The People and the Dao

New Studies in Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer

Edited by
Philip Clart
and
Paul Crowe

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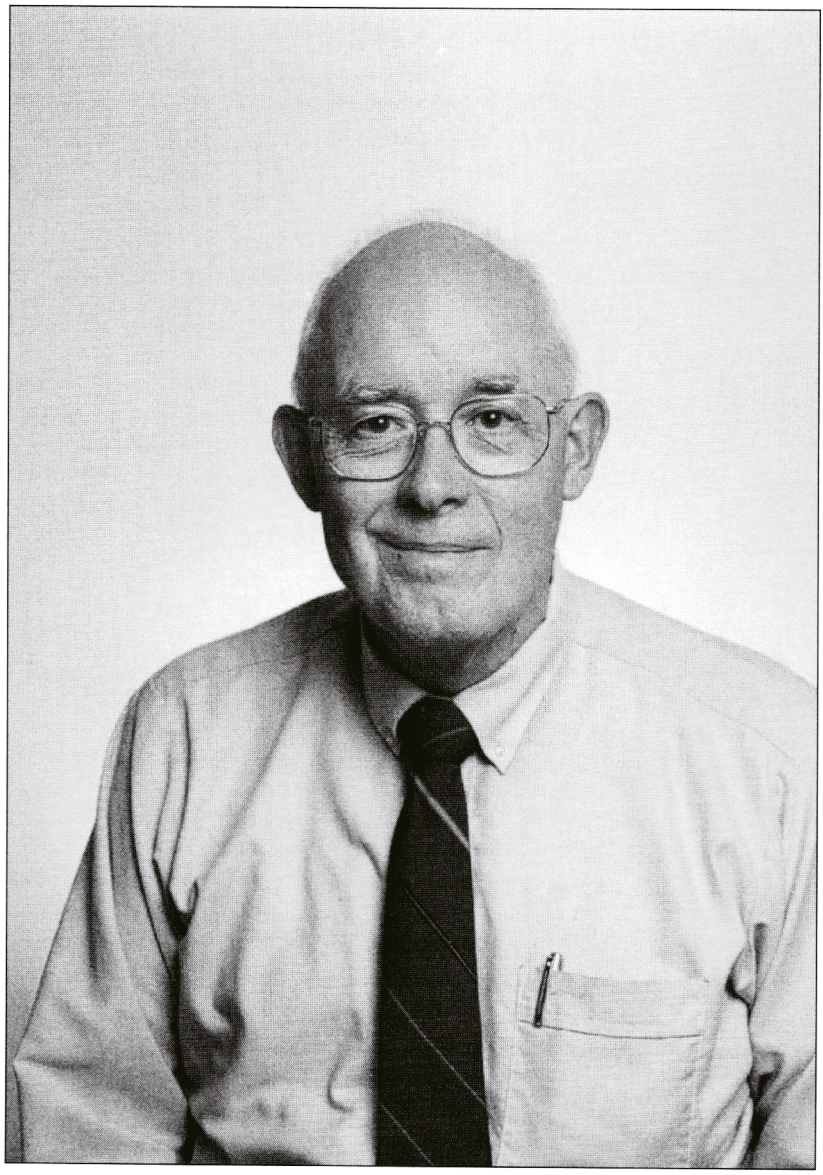

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PHILIP CLART and PAUL CROWE

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ABBREVIATIONS

CMZ — John Lagerwey, "Changting miaozhi 長汀廟志" [Changting temples: a history], in *Changting xian de zongzu, jingji yu minsu* 長汀縣的宗族、經濟與民俗 [Lineages, the economy, and customs in Changting county], ed. by Yang Yanjie 楊 彥杰 (Hong Kong: Overseas Chinese Archives and École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2002), vol. 2: 889-919.

CT — K. M. Schipper (ed.), *Concordance du Tao-tsang, titres des ouvrages*, Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, vol. 102 (Paris, 1975); reprinted as *Zhengtong daozang mulu suoyin* 正統道藏目錄索引 [Index to the Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong reign period] (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977).

DT — Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 (ed.), *Daozang tiyao* 道藏提要 [A conspectus of the Daoist Canon] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991).

HY — Weng Dujian 翁獨健, *Daozang zimu yinde* 道藏子目引得/ *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature* (Beiping: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1935).

TT — *Daozang* 道藏 [Daoist Canon] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1926).

YCFQD — *Yü Ch'ing-fang kangri geming an quandang* 余清芳抗日革 命案全檔 [Complete archives on the anti-Japanese revolution (led by) Yü Ch'ing-fang], 8 vols, ed. & comp. by Ch'eng Ta-hsüeh 程大學, Wang Shih-lang 王詩琅, *et al.* (Nantou: Taiwan Provincial Documents Commission, 1974).

INTRODUCTION

PHILIP CLART

The papers in this volume go back to a conference held September 14-15, 2002, at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Entitled "Religious Thought and Lived Religion in China: A Conference in Honour of Prof. Daniel L. Overmyer on His Retirement," this meeting was sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Green College, the Centre for Chinese Research (Institute of Asian Research, UBC), the Chung Wah Tao Tak Tong (B.C.) Society, the Faculty of Arts – Dean's Office (UBC), the Department of Asian Studies (UBC), the Office of the Vice President Research (UBC), the Department of Classical, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies (UBC), the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism, the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada, Mountain Province Diamonds Inc., and an anonymous donor. It was held in the beautiful grounds of Green College, a residential college on the campus of the University of British Columbia, and was intended to mark the occasion of Professor Daniel L. Overmyer's retirement from UBC's Department of Asian Studies by showcasing new research in fields directly influenced by his distinguished scholarship. Participants included many of Dan Overmyer's present and former students as well as a number of colleagues from North America, Europe, and Asia: Timothy Barrett, Judith Magee Boltz, Shin-yi Chao, Li Chuang-Paper, Philip Clart, Paul Crowe, Kenneth Dean, Jean DeBernardi, Stephen Eskildsen, Stevan Harrell, Christian Jochim, David K. Jordan, Paul Katz, Terry F. Kleeman, John Lagerwey, Randall Nadeau, Susan Naquin, Roberto K. Ong, Jordan Paper, Soo Khin Wah, Catherine Swatek, Barend J. ter Haar, Wang Ch'iu-kuei, Tuen Wai Mary Yeung, Chün-fang Yü, as well as an interested audience of students and members of the larger community. The conference had originally been planned for September of 2001, but had to be cancelled because of the terrorist attacks of September 11 that shut down all North American airports and made it impossible for participants to make their way to Vancouver. The second attempt in September of 2002, however, met with success. Many interesting papers were presented in an atmosphere of lively intellectual exchange, a fitting tribute to the long and distinguished scholarly career of Dan Overmyer.

After the conference, a call for revised papers was sent out, which resulted in the collection of sixteen research papers presented here. Earlier versions of eleven of these were first presented at the conference. The five excep-

tions from that rule are the papers by Wang Chien-ch'uan, Hubert Seiwert, Shin-yi Chao, Kenneth Dean, and Stephen Eskildsen. Wang and Seiwert were unable to attend the meeting at the new 2002 date, but still submitted their intended conference papers to this published collection. Chao, Dean, and Eskildsen chose to submit papers for publication that differed thematically from those presented at the conference. Irrespective of whether earlier versions were first presented orally or not, all manuscript submissions were subjected to peer review by scholars not involved with the conference and were often significantly revised on the basis of suggestions made by the reviewers. To these (anonymous) reviewers the editors would like to extend their thanks for their contribution to this volume.

