form of the dragon into the community's own physical bodies as well as into the communal body at large.

Conclusion

These case studies have taken us some distance from seemingly more commonsensical views of material objects; for example, those that might see them as inanimate objects, merely utilitarian in nature, or even as aesthetic pieces—all views that stress a kind of passivity and inertia. Seen within a ritual context, however, material objects literally come alive, serving as transformative, metaphoric vehicles; as sensate "windows" into higher modes of experience and perception; and as embodiments of the human and divine corpus. I hope that future studies will continue to breathe new life into the study of material objects in religious worlds, promoting a fusion of hermeneutic horizons between traditional China and the present.

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CHAPTER 16

Nature

James Miller, Queens University

"Nature" and its adjective "natural" are two of the richest words in the English language. In music, a natural note is one that is not modified by a sharp or a flat. In gambling, a natural is a combination of cards or dice that immediately wins the pot. In human endeavors, a natural is a person who has an exceptional talent in a field where ordinary persons must undergo extensive training or expend great effort. In the cultural sphere, nature and the natural are sources of contentious debate. Should wildernesses be preserved free from human interference, to maintain their "natural" state? Is genetically modified food no longer "natural" and therefore unfit for human consumption? Should people be allowed to express their "natural" inclinations, or should these be controlled and repressed? It is hardly possible to invoke the word "nature" without wading into a sea of debate and discussion. Although the aim of this chapter is to see what debates and discussions about nature have taken place within the context of Chinese religion and philosophy, it is important to begin by recognizing that the modern Western idea of nature is a historical construct that has been shaped by thousands of years of debate within European traditions.

Today, "nature" most commonly refers to the biophysical reality of the environment—the sum total of the vital processes on which human life depends. This view of nature is a product of the European Enlightenment, which distinguished nature from the "supernatural" realm of magic, ghosts, and gods, and from the human world of arts and letters. This category distinction is perpetuated in universities to this day, with their division of knowledge into human, social, and natural sciences. It is worth noting from the outset that these categories of knowledge, so familiar to the modern West, arose for particular historical reasons and are not easily observable in other cultures or in other eras. Our modern debates about

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nature, environment, and ecology are the products of seismic changes in how we have come to understand the relationship between human beings, the "natural world" of the lived environment, and the transcendent world. To the children of Darwin, human beings are *part and parcel* of the evolutionary continuum that transcends and humbles human beings in the face of fifteen billion years of cosmic evolution. To the children of the Biblical patriarch Abraham—the more than two billion Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the world—humans are creatures of God with immortal souls, *set apart from* the rest of "nature" with divinely ordained powers and responsibilities. The tension between these two worldviews underlies the contemporary debate about nature and the environment and makes it one of the defining issues of contemporary politics.

To discuss "nature" and all that is "natural" thus invokes the profoundest of existential questioning about the human condition and our place in the universe. It also invokes fundamental ethical questions regarding, for example, our relationship with non-human animals, environments, and ecosystems. To raise the question of "nature," then, is to raise the question of the existential orientation of humanity within the cosmos. This truism holds good for Chinese civilization just as much as it does for the West. Chinese philosophers fiercely debate the precise nature of the relationships that obtain between human beings and the vast processes of the cosmos that enfold us and give us life. Buddhists have developed enormously complex cosmological models that tie human ethical action and mindfulness to the lived experience of the universe through the inexorable process of cause and effect known as karma. Daoists view human life as part of the natural generative vitality known as the Way, a spontaneous process that recursively transforms into ever more rich and subtle forms. A cursory glance into Chinese intellectual history viewed under the heading of "nature" thus reveals an enormously complex web of meanings that have evolved over three millennia of Chinese civilization and have involved interaction between China, India, and, more recently, the West. Making sense out of this vast array of information requires imposing a somewhat artificial framework, whether by historical periods or by religious tradition. Following the methodology of this present volume, however, this chapter seeks to explore some of the key themes that arise across historical periods and across specific traditions when the idea of nature is invoked in the Chinese context. This chapter explores these themes through specific cases and debates, the choice of which is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. But, in order to approach this case material, it is necessary first of all to have an overview of the basic vocabulary that has been employed in China to talk about nature and all things natural. This vocabulary will thus reveal the core values and motifs that reappear in various ways throughout Chinese philosophy and religion.

Overview of Key Concepts

Given that the English word "nature" covers a wide range of meanings, it is not surprising that there is no single word in Chinese that covers quite the same semantic

territory. The two modern standard Chinese terms are *daziran* ("great nature") and *ziranjie* ("natural realm"), both indicating the biophysical reality of the natural environment. These terms derive ultimately from the classical Chinese term *ziran*, which is associated most closely with Daoist ideas of spontaneity and acting in accordance with the Way.

Two other classical Chinese terms need to be discussed because of their significance in philosophical and religious discourse. The first of these is *tian*, whose basic meaning is the sky or the heavens. This term has the meaning of nature in the sense of that which happens independently of human volition. It is linked to ideas of fortune, good or ill, and to the function of religion in attempting to mediate between human desire and cosmic reality. Another key term is *xing*, which means nature in the sense of innate vitality, and also human nature. It is also linked to ideas of sexuality, gender, and procreation. Together these three terms, *ziran*, *tian*, and *xing*, cover much of the range of the English word "nature" but with distinct contours and emphases that reveal much about how Chinese traditions have viewed human beings and their relation to the universe beyond.

Spontaneity

The concept of spontaneity or "naturalness" (*ziran*) is a core value of classical Daoist philosophy, and can be contrasted with dependence upon external forces or powers. Chapter 25 of the *Daode jing* (*The Way and its Power*) contains the classic statement of this view:

> Humans follow Earth
> Earth follows Heaven
> Heaven follows *Dao*
> *Dao* follows its own spontaneity

As this quatrain makes clear, to follow "one's own spontaneity" is contrasted with following some external principle or ruling force. The *Dao* does not follow some externally imposed model or set of guidelines, but rather is so in and of itself. The core value of the *Dao*, therefore, is to be self-generating. As Cheng Chung-ying writes, "One important aspect of *tzu-jan* (*ziran*) is that the movement of things must come from the internal life of things and never results from engineering or conditioning by an external power" (Cheng 1986). To be natural, in this sense, therefore means to derive creative power from within oneself. As Karyn Lai (2007) rightly points out, this idea of spontaneity is really the opposite of "following nature," if nature is conceived of as some reality external to the self. There can, therefore, be no preconceived template or grand scheme for what is "spontaneous" since each act

of spontaneity is irreducibly particular. If being spontaneous is understood as being natural, this does not refer to nature in the sense of a large-scale process that carries within it some driving force or goal. The Way, therefore, is not to be understood as the Way of nature in the sense of a transcendent metaphysical reality. Rather, the Way is ideally experienced and engaged in the particularity of the self and, especially, in the experience of the body.

To follow the Way, therefore, means to be natural in the sense of developing one's own internal dynamic of spontaneity. This is understood in terms of acquiring virtue or power (*de*), the second of the two concepts thematized in the *Daode jing*. To be filled with such an internal power is a personal and uniquely particular experience, but it also connotes a form of engagement with the world of nature, understood as that which is external to the body. Frequently this is understood in a salvific way: those who follow the Way (*dao*) and gain inner power (*de*) are able to foster longer life and prevent disease and death. Chapter 55 of the *Daode jing* puts this particularly well:

> Be filled with *De*, / Like a baby:
> Wasps, scorpions and vipers / Do not sting it
> Fierce tigers do not stalk it / Birds of prey do not attack it. (trans. Addis and Lombardo 1993)

To be imbued with this natural power, a power that derives from the spontaneity of the particular individual and not from following a grand cosmic design, thus results in particular powers over the natural environment. Here the natural environment is understood in negative terms: it is a dangerous place full of dangerous powers that have the capacity to bring about the untimely death of the individual. To be filled with this spontaneous, self-generated power is thus presented in the *Daode jing* as the way to be shielded from the negative consequences of the natural world, conceived as a locus of death.

An interesting comparison to this Daoist understanding of the spontaneous power of the baby is the Confucian notion of the ritualized performative power of the emperor. For Confucius, the ideal ruler would be able to bring order and harmony to the empire simply by sitting on the throne and "facing south." The ruler here is understood by analogy with the pole star, around which all the other stars in the heavens rotate. The ideal exercise of power is thus an exercise that seems as though it is nothing. Simply by being properly located and disposed, the ruler can produce an organic influence that radiates about his person.

Whether this influence derives from the natural, spontaneous power of the individual Daoist or from the ritual performance of the skilled Confucian, in both cases the desired goal is the exercise of some kind of authority over the space that extends beyond the individual person. The question of how to dominate nature, understood as the environing context in which the individual moves and operates, is a key question of early Chinese political and natural philosophy.

Heavenly Command

The term that usually indicates nature in the sense of an external context for human life is *tian*, the basic meaning of which is the sky. This indicates a fundamentally astrological understanding of nature, in which the rotation of the stars and the other heavenly bodies was thought to have a determining effect on human affairs. This determining effect was known as *tianming* or "the mandate of heaven," a phrase most famously associated with the authority given by the heavens to the emperor to rule. When a dynastic line came to an end, it was said that the mandate of heaven had been revoked and transferred to the new ruling house. But it is also possible to understand this concept more generally than the particular realm of political philosophy. In this case, human lives and livelihoods are understood as being at the mercy of external cosmic powers over which the individual has seemingly little control. Here, then, we can see the same understanding of nature as before: a potentially negative force without which humans cannot live and yet that also has the capacity to destroy human life. This, then, is the power of *tian*—that is to say, the sky or the heavens.

It is important to avoid understanding this term in the metaphysical sense that is implied by the English term "heaven," with its rich allusions to religious ideas. The sky, for early Chinese thinkers, was not generally conceived as a paradise that was granted as a reward for moral lives. The closest parallels to the Western concept of heaven were the paradise lands that were envisaged not in the heavens above but beyond the mountains to the west, or off the coast to the east. In the Chinese sense, *tian* means the space occupied by the heavenly bodies, which followed complex patterns of rotation that were thought to have powerful influences on human affairs, a concept more akin to the English phrase "the heavens."

A key concern for early Chinese intellectuals was understanding how the operations of nature and the rotations of the heavens could have such an influence on the human world. Here it is worthwhile to pay attention to someone who was something of a skeptic in this area, the Confucian philosopher Xunzi (c. 312–230 BCE). In his famous *Discourse on Heaven* (*Tianlun*), he argues that the realm of nature and the realm of human society are not intrinsically related. He considers the question of heaven from the perspective of both unusual and regular phenomena. In terms of the former, he argues that rare astrological phenomena such as eclipses ought not to be taken as having some special significance for human life. They are merely the function of the constant operations of the various cycles of the heavenly bodies. In terms of the latter, the heavens regularly interact with the human world by providing it with water, the liquid vitality that is the foundation of biological existence. Here, Xunzi is just as caustic as when he discussed unusual signs in the sky: "You pray for rain and it rains. Why? For no particular reason, I say. It is just as though you had not prayed for rain and it rained anyway" (trans. de Bary 1960). In Xunzi's view, therefore, the sky is an independent source of power and influence that is vital

for human affairs and over which humans have no claim to power. This, then, underlies one aspect of his view of the human condition: we depend on natural forces over which we have no influence. This understanding of nature comes close to the English word "environment" when it is understood as meaning the external context or set of factors that determine the internal processes of a system. Heaven, or the sky, is an environmental variable for human livelihood. It exerts a determining influence, but the internal systems of human life and livelihood can have no influence upon it. As Xunzi writes: "Heaven does not suspend the winter because people dislike cold; the earth does not reduce its expanse because people dislike distances; the superior man does not alter his conduct because inferior men make a clamor" (*Tianlun*). Xunzi here portrays nature, expressed as the twin domains of heaven and earth, as purely external environmental contexts that operate independently of the human sphere. Indeed, in this worldview, it is a mark of the sage that he is not perturbed by these environmental factors, unlike the inferior man, who is enraged by changes to his circumstance and frightened by solar eclipses. The proper arena for human action, for Xunzi, is the human world.

Note, however, that Xunzi's focus on the human world is not an end but a means. Xunzi advocated the same lofty spiritual goal as other Confucian sages—namely, forming one body with heaven and earth. His argument was directed against those who would seek the goal of harmony either by forcing nature to succumb to human desires or by forcing human desires to succumb to nature. Rather, the human social world and the natural environment operate on different principles and it would be folly to confound the two.

The stridency of Xunzi's arguments help to make the point that his stance was, by and large, a minority view among China's intellectuals. Soon after Xunzi's death, the intellectuals of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) solidified a system of thinking that wove together the political and the natural world into a seamless whole, one in which the operations of heaven were seen as responses to the human world. Heaven, earth, and humanity were bound together by a principle of "stimulus and response" (*ganying*), with the emperor as the linchpin of the whole system. The principal architect of this natural-political philosophy was Dong Zhongshu (c. 179–c. 104 BCE), who sought to locate the legitimacy of the Han empire in the harmonious operations of nature rather than in the despotic will of the emperor. He wrote:

> But the enlightened and worthy ruler, being of good faith, is strictly attentive to the three bases [heaven, earth, and humanity]. His sacrifices are conducted with utmost reverence; he makes offerings to and serves his ancestors; he advances brotherly affection and encourages filial conduct. In this way he serves the basis of Heaven. He personally grasps the plow handle and plows a furrow, plucks the mulberry himself and feeds the silkworms, breaks new ground to increase the grain supply and opens the way for a sufficiency of clothing and food. In this way he serves the basis of earth. He sets up schools for the nobles and in the towns and villages to teach filial piety and brotherly

> affection, reverence and humility. He enlightens the people with education and moves them with rites and music. Thus he serves the basis of man. (trans. de Bary 1960)

In contrast to Xunzi's view, the operations of nature (understood here as heaven and earth) are vital for the political vitality and authority of the emperor. By serving the ancestors with reverence and symbolically tilling the fields, the emperor is showing himself to be a faithful partner in the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity. If one takes Dong Zhongshu at his word, the symbolic acts of the emperor regarding heaven, earth, and humanity constitute in and of themselves the very basis for his heavenly mandate. This indicates the dominant assumption of Han cosmology—namely, that there existed a reciprocity between human beings and the wider cosmos that it was the emperor's duty to cultivate.

If nature is to be understood as that which is commanded by heaven (*tianming*), the question that follows concerns the extent to which it is possible and desirable to negotiate with that command. Are humans simply to accept their fate, whether good or bad, or should they attempt to manipulate the environment so as to suit their own needs, whether through prayer, technology, or other forms of engineering? There has always been a rich vein of religious activity oriented toward manipulating the natural world, whether by praying for recovery from illness, praying for good weather, avoiding natural disasters, or ensuring the fertility of livestock, crops, and women. In modern Western society, these elements of religion have been largely overtaken by technology, and religion has reoriented itself around questions of spirituality and meaning. But an investigation of Chinese religion reveals that contending with nature, understood as one's environing context (*tian*), must not be overlooked as a major focus of traditional religion.

Already we have seen how the *Daode jing* idealized the baby who escapes nature's evil clutches through its own inner power. From this point of view, nature is something to be overcome by asserting the superior inner resources of the body.

For Xunzi, however, the harmony of the three worlds of heaven, earth, and humanity was achieved by each operating independently according to its own principle. Here, nature is conceived as a discrete domain with no immediate significance to human beings. A similar view appears in the statement attributed to Wu Zixu (d. c. 484 BCE) by Sima Qian (145–90 BCE) in his *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*): "I have heard that human masses defeat nature [*tian*], and nature indeed also destroys humans." Wu Zixu, credited with designing the canal city of Suzhou, seems to indicate that humans and nature exist ideally in a balance of power, a dynamic equilibrium created out of a mutual contention in which neither one gets the upper hand.

Lastly, the synthetic cosmology of Dong Zhongshu placed the emperor at the nexus of the three worlds of heaven, earth, and humanity. Through his ritual gestures, unity between humans, nature and the universe would be achieved, and harmony and prosperity advanced.

Innate Vitality

The third important term related to nature is that of innate vitality (*xing*), sometimes translated as inner nature, or life. This term is used as a complement to the term for heavenly command or fate (*ming*) discussed in the previous section. Innate vitality can be understood both biologically and psychologically. In biological terms, it refers to the sexual aspect of human nature. A fundamental fact of human nature is that humans reproduce sexually and are thus divided into two sexes. The basic fact of human nature is thus that one is, from a biological point of view, either male or female. This is not something over which one has any choice, and thus one's biological sexuality is part of one's nature, in the sense of something granted by heaven and beyond one's ability to control. Human nature, then, is a sexual nature, characterized by sexual differentiation, with male and female possessing different biological traits.

This dyadic or binary form was thought by Chinese philosophers to be fundamental not just to human life but to the very essence of the natural world. The cycles of the moon, the sun, and the stars followed a cyclical pattern that could easily be denominated in the terms of *yin* (associated with the female) and *yang* (associated with the male). That nature might be capable of nonsexual forms of reproduction was beyond the imagination of this binary paradigm. Time itself, as measured by the rotation of the sun, the moon, and the stars, operated according to dyadic cycles, alternately phasing in and out of vision in the sky. This constant and universal heartbeat was thus built into the very fabric of the natural world, at least insofar as human beings were able to grasp it.

In terms of psychology, innate vitality is the inner disposition granted by heaven to the individual—in effect, the internal aspect of the fatedness of human life: the drives, moods, and dispositions of the individual that make up his/her basic character or personality. Each person's "nature" or "character" (*xing*) is unique; it is the constellation of traits that drives the individual along his/her particular life path. Such traits can be molded by education or self-determination; they are the basic substance of one's personality, which can be cultivated, ideally in the direction of wisdom. Much of Confucian moral philosophy was devoted to understanding the precise nature of this "human nature" and precise ways in which the civilizing functions of education, ritual, music, and the arts operated upon it. In a viewpoint that bears comparison to Freud's theory of the superego as expounded in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, the Confucian philosopher Xunzi famously noted that human nature was "evil," which is to say, deviant or errant, leading human beings astray from the goal of creating a coherent, optimal social system. It is worthwhile to consider what these innate characteristics were, and why Xunzi thought they needed the tempering effects of civilization.

First, nature (*tian*) endows humans with an acquisitive inner nature (*xing*). Humans desire to accumulate more and more, and this inevitably leads to strife and

disharmony among people. Second, humans are envious and hateful creatures, and this erodes loyalty and friendship and leads to violence. Third, humans are passionate creatures, with a "love of sound and beauty" (trans. de Bary 1960). Following these passions leads to excess and disorder, and puts stress on the social fabric. In all these cases, nature imbues individual human beings with characteristics that invoke failure at the social level: our natural instincts tend more toward individual gain rather than social cooperation. The genius of Confucianism was that it recognized that cooperation, or social harmony, was the key to forging large-scale civilizations that could transcend the petty vicissitudes of kinship networks. Thus, when Xunzi writes that evil is innate (in one's nature) and good is acquired (through nurture), he is making a claim that virtue is not an attribute of nature but of the social group. Nature, whether understood as external power (*tian*) or internal disposition (*xing*) was not the proper arena for moral philosophy: only in the social sphere could morality be properly attributed to human actions.

Of course, Xunzi's views were widely debated within the Confucian tradition. What remained constant, however, was a preoccupation with understanding the precise relationship between the achievements of human civilization and the natural capacities that were endowed in human beings at their birth. Central to this preoccupation was the figuring of human life as something new or different from the operations of heaven and earth, an order of being that was categorically different from the other forms of natural life, while also sharing many of their characteristics. While the natural world was shaped by the binary impulses of *yin* and *yang*, earth and heaven, the human world constituted a new kind of reality, one that operated in tension (both creative and destructive) with the forces that had given it birth.

Case Studies

The following sections present case studies and debates that aim to shed further light on how the ideas of nature that were embedded in the core values and motifs described above shaped human interactions with the natural world at the practical level. To do so, it is first necessary to recognize that this is not an uncontroversial exercise. Mark Elvin concludes his massive environmental history of China, *The Retreat of the Elephants*, with the following observation:

> The religious, philosophical, literary, and historical texts surveyed and translated in the foregoing pages have been rich sources of description, insight, and even, perhaps, inspiration. But the dominant ideas and ideologies, which were often to some degree in contradiction with each other, appear to have little explanatory power in determining why what seems actually to have happened to the Chinese environment happened the way it did. Occasionally, yes, Buddhism helped to safeguard trees around monasteries. The law-enforced mystique shrouding Qing imperial tombs kept their surroundings untouched by more than minimal economic exploitation. But in general, no. There

> seems no case for thinking that, some details apart, the Chinese anthropogenic environment was developed and maintained in the way it was over the long run of more than three millennia because of particular characteristically Chinese beliefs or perceptions, or, at least, not in comparison with the massive effects of the pursuit of power and profit in the arena provided by the possibilities and limitations of the Chinese natural world, and the technologies that grew from interactions with them. (Elvin 2004)

It is hard to argue with Elvin's assertion that the pursuit of power and profit did far more to shape China's physical environment than all its philosophies and spiritual yearnings. Doubtless, a similar observation could be made for all of the world's cultures. In Confucian terms, the moderating effects of civilization are all too often insufficient to drown out the base desires for profit. Civilizations, in these cases, prove to be failures, as may be the case for our current way of life. But, if Elvin is right to say that Chinese civilization failed to prevent the destruction of China's environment, perhaps this should direct our attention away from the received view of China's intellectual elite and their ideal of the harmony of humans and the cosmos, to search elsewhere for the cultural ideas that helped to power China's devastation of its natural environment in the modern era.

A second argument for devoting attention to the relationship between theoretical visions and cultural realities is that the significance of human cultures lies in their small differences rather than their vast similarities. While humans all over the world seek to acquire wealth, play music, dispose of their dead, and mold their natural environments, they do so with an infinite variety of methods and results. The study of human cultural diversity is valuable in and of itself, and so is the study of this diversity in regards to its effects upon the natural environment. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to outline some specific instances of the ways in which Chinese patterns of thought about nature produced specific (and therefore unique) modes of behavior in regard to the natural world. This may be far less transformative than the juggernaut effect of population explosions and economies based on the extraction of natural resources, but this does not mean it is unimportant or trivial.

Ritual Anxiety over the Transformations of Nature

The capacity of nature to transform itself independent of human volition—that is to say, its self-generative power (*ziran*)—has given it an important role within Chinese ritual. This can be observed at many different levels, from state rituals down to the meditations of individuals. These roles were made possible by the theory of stimulus and response (*ganying*), according to which the various dimensions of the cosmos were thought to function in resonance with each other. The important point to grasp about such resonance was that it was by no means automatic. Rather, the function of religious ritual was to ensure that transformations in the natural world would

evoke optimal corresponding responses in the human world and thus restore the balance between the two realms. The dangerous power of nature was that it was ceaselessly transforming itself, and so constantly moving out of alignment with human affairs. In the theology of Dong Zhongshu, it was the emperor's sacred duty to ensure that these correspondences were maintained. The success and prosperity of the empire indeed rested on the emperor's ability to use ritual in order to harmonize the dimensions of earth, heaven, and humanity. The fact that the natural order was undergoing a constant self-powered transformation thus brought about a sense of urgency to the ritual life of the emperor, in that specific rituals had to take place at the right times and places to correspond with the changes of the seasons. This urgency thus entailed a corresponding anxiety on the part of the ritual functionaries with performing the rituals correctly so as to ensure that the cosmic harmony was maintained. Similar ritual anxieties can be observed in many cultures when it comes to contact with culturally postulated sources of ritual pollution, such as people from another caste, or menstruating women, or dead bodies. In China, however, such ritual anxiety derived not from contagion with polluting bodies but with a failure to keep up with nature's relentless transformations.

Take, for instance, Dong Zhongshu's discussion of the significance of the transformations in nature during the first month of spring:

> The east wind dispels the cold, the hibernating insects and reptiles begin to stir, the fish rise up under the ice where the otter catches them to eat, and the wild geese fly north in season. (trans. de Bary 1960)

The consequence of this transformation is that it imposes a ritual obligation on the emperor, referred to as the Son of Heaven:

> The Son of Heaven shall live in the apartment on the left side of the Green Bright Hall. He shall ride in a great belled chariot drawn by dark green dragon horses and bearing green flags. He shall wear green robes with pendants of green jade. His food shall be wheat and mutton, his vessels coarse and open to represent a coming forth.

The change in the seasons thus required specific actions on the part of the emperor, a ritual response that corresponded precisely to nature's changes. Moreover, these obligations were by no means confined to the emperor's person. It was his duty at this time to see that the transformations in nature would be respected and responded to throughout the empire: only male creatures could be offered in sacrifice to the spirits of the mountains, forests rivers, and lakes; no trees, nests, young insects, or fledgling birds could be killed; and the bones of those who had fallen by the wayside had to be collected and buried.

The power of nature could be counterbalanced by the activities of humans. In the heat of summer, when *yang* forces were at their height, the emperor decreed a

"Cold Food Festival" and directed his subjects to "play in water": with so much *yang* already present, fires should be avoided and the *yin* nature of water could serve as a ritual counterweight to the excessive *yang* of the summer heat (cf. Bodde 1975).

The self-generating power of nature thus imposed upon the emperor and his empire an obligation to adapt and transform themselves in accordance with it. The scope of these obligations clearly encompassed human obligations toward the natural world, such as not destroying nests or young creatures, but also extended to the wider social and political world. Indeed, the conceptual scheme seems to make no clear distinction between the social and natural worlds. Rules governing what we would now call the protection of the environment were intermixed with rules governing dancing, urban construction, and military affairs. There was, it seemed, no limit to nature's power to insinuate itself within the social world of human beings.

Failure to respect this power and evoke the corresponding changes in the human world was barely worth contemplating: "In all things one must not violate the way of Heaven, nor destroy the principles of earth, nor bring confusion to the laws of man." If the emperor were to perform the rites of summer instead of spring, this would result in drought; if he were to perform the rites of autumn instead of spring, this would result in thunderstorms; if he were to perform the rites of winter instead of spring, this would result in flooding and snow. To be the emperor was thus to be in a position fraught with ritual anxiety at the urgent demands imposed by nature's self-transforming powers. One ritual miscalculation, and crops could be ruined, the empire would become a wasteland, and the Mandate of Heaven would be revoked.

A comparable anxiety over nature's shifts may be observed in the more personal meditative rituals of Highest Clarity (*Shangqing*) Daoism. Within the general theology of Highest Clarity, religious transformation was achieved through performing specific ritual actions that accorded with specific transformations in nature. These ritual actions enabled the individual practitioner to be transformed into a spirit being and ascend to heaven. Take, for instance, the ritual instructions known as the "Eight Secret Sayings of the *Dao*" (*Badao miyan*) contained within the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* (*Jiuzhen zhongjing*), from the Ming *Daoist Canon*. The second of these eight sayings reads as follows:

> On the day of the Vernal Equinox, and on the *bingyin* and *dingmao* days, at midnight look to the northeast. There will be azure, black and yellow clouds, which are the Three Pure Clouds of the Heavenly Imperial Lord of Great Subtlety. At this time the Heaven Lord of Great Subtlety rides the carriage of the eight effulgences, ascending to visit the Highest Jade Emperor. Seeing him, visualize in your mind blowing down in prayer as above. If you see the carriage of the Heavenly Lord [of Great Subtlety] four times, then in broad daylight you will have a dragon-pulled carriage with a feathered canopy come to greet you and take you up to heaven. (trans. Miller 2008)

In this case, there is no clearly defined anxiety that if the ritual is not performed properly then the adept will suffer terrible consequences. However, the precision of the instructions indicates that only at the specific times and places will the ritual be

successful. In this case, then, the adept will be obsessively following the transformations of the seasons in order to be in exactly the right time and place for the ritual to have its effect. There is here, then, a positive anxiety about performing the ritual in the right way so as to achieve the desired positive effect, just as in the rituals for the emperor the transformations of nature demand a corresponding change in the ritual actions of the practitioner. Indeed, the regular transformations of nature seem to be the very foundation of the regularity or repetitive nature of religious rituals. Given that the natural world has a strong cyclical element to it, the human world also must mirror this cyclical nature in its rites, habits, and customs. The regular and repetitive nature of these human social rites reflect and correspond with nature's transforming power by acknowledging its regular and repetitive nature.

The Struggle with Nature

In the ancient Chinese world, nature's power derived from its capacity to change and transform independently of human volition. This internal quality, known in Chinese as *ziran*, gave nature the appearance of being an external power or environmental force, something with which humans must grapple, whether by harmonizing with nature through rituals, channeling it through technology, or overcoming it in some form of spiritual apotheosis. Although the dominant ideological stance has been that of "harmony" rather than "discord" with nature, this does not mean that we should overlook the negative aspect of human relationships with nature. The struggle with nature was highlighted most forcefully by Chairman Mao, who led the Chinese people to struggle and defeat nature with an alarming utopian urgency. Judith Shapiro provides a wealth of evidence to argue that specific elements of Maoist ideology were responsible for the massive environmental problems that began to plague China in the twentieth century. In particular she identifies political repression, utopian urgency, and dogmatic formalism as three key components of Maoist ideology that each played an important role in exacerbating environmental problems or in hindering attempts to mitigate them. Altogether these factors constituted what Shapiro terms a "war on nature," a war that was conceptually predicated on Mao's philosophy of voluntarism in which ideas were viewed as "having the power to mobilize efforts to transform the material world" (Shapiro 2001). Willpower would compensate for China's lack of technological development, and ideas would "unleash raw labor to conquer and remold nature." Shapiro continues: " 'Man must conquer nature' (*ren ding sheng Tian*), Mao declared, sounding the phrase that many Chinese mention as the core of Mao's attitude towards the natural world." The impression Shapiro gives here is that Mao's "declaration of war" on nature constituted a new development in the history of China's relationship with its environment, or at the very least a new development in the conception of nature that was promulgated among the people. In fact the four-character phrase "Man must conquer nature" has a long historical pedigree, and struggle with nature is a part of a long strand of

Chinese thinking about the natural world that has deep historical roots and wide cultural resonance.

Take, for example, the myth "Jingwei fills the seas" (*Jingwei tian hai*), a classic tale from the *Scripture of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan hai jing*, third century BCE). The myth tells how the daughter of the sun god Yandi drowned in the eastern sea. In death she was transformed into Jingwei, a bird who for ever after carried little branches and dropped them into the sea in a futile attempt to fill it up. The phrase *Jingwei tian hai* is now an idiom meaning "determination in the face of great odds," and can be interpreted either positively as a story of the indomitable human spirit or negatively, somewhat similarly to the English phrase "banging one's head against a brick wall."

It is of no surprise that, in a country prone to devastating spring floods, nature's negative powers should be symbolized by water. In this story, the natural environment, in the form of the sea, provides the context in which Jingwei's struggle takes on its meaning. Her struggle to fill up the sea with branches symbolizes the eternal struggle of human beings against their fate, a fate dictated more often than not by the power of nature to obliterate human life. In this story, nature commands or mandates the circumstances in which humans exist. Nature defines the contours of people's lives, in the same way that in astrology the position of the stars and the planets creates the basic disposition for individual human lives. Nature demarcates the finitude of human existence and at the same time poses an existential challenge to human beings to overcome the limitations or conditions of existence that have been imposed upon them. These limitations or conditions of existence, especially in premodern China, may be concretely experienced by human beings in their struggles against the power of nature especially as revealed in floods and other natural disasters. In this regard the classical myth of Yu the Great, who controlled the spring floods, is also relevant. Yu's greatness consisted precisely in his ability to dominate the power of nature and provide a more amenable context for humans to flourish.

An alternative to contending with nature can be found in the Daoist concept of channeling nature's power in ways beneficial for human beings. Alchemists saw in nature a marvelous capacity for transformation that could ideally be adopted and adapted by human beings. In so doing they drew on a long tradition of longevity techniques, gymnastics, and breathing exercises that sought to harness the natural forces inside and outside the body. The natural world was in this sense not something to be defeated or struggled against but a resource that could be intelligently exploited.

To give a somewhat unusual example of how nature's power could ideally be exploited, consider the Dujiangyan irrigation project. Dujiangyan is located just outside present-day Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, and was close to the epicenter of the disastrous Sichuan earthquake of May 12, 2008. To the east begins the mountain area where many Daoist sites are located, and which leads toward the western edge of the Tibetan plateau. To the west lie the rich plains of central Sichuan. The Dujiangyan irrigation project was begun in 267 BCE and completed in 256 BCE and was designed as a water conservancy project to regulate the flow of the Minjiang river so as to prevent flooding downstream during the spring thaw and to provide a

constant flow of water for irrigation. The Minjiang river is separated into three main channels: one provides irrigation to thirty thousand separate irrigation channels downstream; the second receives surplus water in times of flooding; the third provides water for the city of Dujiangyan. The project is significant from a water engineering perspective because it is the world's oldest irrigation project in use today that is not built around a central dam. Dujiangyan instead concretely represents the concept of channeling nature's transformative power so as to serve human needs. It is, indeed, regarded as an example of the Daoist idea that the autonomous power of nature can be transformed into something beneficial to the human world through cooperation rather than adversity. The complex contains a Daoist temple immortalizing its architect, Li Bing and is a popular tourist destination along with the nearby Daoist mountain of Qingcheng shan.

Given the focus of religion on culturally postulated superhuman realities deemed to transcend the mundane world of nature, it is not surprising that Chinese religions should also advocate views that tend to downplay the ultimate significance of nature's power. Even if human beings are locked in a struggle for power with the natural world, this struggle can and ought to be transcended. More importantly, this transcendence is equally valid for those whose experience of the natural world has been uniformly positive. The immortal Ruanzi is said to have delivered this speech before his final ascension from the natural world:

> I have wandered throughout the famous mountains, I have gazed upon the eight seas and wandered through the five sacred mountains. I have rested in grotto halls. I have delighted in the drooping fronds of vegetation and have enjoyed the call of animals, the streams gushing forth their essence, the hills lush with forests, the elegance of the hundred creatures and the rhythm of winter and summer . . . Now I have been urgently summoned away. Please let me take my leave from now on. (trans. Miller 2008)

This passage stands as a testament to the irrefutable religious demands for transcendence of the natural world, and to the ultimate conviction of a religious faith that the destiny of human beings lies not in the natural world but in a world of their own imagining. Indeed, the powerful leitmotiv of Daoist religion has constantly been "My destiny lies with myself and not with nature/heaven," a powerful evocation of the capacity of the human subject to rise above the determining factors of his environmental context.

Nature as Moral Force

One aspect of the impact of Buddhism on Chinese philosophy was the attention paid to the problem of desire. This debate took place in terms of questioning the moral capacity of inner nature (*xing*), a term that also incorporated the sexual nature of human beings. The basic question up for discussion was whether the inner drives

and dispositions of human nature should be considered good precisely because they were natural. To what extent was the cultivation of one's nature to be understood as giving free rein to its authentic, innate characteristics, or conversely to what extent was the cultivation of one's nature to be understood as the reining in of those characteristics?

The philosopher Zhang Zai shared with many Confucian philosophers the assumption that the principle of nature (*tianli*) was infinitely good. The problem, as in Xunzi, was how discussing how human nature (*xing*) could become so corrupt. Following the lead taken by the Buddhists, Zhang Zai placed the blame squarely on human desire: "Those who understand the higher things return to the Principle of Nature . . . while those who understand lower things follow human desires" (trans. Chan 1969). In so doing he allied himself with a long and distinguished history of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thinking that saw sensuality and desire as a fundamental problem of the human condition. This insight, first articulated in terms of a full-fledged theory of nature by Zhang Zai, certainly encapsulated one major approach to inner nature in Chinese tradition, an approach that emphasized moderation, restraint, and a certain degree of asceticism. Zhang Zai's view was that sensuality had the capacity to deceive the heart/mind (*xin*), dragging the life of the individual off course, as it were, and thus preventing the operations of nature from achieving their full fruition.

