Academia Sinica on East Asia

RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN WESTERN HUNAN DURING THE MODERN ERA

THE DAO AMONG THE MIAO?

Paul R. Katz

ROUTLEDGE

Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Western Hunan during the Modern Era

This book explores how beliefs and practices have shaped the interactions between different ethnic groups in Western Hunan, as well as considering how religious life has adapted to the challenges of modern Chinese history.

Combining historical and ethnographic methodologies, chapters in this book are structured around changes that occurred during the interaction between Miao ritual traditions and religions, such as Daoism, with particular focus on the commonalities and differences seen between Western Hunan and other areas of Southwest China. In addition, investigation is made into how gender and ethnicity have shaped such processes, and what these phenomena can teach about larger questions of modern Chinese history. As such, this study transcends existing scholarship on Western Hunan – which has stressed the impact of state policies and elite agendas – by focusing instead on the roles played by ritual specialists. Such findings call into question conventional wisdom about the "standardization" of Chinese culture, as well as the integration of local society into the state by means of written texts.

Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Western Hunan during the Modern Era will prove valuable to students and scholars of history, ethnography, anthropology, ethnic studies, and Asian studies more broadly.

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Introduction

In the past, we have been carefully taught that Chinese religious life at the communal level was in large part structured by the state, local elites who supported its agenda, and a Daoist liturgical framework featuring the existence of a three-tiered hierarchy of ritual specialists, with Daoist masters (*daoshi* 道士) at the top, ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) in the middle, and spirit mediums/shamans (*wu* 巫) at the bottom.[1] However, we see something very different in many areas of Southwest China with sizeable non-Han populations that preserve core elements of indigenous religious traditions, including Miao 苗 areas of Western Hunan (Xiangxi 湘西) that are the subject of this study. There, male and female specialists who stage their rites in local languages enjoy relatively high status in local life, and despite centuries of campaigns aimed at eliminating their presence thrive in both rural and urban areas to the present day. The prominence these individuals continue to enjoy can be seen in a story my colleagues and I often heard while doing fieldwork. One day, the exalted Daoist deity Taishang laojun 太上老君 (Laozi 老子) disguised himself as a mangy beggar and asked three of his disciples to carry him across a river. The disciple who refused out of disgust ended up becoming a Daoist master, and had to perform all of his rites standing up and using scriptures written in classical Chinese; he would go blind if he mispronounced a single character. The disciple who hesitated in fulfilling this task became a ritual master generally referred to as a "guest master." He also had to perform his rites in Chinese while standing up, but without the need to use scriptures. The poorest yet most diligent disciple who eagerly fulfilled this task became a spirit medium and was allowed to perform rites in Miao while sitting. Some versions of this story replace the spirit medium with a ritual master known as a "Miao master," but regardless of which specialist is mentioned both perform indigenous rituals in Miao (for more on these ritual specialists, see below and Chapter 3).[2]

The above story raises three issues situated at the heart of this study, as well as research on modern Chinese culture as a whole: religious life, ethnicity, and gender. My analysis of these phenomena centers on the following questions: (1) What historical changes occurred during the interaction (or reverberation) between non-Han ritual traditions and organized religions

such as Daoism? (2) How did factors like gender and ethnicity shape such processes? (3) What commonalities and differences can we see between Western Hunan and other areas of Southwest China? (4) What can these phenomena can teach us about larger questions of modern Chinese history?

This book presents findings from my Academia Sinica Investigator Award project,[3] the main goal of which has been to work with scholars and local experts to explore how beliefs and practices have shaped the histories of and interactions between different ethnic groups in Western Hunan. Chapter 1 features data on the history of Western Hunan's settlement, socioeconomic conditions, and religious life. There are also brief discussions of reports about poisoning scares and zombies. The chapter concludes with an assessment of governmentality in the form of state attempts to regulate local society. The subject of Chapter 2 is the history of temple cults in Western Hunan during the modern era, particularly the implementation and long-term impact of various temple destruction campaigns. It also considers the spatial features of this region's temple cults, particularly since religious life in Miao areas of Western Hunan largely centers on village shrines and the home, as opposed to large-scale sacred sites. This in turn calls into question recent research stressing the central place of temples in Chinese religious life.[4]