Before we proceed to an overview of the book as a whole, a brief explanation concerning the use and placement of Chinese characters is needed. Characters for Chinese names and terms mentioned in the main text and the footnotes are listed in an alphabetically arranged glossary toward the end of the volume. The only exception to this rule are the bibliographic references in the footnotes: Here characters are provided for the authors and titles of Chinese- and Japanese-language works so as to make it easier for the interested reader to identify and locate them.

This Introduction is followed by a detailed account of and tribute to Dan Overmyer's scholarship by his former student Randall Nadeau. I do not want to duplicate this here, but instead will attempt to interweave some comments on Overmyer's contributions to the field with an overview of the articles contained in this volume.

A unique quality of Overmyer's scholarship is his attention to religion in its less well-known manifestations, religion located along paths less travelled by scholars. This emphatically does not mean marginal religious phenomena less deserving of study—quite the opposite. Much scholarship in the study of Chinese religions focuses on the big figures, the great texts, the lofty ideas. Overmyer, on the other hand, chooses to study the religious life of common people. The great figures, texts, and ideas may play a role here as well, but they do so in the context of a religious system that functions according to a logic of its own. His first book, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Harvard University Press, 1976) introduced Western scholars to the role of popular sectarianism in Chinese religious history. He broadened our view of these religious movements in many subsequent publications, of which I should mention the book he co-authored with David K. Jordan, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton University Press, 1986). This work continued the history of Ming/Qing period sectarianism into the twentieth century.

An important contribution of his work was that he brought to our attention the fact that texts play a major role in the religious life of commoners—

and not only or even primarily the canonical texts of the great traditions. He unearthed for us the rich repository of popular religious texts produced from the late imperial to the modern period. His third major monograph, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999) took these texts as its sole focus, proving their value as documents of popular religious thought and windows into the religious experience of commoners. Appropriately, then, several articles in the present volume take their cue from Overmyer's themes of popular sects and popular religious texts.

While most articles contain case studies, Hubert Seiwert in his chapter on "The Transformation of Popular Religious Movements of the Ming and Qing Dynasties: A Rational Choice Interpretation" presents a broader analysis of historical trends in Chinese sectarianism. He notes that Qing sects, while evolving out of their Ming predecessors, developed patterns in their doctrines, structure, and interactions with authorities that make them quite distinct from related groups in the previous dynasty. We see a growth of millenarianism, tensions with the state, organizational and doctrinal differentiation of sects emerging from the same patriarchal line, and homogenization of doctrines across different traditions. He applies Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's rational choice model to account for some of these developments, arguing that changes in the social composition of sects, inter-religious competition, doctrinal changes, and rising tension with authorities were mutually reinforcing factors that have to be seen against the background of a religious marketplace where potential adherents make rational choices, weighing the mundane and religious rewards of sect membership against its costs. The result is a bold sketch of the principal dynamics of the sectarian world in the last two Imperial dynasties and a fitting opener for this volume.

Shin-yi Chao's "*The Precious Volume of Bodhisattva Zhenwu Attaining the Way*: A Case Study of the Worship of Zhenwu (Perfected Warrior) in Ming–Qing Sectarian Groups" illustrates aspects of the Ming/Qing sectarian dynamic already addressed by Seiwert: the growing diversification of sectarian doctrine by the adoption of originally unrelated beliefs and the growing friction between sects and state. While Seiwert discusses the integration of Maitreya millenarianism into Qing sectarian systems, Chao provides a view of a similar, if less prominent case, the sectarian adoption of the Daoist deity Zhenwu (a.k.a. Xuanwu). Chao's case study demonstrates that Zhenwu could supply a similar focus for sectarian militant action as Seiwert attributes to the Maitreya millenarian complex. These insights are worked out in a close textual analysis of several precious volumes, culminating in the late Qing text mentioned in the chapter's title. The main point here is to show how this Daoist deity is "superscribed" with a sectarian interpretation that remakes him into an emissary of the Venerable Mother, the primordial god-

dess worshipped by many sects. While remaining recognizable as Zhenwu, the god acquires new meanings by being placed in a sectarian doctrinal framework and provides an excellent case-example for sectarian approaches of cooptation and subordination towards competing religious figures and ideas.

Christian Jochim pursues another example of sectarian appropriation of mainstream religious themes in his article, "Popular Lay Sects and Confucianism: A Study Based on the Yiguan Dao in Postwar Taiwan." Focusing on three post-1945 Yiguan Dao commentaries on Confucian canonical texts (*The Analects, The Great Learning,* and *The Mean in Action*), Jochim argues that Yiguan Dao exegesis is based on the assumption that beyond the texts' surface there exists a deeper, esoteric level of meaning referring to the true Dao. The Yiguan Dao initiation rite opens the believer up to that Dao and hence enables him or her to discover the true meaning of sacred texts deemed to be part of the Dao's historical line of transmission. Thus, Yiguan Dao exegetes apply a hermeneutical framework that differs significantly from that of traditional Confucian scholarship and consequently come up with interpretations that would seem unusual to a traditional scholar, but that make eminent sense within the teleological context of Yiguan Dao cosmology. For example, Zi Gong's famous statement that he has not heard the Master speak on the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao*; *Analects* 5:13) is not interpreted in the traditional mode to mean that Confucius never spoke of the Way of Heaven, but merely that Zi Gong was excluded from Confucius' transmission of that Dao, while other disciples certainly did receive the Master's teachings on *Tiandao* (which also happens to be an alternative name for the Yiguan Dao). For Jochim, sectarian exegesis of Confucian scriptures is an important way by which Confucian ideas are reread into a novel, more popular religious context. Such interpretations complicate an often too simplistic "two-tier model in which at the elite level of Confucian intellectuals we find specific sophisticated interpretations of the Confucian textual heritage, while at the popular level we find the unconscious absorption of vaguely conceived Confucian moral values." The sectarian appropriation of Confucian texts mediates between these two tiers and, perhaps more clearly than other channels for the transmission of ideas between social and cultural strata (such as opera and local schools), demonstrates that this mediation does not mean simple translation of "Great Tradition" notions into "Little Tradition" terms, but involves creative reinterpretation and superscription.

Whereas Chao's and Jochim's papers dealt with the development of sectarian doctrine, Soo Khin Wah's study of "The Recent Development of the Yiguan Dao Fayi Chongde Sub-Branch in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand" focuses on the institutional development of one Yiguan Dao subbranch as it spread from Taiwan to Southeast Asia, beginning in the mid-1970s. Soo paints a detailed and statistically supported picture of Fayi Chong-

de's mission work in the three Southeast Asian nations. This case-example allows us to observe the development of complex and highly rationalized institutional structures as a Chinese religion goes multinational. At the same time, Soo's article complements Jochim's by describing some of the structural changes within an Yiguan Dao sub-branch that provided a fertile environment for the rising profile of Confucianism within the movement as a whole. Fayi Chongde is one of the more self-consciously "Confucianized" and intellectual branches of the Yiguan Dao. Its children's classes in the classics (*ertong dujing*) and its think-tank-like "Academic Division" (*xuejie*) are examples of the institutional framework within which exegetical efforts such as those studied by Jochim may be placed.