In this approach, human beings are not "sinful" in a Calvinist sense: they are not ontologically alienated from ultimate reality, nor are they existentially alienated from nature in a way that requires the intervention of a divine being or savior to overcome. Rather, because of the power of sensuality, humans deviate from the Way and make decisions that are effectively self-defeating. Moral training therefore consists of learning how to overcome the effects of sensuality or, for the Buddhist, avoiding them by living in a cloistered environment. This view of desire places the burden of transformation on the psychoaffective capacities of the individual rather than on some grand cosmic scheme for remaking the world or establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth.

But Zhang Zai did not always occupy the mainstream of Chinese thinking about the relationship between nature and desire, especially in the later imperial period. Rather than taking the road opened up by Zhang Zai, later Confucians emphasized a materialistic approach that did not regard the principle of nature as a lofty spiritual ideal. Although Zhang Zai had argued that principle (*li*) could never be divested from material force (*qi*), and that one should not imagine some kind of ultimate reality independent from the process of the natural world, later materialists focused even more on nature as vital force (*qi*). Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), for instance, saw no abstract principle of heaven or ideal nature beyond the actuality of the real processes of the material world. With such a strongly materialist philosophy it was even harder to advocate some sense of ideal human nature above and beyond the reality of the natural world. This did not mean that the concept of nature as "heaven" (*tian*) was abandoned. Rather, it meant that the concept of nature/heaven could not be

abstracted completely from the material world. To be natural thus meant following nature's vital force (*qi*) as much as it meant following its heavenly principle (*li*). Thus Wang Fuzhi proudly quotes the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*):

> The great characteristic of Heaven and Earth is to produce. The most precious thing for the sage is [the highest] position. To keep his position depends on humanity. How to collect a large population depends on wealth. (trans. Chan 1969)

Wang's interpretation of this forthright adoration of nature's fecundity is a critique of those moral or religious doctrines that advocate the restraint of desire as the way toward harmony with nature:

> Thus in sound, color, flavor, and fragrance, we can broadly see the open desires of all creatures, and at the same time they also constitute the impartial principle for all of them. Let us be broad and greatly impartial, respond to things as they come, look at them, and listen to them, and follow this way in words and action without seeking anything outside. And let us be unlike Lao Tzu [Laozi], who said that the five colors blind one's eyes and the five tones deafen one's ears, or the Buddha, who despised them as dust and hated them as robbers.

Wang's point is that, if one accepts the basic Neo-Confucian doctrine that heavenly principle (*li*) cannot be separated in any ultimate way from material force (*qi*), then it makes no sense to argue that human desires are the root of the problem of the human condition. The fundamental principle of nature is the flourishing of life. Desire is essential to this operation. Conversely, religious people who follow ascetic lives and advocate the restraint of desires do not properly comprehend the moral relationship between human beings and nature. Although Buddhists or Daoists may posit some ultimate reality, whether denominated as mystery (*xuan*) or Buddha-nature, such a concept cannot have anything to do with the real world of moral import, or, as Wang puts it, "the correct activities of our seeing, hearing, speech and action." The authenticity of nature—both human and non-human—lies not in some transcendental principle but in the reality of nature's capacity for ceaseless production. As Wang says,

> The fact that the things of the world, whether rivers or mountains, plants or animals, those with or without intelligence, and those yielding blossoms or bearing fruits, provide beneficial support for all things is the result of the natural influence of the moving power of material force. (Chan 1969)

In other words, the mandate that can be derived from nature is not to be sought in nature as abstract principle (*li*) but rather in nature as material force (*qi*)—the power to move, grow, and transform, and that drives nature to constantly flourish. One should not read this as a kind of hedonistic delight in nature's fecundity. Wang's message is thoroughly moralistic; but it is also deeply realistic in its appreciation that

real-world problems have to be dealt with at the level of natural, material reality rather than based on some idealistic abstraction. Recalling Elvin's observation that the lofty ideals of Chinese philosophy never seem to have been realized in the real world of China's environmental history, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is hard not to side with Wang Fuzhi's plea to focus on the material reality of nature.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the facets of nature within Chinese philosophical and religious traditions with a view to giving the reader a sense of how this highly contentious subject has produced arguments and debates that are in some ways quite idiosyncratic and in other ways similar to debates in Indian and Western traditions. By ranging quite freely across traditions and historical periods, a picture emerges of a nexus of problems that the concept of nature evokes. These problems have to do with the proper moral relationship between human beings and the natural world, the relationship of the natural world to culturally posited supernatural beings and their realms, and how to understand human beings as both part of nature and set apart from it. These questions are germane to all of the world's civilizations, but the ways of asking and answering these questions quite naturally vary according to the cultural traditions that have historically emerged throughout the world.

In one important sense, the contemporary environmental crisis has tended to put these various cultural traditions about nature into the background, and has focused attention on solving real-world challenges such as species extinction, climate change, population growth, and water scarcity. In this context, Western views of nature and environment are often held up as a model to be avoided, given their emphasis on the transcendence of humans over the natural world. Conversely, Chinese ideas about the harmony of humans and nature are extolled as virtues to be embraced by the world in its quest for sustainable development and ecological balance.

The contemporary Confucian scholar Tu Weiming made the following argument regarding the Chinese encounter with modernity in the twentieth century:

> The modern West's dichotomous world view (spirit/matter, mind/body . . . God/man, subject/object) is diametrically opposed to the Chinese holistic mode of thinking . . . Bacon's knowledge as power and Darwin's survival through competitiveness, . . . fueled by the Faustian drive to explore, know and subdue nature, spurred spectacular progress in science and technology, [but] it also became a justification for imperialist domination and colonial exploitation. As the international rules of the game, defined in terms of wealth and power, were superimposed on China by gunboat diplomacy, Chinese intellectuals accepted the inevitability of Westernization as a necessary strategy for survival. (Tu 2000)

Here, Tu Weiming is proposing a narrative by means of which to explain the revolutionary changes that China experienced in the twentieth century: China's intellectuals abandoned their holistic mode of thinking in which heaven, earth, and humanity were considered parts of a mutually interdependent evolving cosmos and instead adopted a dichotomous Western mode of thinking in which humanity is placed in opposition to nature. This choice was forced upon China by the colonial aggressions of the West in the nineteenth century, and was adopted as a "necessary strategy" rather than by free choice or desire.

While Tu Weiming is right that some Chinese intellectuals certainly advocated a "holistic mode of thinking in which heaven, earth, and humanity were considered parts of a mutually interdependent evolving cosmos," this is by no means the whole story of how China imagined nature. As this chapter has demonstrated, Chinese intellectuals pondered with deep sincerity nature's capacity to destroy human life, its massive indifference to human suffering, and its relentless power to undergo transformation beyond the desires of human beings. Through technologies both religious and material, Chinese people sought to mitigate nature's negative effects, to transform nature into a power for human good, and to imagine a world in which humans and the natural world could flourish in a mutually beneficial way. This philosophical ideal, however, stands as an unrealized dream rather than a reflection of the historical reality of Chinese culture.

Chinese religious culture surprisingly reveals a more realistic and pragmatic pattern of engagement with the natural world. In temples across time and space, Chinese people, from the highest emperor to the lowliest peasant, all have prayed for blessings upon their crops, freedom from floods and famine, and healing for the sick. Praise for nature's fecund powers was always tempered by a realistic anxiety about its capacity to destroy the living. Hovering in between these two realities was a glimmer of harmony and balance that was often sought but rarely achieved.

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CHAPTER 17

Divinity

Randall Nadeau, Trinity University

Ancestors, Ghosts, and Gods

Chinese religion is immanental—ancestors, ghosts, and gods are part of "this world." They are neither "supernatural" (in the sense of being *outside* nature) nor transcendent (in the sense of being *beyond* nature). The Daoist systematizer Tao Hongjing (456–536 CE) said that there is "but the finest thread" separating mortals and immortals, or humans and divine beings, and, apart from the rarified astral deities of Religious Daoism, the gods of Chinese temples are all the apotheosized spirits of the dead—that is, humans transformed into divine beings while retaining the personal identities, likes and dislikes, memories and dreams that they enjoyed as mortal beings.

For this reason, Chinese religion begins with the veneration of ancestors. Evidence of ancestor worship can be found in the earliest archeological sources, from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, where burial mounds containing offerings of vessels, weapons, personal adornments, pets and domestic animals, and human servants or their clay replicas (such as were found in the first century BCE tomb of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty near Xian, with its famed terra cotta soldiers) were constructed to benefit the dead. For the Confucian sage Mencius (fourth century BCE), the reverential burial of one's parents was considered "natural," an almost instinctual behavior of grieving descendents. So strong was the cultural impulse to care for one's parents after death that Chinese Buddhist monks in the fourth century CE and after constructed mortuary halls within the monastery grounds for their parents—one of the major features of the "sinification" of Buddhism. (These halls

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are still present today, and are open for anyone to see.) Even in the present day, when religious belief and practice has been weakened by the social forces of political change and modernity, Chinese around the world "worship their ancestors," with daily offerings of food and drink within the home and annual remembrances at the grave.

Ancestor veneration is the extension of familial feeling after death. Of all the human relationships promoted by the Confucian tradition (parent–child, husband–wife, sibling–sibling, teacher–student, ruler–subject, friend–friend), the parent–child relationship is primary, and should be the model for all other relationships: a teacher is "like a parent" to his/her students, a ruler "like a father" to the nation. All of these relationships are enduring—in fact, permanent—and, in the case of the parent–child relationship, not limited to the lifetimes of the parents and their children. The Chinese character *xiao* ("filial piety") is etymologically related to offerings made to the dead, and refers to the child's obligations of care, reverence, and obedience both during the parents' lifetimes and after their deaths.

The close connection between life and death represents a continuum between "mortals" and "divine beings." As the fourteenth century Neo-Confucian teacher and scholar Zhu Xi explained (based on ideas in circulation even before the Common Era), all things in the universe are constituted of *yang* energies and *yin* energies, the *yang* representing "active" modalities, the *yin* "passive" modalities. *Yang* is an animating force, and is associated with movement, aggression, energy, and brightness; *yin* is associated with the dark, the passive, and the receptive. Within the human body, these forces are localized in ten "souls": three *yang* souls and seven *yin* souls. The *yang* souls, located in the head, the heart, and the abdomen, are the forces that energize and animate the person, and are responsible for thinking, action, and creativity. The *yin* souls, located in the internal organs and bones, are related to the emotions—joy, anger, pleasure, sorrow, like, dislike, and desire. These souls are receptive and reactive. For good physical and psychological health, it is imperative to keep these souls "in balance"—nurturing both one's "masculine" and one's "feminine" qualities—just as *yang* and *yin* exist in a balanced and complementary relationship in nature.

The Daoist religion expends great effort in exploring the various means (ritual, pharmacological, dietary, and gymnastic) for maintaining this balance, and perpetuating an individual's vigor and wellbeing. For much of its history, Daoism has sought to "defeat death" altogether, by retaining and expanding these vital energies within the body. Daoist practices of exercise, traditional medicine, healthy sexuality, and worship are still widely practiced today—remnants of the immortality cult that defined Daoism for most of its history.

After death, the *yang* and *yin* souls follow different paths. The *yang* souls, being light and airy, "float away" and become the spirits of the heavens. In traditional times, it was believed that dreaming was the result of the "flight" of *yang* souls, reanimating the body upon awakening and their "return." Ancient funeral rites consisted of "calling out" to the *yang* souls from a hill or rooftop, requesting that

they "come back" to restore the body to life (like waking from a dream). The *yang* souls themselves are deathless, and are symbolized by the vermillion dot that is painted on the ancestral tablet in the center of the home, ensuring one's parents' and grandparents' ongoing presence with the family long after death.

The *yin* souls, solid and heavy, adhere to the bones, and the burial of the dead—or their cremated remains—is but the first step in a long mortuary relationship, with regular visits to the tomb by the whole family, especially on the "tomb-sweeping" festival every spring. The *yin* souls do survive death, but unlike the *yang* souls they are not eternal—as the bones turn to dust, and as the graveside rites are abandoned after three or four generations, the *yin* souls disappear and are no longer venerated.

The rites of burial are the first demonstration of the continuing filial piety of the living descendents. Following the encoffining of the body, which must take place on an auspicious day (chosen by a professional diviner), a Daoist priest is called to perform a rite of exorcism: this is needed because the family and surrounding households have been polluted by the presence of death, drawing homeless ghosts to celebrate the death and pilfer the family's offerings.

One shows one's ongoing reverence and care for one's parents by carrying over the obligations appropriate to them in old age—caring for their basic needs and abiding by their wishes—to the obligations appropriate to them as spirits, including funerary and graveside rites that are maintained for many years after death. This is mutually beneficial: in return for the descendants' care, the parents/ancestors reward their children with harmonious family relations, good health, and good fortune. This is especially the case if their abode—the tomb—is well-placed, according to the principles of *fengshui*.

Proper burial requires consultation with a specialist: a *geomancer* or *fengshui* master. Using a special compass, and an intuitive sensitivity picked up over years of training and experience, the *fengshui* master attempts to choose a comfortable and potent abode for the dead. He studies the intercourse of mountains and water, the undulations of the land, the presence of auspicious "dragon" and "tiger" formations, and the configurations of the stars and planets above, then selects the site that will bring the greatest blessings—both to the dead and to his/her descendents. Quoting the *Yellow Emperor's Siting Classic*, "If a site is peaceful, a family will have generations of good fortune. If not, the family will decline."

During the nineteenth century, Westerners working in China as missionaries, investors, and engineers attacked *fengshui* as "an abyss of insane vagaries," "a perverse application of physical and meteorological knowledge," "a mere chaos of childish absurdities and refined mysticism," "a ridiculous caricature of science," and "the biggest of all bugbears." They were frustrated by local resistance to the construction of railroads, mines, telegraph lines, and Western-style churches, which were thought to be disruptive to the *fengshui* of the land.

But *fengshui* is not mere superstition. It was the basis for early Chinese geology, geography, astronomy, and architecture. More fundamentally, *fengshui* is an

extension of the Chinese appreciation of nature as a living, complementary force, and of the delicate interaction between natural forms and human constructions. Chinese and Japanese architecture—both ancient and modern—has earned international acclaim as a product of this traditional sensitivity.

Burial and ancestor veneration are not the only forms of contact between the living and the dead. Gifted persons called "shamans" or "spirit mediums" are able to receive the spirits of the dead within their bodies, and to send their own souls on spirit journeys to distant places and into the spirit world. Spirit mediums tend to be poor, and to live on the outskirts of neighborhoods and villages. They practice out of their homes, or, late at night, in community temples. They are most often consulted by families to establish contact with their ancestors, for the purpose of resolving an illness or dispute within the family. Spirit mediums can be male or female, and include young adolescents; older women are considered to be especially skillful in contacting the recently deceased.

While ancestors are the souls of the venerated dead, "ghosts" (*gui*) are the souls of the unvenerated dead. Without the daily or perennial offerings due them, they are "hungry" and resentful, and cause illness and widespread misfortune, even against families that are not their kin. Chinese religion features a sophisticated "demonology," and a primary responsibility of the priestly class (irrespective of their identity as Daoist, Buddhist, or Confucian) is exorcistic: to dispel calamity, heal the sick, resolve disputes, and clear the way for success in exams and in financial transactions. Large-scale temple festivals are also exorcistic in nature, with dramatic processions intended to cleanse the community by harnessing the power of local deities.

Both ancestors and ghosts are spirits of the dead, and the relationship between living beings and the spirits of the dead parallels the relationship between children and their parents and between "ordinary people" (those who "have homes") and beggars or vagabonds (those who do not). Ghosts, by definition, are "outside" the family. While they are analogous therefore to the "homeless people" that one encounters in social life, they are not just the "spirits" of those unfortunate beggars. Rather, they are the spirits of those who died prematurely or unnaturally: victims of disease or famine, of murder or unjust execution. Their rage is righteous rage, sometimes visited upon the perpetrators but as often as not random and indiscriminate, such that any untoward or unfortuitous event can be attributed to the wrath of the wrongful dead. This is why their propitiation is one of the most visible and elaborate of Chinese religious ceremonies, since hardship and calamity are universal experiences, both personally and communally: all persons suffer from unexpected illnesses, from natural disasters, and from economic adversity, and, because the poor usually suffer the most, the exorcistic arts of religious ritual masters are most commonly seen in poor communities and villages. This is no less true today than it was centuries ago, even as technology and social progress have led to improvement in healthcare and public works across the nation. So, we may say that

- Ghosts are spirits of the unworshipped dead; and
- Ancestors are spirits of the family dead.

Without a proper burial and daily offerings of food and incense, a dead spirit will become a "homeless" ghost. Ghosts and ancestors are both spirits of the dead, the distinction being that ghosts are "wronged, neglected, or abused" while ancestors are revered and nurtured by the living.

In both cases, humans and spirits exist in a relationship marked by *reciprocity*. For their neglect, ghosts cause illness, infertility, failure, bad luck, disease, and death; they must be propitiated. For their care, ancestors reward the family with blessings, harmony, and wellbeing; it is the responsibility of the living to perpetuate their memory through worship and offerings. We can categorize ghosts according to the following typology:

1. Marauding ghosts:
    a. Those who go about their business; they do not interact with people.
    b. Those who make mischief; they frighten and harm people.
    c. Those seeking aid or fellowship from humans (often animal spirits such as fox-maidens, dragon-princes, or snake-princesses).
    d. Agents of Heaven or hell on "official business" (to exact retribution for evil deeds).
2. Ghosts with unfinished business:
    a. Those who have died before their time (accident, murder); seeking vengeance or "soul-exchange" with the living—may get revenge on the perpetrator or lash out at anyone near the place of death.
    b. Those not properly buried or cared for (the most common form of "hungry ghost").

These demonic beings are thwarted by especially powerful gods, and by the ritual masters who are able to invoke and control them. For example, Daoist priests in Taiwan and southern China call upon the god Marshall Wen (Wen Yuanshuai) or the Paternal Kings (Wang Ye) to do battle with plague demons, whom they round up on ritually assembled wooden boats; in an annual festival, the boats are set adrift and lit on fire, to protect the community from calamity and disease for the coming year.

In the popular religion of village shrines and temples, the great majority of Chinese gods (*shen*) are also spirits of the dead—in fact, many gods were first feared as ghosts before being transformed into gods by virtue of the offerings made to these spirits by the living. Gods can be categorized according to the following typology:

1. Nature deities: rivers, mountains, trees, stones.
2. Astral deities: Dipper, North Star, other constellations.
3. Deified persons:

a. Ghost-gods (usually associated with miraculous occurrences at a grave or bone site—Guangong, Mazu).
b. Heavenly bureaucrats (Tudi gong, Chenghuang).
c. Sages and worthy persons (Confucius, Laozi).
d. Transcendent deities (Yuhuang dadi, Shangdi, buddhas, and bodhisattvas).

One example of a deified person who began her "spiritual career" as a ghost (the "unvenerated dead," without descendents to provide for her ancestral cult) is the goddess Mazu, known in Hong Kong and other Cantonese-speaking communities as Tianhou, the "Empress of Heaven." Mazu is perhaps the most popular deity on the island of Taiwan and the coastal provinces of mainland China, as she is widely venerated in fishing and sea-faring communities. Her name means "matriarch," and in addition to the title "Empress of Heaven" she is also known as the "Imperial Concubine" and the "Holy Mother of Heaven on High." She is the goddess of fishermen, but her spiritual efficacy extends to all persons, especially families, women, and children.

According to legend, Mazu is the deified daughter of a fisherman, and was born on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month of the first year of the Song Dynasty (960 CE). As a young girl, Mazu was able to send her spirit across the waters and to rescue sailors in distress. Exhausted by her virtuous deeds, she died at the age of twenty-seven, still unmarried and childless. Today she is still worshipped as a protector of seafarers, but Mazu is much more: though a childless young woman herself, she is worshipped as a kind mother, treating her devotees as if they were her own children.

Mazu is one example among many of a spirit who "ought" to be a ghost—having died unmarried and without progeny, she has no descendents to care for her—but, because of her efficacy and power, her "mana" (to translate the Chinese character *ling*) is transformed by the people into a benevolent and loving god. In fact, most Chinese gods and goddesses were once ghosts, and virtually all are spirits of the dead. Their human stories, often involving an untoward or a "righteous" death, are the stuff of folklore, popular opera, and widely read novels and plays.

Chinese gods are worshipped with offerings of food and heavenly currency. But the most important offering is the burning of incense, and the great brazier at the entrance to every temple is its spiritual focus, the point of contact between Heaven and Earth. When a new temple is built, ashes from the incense burner are transferred from one temple to the other to confer spiritual power upon the new location. This is carried out in a public "incense-cutting ceremony," which celebrates the dedication of the new temple. This ceremony is performed by Daoist priests.

Temples have ancestral relations with one another. They have "mothers" and "grandmothers." When a new Mazu temple is built, for example, petition is made to an established temple to "share its incense" in the incense-cutting ceremony. In addition, the new Mazu statue is placed beside the old one for a period of time to

share in its spiritual power, before being carried by sedan chair in a grand procession to the new temple. Then, once a year, the younger Mazu "goes home to her mother" to pay her respects and renew her power.

The most famous of these annual pilgrimages is from Dajia to Beigang, on the island of Taiwan, a 250-kilometer round trip. Up to six thousand people make the eight-day journey every year, most of them on foot, and upwards of thirty thousand converge on Beigang for the return of the Dajia Mazu to her mother's side. The procession is patterned on an imperial inspection tour: it is led by a scout on horseback, and the image of Mazu is guarded by two ten-foot-tall generals (played by costumed strongmen on stilts, wearing elaborate oversized masks), named Qianli yan ("Eyes that See a Thousand Miles") and Shunfeng er ("Ears that Hear what Comes on the Wind"). Mazu is followed by pilgrims dressed in the costumes of flag bearers and foot soldiers.

The key ritual once Mazu arrives in Beigang is the incense-cutting rite. Burning ashes from the Beigang incense burner are placed in a small Dajia urn, to be carried back to Dajia: a re-enactment of the founding rite of the temple. Once back in Dajia, these embers are used by the chief official of the annual pilgrimage—whose title is *luzhu* ("Master of the Incense Burner")—to relight the fires of the Dajia Mazu Temple incense burner.

The rite of incense-cutting originated in the Song Dynasty (960–1280 CE), and developed as a result of growing inter-regional trade throughout the empire. Sojourning merchants would establish temples to their home deities, carrying the images with them in sedan-chair processions that often covered many hundreds of miles. They were "spiritualized" in an incense-cutting ceremony back home, then carried by sedan chair to be installed as the patron deity of the merchant community. Efficacious at home and on the journey, they continued to embody religious power for the immigrants. And, just as the immigrants felt the pull of family ties and nostalgia for their native place, returning periodically to rejuvenate their spirits, so too the religious images of the cult were taken on regular pilgrimages back to the founding temple and their mother image, to restore their spiritual power.

Temple festivals and fairs were also tied to trade. In traditional China, a honeycomb network of regional markets provided the setting for trade between farmers and merchants. Usually, the markets were located on temple grounds. Held in three- or ten-day cycles, market days provided occasions not only for bartering and sales but also for religious worship and popular entertainment. Local operas, plays, and puppet shows were performed. The stage was always set up facing the entrance to the temple, so that the god could enjoy the performance. The stories enacted were taken from religious mythology. Today, most Chinese shop in stores and supermarkets, but temple fairs are still the setting for community rituals and popular entertainment. At the fair, one can buy snacks and handicrafts, and patronize fortune-tellers, traditional doctors, and magicians.

In addition to the temple fairs, the gods conduct periodic "inspection tours" of the community. Their images are carried on sedan chairs along a route that encircles

the village or neighborhood. This secures the "peace and prosperity" of the gods' jurisdiction. The times and places of these tours are determined by the gods themselves, through local temple divination. They follow a circuit of all the participating temples in the area, exchanging tributary gifts along the way, accompanied by guards, musicians, dancers, spirit mediums, and priests—the latter conferring blessings as they go. In this sense, the gods mimic the emperor and magistrates of imperial times, securing the allegiance of local populations and ritually marking the boundaries of their political power.

Temple organization in China is still based largely on merchants and their networks. Community temples adopt many of the formal characteristics of professional associations, including rules of incorporation and record-keeping. Temple leadership is based significantly upon wealth and status in the community. Financial contributions to temple construction and maintenance are a symbol of honor and prestige. Worship of gods is often economically motivated as well. Offerings are made in search of wealth and prosperity, or for specific advice (learned by divination) on financial investments. Some gods are patron deities of occupational groups, including fishermen, craftsmen, shopkeepers, cab drivers, and even prostitutes and racketeers.

Extensive participation by the state has been integral to the development of temples and deity cults in China. In imperial times, the emperor as well as provincial governors and local magistrates sponsored temple construction, approved the canonization of the gods and the deification of exemplary citizens, and erected commemorative plaques and steles. Most Confucian officials were ostensibly religious skeptics, but they believed that religion reinforced morality and provided hope and encouragement for the people. This is still largely true today: even in the People's Republic of China, which has condemned "superstition" based on Marxist principles, government officials typically attend temple fairs and support the construction and restoration of local shrines.

Philosophical Views

Throughout Chinese intellectual history, philosophers have expressed an interest in divinity. There are a number of classical Chinese terms that we could identify with the Western idea of divinity. We will focus on one: *shen*. This is a term that we usually translate as "god" or "gods," "divine" or "sacred," but that also includes notions of "spirit," "spirituality," "vitality," and "animation."

The axial age of Chinese philosophical reflection was the later Zhou Dynasty (roughly sixth century to third century BCE). A number of important figures are credited with founding philosophical schools in this period: Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi (the "Confucians"); Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi (the "Daoists"); Mozi (the "school of Mo" and the "Dialecticians"); and so on. These philosophers speculated about nature and the cosmos, and argued about the rational and ethical significance

of things and events: Is nature law-like in its operations? Do natural events reflect a moral meaning, such as reward for good or punishment for evil? Do spirits exist, and if so do they act in morally meaningful ways?

Shen has two clusters of meaning: first, gods and spirits, and especially "strange" or anomalous phenomena observed in the natural world, and second, the numinous and charismatic virtue of sages. In both cases, *shen* are extraordinary, even supernatural, but not beyond or outside the world—not beyond or outside human nature.

Shen as "Supernaturalism"

The Chinese built upon early cosmological conceptions of *yin* and *yang* to describe the nature–spirit continuum. The *yang* world is the world of light: humans and deities belong to this world. The *yin* world is the world of shade: ghosts and ancestors belong to this world. Just as *yin* and *yang* are in constant interaction and mutual penetration, the world of humans and the world of the ancestors are not actually "two worlds" at all, but two interacting and mutually penetrating realms of existence.

The earliest dictionaries, such as the *Erya* (c. third century BCE) or the *Shuowenjiezi* (c. second century CE), associate *shen* with "mysterious" or "inexplicable" forces, or with "unseen" causes in the natural world. In the dictionaries, *shen* appears in compounds: "mysterious trees," "weird fire," "inexplicable events," "unusual phenomena." We can call these things "divine," even "supernatural," but only in the sense that they have numinous qualities—there is no idea of their being "outside" or "beyond" nature. A whole genre of literature arose that was dedicated to chronicling these creatures and events. This literature is sometimes called "literature of the strange" or "records of anomalies," and enjoyed widespread circulation from at least the Zhou and Han until the Song and Ming Dynasties. In his exhaustive study of several hundred of these texts dating from the Warring States period to the Tang, Robert Campany (1996) has rejected classifying "anomaly accounts" as "fiction" (fiction suggests something invented or unreal); rather, the "records of anomalies" were more like histories, biographies, and topographies, describing real but inexplicable things and events.

In Western religious thought, the divine is infinite, immutable, supernatural, unseen, and wholly other; the human is finite, mortal, naturalistic, visible, and familiar. (As Otto (1967) says, "The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other', whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.") This clear distinction—a distinction that is at the heart of the Abrahamic faiths, to the extent that any confusion of these two fundamental categories of existence would be sacrilegious—means that Western religious skepticism, or "atheism," is the very

simple denial of the existence of one half of the binary pair, such that the human realm—finite, mortal, naturalistic, visible, and familiar—is literally "all that exists."

But, in the Chinese religious context, "supernatural beings" are part of "this world." They are not a "transcendent other," independent of nature and humankind. This is why there is no exact equivalent to Western "atheism" in Chinese philosophy, as Western atheism simply rejects a transcendent realm, a realm that, in China, has never existed (as a conception) to be denied (see Ames and Hall 1987).

Chinese religion is polytheistic to the extreme, with literally thousands of gods associated with natural phenomena, particular localities, or eminent men and women (deified humans). Fewer of these—though still a large number—are cross-regional, and are venerated in communities related by immigration or commerce.

Most gods, as we have seen, are deified humans. They were once ancestors—spirits of the dead, worshipped by whole communities rather than simply descendents—though some, surprisingly, were once ghosts: once ignored, then feared, and then worshipped as powerful spirits. Mazu herself was one of these deified ghosts: her legend tells that she died a virgin; that is, without descendents (one of the worst fates in traditional Chinese culture). But her goodness and power were so great that she was at once elevated to the status of a heavenly consort, though her "ghostly" origins are betrayed by the dark coloration of her images and statues.

With the emergence of Religious Daoism in the medieval period (the second to fifth centuries CE), the highly educated priestly class sought to distance itself from the masses' "spirits of the dead," and affirmed the superiority of spirits never touched by death—either immortals (humans who had never died) or celestial (non-human) deities. These remain the "high gods" of Chinese community temples. They are "emperors," and are so distant and abstract that they can only be worshipped directly by the priests themselves.

In addition, a few religious movements in Chinese history affirmed a single high god superior in status and power to the gods of the people. These movements believed that their high god revealed special dispensations to their followers, in the form of "spirit-written" scriptures and sacred objects. Many of these religious groups, sometimes described generically as "White Lotus" movements (as they were so classified by the government), were proscribed, as they were perceived by the government to threaten rebellion. Indeed, the White Lotus sects envisioned a future political utopia, and a few did attempt to create independent theocratic states, branding such movements forever as "heterodox" in the official records. Most such movements, however, were peaceful, and advocated traditional values.

Some Western missionaries and scholars have argued that an incipient "monotheism" underlies the vast multiplicity of Chinese gods. These missionaries had their own reasons for making this argument—to make the Christian transformation more palatable to the Chinese, or to defend their ongoing work to religious authorities back home—but the Christian mission never took hold in China, partly as a result of the conceptual difference between "one" and "many" but more because of the Chinese

sense of the close proximity of the material and spiritual world, and a refusal to see them as divided. Gods, ghosts, and ancestors are present in the world, even within ourselves, as a human being contains a kernel of the divine as a "god prior to death." Some persons are so powerful spiritually that they can even control the spirits, or send their own divine eminences on spirit journeys to distant places and other worlds.

Shen as Charismatic Virtue

A second sense of *shen* is "moral charisma" or the numinous virtue of the sage. Mencius discusses six qualities of a sage, the last of which is *shen*, a "sageliness that surpasses understanding" or "cannot be known":

> That which we want most is goodness; manifesting this [goodness] within oneself is truth; filling oneself with [this goodness] is beauty; displaying this [beauty] to all is greatness; transforming others with this greatness is sageliness [*sheng*]; demonstrating a sageliness that surpasses understanding is *shen*. (*Mencius* II.B.25)

In his commentary on this passage, Zhu Xi, citing Cheng Hao, writes: "What is meant by 'a sageliness that surpasses understanding' is 'marvelous sageliness,' a sageliness that ordinary persons cannot fathom. [However,] this is not to say that there is some class of 'divine persons' beyond the realm of the sages" (*Mengzi jinzhu jinyi* (Commentaries on Menicus)). We will return to this important point in a moment.

The Zhou Dynasty Confucian sage Xunzi also defines *shen* ("numinous virtue") in relation to *sheng* ("sageliness"). In *The Teachings of the* Ru (third century BCE), he includes a *fu* ("rhapsody") describing the charismatic qualities of a sage. A sage is "principled," "serious," "serene," "contented," and so on. Xunzi then comments:

> Such a man may be called a sage, because his Way proceeds from oneness. What is meant by "oneness"? To grasp *shen* and to be steadfast. What is meant by *shen*? To manifest virtue to the utmost, and to be fully in control of oneself: this is what is meant by *shen*. And holding fast without worldly distractions is what is meant by self-control. One who is both *shen* and steadfast is a sage.

Note that, for the philosophers Mencius, Xunzi, and Zhu Xi, the "numinous virtue" of the sage is not something *beyond* the human realm—not "transcending" it—though it cannot be "known" or "understood" by ordinary persons. Rather, the quality of *shen*—of "marvelousness" or "numinousness"—is fully realizable through moral self-cultivation. In fact, *shen* is on a continuum with the other virtues of the sage, and sagehood is realizable by all. For Mencius, "spirituality" or "divinity" is topologically embedded within the Confucian ideals (the good, the true, the

beautiful, the great, and the sagely) and is within "the same realm"—a point made clear by Zhu Xi in placing the sage and the *shen* on the same level of existence.

Chinese Philosophy and Western "Atheism"

We have examined two senses of the word *shen* in the early philosophical tradition. Both describe something extraordinary, even anomalous. In the first sense, *shen* are "marvels" of the natural world; in the second sense, *shen* is a "marvel" of ethical attainment. Yet, though "marvelous," *shen* does not describe something outside or beyond the natural or human realms. The *shen* worshipped in temples are numinous spirits of nature or deified persons. Similarly, anyone, through self-cultivation, can become a sage, and a sage is one who manifests numinous charisma.

If we accept that *shen* has these two senses, it would be impossible to conceive of any Chinese, even the most materialistic, as rejecting the idea of *shen*. This is why even Xunzi, often cited as China's first "religious skeptic," is happy to use the word *shen*, and expresses no doubts about it. If anything, we will find simply that some of the classical philosophers were reluctant to *talk* about *shen*, not as an expression of "doubt" or even "disinterest" but simply as something "beyond understanding."

The belief in gods, ghosts, and spirits can be found in the earliest historical and archeological records. We can say with certainty that by the end of the Shang and Zhou dynasties these beliefs and practices were widespread, permeating Chinese culture. Moreover, these beliefs and practices are consistent with those of the present day. However, there was also a great deal of discussion about the "real existence" of spiritual beings.

Mozi

One source for the history of popular religion in early imperial China can be found in the extant essays on Heaven and spiritual beings attributed to the Warring States philosopher Mozi (c. 470–c. 391 BCE). In the philosophical compendia of the Han Dynasty (roughly 200 BCE–200 CE), the "school of Mozi" is listed among six principal philosophical and political movements of the classical period. Generally dismissed by later thinkers (and especially by the Confucians), Mozi advocated an almost stoic frugality and radical egalitarianism, which he described as "universal" or "undifferentiating" love (*jian'ai*). He argued that all persons should be treated equally: we should "cherish one another without discrimination." Mozi's essays include extended arguments for the elimination of wasteful expenditures, including religious expenses (funerals and other rites), even though he defended the belief in Heaven, ancestors, and other spiritual beings. By practicing "moderation" in funerals and other rites, and eliminating music and the arts, offensive warfare, and other

costly expenditures of the state, the people would achieve a perfect harmony, and support one another as equals.

Mozi was roundly condemned in later generations, possibly because of a utopian movement formed around his ideas that was eventually crushed by imperial forces. Apart from this political concern (the Mohists appear to have at least attempted to form a secessionist state), the main objection to Mohism on the part of the Confucians was that Mozi's notion of "universal love" was both impractical and inhuman. For the Confucians, the model of "love" should be found within one's natural family, a model that "radiates outward"—in attenuated fashion—to all other, lesser relationships. Mozi's universalism, argued the Confucians, was perverse, because it imposed a flat authoritarianism on all of human life, depriving it of its natural joys.

Mozi's essays on gods and ghosts are useful historically because they indicate their cults were widespread among the common people of the later Zhou Dynasty. One reason that his book is an especially good source for popular culture is that Mozi himself may have been a laborer or artisan of humble origins: his name means "dark" or "dark-skinned" (suggesting a background as a manual laborer), or even perhaps "tattooed" (he may have been a prisoner or convict); moreover, he frequently employs examples and metaphors in his essays about wheelwrights, carpenters, and other professions. Finally, his style of writing is plodding and deliberate, suggesting a more remedial educational background—some scholars suggest he may even have been self-taught (cf. Schwartz 1985). Consequently, the book of Mozi is a rare textual source for beliefs and practices of illiterate and semi-literate people in the pre-Han period.