The next three chapters focus on the roles ritual specialists play in communal life. Chapter 3 introduces the main rites they perform, while also considering the following issues: (1) The fact that most indigenous rituals in Miao areas are for individuals or families, not entire communities, and are generally not staged at temples; (2) The importance of ancestors as specialists' patriarchs; (3) The place of gender in their ritual traditions; and (4) The seemingly limited degree of Daoist influence. Chapter 4 features historical and ethnographic descriptions of judicial rituals, especially rites performed to mark the formation of Miao community compacts as well as blood oaths to proclaim one's innocence or accuse rivals of wrongdoing. It also draws on new field data to challenge conventional wisdom about the Heavenly Kings being the principal deities in Miao judicial practice. In fact, local rituals performed by Miao masters consist of speech acts lacking any mention of such figures, centering instead on local deities and masters' patriarchs (who are often their ancestors). The goal of Chapter 5 is to examine the beliefs and practices at the heart an early 1940s uprising known as the "jumping immortals" (*tiaoxian* 跳仙), as well as their significance in modern Chinese history. In contrast to previous research on this incident, which treats its religious facets as "superstition," I stress that beliefs in savior figures and the staging of mass possession rituals led by Miao female mediums proved critical in triggering acts of highly motivated resistance, with the Miao montagnards who took up arms against the state choosing to die on their feet rather than survive on their knees.

The book's final two chapters treat communal rituals. The subject of Chapter 6 is an annual harvest festival known as "Incense Dancing" (Tiaoxiang 跳香)

held in southwestern areas of Western Hunan. Apart from describing one festival my colleagues and I observed in Luxi 瀘溪 County in 2012, the chapter focuses on its convoluted historical development, which has been intricately intertwined with both non-Han and Han religious cultures plus local identity politics. Particular attention is devoted to the Incense Dancing festival's possible origins in myths and temple cults to the ancient canine deity Panhu 盤瓠 and his princess bride Xinnü 辛女. Chapter 7 explores the significance of a set of Han Chinese ritual dramas known as "Repaying a Nuo Vow" (Huan Nuoyuan 還儺願). I examine the cultural significance of Repaying a Nuo Vow from three perspectives: (1) Historical and ethnographic data other scholars have collected throughout Western Hunan, including among both Miao and Tujia communities; (2) A case study of one such rite held in Huayuan 花垣 County in 2011; and (3) Information on such rituals as performed in other parts of Southwest China.

For the purposes of this study, "Western Hunan" refers to the Western Hunan Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture (Xiangxi Tujiazu Miaozu zizhizhou 湘西土家族苗族自治州), which encompasses Jishou 吉首 City (formerly Qianzhou 乾州) plus the counties of Baojing 保靖, Fenghuang 鳳凰, Guzhang 古丈, Huayuan 花垣 (formerly Yongsui 永綏), Longshan 龍山, Luxi 瀘溪, and Yongshun 永順 (see Figure I.1).[5] In terms of temporal focus, much historical research on Western Hunan and other parts of Southwest China has tended to center on state policies enacted during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most notably the replacement of hereditary native chieftains (*tusi* 土司) with appointed magistrates (*gaitu guiliu* 改土歸流), while ethnographic research by definition centers on the present day. Such scholarship overlooks the dramatic changes in Chinese religious life that took place during the modern era, starting with new dichotomies between "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗教) and "superstition" (*mixin* 迷信), neologisms that not only served as "apertures" for the state and elites to characterize indigenous religious traditions, but also developed into labels that practitioners applied to themselves.[6] In Southwest China, scholars, officials, missionaries, and other elites regularly affixed derogatory terms like "superstition" and "backwards" (*luowu* 落伍, *luohou* 落後) to ritual specialists and their traditions, with such terminology persisting in official publications to the present day.[7] A new generation of scholars and local experts is gradually working to avoid the use of such pejorative language, yet there remains a tendency to rely on terms like "shamanistic religion" (*wujiao* 巫教) or "primitive religion" (*yuanshi zongjiao* 原始宗教).[8]

That being said, it is essential to bear in mind that not all modern discourse about religion exerted a negative impact. Some Chinese intellectuals viewed religion as a form of "folk customs" (*minsu* 民俗) meriting study and protection. Others argued in favor of designating at least some of China's most venerable temples as historical monuments (*guji* 古蹟; also a traditional term in its own right), with their statues and other ritual artifacts meriting protection as cultural artifacts (*wenwu* 文物, a traditional term