Philip Clart's chapter on "Merit beyond Measure: Notes on the Moral (and Real) Economy of Religious Publishing in Taiwan" shifts our focus from Yiguan Dao to Taiwanese spirit-writing cults, or "phoenix halls" (*luantang*). However, thematically there is a line of continuity with the previous two articles in combining attention to a religious group's belief system with an analysis of the institutional structures supporting that system. As the title says, the chapter's focus is on the concept of merit (*gongde*) as a key operative principle in phoenix hall "theology." The spirit-writing carried out by a phoenix hall produces morality books (*shanshu*) that are intended to effect the moral transformation of society and individuals as part of the cult group's mission to "proclaim transformation on behalf of Heaven" (*daitian xuanhua*). The production and distribution of morality books is therefore regarded as a highly meritorious endeavour for all participants. The merit earned is quantified according to formal regulations used by some phoenix halls, such as so-called ledgers of merit and demerit. The tabulation of merits and demerits gains soteriological significance from the fact that posthumous ascension to Heaven depends on clearly specified surplus amounts of merit. As one of the richest sources of merit, *shanshu*-writing and publishing motivates believers to invest considerable amounts of time and money in the activities of a phoenix hall, allowing some modern phoenix halls to develop professional publishing concerns with full-time, salaried staff that enable them to publish, print, and distribute large numbers of religious publications each year. At the same time, this professionalization requires a constant inflow of money from people wishing to earn merit by sponsoring the printing of morality books. The phoenix hall therefore has to keep producing new *shanshu* on a regular basis to keep attracting merit money, thereby covering its overhead and maintaining its institutional structures. Here we see a neatly complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship between a modern phoenix hall's belief system and its economic functions. Clart employs Stark and Bainbridge's religious economy model (which is also used in Sei-

wert's chapter) to analyse some aspects of this relationship, even while revising and adapting it in accordance with his specific set of data.

Jean DeBernardi's article "'Ascend to Heaven and Stand on a Cloud:' Daoist Teaching and Practice at Penang's Taishang Laojun Temple" explores religious beliefs as presented in the oral teachings of Penang spirit mediums and in religious writings circulating among Penang Chinese, in particular texts connected with the local Taishang Laojun Temple. DeBernardi's research shows that the "merit complex" traced by Clart is also very much in evidence among the Chinese community of Penang where "the free distribution of sacred texts [...] is a merit-making activity that improves a person's fate, and devout Chinese patrons support their publication and distribution at popular religious and Buddhist temples." Such continuities in worldview can be accounted for in general terms by the shared Chinese cultural heritage of Penang Chinese, but more specifically by the fact that many of the morality texts in circulation on the island stem either from pre-1949 mainland China, or from post-1949 Taiwan. DeBernardi also demonstrates that text-based religious notions of merit and moral causality reappear in the oral disquisitions of possessed spirit mediums who thus serve as an important channel of cultural communication. Beyond the continuities with Chinese popular culture elsewhere, however, Penang Chinese religious discourse also shows numerous unique features connected with the specific social, cultural, and political circumstances of the Chinese minority in Malaysia. Political and economic pressures from the Malay-dominated state foster popular and other religious activities as vehicles of Chinese identity affirmation, but at the same time identity-construction differs significantly between two major groups in the Chinese community: the Mandarin-educated and the English-educated. DeBernardi devotes particular attention to the religious thought of English-educated members of the Taishang Laojun Temple, which often involves a creative blending of Chinese and non-Chinese elements and perspectives. The latter may, for example, be drawn from Theosophy, Christianity, Theravada Buddhism, or from neo-Hindu movements such as that of Sai Baba. Here we see Chinese religious tradition engaged in dialogue and exchange with Western and Asian traditions right within the lives of ordinary people. This makes the Malaysian-Chinese experience somewhat unusual, but it may also perhaps allow it to serve as a window on future religious developments in increasingly globalized Chinese societies such as Taiwan, where phenomena as diverse as Tibetan Buddhism and the prophecies of Nostradamus have already come to make an impact on popular religious beliefs and practices.

The six articles in Part I by Seiwert, Chao, Jochim, Soo, Clart, and DeBernardi all can be seen as building on Dan Overmyer's pioneering work on popular sects, their textual tradition, and the textual aspect of popular religion more generally. The six papers in Part II can be linked to Overmyer's

turn to the study of local religious practice, in recent years especially in Northern China. Each of these six articles addresses specific practices as embedded in a local and historical context. The section opens with John Lagerwey's "The History and Sociology of Religion in Changting County, Fujian." Part of a larger project on the local religious history of Changting county in the hilly interior of Fujian province, this article explores the potential of local gazetteers as data sources for the writing of a history of local religious life. Lagerwey mines gazetteers from the Song dynasty to the Republican period for information on the establishment and development of local temple cults. He compiles these data into tables that provide clear indications of a major trend starting with the dominance of Buddhist, Daoist, and local hero temples in the Tang and Song periods, while village- and lineage-based local temples come to predominate in the Ming and Qing dynasties. This development is linked to a strengthening of Confucian orthodoxy during the last two dynasties, which pushed back the influence of Buddhism and Daoism, while at the same time somewhat ironically aiding in "the creation of a local religion in which shamanism, Buddhism, and Daoism were so thoroughly intermingled as to be in some sense indistinguishable." Thereby "Confucians, insofar as they formed a sociologically distinctive village-based elite, ended up not only participating in local worship but also promoting state recognition of local gods." While calling for the systematic utilization of local gazetteers in writing the history of Chinese popular religion, Lagerwey also cautions against the inherent biases of these texts and devotes sections of his article to an analysis of the ideological agendas of his sources and to an exhibition of modern ethnographic data so as to give an impression of the richness of local religious belief and practice that is not reflected in the usually very terse gazetteer entries on temples. In this manner, he provides us not just with a rich picture of the religious history of Changting, but also raises important methodological issues for the historical study of popular religion. As he points out, historians of Chinese religions unfortunately lack quality sources like the detailed inquisition files that allowed Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie to write his study of a medieval heretical village in southern France, or Carlo Ginzburg to compose his portrait of the religious world of a sixteenth century miller in northern Italy.[1] Under these circumstances, we cannot but use what we have, including ideologically skewed gazetteers and the potentially problematic projection of modern ethnographic observations into the past. It may be added that other scholars have in addition tried to broaden the source base by using anecdotal writings (*biji*) and

[1] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

tales of the supernatural (*zhiguai*) as windows on popular belief and practice in Chinese history.[2]

Kenneth Dean, the author of our next article, is a pioneer in the collection and analysis of yet another type of textual source on historical dimensions of popular religion: stone inscriptions recording such matters as temple construction and renovation, communal covenants, and official decisions on local matters. Having collected and published numerous such inscriptions in Fujian, Dean makes use of them in his study of "The Growth of Local Control over Cultural and Environmental Resources in Ming and Qing Coastal Fujian." He argues that from the mid-Ming through the Qing to the Republican period, coastal Fujian witnessed a "gradual downward transfer of powers over culture, local governance, and environmental control [from the state] to local communities." Attempts by the state to exert local control by, for example, community compacts (*xiangyue*) typically ended up being co-opted by local elites and merged into the local "ritual power formations" dominated by them. Ever since the mid-Ming we can thus observe a trend of "of growing organizational strength at the local level," administered through the imbricated structures of lineage and temple networks. The principal function left to the state at the local level is the resolution of conflicts between communities that local mediation failed to address successfully. Here we may perhaps be seeing in coastal Fujian another aspect of the same process observed by Lagerwey in the province's hinterland: the strengthening of local cults that Lagerwey described as an unintended consequence of the increasing imposition of Confucian orthodoxy through the Ming and Qing dynasties may well have occurred in the context of social-structural changes similar to those analysed by Dean, i.e., the strengthening of local organization by lineages and temple networks and their increasing assumption of regulatory functions at the local level.