A subtext of Mozi's essays on religious matters is what appears to be a widespread skepticism about the existence of spiritual beings, which Mozi addresses directly. Again and again, Mozi refers to "doubters" and "deniers," and he argues that their "unbelief" is a cause of social ills.

For Mozi, the belief in ghosts and spirits depends on "three bases"—"common experience, reputable testimony, and practical benefit":

> A theory must meet three standards. What are these three standards? Mozi said: "There is the standard of *common experience*, the standard of *reputable testimony* and the standard of *practical benefit*. Where do we find the standard of reputable testimony? We see it from above, from the deeds of the sage kings of antiquity. Where do we find the standard of common experience? We see it from below, by examining the experience of the ears and the eyes of the common people. Where do we find the standard of practical benefit? We put the theory into administrative practice, and observe its benefit to the state and the people. These are the three standards of a theory." (*Mozi* 35, "Against Fatalism" Recession I)

Mozi applies these three standards to his argument for the existence of ghosts and spirits, demonstrating that the belief in their retributive activity enjoys the common

assent of the people (the standard of common experience), was supported by the sage kings of antiquity (the standard of reputable testimony), and serves to benefit the moral good of the state (the standard of practical benefit). In referring to spiritual beings, Mozi mentions specifically "heavenly spirits," "spirits of mountains and rivers," and ghostly or ancestral spirits. His emphasis is on the last of these; in particular, ghosts who have returned to avenge their persecutors. But he also refers frequently to spirits who "do Heaven's bidding," especially by "spying out" the good and evil deeds of the people, wherever they might be performed. A repeated refrain of the essays is the idea that "even in deep valleys, wide forests, or secluded places, if one's actions are improper, the spirits will see them."

To prove the existence of spiritual beings, Mozi begins with the "evidence of the ears and the eyes" of the people (the standard of common experience). He includes seven cases from history, drawing from the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing*: one of the oldest of the Chinese classics) and other more local historical documents (none of which survive today) to substantiate his claim that ghosts and spirits exist and carry out retributive justice. Each is based upon the shared observations of numerous witnesses. Quoting from Mozi:

> Today those who hold the view that there are no ghosts say: "There are innumerable people who claim to have seen and heard ghost-like or god-like things. But who has really seen and heard something to establish their existence or non-existence?"
>
> Mozi replied: "If we are to take what many people agree to have seen or heard, then in antiquity the case of Earl Du meets the requirement. King Xuan of Zhou executed his minister, Earl Du, though he had done no wrong. Earl Du said: 'My lord, you are putting me to death though I have done no wrong. If the dead are unconscious, then this will be the end of it. But if there *is* consciousness after death, then I will have you know it within three years!'
>
> "[One day] three years later King Xuan assembled the feudal lords to go hunting at Pu. Several hundred field chariots and several thousand attendants covered the wilderness. At midday, Earl Du, riding in a simple chariot drawn by a white horse, wearing a red robe and cap, grasping a red bow with a quiver of red arrows, overtook King Xuan of Zhou and shot him in his chariot. The arrow struck his heart and snapped his spine. He collapsed in his chariot and died, slumped over his bow-case.
>
> "When this transpired, there were none among the Zhou attendants who failed to see it, and none in distant places who failed to hear of it. It was recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Zhou* [note: this text is no longer extant] and is used by rulers to instruct their ministers and by fathers to caution their sons, saying, 'Take heed! Watch out! Anyone who takes the life of an innocent person shall suffer misfortune and incur the punishment of the ghosts and spirits as suddenly as this!'
>
> "If we examine the testimony of the records, how can we doubt the existence of ghosts and spirits?" (*Mozi* 31, "Explaining Ghosts" Recession III)

Mozi reports that the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Yan* (*Yanshi chunqiu*, no longer extant) tells a similar cautionary tale. Duke Jian of Yan executed his minister Zhuang

Ziyi though Zhuang had done no wrong, and suffered a fate almost identical to that of King Xuan: the Duke was bludgeoned to death by Zhuang's ghost, which bore a red staff. These are two of the seven cases from "common knowledge" that Mozi employs as verification for the existence and retributive activity of ghosts and spirits.

Mozi second argues from "reputable testimony," reflecting the acts of the "sage kings." He presents documentary evidence from the histories of the Three Dynasties (the prehistoric period of the Tang, Yu, and Xia dynasties) that the sage kings shared the belief in spiritual beings and participated in rites for the dead.

> Now, those who hold the view that there are no ghosts might say: "Can the testimony of the ears and eyes of the common people be sufficient to overcome all doubts? How can one hope to be an esteemed gentleman of the civilized world if at the same time one simply trusts the testimony of the ears and eyes of the common people?"
>
> Mozi replied: "If you feel that the testimony of the ears and eyes of the common people is not deserving of your trust and is not sufficient to overcome your doubts, then will you not agree that the sage kings of the Three Dynasties of antiquity—Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu—are capable of setting the standard? If you do agree that they are capable of setting the standard, then let us consult their records."

Mozi also cites ritual performances carried about by the sage kings:

- King Wu commissioned his ministers to partition the sacrifices of the vanquished Yin empire.
- The sage kings recognized meritorious citizens before the ancestral altar and executed their enemies before the altar of the earth.
- The kings of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou commemorated the founding of states and capitals by establishing a central altar as the ancestral shrine. The shrine was erected in a wooded place, its ritual officiants were selected from among the most virtuous men of the state, and the offerings placed there included the best samplings of sacrificial animals, jades, grains, and wines.

Repeatedly, the sage kings recorded these deeds on bamboo and silk, inscribed them on bowls and basins, and engraved them on metal and stone. Those who do not believe in ghosts and spirits "turn against what the sage kings held most important." As evidence, Mozi cites the *Shujing* and other records of the Three Dynasties: there is ample precedent for the belief in ghosts and spirits and for the rites of sacrifice to honor them.

Finally, Mozi argues for the belief in gods and spirits on the basis of utility or "practical benefit." Mozi excoriates unnamed contemporaries who deny the existence of ghosts and spirits, but, he argues, "even if they do not truly exist," their worship has beneficial results. Mozi argues that the social utility of the belief in gods and spirits is even more important than whether or not the belief is "true." The belief in gods and spirits reinforces morality and a sense of community. It is clear from the

"experiences of the people" and the "testimony of the sage kings" that spirits reward good and punish evil: belief in their existence "strikes the people with awe and fear." Moreover, religious rites and offerings bring families and communities together, and reinforce harmonious relations and "group enjoyment."

> And for this reason Mozi said, "If the kings and nobles of the present day wish to enhance the benefits and reduce the harms of their people, they should act as if they exist and not fail to worship them; this is the Way of the sage kings."

To whatever extent Mozi's philosophical argument was representative of his time, we can assume that legends of ghosts and spirits were widely known, and that public worship was thought to have played a crucial social function. Clearly, stories of gods and ghosts were in wide circulation, and were part of the common experience of early Chinese across the social spectrum.

Confucius

Confucius (551–479 BCE), who spoke repeatedly and often about ethical obligations within families and communities, did not say much about nature, the cosmos, or spiritual beings. Did this mean that he was an "atheist," denying the existence of gods, ghosts, and spirits? There is a stream of both Chinese and Western scholarship that denies Confucianism the status of a "religion" precisely on this point.

Though Confucianism has been described as a "humanistic philosophy," Confucius was hardly a religious skeptic in the strong sense of the term. That is to say, he did not deny the existence of "gods" or "supernatural phenomena." Rather, he "refused to talk about them." The *Analects* records, "The topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder, and gods" (trans. Lau 1979). D. C. Lau, like many translators, treats these as four separate topics, but the commentaries of later Confucians treated the four characters *guai*, *li*, *luan*, and *shen* as two binomial pairs: "anomalous power" (*guai li*) and "chaotic noumena" (*luan shen*), the latter refering to inexplicable occurrences in the natural world that defy understanding. Confucius is not "denying the existence" of such things—in fact, there is the tacit assumption that such events do transpire—but he sets them apart by refusing to discuss them.

In his commentary on the *Analects*, the Song Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200) glosses the passage exactly in this way, not as a condemnation of the belief in gods. His commentary reads as follows:

> Marvels, extraordinary powers, anomalous events: these defy known principles, and this is why sages do not speak of them. Ghosts and spirits are the traces of the evolutionary process; though acknowledging them is not improper, they cannot be comprehended by the thorough Investigation of Principle, and so they should not be spoken about casually. Quoting Master Xie's commentary, "The sage speaks of regularity, not

> anomaly; speaks of virtue, not power; speaks of order, not disorder; speaks of humans, not spirits."

Note that for Zhu Xi (here citing Xie Liangzuo, c. 1050–1120, who composed his own commentary on the *Analects*), the point is not that spirits "do not exist" but rather that "sages do not talk about them" (see Chan 1989).

Confucius also cautions against getting "too close" to the marvelous and extraordinary. When asked about "wisdom," he said, "Respecting the ghosts and spirits while keeping one's distance: this is what is meant by 'wisdom' " (6.22). (Hereafter, translations from the *Analects* are by the author.) This is consistent with his advice to Ji Lu, who inquired about "ghosts" and about "death," to which Confucius replied, "You are not yet able to serve people—how could you serve ghosts and spirits? . . . You do not yet understand life—how could you possibly understand death?" (*Analects* 11.12). Confucius is not reflecting a "skeptical" stance, at least in the Western atheistic sense of "denying the existence of ghosts and spirits," but rather a reluctance to speculate about anomalies and unseen forces, or to try to "understand" them.

What we see in Confucius is not the division of the human and divine into "real" versus "unreal" or "true" versus "false" realms, but rather a division of the "natural world" into regularized versus anomalous events and occurrences. It is unwise to speculate about those anomalous events.

At one point, Confucius announces that he is going to "stop speaking." When asked why, he suggests he is simply imitating Heaven: "Does Heaven speak? [The question is rhetorical: No, it does not.] Yet the four seasons continue to change, and all things are born. Does Heaven speak?" (*Analects* 17.19). Confucius models Heaven in "refusing to speak" as well. His disciple Zigong reports that Confucius was willing to discuss literature but not human nature or the Heavenly *Dao* (*Analects* 5.13). But we know that Confucius had a deep interest in human nature and the Heavenly *Dao*, so his reluctance to speak about them could not have betrayed an agnostic or atheistic stance. "Not to speak" is wisdom—as stated in the oft-quoted aphorism from the *Daode jing*, "Those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak" (ch. 56). In all of these cases, the avoidance of speculation, and the distrust of language when applied to spiritual matters, is not a humanistic or atheistic stance; it could even be called reverential (see Ames and Hall 1987).

Xunzi

One of the best examples of the more thoroughly skeptical views was elaborated by Xunzi (312–230 BCE), the "third sage" of Confucianism, known for his negative evaluation of human nature. Xunzi was a strong advocate of *li* (public ritual or rites-based ethics) but he did not believe that "spiritual phenomena" should occupy our attention and he did not see anything more than "social usefulness" in religious performance.

Xunzi rejected religious explanations for unusual occurrences. He argued against commonly held beliefs that ghosts and spirits produce strange events and that one can predict the future based on peculiar physical characteristics—that is, palmistry or physiognomy ("face-reading"). He rejected the popular beliefs of his time that omens could be read in acts of nature, such as storms, earthquakes, river currents, eclipses, or movements of the moon and stars. He refused to acknowledge unseen causes of natural events or political upheavals, or to admit any connection between strange natural events and the success or failure of human endeavors. The greatest wisdom, he said, is to see that the social realm, the realm of the heavens, and the realm of the earth are completely distinct (they form a "triad"): only the first of these can be understood and only human action has moral significance. In his essay entitled "A Discourse on Heaven" (*Tianlun*), Xunzi describes his naturalistic understanding of Heaven. Prior Confucians (including Confucius himself) had conceptualized *Tian* in anthropomorphic terms, as guiding human life, and rewarding and punishing, delighting in, or detesting human acts. Xunzi, by contrast, described *Tian* simply as the order of nature, independent of human behavior in its processes and activities. *Tian*, he said, is impartial, speechless, natural, spontaneous, purposeless, indifferent, unconscious, irrational, and unknowable. "So, a person of depth does not attempt to contemplate it" (All translations from *Xunzi* are from Knoblock 1988–1994).

This is not to say that Xunzi rejected ceremony or religious ritual, however. He simply rejected an interpretation of religious ritual as "true" or efficacious: "You pray for rain and it rains. For what reason? I say there is no reason. It is as if you had not prayed for rain and it rained anyway." Yet religious ritual has its positive effects if it is seen for what it truly is—the ordered expression of human emotion and a model of social harmony. Xunzi describes the function of religion as "ornamental" (*wen*), a word that connotes order, pattern, and emotional and aesthetic balance—the same word that Confucius used to describe "culture" or "civilization." "Ornament" creates models or paradigms for human life, and religion is part of the general molding process of education. Religious rituals (*li*) give emotion an appropriate outlet and help us to overcome our naturally selfish expression of desire. But there is no question of spiritual efficacy: "So, the gentleman regards the *li* as ornamental, the common people as divine. To see them as ornamental is fortunate; to see them as divine is unfortunate."

In the context of a divinatory culture that saw meaning in unusual natural events, Xunzi denied the significance of anomalies: falling stars, solar and lunar eclipses, weather irregularities, eerie sounds emanating from animals and trees, and so on. "The people are all afraid, and they ask, 'What is the explanation for this?' I say, 'There is no explanation! Such things occur once in a while with the changes of Heaven and earth and the mutations of *yin* and *yang*. Wonder at them, but do not fear them.' " Other disasters, by contrast, are clearly man-made: farmers neglect their plowing and weeding; government policies are onerous or ill-timed; families abandon traditional standards of comportment and they quarrel and bicker. These

failings are portentous: they lead to trouble. So, Xunzi writes, "Portents such as these are born from disorder . . . The reasons for their occurrence may be found very close at hand. Wonder at them, and fear them as well" (*Tianlun* 17.7).

In the introduction to his translation of this essay, John Knoblock characterizes Xunzi's argument as a rejection of "the superstitions of his age, arguing for an entirely naturalistic explanation of uncanny, strange, or abnormal phenomena." But let us be more precise about what Xunzi is saying: We should both "wonder" and "fear" when it comes to things over which we have moral control, but only "wonder" when it comes to things over which we do not have moral control. This is not a statement that "mysterious things" do not happen, or that gods and spirits do not exist. Rather, Xunzi, like Confucius, avoided speculation about natural anomalies and "spiritual" matters.

Wang Chong

Another classical philosopher who has been regarded as an "atheist" or "religious skeptic" is Wang Chong (27–c. 97 CE), an eclectic thinker of the Han Dynasty. He is known today as the author of a major work, *Discursive Equilibrium* (*Lunheng*), in eighty-five chapters (82–83 CE). Chapter 85, an autobiography, mentions three shorter works, none of which survive. Going further than Xunzi, Wang Chong argued that natural events have natural causes; that beliefs in gods, ghosts, and spirits are superstitious falsehoods; and that there is no correspondence between human events and natural phenomena—the processes of nature are not influenced by human behavior and have no moral significance.

Wang Chong did not receive much attention in his time. There is no commentary on the *Lunheng*, and Wang Chong was not associated with any particular philosophical school in the bibliographical works of the third to ninth centuries (he is listed among the "miscellaneous philosophers"). Insofar as he borrowed from Daoist, Confucian, and Cosmological works in his writing, Wang remains difficult to categorize. Though often described by modern scholars as a "Confucian," Wang Chong was not a member of the *Ru* School. One essay of the *Lunheng* is a commentary on the *Analects*, and in several instances Wang remarks on the aspirations of the *Ru*-ists, but he clearly did not identify himself with them.

"Hatred of fictions and falsehoods" was, wrote Wang Chong, the "one phrase" that summarized his teachings, and Wang Chong has been credited with being a rare example of a critical "scientific spirit" in the history of Chinese philosophy. Employing both empirical evidence and the test of reason, *Lunheng* examines contemporary beliefs in supernaturalism, philosophical views of human nature and human destiny, and correlative theories of the correspondence between natural events and human affairs. Wang subjects the testimony of the Zhou philosophers and historians as well as the popular beliefs and practices of his contemporaries to critical scrutiny.

Wang's style of argumentation in *Lunheng* set a standard for the critical evaluation of evidence. He draws heavily upon the histories and commentaries of the Zhou and Han Dynasties, particularly the *Shujing*, the *Shiji*, and the commentaries on the *Chunqiu*, and their numerous accounts of marvelous events—astrological anomalies, unusual plants and animals, ghostly apparitions, sudden climatic changes, biological metamorphoses, and hidden treasures. Like Xunzi, Wang generally accepts these reports at face value, but he rejects the conclusion that these events are caused by ghosts and spirits, and denies that they have moral significance as cosmic rewards or punishments for human acts. In this, he explicitly takes issue with the Zhou Dynasty philosopher Mozi, who employed the testimony of the histories as evidence for the willful interventions of Heaven and the retributive activity of ghosts and spirits. Wang concludes that a rational evaluation of the evidence does not support an anthropomorphic conception of Heaven or the attribution of conscious intention to the dead. He insists on natural explanations for remarkable events.

In his most explicit commentary on the employment of evidence, Wang Chong writes:

> If one theorizes without focusing one's mind and clarifying one's thoughts, carelessly taking external evidence to establish truth and falsity, believing what one sees and hears from outside without interpreting it and settling it within—this is *theorizing with the ears and the eyes*, not *deliberating with the mind and the intellect*. Now, if one theorizes with the ears and the eyes, then one establishes tenets on the basis of empty appearances; and if empty appearances are employed as evidence, then one falsifies reality. In fact, truth and falsity are not dependent upon the ears and the eyes—one must appeal to the mind and the intellect. The Mohists do not investigate the basis of things with their minds, but carelessly believe whatever they hear and see. As a result, they miss the truth despite the clarity and distinctness of their evidence.

Unlike the Mohists, Wang Chong argues, he tests the evidence of empirical observation against the standard of reason by "focusing the mind" and "clarifying thoughts." Wang Chong bases his critique of Mozi upon his "standard of verification" and use of empirical evidence. Though the testimony of the histories witnesses to the appearances of strange phenomena including shadowy apparitions, it is, Wang argues, irrational to infer from these appearances the conscious activity of the dead. The observation of "marvels" is not evidence for the existence of ghosts: "People fear anomalies and wonders, so they idly exaggerate and embellish them." In fact, ghosts—the conscious dead—cannot exist, and this can be known by reason. With regard to the tales of King Xuan and Duke Qian, wrongly persecuted regents who allegedly returned to seek vengeance as ghosts, he comments:

> These two cases are taken as evidence that the dead become ghosts, and that ghosts are conscious and are capable of injuring the living. What can we say about this? I say that persons are born as one of the ten thousand things. When *things* die, they do not become ghosts. When *persons* die, why should they alone become ghosts? If it is because

> of their supremacy over other beings that they can become ghosts, then all dead persons should become ghosts—why just King Xuan and Duke Qian? If it is those who have been wrongly accused who can become ghosts, the world has numerous cases of ministers wrongly accused.

The belief in ghosts is irrational. There is nothing qualitatively different between persons and things that persons alone should become ghosts and nothing qualitatively different between persons that a few should become ghosts while the majority do not.

Wang frequently employs a reductio ad absurdum to mock popular beliefs. In the essay "Discourse on Death" (*Lunsi*), he elaborates on the points raised against Mozi. If all dead persons became ghosts, the world would be full of them:

> From the time of the ordering of Heaven and Earth, from the time of the human emperors, people have died in ripe old age. Millions of others have died in middle age or youth. The number of people now living cannot exceed the number now dead. If people became ghosts after death, there would be one for every step on the roads and highways. If people saw ghosts on their deathbeds, they would see hundreds and thousands. Ghosts would pack the halls and fill the courts, block and stuff the alleys and roads. One could not see just one or two . . . Exposed corpses by the thousands can be counted in the grasses and swamps, so we ought to hear their wails and moans at every step.

Oftentimes ghosts are seen, as was Earl Du, in striking attire, but if ghosts are the souls of the dead, then

> people seeing ghosts should see just their naked, undressed forms. There is no way they should see them wearing sashes or covered with clothes. Why? Because clothes have no soul. When a person dies, the clothes decompose with the body. How can they be worn?

The problem is not limited to clothing and other material things; the decomposition of the body makes a number of phenomena associated with ghosts impossible to conceive. The dead cannot cry out, much less do injury to the living, because speech depends upon the breath:

> After death, the mouth and throat rot and decay, and the tongue can no longer move. How can they form words? Could it be when dried bones from time to time sigh and moan, that these are human bones with the capacity for sighing and moaning all by themselves? . . .
>
> After death, since persons do not become ghosts, are not conscious, and cannot speak, they cannot harm the living. How do we show this? Anger requires breath, and harming others requires force. To use force, one must have strength in the muscles and bones; with this strength, one can do injury . . . After death, the bones decay, and the muscular strength is exhausted; one cannot lift hand or foot.

If ghosts are physical, they must eat to live. But they are provided only the smoke of burnt offerings, and such smells cannot sustain a physical body:

> Some say that the dead smell cooked meats and consume their odors, and are therefore able to speak. Now, the souls of the dead are the same as the souls of the living: if living persons were neither to drink nor to eat but simply opened their mouths to smell cooked meats and consume their odors, they would starve to death within three days.

In these and similar arguments, Wang Chong reduces the belief in ghosts and spirits to a series of logical absurdities.

Despite what the world believes, therefore,

> I maintain that the dead do not become ghosts, are not conscious, and cannot injure the living. So it is clear that what are seen as ghosts are not the souls of the dead, and whatever it is that injures the living is not done by these souls.

Having dismissed the belief in ghosts and spirits, Wang Chong goes on to explain what really happens at death. Death brings about the withering and decay of the body and the exhaustion or dispersal of the "spiritual breath" (*shenqi*):

> The means by which a person is born is the spiritual breath. When he dies, this spiritual breath is extinguished. That which can produce the spiritual breath is the pulse. When a person dies, the pulse stops. When the pulse stops, the spiritual breath is extinguished. When the spiritual breath is extinguished, the body decays. And when the body decays, it turns to earth and dust. How could it become a ghost? . . .
>
> When something has died, its body rots and decays, and its soul scatters and is gone.

Becoming scattered and dispersed, this spirit is "diffuse and formless," and cannot recover its former human shape. The spirit "ascends to heaven" from whence it came, and the body "returns to the earth": "Thus, it is called 'ghost' (*gui*), which means 'to return' (*gui*)."

What, then, are ghosts? That is, what have people seen when they claim to have seen ghosts? In his essay "Explaining Ghosts" (*Dinggui*), Wang Chong presents a number of theories seemingly current in the Latter Han Dynasty. He appears to find all of them plausible: "I have listed them together; now let the world examine them." We can only quote briefly from Wang's lengthy discussion.

(1) *Ghosts arise from illness and dementia*. Wang notes that ghostly apparitions appear to those who are ill or near death:

> The ghosts in Heaven and Earth are not produced by the souls of persons who have died. They are all brought into being by persons thinking, imagining, meditating, and calling them to mind. What causes them to appear? Illness and dementia. When persons become ill, they are agitated and fearful, and when they become agitated and fearful, they see ghosts emerging . . .

> When their troubles intensify, and their bodies are racked with pain, they will say that ghosts grasping bamboo switches are beating and striking them. It is as if they see them standing guard over them, poised with mallets, chains, ropes and binding. They conjure these up when their illnesses pain them and their fears terrorize them. With the onset of illness, they become frightened and alarmed, and see the ghosts' arrival; as their illnesses develop complications such that death is imminent, they see the ghosts' fury; and as their bodies produce their own acute pains, they see the ghosts' assaults. All of these empty afflictions arise from the imagination: there is no corresponding reality . . .
>
> [Also] . . . The insane see ghosts. In their dementia, they talk to themselves and avoid contact with ordinary persons, due to the complications of their illness and the confusion of their minds. Now, when people are ill and approaching death, they are like the insane.
>
> For dreamers, the ill, and the insane—these three—the mind is weakened and exhausted, and the vision is disturbed. This is why they conjure up the images of persons and things.

(2) *Ghosts are the spirits of the stellar breath*. Quite in contrast to the view that ghosts are merely the products of hallucinatory imagination, with no objective observable reality, Wang seems equally convinced by the theory that ghostly apparitions are formed by the descent and congealing of "heavenly breath" (*Tianqi*), the "breath" of stars (*xingqi*), the "breath" of the sun (*taiyang zhi qi*), or the "breath" of *yang* (*yangqi*), all of which are publically observable and have tangible effects. He devotes a significant proportion of the essay to expounding this view:

> The breath of Heaven and Earth is purest in Heaven. Above, the Heavenly patterns [constellations] suspend their images [stars], and their breath descends and produces things. When the breath is harmonious, it sustains them. When it is not, it causes harm and injury. What originally produces an image in Heaven, upon descending takes shape on Earth. So, the appearances of ghosts are caused by this stellar breath. The bodies of the myriad stars form persons, birds, and beasts. This is why ill people see the shapes of persons, birds, and beasts.

The images formed by this *yang* breath are flickering and impermanent: "Ghosts are the breath of *yang*: sometimes hidden, sometimes apparent." This is to say that ghosts are not the spirits of the conscious dead but are rather the natural emanations and conglomerations of stellar *qi*.

(3) *Ghosts are portentous apparitions*. Another theory that seems to enjoy Wang's favor is that the appearances of ghostly apparitions are tied to individual destinies as omens or portents. Despite his "skeptical" views, Wang believed fully in divination, which he described entirely in naturalistic terms:

> There is another view that states that before one meets with good or bad fortune, lucky or unlucky omens appear; and that before one meets with death, there is the appearance of many marvels. Ghosts are among these marvels . . .

> The appearance of a ghost is an unlucky omen. In Heaven and Earth, calamities and blessings are always preceded by signs of their arrival. The images [of these signs] appear gradually, not all at once, and they are not plentiful in number. The Way of Heaven and Earth is such that when a person is about to die, unlucky omens arise, and when a state is about to fall, ominous signs appear . . .
>
> When a state is about to fall, evil omens appear, but its demise is not caused by these omens. And when a person is about to die, ghosts appear, but his death is not caused by ghosts. What causes a state to fall is weaponry, and what causes a person to die is illness.

Though he seems to acknowledge the "existence" and portentousness of spirits, Wang is consistent in rejecting the attribution of conscious intention to ghosts or to the dead.

(4) *Ghosts are transformations of anomalous creatures.* Wang comments only briefly on several other views, without arguing for or against them. One states that ghosts are the spirits of "old creatures" capable of self-transformation:

> There is another view that states that ghosts are the souls of old creatures. When creatures grow old, their souls become human, and there are even things that can in essence undergo transformations before they are old, and imitate the human shape.

Another view maintains that ghosts are "originally born with a person," but later "transform and depart." This transformative capacity is common to a number of creatures admitted by Wang to be real, including dragons, phoenixes, and unicorns. These creatures are native to the barbarian lands, but "from time to time come to the central kingdom and mix with men." They include "malignant demons." These are not formless apparitions, but have tangible physical bodies, which "can be caught hold of and fed to tigers."

> Because they are things that can be eaten, they are not empty or unreal. But the nature of these things differs from the nature of humans. One moment they appear, the next they are hidden. There is no difference between this and the infrequent appearances of dragons.

Clearly Wang is attempting to establish some naturalistic basis, grounded in analogy to the qualities of observable things, for the appearance of ghostly apparitions. In doing so, he is able to reject what he views as the logically absurd theory that ghosts are conscious spirits of the dead. Thus, he draws upon Mozi's "standard of verification," accepting the testimony of the senses, but he charges Mozi and the common people with leaping to conclusions unjustified by the evidence.

Wang Chong also draws upon precedent, in the sense that he feels it important to defend Confucius against the charge of ambivalence in the matter of ghosts and spirits: despite disagreement among his contemporaries, "it is not the case that Confucius was unclear about the nature of life and death." To defend his view that

Confucius in fact did not ascribe consciousness to the dead, he cites the Sage's response to the collapse of his mother's tomb:

> Confucius buried his mother at Fang. Later a heavy rain fell, and the tomb at Fang collapsed. When Confucius learned of this, his tears flowed with weeping, and he noted: "The ancients did not repair their graves." So he did not repair it either. If the dead indeed were conscious, they would resent anyone who did not repair their graves. And if Confucius believed this, he would certainly have repaired the mound to please the soul of the dead. But he did not repair it. The Sage, clear in his investigations, knew that the dead are not conscious.

Wang Chong was inspiring to the late Qing reformers of the nineteenth century and to Chinese intellectual historians of the twentieth. Hu Shih (1891–1962) credits Wang with a "critical scientific spirit" unique in Chinese intellectual history (Hu 1931). Fung Yu-lan (1895–1990) asserts that Wang "undoubtedly did much to purge China of a great mass of popular superstition"; his "scientific spirit . . . makes one regret that it has found no later followers" (Fung 1983). Qian Mu (1895–1990) lauds Wang Chong as "China's preeminent logical thinker" (Qian n.d.). Wing-tsit Chan (1901–1994) describes Wang as "a thoroughly independent thinker" notable for his "critical spirit, skepticism, scientific method, demand for evidence, and revolt against the past . . . His chief contribution to the history of Chinese thought is to clear the atmosphere of superstition and enhance the critical and rational spirit that was already incipient" (Chan 1963).

Wang has enjoyed similar praise in the West, correcting "the excesses of correlative system-building" at a "low point" in the "debasement" of ancient Chinese thought (Graham 1989); showing an "astonishingly modern," "independent spirit" not seen in "any other literary work in human history" (Creel 1953); and standing as "one of the greatest men of his nation in any age . . . from the point of view of the history of scientific thought" (Needham 1956).

Conclusion

Why survey the philosophical views of Mozi, Confucius, Xunzi, Wang Chong, and other classical thinkers for their "theological" views? Though they lived and wrote many centuries ago, these thinkers are highly representative of Chinese intellectual views of divinity and the spirit world. We have noted that, while philosophers such as Confucius, Xunzi, and Wang Chong were reluctant to "talk about" gods and spirits, or even to attribute consciousness to them, they did not go so far as to "deny their existence," as a Western "atheist" would. Moreover, they saw the social utility of religion—and especially of religious ritual—as a standard or model for social relations in general: ordered, harmonious, virtuous, and dignified.

Chinese today maintain beliefs and practices no less diverse than any other culture, from active worship of spiritual beings to a more "naturalistic" orientation.

Chinese intellectuals are also the product of modern scientific rationalism, and the idealization of reason and standards of proof. But Chinese today differ from Western "atheists" in admitting the "possibility" of spiritual beings, seeing them (as Xunzi and Wang Chong did) as part of "this world" rather than inhabiting some transcendent or supernatural realm. These views—that spiritual beings are real but lack moral significance—are remarkably consistent with the religious views of modern-day Chinese intellectuals, even those raised under the banner of the "scientific materialism" of Chinese Marxist thought.

Chinese philosophers, while expressing doubts about the moral significance of anomalous things and events, do not express Western-style "atheism." There is no doubt about the existence of *shen*, only about its significance. Moreover, the reluctance to speak about—to name, describe, or conjecture about—the spiritual world is hardly a rejection, but is in fact an affirmation of noumenal reality, "surpassing the understanding of ordinary men." Highest wisdom, we might even say "spiritual wisdom," is inexpressible, even unknowable.

Western atheism is the denial of transcendence. Atheism rejects the existence of a god, or any entity, that stands outside and is independent of the world. Since Chinese religion lacks such a conception—seeing spirituality as a facet of the world and of human beings—the position of atheism is topologically impossible.

The Chinese concept of "divinity" is rich and diverse, and is readily apparent in the worship of spiritual beings, which has been remarkably consistent over the long course of Chinese history. People today, as they did in the Shang Dynasty over two thousand years ago, venerate a wide array of gods, ghosts, and ancestors through ritual, supplication, and philosophical speculation. The spiritual universe, which thoroughly penetrates the "material" world of everyday life, is one of the abiding cosmological conceptions of traditional Chinese culture to the present day, whether among the great majority of "ordinary folk" or among the scientifically oriented intellectual elite. Through all of its historical and cultural change, the Chinese conception of divinity is actively expressed in the veneration of ancestors, in the worship of gods and spirits, and in intellectual speculation about the cosmos and the natural world.

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CHAPTER 18

Gender

Beata Grant, Washington University

At its most basic, the term "gender" presumes duality: there are men and there are women and there is difference (apart from the obviously biological) between them. The nature and value of that difference have been defined in varying ways, although historically speaking, in China and elsewhere, it has been the male side of the equation that has largely set the terms for the definitions. In the case of Chinese religion, the terms that most immediately invoke this gender dyad are ones that are familiar even to those who know little or nothing of Chinese religion or culture: *yin* and *yang*. The Chinese characters for these terms refer most literally to the shady (*yin*) and sunny (*yang*) side of a mountain slope; over time the terms themselves were used to express the basic notion of binary complements: sun and moon, earth and heaven, light and dark. The notions of *yin* and *yang* underlie all of indigenous Chinese religious thought, including what are known as Daoism and Confucianism. As Richard J. Smith neatly summarizes, "*Yin*/*yang* relationships involved the notion of mutual dependence and harmony based on hierarchical difference. *Yin* qualities were generally considered inferior to *yang* qualities, but unity of opposites was always the cultural ideal" (Smith 1991).

If the "unity of opposites" was the cultural and religious ideal for Daoism and Confucianism, the transcendence of opposites was the ideal for at least some forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which came to China from India in the first millennium and in the centuries that followed became an integral part of the Chinese religious worldview. With regard to gender, this ideal of transcendence was, in some cases, manifested as the "overcoming" or non-differentiation of male and female, with the practical result that, for women, renunciation as part of the monastic order

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of nuns has been throughout Chinese history and remains a real social alternative for women.

Between ideal and reality there has always and ever been a huge gap, however, and students and scholars of Chinese religion are faced with trying to understand the extent and the nature of that gap. The obstacles are considerable, primary among them being the nature and number of our sources. It is only fairly recently that ethnographic fieldwork has enabled scholars to once again observe religion on the ground in the People's Republic of China, and to talk and listen to those most directly involved in its beliefs and practices. While some of this fieldwork may suggest that certain beliefs and practices go back many centuries, there is no way of knowing this for certain. Thus, apart from important and exciting (although still frustratingly limited) archaeological discoveries, the only sources we have for the many millennia of Chinese history are texts. And these texts—be they official histories, local gazetteers, hagiographies, or collections of anecdotes and tales—were all for the most part composed, compiled, or edited by men whose literacy presupposed a largely Confucian-based education. In other words, they were members of the educated elite, which, although larger in the later dynasties than it was in the early periods of Chinese history, never represented more than a small percentage of the general population. As males and as members of the educated elite, not only did they tend to view and record the world through largely androcentric eyes but they also did not write or record much, except occasionally out of simple curiosity if not moral disfavor, about the religious lives of the vast majority of Chinese, both women and men. This problem is further complicated by the generic conventions of much Chinese writing, which meant, for example, that the same men who expounded in their official writings on the necessity of strict female subordination expressed sympathy for the difficulties faced by female relatives in their personal letters. Or that a brief biographical notice of a woman's life in an official gazetteer would contain no mention of her Buddhist piety while her tomb inscription might go into considerable detail about her acts of Buddhist devotion. In fact, the official notice might even neglect to note that after becoming widowed she became not just a Buddhist nun but the abbess of a thriving convent!

In other words, given the nature of our sources, any attempt to draw definitive conclusions about the historical roles played by gender in Chinese religions is fraught with difficulty. Nevertheless, one must begin somewhere, and the *yin*/*yang* dyad, given the extent to which it has always permeated so much of Chinese religious thought, is as good a place as any, although one further caveat must be made before we begin. While this initial discussion will be presented in terms of the so-called "three traditions"—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—with a fourth category vaguely entitled "popular religion," this is purely for the purposes of convenience and will later be abandoned, since such a categorization seriously belies the extent to which the boundaries between these so-called traditions, while by no means completely imaginary, have always been extremely porous.