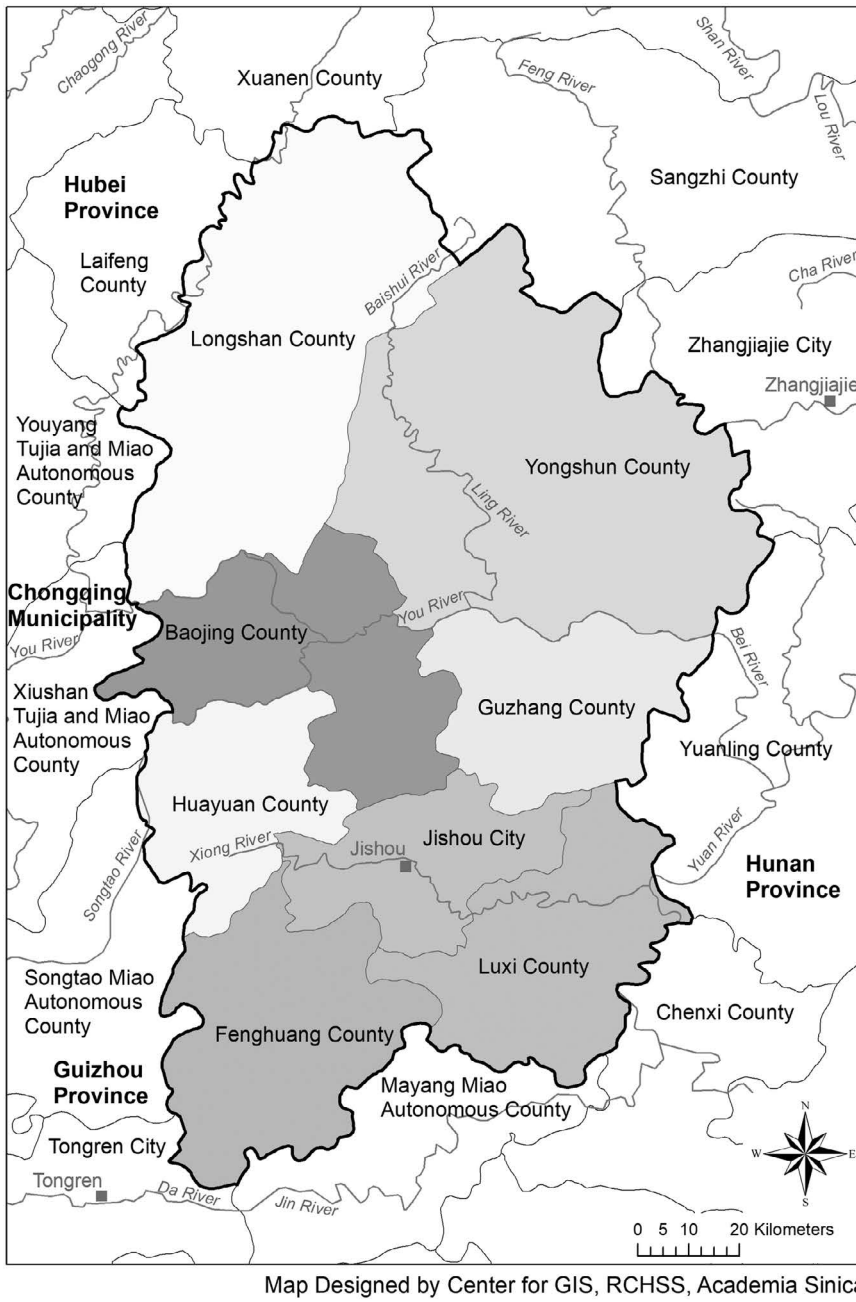

Figure I.1 Western Hunan. Courtesy of the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica. Used with permission.

as well).[9] Current state policy has led to some local traditions being discursively reconstructed as "intangible cultural heritage" (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan* 非物質文化遺產), a form of state-approved "popular culture" often stripped of its religious elements designed to attract tourists and stimulate economic development.[10] As a result, religious life has become legitimized but within strict limits, including as part of state-sponsored performances, conferences, and publication projects, as well as performances staged under this rubric.[11] In Western Hunan, this has involved shifting images of this former frontier from a place of danger to a land of wonder popularly referred to as "Mysterious Western Hunan" (*shenmi de Xiangxi* 神秘的湘西).[12]

One core element of this project's focus on modern Chinese history is its links to a venerable tradition of scholarship at Academia Sinica that dates back to the 1930s. My initial interest in studying Western Hunan derived from extensive discussions with Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, Academician and Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica (Taiwan), who informed me about the legacy of research on this area by some of the founding members of his Institute, Ling Chunsheng 凌純聲 (1901–1978) and Ruey Yih-fu 芮逸夫 (1898–1990), who worked with a Kho Xiong intellectual named Shi Qigui 石啟貴 (1896–1959) to do fieldwork in Western Hunan as part of a major research project on Southwest China undertaken between 1929 and 1943.[13] Despite numerous obstacles, including being sued by some local elites for allegedly defaming Miao customs, their work resulted in the collection of over 8,000 photographs, 1,100 artifacts, and 800 documents.[14] Ling and Ruey wrote up their findings in 1940, although their book (entitled *Xiangxi Miaozu diaocha baogao* 湘西苗族調查報告) was not published until 1947. Shi also wrote up his results in 1940, with his work (one of the earliest examples of Chinese indigenous anthropology) finally being published in 1986 under the title *Xiangxi Miaozu shidi diaocha baogao*湘西苗族實地調查報告. More recently, Shi Qigui's son and daughter-in-law Shi Jianzhong 石建中 and the late Ma Shulan 麻樹蘭, both emeritus professors at Beijing's Zhongyang minzu daxue 中央民族大學, have done extensive follow-up research and worked with other scholars and local experts to publish Shi Qigui's field data in an annotated ten-volume collection entitled *Minguo shiqi Xiangxi Miaozu diaocha shilu* 民國時期湘西苗族調查實錄.[15] The quantity and quality of their data, combined with the new historical and ethnographic materials collected in the course of my Academia Sinica research project, provide us with an opportunity to address the four questions listed above.