Paul Katz's paper on "Religion, Recruiting, and Resistance in Colonial Taiwan: A Case Study of the Xilai An Incident, 1915" shows that at least for some areas and some time periods we do possess quite rich data sources that allow us to reconstruct historical events in considerable detail. While John Lagerwey points out the limitations of late Imperial local archival records for our study of local religious conditions, Katz was able to draw on quite rich and detailed records kept by Japanese colonial authorities on a major rebellion in southern Taiwan in the year 1915. Combining information drawn from "local gazetteers, archives, newspaper accounts, demo-

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[2] See for example, Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), and Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

graphic information in household registers, and data collected during fieldwork," Katz compiles a detailed picture of the recruiting process of the rebellion and the motivations of participants. He emphasizes that religious factors played a key role in the recruiting of rebels and identifies components of messianic and demonological paradigms operative in the rebels' religious outlook. Such components include vegetarianism, oath-taking, banner worship, use of amulets, and occasionally, human sacrifice. These paradigms are not specific to early twentieth century southern Taiwan, but can be detected in rebellions in southern China since at least the eighteenth century. The wide distribution of these markers among a great variety of groups and movements leads Katz to question the utility of distinguishing strictly between "sects" and "secret societies," therein following and confirming the lead of Barend J. ter Haar in his studies of Triad ritual and myth.[3]

The Tainan temple Xilai An that stood at the centre of the rebellion studied by Katz, also figures prominently in Wang Chien-ch'uan's chapter on "The White Dragon Hermitage and the Spread of the Eight Generals Procession Troupe in Taiwan." The Eight Generals (*Bajiajiang*) play an exorcistic role in temple processions primarily in southern Taiwan. Wang argues here that the first Taiwanese temple to establish such troupes was the White Dragon Hermitage (Bailong An) in Tainan, the Xilai An's mother temple. Using Japanese-period newspaper reports and archival sources, as well as oral histories collected during field visits, Wang traces the spread of these troupes from their founding at the White Dragon Hermitage some time between 1863 and 1898, and then within the next twenty years or so first to other Tainan temples, then to Jiayi, and from there to Tainan county. This article confirms something we already saw in Katz's research on the Xilai An incident: namely, that we have exquisitely rich sources for Taiwanese religious history during the Japanese period (1895–1945). The scholar willing and able to devote a lot of time conducting field interviews, digging through colonial era official archives, and browsing through volume after volume of contemporary newspapers, can assemble a wealth of data allowing him or her to reconstruct local religious practices in quite amazing detail.

Different from the preceding articles with their emphasis on written sources, Tuen Wai Mary Yeung's study of "Rituals and Beliefs of Female Performers in Cantonese Opera" is largely based on interviews with Cantonese opera performers in Hong Kong and Vancouver, B.C., supplemented by a number of secondary studies on historical dimensions of Cantonese opera, as well as observations of ritual practices in Hong Kong. Through her privileged access to actors and actresses, Yeung provides her readers with

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[3] *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998).

unique insights into the religious dimensions of the daily life of stage artists. Rather than dealing with the already comparatively well-studied religious functions of opera performances, she chooses to focus on the worship of actresses' patron deities such as Huaguang and Tangong, thereby throwing light on an underreported religious facet of traditional opera troupes and enhancing our understanding of the cultic dimensions of professional groups in traditional trades and crafts.

Contrasting with the specialized case foci of most contributions to this volume is Jordan Paper's chapter, "The Role of Possession Trance in Chinese Culture and Religion: A Comparative Overview from the Neolithic to the Present," which ranges widely across Chinese history and utilizes comparative data drawn from other cultures. Paper argues that Western scholarship has tended to underestimate the importance of spirit-mediumship in Chinese culture and seeks to restore it to its proper place in Chinese religious history, namely, at the cultural centre rather than the margins. He approaches his subject matter from a comparative perspective that demonstrates the universal nature of mediumship, which he distinguishes sharply from shamanism. Given such universality, it would be rather unusual if mediums had occupied the mere margins of religious life in a vast civilization such as China. And indeed, Paper argues, an unprejudiced reading of the sources reveals the ubiquity of mediumistic phenomena among all social strata of traditional Chinese society. His article thus provides a synthetic conclusion to the foregoing case studies, of which several addressed spirit-mediums in various historical and religious settings (see especially the articles by Jochim, Clart, DeBernardi, and Katz). It also leads over to this book's final section where the issue of mediumism is taken up again in Judith Magee Boltz's study "On the Legacy of Zigu and a Manual on Spirit-writing in Her Name."

In Part III, we are moving out of the study of sectarian and popular religions into the religious worlds of Daoist practitioners, Buddhist monks, emperors, and literati. However, there is continuity in the way these worlds are approached in that each article emphasizes the impact of religious ideas on religious praxis. Judith Magee Boltz studies a Daoist ritual manual for spirit-writing; Stephen Eskildsen links Daoist notions concerning immortality with data on burial practices among Daoists; Roberto K. Ong introduces a Ming scholar's encyclopedic work on dreams and their meanings; while Barend J. ter Haar looks into the Yongzheng emperor's personal religious beliefs as they became apparent in his interactions with Chan-Buddhist monks. Each article represents the spirit of Dan Overmyer' scholarship in that it locates religion not primarily in the realm of ideas and doctrines, but in the lived experience of people, be they peasants, merchants, sectarians, literati, Daoist clerics, Buddhist monks, and even emperors. Religious thought (e.g.,

notions concerning immortality or the nature of dreams) needs to be studied in its practical context (e.g., which form of burial to use or how to interpret specific dreams). Let us look at the four chapters in this section in more detail.

Boltz introduces a text that for some reason was left out of the 1923–1926 reprinting of the Daoist Canon (*Daozang*) and only reappeared in the 1988 edition published by three major mainland presses. Entitled *Zhao Ziguxian fa* (Ritual for Evoking Purple Lady Transcendent), it appears in a Yuan dynasty anthology, the *Fahai yizhu* (Residue Pearls from the Sea of Ritual). Boltz presents the Chinese text, together with a complete and annotated English translation, which is based both on the *Fahai yizhu* version and a Ming dynasty rendering preserved in the *Shilin guangji* (Extensive Records of a Forest of Matters). She also traces the influence of this manual on the actual practice of spirit-writing as reflected in widely circulating ritual collections such as the *Wanfa guizong* (Ancestor to which the Myriad Rites Return). This meticulous and erudite study gives us insights into a Daoist approach to the practice of spirit-writing at a fairly early stage of its history. Is this method still used today? My own field experience in Taiwan would negate this question, as Taiwanese phoenix halls utilize a quite different ritual pattern. However, things may be different in Quanzhen-Daoist inspired spirit-writing cults in Hong Kong—future field research will tell.