Women's Roles and Status in the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist Traditions

For the earliest explicit discussion of gender in the Confucian tradition, we need to go back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) figure Dong Zhongshu (c. 195–105 BCE), whose primary goal was to systemize Confucian thought so that it could be used for the purposes of statecraft and governance. One of the things he did, which would have great consequences, was to apply the theory of *yin* and *yang* to the relationship between and roles of men and women. The association of *yin* and *yang* with Earth and Heaven, for all its implication of complementarity (one cannot have one without the other), also suggests hierarchy: Heaven, after all, stretches above Earth. Thus, the notion of *yin* and *yang* cannot be said to have been strictly one of complementary equivalence. However, scholars generally agree that, while even before the Han *yin* and *yang* were regarded as largely *functional* in nature, it was with Dong Zhongshu that men were *essentialized* as *yang* and women were *essentialized* as *yin*. Women were complementary in that, without them, men would be unable to fulfill *their* primary religious duties, which were to offer ritual sacrifices to the ancestors and, above all, assure the continuity of the family line by means of male heirs. This assumption of complementary hierarchy lies behind the primary, although by no means unchanging, meaning of the *fudao* or "the way of women," which, ideally speaking, referred to unwavering adherence to what were often summarized as the "three obediences and the four virtues" (*sancong side*). The "three obediences" refers to a woman's willing subordination, at various stages in her life, to her father, her husband, and finally her son. This demand for subordination, at its most extreme, is reflected in the infamous statement by the eleventh century neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Yi that it would be better for a widow to die of starvation than lose her virtue by remarrying. While it was only in late imperial China that this injunction against remarriage became truly widespread, it is important to note that it was an expectation that was never made of men. The "four virtues" refer to women's character, speech, deportment (all of which required modesty, humility, and impeccable morality), and work (household management, childcare, and activities such as weaving and needlework). It is clear, then, that terms such as virtue and chastity, which are ubiquitous in the Confucian prescriptive texts, obviously do not refer simply to physical chastity as they do in Christianity, for example; rather, they refer to adherence to Confucian norms of proper female behavior.

Nor was it only men who insisted on this adherence: as early as the first century BCE, the woman scholar and writer Ban Zhao composed a text entitled *Nüjie* (*Instructions for my Daughters*) in which she emphasized the importance of women adhering to these norms. Although some have argued that her purpose in so doing was pragmatic rather than ideological, the fact is that her text, and many others like it, became required reading for elite women through the subsequent centuries. At the

risk of generalization, then, one might say that for Confucianism *yin* represented woman as necessary but also as necessarily subordinate: modest, maternal, yielding, chaste, and loyal. In other contexts, however, this subordination was more damning to women: at its worst, *yin* was associated with another character, written differently but also pronounced *yin*, meaning lewd and improper.

However (and this is a very important qualification), it must never be forgotten that these norms were ideals—ideals that were, and could only be, applicable to women who could afford to remain within the so-called inner sphere (*nei*). They did not, indeed could not, apply to the great majority of women in premodern China, who, being for the most part illiterate and poor, may not even have been fully aware of these prescriptive ideals, and, even if they were, could not have afforded to strictly live by them. One might say that, in Confucianism, *yin* was regarded as necessary and possibly good (in the case of modesty and humility) but also potentially dangerous if not contained by rules of proper behavior. For the term *yin* never referred exclusively to "women"—it could also refer to a wide range of phenomena and states. In particular, it could refer to the dark side of things—death, the underworld, the irrational, the ecstatic—many of which were obviously necessary (night-time) and others clearly inevitable (death). The problem, however, was that they were not always, and sometimes never, amenable to control. And questions of gender, as many feminist writers have noted, are often intimately intertwined with issues of control.

Perhaps one of the most striking illustrations of this concern with control is the convoluted and persistent history of shamanism in China. It is generally agreed that, as Donald Sutton puts it, "shamanism can be regarded as the 'substrate' of Chinese religion, as long as that term does not imply lack of change or absence of regional variation" (Sutton 2000). One of the primary characteristics of shamanism was that its practitioners derived their power, and reputed efficacy, from their unmediated contact with *yin*, in this case the supernatural, whether in the form of gods, ghosts, or ancestors and in particular supernatural beings who had once, or who still were, unhappy or discontented. And, since *yin* was identified with the female, including the female body, it is not surprising that, while it is by no means the case that all shamans were (or are) female, a large percentage of them were. Indeed, the very first historical accounts of female religious power relate to shamanic power. Thus, in early Chinese texts from the Zhou and Western Han Dynasties, we find the term *nü de* or "female power" which, according to some scholars, appears to have referred primarily to women's ability to manipulate the supernatural in order to control others. In other words, women could and should be wives and mothers, but they could and sometimes were also witches, sorcerers, and shamans.

The ability to communicate with the divine was a potentially useful skill, especially for those who exercised temporal power. In fact, from the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1100 BCE) up until as late as the first century of the Common Era, shamans of both sexes played an important role in official government circles: female shamans, known as *wu*, held official positions and were responsible for vitally important

rituals of purgation and, even more importantly, rainmaking. In other words, the religious power of women was not only acknowledged but regarded as important and worthy of respect. In the Shang Dynasty, female shamans enjoyed an extraordinary amount of prestige as official rainmakers—the names of several of these *wu* are found inscribed on oracle bones from this period. Their power was such that ritual exposure of their naked bodies was considered enough to overcome the dreaded demon of drought (*hanpo*) who, not incidentally, was also regarded as being feminine.

By the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), however, the imperial court had distanced itself from the magical-ecstatic world of shamanism, and in particular that of female shamanism, which was then relegated to the world of the religiously and culturally marginal. It by no means disappeared, however; although no longer under elite ritual control, it came to be identified with the so-called popular strain of Chinese religion, the type of religion that is described in elite texts in highly ambivalent and often negative terms, if it is described at all. Nevertheless, it is here that we find reflected some of the deepest and most powerful religious fears, hopes, desires, and concerns of the ordinary Chinese. It is here also that below the overlay of increasingly Confucian and largely patriarchal elite ideals we find even to this day continued manifestations of *nü de*, or feminine religious power, including the power wielded by shamans and mediums of all sorts. The subsequent history of attempts, usually on the part of the representatives of either secular or institutional power (be this Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist), to utilize, channel, contain, control, or co-opt this power of *yin* makes for a fascinating and still incompletely understood story, a few highlights of which will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

In Daoism (used as a convenient—but potentially misleading—term for a wide range of beliefs and practices), the notion of *yin* is also fundamental. This is perhaps not so surprising given that, as many scholars attest, Daoism has its roots in early shamanism, although later it worked hard to reinterpret, channel, and often differentiate itself from practices associated with shamanism. It has often been said that unlike Confucianism, which subjugated *yin* to *yang* (and by extension female to male), Daoism elevated and even privileged *yin*. Thus, we find in the well-known Daoist classic, the *Daode jing*, allusions to the power of the obscure or dark, of the mother, of the valley, and of water—all of which were associated with *yin* (although it is important to note that recent archaeological discoveries of some of the earliest bamboo-text versions of this work contain far fewer of these maternal and feminine images than are found in much later versions).

It has also been argued that, due to this philosophical privileging of *yin*, Daoism has—especially in comparison to Confucianism, but also Buddhism—shown a relatively greater inclusiveness when it comes to women, whether as goddesses, immortals, teachers, or practitioners. And it is indeed true that there are a good number of powerful goddesses in the Daoist religious pantheon, including the Mother of the *Dao*, who is "born from cosmic energies and created through the unfolding of primordial energies" (Despeux and Kohn 2003), and the all-powerful

Queen Mother of the West, who, while her origins were in shamanism, eventually was elevated to the top of the Daoist pantheon. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in particular, the Queen Mother of the West became an object of intense cultic veneration by women and men alike. Many centuries later, during the late imperial period, she was further identified with the Eternal Mother of various sectarian religions.

Medieval Daoist texts make little or no distinction between men and women in terms of rank, accomplishment, and even clothing—the exception being the ritual dress of Daoist priestesses, which included a special elaborate headdress, which is why in the medieval period and later they were called *nüguan* or "female hats." It is also the case that in Daoist scriptural texts (some of which were believed to have been "transmitted" by female deities such as the Queen Mother of the West or other female immortals) it was accepted that women as well as men could engage in the various types of mental and physical cultivation required for ultimate liberation from the constraints of time and space. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this ultimate liberation necessitated a conscious control and ultimately rejection of female embodiment as represented by menstrual blood. Thus, the first stage in *nüdan* or female internal alchemy entails transforming menstrual blood, which in its unrefined state is said to gather in the Sea of Blood (*xiehai*), first into *qi* ("breath") and finally into *shen* or spirit. This is accomplished through a variety of practices including breathing exercises and massage of the breasts. Some of the physical signs of the successful accomplishment of this first stage are significant—the breasts shrink and the woman ceases to menstruate. In other words, she becomes more like a man.

But what about Buddhism, the third of the so-called "three traditions"? Not being indigenous to China—it was brought from India sometime in the first millennium of the Common Era—Buddhism was not based on the notions of *yin* and *yang*. However, Buddhism, and in particular Mahāyāna Buddhism, which was the form that was to become dominant not only in China but in all of East Asia, brought with it its own ideas and ideals about gender, many of which would eventually influence, or be influenced by, indigenous Chinese ones. If, as we noted above, the Chinese religious ideal (to be distinguished from the actuality!) could be said to be "the unity of opposites," then the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal might be said to be "the transcendence of opposites," or, perhaps more accurately, the enlightened insight that reality is "empty." In other words, reality is constantly changing, subject to causes and conditions, and ultimately not subject to labels or definitions—and, as a logical consequence, there can be no such thing as "male" or "female." Again, however, the ideal proved to be difficult if not impossible to translate into reality: the Buddha himself, according to some versions, was very reluctant to allow women to enter the monastic community, claiming that to do so would drastically weaken and ultimately destroy it. It was only, so the legend goes, when he was reminded of his teaching of non-duality, including the non-duality of male and female, that he yielded, and then only on the condition that women adhere to the so-called "Eight Heavy Rules," all of which ensured that all nuns, regardless of their status or seniority, be subordinate to all monks, again regardless of their status or seniority. The

"Eight Heavy Rules" were of course not always strictly followed, but they remained in effect in the centuries to follow and even today remain an issue of contention and debate.

The restrictions placed on nuns (which also included 331 major rules, as opposed to the 227 stipulated in the monastic code for monks) were not the only way in which Buddhist religious ideals were compromised when translated into the real world, a world that for the most part was based on assumptions of female subordination. In India, Buddhism had been a primarily monastic tradition; the Chinese familial ideal made monasticism a hard sell for many, although Buddhism countered, often quite effectively, by claiming that monks and nuns could exercise an even greater form of filial piety by not only caring for their parents' physical wellbeing (and the continuation of the family line) but by enabling the whole family to attain ultimate salvation and eternal bliss.

This expanded notion of filial piety is exemplified by the story of the Princess Miaoshan, which emerged in part as an explanation for the physical appearance of the bodhisattva Guanyin, who was often described as having a thousand arms and a thousand eyes, all of which were designed to better come to the aid of suffering people who sought her compassionate aid. Guanyin is by all accounts the most important female religious figure in all of Chinese Buddhism, and arguably in all of Chinese religion, her popularity surpassing even that of the Queen Mother of the West. She first arrived in China in male guise as Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion—a bodhisattva being, very generally speaking, one who has made the vow to be voluntarily reborn as many times as it takes in order to save all sentient beings. Avalokitesvara, often regarded as the embodiment of compassion, belonged to the category of celestial bodhisattvas, who, unlike even the historical Buddha himself, do not appear to have begun as ordinary human beings. After being introduced into China, Avalokitesvara, who is said to have the ability to take a multiplicity of forms, both male and female, in order to better assist those in need, slowly but surely assumed in the eyes of his devotees a decidedly female form and persona. By the Song Dynasty, Avalokitesvara had become better known as Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, and as such became China's most beloved goddess, regardless of religious affiliation. As is often the case in China, she was also given a personal history that situated her more firmly in the (Chinese) world and thus made her of more use as a model for behavior as well as an object of devotion. In one instance, the Bodhisattva Guanyin was born as Princess Miaoshan, the youngest of three daughters of King Miaozhuang, who, while she initially disobeyed her father and went against Confucian norms by refusing to marry, in the end was able not only to realize her true identity as Guanyin but also her boundless filial piety by offering the flesh of her own eyes and hands to be used as a cure for a horrible illness with which her father had been afflicted. In this way, Miaoshan/Guanyin set an example of Buddhist filial piety, and, in some cases, provided a religious rationale for remaining unmarried.

Despite the extraordinary example of the male Avalokitesvara's transformation into the female Guanyin, in the end, most ordinary Buddhist women aspired to be

transformed, after death, from a woman into a man, if necessary in this world but ideally in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. This was particularly true of ordinary laywomen, whose primary religious practice consisted of devotion to Amitabha, expressed most commonly through the simple but faithful recitation or invocation of his name, or of the phrase "Homage to Amitabha" (*Namo Amituofo*).

Given the traditionally limited literacy, not to mention leisure, among women, it is not surprising that most of them devoted themselves not to the study of Buddhist religious texts or the practices of seated meditation but rather to simpler practices such as performing acts of charity; lighting incense and worshipping Buddhist images; visiting temples; and, above all, invoking the name of Buddha, and in particular the name of Amitabha Buddha (*Amituofo* in Chinese). By so doing they believed that on their deathbeds they would be escorted, sometimes by Amitabha Buddha himself, to the Pure Land, where they would be born in a lotus flower, which, depending on their spiritual ranking, would be either closed or in one of various stages of openness. But, most importantly, they would be completely divested of their female form. For, among the forty-eight heartfelt vows made many eons ago by Dharmakara, who, after he had satisfactorily fulfilled all of them, became the Amitabha Buddha, was one that explicitly promised women who not only placed their faith in him but also felt revulsion toward their female embodiment that they would be reborn as males in his Pure Land. It would appear, then, that despite the existence of ideals of the harmonious complementarity of *yin* and *yang*—or, in the case of Buddhism, the ultimate irrelevance of the distinction between "male" and "female"—in almost every variety and strata of premodern Chinese religion (as in so many other religious traditions) the female state was, ultimately, one to be transformed or transcended rather than honored and celebrated.

Nevertheless, the very existence of the ideals of gender complementarity or equality, codified in accepted scriptural texts, meant that women and men could always make use of them in their attempts, whether directly or indirectly, to address and redress social and religious gender inequities. We can find numerous examples of this scattered throughout the history of Chinese religion. Some of these will be discussed below. And it would be difficult otherwise to explain the emergence of women (and men) today who, with a clear understanding of the history of Confucian thought, self-identify as Confucian feminists.

Shamans and Goddesses

The second part of this essay will explore in greater illustrative detail some of the issues and ideas briefly introduced above, beginning with what we referred to as the "substrata" of all of Chinese religion, or shamanism. As we saw, one of the earliest references to religious women dates back to the female shamans of the Shang Dynasty, who not only wielded considerable power but also commanded great respect. However, as early as the *Chronicle of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*), which was compiled

sometime in the fourth century BCE and refers to events said to have taken place from 722 to 468 BCE, we find certain types of religious practices being described as *yin* and greatly disparaged. And Confucius himself is famously known for having instructed his disciples to keep their distance from ghosts and supernatural beings (although he did not deny their existence) and to focus on the here and now. By the first century, then, the imperial court had begun to distance itself from the ecstatic and to align itself with the rational, or at least with rites and rituals characterized by a more "civilized" decorum as opposed to the unpredictable, and, to the outside viewer at least, often unrestrained and wild communication between shamans and the gods. Shamanism—and the opportunity for women to exercise officially recognized power—was thus relegated to the margins. However, in China, while to be marginal in elite terms may mean invisibility in the written record, it did not necessarily mean absence in the daily life of society at large. Thus, shamanism, as well as other types of what may be called "popular" religion, continued (and continues even today) to flourish in the vast hinterland of China, especially although by no means exclusively in southern China, far away from the centers of imperial power. This survival cannot be dismissed as simply a question of ignorant "feudal superstition." It was simply that for most non-elite Chinese the question was not "is it proper?" but rather "does it work?" In other words, practitioners of what we might call the arts of *yin* provided services otherwise unavailable or unaffordable: conflict resolution, assistance with issues of death and mourning, the healing of illness, and comfort and consolation. And, while there continued to be both male and female mediums and shamans, often it was women who were regarded as best suited to and more skilled at rendering such services.

Some of these female shamans over time became what we might call goddesses. Some were purely mythical, but many others began as historical figures (though little can be ascertained about them as such). Indeed, although creation myths appeared later and did not play the same central role in Chinese culture as they do in the Judeo-Christian world, for example, it is significant that in one such creation myth it is a female deity, *Nüwa*, who is said not only to have created the world by stopping the primeval floods and bringing order out of chaos but also to have created humans out of clay. And in China, as in many other ancient cultures, the powers of fertility were often envisioned in the form of mother earth figures. One of the most ancient of these is Jiang Yuan, the first ancestress of the Zhou royal house and, even more significantly, the mother of Lord Millet (*Hou Ji*), the god of agriculture. Jiang Yuan is described as having conceived her child by mastering the ritual of fertility sacrifice (which involved among other things stepping on the footprint of god), subsequently giving birth without suffering any discomfort or pain.

There were also other female deities that emerged in early China, many of which later became associated with what is sometimes referred to as Religious Daoism. The histories and profiles of these various deities are often difficult to trace, and at times seem to blur one into the other. They do appear, however, to represent different aspects of what one might term female power or energy, and are by no means all a

single undifferentiated "goddess." The primary task of the Mother of the *Dao*, for example, was to give birth to Lord Lao (Laozi, traditionally regarded as the founder of Daoism), raise him to fulfill his mission in life, and then return to heaven: "Her career—from daughter through wife/mother to teacher and eventually ancestor—matches the ideal life cycle of women on earth and represents the formalized version of a successful Chinese woman's accomplishments" (Despeux and Kohn 2003). Very different, and ultimately far more influential in that she became the object of widespread devotion throughout China, was the goddess known as the Queen Mother of the West (*Xiwangmu*). The complex origin and development of this fascinating deity is the topic of an important book by Suzanne Cahill (1993). The figure that emerged as a single goddess in the Tang Dynasty appears to have evolved by absorbing, sometimes reconciling and other times not, a variety of different personas, from the awesome and fearful to the maternal and loving. It was perhaps her ability to both fully embody the seemingly contradictory aspects of the feminine and, as an immortal with cosmological powers, transcend them that her followers found so attractive. During the Tang period in particular, the Queen Mother of the West became an object of intense cultic veneration. While her followers included both men and women, however, she provided a particular source of both inspiration and guidance to women, especially Daoist laywomen, as well as to women who found themselves outside the Confucian mainstream, such as actresses, prostitutes, widows, and nuns. In later periods as well, educated women often wrote with longing of their desire to join the Queen Mother of the West and her retinue of female immortals and attendants in her lovely residence, indeed her paradise, by the Jasper Lake in the Kunlun Mountains.

The stories of female deities in China frequently begin with a tale of suffering and, often, of premature death. Indeed, according to popular belief, it was precisely this suffering that endowed them with their power, which is often regarded as beneficent but also, potentially, malefic. This is what links these deities with the tradition of the shaman, whose story begins not with premature death, of course, but with a seemingly incurable illness or some kind of psychological suffering that is resolved only when the afflicted person accepts his/her calling as a shaman.

In ancient China, the spirits of the deceased—the ancestors—in many ways filled the role of gods, with their need for propitiation and their power to bless or to curse. During the Shang Dynasty and into the Zhou, the spirits of female ancestors of the royal family were believed to have the power to cause much trouble if they were not provided with the proper ritual sacrifices. Indeed, it would appear that it was fear of female power as much as devotion or filial piety that motivated these sacrifices. This awe/fear of the unappeased female spirit continued in different forms and can be found reflected in countless tales and stories down to the recent period of Chinese history. In fact, women who found themselves in an impossible situation often committed suicide not only as a way to end their suffering but also as a means to punish, in the form of avenging spirits, those who had caused that suffering. It is worth noting that there is a certain overlap, sometimes explicit, among these various god-

desses: all are characterized by the desire and ability to relieve the suffering of others—especially although not exclusively women—and all are associated in one way or another with water, the primal *yin* element, and for this reason are often appealed to in times of flood or drought. Finally, it may be said that, in the words of Irwin Lee, the compassion exercised by these female deities "does not function through any hierarchic channels, but is an immediate, responsive, personalized act which was regarded as a primary expression of female virtue and power . . . [They represent] channels of possible transformation that functioned independently of the male social order" (Lee 1990).

Perhaps one of the most well-known of such goddesses—one whose popularity has continued unabated to this day, albeit in modernized form and reinterpreted significance—is the Empress of Heaven (Tianhou), known also by her more popular name of Mazu. Like Guanyin, she is a pan-Chinese figure, and does not belong exclusively to either the Daoist or Buddhist pantheons. Also like Guanyin, her primary mission is to offer succor to those in great distress, although she does have a special affinity for seafarers, since her own origins have been traced to the coastal area of southern China. But she also has a special significance for women, especially those who wish to conceive or are pregnant. Unlike Guanyin, Mazu is a purely indigenous deity who began life not as a bodhisattva but as a young girl born (sometime at the end of the tenth century) to a family of fishermen. She was devoted to Guanyin and clearly endowed with special abilities: one day, while in a trance, she rescued her brothers when they were caught in a fierce storm at sea. After a premature death, Mazu continued to appear to sailors in distress. She was also appealed to in cases of drought, and, because of her effectiveness, in 1198 the Emperor bestowed her with the title of Queen and, in 1270, Queen of Heaven. By the early fifteenth century we find public shrines to the Queen of Heaven, at which state sacrifices were offered, and Daoist scriptures related to her began to appear as well. She continued to be favored by the imperial court in the Qing Dynasty and, officially recognized and the object of state rituals, she attained a position equal if not superior to that of any male deity, subordinate only to the Jade Emperor (Watson 1985). Despite her elevation in rank, however, she also continued to be simply Mazu, patron of merchants and seafarers and beloved by the masses, and worshipped in countless smaller temples and shrines in southern China, particularly Fujian Province, and later in Taiwan as well. Her popularity has continued unabated—according to some accounts, there are more than 1500 Mazu temples (mostly in the coastal areas of southern China, as well as in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao) and over a hundred million devotees, both women and men. In fact, in very recent years, the cult of Mazu has served as a political and cultural as well as a religious bridge, as Taiwanese pilgrims travel across the Taiwan Strait to visit Meizhou, the birthplace of Mazu, in Fujian province. They come to worship, of course, but in the process also to engage in dialogue with their mainland cousins.

Pilgrimage was, and continues to be, an important mode of religious expression not only for devotees of Mazu but for those of Guanyin as well: even today, hundreds

of pilgrims flock to the place associated with Guanyin—Mount Putuo, a small island in the East China Sea, just off the coast from Ningbo in Zhejiang Province. A great number of such pilgrims have always been women; indeed, it was one of the very few ways in which they could actually leave the home and travel. This presented a serious problem for certain male elites, especially in the late imperial period, who did not like the idea of women leaving the safety and supervision of the domestic arena. This deep ambivalence toward pilgrimage can be seen vividly in relation to a third important female deity, this one from Northern China: the Princess of the Azure Clouds (*Bixia Yuanjun*). Although Bixia Yuanjun was first "discovered" in 1008 by no less a personage than the Song emperor Zhenzong (r. 998–1022), over the succeeding dynasties she continued to be the recipient of imperial honors, and the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–1566) bestowed upon her the title of "Heavenly Immortal Jade Maiden and Princess of the Azure Clouds" (*Tianxian Yunü Bixia Yuanjun*). A Daoist scripture about her appeared as well, an*ūū*d she was incorporated into the Daoist pantheon. Bixia Yuanjun's powers were considerable: she determined how long people would live, judged the dead, and, like Mazu and Guanyin, also appealed to those in need of children, especially sons. She was associated with Taishan, the great sacred mountain in Shandong Province; another name of the goddess is "Empress of Mount Tai" (*Taishan niangniang*). The summit of Mount Tai was widely believed to represent the apex of *kun*, a term that, like *yin*, refers to the earth or female principle.

Beginning in the 1400s, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even as many as four hundred thousand pilgrims a year, made their way to Mount Tai. These pilgrims came from all classes of society, and a large percentage of them were women, who came from both the imperial court and from the poorest of peasant villages. Most of these women, especially if they were not particularly wealthy, made the pilgrimage in groups, which were organized by women who commonly moved between households (matchmakers, midwives, healers, etc.) and who were, for that very reason, regarded by many male elites with suspicion and disdain. The tremendous popularity of pilgrimage among women—for many it represented their one chance to travel and meet with people outside their immediate domestic circles—was a source of considerable anxiety for many men, and lurid descriptions of the disreputable activities engaged in by female pilgrims can be found in fictional narratives of the period.

In any case, it would appear that, while Bixia Yuanjun shares a number of characteristics with Guanyin and Mazu (such as the ability to aid the childless), it is the ways in which she is different that are most interesting, and that resulted in her falling out of favor with the Qing Dynasty. One of these is the extent to which women, including court women (together with marginal males, such as eunuchs) were the primary patrons, participants, and pilgrims in the cult. In fact, Bixia Yuanjun is said to be particularly responsive to the prayers of women. Another important difference is that, while over time Guanyin and Mazu were to a large extent desexualized women assisting in the production of an heir without themselves becoming mothers, Bixia Yuanjun is more often depicted as a particularly

beautiful young woman who, unlike Guanyin and Mazu, has bound feet, and is even often depicted lying down in her bedchamber. In fact, common offerings made to her, apart from money, included jewelry, shoes, and clothes.

In some cases Bixia Yuanjun is said to have a spouse, although she never leaves her home, which is Taishan. In other cases she is, like Guanyin and Mazu, described as being unmarried: she does not appear, in the words of Kenneth Pomeranz, to have "earned" the right to remain part of her natal lineage by rescuing males of that lineage, be they fathers or brothers (Pomeranz 1997). Pomeranz also argues that the role Bixia Yuanjun plays is not the unifying one of mother, but rather the potentially divisive one of daughter-in-law: an outsider brought in to continue the patriline but whose loyalty is questionable and whose sexuality is potentially dangerous. In short, aspects of the cult of Bixia Yuanjun were particularly appealing to women, allowing them to participate more publically in religious life and offering different notions and possibilities of female power. In the end, Pomeranz says, however, "the importance of midwives, matchmakers, and other such women in the cult's leadership, the phenomenon of female pilgrimage, Bixia Yuanjun's own sexuality, and her apparent affinity for the obviously necessary but still threatening figure of the young daughter-in-law" were simply too much for the male neo-Confucian elite, and by the Qing Dynasty we find Bixia Yuanjun being demoted from her supreme position and, unlike Mazu and Guanyin, slipping into virtual obscurity.

Goddesses such as Guanyin, the Queen Mother of the West, and Mazu can be considered to be pan-Chinese, and (in the case of Guanyin especially) pan-Asian. However, there have always been numerous more regional goddesses, especially in southern China, which, as far back as the Han Dynasty and earlier, was often considered by the Confucian elite to be particularly susceptible to cultic worship. Many of these deities, or others like them, continue to find adherents to this day, much to the dismay of the authorities, who are quick to label these figures as carry-overs of folk superstition. Brigitte Baptandier is the author of a fascinating study of the powerful female shaman Chen Jinggu, said to have been a historical figure who lived between 767 and 790 CE who, following an early death, became the focus of a cult that continues to flourish today. Chen Jinggu's legend reflects a complex interweaving of beliefs and practices traditionally associated with Daoism (she undergoes Daoist ritual training on Mount Lu) and Buddhism (she is said to have been born from a drop of blood shed by Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion). But she is also Confucian, and (like the Princess Miaoshan) out of filial piety is said to have used her own flesh to heal her ailing father. It is interesting to note, too, that the dramatic heart of her story is her performance of a much-needed ritual rainmaking dance—because of this the child she is carrying is aborted, after which she dies after a bloody hemorrhage, at the age of twenty-four. It is this untimely death that transformed her from a shaman into a deity, appealed to primarily by women either pregnant or desirous of becoming pregnant. Interestingly, in her legend, Chen Jinggu is given an alter ego: at the same time as Guanyin's blood becomes a powerful female shaman, a strand of hair becomes the White Snake who devours Chen's fetus, and represents,

in Baptandier's words, the "two irreconcilable aspects of female fate" (Baptandier 2008)—that is, the impossibility of simultaneously fulfilling the demands of Confucian womanhood and cultivating one's religious life. Chen Jinggu might also be seen as an embodiment of what for many (mostly men) represented the dual aspects of femininity: woman as mother and woman as a creature of voracious lust. Just as the Shang female shaman rainmakers were required to used their power against the feminized drought demon, so is Chen Jinggu—and by extension the women who have constituted her primary cult followers, some of whom are shamans or mediums themselves—caught between expressing and exercising religious power not only for the benefit of others but also against her own demonic alter ego.

Numerous examples of this seemingly irreconcilable tension can be found in the religious popular literature of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties, stories in which we find again an amalgamation of notions originally associated with different religious traditions. One such notion, which we do not find so accentuated in ancient China but which by the Song Dynasty had become ubiquitous, is that of female impurity. Specifically, this impurity refers to the belief that women's menstrual blood, as well as the blood shed in childbirth, is deeply offensive to the gods, and indeed to the cosmos. So offensive is this blood that after death women are automatically condemned to Hell, and in particular to the sufferings of the horrific Blood Pond, from which only the filial ritual activity of their living sons (or in some cases daughters) can rescue them. This belief was primarily associated with Buddhism—as evidenced by the well-known story of Mulian, who, although a monk, devotes most of his religious energies to saving his mother from the sufferings of Hell, and in particular the Blood Pond. However, it was adopted by Daoist and sectarian religions as well. And, of course, the notion of a son or daughter saving his mother was designed to fit in nicely with the central Confucian religious virtue of filial piety. Popular religious stories such as that of Woman Huang vividly illustrated the dilemma that women were placed in by this belief. Woman Huang is a pious Buddhist laywoman, married to a butcher and the mother of two children. In growing fear of the fate that awaits her for having defiled and contaminated the world, she decides to dedicate herself single-mindedly to the recitation of the *Diamond Sūtra*, which she believes will extend her lifetime, if nothing else. However, it is precisely her great piety that attracts the attention of Yama, the Lord of the Underworld, and she is brought, much against her will, down to Hell, where she is given a tour of its gory terrain, including the infamous Blood Pond, and then asked to recite the *sūtra* in the presence of Lord Yama. Her religious power and proficiency is such that it threatens to break open the gates of hell and save all of the suffering souls—but this is forestalled by Lord Yama, who sends her back to the world of the living instead, although this time in the body of a man. Perhaps nothing says so much about gender in Chinese religion as the fact that, more often than not, the only release from the religious pains and perils of the female state was either a transformation into a male in a subsequent life as in the case of Woman Huang or, as in the case of Chen Jinggu, transformation into an object of worship, if not a full-fledged goddess.

In many ways it is not so much questions of belief but rather of very practical physical and sometimes psychological needs that lie behind religious phenomena that we might otherwise find puzzling. How else, for instance, can those of us living in the twenty-first century Western world understand the apparent willingness of many (although by no means all) women to accept that their best bet for happiness and fulfillment, whether spiritual or otherwise, was to hope that in a subsequent life they would be reborn as men, or, in the case of more specifically Buddhist devotees, to be reborn, sans their female body, in Amitabha's Pure Land? This willingness partly stemmed from a realistic observation of the particular sufferings that so often accompanied women's lot, not the least of which was childbirth, which so often resulted in physical and emotional depletion of the mother and, not uncommonly, her death. It is telling in this regard that, just a few years ago, when a young Chinese scholar who was doing dissertation fieldwork on women's religious rituals in a relatively poor rural area of Fujian Province asked the women he was interviewing whether they would rather be reborn as men or women, most responded that they would definitely prefer being reborn as men, and even those who did not agreed that men were of higher status. Conversely, though, if one were to ask the same question of educated Buddhist nuns, one would encounter a decided reluctance to even talk of this notion of female spiritual inferiority, much less second it: this is understandable, given the extraordinarily active role being played by Buddhist nuns today in places such as Taiwan, and, to a lesser extent, in the People's Republic of China.

Female Models of Religious Attainment

Despite significant social and institutional obstacles, Chinese women have attained remarkable achievements in religious self-cultivation. We find this in certain groups of Buddhist women, in particular among religious women who associated themselves primarily with Chan (Zen) practice. In part, this was because Chan Buddhist rhetoric, unlike that of Pure Land Buddhism, placed greater emphasis not on rebirth in a happier realm but rather on a realization in this life of the truth of emptiness, impermanence, and non-duality. In other words, Chan Buddhism preached not a rejection of or revulsion against the female form but rather a realization of its illusory nature. Enlightenment was to be experienced here and now, and in this very body, even if it happened to be a female one. Famous male Chan masters such as the Song Dynasty monk Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) often reiterated the notion that "in the *dharma* there is neither male nor female" and, moreover, put the ideal into practice by taking on women as disciples and even going so far as to name them *dharma* successors.

Female Chan masters in the Song, such as as Miaodao and Miaozong, and before them the Tang Dynasty Moshan Liaoran, drew for inspiration on stories such as that of the Dragon Girl from the *Lotus Sūtra* (Levering 1982). The *Lotus Sūtra* story

unfolds in this way: The Dragon Girl is only eight years old, but has a complete mastery of enlightened wisdom, her eloquence unobstructed and "compassionately mindful of all living beings." However, her ability to attain ultimate Buddhahood is questioned by the Buddha's male disciple, Shariputra, who has heard not only that "the body of a woman is filthy and not a vessel for the *dharma*" but also that "a woman's body has Five Obstacles: one, she cannot become a Brahma heaven king; two, she cannot become Shakra; three, she cannot become a Mara king; four, she cannot become a Wheel Turning sage king; five, she cannot become a Buddha" (the so-called "five obstacles" or *wuzhang*). The Dragon Girl then takes up a precious pearl, and in the time it takes to offer it as a gift to the Buddha himself she suddenly transforms herself into a man and then a Buddha, after which she goes "off to the south, to the world without filth" where as a full-fledged Buddha she sits upon her jeweled lotus and proceeds to "proclaim the wonderful *dharma*."

The message conveyed by this story is not a straightforward one: on the one hand, the Dragon Girl does seem to dispute Shariputra's assumption that because of the five obstacles and the presumably inherent impurity of the female body a woman cannot hope to achieve enlightenment—or, at least, not until after eons and eons of cultivation, when she finally succeeds in being reborn as a man. The Dragon Girl's magical transformation is instantaneous and effected by her own spiritual achievements. Female Chan practitioners took heart from the conviction that once they were able to realize the enlightened wisdom of non-duality through meditation practices of various types, they too would be able to spontaneously, and in this very body, become "as if a man." In Chan texts the determination required to achieve this realization is described as being that of a "great gentleman" (*da zhangfu*). Thus, while a Chan Buddhist woman may not have had to resign herself to the hope of being reborn as a man in the Pure Land, she was still faced with the challenge of overcoming socially inscribed notions of female inferiority, especially emotional instability, and demonstrating masculine dedication to practice. Only then, in the words of a funeral sermon delivered by a seventeenth century male Chan master for one of his female disciples, will she be "able to embrace both Heaven and Earth, penetrate both past and present, detach herself from the cycle of life and death . . . transcend the labels of 'saintly' and 'ordinary,' melt away the forms of 'male' and 'female' and realize the permanence of the unparalleled bliss."