Daoism and non-Han ritual traditions

Regarding the first question (historical changes resulting from the interaction between non-Han ritual traditions and Daoism), my research has centered less on the problem of whether the Western Hunan Miao have preserved earlier forms of Daoism originally practiced by Han Chinese but

not existing among them anymore, and more on the varying degrees of this religion's impact in non-Han areas during the modern era.[16] Apart from the state, one force often cited as having played a vital role in promoting Chinese cultural unity is Daoism, most notably its efforts to absorb, reform, and restructure local cults, including those that flourished in non-Han areas of Southwest China. Few problems in the study of Chinese religion deserve greater attention than the complex processes of interaction between Daoism and local cults, yet few issues are so often misunderstood. For the purposes of this study, I basically follow Nathan Sivin and Michel Strickmann, who define as "Daoist" movements that share a recognition of Taishang laojun 太上老君 and/or Zhang Daoling 張道陵 as patriarchs and promote the worship of deities representing "pure emanations of the Tao [Dao]."[17] I also concur with Vincent Goossaert's definition of Daoist practice as consisting of "Rituals and the social formations that organize them, addressing a set of hierarchized deities the top level of which are transcendent."[18] As for "local cults," I use the term to encompass deities, their temples and rituals, as well as the activities of associations and local ritual specialists that support them at the communal level.[19]

Some scholars have viewed Daoism as a "higher" or "elevated" form of Chinese popular religion that standardized local cult worship through a hierarchical liturgical framework (see note 1). In the case of Southwest China, research on Daoism's spread throughout the region has tended to view the Daoist liturgical framework as a civilizing force that helped to promote processes of "sinicization" (Hanhua 漢化).[20] This problem is especially apparent in Chinese scholarship that chooses to label non-Han ritual traditions as "shamanistic religion" (*wujiao* 巫教) or "ghost religion" (*guijiao* 鬼教), or else classify them using exonyms containing the term "teachings" that have little meaning on the ground (examples include Meishanjiao 梅山教, Mayangjiao 麻陽教, Hunanjiao 湖南教, etc.).[21] Such views overlook that fact that Daoism's impact varied dramatically in different areas of Southwest China, particularly the extent to which it was shaped by the communal traditions it encountered as well as grew out of. This is in turn related to the links between Daoist masters, local ritual maters, and shamans or spirit mediums, which took place along migration networks and commercial transportation routes and resulted in the growth of ritual traditions, such as Shenxiao 神霄, Tianxin zhengfa 天心正法, etc., which became recognized as "Daoist" yet also preserved elements of indigenous ritual traditions.[22] For example, in areas of Central Hunan (Xiangzhong 湘中) where traces of non-Han indigenous cultures have largely vanished, many Orthodox Unity Daoist masters (Zhengyi *daoshi* 正一道士) have integrated the traditions of the local ritual masters (generally referred to as *shigong* 師公 or Yuanhuang *fashi* 元皇法師), while some ritual masters borrow aspects of Daoist liturgies, all of which points to the presence of extensive processes of reverberation.[23]

As Terry Kleeman properly observes, "… a cursory examination of the history of Daoism shows that non-Chinese ethnic groups have played a significant role in Daoism from the beginning, that Daoism remains an influential religion among ethnic minorities within and outside China …, and that archaic forms of Daoism survive among non-Chinese peoples."[24] This point has been demonstrated by the classic studies of the Yao 瑤[25] by Michel Strickmann, Jacques Lemoine, and Shiratori Yoshiro 白鳥芳郎,[26] as well as more recent work by Eli Alberts and Chen Meiwen 陳玫妏.[27] However, while some non-Han peoples (such as the Yao) have absorbed numerous elements of Daoist liturgies, others have successfully preserved indigenous ritual traditions due to processes David Holm describes as "pervasive cultural code switching and complex patterns of mutual encapsulation."[28] Holm's work is highly valuable for demonstrating that local communities adopted facets of Daoism while also preserving their own ritual traditions, which often proved highly resilient despite the effects of Han Chinese hegemony. Clear evidence for this may be found in the presence of specialists who perform indigenous rituals in local languages while also making offerings to Daoist deities. In some Zhuang 壯[29] areas of Guangxi, for example, one finds not only Daoist masters (*daogong* 道公, *bouxdauh*) and ritual masters (*shigong* 師公, *bouxsae*), but also male specialists referred to as *mogong* 魔公 (*bouxmo*) who use vernacular liturgical texts and stage their rites in Zhuang.[30] Holm brings an innovative perspective to the status of non-Han ritual specialists in Southwest China by drawing on evidence in vernacular texts from Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, and northern Vietnam to show that, prior to the disbandment of the native chieftaincies in the eighteenth century, many *mogong* were attached to chiefly lineages. The geographic scope of Holm's article, which includes Vietnam, also suggests the need for scholars to broaden their horizons to encompass regions bordering Southwest China, especially Southeast Asia. In addition, female specialists (especially mediums) play central roles in Zhuang and other non-Han local ritual traditions, not only cooperating and competing with male specialists (including Daoist ones) but even surpassing them in terms of both status and actual influence.[31] Additional food for thought may be found in the fact that, in contrast to practices in Central Hunan and many other parts of China where Han culture is predominant, the veneration of statues does not seem central to indigenous ritual traditions found in Western Hunan and many other parts of Southwest China.[32]