Stephen Eskildsen continues in a Daoist mode by investigating "Death, Immortality and Spirit Liberation in Northern Song Daoism: The Hagiographical Accounts of Zhao Daoyi." Drawing on two hagiographical collections by the Yuan dynasty Daoist Zhao Daoyi (fl. ca. 1294–1307), Eskildsen gathers accounts of burial practices among Daoist clerics of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1126) and studies the interaction of burial practices and changing notions concerning the physical/spiritual nature of immortality. His sources show a shift among Daoist clerics from Buddhist-style cremation to traditional Chinese coffin burial—which is somewhat unexpected as these years witnessed the development of a new understanding of inner alchemy that would eventually culminate in the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen) school of Daoism. We would expect a movement from physical to spiritual notions of immortality and its conscious adoption of Buddhist ideas and outlooks to be accompanied by the Buddhist practice of cremating the bodies of monks and nuns. Eskildsen argues that the rejection of cremation should be understood as "consistent with the polemical stance of the *neidan* movement, which was eager to assert that it was both distinct from and superior to the Buddhism with which it coexisted and interacted." One might note that contemporary Neo-Confucians were also engaged in an (in the long run successful) effort to roll back Buddhist influence in funeral rites and to

reassert Confucian models of ritual practice, including coffin burial.[4] The Daoist drift towards coffin burial may perhaps also be understood as part of the increasing "Confucianization" of mortuary praxis in early modern China.[5]

"Sleep is a small death," as the saying goes. Like dying, sleeping means entry into a liminal state in which the human spirit sees and knows things that are beyond its everyday powers of perception. In the liminal realm of the dream, it meets gods and immortals and is shown images that are felt to be meaningful, but that need to be decoded to yield their deeper significance. Fascination with dreams and their meaning is probably a human universal. Roberto K. Ong looks into a rich Chinese expression of that fascination in his study of "Chen Shiyuan and Chinese Dream Theory." Chen Shiyuan (*jinshi* 1544) spent most of his life as a prolific private scholar in his hometown of Yingcheng (modern Hubei province). Among his more than thirty works, we find the *Mengzhan yizhi* (Vagrant Import of Dream Prognostication), which gives a comprehensive overview of both traditional Chinese dream theory and of the major types of dreams and their meaning, grouped by subject matter. Ong provides his readers with a succinct summary of this work and discussion of its significance both for our understanding of China's spiritual culture and for the comparative study of dream lore in other cultural contexts. It may be added that dream analysis and prognostication retain a place in popular religious life to the present day, with some temples specializing in providing overnight stays in their sanctuaries for the express purpose of allowing the believer to commune with the gods in his or her dreams that night.[6]

Last, but certainly not least we come to Barend ter Haar's article on "Yongzheng and His Abbots." While patronage of Buddhist figures and institutions by Qing rulers is well known, it is usually attributed to primarily political motivations (such as strengthening the government's hold on Buddhist peoples, such as the Tibetans and the Mongols). By contrast, ter Haar

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[4] See for example, Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) critique of cremation in his manual of family rituals, the *Letters and Ceremonies of Mr. Sima* (*Sima shi shuyi* 司馬 氏書儀), Congshu jicheng jianbian edition (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1966), 7.76. These strictures were incorporated into Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) ritual handbook, *Family Rites* (*Jiali* 家禮), which strongly influenced late Imperial burial practices.

[5] For more on the general trends in mortuary practices during the Song, see Silvia Freiin Ebner von Eschenbach, *Die Sorge der Lebenden um die Toten: Thanatopraxis und Thanatologie in der Song-Zeit* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 1995).

[6] An example is the Zhinan Gong in Taipei's Muzha district. For an example on the Chinese mainland, see Brigitte Baptandier, "Entrer en montagne pour y rêver. Le mont des Pierres et des Bambous," *Terrain* 26 (1996): 99-122.

argues that in the case of the Yongzheng emperor we can see a long-standing personal involvement with Buddhist, especially Chan, monks and an intense religious interest in Buddhist thought and, more importantly, practice. Drawing on two hitherto underutilized sources, Yongzheng's anthology of Chan sayings (*Yuxuan yulu*, Imperially Selected Record of Sayings) and the gazetteer of the Li'an monastery in Hangzhou (*Li'an sizhi*), ter Haar sketches a convincing picture of a close personal relationship between Prince Yong (Yongzheng's name prior to his ascension of the throne) and a number of monks linked to the Li'an monastery, but present in Beijing in various functions at monasteries there, most importantly at the Bolin monastery which was located just beside Prince Yong's famous Yuanming garden. This relationship changed after his enthronement, but it was not discontinued. In spite of his Confucian rhetoric as an emperor, Yongzheng remained committed to Buddhism as a personal spiritual interest—a fact that may help explain some unusual aspects of his reign, such as the Chan-like directness and occasionally rudeness he employed in his communications with officials, as well as his clemency towards a would-be assassin and his prohibition of cockfighting. This article thus provides a valuable addition to our understanding of both the political and the religious history of the Qing dynasty—and reminds us that emperors, too, are human beings and not just incumbents of a particular social rank. "Lived religion" is not just to be studied among the peasants, artisans, and merchants of local society. The emperor, too, needed to construct a religious vision out of the cultural material available to him and within the social and political constraints that life at court imposed upon him. This study of Prince Yong/Yongzheng as a lay Buddhist practitioner demonstrates forcefully both the opportunities and the limitations for an emperor's personal religious creativity and exploration.

The articles in Part III are evidence that Dan Overmyer's methodological choice to study religion as it was and is lived by real people rather than as an abstract system of ideas and doctrines is not limited to the study of popular religions, but has applicability across the sphere of Chinese religious traditions. Thus, they nicely round off this volume in honour of a great scholar whose work is a constant reminder to us to look beyond text to context, beyond idea to practice, because it is only in context and practice that the religious traditions of China (or any culture) come to life and become meaningful both for the practitioners and for the scholars who study them. The articles in this volume show us on the one hand the impact of Overmyer's publications on the field as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, they also demonstrate the enormous potential inherent in his approach to the study of Chinese religions, making the lived religion of emperors, scholars, and monks as fruitful an object of inquiry as that of sectarians and soldiers, peasants and paupers.

Professor Daniel L. Overmyer conducting fieldwork at the Temple for Patriarch Han (Hanzu miao) in Beiqi village, Ding County, Hebei in 2001. To his right is Professor Hou Jie of Nankai University in Tianjin. Both are joined by leaders of the temple. This photograph was taken by Professor Fan Lizhu of Fudan University in Shanghai.

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF DANIEL OVERMYER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF CHINESE RELIGIONS

RANDALL L. NADEAU

1. Introduction[1]

Born to missionary parents and raised in China, Daniel Overmyer has brought a missionary zeal to the study of Chinese religions. For thirty years, as a teacher, scholar, and traveller, he has done as much to advance the field as any other scholar of his generation. He has ably and honourably carried forward the work of his teachers in the comparative study of religion, and he has inspired younger students of Chinese religion in Asia, Europe, the United States, and Canada.

Overmyer stands tall on the shoulders of giants, and—always the filial son—repeatedly gives credit to his parents and teachers. In the classroom, he often talks about the moral example of his father and mother and the intellectual standards of his teachers. From his parents, he absorbed a love of China and the Chinese people, especially the common folk of the village and countryside. This love and appreciation has served as the foundation of his career and inspires his work to this day. From his teachers, Herlee G. Creel and Joseph M. Kitagawa of the University of Chicago, where he earned a Ph.D. in 1971, he adopted the methodology of historical and textual study, and he has held himself and his students to exacting standards of historical investigation and to linguistic precision in the translation of source materials. Overmyer often expresses his debt to his parents and teachers, but in his unique combination of anthropological, historical, and textual methods in his teaching and published work he has surpassed them.

This tribute will begin with an overview of Dr. Overmyer's career, as a teacher, scholar, and lecturer, then turn to a critical analysis of his contributions to the study of Chinese religion (in particular, his pioneering work on Chinese popular religion, sectarian religion and its textual expressions). It concludes with a general evaluation of Overmyer's professional standards as a teacher and scholar.

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[1] An earlier version of this article appeared in *Jindai Zhongguoshi yanjiu tongxun* 近代中國史研究通訊 / *Newsletter for Modern Chinese History* 34 (2002): 1-15.