There are numerous examples of real-life women, whether semi-literate commoners or educated elite, who were undeterred by this pervasive rhetoric of female physical and/or psychological inferiority and aspired to the highest levels of spiritual fulfillment and religious competence. Miaodao (fl. early twelfth century) and Miaozong (1095–1170), the women disciples of Master Dahui, were recognized officially as Chan masters and exerted their spiritual authority accordingly, as did a significant number of women Chan masters of later periods, such as Qiyuan Xinggang (1598–1654), who not only built up a thriving convent but formally designated as Chan masters at least seven of her own female disciples. And, as we know from the sixty biographies of eminent nuns compiled by the monk Baochang in the sixth century,

very early on there were Buddhist nuns of considerable attainment (Tsai 1994). Some of these engaged in a wide variety of solitary religious and ascetic practices. Others, because of their religious achievements and personal charisma, attracted hundreds to their convents to listen to their sermons and engage in religious discussion. Still others were recognized and consulted by no less a personage than the emperor himself. Many of these women came from elite families, and some were highly educated, although unfortunately almost none of their writings remain extant. Women of attainment continued to exist, no doubt, although unfortunately there was no Baochang to chronicle these attainments and, as a result, except for scattered and tantalizingly brief accounts, they were for all intents and purposes erased from the official records. Here again, we see that so much of what we can know about life on the intellectual margins, including non-elite religion and the history of women in general, depends on the extent to which male literati took interest in the subject. And, in general, it was much more likely for women of the elite class to be remembered and have their stories recounted.

Not surprisingly, the greatest body of such accounts comes from the Confucian tradition, beginning in the Han Dynasty with the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan*), compiled by the famous Han Dynasty scholar Liu Xiang (79–8 BCE). This collection includes 125 hagiographical accounts of women from early China, who exemplified such essential Confucian virtues as modesty, frugality, devotion, filial piety, and chastity—or who, in some cases, served as examples of the calamity that could befall both family and state should women not adhere to these moral virtues. Similar such biographies of women were later included in especially designated sections of both dynastic histories and regional gazetteers. Liu Xiang's collection would serve as the primary handbook of female Confucian morality throughout the imperial period: reprinted and illustrated versions became particularly popular during the late imperial period, when the obsession with female chastity reached its height. In fact, the word *lienü*, which originally meant "arrayed [biographies of] women"—that is, biographies arranged according to the format first established by the great Han Dynasty historian Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 87 BCE)—subsequently came to be conflated with a cognate *lienü* that referred specifically to "women martyrs"—that is, women who committed suicide rather than compromising their chastity. In other words, the ultimate religious goal for a Confucian woman was the preservation of moral virtue, with official sanctification provided, at the very least, by the official designation as a *lienü*.

In the Buddhist tradition, as we have seen, the ultimate goal for a practitioner, male or female, was either enlightenment or rebirth in the Pure Land. As regards the former, there are numerous collections of women, mostly lay and mostly ordinary, who, thanks to their unflagging devotion to the Amitabha Buddha, died in the assurance of being reborn in the Pure Land. This assurance, provided not only to the women themselves but to those near to them (and those who would later read or be told about them), was often in the form of such phenomena as dreams or visions, or the presence of unusual fragrances or auspiciously colored clouds at the

time of their deaths. These are described in great detail in accounts such as those contained in the *Biographies of Pious Women* (*Shan nüren zhuan*), compiled by the eighteenth century Buddhist layman Peng Shaosheng (1740–1796). These women were not presented as saints who deserved veneration and adoration, although they were often described in what is clearly hagiographical language; rather, they were presented as practical exemplars and models for other pious women. It is also important to note that the great majority of women that Peng Shaosheng, who was a Confucian literatus as well as a Buddhist layman, offers as models of female piety were women who during their lifetimes conformed utterly to proper Confucian womanly behavior—including serving their husbands and in-laws and bearing children—but at the moment of death were, thanks to their religious devotions, able to detach themselves from these domestic concerns and single-mindedly focus on obtaining birth in the Pure Land. By so doing, Peng Shaosheng may have been able to assuage the concerns of some of his more strictly Confucian counterparts, who were above all worried that women would neglect their familial responsibilities (and, at the very extreme, actually abandon them and leave home to become nuns) if they became overly involved in religious practices. We find an explicit expression of this concern in a funeral inscription composed by the famous Song Dynasty poet Lu You (1125–1210) for a woman relative. Lu You praises her relative for having faithfully carried out her Buddhist devotions but without neglecting her wifely duties—unlike other women who, he laments, in their eagerness to study Buddhism do just that. "Alas," exclaims Lu You, "one marries a wife so that she will perform the ancestral rites and devote herself to household affairs. Perhaps she should not be allowed to engage in spiritual pursuits at all!"

Daoism too had its collections of female hagiographies, one of the most noteworthy of which was compiled by the Tang Dynasty literatus Du Guangting (850–933). His collection, entitled *Assembled Female Immortals of the Walled City* (the Walled City being another reference to the dwelling place of the Queen Mother of the West), originally contained accounts of 109 immortals; the original version was lost, however, and in the extant version we find only the accounts of thirty-seven women. These accounts contain numerous examples of women who, through the successful practice of various cultivation techniques such as fasting, breath control, and inner alchemy, attained longevity, and ultimately immortality (and in some cases ascent to heaven "in broad daylight" clothed in bodies of cosmic light). However, as women who lived in a society based largely on Confucian norms of female behavior, many of the Daoist religious aspirants, like their Buddhist counterparts, had not only to contend with sometimes quite violent family opposition and social disapproval but also to overcome tremendous obstacles on the path to immortality. In the early period of Daoism, there were a number of important female practitioners-become-immortals who were entrusted with the transmission of sacred texts, the primary example of which is Wei Huacun (252–334), who was born to a scholarly family and showed a predisposition to the religious life even as a young girl. Although not particularly interested in marriage, a marriage was arranged for her by her father

and it was only after her two sons were grown that she was able to devote herself single-mindedly to her religious practices. Following her death, she revealed Daoist scriptures (including her own biography) to her primary devotee Yang Xi in his visions. These texts later became the basis for one of the most important schools of medieval Daoism, known as Highest Clarity, or *Shangqing*, and Wei Huacun came to be regarded as its first matriarch.

The status of Daoist women reached its apogee during the Tang Dynasty, after which it became much more unstable and, as we have seen, often subject to the ambivalent gaze of the ruling elite. However, it is perhaps the story of a later Daoist woman that best exemplifies many of the themes that have been discussed so far. This is Wang Daozhen, known best by her religious name of Tanyangzi, who has been studied by Ann Waltner (1987). We know about Tangyangzi primarily from the biography composed by her male disciple (and relative), the famous literatus Wang Shizhen (1526–1590)—her own writings have been lost. Tanyangzi was born in 1558 to an elite scholarly family from the Jiangnan area, which at this time was regarded as the cultural heartland of China. We are told that even as a young child she showed a fondness for worshipping Guanyin and regularly chanted the name of Amitabha. Like Hua Weicun, Tanyangzi was not all that keen on marriage, but, having little choice in the matter, was betrothed to an upstanding young scholar. Unlike in the case of Hua Weicun, however, the young man died, as Tanyangzi herself had predicted, before the marriage could be formalized. The neo-Confucian proscription against remarriage allowed Tangyangzi to declare her loyalty to the memory of the man who would have become her husband, and in so doing she was commended for her chastity, which, as we have seen, had by this time become a cult in and of itself. More importantly, it allowed her to dedicate herself to her religious pursuits, which included abstaining completely from food and entering into states of deep meditation, during which she was provided with texts (both Buddhist and Daoist) and instructed in the arts of religious cultivation by various goddesses and female immortals, including Guanyin. Then, in 1577, Tanyangzi is said to have been taken on an astral journey to the palace of the Queen Mother of the West, where she was initiated into the ultimate secrets of immortality. In other words, while some might have called her a mystic, it is clear that she was also a shaman, the main difference between her and the village shamans discussed earlier being, perhaps, that her primary focus was upward rather than downward; that is, she communicated not with the spirits of the dead but rather with goddesses and immortals, including the most powerful goddess of them all, the Queen Mother of the West. It was not long after this that, seated in the shrine built near the grave of her dead fiancé and surrounded by, it is said, over one hundred thousand devotees, she attained immortality. Her most dedicated disciples, however, were her father (who, significantly, was converted after she cured him of an illness), her brother, Wang Shizhen, and a number of other prominent scholar-officials. Interestingly, not long after this, Tanyangzi herself was accused of witchcraft and Wang Shizhen and Tanyangzi's father and brother were all impeached for heterodoxy, although thanks to the intervention of a fellow official nothing came of it.

Although Tanyangzi was very much a product of her time—that is, the Ming Dynasty—and place, and her story is in many ways unique, it nevertheless illustrates some of the major themes running through this brief discussion of gender and religion in China: (1) the underlying assumption of Confucian standards of female behavior that may be rejected or, as is perhaps more common, accepted but reinterpreted as in the case of Tanyangzi; (2) the intermingling of the various religious "traditions" of China, more salient in the later periods of Chinese history but evident in earlier ones as well; (3) the profound ambivalence (ranging from enthusiastic support to moral outrage) on the part of the Chinese male elite toward expression of religious activity and, in particular, female religiosity, which like expression of folk religiosity did not always conform either to the expectations of proper female behavior or to norms of "civilized decorum"; and, finally, (4) the impossibility of ever completely controlling or repressing such activity, filling as it does even to this day the deep needs and aspirations of women, men, and society as a whole.

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CHAPTER 19

Divination

Jue Guo, Western Michigan University

Although divination might strike some observers as a natural category, the diversity and heterogeneity of practices in China that have been described using that term argue against such an assumption. Complicating the matter even further is the fact that sometimes practices are called "divination" based on aspects of their procedure (e.g., sortilege) while others earn the label because they have a nonscientific theory of how they function (e.g., predictions based on spirit communication). For these reasons, defining what the category of divination means in a Chinese context and setting up basic classification criteria are prerequisites to discussing the history of divination in China. Only then does cataloging different forms of divination practices become more fruitful.

Therefore, instead of providing an exhaustive list of the various divination practices that existed and still exist in China, this chapter questions the theoretical and methodological presuppositions of a linear or developmental model of studying Chinese divination and calls instead for an approach to analyzing divination practices based upon more consistent criteria. Utilizing recently discovered archaeological materials that challenged the historical validity of some claims that existing models have made, this alternative approach favors a historical delineation of divination practices with dynamic boundaries. This allows meaningful dialogue and analytical comparisons not only between different forms of divination but also between what have been conventionally perceived as separate practices, some of which have been labeled divination and some of which have not.

A Theoretical and Methodological Reflection

Chinese divination has long been perceived through the lens of a few "great traditions" in a historically linear progression. The renowned historian of early China, Michael Loewe, writes

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> Of the many methods which have been used in China to practise divination or to consult oracles, three stand out conspicuously with especial significance. These are the roasting of animals' bones or turtles' shells and the induction of cracks upon their surfaces; the cast of the stalks of the yarrow plant as a means of forming linear patterns or hexagrams; and the recognition of inherent properties in the land with a view to determining its propensities for good or evil. (Loewe 1981)

The three methods that Loewe singled out correspond to those that are called *bu* (pyromancy), *shi* (stalk-casting, also conventionally known as *yijing* or the "Changes method"), and *fengshui* (geomancy). They are considered by Loewe, and by many others, to be those that "have been of the longest duration and the most widespread adoption."

Loewe further observes:

> There are two aspects of divination and oracles in China that appear to be contradictory but which are in fact complementary. The first depends on intuition or instinct and stands outside the sphere of rational activities; the second stems from the exercise of the human intellect.

To further reconcile these two seemingly contradictory aspects, Loewe proposes a developmental model to sequence the three traditions:

> There was a general tendency for spontaneous and intuitive divination to be overtaken by processes of regularization or standardization, or by intellectual advances. Thus, the creation of patterns on bones and shells came to follow a prescribed and regulated course. The interpretation of the patterns formed by the cast of the stalks became imbued with scientific explanations of the universe. Geomancy came to be practiced in accordance with guidelines laid down in handbooks, and with the use of a highly sophisticated type of magnetic compass.

With its undeniable merits, Loewe's description highlights enduring and widely spread divination traditions and allows us to streamline the massive number of divination practices that have existed throughout Chinese history. Nonetheless, this strictly historical typology, with its emphasis on a diachronic evolution, also has underlying theoretical presuppositions and historical limitations.

This developmental model presents a historical progression from straightforward and intuitive methods to complex and heavily technical operations that, in fact, is based upon a *theoretical* position of a developmental view of rationality and the role that human reason plays in the progression of activities that often fall into the classic categories of magic, religion, and science. This position, as Stanley J. Tambiah correctly points out, is in fact a modern philosophical and intellectualist conception of rationality that "minimally identifies logical consistency and coherence as its distinctive feature" (Tambiah 1990). Nevertheless, this historically specific theorization of the "contemporary rationality of the West," against Tambiah's warning, tends to be "held to be the sole universal yardstick." The way that Loewe defines divination

clearly shows the influence of such presuppositions: "Divination . . . may be regarded as an attempt to ascertain truth on a level *other than that of verifiable analysis or quantifiable proof*, and by means *other than those which depend on reason*" (emphasis added).

From a historical point of view, this linear and developmental framework has two problematic consequences. First, heterogeneous practices from various traditions and historical periods are homogenized according to a set of selective criteria to fit the umbrella category of "divination." Second, different and complex practices are further tailored and simplified to fit one single model—namely, the aforementioned historically progressive sequence. In doing so, these practices are in fact made static and ahistorical. Not only are they deprived of their heterogeneous natures and historical changes over time, but they are also crystallized and isolated from the active and historical context in which the heterogeneity and change took place. Consequently, certain aspects are strategically assimilated. A case in point regards the reason for performing divination. Ever since the fourth century BCE source *Zuozhuan* (*Zuo Commentaries to the Spring and Autumn Annals*) stated that "to divine is to resolve doubts," this has become the orthodox interpretation, and more importantly an all-encompassing strategy to house various practices under the same roof.

In the developmental model, certain aspects, particularly differences, are highlighted, and, to a certain extent, magnified to enhance a historical progression. For instance, the predominant use of compasses has been conventionally considered one of the most distinctive features in geomancy since the Song Dynasty. Multiple aspects of such compasses, such as their physical similarities, cosmological elements in their design, and their complicated operative techniques, exhibit clear parallels with bronze mirrors and divination boards (*shi*) from the Han Dynasty. However, locating Song and later compasses in a progressive history of divination practices has meant that these parallels are generally downplayed to smooth the transition from simplicity to complexity in terms of their operating rationales and techniques. More recent archaeological discoveries of certain game-board-like objects—for example, an inscribed board with cosmological patterns and two pieces of dice from a fourth century BCE Chu tomb from Zuozhong, Hubei province, excavated in 2000—might, once deciphered, be evidence of an even earlier presence of such devices.

The main lessons to be learned from a critical examination of the developmental approach are twofold. On a theoretical level, it is important to recognize the risk that we might run into when using "divination" as an all-encompassing category without necessary scrutiny of its underlying theoretical presuppositions. Methodologically, the awareness that divination practices are not one-dimensional or independent but multifaceted and complex, consisting of multiple historical variations, invites a paradigm shift in approaching this millennia-old phenomenon. In essence, a new paradigm should not only incorporate and allow the coexistence of different elements and perspectives in order to obtain a "thick description" of the specific divination practices but also consciously denaturalize any theoretical presuppositions so as to keep the dynamics or even the tension between definitions

of divination and the specific forms of practices in check. In other words, as we realize that divination practice is a human and therefore a social phenomenon that interacts with historical contingencies and circumstances, we should also remember that the study of divination is a human, and in our case an academic, enterprise that cannot and should not be isolated from its own sociohistorical context and exempted from theoretical scrutiny. Chinese divination and studies of Chinese divination are no exception.

Hence, the objective of this chapter is to suggest an alternative approach to studying Chinese divination practices. The existing model falls into what Foucault calls "total history" (Foucault 1972), in which a search for an obscure "origin," a construction of "continuity," and a teleological end constitute a genealogical quest of an already theoretically homogenized phenomenon called Chinese divination. Alternatively, putting aside this prestructured and closed history, which centers on what Chinese divination was, is, and will be, we can view the discourse of Chinese divination as an open process in which we ask questions such as why and how certain practices have come to be perceived as divination.

As any analytical work is inherently comparative, this alternative approach also ultimately does comparative work. Nonetheless, its different theoretical orientation demands that what is being compared is different. The existing model, in Foucault's words, recounts what has been "already said" or analyzes the interpretation of "hearing," and then arranges the results of these discussions in a progressive sequence beginning with "an origin that eludes all historical determination." Therefore, what are being compared are different developmental stages within a presupposed continuous progression. Jonathan Z. Smith aptly categorizes this kind of comparison as genealogical. He also insightfully points out that "comparison does not necessarily tell us how things 'are' (the far from latent presupposition that lies behind the notion of the 'genealogical' with its quest for 'real' historical connections)"; rather, "like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be conceived, how they might be 're-described.' " In other words, comparison is an enterprise that "provides the means by which *we* 're-vision' phenomena as *our* data to solve *our* theoretical problems" (Smith 1990).

Having set up the theoretical goal of this chapter as re-envisioning and redescribing a phenomenon that has long been categorized under a singular designation—Chinese divination—we also need to make two methodological issues clear at the outset. The first concerns selecting and using data. Given the objective of this chapter of exploring an alternative approach to studying Chinese divination practices, appropriate data from various sources will be utilized in the service of demonstrating the reoriented theoretical paradigm shift rather than providing a comprehensive survey of existing traditions and existing practices. Second, in terms of analyzing the selected data, in contrast to a genealogical comparison, which would be mainly carried out with the existing developmental model, I adopt Smith's proposal for an analogical comparison through a different set of new parameters that take various historical, social, economic, political, and materialistic factors into account.

New Parameters and New Perspectives

Four basic parameters will be examined in this essay: occasions and purposes; techniques and mechanisms; practitioners; and functions. These categories are not exhaustive. I have chosen these aspects as exemplary parameters through which to examine more closely the characteristics of practices usually labeled as Chinese divination. Nor are they mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they should be viewed as interwoven and interdependent aspects of multidimensional and discursive divination practices. They are intended as mapping tools to delineate the boundaries between traditionally accepted divination activities and other practices.

Occasions and Purposes

On what occasions do people consult divination? The available records (i.e., oracle bone inscriptions) of divination practices in China from the late Shang period (c. thirteenth to eleventh centuries BCE, found at Anyang in Henan Province in the late nineteenth century) provide a comprehensive list of affairs for which the Shang royal family, kings in particular, sought help or advice from divination: sacrifices to ancestors, military campaigns against other clans, tribute payments, royal hunting expeditions and excursions, the general outlook of a typical Shang ten-day week, weather, field-plowing and harvest, settlement building, various specific illness, general distress or trouble, dreams, and so on (Keightley 1978). Because the majority of oracle bone inscriptions are records of the royal family's divination practices, the range of occasions reflected in them is limited to those that were specific to kings and matters of state. However, the above list is expanded for later periods, for which we also have greater knowledge of the practices of the rest of society. Throughout Chinese history, various sources recorded rich information regarding the occasions on which divination performances might have taken place. Some second century CE texts—despite their polemic nature, repudiating divination practices and associated beliefs—nonetheless preserve the occasions of divination activities. For instance, Wang Chong (c. 27–100) stated in his *Balanced Discussions* (*Lunheng*) that common people of the time believed in supernatural causes of disasters and misfortunes, and therefore were careful not to offend these powers and forces, particularly in activities such as moving and traveling, sacrifice and offerings, funerals and burial, marriage, taking official positions, and even matters of everyday conduct and behavior. Ying Shao's (c. 140–204) accounts of various beliefs, customs, and practices among the common people in the *General Meanings of Manners and Customs* (*Fengsu tongyi*), and a later compilation of similar content, Hong Mai's (1123–1202) *Records of Yijian* (*Yijianzhi*), can also be read as ethnographical materials in which occasions of divinatory activities can be found in an even more contextualized manner.

For divinatory occasions, an almanac is probably the source par excellence. Recent archaeologically discovered almanac texts that are dated from the fourth century BCE to the second century CE are similar to modern-day almanacs (*tongshu* or *huangli*) in that they detail daily activities that are beneficial or that are harmful and should be avoided. Everything from significant events such as rites of passage (childbirth, puberty ceremonies, marriage, death, etc.) to the most mundane and everyday activities (weather, traveling, school, work, and health) could be divined.

The significance of surveying the range of occasions on which people employ divination lies less in randomly cataloging and more in showing the great degree to which divination practices and other social activities have overlapped and intertwined in people's everyday lives. What makes some practices be conceived as divinatory and others not? One answer may be to look at the purposes of taking part in different activities. In other words, examining at what people look for or seek to accomplish via those practices that have been labeled as divination might give us some hints.

The specific reasons why people participate in or practice divinatory activities are varied and numerous and can be indicated by specific occasions. However, an overall common tendency is to view divination as a practice aiming to foresee the future, predict certain outcomes of significant events, and ultimately control the unknown aspect of the physical world and man's social life. This view is clearly shown in ordinary language definitions of divination. For instance, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines divination as "the art or practice that seeks to *foresee* or *foretell* future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or the aid of supernatural powers" (emphasis added). Divination provides the means through which to probe the regularity of human events, and based on that knowledge one can approach one's life with fewer worries about the randomness of the world and make decisions and choices with more confidence.

Nevertheless, however little they have been noted in comparison, some divination practices in fact are directed at other ends besides determination of the future. As Evan Zuesse points out, divination is "the art or practice of discovering the personal, human significance of future or, more commonly, *present* or *past* events" (Zuesse 2005). That is, divination may be used to find out what has happened in the past to account for the present state, and in some cases to provide guidance and advice for future actions. In this sense, there is no intrinsic separation between the prognostic, predictive, and prescriptive aspect of divination, which implicitly employs information from the past and present, and the reflective and diagnostic aspect of divination, which explicitly makes use of the past—rather, they are closely connected.

To summarize, we can see that practices that are commonly conceived as divinatory are not intrinsically and naturally different from other human activities, but stand out at the crossroads of historically specific occasions and purposes. Through the lens of occasions and purposes, we start to delineate a preliminary yet still quite ambiguous outline of divination practices. To focus more closely and clearly, we need to look into the practices at an anatomical level. The operational techniques and

principal mechanisms of divination are at the center of the next stage of our investigation.

Techniques and Mechanisms

How was divination supposed to work? The answer to this question involves at least two broader aspects: techniques for conducting divination, and the mechanism of divination that distinguishes it from other actions. Techniques, in a stricter sense, include: (1) media—that is, the instruments, material objects, or phenomena that are read and interpreted; and (2) specific operative methods chosen by the medium to perform the divining action. Further, the physical location and social environment in which the divination takes place is also related to the technical performance, although perhaps in an indirect way.

H. J. Rose has composed a preliminary list of common divinatory media in different cultures, including dreams (oneiromancy); involuntary body actions (twinges, sneezes, etc.); animal behavior (ornithomancy or the flight of birds); the form of entrails of sacrificial victims (extaspicy or haruspicy) or the victims' last movements before death; small objects such as dice, or drawing long or short stalks from a bundle (sortilege); tea leaves (tasseography); cards (cartography); and natural phenomena, as in geomancy, palmistry, phrenology, and astrology (Rose 2003). What these media have in common is that they produce signs to be read and interpreted. There are signs that one can observe directly in nature, social surroundings, and psychological or unconscious states (e.g., dreams, trance, or possession). There are also signs that are obtained through manipulating certain objects or devices, and these are acquired through the use of various operative methods.

There is no single, exact linguistic counterpart of the English word "divination" as a generic category in Chinese, classical or modern. The commonly used modern compound words are *zhanbu* (literally yarrow-stalk casting and turtle-shell cracking divination) and *suanming* (calculating fate). These terms come from a repertoire of discursive and heterogeneous practices that are based on different techniques and mechanisms, so they only partially represent the divinatory activities that have long been developed and practiced since early Chinese society. In order to get a better grasp of the different techniques employed and the different mechanisms through which divination is supposed to work, it is worth examining in greater detail the classifications of divinatory techniques and methods as reflected in the early divination texts.

Various kinds of practices that are based on a repertoire of specialized and usually practical knowledge belong to a category called *shushu* ("numerology and techniques") in classical Chinese. The earliest extant bibliography of early Chinese texts, the "Bibliographical Treatise" (*Yiwenzhi*) chapter in the *History of Han* (*Hanshu*) composed by Ban Gu (32–92 CE), records 190 different *shushu* texts (out of 596 texts in total in this bibliography). These texts are divided into six sub-categories:

"Astrology," "Calendars," "Five Phases," "Milfoil and Turtles," "Miscellaneous Divination," and "Forms and Patterns." Although the majority of the texts catalogued by Ban Gu have been lost, their titles are preserved in the "Bibliographical Treatise" under the above six categories. These titles give us some basic idea of the media and methods used in early divinatory practices.

In the "Astrology" section, most of the titles contain the names of constellations and other celestial phenomena including clouds, comets, meteors, and rainbows. Presumably, these divination manuals might have provided pictorial instructions on recognizing certain stars, and the shapes and positions of certain celestial objects that might have been believed to indicate the significance of or have an impact on human affairs.

The "Calendars" include not only the calendars used in daily life but also "reign calendars" or genealogies of legendary and ancient kings and nobles. Almanac calculations can be made based on correlations between the specific traits of days and times assigned in these numerical charts and proposed activities so as to select auspicious times and avoid inauspicious ones in planning social and personal events.

The "Five Phases" section focuses on different cosmological cycles including the Five Phases (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), the binary pair *yin* and *yang*, and the four seasons. This section also includes those natural, spiritual, and even musical elements that may be correlated with cosmological cycles. Texts about another major type of divination device, the *shi*, or divination board, are also included in the "Five Phases" section, perhaps because the design of this type of divination board also alluded to a mechanism that depicted a correspondence between the cosmos and human society. A typical divination board consists of two parts: a round disk on top, said to represent the heavens, and a square bottom, the earth where human beings reside.

The other three sections of the "Bibliographical Treatise" specify more directly what have been commonly conceived as "divination techniques." The "Milfoil and Turtles" section contains texts representing two forms of divination: turtle shell cracking (*bu*) and plant stalk casting (*shi*). Shang oracle bone divination is a famous example of the former category, and the *Yijing* method of casting yarrow or milfoil stalks is so dominant that it has almost become interchangeable with the latter method, or even interchangeable with Chinese divination in general, as Zuesse has proven in an encyclopedia entry on divination (Zuesse 2005). But the other divination texts recorded in the "Milfoil and Turtles" section make it clear that these two "great traditions" are only two among many that employed similar techniques and relied on similar mechanisms. More evidence can be found both in other traditional sources and in recent archaeological discoveries of some of the "lost" texts. A text called *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*), which presumably took its current form in the Han Dynasty, mentioned three types of plant stalk casting method (*sanyi*, or "Three Changes")—*Lianshan* ("connecting mountains"), *Guicang* ("returning and storing"), and *Zhouyi* ("Changes of Zhou," later also known as *Yijing* or just "Changes")—and attributed them to the three dynasties: the legendary Xia, Shang, and Zhou, respec-

tively. Though no extant *Lianshan* text is available in the literature or through archaeology, fragmentary pieces claimed to be from the *Guicang* were collected in some Qing Dynasty anthologies. Before the discovery of an excavated text related to the *Guicang* at the Qin Dynasty tomb in 1993 at Wangjiatai in the Jiangling area of Hubei Province, the transmitted sections of the *Guicang* were regarded as later forgeries. The 394 bamboo slips of the *Guicang* found at Wangjiatai confirmed that a version of the *Guicang* as a stalk-casting divination system separate from the *Yijing* was in use as early as the late Warring States period.

The "Miscellaneous Divination" section includes manuals for dream interpretation; recognizing different kinds of spirits, ghosts, mythological and mysterious animals, and objects; physiognomical techniques for garments and soil; meteorological information; prayers for rain; fishing methods for certain types of fish and turtles; and practical knowledge about planting trees, storing fruits, and recognizing good silkworms.

The "Forms and Patterns" section has more physiognomy manuals such as those for selecting auspicious and beneficial locations for building a palace or residential house; and for physiognomical features of people, swords and knives, and the six domestic animals. Texts excavated in 1973 from Mawangdui tomb no. 3 dated to 168 BCE—such as *Miscellaneous Divination of Cosmic Patterns and Pneumatic Images* (*Tianwen qixiang zazhan*) and *Physiognomy of Horses* (*Xiangma*)—bear witness to such practices in the Han.

This brief survey shows that different *shushu* texts closely related to divination practices in early China, although not necessarily named after a method of divination, used various kinds of media to provide a prognostication for various inquiries. The media that these texts mentioned generally fall into the two categories of signs we previously summarized—directly observed signs or indirectly obtained signs—but arguably the second category constitutes the majority, particularly in later periods. In other words, the specific techniques of divination depend on the specifically chosen medium and the specific operative method through which the sign or signs are obtained.

Now let us turn to the question of the mechanism of divination. I have suggested that divination practices generally deal with specific signs to fulfill their prognostic or diagnostic purposes. The result of divination comes from reading (in a broader sense of the word) and interpreting the signs. This result in turn serves the purpose of answering questions that people ask during the course of a divination performance. The divinatory process actually consists of interdependent events and actions. It starts with the specific situation that has caused one to consult divination; then moves on to employing certain techniques to obtain a sign or signs; and finally connects the sign or signs to the specific inquiry through an interpretation. How this interpretation is reached may be called the mechanism of divination.

As with the different specific techniques for conducting divination, there are various ways to obtain a reading or interpretation of the signs. In other words, there are multiple mechanisms, upon which different divination practices are based. For

instance, Zuesse suggests three different mechanisms of divination as follows: (1) intuitive divination, which is based on an immediate context interpreted by the spiritual insights of the performer; (2) possession divination, which is based on spirit communication and manipulation; and (3) wisdom divination, which reflects an operation of impersonal laws within a coherent divine order (Zuesse 2005).

As selective and limited as this list is, it still illustrates one shared significant aspect of the mechanisms of divination practices: that is, the important role that the participants, particularly those who provide the interpretation, play in relating the signs to the inquiries. Even in wisdom divination, which is defined in a way that seems to involve no human agency, "wisdom" itself implicitly suggests that the process requires at least the knowledge of impersonal laws and the ability to appropriately apply them to the specific situation within the commonly accepted order, cosmological or social. Further, the process of divination starts with questions, worries, or concerns about one's life situation, but obtaining a result from divination is only a middle stage. The process is not finalized until the divination result goes back to the inquirer, upon whom it may or may not make an impact. It might be appropriate to conclude at this point that the mechanism of divination is not purely mechanical or technical, as it might seem to be and is generally believed to be; on the contrary, the more fundamental mechanism of divination deeply involves human agency and human action. Therefore, any studies of divination practices cannot and should not avoid bringing practitioners of divination to our attention.

Practitioners

The questions of what makes one a practitioner of divination has no single answer, and there is no single way to define divination practices. Let us consider "active participation" as a minimum criterion in the definition of a practitioner of divination. By this definition, practitioners can at least include two groups: the specialists, usually known as diviners, who professionally provide the service of performing divinations; and patrons, those who actively seek out and consult divination with specific concerns. The rest, who can be labeled "non-practitioners," though not necessarily directly or actively participating in divination practices nevertheless define the practitioners by distinguishing them from non-practicing groups through collective endorsement, recognition, or condemnation.

It is worth noting at the outset that the proposed division between practitioners and non-practicing groups and the separation between the specialists and patrons are not intended to be fixed and rigid, but rather relational and dynamic. The different appellations—specialists, patrons, and non-practitioners—are best understood as roles into which people can fit according to the specific situation. Therefore, we should keep in mind that there are examples both of diviners, patrons, and non-practitioners constituting different individuals and social groups and also of the

boundaries between different groups of people being less distinct and tending to overlap.

The origin of the diviner as a profession in China is unclear. The Shang oracle bone divination inscriptions from the twelfth century BCE preserved some of the earliest information about diviners. However, because the engraved inscriptions are brief and in most cases truncated due to the fragmentary condition of the discovered shells and bones, in most cases we have only the first names of diviners to identify them. For example, David Keightley has presented a version of a rare, yet in his view complete, Shang oracle bone divination inscription that includes parts that are designated as preface, charge, prognostication, and verification:

> (Preface:) Crack-making on kuei-ssu (day 30), Ch'üeh divined:
> (Charge:) "In the (next) ten days there will be no disaster."
> (Prognostication:) The king, reading the cracks, said: "There will be harm; there will perhaps be the coming of alarming news."
> (Verification:) When it came to the fifth day, ting-yu (day 34), there really was the coming of alarming news from the west. Chih Kuo, reporting, said: "The T'u-fang are besieging in our eastern borders and have harmed two settlements." The Kung(?)-fang also raided the fields of our western borders. (Keightley 1978)

In this example, the context is relatively complete and the participants and their roles are clear. Scholars have agreed that the character *Ch'üeh* (i.e., *Que*), which has also appeared in some other records in the same location before the character standing for the divining action, is the name of the diviner for these specific divination performances. Thus, scholars have been able to compile a list of names that have recurred, determining that these must be the diviners who performed numerous divinations for the Shang kings on various occasions. But, because these divination records are the only firsthand history that we have for the Shang at present (besides this list of names), we know next to nothing about the diviners' social and personal background. We generally do not know who they were, where they came from, how they became diviners, what their duties as diviners were, or what their lives as diviners were like.

More recent scrutiny of the records suggest that some of the shells and bones were probably used for inscription-engraving training and learning purposes rather than for recording actual divinations. This observation leads to hypotheses such as the possible existence of training workshops for future diviners or scribes and means through which literacy was gained and spread. While we await more certain information—for instance, about who was in fact in charge of engraving the records on the shells or bones—these breakthroughs are promising, yet they do not directly address our purpose of discussing the role of diviners.

Another noteworthy aspect of these Shang divination records regards the role that Shang kings played. As the above example and many other records have shown, the divined matters were directly related to the royal family, the state, and the kings

themselves, and in these cases the king was also the one who made the prognostication. This poses the question of how to define the king's position in these divination practices. Should kings be considered as the patrons or should they be grouped under the specialist category? Clearly, in this case they were both. This again confirms that we should primarily be concerned with defining the different roles rather than focusing on specific individuals, whose roles may have varied in different situations in the divination practices.

Historical sources show that specialists in divination in premodern China were mainly either affiliated with the state bureaucracy or practiced as individual professionals for a living. The former group is represented by those recorded in the *Zhouli*, in which we find a presumably Han vision of the bureaucratic institutions and regulation of rituals of the Zhou Dynasty (c. eleventh century to 256 BCE). As the *Zhouli* shows, there were various offices and official positions in the governmental hierarchy with specific duties that we would consider to be related to divinatory practices. In the chapter entitled "Offices of the Spring" (*Chunguan*), we can see official titles and their accordingly designated duties, such as *dabu* (Grand Diviner), *bushi* (Divining Master), *guiren* (Person in Charge of the Turtle), *chuishi* (Person in Charge of Firewood), *zhanren* (Person in Charge of Stalk-casting Divining), and *shiren* (Person in Charge of Milfoil Stalks).

Historically transmitted textual records like these indicate that divination and its specialists were believed to be part of the Zhou state affairs and its bureaucracy. But the *Zhouli* text does not provide any further information about these specialists beyond a brief description of their official duties. Similar questions about these specialists' personal and social background.

One aspect to which generations of scholars have paid special attention regards how diviners became diviners in the first place. Or, to put it another way, who were these diviners? Speculation that Shang diviners may have been part of the Shang royal family or from a particular clan that claimed and was believed to have exclusive authority and access to the realm of the numinous remain unproven. Nonetheless, the hypothesis that the diviner, as a profession in general, might have been hereditary, particularly from father to son, is popular and persistent. The *Zuozhuan* provides one clear case in which both diviners were from the same family, and they were indeed father and son. The son, whose name was Chuqiu but who was addressed with his professional and official prefix *bu* ("diviner"), was probably a well-known diviner in the State of Lu in the seventh to sixth centuries BCE, according to the text. There are several accounts in the text of him performing divination for the Duke of Lu and even the Duke of the neighboring state, Qi. Chuqiu's father, recorded with the name of "father of Diviner Chuqiu," appears only once, but in this appearance he also performs a divination, for a different Duke of Lu. Regarding the diviner's name, Chuqiu, there are also suggestions that it might be the name of the region from which this diviner came. This example has been used to support the widespread speculation that in the Shang diviners usually came from a specific family in some specific region and learned the profession through their fathers. However, it is risky

to use a single instance to support a generalization about the profession of diviner as a whole, and therefore these theories are still hypothetical.