As we will see below, similar patterns have occurred in Western Hunan, where Daoism's impact on indigenous ritual traditions needs to be understood in light of ethnic differences as well as the importance of male and female specialists who perform their rites in Miao. The reasons underlying these phenomena may in part be explained by the concept of transhybridity discussed below, especially its relevance for the study of cultural frontiers.

Cultural frontiers and trans-hybridity

As noted above, this project has attempted to transcend previous scholarship on the transformations of Western Hunan religious life resulting from the impact of state policies and elite agendas, focusing instead on the vital roles played by ritual specialists. Such changes represent a microcosm of this region's ethnic history, with considerable variation by area and degree of influence exerted by Han culture. As we will see below, local cults and rituals not only served as integrating forces between different groups of people, as well as communities and the state, but also contributed to the demarcation of ethnic boundaries and formation of diverse identities. Such processes also need to be understood in the larger context of Han ideologies of ethnic interaction designed to help non-Han peoples become "civilized," especially via moral education (*jiaohua* 教化; literally "transformation through [moral] teachings"), which often resulted in indigenous peoples suffering a sense of "stigmatized identity" (such as being "backwards"). At the same time, however, many non-Han groups strove to maintain their own traditions while simultaneously importing cultural elements from Han regions.[33] Western Hunan contains numerous examples of such reverberation, including: (1) The presence of both ritual specialists who self-identify as Miao and speak Miao choosing to use non-indigenous texts written in Chinese, as well as other specialists who insist on full adherence to traditional ritual forms, including not only language but also clothing (see Chapter 3); (2) The Incense Dancing harvest festival described in Chapter 6, which blends indigenous and external elements in an event fraught with ethnic identity politics; and (3) Repaying a Nuo Vow ritual dramas combining local versions of the flood myth sung in Miao with dramas full of Han Chinese characters performed in Chinese (see Chapter 7). Such forms of reverberation could also result in tensions, one example being fears of poisoning by Miao women, with the persecutions and even lynchings persisting into the modern era helping to shed light on Han reactions to non-Han culture, including gender issues (see Chapter 1).

Our study of historical and contemporary mechanisms by which Miao and Han Chinese beliefs and practices interacted can shed new light on the nature of so-called "cultural frontiers" in modern Chinese history, regardless of whether such frontiers are conceived of as objective and mappable entities (an etic perspective) or symbolic boundaries of imagined communities, including as expressed in rituals (emic). This relates to the question of whether we choose to consider frontiers as barriers (zones of resistance that slow cultural movements or divert them into different channels) or contact zones (meeting places where hybrid cultures form, with ritual serving to further such processes).[34] Similar issues have shaped frontier studies worldwide. In the case of the American West, historians beginning with the venerable Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) have maintained that settlers readily adopted the customs of the Native American peoples they

encountered, thereby remaking their own cultures at the same time they were striving to create a new frontier.[35] In the case of China's southwestern borderlands, we can see that their history has been in large part shaped by a combination of Han migration, state violence, and cultural policies, which in turn were impacted by varying levels of effectiveness of central and local state power, different degrees of integration of non-Han populations, and a wide range of indigenous and external identities, including those brought in by migrants from provinces like Fujian and Jiangxi (see Chapter 1).[36] In their Introduction to the edited volume *Empire at the Margins*, Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton explain that one goal of their book is to assess "how state categories confront and compromise with indigenous ones, and how differences were attested in different historical contexts."[37] The aim of this book is somewhat similar, although in this case the term "state" can readily be supplemented by "Daoist."