2. Career

Daniel Overmyer has enjoyed a distinguished career. After three years in the Department of Religion and East Asian Studies program at Oberlin College, he taught for twenty-five years in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, where he became full professor in 1984. At UBC, he has been Head of the Department of Religious Studies as well as Head of the Department of Asian Studies; he has served on advisory committees for promotion and tenure for the Dean of Arts and the President; and he has been a willing colleague in other areas of service to the University. Though teaching at an institution of 25,000 students, he is a gifted and inspiring undergraduate professor; his courses on Chinese religion and philosophy and Chinese language and linguistics were among the most popular in the Department of Asian Studies. He has supervised twenty-four graduate students, eight to the Ph.D. These students are now themselves teachers in colleges and universities in North America and Asia. As one of the fortunate individuals to have studied with him as a graduate student, I can attest that I was loath to miss any of Dr. Overmyer's undergraduate lectures, and I make use of notes from those lectures in my own classes over a decade later. In 2000, Overmyer was the deserving recipient of UBC's prestigious Killam Faculty Teaching Prize.

Overmyer has been a visiting lecturer and researcher at several other institutions, including Princeton University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Iowa, the University of Heidelberg, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he worked as professor and department chair from 1996 to 1998. Recently (February–July, 2002) he was a visiting professor in the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. He has advised many students of Chinese popular religion from numerous institutions, and has served on graduate committees and tenure-review committees for the most highly regarded programs in the field.

The recipient of University, National Endowment for the Humanities, Canada Council, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada awards, as well as grants from the Kameyama Fund in Buddhist Studies and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation—grants and awards well in excess of US$100,000—Daniel Overmyer has been recognized as a leading figure in the scholarly community. He is the author of three major books on Chinese religious sects and their scriptural traditions (*Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*; *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*, with David K. Jordan; and *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*), a textbook on Chinese religions in the

Harper series on Religious Traditions of the World, numerous encyclopaedia articles on various aspects of Chinese popular religion, more than twenty articles for refereed journals—with material that both complements and goes significantly beyond the research of his book-length publications—and more than fifty published book reviews. He has presented this work, as well as comprehensive papers on the state of the field, at conferences sponsored by the Association for Asian Studies, the American Academy of Religion, and universities around the world. The presses which have published his work attest to its quality: these include Harvard University Press, Princeton University Press, and the top journals in the field, including the *Journal of Asian Studies*, the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *Modern China*, the *Journal of Chinese Religions*, and *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Some of Overmyer's major contributions to the study of Chinese religions, based on these books and essays, will be discussed below.

Even in retirement, Overmyer has undertaken one of his most ambitious research projects, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. This is a three-year project investigating temple festivals of rural north China, with an ambitious ethnographic component. Three book-length reports by local scholars in Hebei have recently been published in Tianjin, those on Handan, Gu'an, and Baoding, and Xianghe counties.[2] The Baoding volume includes about 750 pages, more than 150 pages of which are Overmyer's English-language summaries of each report.

In 2008, Overmyer published "Chinese Religious Traditions from 1900–2005," for the *Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture* (edited by Kam Louie). Another of his current research endeavours, the Asian Religions in British Columbia project, will result in an edited volume, scheduled for publication in 2009. Overmyer's current book project, "Community Religion in North China: the Structure and Organization of Local Rituals and Beliefs," includes chapters on history, government oversight, ritual leaders, and rain rituals.

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[2] Zhao Fuxing 趙復興 (comp.); Ou Danian 歐大年 (Daniel Overmyer) and Fan Lizhu 范 麗珠 (ed.), *Gu'an diqu minsu jilu* 固安地區民俗輯錄 [Records of folk customs in the Gu'an area] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006). Du Xuede 杜學德, Yang Yingqin 楊英芹, Li Huaishun 李懷順 (comp.); Ou Danian 歐大年 (Daniel Overmyer) and Fan Lizhu 范麗珠 (ed.), *Handan diqu minsu jilu* 邯鄲地區民俗輯錄 [Records of folk customs in the Handan area] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006). Geng Baocang 耿保倉 *et al.* (comp.); Ou Danian 歐大年 (Daniel Overmyer), Hou Jie 侯杰, and Fan Lizhu 范麗珠 (ed.), *Baoding diqu miaohui wenhua yu minsu jilu* 保定地區廟會文化 與民俗輯錄 [Records of the temple fair culture and folk customs in the Baoding area] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2007).

Not least significant of Daniel Overmyer's contributions to sinology and the comparative study of religion is his active role in organizing conferences, research societies, and cooperative research teams—an indication of Overmyer's strong and oft-repeated belief that scholarship is a cooperative, even communitarian, venture. One of the founding members of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions (he was its first Secretary-Treasurer, beginning in 1975; the founding editor of its *Bulletin*, now the *Journal of Chinese Religions*; and has served as its President), Overmyer has organized more than half a dozen panels on current research in Chinese religions for the American Academy of Religion and the Association for Asian Studies. A 1992 AAS panel on the state of the field resulted in a significant two-part publication, which he edited, published by the *Journal of Asian Studies*. One of his major publications, as well as his current project, involve collaborative research, and it is fair to say—based upon the care he takes in evaluating the research of his graduate students and the editorial assistance he requests from them—that Dan Overmyer regards scholarship in general as collaborative work. One of the most inspiring aspects of this spirit is his care in acknowledging the work of other scholars, from his forbears to his contemporaries in the field. Overmyer sees himself as a member of a community of scholars, beginning with James Legge, J.J.M. de Groot, Marcel Granet, H.G. Creel, and Sydney Gamble—to cite those whom he mentions most often; to his "scholarly friends" Lawrence Thompson, Li Shiyu, Susan Naquin, David Jordan, Sakai Tadao, Frederick Streng, Byron Earhart, Michel Strickmann, Victor Mair, and Noguchi Tetsurō; and finally to the new generation of scholars whom he has inspired and supported, including Kenneth Dean, Stephen Teiser, and John Lagerwey, to name only a few. Within this distinguished group, all would agree that Daniel Overmyer is a "first among equals."

Dr. Overmyer has been a frequent speaker throughout North America and Asia on Chinese religion and culture. He has lectured on the importance of the study of religion, with an emphasis on popular religion as an authentic expression of the majority of the population, past and present, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, Fudan University and Shanghai Normal University in Shanghai, Nan-kai University in Tianjin, the Academia Sinica in Taipei, and the Luminary Buddhist Institute (Xiangguang Foxueyuan) in Chia-yi, Taiwan. A testament to his engagement with Chinese students and scholars, as well as his competence as a scholar of Chinese religion and culture as lived practice, Dr. Overmyer delivered these lectures in Chinese.

In addition to his long and distinguished career at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Overmyer taught for two years at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (conducting his undergraduate courses in Chinese and Eng-

lish, and his graduate course in Chinese) and for six months at Chengchi University in Taipei (all in Chinese). Dr. Overmyer is an honorary professor at Shanghai Normal University (Shanghai Shifan Daxue).

Daniel Overmyer's research has inspired a generation of scholarship on Chinese religion, especially in the area of popular religious movements and popular religious literature. Significantly, this influence extends to China and Japan, where translations of his major works (reviewed below) have been cited extensively by Chinese and Japanese scholars of religion, history, and anthropology.

3. The Study of Chinese Religion

The work for which Daniel Overmyer is best known is his research into the hybrid-vernacular scriptures of late imperial sectarian groups, to which we will turn below, but he has published widely on every aspect of the common religion of China: conceptions of death and the ritual activities surrounding death, religious alternatives for women, the juxtaposition of "tradition" and "innovation" in Chinese religions, "folk" religious elements of the state cult, Chinese gods and Christian saints, and numerous "state of the field" reports covering scholarship in English, French, Chinese, and Japanese. These essays include explicit discussion of the theoretical conclusions that can be drawn from careful examination of textual and ethnographic data—including discussion of the distinction between "elite" and "popular" religion, of the mutual influence of written and oral transmission, of the cultural creativity of lower and middle echelon social groups, and so on. Always, theoretical speculation arises from the data, and remains speculative.