Nonetheless, these hypotheses are not completely imaginative. Hereditary transmissions of political authority and aristocratic status were not uncommon in early China. Along the same line of thought, it is not difficult to understand the rationale for expanding this customary tradition to some professions, particularly those that required specialized knowledge and skills. The 1975 discovery of several kinds of Qin legal documents at Shuihudi in Hubei also lent some evidence to these long-standing hypotheses. In a section called "Miscellanies about the Inner Scribes" (*Neishiza*) from the "Eighteen Statutes of Qin" (*Qinlü shibazhong*), it is stipulated that only the sons of the scribes could study in the "study room" that was specifically set up for the training of future scribes. Violations of this regulation were to be punished. Regulations that are more clearly specifically related to diviners can be found in a set of Han legal and administrative regulations excavated at Zhangjiashan in Hubei in 1983. These texts not only provide more convincing support for the existence of official diviners in the Han time but also specifically mention that only sons of scribes and diviners were qualified to study their fathers' professions. One of the texts, called "Statutes for Scribes" (*Shilü*), detailed a process for those who sought an official career as *shi* (scribes), *bu* (diviners), or *zhu* (invocators) in the Han court. According to this regulation, those diviners-to-be must first of all have been sons of diviners and must start their study at the age of seventeen, with this learning process lasting for three years. They were then tested on both literal knowledge of historical texts and divination texts and technical mastery of performing accurate divinations. They were assigned to different official positions based on their testing scores. Those who studied to become a scribe or an invocator went through a similar process of learning, taking a test, and receiving an appointment.

It might not be a complete coincidence that these three professions—scribe, diviner, and invocator—were treated in a similar way. As we have briefly surveyed previously, different *shushu* texts from the same Han "Bibliographical Treatise" have shown that divination texts and techniques have been interwoven with many other subjects and practices that are categorized under various headings that range across modern disciplinary categories such as astrology and medicine. By the same token, it would be making a similarly anachronistic mistake to assume that such practitioners in general, and the official specialists in particular, were only limited to a small group that practiced what divination connotes in the modern day; on the contrary, we should not be surprised to find that the duties and practices of these specialists also included observing constellations, diagnosing and healing, performing and assisting all kinds of rituals, and even recording history.

A particularly interesting piece of information from the regulations for the diviners reflected in the Zhangjiashan text is the "test" criterion. The degree of the mastery of performing divination was measured by the percentage of "accurate ones" among the total number of performances. The reading of the exact number of the "accurate ones" is still in debate because of illegible characters, but what interests us most here

is the indication that, in the Han, divination could be and apparently was "tested" in a technical sense just like other skills, such as writing, memorizing, or reciting. This does not exclude the possibility that divination as a practice and the performance of divination as a technique could still have been perceived as inspired by agents or mechanisms beyond the human realm, but it does indicate, at least in this case, that divinatory techniques can be learned and that accuracy can be almost objectively measured. Speaking of diviners as a profession, this further indicates that the overlap with other professions might have been larger than has usually been considered to be the case for early Chinese history.

Now let us turn to the other group of diviners. Individually practicing diviners appeared in written documents later than their royal or official counterparts. Nonetheless, the lack of written evidence of their early presence does not exclude the possibility that they existed even earlier. Archaeological remains of turtle shells and animal bones with burn marks have been found outside the capital of the Shang Dynasty, and scholars have speculated that they might have been used by non-royal practitioners of a similar divination method.

A new genre of divination records written in a highly formulaic language have been unearthed in several fourth to third century BCE Chu tombs—at Wangshan in 1965, Tianxingguan in 1978, Qinjiazui in 1986, Baoshan in 1987, and Xincai in 1994—in Hubei. These divination records evidence the activities of a group of individually practicing professional diviners of the time in that area. They show that different numbers of diviners were summoned on various occasions, mostly related to illness, by these tomb occupants when they were alive. These patrons' social status ranged from the lowest to the highest level of the nobility, including unidentified *shi* scholars (Qinjiazui), a direct descendant of a former Chu king (Wangshan), a high-ranking official (Baoshan), and two enfeoffed princes (Tianxingguan and Xincai).

Two noteworthy observations regarding these diviners are especially relevant to our discussion. First, as we have shown previously, traditional sources about official diviners address diviners in the form of "diviner X," in which "X" referred to their name and "diviner" (*bu*) was most likely an official title. However, in this new genre of divination records, the names of the diviners are recorded without the title, *bu*. The omission of the official title hints that these diviners were not part of the bureaucratic divination office for the royal family or the state. Instead, they might have been individually practicing professional diviners in the sense that they provided a service—divination—to people, regardless of the client's social or economic status.

The second observation is that a diviner named Fan Danzhi appeared both in the Wangshan and Tianxingguan divination records. These two tombs are geographically close to one another and it seems reasonable to speculate that this same diviner might have worked in that area and provided divinatory service, or was sufficiently well known to become a popular diviner in a larger area and therefore was hired by two patrons with different social statuses. This indicates that these diviners were not as limited in terms of whom they performed divination for as official diviners were.

Compared to the official diviners, who have disappeared along with the imperial bureaucratic system of premodern China, individually practicing professional diviners remain active in Chinese society despite the persistent stigma of their profession and practices. The first detailed account of professional diviners in the transmitted history can be found in a chapter entitled the "Biography of Specialists of Days" (*Rizhe liezhuan*) from Sima Qian's second century BCE *Book of History* (*Shiji*), although there is some dispute about its authorship. Another (possibly later) composition, the account of a marketplace diviner named Sima Jizhu, gives us valuable hints about professional diviners, particularly in relation to their official counterparts, who represented and embodied the state ideology. This particular account records a conversation between Sima Jizhu and two Confucian officials from the Han court in which the marketplace diviner polemically defends his profession against the general accusation of divination as deviating from the proper path of self-cultivation and leading to profit-seeking and moral chaos in society. Sima Jizhu not only traces divination back to exemplary ancient sage kings such as King Wen of Zhou to support the practice's historical legitimacy but also, more importantly, narrates the proper ritual of divinatory practice and responds directly to the critique that its *raison d'être* was profit-seeking:

> The diviner by stalks and shells first sweeps clear the place where he will sit, straightens out his hat and sash, and only then will do business . . .
>
> By spending several tens of cash, [with the diviner's words] the sick may recover, and the dead may even come to life! [With his words,] disasters may be averted, and ventures brought to successful completion! [With his words,] one's married daughters and daughters-in-law may raise and give birth [to children]! If this is why he is called virtuous, how could it only be worth several tens of cash? (Csikszentmihalyi 2006)

In a text named "Yao" ("Essentials"), archaeologically excavated from Mawangdui, Hunan Province in 1973, Confucius gives an apologetic explanation for his practice of divination and study of the "Changes":

> If scholars of later generations have doubts about Qiu (i.e., Confucius), perhaps it is because of the Changes. I seek virtue [in the Changes], and no more. I share the same path with scribes and *wu*-shamans but [we] go to different destinations. How can the gentleman behave virtuously simply to seek for blessing? Thus [the gentleman] sacrifices but [does it] infrequently. [How can a gentleman's] benevolence and righteousness be intended to seek auspiciousness? Thus [the gentleman] cracks the turtle shells and casts the stalks but [does them] rarely.

By emphasizing how his motivation for practicing divination differs from that of other classes of practitioners, Confucius states that his use of divination and studies of divination manuals such as the "Changes" for a philosophical and moral purpose is superior to the purely divinatory usage for fortune-seeking or future-prediction.

This short passage exemplifies the rationalization and promotion of a moral orientation and a dimension of self-cultivation in practicing divination. This tendency not only dominated the literate elite's thoughts about divination but also formed the general opinion of the professional practitioners, more or less in a negative sense, and led to the social stigmatization and marginalization of both the practice and the practitioners to this day.

Another purpose of this brief survey of different types of specialists of divination in China is to highlight the heterogeneous nature of the practitioners. None of the groups—royal diviners, official specialists, or individually practicing professionals—should be seen as a homogenous whole or as naturally defined. On the contrary, within each group that we have defined, the people who played the role of diviner were just as diverse as any social group can be. The rejection of popular or instrumental use of the "Changes" in particular and divination in general from the elite class of practitioners, such as that of Confucius and many other literati in later times, is a good case in point for the diversity, tension, and even conflict within the same group—namely, the practitioners. Therefore, the boundaries between the different groups are not naturally drawn and fixed but dynamically defined in relational terms in historically specific contexts.

This also applies to the other side of the coin: the patrons, whose definition is intrinsically dependent on and conceived in relation to that of the specialists. The distance between the specialists and the patrons also varies: in some instances they are two distinct groups, in others there are degrees of overlap, and still others there is complete overlap, as in cases where elite literati and common people perform divination for themselves or simply consult an almanac without involving a professional specialist. Also, because the specialists and the patrons are so interdependent on one another, our above discussion has—though implicitly—also shown the characteristics of the patrons. Thus, the limits of space in this chapter are no impediment to our discussion, as we may summarize that the patrons of divination practices in China were people from diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds just as the practitioners were. Other factors, such as gender, age, and educational level might also play a role in the specific inquiries that people have when they consult divination, but generally both men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate can and have consulted diviners on a variety of occasions. This shows that divination practices have been a widespread and significant aspect of Chinese societies throughout history.

The relationship between diviners and patrons varied across Chinese societies of different periods. Depending on the specific situations in which diviners and patrons were located, their mutual relationship might have been predominantly religious, political, or economic. But fundamentally, their relationship can be seen as a form of exchange, whether of authority, power, wealth, fame, honor, or prestige.

As we have shown so far, diviners and patrons are the two key components of practitioners of divination; however, neither group can exist independently of one another, nor of the rest of their social surroundings. On the contrary, not only do

diviners and patrons coexist and interdependently define one another, but they are also closely integrated into society and actively interact with their social surroundings. In fact, a necessary condition for practitioners of divination to exist at all is a social environment that makes the practice possible, not on a legal or legitimate but a psychological level. Lévi-Strauss once distinguished three levels of belief in the efficacy of magic in societies in which people go to sorcerers to diagnose and treat misfortunes: the sorcerer's belief in his own techniques; the patient's or victim's belief in the sorcerer's power; and the faith and expectation of a group functioning as "a gravitational field in which the relationship between sorcerer and bewitched is located and defined" (Lévi-Strauss 1963). This metaphor of a gravitational field also captures the significant role that the social environment of divination plays in constructing a system that is accepted and justified through the collective recognition of the validity of the practices.

Functions

What are the functions of divination? Answers to this question may vary depending on to whom it is addressed. Today, insiders tend to focus more on the specific and therapeutic functions of divination practices. As we have previously shown in our discussion of the occasions and purposes of divination as well as of practitioners, divination can be employed to diagnose and reflect on the past, analyze the present, and foresee the future with more informed knowledge and therefore to resolve doubts, pacify concerns and anxieties, make decisions, and encounter the unknown with more certainty and assurance. In other words, this insider perspective centers on accounts of what divination can do for people in specific contexts and individual situations. Therefore, these functions of divination are more individually oriented.

Another perspective on divination practices involves going beyond the specific functions that divination performs for an individual, viewing divination through the lens of society and seeing what divination does for the society as a whole. What is the social function of divination practices and what can account for their existence on a collective level?

Anthropologists, particularly those who are proponents of functionalism and structuralism, have made theoretical efforts to analyze divination's functions, especially the social functions of divination practices. In particular, pioneering studies of the divination practices of the Azande by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and of the Ndembu by Victor Turner provide clear examples of such endeavors. Evans-Prichard and Turner argued that divination played an extremely significant role in the Azande and the Ndembu, which were tribal societies in Africa at the time of their fieldwork. Divination practices permeated almost every aspect of daily life, and so it seemed reasonable to conclude that divination was the foundational institution of the tribes' societies. For instance, in Azande society, Evans-Prichard observed that people employed various divinatory methods to diagnose the reasons for misfortune so as

to prevent, cure, or even set up a legal procedure to prosecute the instigator of harmful witchcraft. In other words, Azande divination fills roles that are today often played by political, legal, or moral institutions.

Concerning the Ndembu people, Turner wrote:

> Divination is a phase in a social process which begins with a person's death, illness, reproductive trouble or misfortune at hunting; continues into informal or formal discussion in the kinship or local group of the victim as to the steps to be taken next, the most important of which is a journey to consult a diviner. The fourth stage is the actual consultation or séance, attended by the victim's kin and/or neighbors, followed by remedial action according to the diviner's verdict. (Turner 1969)

Turner concluded that "divination therefore becomes a form of social analysis, in the course of which hidden conflicts between persons and factions are brought to light, so that they may be dealt with by traditional and institutionalized procedures." He labeled this function of Ndembu divination as "cybernetic." This rather mechanistic term demonstrates how Ndembu divination operates on a deep level in the society. Divination is the single most important means through which social tensions and conflicts are brought into the public arena and mediated. As a result, a sustainable social structure can be maintained and social equilibrium can be achieved.

In China, divination has been practiced ubiquitously since written history began over three millennia ago. Records and traces of divinatory practices and their influences on almost all aspects of society are evident in various forms: official and nonofficial histories, literature, arts, miscellaneous writings, and objects such as burial materials. Nevertheless, in China, throughout history, divination has never achieved the same dominant status as Azande or Ndembu divination has in their societies; nor has it become the sole foundation upon which other institutions such as political and social structures, legal regulations, or moral values are built.

One possible exception to this observation may be divination in the Shang Dynasty. Based on the documents that we have from the Shang Dynasty—documents that are solely divination records—there has developed a general impression that divination was *the* center of Shang life, at least for the royal family. But we must keep in mind that, because the vast majority of firsthand historical materials we have from the Shang Dynasty are records of that practice, it is important to be cautious about concluding that divination was the only means or institution that the Shang used to manage their state and life. Based on these oracle bone inscriptions, we can only observe that divination was employed and practiced for a wide array of occasions and therefore its records preserve a significant amount of information about Shang society that we would not have known otherwise. However, it would be contentious to conclude that divination functioned as an overarching institution in the way it has in Azande or Ndembu societies.

Thus, at best, the everlasting presence of divination practices in Chinese societies shows that divination exercised significant social functions, but not to the extent that

Chinese society was organized around it in an all-encompassing manner. Let us return to our opening question: what exactly does divination do for Chinese society as a whole? In order to answer this question, we also need to consider other characteristics of Chinese society. Throughout the three millennia of written history, Chinese societies have gone through many different forms: large multitribal states, imperial empires and dynasties, and modern republics. These vary in the specific nature of their polities, but they share some basic political, economic, legal, and social institutions such as bureaucracy and legal codes. Therefore, the divination practices that we find in all Chinese societies played a supporting role to those major institutions and facilitated aspects of the social order, at times becoming more prominent and at others more obscure and marginalized. Specifically, divination in Chinese societies might have functioned as a means to address social uncertainties. But again, divination rarely worked alone in Chinese societies to cause social changes or maintain a social order, but often cooperated with other institutions. Therefore, analyzing divination practices alone will not give us a comprehensive understanding of Chinese societies as it would do for Azande or Ndembu societies.

Re-envisioning and Redescribing Chinese Divination

Two centuries ago, when transmitted materials from standard histories, scholastic classics, and orthodox commentaries were the major portal through which students of Chinese divination could access past practices, the difficulty scholars faced was the lack of firsthand evidence for the "earliest" divination practices, or the "origin" of later practices mentioned in scattered early references. Against this background, it is not difficult to understand the scholarly excitement generated by the late nineteenth century archaeological discovery of the Shang oracle bones.

Finding the "beginning" of divination practice was key to generating a genealogical history in which all the later seemingly haphazard practices were believed to naturally fall into place and create a linear progression like that of Loewe, presented at the beginning of this essay. However, in addition to those theoretical presuppositions and potentially problematic consequences, this strictly progressive model has also constantly been challenged by practices that cannot be easily and convincingly fit into it, particularly those identified from recent archaeological discoveries. If divination practices evolved from simpler forms to more complex ones, first, where and how do we situate hybrid practice in the linear progression? Second, if this progression was based upon the advancement of human reason and rational thinking from magic to science, how do we explain an organic combination of divination, sacrifice, and healing?

The most likely answer, which may be provided by the existing model, is to portray this kind of hybrid practice as a transition between stages of the linear evolution. In light of such a characterization, differences are explained away and similarities are emphasized according to known features of the practices that preceded and followed

the performance of divination. The categorization of the divination methods in these new records is a good example to illustrate this tendency. In these new records, each diviner had their own unique divination instrument made from turtle shells or plant stalks. For example, one called "protect-the-household" was made from a precious kind of turtle's shell. Another named "long luminousness" was probably made from another species of turtle with a long and slim body shape. Some instruments were also named after various plant stalks, which were also believed to have the ability to communicate with the spirit realm. It is reasonable to conclude, based on these instruments, that the methods that were used belong to two larger categories: crack-making and stalk-casting. However, under the existing model, these two categories are often identified with two specific methods: *bu* and *shi*, respectively. The former is mainly associated with Shang oracle bone divination and the latter is almost exclusively used to refer to the method of *Yijing* (or "Changes") that was presumably handed down from Zhou times. The problem with this genealogy-based identification is how it assimilates unfamiliar practices into the better-known ones. A consequence of such assimilation is that much about these unfamiliar methods is assumed, and differences between them and familiar methods are strategically overlooked. In other words, historically specific practices are turned into generic categories in which heterogeneous and diverse divination practices are homogenized.

If, however, we adopt a historical-analogical approach, relocating and contextualizing these "new" methods without assigning them a position on a linear chain, we might be able to avoid such problematic outcomes. Instead, we can describe and analyze these methods—and, further, the practices themselves—on their own terms, but at the same time compare them to other methods and practices without forcing them into a progressive sequence. Ultimately, this will also allow us to redefine divination on a general level based on a more accurate reconstruction of the practices without risking substitution of specific practices such as *bu* and *shi*.

In the preamble to his influential study of Shang oracle bones, David Keightley aptly reimagined a divination scene based on the inscriptions on a set of five shells from the reign of the powerful Shang king Wu Ding (c. thirteenth to twelfth centuries BCE). In it, Keightley reconstructed great details such as the ancestral temple in which the divinations were taking place; the king, the diviner, and his assistant, standing by the bronze cauldrons full of cooked meat offerings for the royal ancestors; and the heated turtle shells over the flames and the *puk*, *puk*, *puk* sound that they made while being cracked. Although he admitted in the notes that this scene was an "imaginative reconstruction which the specialist may wish to pass over in decent silence," Keightley still wrote hopefully at the end of this beautifully constructed narrative:

> The Shang kings read the mantic cracks to divine the wishes of their ancestors. We read the mantic inscriptions to divine the wishes of the Shang kings. May the oracle bones, once used to read the future, now be used to read the past! (Keightley 1978).

As compelling as this image may be, however, solely relying on fragmentary inscriptions can only get us so far. There is still much research to be done before we can convincingly restore the context and reconstruct the oracle bone divination practices.

Fortunately, with more archaeological materials being unearthed, the wish to "read the past" is becoming increasingly realistic. More and more valuable grave goods, including not only texts but also other forms of tomb and burial materials that preserved a record of their original use in people's daily lives or funeral rituals, have been found in tombs, which may be more accurately located in time and space.

Against this background, I propose new parameters that are able to break down conventional boundaries between different divination traditions and practices. Further, because these parameters are intended as analytical categories rather than as natural ones, they serve our purpose better as a framework for comparison. In this framework, the different divination practices may be restored to their organically complex and integral contexts, in which they interact with as well as distinguish themselves from other practices and institutions without sacrificing their integrity either on a synchronic or diachronic level.

Ultimately, through this comparative and analytical framework, we will be able to revisit the repertoire of heterogeneous and discursive divination practices and reconfigure them in light of new analytical categories without seeking a "total history" of Chinese divination. This parameter-based analytical approach proves to be especially groundbreaking when we try to analyze new materials and practices from recent archaeological discoveries, whose nature often poses thorny questions for the genealogical progression implied in an evolutionary version of history.

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CHAPTER 20

Asceticism

Stephen Eskildsen, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

This chapter examines ascetic forms of self-cultivation in Chinese religious practice, forms that have received too little attention in earlier scholarship on Chinese religion. On the whole, personal religious practice has an ascetic dimension that was either prerequisite to or constituted a significant dimension of individual self-cultivation in all of the major Chinese religious traditions. Our focus here will be roughly the first millennium of the Common Era, from the Han to the Song Dynasties (206 BCE–1279 CE), with some attention to the pre-Qin background.

The word "asceticism" derives from the Greek noun *askēsis*, which originally referred to exercise, practice, or training of the sort undergone by athletes. Over time, the word came to take on philosophical and religious connotations, and would increasingly denote a more spiritual sort of discipline. Walter O. Kaelber, in his entry on "asceticism" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, states that this word, when used in a religious context, can be defined as follows:

> A voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred. (Kaelber 1987)

As forms of asceticism virtually universal among religious traditions cross-culturally, Kaelber enumerates fasting, sexual continence, poverty (under which may be included begging), seclusion or isolation, and self-inflicted pain, either physical or mental.

Asceticism in the Chinese religious context has indeed entailed all the types of practices enumerated by Kaelber. As for which ascetic practices were to be

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considered acceptable or admirable in China, there was certainly a great deal of debate and controversy—particularly in regard to celibate monasticism and the various sorts of self-immolation. Also varying greatly has been the perceived purpose, goal, reward, or effect of the ascetic behavior. Often enough, asceticism has been carried out or endorsed as a means toward gaining divine blessings, personal immortality, or some sort of salvation beyond the grave—though exceptions are particularly notable in this regard among the ancient philosophical schools. Prior to the early centuries of the Common Era, acts of severe austerity and self-denial tended not to be endorsed or carried out so much in a sustained or systematic manner, but rather as a means of recourse to be taken in certain situations or circumstances. This would change with the introduction of Buddhism and the rise of the organized Daoist religion (*Daojiao*), with its emphasis on seeking personal immortality, which resulted in the proliferation of austere monastic disciplines and harsh training regimens within and through the auspices of both these traditions. In China as elsewhere, it is through self-denial and self-discipline that many have felt that one can best embody a genuine belief and commitment to something greater and more significant than the finite ego and material things, and thereby rise above the anxieties and disappointments of mundane life through a higher excitement.

Asceticism of the Pre-Qin Schools

The Spring and Autumn (770–403 BCE) and Warring States (403–221 BCE) periods in pre-Common Era China saw the emergence of numerous influential schools of thought. Three of the most important of these, namely Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism, can each be said to have in their own way endorsed austerity and self-denial to some degree, and for different objectives.

Confucius (Kong Qiu; 551–479 BCE) and his followers advocated a path of moral self-cultivation through the learning of history, poetry, music, and the rites, whereby one hoped to become truly "benevolent" (*ren*; to possess the sum total of ideal virtues such as kindness, integrity, courage, equanimity, ritual propriety, and filial piety) and to thereby participate in the larger project of restoring human society to a more civilized and humane condition. The Confucian attitude could be described as ascetic in the sense that it ultimately calls upon people to transcend their concern with self-interest, through the single-minded pursuit of what is good and true. While one must make the sincerest effort to be benevolent and do what is right (follow the Way, or *Dao*), there is no tangible personal reward that can be guaranteed by doing so; one must be good simply for the sake of being good. This notion that goodness is the end in itself is most succinctly articulated in a statement of Confucius recorded in *The Analects* (*Lunyu*): "He has not lived in vain who dies the day he is told about the Way." To live with a clear conscience should provide adequate solace, even if one may find oneself in poverty:

> In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds. (trans. Lau 1979)

Indeed, by sticking rigorously to his moral principles and candidly criticizing the moral failings of powerful people, Confucius appears to have at times undermined his own chances at a successful political career, and even put his life at risk. However, it would appear that in Confucius' view there was nothing wrong with wealth and rank *per se*—nor with general pleasure and comfort—provided they were not obtained immorally, at the expense of the larger good of human society. Confucian self-cultivation by and large did not require any voluntary regimen of fasting, seclusion, poverty, or the like unless moral considerations under specific circumstances required such things. Of course, in Confucius' view there was one particular circumstance—to be encountered at some point by most gentlemen—that did require programmatic, voluntary self-denial; this circumstance was the death of one's father or mother, which required the observance of the three-year mourning rite. *The Analects* records the following interesting conversation between Confucius and a student:

> Tsai Wo asked about the three-year mourning period, saying, "Even a full year is too long. If the gentleman gives up the practice of the rites for three years, the rites are sure to be in ruins; if he gives up the practice of music for three years, music is sure to collapse. A full year's mourning is quite enough. After all, in the course of a year, the old grain having been used up, the new grain ripens, and fire is renewed by fresh drilling."
>
> The Master said, "Would you, then, be able to enjoy eating your rice and wearing your finery?"
>
> "Yes. I would."
>
> "If you are able to enjoy them, do so by all means. The gentleman in mourning finds no relish in good food, no pleasure in music, and no comforts in his own home. That is why he does not eat his rice and wear his finery. Since it appears that you enjoy them, then do so by all means."
>
> After Tsai Wo had left, the Master said, "How unfeeling Yü (Tsai Wo) is. A child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years mourning is observed throughout the Empire. Was Yü not given three years' love by his parents?"

This conversation would indicate that at Confucius' time there already existed a customary three-year rite of mourning during which one would take leave of one's vocational pursuits while abstaining from the comforts and enjoyments of ordinary life. In Confucius' view, one ought to do this not only out of a sense of propriety and obligation (since one could not even survive beyond the age of three without one's parents) but also because it is a course of action that should come about

spontaneously as a result of the most noble and natural feelings—filial piety (*xiao*)—that one ought to possess as a human being. Thus, at least in the case of the three-year mourning rite, Confucius does endorse a sustained, voluntary regimen of self-denial.

In sum, austerity and self-denial can become necessary components within the Confucian pursuit of moral perfection; in the pursuit of truth and goodness, one must at times eschew personal benefit, comfort, or pleasure. When striving to embody the virtue of filial piety (or, even better, doing so spontaneously), the austerity and self-denial can take on an intensity as well as a sustained and systematic quality that can render it describable as an "ascetic regimen." The embodiment of cardinal virtues such as benevolence and filial piety is in itself the reward and justification for one's personal sacrifices; in the view of Confucius, there is no guarantee of any tangible blessings and benefits coming about through any superhuman or cosmic agency.

Nonetheless, there has long existed in China the view that deities and cosmic forces do respond favorably to virtuous human actions (and also punish evil actions). Virtue embodied in acts of self-denial and self-immolation could be considered particularly efficacious in this regard. One well-known story conveying this notion (recorded in Liu An's (d. 122 BCE) *Huainanzi* and Gan Bao's (fl. 317–350 CE) *Soushen ji*) pertains to King Tang, the sage king credited with overthrowing the tyrannical King Jie of the Xia Dynasty and establishing the new Shang Dynasty (around 1600 BCE). We are told that, after Tang had accomplished his righteous conquest, there occurred a seven-year drought that caused the Luo River to dry up. Unable to bear seeing his people suffer any longer, Tang trimmed his hair and nails, intending to offer his own body as a sacrifice to the supreme heavenly god Shangdi. Shangdi and the cosmos were so moved by Tang's altruism that, before his act of self-immolation could be consummated, torrents of rain arrived in an instant, bringing the drought to a complete end.

A nearly identical miracle is also said to have occurred during the Latter Han period (25–220 CE). At that time, we are told (in the *Soushen ji*, as well as Fan Ye's (398–445 CE) *Houhan shu*), there was an upright local official in Guanghan (in present-day Sichuan) named Liang Fu. One summer there was a severe drought. The county magistrate (Liang Fu's superior) tried to solve the problem by praying for rain while exposing himself in his courtyard to the hot, glaring sun—but to no avail. Liang Fu thereupon came forward to pray to the gods of the mountains and rivers, pronouncing a vow to burn himself alive as a sacrifice if rain did not fall by the noon hour. He proceeded to assemble firewood and construct a pyre on which to perform the self-cremation. Lo and behold, at exactly the noon hour, massive thunder showers came forth to save the day.

From the story of Liang Fu it would appear that, along with vows of self-immolation, self-exposure to the hot sun was considered available as a lesser austerity to resort to at times of drought. Of course, blood sacrifice—indeed including human sacrifice during very ancient times—is among the oldest religious practices known of in China. It is understandable that this fact, coupled with the widespread

belief that supreme virtue can move divine forces, would lead to the notion that the self-immolation of a social leader could be a supremely efficacious act of benevolence—whether or not the miracles ever occurred, or whether the self-cremation ever took place. While self-immolation of this sort would certainly qualify as an act of self-denial performed on the basis of religious belief, it is an incidental, sporadic act, and not a sustained or systematic regimen. Surprisingly, it was the Chinese Buddhists who would prove most prolific in the art of self-immolation (particularly by burning), which they at times performed in a manner quite sustained and systematic (cf. Benn 2007). This practice is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 21 of this volume.

While it was believed that the altruistic benevolence of a king or official could move divine and cosmic forces in wondrous ways, a similar power would come to be frequently attributed to the filial piety of people of various social standings. Most compelling is the story of Chu Liao (fl. first century CE) recorded in the *Soushen ji*. Chu Liao obeyed and cared for his stepmother with extreme filial piety (his natural mother had died when he was very young). On one occasion his stepmother became very ill; she suffered from festering boils and had become severely emaciated. Chu Liao used his own mouth to suck on her boils, extracting the blood and pus. This relieved the pain and pressure enough that she could sleep at night. That night a little boy appeared to the stepmother in a dream, to inform her that her illness could be instantly cured if she obtained and ate some carp, and that she would soon die otherwise. When she woke up, she told Chu Liao about the dream. It was the height of winter, the rivers were frozen over, and Chu Liao seemed to have no hope of obtaining any carp to feed his stepmother. In desperation, he went to the river and gazed up at the sky moaning and sobbing. He then removed his clothing and lay down on the ice. Thereupon a little boy came by and started to dig into the ice that Chu Liao had melted. Suddenly, the ice burst open, and a pair of carp came leaping out. Chu Liao took the fish home and fed them to his stepmother, who was not only cured but went on to live to the age of 133 (cf. Knapp 2005).

One might say that the filial piety of Chu Liao is selfless beyond what even Confucius could have imagined; he subjects himself to disgusting, degrading, and health-imperiling acts, in the service of a parent to whom he is not actually related by blood. Another salient trend of the times is the appearance of stories about children who observe the mourning rites in austerity beyond the norm, for periods far surpassing the standard three years. This trend seems attributable to the fact that the standard three-year mourning rite had actually widely proliferated among the elite; the didactic purpose of the excessive/limitless mourning stories seems to have been to extol sincerity and prevent the onset of apathy into what had become a habitual custom. In any case, the stories extol the virtue of observing—at an even greater intensity—the same sustained, systematic ascetic regimen (the mourning rite) endorsed by the sage Confucius himself.

As has been masterfully discussed by Keith Knapp, such stories of selfless children and blessed miracles became popular during the Latter Han (25–220 CE) and particularly the Six Dynasties (220–581 CE) periods; this phenomenon was closely

related to two social trends of the time: the increased number of extended families and the proliferation of Confucianism among the general learned elite. Filial piety, as endorsed by Confucius, was cherished as an ethic that could maintain the order and fabric of large households. Although Confucius himself may not have been fond of speaking of miracles and prodigies, the Confucianism that had come to proliferate by the Latter Han and Six Dynasties was that of a newer variety, propounded most famously by Dong Zhongshu (c. 195–115 BCE) and the New Text (*jinwen*) movement of the Han. This movement incorporated cosmological theories of correlation and resonance that linked natural phenomena and prodigies to human moral behavior.

Mohism, the movement named after its founder Mo Di (479–381 BCE), would by and large appear to be considerably more pronounced in its ascetic tendencies than Confucianism; indeed, Mohists frequently attacked their Confucian rivals for being too extravagant and self-indulgent in their everyday way of life. Mohists aspired in all circumstances to observe lifestyles of extreme frugality, austerity, and altruism—all in the spirit of equal, universal love (*jian'ai*). Mo Di specifically spoke out against music and elaborate funerals as extravagances that wasted valuable time and resources that ought to be better utilized for the common good. In contrast to Confucius, who set forth the Way as an end and fulfillment in itself, Mo Di endorsed his austere pursuit of universal love as something that was much more tangibly beneficial, due to the presence of a righteous Supreme God (Shangdi), assisted by spirits (*guishen*) who would always bring blessings upon the righteous and blight those who were evil. Indeed, in the Mohist view, the Confucians of the time, by holding a fatalistic view that failed to acknowledge the active presence of a moral divine agency, threatened to undermine public morality. Similarly to Confucians, Mohists did look to ancient sages as their exemplars, and their supreme hero was Yu (founder of the Xia Dynasty). Mo Di's attitude and way of life is vividly described as follows in the thirty-third chapter ("All Under Heaven") of the Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*:

> Master Mo declared, "Long ago, when Yu was trying to stem the flood water, he cut channels from the Yangtze and the Yellow rivers and opened communications with the four uncivilized tribes and the nine regions. There were three hundred famous rivers, three thousand branch rivers, and countless smaller ones. Yu personally handled the basket and the shovel, interconnecting the rivers of all under heaven, till there was no down on his calves and no hair on his shins. He was bathed by the pouring rains and combed by the gusting winds as he laid out the myriad states. Yu was a great sage, and he wearied his physical form on behalf of all under heaven like this. He caused Mohists of later ages, for the most part, to wear furs and clothes made of arrowroot hemp and to put on wooden clogs and grass sandals. Day and night, they never rested, considering self-misery to be perfection. They said, 'If one cannot be like this, he is not following the way of Yu and is unworthy of being called a Mohist.' " (trans. Mair 1994)

Thus, in emulation of their altruistic sage-hero, Mohists engaged in austerity and self-denial to the point of imposing misery upon themselves. For good measure, it

should be mentioned that Mohists, based on their ideal of pacifism and their objection to aggressive warfare, actively engaged in armed defensive resistance on behalf of weaker states imperiled by stronger states—thus they were ready to sacrifice their very lives in the spirit of universal love. However, the Daoist-inclined author of the above passage certainly considered Mo Di's ways to be excessive. The same author also remarks, in regard to Mo Di's criticisms of music and funerals, as follows:

> Nevertheless, people will sing, yet he rejected singing; people will wail, yet he rejected wailing; people will make music, yet he rejected music. Does this really seem human? For him, life was toilsome and death was contemptible—his way was greatly deficient. Because it caused men to worry and be sad, it was difficult to put into practice. I am afraid that it cannot be taken as the Way of the sages. Whatever is contrary to the mind of all under heaven, all under heaven will not bear it. Although Master Mo alone might have been able to endure it, how could all under heaven?

Thus, in the Daoist author's view, Mo Di's way is too somber and austere, and based on a misunderstanding of human nature and of the true meaning and value of human happiness. Yet, he also cannot hide his admiration for Mo Di the man:

> Nonetheless, Master Mo was truly one of the best men under heaven, and it would be hard to find another like him. Though he became withered and wasted, he never gave up. He was indeed a scholar of ability!

Certainly, Mo Di's brand of heroic self-denial holds a far-ranging appeal, impossible though its emulation may be to most people. While Mohism as a movement seems to have died out at the end of the Warring States period, its notion of a moral universe administered by just and righteous divine powers was certainly in line with what prevailed as the majority view in traditional China, which sanctioned virtuous behavior of an ascetic nature.