When it comes to Southwest China's religious life, the data presented below suggests that interaction was characterized not only by the deliberate transmission of doctrine and liturgy, but also the persistence of indigenous beliefs and practices. In general, two concepts have been used to analyze such cultural encounters. The first, translation, features mechanisms generally used by the state or local elites to introduce external cultural traditions (including religious ones), some of which end up gaining acceptance among indigenous communities. In much of Southwest China, the main form of translation centered on the construction of temples to "standard" Chinese deities, as well as the introduction of the Buddhist and Daoist religions.[38] Be that as it may, reliance on translation overlooks the fact that processes of cultural cross-fertilization are not always purposeful ones. This problem can be resolved by means of the second concept, hybridity. Hybridity can account for unintentional forms of acculturation, which for Southwest China involved aspects of Chinese culture (including rituals) melding into local traditions without state intervention or active promotion on the part of Han elites. The problem with hybridity, however, is that it omits human agency, including the fact that indigenous peoples can engage in their own forms of translation by adapting outside elements to local cultural preferences and purposes. To do justice to these intricate forms of reverberation and their impact on religious life in Southwest China, I have chosen to combine them into a shorthand, namely "trans-hybridity."[39]

In addition, one might well consider Michel de Certeau's idea of "re-employment" (*ré-emploi*) as a means of exploring how people make selections from existing repertories, produce new combinations from what they select, and place what they have appropriated in new contexts.[40] For example, one needs to distinguish between deeply rooted indigenous practices, such as the oxen sacrifice (*zhuiniu* 椎牛), and the employment (or re-employment) of Daoist rituals in family or communal settings. It is particularly important to stress the strength of local traditions, thereby avoiding simplistic views centering on ideas of sinicization. Take for example indigenous stories

recounted in Miao that describe a flood followed by the subsequent repopulating of the world by means of an incestuous marriage between the sole surviving brother and sister (see Chapter 7). Such tales seem hybrids in their own right, with non-Han versions merging with Chinese legends and cults via processes that David Holm has aptly described as "classical Chinese myths grafted onto native material."[41] Similar processes of reverberation marked by trans-hybridity can be found throughout Southwest China, and represent in large part the ability of indigenous peoples to adjust their ritual traditions despite the presence of external hegemonic cultures, both absorbing Han rites while also blending them into their own traditions. In just one example, Ho Zhaohua 何兆華 has demonstrated that the Shidong 施洞 Miao in Guizhou province have not hesitated to "appropriate Han Chinese symbolic capital to strengthen their in-group identity."[42]

Gender and ethnicity

The above discussion of trans-hybridity can also serve to direct our attention to this book's second question, namely the impact of gender and ethnicity on processes of change during the modern era. Regarding this issue, I would first observe that one goal of this book is to draw on historical and ethnographic data to help us better understand aspects of indigenous culture that traditional sources tend to ignore. As Ranajit Guha noted in his classic *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, religious beliefs and practices constitute an essential element of indigenous consciousness and subjectivity, yet one that is often downplayed in traditional historical narratives or else treated as mere folklorist detail.[43] In the case of Western Hunan, despite the obvious importance of indigenous ritual traditions in Miao social life, much scholarship tends to either ignore these practices or else label them as "superstition." One example of this neglect involves the significance of gender issues and women's roles in local religious life, phenomena that merit consideration in light of on-going research on gender and religion in non-Han and Han societies.[44]

Admittedly, Southwest China is a vast region, possessing a rich variety of kinship structures and gender-based divisions of labor. In some areas, women's prominence in ritual life has declined over time, in large part due to the imposition of Han Chinese lineage structures and their associated values. In Central Hunan, for example, research by Chen Zi'ai 陳子艾 suggests that goddesses and female specialists linked to the Taoyuan Cave (Taoyuandong 桃源洞) or the Eighteen Caves of Meishan (Meishan shibadong 梅山十八洞) have been superseded by male deities and Daoist specialists,[45] while Chen Meiwen's fieldwork among the Pangu Yao 盤古瑤 in Guangxi reveals that women's roles in local rites tend to be restricted to singing and preparing essential foods.[46] Women have been shunted aside in many other areas of Southern China, especially where residents have long forgotten their non-Han roots. Take for example the fascinating story about a venerable

ancestress affectionately known as the "Little Old Lady" (*xiaopo* 小婆), who had been enshrined by a leading lineage of Huizhou 徽州 (Anhui) since at least the thirteen century, only to have her tablet unceremoniously removed 500 years later by male elites who seem to have felt uncomfortable in her presence.[47] Whether her cult reflects the influence of non-Han cultural traditions predating "Confucian" impact remains to be determined, but scholars working on non-Han peoples of Southwest China have convincingly documented the central role that female deities and specialists continue to play in indigenous ritual systems, due in part to effective resistance against the hegemony of Han values and practices.[48] One stimulating perspective may be found the work of Ho Ts'ui-p'ing 何翠萍, who argues that women's ritual activities can serve to shore up their communities (regardless of whether they are actual or imagined), and that such practices reveal women indirectly resisting the Chinese state by creating their own subjectivities that may not always conform to its hegemonic agendas.[49] In addition, Kang Xiaofei and Donald Sutton's stimulating monograph on religion and ethnic interaction in the Songpan 松潘 and Huanglong 黃龍 regions of Sichuan provides fascinating accounts of the roles women play in communal life, including the revival of temple cults and their rituals.[50] A third case involves Megan Bryson's study of the cult of Baijie 白姐 in the Dali 大理 region of Yunnan, where she is variously referred to as Baijie shengfei 白姐聖妃, Baijie furen 白姐婦人 or Baijie amei 白姐阿妹. Bryson's data show that manifold images of Baijie resulted from indigenous peoples adapting to the impact of Buddhism and Han Chinese culture by creating diverse representations of this goddess that challenged Han stereotypes of sexually uninhibited minority women while continuing to stress indigenous ideals of feminine fertility.[51]