For Daniel Overmyer, the study of Chinese religion begins "from the ground up" with the common religion of the people in their village communities and homes. What this means in practice is a careful description of the rich traditions of Chinese popular religion in their own terms, without the imposition—and often in explicit defiance—of the grand theories of Western scholarship and of the dismissive attitudes of Chinese officialdom.

Overmyer's criticism of Western theoretical categories has been understated but persistent. Our understanding of the Chinese religious landscape, he has argued, should not depend upon models developed for the study of European history. These models have only limited applicability to Chinese religion as it is actually lived and practised. They can point us in new directions, and make us attentive to our own presuppositions, but should never substitute for the careful work of investigation and discovery. At their worst, Western academic theories blind us to the theoretical structures suggested by the Chinese traditions themselves.

In a recent review published by the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, to cite but one example, Overmyer chastises a scholar who has uncritically applied Western literary theory to the study of Chinese vernacular literature:

> ... All this means [Overmyer writes in conclusion] that literary theories based exclusively on a very different Western experience may have little value for interpreting the Chinese situation. It may be helpful to use them as a point of entry into a topic, but they should be used delicately and flexibly, not imposed roughshod on material from another culture. For me it is always better to begin with detailed and patient descriptions of the Chinese material, doing one's best to understand it first in its own terms and context, trying to establish a dense matrix of meaning. Theoretical discussion and analysis can proceed in careful stages, first expressed in and through that matrix. Only then can one make larger statements that are faithful to the material at hand.[3]

Nor should the study of the common religion of China be limited to the reports of the scholar-gentry class, which served as "primary sources" for an earlier generation of scholarship. For Overmyer, the study of Chinese religion begins with the common people, and the ritual traditions and beliefs of the countryside. He has made careful use of official records, mining them for descriptive accounts while excising their pejorative judgments, and then gone beyond the official texts to other written materials, from popular literature to sectarian scriptures, as well as ethnographic descriptions from the field. Overmyer's critique of the anti-sectarian biases of the scholar-official class was, of course, the basic methodological orientation of his first book, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*, but my example comes from one of Overmyer's recent publications, a review of Fang Xuejia's ethnographies of religious practices in north-eastern Guangdong:

> The material in these books [he writes] provides a fresh perspective on what one part of traditional Chinese culture was in actual practice, and reveals to us how long we have been led astray by starting from the top down instead of with their common ground, by emphasizing what seems most intellectually compatible and satisfying to scholars in China and the West instead of what has really been doing the cultural work for the majority of the Chinese people. [...] Of course, there is much beauty and wisdom in more specialized traditions such as philosophy, poetry, and landscape painting, and their study is most rewarding, but such activities engaged only relatively few and had little impact on ordinary people. My point here is simply that to understand Chinese culture as a whole we

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[3] Daniel L. Overmyer, review of *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables*, by Anne McLaren, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59.2 (1999): 637.

> should begin with those at its demographic foundations, in the villages and towns where by far the most people lived.[4]

Overmyer's reliance upon the vernacular scriptures of sectarian groups, as well as his critical use of the records of the Confucian official elite—the Ming Statutes, Huang Yu-bian's *Refutation of Heresies* (*Poxie xiangbian*), dynastic histories, and local gazetteers—reflects an even more fundamental principle: situating texts historically and sociologically. Most of Overmyer's published work is based upon texts, not because of a theoretical bias for "the primacy of the text," but because Chinese culture demands it, and Overmyer holds himself, his students, and the scholars he reviews to the most exacting standards of linguistic accuracy. But he always places those texts in a living situation, and if anything, Overmyer is first and foremost a social historian. I well remember Dr. Overmyer's first lecture on Chinese religions to undergraduate students at UBC: it is not a free-floating rhapsody on qi and *yin-yang* cosmology, but a careful description of social stratification in the Song—a nuanced discussion of religious variation among social groups. In keeping with this methodological orientation, Overmyer insists that the exploration of any text includes an analysis of its dating, authorship, place of publication, distribution, and reception.

Yet Overmyer is too respectful of persons—the religious authors and practitioners themselves—to go to the other extreme, a Marxian eclipse of intentionality, individuality, or transcendence. Once he has identified the social situation of an author and his audience, Overmyer gives voice to the text itself. Characteristic of Overmyer's published work is the detailed examination of books and their contents, with careful descriptions of their appearance and organization, summaries of major themes, and lengthy quotations of translated passages. This is the mark of his careful scholarship, but also of his basic respect for the subjects of his research: Overmyer writes about interesting, often socially liminal, agents of religious transformation, and he cares first and foremost about how their soteriological or eschatological vision has enabled them to transcend the social and economic limitations of their times and place.

4. Sectarian Religion and its Textual Traditions

Daniel Overmyer dedicated more than twenty-five years to the study of late imperial sectarian scriptures, including, first, their discovery—he brought

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[4] "On the Foundations of Chinese Culture in Late Traditional Times," in *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results*, ed. Daniel Overmyer, with the assistance of Shin-yi Chao (Taipei: Yuan-liu Publishing Company, 2002), 315.

texts home from China, Japan, and the Soviet Union, over the course of numerous trips—followed by careful translation and analysis.

Overmyer's first published book on sectarian scriptures and the religious communities that produced them marked a turning point in the history of the study of Chinese religions, innovative for its attention to religion at the middle and lower echelons of late imperial society. *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) was awarded by the American Council of Learned Societies as the "best first book written by an historian of religions in the last three years" (1976–1979). His second book, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*, co-authored with David K. Jordan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), addresses the history of popular religious literature in light of its contemporary forms and uses, and includes valuable self-standing studies (authored by Overmyer) on the history of spirit-writing (*fuji*), the eschatology of inspired texts, and the sectarian history of the Compassion Society (Cihui Tang). Overmyer's most ambitious work so far, and the culmination of his *baojuan* research, was *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Centre, 1999). The study identifies distinct strata of sectarian eschatology, with a refined analysis of their religious vision and ritual employment, and goes further than any previous work in delineating the religious orientations and textual sub-genres of *baojuan* texts.

In these three books, Overmyer employed historiographic, ethnographic, and textual methods of research, and ranks among precious few scholars who have crossed disciplinary boundaries with such skill. Overmyer based his investigations on secondary sources of Chinese history in at least four languages (English, French, Chinese, and Japanese); "ethnographies" by local magistrates as well as European and Japanese travellers; and meticulous translation of many hundreds of folios of sectarian histories and scriptures. In this, he surpassed even the exact scholarly standards of his Chinese and Japanese mentors/colleagues, and it is no exaggeration to say that Daniel Overmyer is the world's foremost authority on the authorship, transmission, and religious teachings of sectarian *baojuan*.

5. Professional Standards

This tribute honours Daniel Overmyer on his retirement from teaching, but he remains an active scholar. Daniel Overmyer has produced a legacy of scholarship that has fundamentally altered and reshaped the study of Chinese religions. He has done so because of a profound respect for the work that has defined his life, and an even deeper respect for the people—sinologists,

imperial scholars, inspired authors of scripture, and ordinary religious folk —that make up his community and family. Dan Overmyer is a great man and scholar, a *junzi* (and I am not the first person to call him this and will not be the last) who reveals his own nobility in the reverence he shows for others.

His respect for his work is demonstrated in the professionalism he demonstrates in his service to his university and his students. Towards his graduate students, he is both demanding and appreciative. His criticism is helpful, tough, never nice. He celebrates his students' successes and praises their accomplishments. We are very, very grateful.