Daoist philosophy, as most famously represented by its two Warring States period classics, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* (both date to roughly the fourth century BCE), could be termed as ascetic in the sense that it enjoins us to decrease our desires, be content with what we have, and diminish the ego. The *Laozi* states:

> The five colors make man's eyes blind;
> The five notes make his ears deaf;
> The five tastes injure his palate;
> Riding and hunting make his mind go wild with excitement;
> Goods hard to come by serve to hinder his progress. (Ch. 12)

> Exhibit the unadorned and embrace the uncarved block,
> Have little thought of self and as few desires as possible. (Ch. 19)

> There is no crime greater than having too many desires;
> There is no disaster greater than not being content;
> There is no misfortune greater than being covetous.
> Hence in being content, one will always have enough. (Ch. 46; trans. Lau 1963)

Here, the reason why one should decrease desires, live simply, and diminish the ego is that this is how one can best maximize one's mental and physical wellbeing. People with few desires and ambitions do not engage in activities that expose them to unnecessary danger and stress. By not over-indulging their senses they avoid damaging their health. In sum, they are happier and more likely to live longer. Since they do not meddle unnecessarily with the affairs of the world, they bring no harm upon it either. The enhanced wellbeing comes about not because one has evoked miraculous blessings from righteous, benevolent divine powers but rather because one has fully adjusted and acquiesced to the processes of nature and the mysterious impersonal force or principle (the *Dao*) underlying it.

In the *Zhuangzi*, in particular, it is emphasized that the most sagely of Daoists (such as the four bosom friends described in chapter 6) are able to rise above all distinctions between harm and benefit, and can rejoice equally in life and death. This appears to be because such people have diminished their desires and egotistical thoughts—apparently in part through techniques of meditation described by terms such as "sitting and forgetting" (*zuowang*) and "fasting of the mind" (*xinzhai*)—to the point where they enter into a state of self-oblivion, and in so doing become acutely aware of the eternal *Dao* and their own participation in it. This condition is most vividly described as follows by Yan Hui (Confucius' favorite disciple) in an anecdote (most certainly fictitious) found in *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6:

> "I slough off my limbs and trunk," said Yen Hui, "dim my intelligence, depart from my form, leave knowledge behind and become identical with the Transformational Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by 'sit and forget.' " (trans. Mair 1994)

The awareness of one's participation in the eternal, ubiquitous *Dao* would seem to have the effect of drastically reducing one's anxiety over death or whatever other adverse circumstances the mortal body and ego are subject to.

In sum, the self-denial of ancient Daoist philosophy appears to have been of a sort entailing simplicity and some degree of self-discipline, but probably not self-mortification or extreme, unnatural deprivation. Self-indulgence is to be minimized not in order to inflict difficulty or misery on oneself but rather to attain optimal wellbeing. Severe asceticism of the sort entailing fasting, sleep avoidance, wilderness seclusion, celibacy, and the like would eventually enter the Daoist tradition, albeit only after it had thoroughly incorporated into its integral agenda the quest for personal immortality. While health and longevity may only require simplicity and moderation, the elusive pursuit of immortality would sometimes call for a more superhuman caliber of asceticism.

Ascetic Practices Associated with the Cultivation of Immortality

In China, the belief in immortal beings and the possibility of mortals joining their ranks is probably at least as ancient as the Daoist philosophy itself; however, the

earliest Daoist philosophers in all likelihood did not yet embrace such a belief. It would appear that by at least the second century BCE seekers of immortality—who functioned largely as solitary adepts or small groups of enthusiasts—were pursuing regimens entailing austerities such as fasting, seclusion, and perhaps some curtailment of sexual activity. By the first century CE, Daoism and immortality-seeking were becoming synonymous entities in the view of many, and the Daoist sage Laozi was reputed by many to have become immortal. By the second century, the first known Daoist religious groups—the Way of the Heavenly Masters (*Tianshi Dao*) and the Way of Great Peace (*Taiping Dao*)—emerged, and Laozi had come to be seen as an eternal supreme deity, and a personification (and recurring incarnation) of the *Dao* itself (cf. Eskildsen 1998). Among the earliest Daoist religious scriptures that we have (albeit not extant in its entire original form), which perhaps issues from the early Heavenly Masters movement, is "The Xiang'er Commentary to the *Laozi*" (*Laozi Xiang'er zhu*; c. second century CE). There we find passages such as the following:

> The Transcendent nobility differ from the vulgar in that they do not value glory, rank, or wealth. They value only "drawing sustenance from the mother"—that is, their own bodies. In the interior of the body, the "mother" is the stomach, which governs the pneumas of the five viscera. Commoners eat grain, and when the grain is gone, they die. The Transcendent nobility eat grain when they have it, and when they do not, they ingest pneumas. The pneumas return to the stomach, which is the layered sack of the bowels.
>
> The Dao of *yin* and *yang* is therefore similar to congealing the essences to produce life. At the age of fifty, having filled one's [productive] role, one should stop. Even when one is young, though one possesses [the capabilities for reproduction], one should rest [from intercourse] and preserve [these potencies] . . . Desiring humanity to join their essences and so produce life, the Dao teaches the youthful to preserve their essences but not to cut them off. It does not teach humanity to labor [at intercourse]. This scheme of laboring [at intercourse] was thought up by the ignorant. The Dao cannot be held responsible for it. Those of higher virtue possess iron wills and are able to stop coupling for the purpose of reproducing. Thus they cut off the flow [of their essences] when they are young. Moreover, in this way they are sooner able to form beneficial [internal] spirits. These are called "essences of the Dao." This is why heaven and earth lack ancestral shrines, dragons lack offspring, Transcendents lack wives, and Jade Maidens lack husbands. This is the highest way of keeping faith with the Dao! (trans. Bokenkamp 1997)

Thus we are told that immortal beings (Transcendents and Jade Maidens) are able to do without ordinary food ("grains") and refrain from sexual intercourse (or at least that which would lead to reproduction). Transcendents can and will eat grains when grains are available, but do not need to since they can adequately nourish and satiate themselves just by ingesting pneumas (*qi*). Since their continued survival—unlike that of mortals—is not contingent upon the availability of food, they need not die. Sexual intercourse is something better limited or perhaps even avoided, since

it depletes the body of "essences" (*jing*), which if preserved within could be used to "form beneficial spirits." In other words, sexual continence preserves vital forces, thereby facilitating longevity and immortality. Sexual intercourse is not inherently evil—indeed it is essential for the propagation of the species and hence a blessed thing. However, once one has adequately accomplished the objective of reproduction one ought to stop copulating (at least for reproduction), and those of highest aspiration and firmest resolve for immortality refrain from such copulation entirely even in youth. Of course, for ordinary people to emulate the Transcendents in regard to these sexual and (especially) dietary matters would require extraordinary discipline as well as a drastic transformation of their physical capacities.

In the Daoist quest for immortality, fasting of an often very extreme sort—commonly referred to as the "avoidance of grains" (*bigu*, *jueli*)—came to be considered necessary for bringing about the ultimate transformation of the body. Another fundamental attitude underlying Daoist fasting is that "you are what you eat": ordinary solid foodstuffs are heavy and corruptible, and will confer the same undesirable properties upon one's body (lightness to an extreme degree was deemed desirable if one was to hope to "ascend to heaven in broad daylight" as an immortal). Further, grains and such foodstuffs clog the conduits through which *qi* needs to circulate for a healthy body, and also keep alive certain malignant, death-bringing forces dwelling in the body known as the "three corpses" (*sanshi*). Thus, an amazing variety of fasting regimens are described in texts of the *Daoist Canon*. The most serious immortality seekers needed to try to eat absolutely as little as possible. While fasting, practitioners were told to subdue their hunger by swallowing large quantities of air or their own saliva, which were thought to be imbued with the most salubrious vital forces of the universe. In most cases, practitioners were also to ingest certain drugs or talismans as hunger suppressants. The intake of food was usually supposed to be decreased gradually until one was ultimately eating little or nothing. The most enthusiastic Daoist proponents went so far as to claim that fasting could serve as the principal means of effecting the full physical transformation that brings about heavenly ascension as an immortal. While fully acknowledging that severe fasting can initially cause extreme emaciation and suffering (physical and mental), these Daoists maintained that, if one keeps up the faith and diligently perseveres with the fast, the body and mind will revive and fully recover once the body has been purged of impurities, and once salubrious *qi* has come to circulate and nourish the body properly (Eskildsen 1998).

Daoist texts of various periods speak of how sexual intercourse and the resulting depletion of essence lead to disease and premature death. Actually, celibacy was but one method that Daoist adepts had as a means of retaining and utilizing the body's vital essences. There also existed special sexual intercourse techniques—"arts of the bedroom" (*fangzhong shu*)—meant to minimize the depletion of essence or even increase one's supply of it; these by and large appear to have entailed copulating without ejaculating, and instead sending the "essences" through the spinal column and up to the brain. The *Laozi Xiang'er zhu*, which, as we have seen, extols the merits

of preserving essence through sexual continence, denounces certain such methods as follows:

> Today there are in the world false practitioners who craftily proclaim the Dao, teaching by means of texts attributed to the Yellow Thearch, the Dark Maiden, Gongzi and Rongcheng. They say that during intercourse with a woman one should not release the semen, but through meditation return its essence to the brain to fortify it. (trans. Bokenkamp 1997)

It is indeed a well-known fact that Daoists of the Way of the Heavenly Masters practiced a sexual rite known as the "merging of pneumas" (*heqi*). Stephen Bokenkamp has in fact speculated—based on intriguing yet inconclusive internal textual evidence—that the author of the *Laozi Xiang'er zhu* (likely a proponent of the Way of the Heavenly Masters) probably endorsed the "merging of pneumas" as a method of sexual intercourse that, unlike the "false" ones, could successfully retain and utilize the essences; perhaps, then, "those of higher virtue" who "cut off the flow [of their essences] when they are young" do so through the mastery of this sexual technique, and are not necessarily celibate. Whatever the case, from the latter part of the fourth century (such as in the *Shangqing* scriptures) onward, we begin to see an increased tendency to disdain or disown sexual techniques (including the "merging of pneumas"), and from the sixth century (or earlier) celibate monasticism akin to that of Buddhism came to prominence within the Daoist religion. While Daoist celibacy thus came to be sanctioned in part by Buddhistic concerns of desire and karma, it would continue to be grounded on the prior established concern with the retention of essence. Thus, monastic and lay Daoist practitioners of the "pure cultivation" (*qingxiu*) variety of internal alchemy (*neidan*) meditation not only practice celibacy but also endeavor to control and terminate all involuntary bodily functions (nocturnal emission for men, menstruation for women) of the sort that may lead to the loss of sexual fluids. Advanced practitioners are sometimes said to undergo physical transformations indicative of a neutralization of sexuality and gender—such as shrinkage or retraction of the penis (for men) or flattening of the breasts (for women) (cf. Eskildsen 2001).

Buddhist Ascetic Practice

Probably the most momentous event in the evolution of asceticism in China was the introduction of Buddhism in the first century CE. From its origins in India (c. 500 BCE), Buddhism was a monastic religion. In a manner and degree previously unknown in China, Buddhism called for self-denial and self-discipline to be carried out in a sustained, systematic manner in intentional communities governed by well-defined rules. It enjoined vegetarianism, celibacy, and the like primarily for the purpose of

maintaining mental purity and avoiding evil karma, rather than for physiological concerns of the sort that concerned Daoist immortality seekers. By eliminating desires and the egotistical ignorance underlying them, one hoped ultimately to attain *nirvana* and once and for all escape the vicious circle of suffering and reincarnation. Within several centuries, Buddhism established itself on the Chinese religious landscape, and influenced it to the point where its manner of monasticism was greatly emulated by Daoism and its theory of reincarnation permeated the worldview of most Chinese people.

Nonetheless, even after it had firmly established itself in China, Buddhism quite often became the target of hostility and even persecution due to certain inherent characteristics at odds with Chinese tradition. Certainly most controversial from the standpoint of the pervasive social ethos was the practice of "leaving the family" (*chujia*) to become a celibate monk or nun; this could be viewed as a flagrant shirking of one's filial duty to care for one's parents and to produce progeny to continue the family line into posterity.

Modern scholars assume that Buddhism, as a result of the personal experiences of the founder Sakyamuni Buddha, defines itself as the "Middle Path," promoting neither self-indulgence nor self-mortification. In the context of Indian religion we tend to think of Buddhism as a religion of moderate self-discipline, as opposed to Jainism, which is a severe ascetic religion that extols self-starvation, nudity, and the like. However, a more careful and extensive examination of historical and textual evidence will very often reveal how misleading this assumption can be. Such seems to be particularly the case when it comes to China. Over the centuries, severe ascetic behavior—self-immolation in particular—has been repeatedly exhibited and extolled in Chinese Buddhism; this was in spite of the fact that the Vinaya rules governing monastery life expressly forbid suicide, and the fact that certain Chinese Buddhist luminaries such as the Tang pilgrim Yijing (635–713) and the eminent Ming cleric Zhuhong (1535–1615) trenchantly criticized self-immolators. Self-immolation has an especially long history in China, and includes gestures ranging from scarring the scalp with burns to lighting the entire body, or parts of the body (such as the fingers), on fire.

As has been quite cogently argued by James Benn, by and large within the tradition of Chinese Buddhism, self-immolation was "not aberrant, heterodox, or anomalous, but part of a serious attempt to make bodhisattvas on Chinese soil" (Benn 2007). Authors of major hagiographical collections between the fourth and tenth centuries appear to have been unanimous in their admiration for self-immolators, and thus devoted entire sections of their compilations specifically to Buddhists who had "abandoned the body" (*yishen* or *sheshen*). Chinese Buddhist self-immolators and hagiographers, it would appear, drew a great deal of inspiration and justification from themes recurring in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, which they took to heart in a more literal manner than what was perhaps originally intended. However, more indigenous sources of inspiration and justification also become apparent upon close examination of the hagiographical accounts.

Although the Buddhist scriptural sources drawn upon for inspiration and justification were quite numerous, the most influential text appears to have been the *Lotus Sūtra.* In the twenty-third chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* ("Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King"), Sakyamuni Buddha tells the following story: In an era long, long ago, in a realm far, far away, a certain Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings heard a certain Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue preach the *Lotus Sūtra*. Filled with joy, the Bodhisattva decided to make a very special offering to the Buddha and to the *Lotus Sūtra*. He doused himself with fragrant oil, drank scented oil, wrapped himself in oil-soaked cloth, and set himself afire. After burning for 1200 years, he was reborn (not in the usual manner, but simply by materializing directly), sitting cross-legged in the household of a king. By this time, Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue, though still alive and active, was on the verge of dying and entering final Nirvana. After the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright virtue entered final Nirvana, the reborn Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings cremated him and had the relics enshrined in 84,000 stupas. Then, to further honor the Buddha, the Bodhisattva set fire to his forearms, which burned for 72,000 years—this caused many beings to open their minds to complete and total enlightenment. He then proclaimed the vow, "I have thrown away both arms. May I now without fail gain the Buddha's golden-colored body! If this oath is reality and not vanity, then may both arms be restored as before." (Hurvitz 1976) His forearms immediately grew back. (Benn 2007)

After narrating the above story, Sakyamuni Buddha reveals that the Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings is now the Bodhisattva Medicine King. Sakyamuni Buddha praises the bodily sacrifices of Bodhisattva Medicine King, and declares that tremendous merit can be gained by anybody by burning just a finger or a toe as an offering. However, he then goes on to state that the greatest blessings of all can come from merely memorizing a single verse of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Perhaps the above story was meant merely as a parable extolling the superb value of devotion, and re-emphasizing the supreme merit that comes from hearing, reciting, proliferating, and honoring the *Lotus Sūtra*. Mahāyāna Buddhism asserts that all sentient beings possess the Buddha Nature—the innate capacity for supreme Buddha enlightenment that will come to fruition at some point, albeit probably after numerous eons and lifetimes of walking the path of the Bodhisattva. Any act of piety, devotion, charity, or kindness, however large or small, constitutes not only progress in the path toward future Buddha-hood but also clear evidence of one's inherent potential and ultimate certainty of success. However, in China, the story of the Medicine King was often assumed to be a real event that bore testimony to the fact that self-immolation, if done in a serene spirit of selfless devotion, could vastly accelerate one's advancement in the Bodhisattva path, and transform one into a great being of superior mind and body. Chinese Buddhist hagiographies record numerous stories of monks or nuns who, often in conscious emulation of the Bodhisattva Medicine King, covered themselves in oil-soaked cloths, drank oils and fragrances, and burned themselves on a funeral pyre. Often they are reported to have

sat calmly, reciting the *Lotus Sūtra* while they burned—all the while showing no signs of pain or anguish.

In many accounts we see the protagonist expressing disdain and disregard for the mortal physical body. Daodu (d. 527), for example, in proclaiming his aspiration to auto-cremate, reportedly proclaimed, "The body is like a poisonous plant; it would really be right to burn it and extinguish its life. I have been weary of this physical frame for many a long day" (Benn 2007). Such an attitude is deemed indicative of a supreme level of spiritual attainment in which one has truly risen above all ignorant attachment to the self. The imperviousness to pain amid the flames is implicitly attributed to the utter control of mind and body, and the depth of meditative concentration that the protagonist attains. Further, the burning of the body can be carried out not only with equanimity but even with joy—on the part of both the self-immolator and his/her audience—since the supreme sacrificial offering is deemed certain to lead to another rebirth of a wondrous bodhisattva, and progress toward Buddha-hood. Further, the self-cremation is said to be conducive to the propagation of the Buddhism, since it brings forth miraculous phenomena that inspire faith in those who witness them, and produces relics that become inspiring and efficacious objects of devotion. One such relic said to have been left behind by Chinese auto-cremators in a number of instances was the unburned, undamaged tongue—apparently a testimony to the power of the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* that were being uttered by it while the rest of the body burned.

While Chinese auto-cremators and their hagiographers thus justified self-immolation on the basis of such Buddhist ideals and interests, one can also detect in their actions possible traces of influence of indigenous religion. In numerous instances self-immolators pronounced vows to self-immolate long before undertaking the consummate act, and underwent a protracted regimen of practice in preparation for it. Often this regimen is said to have included the "avoidance of grain," which as we have seen is the term used most frequently to denote the severe fasting regimens undertaken by Daoist immortality seekers. The purpose of such fasting for an auto-cremator, one might guess, would perhaps be to render the body purer, so as to be a more savory offering to the Buddha and the *dharma*. Or, perhaps, the act of fasting was generally thought to be conducive to a mental fortitude and mastery of the body required for the successful execution of the lofty act of immolation. Since such success at immolating the present body was thought to lead to the more rapid attainment of the "golden body" of a Buddha—and tremendous longevity was often attributed to Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas—one could say that the preparatory regimens of Buddhist self-immolators did bear a similarity to Daoist immortality regimens. Indeed, as has been compellingly discussed by Christine Mollier, Buddhists clearly took advice from Daoists on how to transcend hunger, as can be seen in the instance of the authoring of the Daoistic Buddhist apocryphon, the *Sūtra of the Three Kitchens, as Spoken by the Buddha* (*Foshuo sanchu jing*) (Mollier 2008).

Also frequently reflected in the Buddhist narratives of self-immolation are certain assumptions regarding cosmological principles of correlation and resonance that

link natural phenomena and prodigies to human moral behavior; as we have seen, notions of this sort were prevalent within the type of Confucianism that had proliferated among the educated elite by the Latter Han and Six Dynasties, and are readily reflected in the tales of selfless filial piety discussed earlier. Thus, when a Buddhist self-immolated, strange and wondrous phenomena (such as descending stars and marvelous trees or plants) were said to be manifested in the sky and the earth, all of which constitute an indication that the moral cosmos approves of the act of immolation, and is moved by its sincerity.

Again, the *Lotus Sūtra* was not the only piece of Mahāyāna literature to provide motivation and justification for self-immolation. Operative also in a fair number of cases has been the desire to attain rebirth in the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha, as described in the *Pure Land Sūtras*. Also, various *jataka* tales (tales of the prior lifetimes of the Buddha)—most notably the story of "Prince Mahasattva and the Hungry Tigress," as narrated in another important Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Sūtra of Golden Light*—at times provoked emulation by Chinese Buddhists. We are told that certain monks, out of disregard for their bodies, concern for the hunger of other creatures, and unwillingness to put their tasty, nutritious flesh to waste, threw themselves before wild beasts and insects in hope of being eaten—albeit not always successfully. Daojin (d. 444) is said to have cut off slices of his own flesh in hope of feeding it to starving people. Quite touching also is the case of Sengqun (fl. c. 404), who, we are told, chose to starve to death rather than push aside an injured duck that was blocking his access to a special mountain spring that was his sole source of nourishment (he was a practitioner of the "avoidance of grains"). Acts of self-immolation could also take on political dimensions, as acts of lamentation or protest against unfavorable treatment of the Buddhist monastic order by the government. Puji (d. 581), after the persecution of Buddhism under the Northern Zhou Emperor Wudi in 574, vowed to sacrifice his body if the Buddhist religion could ever come to flourish again. His wish was fulfilled when the devoutly Buddhist Sui Emperor Wendi assumed power in 581, so he proceeded to honor his own vow by throwing himself off a high cliff.

In sum, despite the prohibition on suicide in the Vinaya, and the occasional criticism of self-immolation by some Buddhist luminaries, Chinese Buddhist hagiography not only condones but extols self-immolation provided it is conducted by people of adequate spiritual attainments, with selfless, pious, or compassionate motives. The physical body is viewed as something of no intrinsic value to those who abandon it, and can be exchanged for a better rebirth in a better body.

It is this casual disdain for the human body that, perhaps understandably, attracted trenchant criticism from proponents of Daoism, who, as we have seen, placed a particularly high priority on bodily health and longevity. The *Scripture of the Jade Purity* (*Taishang dado yuqing jing*), a lengthy Daoist scripture of the sixth or seventh century, provides us with the most prolonged articulation of this criticism. The scripture delivers numerous thinly veiled attacks against Buddhist self-immolators. It does this through the medium of grisly allegorical tales describing

"infidels" (*waidao*) who practice self-mutilation or cremation, or abandon their corpses as food for the birds and beasts, under the delusion that such behavior is an appropriate means of devotion and piety, or is conducive to attaining personal salvation ("birth in Heaven" or attainment of "the *dharma* body"). The orthodox Daoist view of such things, as articulated through the voice of a righteous protagonist in one such tale, is as follows:

> Why, in seeking blessings do you contrarily annihilate your body? The annihilation of the body is not to be called a "blessing." Why do you barbarians want to annihilate your bodies? The body is the basis of blessings. Why should you annihilate it? To annihilate the body is to be called "annihilating blessings." Also, the body is the basis of the Tao (*Dao*). To annihilate the body is to be called, "annihilating the Tao" . . .
>
> The Most High Ultimate Tao begins with the perpetuation of life as its basic tenet. Immediately within this body one makes the Dharma Body. (Eskildsen 1998)

Thus, this Daoist author asserts that no merit or benefit occurs through self-immolation. The supreme salvation (described here as the attainment of the "*dharma* body," a term that had been borrowed and adapted from Buddhism to denote eternal life), is something that needs to be realized within this very physical body. Thus, the body must never be harmed purposely, and self-immolation is an abomination. It would appear that this attitude on the whole indeed did prevail in the Daoist religion. While, as we have seen, Daoists did at times endorse or undergo ascetic regimens (particularly fasting, which is also extolled in the *Scripture of Jade Purity*) that taxed the body severely, it was under the assumption that the body would eventually recover, and ultimately benefit from the regimen. However, there nonetheless do appear to have been deviations from this norm, a state of affairs lamented as follows in the *Scripture of Jade Purity*:

> The way of annihilating life is not the [way of] attaining Perfection. It is to be called "the wicked and false way of the walking corpses [*xingshi*]." *Even within the Religion of the Great Way, there are people like this* [emphasis added]. The hearts of people change and waver and their bodies do what is incorrect. Wicked gods employ them. These people are also to be called infidels.

The *Scripture of Jade Purity* thus seems to admit to the presence of self-immolators within the Daoist fold, but maintains that such people must be under the influence of "false" doctrines (such as those put forth by Buddhism), and are not real Daoists.

It can be said that a major transition in Daoist doctrine and praxis occurred from the Song (960–1279) period onward, when internal alchemy (*neidan*) became the predominant form of meditation. According to the mainstream view among internal alchemists, the ultimate immortality to be sought would be that of the internal *Yang* Spirit (*yangshen*), which casts off the ordinary flesh—the mortality of which tends to be conceded—to attain supreme freedom and divinity. Did this change of doctrine have the effect of rendering bodily health irrelevant and bodily abuse acceptable?

Such in fact does *not* appear to have been the case. The ordinary physical body, though perhaps mortal in the end, was still to be valued as the "alchemical vessel" that provided the principal "ingredients" of essence, energy, and spirit required for the successful recovery of the "golden elixir"—that is, the eternal *Yang* Spirit. In other words, the quest for highest attainment still involved the refining of both mind and body, and superior health and longevity were still to be cherished. Thus, when a certain Mr. Liu was on the verge of resorting to auto-cremation, the famous *Quanzhen* Daoist master Ma Danyang (1123–1184) endeavored to dissuade him with the following poem:

> Mr. Liu, listen to my exhortation.
> Studying Buddha-hood and studying immortality,
> Is to rely on one's knowledge and insight in order to cut off and abandon the mind's dust.
> It is not to be accomplished by burning and abandoning the body.
> Intricately cultivate, refine, and train the divine elixir.
> Strive for the nine cycle completion of your merit and deeds.
> Follow in the footsteps of Haichan, the brilliant Patriarch Liu [a famous eleventh century internal alchemist-immortal]. (Eskildsen, 2004)

Ma Danyang was himself a rigorous ascetic. *Quanzhen* Daoist sources tell of how he lived and meditated secluded in a small hut, limiting himself to the most meager of food and clothing, and with no heat in the dead of winter. He vanquished his pride by begging in public, and refused to resist or retaliate when assaulted by the fists of a drunkard. However, in his view, auto-cremation was a misguided practice, counterproductive to the internal alchemical endeavor. Although one ought to withstand many difficulties in order to rise above all desire, pride, and inner weakness, the body must not be purposely harmed, since it provides both the vessel and ingredients for concocting the divine elixir. Although Ma Danyang's view would thus appear to represent the orthodox internal alchemical view on the subject of self-immolation, we can see that he, much like the author of the *Scripture of Jade Purity*, was forced to deal with people who deviated from the norm, for whatever reason.

Conclusions

Over the centuries, Chinese people have undergone virtually all sorts of self-discipline and self-denial imaginable, based on a truly wide range of religious principles or motives. When one looks up the word "asceticism" in various dictionaries, one will occasionally come across a definition such as the following, from *The American Heritage College Dictionary*:

> 2. The doctrine that the ascetic life releases the soul from bondage to the body and permits union with the divine.

This definition assumes a stark body–soul dualism that may often be assumed in Western philosophy and religion, but that is at best problematic in the Chinese context. While Chinese religious texts will frequently enough juxtapose spirit/mind against matter/body in a manner that might seem to favor the former, they are also typically grounded on a deeper framework in which the seeming dualities are in the final analysis inextricably linked in an organic unity. In the terms of indigenous Chinese cosmology, all is *qi* (the universal substratum that is itself neither spirit nor matter) in various modes of density that has separated and differentiated out of an original primordial chaos through the workings of the eternal *Dao*. In terms of Mahāyāna Buddhism, both the body and the mind, like any phenomenon or concept, are empty—lacking in any inherent existence.

What perhaps becomes clear is that the stark dualism of the West is not an indispensable factor in motivating religious people toward intensive forms of self-discipline or self-denial. More essential is the conviction that there exists something greater and more important than one's mortal self and one's mundane material wants.

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CHAPTER 21

Self-Inflicted Violence

Jimmy Yu, Florida State University

Self-inflicted violence is a recurrent motif in Chinese cultural and religious history. Consider the filial practice of slicing off a piece of one's flesh and cooking it in broth to nourish ailing or dying parents; the scarring of one's own face to avoid remarriage or resist rape; the ritual exposure of the naked body to the blazing sun in order to end drought as a form of penance; the public act of self-immolation as a Buddhist expression of selfless offering to rectify society and propagate the *buddha-dharma*; the performance of self-flagellation to enter into a trance and exorcise demons; or the slicing of the tongue to draw blood in order to copy or write sacred texts as a form of protest or self-vindication. The list goes on, and the range of performers goes beyond the divides of socioeconomic stratification, occupational cultures, and gender. While premodern Chinese performers generally would not use the term "violence" to characterize these practices, observers do describe some of them as "fierce" (*lie*). These visceral and bodily means of negotiating sociopolitical and cosmic relations are deeply rooted in Chinese notions of moral self-cultivation.

The self-infliction of violence was an indispensible element in the construction of Chinese culture. It can be discovered in a variety of sources, including not only canonical literature and official history but also edicts, poetry, local gazetteers, novels, illustrations, drama, and even children's books. All of these sources demonstrate the pervasiveness of violence in how performers of these practices negotiated social relations, defined or redefined the nature of authority, and imagined human agency in relation to the cosmos. When do filial acts of body slicing become a form of violence against the family itself? When do practices of female chastity, where women resisted remarriage or rape by cutting off their noses and ears or committing

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suicide, become acts of self-assertion? Where is the boundary between the Confucian virtue of "not harming the body" and the literati's memorials to the emperor written in their own blood?

For practical reasons, the scope of this chapter is limited to premodern times, specifically the late imperial period. I also focus not on institutional violence in the general sense, such as warfare and imperial punishment, but the kind that was disguised under culturally sanctioned practices, as part of the everyday life of ordinary Chinese. I divide this chapter into four parts. Parts one and two offer some general reflections on the intertwining themes of self-cultivation, sacrifice, and the effective power of bodily actions. I show how these themes in Chinese culture inform perennial concerns of human and cosmic efficacy. Parts three and four detail how these themes unfold in specific cases from late imperial times. Before moving on to part one, it is only proper to review what we already know about the two categories of religion and violence; they will serve as a foundation to further our exploration of specific practices.

Scholars of Chinese religion recognize that "religion" is not a native phenomenon. It does not signify a discrete object in the Chinese cultural landscape. As soon as the scholar engages with any religious practice, a whole range of political and cultural issues that are not generally considered religious emerge. Similarly, behind what appear to be secular practices are assumptions about the cosmos and the invisible world of gods, ghosts, and demons. Premodern Chinese culture recognized different ways to go about healing an illness, fulfilling filial duties, or changing the weather. For example, descriptions of state sacrifices, blood oaths, and the self-maiming practices of filial piety and female chastity are often imbued with a sympathetic understanding between the human world and cosmic agencies. People expected gods (or Heaven) to intercede when they were in trouble, and by performing extreme forms of sacrifice they appealed for help. Many miraculous cases appear throughout historical documents up to the modern period. These sources testify that what we would consider as "religious" or "secular" in premodern China were not separate or distinct.

Understanding Chinese religion requires us to examine diverse practices within a wide cultural nexus of social relations, using many different sources. This strategy places religion within the concept of "culture," which is most commonly thought of as the domain of values, meanings, symbols, and other ideal entities that require some form of material support, such as bodily practices, communities, institutions, and texts. Similarly, scholars in religious studies generally study violence in light of the ways in which it has served religion or is constitutive of religion. They generally define violence as acts of external aggression, disruption, assault, murder, and armed conflict. These acts, of course, occurred in China. But this way of understanding violence is not helpful in situations in which individuals inflicted violence on themselves as a viable way to instantiate mainstream values, to construct sanctity, and to negotiate social–cosmic relationships. A child's filial sacrifice or a young

chaste woman's act of body mutilation is not an act of aggression or assault. In fact, it reinforces traditional relationships and produces order.

This chapter is not a study of social or political aggression in the general sense. Rather, it examines self-inflicted violence as a cultural expression of self-cultivation. The term "violence" is used heuristically in this chapter to refer to culturally accepted performances of mutilating and transfiguring the body. Ultimately, this category breaks down in the end to reveal the complexity of various ways of exercising sanctity, creating subjectivity, and forging new social relations. My purpose is to challenge received notions of violence and reformulate our understandings of practices of filial piety and female chastity in premodern China.

Self-Cultivation and Effective Power

In order to understand self-inflicted violence it is important to appreciate the deeply rooted notion of self-cultivation, and all of its attendant ideas, in Chinese culture. From early material evidence of oracle bones and bone inscriptions of the twelfth century BCE, the patterns of self-cultivation seem to be inextricably tied to an inner moral cultivation and an external display of potent power. One key word is *de*, or effective power. *De* resided within an individual who had acted favorably toward ancestral spirits or Heaven. A recipient of such favor often repaid the debt (*bao*) of such favor through offerings. The word "effective power" (*de*) was also graphically and semantically connected to the homophone "to get" or "to obtain," suggesting that effective power enabled the individual who possessed it to obtain power over others and forces of nature. This power was originally an attribute of rulers, which enabled them to "obtain" the sanctity from ancestral spirits who acted as intercessors with the Lord on High (*Shangdi*) or Heaven (*Tian*). Their actions were stimulating enough to affect the forces of nature and human destiny resulting in external (or public) responses, in terms of cosmic or sociopolitical reward. Thus, there was a dynamic reciprocity between the inner cultivation and outer proof of sanctity (Ivanhoe 2000).

In later centuries, beginning with the Zhou Dynasty rulers, notions of effective power slowly changed to mean something that could be cultivated, something that a ruler could either forfeit or earn through his moral and religious obligation and prowess. In effect, it became a source of legitimacy for rulers, literati officials, and religious professionals to exercise their authority. So powerful was this discourse that the subsequent rise and fall of rulers and dynasties has been interpreted by premodern Chinese historians as the success or failure of the inner moral cultivation of the ruler's Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*). Self-cultivation and effective power became intertwined as a litmus test for interpreting the actions of sages, emperors, officials, literati, religious professionals, and even commoners. In later imperial

times, political legitimacy and religious sanctity were constructed through the cultivation of effective power, irrespective of social and religious divides.

There were shifting paradigms of ways to cultivate and acquire such effective power. In fact, all the main thinkers and their philosophical treatises in Chinese history grappled with methods of self-cultivation. One of the prominent and powerful patterns of self-cultivation was voluntary "austere practices" or "painful practices" (*kuxing*). By enduring hardship and suffering, by negating the self, greatness would result. Consider, for example, the *Mencius* (which became extremely influential after the eighth century of the Common Era), which contains the collected sayings of the fourth century BCE thinker Meng Ke:

> [King] Shun rose from the fields; Fu Yue was raised to office from among the builders; Jiao Ge from amid fish and salt; Guan Yiwu from the hands of the prison officer; Sun Shu'ao from the sea, and Bo Lixi from the market. That is why Heaven, when it is about to bestow great burden on a man, always first inflicts pain on his will and body, makes him suffer starvation and hardship, and frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature, and make good his deficiencies.

This prescriptive narrative emphasizes the apophatic practices of past sages. The message is clear: moral fortitude and spiritual growth can only come about from voluntary hardship and physical suffering. As exemplars, these ancient sages represented the importance of self-sacrifice for the greater good. Subjecting their bodies to pain and suffering to relieve natural disasters gave them power and legitimacy from Heaven. Most importantly, their sacrifices suggest that their corporeal forms were conduits to manipulating cosmic forces.

There were other types of special individuals who wielded a similar power to affect the natural world with their bodies. People generally agreed that the source of power was what mattered most deeply, whether it was from Heaven, spirits, demons, or buddhas. In the *Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Zuozhuan*) it is stated that during a drought in 639 BCE the Duke of Lu wanted to perform the ritual of "burning the shaman and the crippled" in order to produce rain. The assumption was that their destruction brought rain and a renewal of world order. Scholars have shown that there is a historical and semantic correlation between the "shaman" (*wu*) and the "crippled" and between the "crippled" and the "ruler," especially those who suffer from lameness—referring specifically to the mythical sage king of the Xia (Yu the Great) and the founder of the Shang Dynasty (King Tang). Both of these sage kings are depicted as having had physical weaknesses and as having sacrificed themselves for the good of their people (Schafer 1951). When Yu the Great labored ten years without rest to control the flooding of rivers in China, he endured a variety of physical ailments to help his people. He is known to have had a lame leg as a result of his efforts. The legend of the lameness of Yu survives into late imperial times in the form of shamanic expiatory dance moves called "steps of Yu." King Tang, on the other hand, supposedly ended a great drought via his attempt to self-immolate. It is

said that he shaved his hair, cut his fingernails, and was ready to burn himself when Heaven bestowed rain upon his people. Heaven responded positively to his attempted suicide because his selfless action embodied the effective power of the cosmos.