In Western Hunan, diverse expressions of gender identity situated at the core of religious life are described throughout the chapters of this book. One example is the worship of warrior goddesses such as Mother Nuo (Nuomu 儺母) and the Vanguard (Xianfeng 先鋒), whose exorcistic powers are enacted by male specialists during often ribald ritual dramas. Mother Nuo is also a central figure in local versions of the flood myth, which stress the motif of fertility resulting from atypical sexuality in the form of incestuous marriage to her brother Lord Nuo (Nuogong 儺公) (see Chapter 7). Female deities and unusual marriages also lie at the core of the Incense Dancing festival performed among the Waxiang 瓦鄉 people of Guzhang 古丈, Luxi 瀘溪, and Yuanling 沅陵 counties (see Chapter 6). While the Incense Dancing festival is a communal event (as opposed to a family rite like Repaying a Nuo Vow) and has a very different ritual structure, the two main deities sacrificed to during this festival, the divine canine Panhu 盤瓠 and his wife Xinnü 辛女, are often conflated with Lord Nuo and Mother Nuo, and both rituals can feature the telling of the flood myth. Other key goddesses in the region include Jiji 姬姬 (also written as 急急, two characters often used in exorcistic (and other) spells), the daughter of Taishang laojun who is said to have protected her lover from attack using sanitary cloth; a healing deity known

as the Matron of the Umbrella (Yusan niangniang 雨傘娘娘); and the Lady Linshui (Linshui furen 臨水夫人), whose rites are practiced among some Han communities but largely unknown in Miao areas (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Women also play prominent roles in Western Hunan Miao social life, as can be seen in the stature that maternal uncles (*mujiu* 母舅; mother's brothers) and brothers-in-law (*qijiu* 妻舅; wife's brothers) enjoy during family and communal rituals. Dangerous aspects of womanhood find expression in fears of *gu* poisoning (*gudu* 蠱毒) or mental illness (literally "falling into a cave" or *luodong* 落洞). One also needs to consider the status and influence of female mediums, who not only perform a wide variety of rituals, but also led rebel forces into battle during uprisings against state authority (see Chapter 5). At the same time, however, the same rituals that feature woman warriors like Mother Nuo also stress the importance of female fertility, and young brides are expected to wash the feet of guests who attend such occasions. Changes in gender roles during the modern era also merit close consideration. For example, while there has been a marked decline in "masculine" practices like hunting,[52] Miao male specialists (Miao masters) continue to be venerated as leading figures in local life (see Chapter 3). There are also numerous examples of women taking the lead in the revival of local temple cults discussed in Chapter 2.[53]

Studying issues like gender and ethnicity also calls our attention to the third question raised above, namely the spatial scope of Southwest China's religious traditions.[54] Too often scholars have devoted their efforts to one particular place or ethnic group, which makes sense from the perspective of doing in-depth research but runs the risk of downplaying the holistic nature of this region's cultural traditions. The beliefs and practices described in this book represent the results of mutual borrowing and accommodation among *several* co-existing groups and between different regions, which in turn points to the ability of indigenous peoples to adjust their ritual traditions despite outside cultural influences.[55] Another valuable source of information with the potential to transcend Sinocentric views is research on non-Han peoples in Southeast Asia, an area where they have lived for centuries without being subjected to the hegemony of the Chinese state.[56] As Kao Ya-ning 高雅寧 points out in her study of the Nong Zhigao 儂智高 story in Zhuang religious culture, such cultural phenomena "exhibit a dialectic between experiential dimensions that are near (Southeast Asian cultural structure) and those that are distant (the Chinese state)."[57]

Rethinking modern Chinese history: The state, local elites, and ritual specialists

As for the fourth question (this study's implications for the historiography of modern China), one way to assess its findings is in the context of scholarship on how the state and/or Daoism may have impacted communal religious traditions during the late imperial and modern eras, especially recent

trends aimed at utilizing data from different parts of China to determine what general patterns may be found, how these patterns changed over time, and why some patterns persist in certain regions while others do not. For example, Joseph McDermott has identified a "village quartet" of common religious practices, including earth god associations, sacred sites for popular cults, formal Buddhist or Daoist organizations, and kinship institutions.[58] In this study, we will see that variations occur when one augments the melody with two chords from non-Han regions of Southwest China: ethnicity and gender.