The potency of the ability of certain individuals to influence the natural world is particularly prominent in later accounts of those who engaged in self-inflicted violence. For example, in late imperial rainmaking rituals, where emperors, officials, and Buddhist clerics would publically expose their bodies to the blazing sun for days and weeks in order to end drought, the success of their attempts was invariably interpreted as the triumph of their inner charisma to influence Heaven. When the Ming Emperor Taizu and later officials who emulated him successfully relieved drought through their sacrificial acts, they were represented in official documents as equivalents of mythic sage kings of ancient times. Conversely, when failed attempts to end droughts occurred in particular regions (not surprisingly, in areas outside the imperial capital where the emperors resided), the official sources typically interpreted these natural disasters as the moral failure or dissipation of effective power of the local officials (Elvin 1999). Certain important figures were responsible for meteorological disasters. Many sources attest to the general acceptance of this religiopolitical discourse. The expectations and pressures on the officials were often enough to push them to engage in public acts of penance in the form of self-inflicted violence or painful practices, either willingly or unwillingly. As we will see below, the self-cultivation of effective power was used by various people to construct sanctity and legitimacy for different ends.

Bodily Practices and Cosmic Efficacy

Self-inflicted violence and painful practices as a form of self-cultivation are centered on the body. Bodily practices were productive of Chinese culture—enabling performers to graphically and viscerally demonstrate moral values, such as filial piety and female chastity. Their bodies allowed them to affect the environment, reinstitute order, forge new social relations, and secure boundaries against the threat of moral ambiguity. In this section, I briefly highlight the centrality of the human body as it was variously perceived and represented in order to provide a context to understand later expressions of self-inflicted practices.

The corporeal body (*shen*) in premodern Chinese culture was a marker for social and religious value. Scholars have noted that it became an important topic of discussion and debate in the fourth century BCE. The *Analects*, written during the Warring States period (c. 479–221 BCE), states that "There are those who kill their own bodies in order to complete their humanity" (trans. Lewis 2006). This passage suggests that a cultivated person would rather die than give up certain moral values. In the collected sayings of Mozi, it is stated that "Among all things nothing is more valuable than righteousness . . . Nothing in the world is more valuable than the body, but if people kill one another in a quarrel over a single word, this means that

[righteousness] is more valuable than the body" (Lewis 2006). Later, in *Mencius*, it is stated that just as one would give up good food for better, so one would give up life for virtue. This willingness to sacrifice oneself in the name of integrity is an enduring theme that demonstrates the value given to moral development.

Early Chinese treated the limits of the body not as rigid boundaries but rather as permeable and extendable. Through self-cultivation, the influence of the body could extend from its own center to the edges of the cosmos. This idea is most succinctly elaborated in the "Inward Training" (*Neiye*) chapter of *Guanzi*, a fourth century BCE text that describes a holistic transformation of the entire person that begins with the body, works through the senses, perfects the mind and spirit, and culminates in the full manifestation of human perfection that is expressed by the outward appearance of the body. For example, it states that for people who attain the Way it permeates their skin and saturates their hairs, and that with the Way of restricting desire nothing can harm them. The conception of the body in this influential text is that the human body (and mind) is made up of refined energies or vital breaths (*qi*), which also constitute the external world. Hence, cultivating the energies within oneself leads to aligning oneself with the external workings of the cosmos. The embodied self is linked with the movement of the world in a common energy field.

The interconnection of the individual body and the social and cosmic body hinges on the notion of stimulus-response or *ganying*. This term describes a sympathetic understanding of the cosmos and "humanizes" the most unusual happenings in the world. According to this idea, human beings live in a homocentric universe in which they, more than any other creature, embody the attributes of heaven and earth, which produced all things. Consequently, only humans possess the finer attributes of heaven and earth, such as the ability to practice the virtues of filial piety and loyalty. Based on the premise that Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things are of the same kind, and thus affect each other, people can, by cultivating their heavenly and earthly endowments, effect change in nature. In other words, they can stimulate (*gan*) the moral universe with their virtuous acts. And, as a result of this human effort, heaven and earth will respond (*ying*) with rewards or miracles.

In this light, self-sacrifice of important people was believed to lead to favorable rewards such as Heaven's sympathy and support. The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*), which dates to the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) and became extraordinarily important in later times, asserts that "When in the ancestral temple one conveys respect, and spirits and deities manifest themselves. When filial piety and brotherliness reach their pinnacle, they communicate with the heavenly spirits, shine throughout the four seas, and travel everywhere." As we will see below, filial children throughout Chinese dynastic history engaged in self-sacrificial acts to benefit their parents because they believed that their acts exhibited the "pinnacle" of filial piety. Through their acts, their parents would be miraculously healed.

I have dwelled at length on earlier documents because they presage many patterns important to subsequent Chinese practices. This is not to suggest that these early antecedents continued without change into late imperial times. In ancient

times, shamans were sacrificed to bring rain, while in medieval and late imperial times Buddhist clerics volunteered to take up the task. Yet, while the performers changed, the general contours of self-cultivation, the uses of the body, and emphasis on voluntary sacrifice persevered. Thus, without discussing these antecedents, it is impossible to understand the logic of self-inflicted violence in late imperial times. In the following section we will see how many of these themes were played out in complex, specific cases that demonstrate how bodily acts could negotiate social and cosmic realities such as healing the sick and affecting social justice. Because historical sources on self-inflicted violence are particularly abundant for late imperial times, where we have different voices and perspectives reflecting on the same acts we will focus on specific post-sixteenth century cases.

Late Imperial Cases of Self-Inflicted Violence

One prominent example of self-inflicted violence is a group of practices associated with filial piety. On the surface, self-inflicted violence is at odds with the injunction from the *Classic of Filial Piety* that people should avoid "harming the body" because the body is viewed positively as a precious gift from one's parents:

> Now, filial piety is the root of virtue from which grow [all moral] teachings . . . Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received by us from our parents, and we must not injure or wound them: this is the beginning of filial piety. Establishing our character by the practice of the [filial] way, so as to make our name famous in future ages, and thereby glorify our parents: this is the end of filial piety. Filial piety commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of the character.

If the *Classic of Filial Piety* seems to proscribe any damaging of the body, how can we interpret the actions of many pious children who inflicted violence on their bodies to fulfill their filial duties? And why did educated contemporaries—sometimes including the emperor—eulogize and reward such actions that were supposedly unfilial? The answer is that it was precisely the harming of their bodies that established their character and made their parents' name famous for posterity. Although at a rudimentary level the text proscribes harming the body, this was precisely what a pious child had to do! Serving one's parents to the utmost was actually encouraged by this passage—especially if the ultimate aim was to "glorify parents." Giving up something as precious as one's own body was reserved for none other than one's parents, the source of one's own body.

While the medieval *Classic of Filial Piety* instructs children not to harm their bodies because their flesh comes from their parents, the social expectation of a son was quite different. Engaging in self-inflicted violence to fulfill one's filial duties was transmitted through the actions of generations of performers who embodied this

ideal. For example, the children's primer *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Ershisi xiao*), arguably the best-known and most readily available book in premodern China, details narratives of how children sacrificed themselves to care for their parents. One account tells us of a boy named Wang Xiang (185–269) who, in the dead of winter, risked his life by breaking the ice covering a lake with his bare hands to obtain carp to feed to his stepmother. Similar stories abound, such as the story about another filial boy who drowned in an attempt to fetch river water for his grandmother. In short, these accounts stressed that sacrifice was justified if performed out of filial piety (Knapp 2005). Children grew up reciting these stories, which embodied ideals for emulation. The message in their performances was that self-sacrifice or physical hardship was morally required for filial children.

In late imperial times, one filial practice emerged as a distinct motif in its own right: the practice of "filial slicing" (*gegu*), a ritualized practice of using one's own flesh to make a healing medicinal broth for sick parents, uncles, or parents-in-law. This act was the epitome of filial devotion: the son used his own flesh from the thigh or other parts of the body to give back nourishment in a condensed form as a direct recompense for what he had received during pregnancy and childhood.

Filial slicing was first documented in the tenth century, indicating that this practice began in the Tang Dynasty. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it had become a culturally established expression of filial piety. The practice reached such a height that a special category was created in local gazetteers to feature sons and daughters who engaged in this act. Cases of filial slicing can be found in thousands of local gazetteers in all provinces during this time. It was a national phenomenon. The practice became a regular theme in novels, dramas, children's books, and literati debates. Miraculous healings of the ailing parent by deities or Heaven were often attached to the recorded cases to legitimate their efficacy. An institutional mechanism was also established by local governments to single out, investigate, verify, record, and recommend cases of filial slicing to the imperial state, which granted imperial reward to the performers. Physicians prescribed human flesh of a filial son for a parent who was sick. People of all walks of life read and thought about, and some emulated, recent and past narratives of children who had performed "filial slicing." Despite the Confucian prescription to cherish the body, the phenomenon of filial slicing was widespread and condoned by the very people who supposedly aligned themselves with Confucian values.

The provenance of filial slicing is extremely complex. Even though the practice of nourishing ailing parents with human flesh centers on the cultural axiom of filial piety, its complexity as an accepted practice means that to reduce it to the "Confucian" imperative of filial piety robs it of other cultural meanings. In the Ming period, many cases of filial slicing were documented and became a topic of debate among the literati. There was a case of filial slicing by a young lady named Zhangchong, who sliced a piece of her thigh and cooked it in congee to feed her ailing father. Her father ate it and was cured of his sickness. Examining the complexities of this particular case, we see that Zhangchong had a miscarriage from rushing to see her

father. Because custom holds that it is inauspicious for a woman who has given birth or miscarried to enter the home of her natal family, she was restricted from seeing and serving her father. She resorted to praying to the Stove God to sanction her to slice her flesh and cure her father.

Her case was eulogized by her literati uncle Wu Jiaji (1618–1684), who not only praised her act but also used the case to criticize contemporary social customs. In fact, a cursory glance through the rest of Wu Jiaji's collected poetry suggests that he consciously sought out some of the most ordinary, marginal people in his circles of kinship and friends to act as bearers of ideal cultural values to demonstrate the superior moral aptitude of the commoner (Chaves 1986). This focus on ordinary people seems to be a move to utilize the power of the common people to shame the elite into conforming to normative behavior. By focusing on the socially marginal woman, his niece, the impact would shame the readers, especially those with superior social station who lacked the virtues of their presumed inferiors. From texts such as this one, we can see that in the late imperial period filial slicing was an object of debate in a system of moral pedagogy and a vehicle to challenge certain social customs.

Wu Jiaji also used this case to champion sentimental values and truncate rigid social norms. Beneath the veil of filial piety, literati eulogized performers of filial slicing in order to give literary expression to ideas of "sentiment" or "passion" (*qing*), which at the time was an unprecedented philosophical and literary movement that reinterpreted traditional values and formulated a new morality based on powerful, impulsive, natural, and primal feelings. This shows that the literati touted and praised such filial sacrifice in response to social relations, but their documentation and discussion also served complex ends. Similarly, local government officials legitimated their own mandate to govern their districts by rewarding performers of filial slicing, demonstrating how the virtue of performers directly reflected their own governance.

Wu Jiaji's case shows an alternative reality to that portrayed by earlier twentieth century scholarship, which argues that for a variety of reasons the late imperial society was dominated effectively by the strict subordination of wives to their affinal relatives. The arguments advanced drew from shifts that early scholars saw in literature on women. For example, in pre-Ming editions of the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan*) by Liu Xiang (76–6 BCE), the "filial women" category is absent. Instead, categories were created for "benevolent wisdom" (*renzhi*) and other talented virtues, such as skill in argument (*biantong*). In the Ming editions of the *Record of Female Exemplars* (*Guifan tushuo*), which were expanded editions of the original *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, however, the situation changes completely (Raphals 1998). "Filial daughters" as a category was introduced as one of the three important ways to organize records of virtuous women; the other two categories were "chaste wives" and "self-sacrificing mothers." Because these three categories are all role-oriented, favoring the affinal family lineage, early scholars contend that representations of virtuous women changed from agents of

"intellectual" virtues to bearers of specific "gendered" virtues such as wifely fidelity and ritual propriety. They link this shift to the increasing emphasis on male loyalty in the political realm during the late Ming (Rosenlee 2006). In other words, the state supposedly promulgated an effective regime in which wives were subjugated to their affinal lineage. However, did all women fulfill such prescriptive roles so as to transfer their allegiance to the affinal lineage? It seems that Wu Jiaji is arguing otherwise.

Focusing on Changzhong's feeling toward her natal father, Wu Jiaji highlights the genuineness of filial devotion toward one's own father. He shows that it is this emotion that drives some people to act the way they do; it is this emotion that guides people's filial piety and loyalty. Thus, in her desperation, Changzhong could find no other way to express her filial piety toward her ailing father than to pray to the Stove God and slice her own flesh to feed her father.

Wu Jiaji's description of Changzhong's performance is also devoid of gruesome details. Instead, according to Wu Jiaji the drama lies in her miraculous feats of not bleeding or feeling pain. This has several symbolic meanings. It can be argued that she overcomes the traditional association of women with the biological processes of bodily fluids as a dangerous and polluting threat to order. On further reflection, if she had given birth to a boy rather than miscarried her child, she would have greatly aided her husband's lineage. But she (presumably) sheds blood inappropriately through miscarriage—a sign of pollution—so she engages in an act of expiation: feeding herself to her natal father. Thus, the case can be interpreted as a thoroughgoing route to filial piety.

Changzhong's filial slicing symbolically replicates that of Miaoshan—the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) in human form—in the *Fragrant Mountain Precious Volume* (*Xianshan baojuan*), a fifteenth century work. Both Changzhong and Miaoshan had no children. In Miaoshan's case she refused to marry; in Changzhong's case she had a miscarriage. Both women also fed their fathers by cutting themselves surreptitiously, using their own flesh as medicine. By offering their bodies to their fathers, each was reincorporated into her natal family through the father. These acts served, in other words, to regenerate the social order.

The significance of the fact that Changzhong does not bleed is the suggestion that her boundaries are contained. Her body is also represented as an instrument of concealment. Instead of depicting the concrete pains and messiness of body-slicing, Wu Jiaji works by inciting the reader's imagination about the hidden body. The reader is teased to visualize and fantasize about what is of more importance—that is, the theme of her moral triumph of cultural value is played against her biological imperative as a woman. She is not quite human, and according to Wu Jiaji all the neighbors marvel at her body, attesting to the efficacy and the moral power of her filial devotion to win over heaven (or, in her case, the Kitchen God Zaoshen). The concealment of blood in these narrative strategies suggests that female blood may have been perceived as polluting. However, the practice of cutting one's flesh for the sake of saving parents was approved.

In the late Ming medical compendium *Hierarchically Classified Materia Medica* (*Bencao gangmu*), published in 1578, the famous pharmacologist Li Shizhen (1518–1593) states that the practice of using human flesh as medicine should be condemned because it is "immoral":

> In the middle of the Kaiyuan era [713–742], in the Tang Dynasty [618–907], Chen Cangqi, native of Mingzhou, wrote a book entitled *Supplement to Materia Medica*, in which he recorded that human flesh was good for treating atrophy and emaciation. Henceforth, most of the local villagers would treat those with this sickness with slicing the thigh (*gegu*). But before Chen's time there were already people who practiced slicing the thigh and slicing the liver [for medical purposes] . . . Our bodies, hair, and skin are inherited from our parents and must not be harmed. How could any parent, even if seriously ill, possibly desire their offspring to harm their bodies and limbs, and consume their own flesh and bones? Such [practices] stem from the views of the foolish.

Li Shizhen's criticism may have been perfunctory as he went on to list thirty-seven medicinal benefits of consuming different parts of the human body. For example, eating dried and powdered human gall bladder with tangerine peel treats chronic malaria; drinking powdered penis with wine heals genital wounds; eating baked then powdered human placenta nourishes the vital energy or *qi* and cures abdominal disease; imbibing fresh human blood eases dry and scaly skin; and eating stir-fried human hair rolled into the size of a pear with ten egg yolks treats convulsions and epilepsy. Given these and other detailed medical prescriptions of human body parts, all allegedly "received from one's parents and hence to be protected," it is difficult to take Li Shizhen's criticism as more than lip service, especially when this pharmacopoeia was submitted to the throne for endorsement. The expansion of literacy and the reading public, and the production of state-sponsored pharmacopeias during his time led to a polemic against vulgar healing practices. It would be better to see Li Shizhen's criticism in this context as he tries to distance himself and his expertise from that of his predecessors.

The prescription to consume human flesh for medical purposes may have roots in ancient sacrifice and what we would now consider cannibalism, which has a long history in China tracing back to the ancient lore of dynasty formation. At various times in Chinese history cannibalism was practiced as a means to endure periods of famine, warfare, and political takeover. In most of these cases, there is a recognizable pattern. Even though cannibalism is tied to hunger, hunger is not necessarily connected to cannibalism. Eating another human being (part or whole) was never just about eating, but was about sacrifice and establishing social order.

Well-known mythic stories of early dynastic crises shed much light on the sacrificial nature of cannibalism. The Yellow Emperor (Huang Di), said to be the founder of civilized warfare and even Chinese civilization itself, claimed victory over the half-monster warrior Chi You, who was cut apart, cooked in a meat stew, and divided

among victorious soldiers. The first prehistoric dynasty, Xia (c. 2000–1500 BCE), could only be re-established after the defeat of the usurper, the archer Yi, who was fed to his own son by the treacherous minister Han Zhuo; Han Zhuo was later overthrown. The Shang could only replace the Xia when the founder offered himself up as a sacrifice. The Zhou could only replace the Shang, according to some texts, when the dead king was offered up for a sacrifice, and, according to others, when its founder had personally killed King Zhou by eating him raw or lapping up his blood. Even in late imperial times, eating one's political or personal enemy to seal his defeat was not unimagined. Liu Jin (1452–1510), the powerful eunuch of the late Ming, was supposedly cut up into pieces in 1510 for distribution among those officials who detested him (Lewis 1990). In these cases of political cannibalism, sacrificing the other, whether the predecessor or the political opponent, was the means of expiation and regeneration. By eating the former ruler, a new era of rule could be established; by eating the eunuch, evil could be eradicated and a renewed balance was gained in the political state. The objects of sacrifice (former kings and the eunuch) represent sources of power; their very existence denies the sacrificers strength. But, by incorporating that strength into the latter's bodies, new possibilities are generated.

There are alternative accounts of these cases of cannibalism, some offering conflicting versions of the stories. It is almost certain that some figures have been euphemized from early cultural heroes or portrayed in acts they did not commit. But that does not affect the argument here: widely believed stories underlined the necessity of regenerative sacrifice (the offering of oneself or of one's enemies) and represented cannibalism as not only emotionally fulfilling but also ritually and morally appropriate.

Offering one's own flesh to feed ailing parents out of filial devotion and consuming human flesh as a form of political legitimation are categorically different, but both acts involve ritually sacrificing bodies (whole or part) as food in a way that lends intense emotional meaning to human relationships. Nourishing the parents with that which came from them was a form of communion. Cannibalism united the eater and the eaten, and feeding ailing parents one's own flesh underscored ties between children and parents. Context was what counted. Filial cannibalism is, then, ritually similar to political cannibalism, gaining its meaning from cultural assumptions about ritual in human relations.

Female Chastity and Vengeful Ghosts

While scholars of premodern China have long been aware of the sixteenth and seventeenth century practices of self-inflicted violence that involved young girls and widows who mutilated themselves and committed suicide to resist remarriage and rape, most scholars ignore the religious valence of representations of women as vengeful ghosts and the possibility of interpreting these representations in light of women's agency. These women were eulogized by thousands of gazetteer

records and state-sponsored shrines and monumental arches. This section focuses on a new way to understand the practices of Confucian eulogization and veneration of deceased widows. I argue that such eulogization and veneration were not only for purposes of moral edification but may have been prompted by concerns about the deceased women's vengeful ghosts. Even though female chastity was a useful trope for maintaining Confucian moral values, women's deaths were often characterized by a fear of them returning as ghosts to take revenge on those who had wronged them. This must be appreciated in the larger cultural context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when young widows were pressured to remarry and when Buddhist notions of karmic retribution were fully integrated into mainstream novels and illustrated books, whose wide circulation helped to disseminate the ideal of female chastity.

The common term used throughout late imperial times for the virtuous actions of widows who refused to remarry was *shoujie* ("to be chaste"). But the term can be literally rendered as "preserving one's moral fidelity." To be sure, many other terms were also used, highlighting different aspects of the practices of female chastity. For example, *zhenjie* ("pure moral fidelity") was used to convey the sense of purity, and it carried the meaning of not "losing one's body," or virginity (*shishen*). This latter term was a symbolic expression for not losing one's sexuality (*jie*) by transferring one's procreative power to a man other than one's husband. Thus, in practice being chaste implied that these women should "follow their husbands in death" (*xunsi*). For these young widows, sexuality and chastity were assets, tools, or strategies that could be deployed by a variety of actors in the complex social and economic systems of exchange and negotiation.

In order to avoid being accused of "defilement by illicit sex," many widows refused remarriage. But some went to the extreme of disfiguring their faces or bodies to be excluded from the remarriage economy. These women were characterized by premodern Chinese historians as "fierce" (*lie*), a term that has political overtones reserved for men who sacrificed their lives out of loyalty for the state. Their acts included cutting off their noses, ears, or fingers, or branding their faces with words. To a lesser degree than mutilations, they cut off their hair. Sometimes beautiful widows purposefully made themselves look like vagabonds by smearing dirt on their faces, letting their hair loose, or not wearing shoes. These were means to protect themselves from being courted by rogue males or bandits. Destroying the physical body was a way to de-eroticize it.

While there were pressures to remarry for young widows, not every woman was preoccupied with her chastity. In the context of the late Ming, when commercialization and cultural affluence generated prosperity as well as moral profligacy and the deterioration of traditional values, plenty of women carried on adulterous affairs without worrying about their reputations. In this context, many conservative literati portrayed female chastity narratives as moral lessons for the general public. For the literati, the destruction of the female body was a marker of authentic virtue, which they called "women's effective power" (*nüde*). But the literati's efforts in

educating the public may also be understood in part as their fear of women's sexual promiscuity. Their endorsement of violent practices of chastity may be seen as a condemnation of the unchaste women of their day. In this sense, female passions were "contained" in didactic works as "virtuous" in order to perpetuate the patriarchal order.

Yet, when we examine sources other than official edicts and local gazetteers, which utilized female chastity for moral education, another picture emerges. If we examine popular literature, we see a preponderance of stories about vengeful female ghosts returning to haunt the living; the prevalence of these stories in Chinese literature during this time is undeniable.

The perception of widows who committed suicide was complicated, because this form of death was perceived as abnormal, a disruption of life as it was intended to be. The official rhetoric of the state, evinced in edicts and local gazetteers, asserted that the cosmos was made whole and balanced through the values of filial piety, loyalty, and female chastity. These values were understood as forces that supposedly unified people with heaven. When people aligned themselves with these virtues, they could affect the gods and accomplish the inconceivable. Conversely, when the relationship between the people and heaven was disrupted, danger might ensue. In the interdependent world of the living and the dead, untimely death was perceived as a disruption of the norms of life. Widows who had committed suicide or were killed during rape were particularly dangerous. They had the potential to return to the world as vengeful ghosts to harass the living. Traces of their malevolent power over the living are evident in the ritual sacrifices performed for widow suicides, described in the literature on widows' chastity. The *Illustrated Biographies of Fierce Women* explicitly states that libations and sacrifices must be offered to dead widows at the numerous altars and shrines dedicated to them, which were established by the state.

The state's effort to honor the numerous widows who committed suicide may be seen as a way to appease the potential threat posed by the ghosts of such women. In the cultural and literary contexts of premodern China, the potential for wrongly killed women to become ghosts had enormous influence on the living. Violent suicides and killings of chaste women were often portrayed as causes for these women to roam the world of the living as resentful ghosts. This is particularly true for widows or young women who killed themselves or were killed in the process of resisting remarriage and rape. There is a county essay written in the sixteenth century on the chaste woman née He who drowned herself to avoid rape when she was fleeing a battle. Her ghost appeared in a dream of the village head, demanding that he build an altar and make offerings to her at the place where she met her death. A ghost altar was established for her and sacrificial offerings were regularly made. Yet the essay contained a poem that recast her as a "martyr of virtue" instead of as a vengeful ghost. Later, a provincial administrative assistant commissioner had the poem engraved on a stele at her shrine. In this case, the local government and literati worked together to convert a deceased vengeful ghost who demanded libation into a virtuous martyr worthy of veneration. Late Ming literati describe how it was

common for a deceased widow to appear as a ghost. For example, in the seventeenth century *Illustrated Biographies of Fierce Women*, we read:

> In the fourth year of Jianyan [1130], a rebel soldier Yang Jiu invaded the south of Jianzhou . . . He passed by the village of Xiaochang and singled out the wife of a villager. He wanted to [rape and] humiliate her. But she resolved to die before she would be humiliated. He raped and killed her, then abandoned her corpse on the side of the road. The bandit [rebel soldier] left. People collected and buried the corpse where it lay. Yet, the imprint of her corpse where she had lain never disappeared. Whenever it would rain her silhouette [on that spot] would be dry; whenever the weather would be clear, the silhouette would be wet; if scraped away, the silhouette would reappear; if covered with dirt from elsewhere, the silhouette would appear more prominent. Noblemen praised her fierce chastity and lamented her misfortune. The *Analects* says, "Not surrendering the will; not humiliating the body." This would be an example of this saying.

Like many widows who resisted rape or remarriage, this young woman died in a violent fashion. Moreover, she died polluted, without ever having the chance to be canonized. The Ming state canonized "chastely martyred wives and girls" (*zhenlie funü*) as a special category of people who were the victims of homicide or committed suicide while resisting rape. But, according to Ming law, if rape was consummated, the female victim could not be canonized as a chaste martyr, even if she resisted the rape (Sommer 2000). Considering the wide circulation and the readership of this work, this case shows how people believed that wrongful death of a virtuous woman could have supernatural effects on the visible world. The non-disappearing silhouette of her corpse suggests that her inexhaustible life force continued to be a palpable presence in the visible world of the living. Such a phenomenon was typically attributed to wronged souls and vengeful ghosts.

There are many other historical anecdotes of late imperial times that illustrate the perceived power attributed to the vengeful ghosts of dead widows. For example, in the late Yuan and the early part of the Ming, there was a literatus named Yang Weizhen (1296–1370) who wrote a poem criticizing the widow née Wang, who committed suicide resisting rape after the death of her husband. His disparagement of her disregard for her body aroused the ghost of the widow to appear in his dream, explaining that he had no son precisely because of his poem slandering her act. When he awoke, he quickly wrote and published another poem extolling the virtue of the widow. Shortly thereafter, he was rewarded by the birth of a son. This anecdote illustrates how Confucian discourses on virtue and preserving the body cannot compete with religious discourses of sympathetic resonance and karmic punishment and reward.

In another Ming case, there was a courtesan who was wrongly sentenced to death because she was captured along with several bandits. The magistrate never bothered to further examine her case, even with the knowledge that she might be innocent. A month after her execution, the ghost of the innocent courtesan returned and came to the magistrate. She told him that he had killed her unjustly and that her

outrage could not be assuaged. She suddenly jumped into his mouth. The magistrate awoke and then collapsed as if he had been struck by epilepsy. When he awoke, his head was twisted around to face his back. He died four days later. His family also received harsh karmic retribution: the household became increasingly poor; his son died young; and his grandson became a vagabond. This anecdote shows the extensive destruction a vengeful ghost can inflict on the living.

The motif of vengeful female ghosts figures most prominently in late Ming vernacular literature. For example, in one of Feng Menglong's (1574–1646) short stories, the beautiful courtesan Du Shiniang drowns herself in a river after finding out that she has been sold by her lover to a merchant. After her death, her lover becomes insane and the merchant dies a month later. The taste for "phantom heroines" is part of the widespread fascination with the death of beautiful, talented women in the sentimental culture of the period (Zeitlin 1997). Interestingly, popular novels from this time usually depict the man as the normal human protagonist and the woman as the beautiful, talented, sensual, and sometimes virtuous representative of another (nonhuman) realm. It is no accident that in such anthologies as Feng Menglong's *History of Emotions* not one of the thirty-eight stories listed under the heading "ghosts of love" concerns a male ghost.

In the religious landscape of late imperial China, a widow's suicide and the establishment of a chastity shrine did not simply reflect Confucian values but demonstrated the malevolent power of ghosts in the popular imagination. A widow's ghost had the power to exact revenge on the men who had wronged her. In this sense, shrines dedicated to such women may have had more to do with appeasing their dangerous ghosts than with honoring their virtue. In other words, shrines were intended as much to propitiate as to venerate. As Emily Martin Ahern reminds us, worship and fear are inseparable parts of Chinese religious experience (Ahern 1973).

It is important to recognize that notions of karma, rebirth, and a world populated with ghosts were intricately woven into the very fabric of Chinese culture, irrespective of differences in people's social status. Female chastity became a site of interaction between supposed Confucian orthodox values and popular (but mainstream) Buddhist tales of karmic retribution. Strictly speaking, the Buddhist notion of karma is defined in terms of the causal effects of intentional actions or deeds that shape the lives of sentient beings in the realms of existence. Morally good acts lead to good consequences and rebirths; bad acts lead to negative results and evil destinies. The realms of existence are typically divided into higher and lower destinies. The three higher destinies are those of the beneficent *devas* (gods), the *asuras* (disruptive demigods and higher-order demons, who are opponents of the gods but otherwise quite similar to them), and humans. The lower or evil destinies are rebirth among the animals, the *pretas* (hungry, restless ghosts), and the denizens of hell. In China, these ideas were interwoven with indigenous concepts of death, retribution, and afterlife.

Belief in vengeful ghosts can be seen as an amalgamation of indigenous soul theory, concerns of ancestral worship, and popular Buddhist understandings of

karmic retribution. In this amalgamation, only certain Buddhist components are drawn into indigenous Chinese beliefs concerning the afterlife (Teiser 1988). According to Buddhist understanding, a hungry ghost is a state of being that a person can be born into after death. By late imperial times, the Buddhist idea of hungry ghosts became synonymous with terms such as "vengeful ghosts" and "wronged souls." Rather than being born into such a state, vengeful ghosts or wronged souls were usually "unprocessed" spirits in the cycle of existence because they died wrongly or were of marginal or outcaste status when they were alive. Their existence was sometimes reflected in their indeterminate and marginal status, similarly to when they were living. Only when the grievances fueling their manifestation were properly redressed could they could be reincarnated, or could the emotional stasis of ghosthood come to an end. Until then, they roamed the world causing havoc among the living.

Sometimes the liminal state of ghosthood was understood as a necessary transition to sanctity. Perhaps no story served as a model for chastely martyred women more than the popular legend of Miaoshan, whom we have discussed above. In her tale, Miaoshan refuses to marry and becomes a ghost, wandering through the world of the dead. Only when she performs an act of universal deliverance of hell beings is she transformed into the goddess Guanyin. As Guanyin, she protects and saves the anomalous dead, particularly those who do not have descendants to care for them by rites of ancestral worship. Her redemption and supernatural ability necessitate her death. This motif is inextricably linked to young women martyrs in late imperial China.

If we compare this legend to the cases of chaste widows, we see that the focus on acts of violence not only clarifies the ambivalent origins of many Chinese gods and goddesses but also changes the significance of chastity, self-mutilation, and suicide. Just as Miaoshan cuts off parts of her body to cure her father, so too did chaste widows, in order to demonstrate their resolve, slice off their noses, ears, or other body parts. Though the thrust of Miaoshan's performance stemmed from filial piety, it was easy for chaste women to model their marriage refusal on her self-inflicted violence because of the potential positive outcome that these acts could bring.

The motif of the disruptive power of wronged women also appears prominently in the most viscerally terrifying part of the widely popular Mulian operas of late imperial times. The scene in question depicts the vindication of the "hanged woman," who has been wrongfully accused of adultery by her husband and has resolved to commit suicide to affirm her chastity. This hanged-ghost scene was often performed as an exorcistic rite in communities where there had been a suicide, which testifies to the close connections between deceased widows and vengeful ghosts (Johnson 1989).

Scholars have already emphasized the tenuous boundary between Chinese gods and ghosts. "Many gods," argue Shahar and Weller, "share the kind of premature and violent deaths, often by suicide, that typify malevolent ghosts," and "draw upon the power of the margins, of death, and of the outside" (Shahar and Weller 1996).

In our cases, the female ghosts of the rape victims drew on the posthumous superhuman power of the disenfranchised. They could not defend themselves against their assailants before they died, but their incarnation as ghosts empowered them against their assailants.

Young women in premodern times had marginal social statuses: they were outsiders, and their positions in life were difficult to secure until they bore sons. If childless women were raped or violated, they would carry another stigma of being defiled. In late imperial times, writers portrayed these women's assertions of their claims to agency, vindication, and transcendence through suicides. Their violent deaths and returns as vengeful ghosts were an expression of autonomy and a means for them to control the circumstances and significance of their deaths. Women readers of these stories were most likely well aware of their potential power as ghosts. Placing the phenomenon of female suicide within the long Chinese tradition of venerating the good or honorable dead, one scholar argues that, for fictional heroines who were wronged or alienated by their inability to fulfill their desires in life, suicide was "a revitalizing self-assertion" that signified "a moment of control and power . . . an act of self-construction" (Zamperini 2001). Through violent suicide, chaste women acquired the potent power of either vengeful ghosts or benevolent goddesses to redeem their unjust circumstances.

Pushing this analysis further, by excavating the cultural backgrounds of these representations, we can better understand some of the sources of women's power. The vengeful ghosts can be seen as a way for both female actors and male writers to work through self-vindication and social injustice. Death and reincarnation as a ghost was a vehicle for the vindication of wronged women, representing their effective power to the conventional world when other methods of salvaging their reputations or requiting injustices done to them were unavailable. The vengeful ghost may also be understood as a vehicle for female outrage. Its manifestations were troubling for the literati and the state because these malevolent, or at least dangerous, women were represented as wielding power over life and death.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the complex ways in which self-inflicted violence was inherited as a construct from ancient Chinese notions of self-cultivation. While I have described bodily practices as intimately connected to the demonstration of effective power, I tried to avoid portraying the body as just a passive recipient of cultural imprints. Instead I have suggested that the body was a dynamic site—conditioned by circumstances but also open to actors' manipulations—through which performers were able to affect and be affected by their environment.

The social and ritual forms of self-inflicted violent practices transcended religious boundaries, disclosing the very nature of Chinese religion. Stripped of its normative Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, or popular associations, religion in China can be viewed

first within Chinese culture at large—in such institutions as the family, community, and the state—and only secondarily as what we would recognize as a religious institution distinct from all other social groupings. In making this assertion, I have tried to closely examine the logic of self-inflicted violent practices, taking into consideration the overarching themes in Chinese religion without limiting myself to interpreting various practices from one religious angle alone.

The idea that violent practices might be integral or fundamental to cultural practices has recently become popular in academic circles. Some might argue that violence denotes the absence of order and meaning—a negation of the very idea of culture. Yet there is little evidence that people living in premodern China thought of what we would consider "violent" acts as necessarily negative or disruptive of order. I have shown that self-inflicted violent practices were often systematic, rule-governed, and replete with meanings for both the performers and their observers. In other words, the practices of filial body-slicing and female chastity have important places in the production of Chinese cultural life, in terms of mythology, rituals, cosmological conceptions, religious virtuosi, and family dynamics.

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Index and Glossary of Chinese Characters

This index includes principle themes, concepts, and practices, and also serves as a glossary of Chinese characters in the text. Chinese characters appear in their traditional form; numerous online conversion programs can be employed to convert traditional to simplified characters. With a few exceptions, place names and book/chapter titles are not indexed, nor are names of emperors, authors, or translators.

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