To understand the issues at stake, it is useful to situate them in the context of regional or local historical studies. In particular, scholars from the "South China School" (Huanan xuepai 華南學派; sometimes referred to as Min Yue 閩粵 School) have made substantial contributions to this field.[59] Such scholarship is noteworthy for its interdisciplinary approach combining anthropology with history and religious studies, as well as the use of source materials such as genealogies, land deeds, stele inscriptions, liturgical manuscripts, and other local materials often discovered during ethnographic investigations. Much of this research has followed in the footsteps of Fu Yiling 傅衣凌 (1911–1988) and Liang Fangzhong 梁方仲 (1908–1970) by stressing local responses to the impact of imperial institutions culminating in the recognition of locales and social groups by the state (most notably lineages and the elites who headed them) as one means of achieving cultural unity. For example, James Watson's classic studies of "standardization" have explored how the state and local elites who supported it strove to achieve cultural integration via the promotion of approved deities like the goddess Tianhou 天后 (also known as Mazu 媽祖).[60] More recently, David Faure has argued that, "In the longer term, the inroad of official ritual into the village [beginning with the "ritual revolution of the sixteenth century" in the Pearl River delta] was only the last of a number of external pressures powered by the use of *written texts*, the extension of government, the recognition of village authority in ritual terms, upward mobility of the village elite facilitated by the imperial examinations, and, in a broad sense, *the integration of local society into the state*" (*emphasis added*), one result being that "When only a single standard of propriety was enshrined, there was no room for a 'little tradition', only the difference between people 'in here' and people 'out there'."[61]

Such views clearly have merit, especially in the context of the regional histories of the Pearl River Delta and coastal Fujian that these scholars have studied. At the same time, however, they have little to say about the diverse populations experiencing such "integration," and almost completely ignore phenomena such as ethnicity, gender, and language that have so prominently shaped the histories of non-Han areas of Southwest China.[62] Moreover, by privileging the place of written texts, scholars run the risk of overlooking oral traditions that played an equally vital role in constructing local communities. In response to these trends, Kenneth Dean cautions

against applying the same conceptual framework to different regions, while eloquently advocating for the study of each region's own patterns of historical development. Dean points out that such research "would not necessarily be an account of the successful expansion of the Chinese imperium into different regional cultural communities of China, but instead an account of the unique combinations of elements, including state institutions, lineage forms, cults, and regional alliances, etc., that came together in dynamic, transforming ensembles in each region over different time periods."[63] This is certainly the case for Western Hunan, where beliefs and practices were not simply reified byproducts imposed by the state or local elites. Instead, they consisted of unique combinations of elements that coalesced into vibrantly imperfect ensembles during processes of trans-hybridity that took place during the modern era. Such processes did involve state institutions, yet also featured village shrines to Miao protective deities, the central place of matrilateral ties in ritual life (especially maternal uncles and brothers-in-law), and the prominence of ritual specialists whose traditions are transmitted along family lines (including by male and female ancestors who had also been specialists).

In short, when considering paradigms like the Daoist liturgical framework or the village quartet, it is essential to be aware of the fact that they are largely grounded in data collected during the study of Han Chinese communities in Southeast China (especially coastal areas of Fujian and Guangdong). In the case of non-Han peoples, while these forces did exert an impact, one also needs to consider how factors like gender and ethnicity may have modified or mitigated their influence on local life. As John E. Herman notes in a recent review article, much previous scholarship has "privileged Chinese sources, affirmed the authority of the Chinese perspective, and suppressed voices that might offer an alternative perspective."[64] Herman takes as an example the "snowball theory" advanced by Xu Jieshun 徐杰舜, which postulates Han civilization as a snowball rolling across a non-Han landscape while constantly expanding in size and density.[65] In contrast, Fredrik Barth argues that tensions and conflicts between groups formed or strengthened cultural differences and ethnic boundaries (see below).[66]

In the case of Southwest China, one place to look for such differences and boundaries is local ritual traditions, including those often viewed as a "shamanic substratum." David Holm's recent study entitled "Crossing the Seas" explains that such a substratum is one part of non-Han linguistic and cultural substrate in many areas of Southwest China. Using the image of "multi-layer ethnic cake," Holm observes that while North China has the Han and Qiang at its base, with more recent peoples (Tanguts, Mongols, Manchus) added on, a very different phenomenon may be seen in the Southwest, where non-Han groups form the base of the cake, and a largely misunderstood one at that. One key reason is that non-Han substrate tend to be poorly documented, and even when documentation can be found historians tend to be wary about engaging with it, one result being that terms like