His respect for his colleagues is never flattering or trivial, but is genuine, as evidenced by the way he has made collaboration a basic method of his work. He does not limit this respect to colleagues who write in English, or colleagues who are his equals in publication and research; the acknowledgements pages of Dan Overmyer's books include students, editors, family, and friends.

His respect for the history of his discipline is made all the more persuasive by the Mencian candour he is willing to express towards his elders.

His respect for the object of his study can be seen in his distrust of theory and its tendency to trendiness. Overmyer's healthy theoretical discomfort brings him back again and again to the data, to the field and the text.

His respect for the text is evident in the meticulous standards of translation he expects of himself and others, and surpasses those of scholars who specialize more narrowly in Chinese language and linguistics. His instructions to me, in one of my woefully loose translations of a religious text assigned for a graduate seminar, are typical of his universally applicable principles: "(1) Begin with the literal word order; translate *every* character. (2) Do not skip, add, or invent. Translate what it *says*, not the associations it may set off in your mind. (3) Do not gloss over difficult spots; look things up until you figure them out. (4) Do your best to keep the various *contexts* in mind: grammatical, stylistic, literary, and cultural. These contexts limit options for translation." These words, written in Dan's pharmacological scrawl in 1985, are framed above my dictionaries, and reflect not merely academic standards, but standards of virtue.

Finally, Overmyer's respect for the common people of China and their history informs the whole of his personal and public life, and is heartfelt and motivating. Through his careful work, his high ideals, his exacting standards, and his endless curiosity and love of learning, Dan Overmyer is the "lion's roar" in defence of the many agents, high and low, of traditional Chinese religion.

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Part I

Popular Sects and Religious Movements

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF POPULAR RELIGIONS MOVEMENTS OF THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES: A RATIONAL CHOICE INTERPRETATION

HUBERT SEIWERT*

1. Introduction

No field in the study of Chinese religion is more indebted to the work of Daniel Overmyer than the history of popular sects during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. It is, therefore, appropriate to pay homage to him by adding a few strokes to the picture that has been outlined by this outstanding scholar. The emergence of new religious movements during the Ming dynasty and their development during the Qing attracted the increased attention of contemporary Western scholars only after the publication of Daniel Overmyer's ground-breaking study *Folk Buddhist Religion* in 1976.[1] While popular religious sects at the margins of Buddhism and Daoism have a long history in China that goes back to the early middle ages, the popular religious movements of the Ming added a new and significant element to this tradition with the large-scale production of sectarian writings. It was again Daniel Overmyer who in 1999 offered the first comprehensive study of sectarian *baojuan* in a Western language.[2]

In this contribution I will analyze and interpret certain aspects of sectarian movements of the Ming and Qing, applying some elements of the ra-

* I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for their corrections and critical comments. While I have gratefully accepted the corrections, I decided not to change significantly my argument to respond to the criticism of one reviewer. I take these comments very seriously, but to defend my argument would be the beginning of a discussion about theory, which I would enjoy but which need not be public.

1 This is not to deny the merits of Susan Naquin's work, whose pioneering study *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976) appeared in the same year as Overmyer's book, and of the early work of Jan Maria de Groot (*Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, Amsterdam 1902).

2 Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes. An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

tional choice theory of religion as presented by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge.[3] The focus is, therefore, not on historical description but on interpretation and explanation.[4] It is an attempt to apply a sociological theory to the study of Chinese religions.

I am aware that this theoretical approach is not uncontroversial in the study of religions and has so far not been applied to the history of Chinese religions. I also admit that I personally do not subscribe to this theory if it is meant to explain all aspects of religion and religious behaviour. But it would not be reasonable to expect any theory to explain all aspects of religion and religious behaviour. I nevertheless think that even in the study of Chinese religions it is useful and interesting to occasionally change the perspective and look for new types of answers. The new perspective of this approach is the supposition that most people act rationally even if they are religious. This, of course, contradicts the view that religion is something basically irrational and that religious behaviour cannot be understood rationally. On the other side, to suppose that religious people usually act rationally does not contradict or ignore the fact that there also are other factors influencing their behaviour, such as emotions; nor does it imply that their behaviour is not restricted and conditioned by external factors, such as economic and political developments, as well as cultural traditions. This is true for any behaviour, and religious behaviour is no exception. However, the role of cultural traditions and social structures, as well as of economic and political conditions has long been observed in studies of Chinese religions, while the aspect of rational choice among religious options did not receive much attention. It is against this background that the present paper attempts to interpret some religious developments in Ming and Qing China from a new perspective. I do not claim that this interpretation explains every aspect of these developments. I do think, however, that it is worthwhile to consider a new theoretical approach that may inspire more detailed historical research and possibly theoretical controversies.

To illustrate the approach, it is sufficient to select certain aspects of Ming and Qing sectarianism without attempting to give a comprehensive historical description. The new religious movements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as the Luo movement (Luojiao), the Huangtian Jiao (Yellow Heaven Teaching), and the Hongyang Jiao (Vast Yang Teaching), had lasting influence primarily because they produced scriptures that were printed

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[3] Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Lang, 1987; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[4] Most of the historical material referred to in this article is documented and described in more detail in my *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

and became the core of an evolving sectarian literature. Despite severe persecutions during the Qing dynasty and the proscription and destruction of sectarian scriptures, many of these writings have been preserved, which proves their wide distribution and continued use in sectarian milieus. It is above all the transmission of certain scriptures and the reverence for patriarchs connected with them that allow us to trace the history of later sectarian groups to their origins during the Ming. Historical continuity from the Ming to the Qing sects is in many ways obvious, but at the same time it should not be overlooked that there also were significant changes. One of them is the proliferation of sectarian groups that had a common ancestry. A good example is the development of the Luo movement, that is, sectarian groups tracing their origin to Patriarch Luo (Luozu, 1443–1527) and transmitting his scriptures.[5] Within a century after Patriarch Luo's death, a variety of independent groups related to this movement had developed. Part of the Luo movement were congregations consisting mainly of canal boatmen, sectarian groups in villages in Zhejiang and Fujian, communities in big cities such as Beijing and Nanjing, and sectarian networks in Shandong. While they all shared reverence for Patriarch Luo and his scriptures as a common point of reference they did not form a unified organization, and their religious beliefs and practices, as well as their internal structure, diverged at many points. During the Qing dynasty, the number of sects growing out of the Luo tradition further increased, and many of these groups adopted beliefs that originally were not part of Luo's teaching. Thus, there was a tendency of internal differentiation of sectarian traditions deriving from a common origin, and at the same time a tendency towards homogenization that brought teachings of different traditions closer to each other.

Another point concerns changes that caused increasing tensions between the new sectarian movements and their social and political environment. As an indicator of this development we may take the number and intensity of persecutions and rebellions. While during the early phase in the sixteenth century the new religious movements were not involved in any rebellion and do not seem to have suffered from systematic persecution, the situation was markedly different during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To be sure, already during the last decades of the Ming dynasty, state officials warned against the activities of heterodox sects and, after the founding of the Qing dynasty, laws against heterodoxy were reinforced. It was, however, only during the eighteenth century that the Qing government adopted a policy of systematic and large-scale persecution of popular religious sects. Religious groups that were outside the state-controlled structures of official

[5] Patriarch Luo's personal name was Luo Menghong, but he is better known in Western literature as Luo Qing.

Buddhism and Daoism were perceived as threatening the political stability and the autocratic power of the ruling dynasty. It does not seem that persecutions were always prompted by rebellion, although the number of rebellions increased during the same period. In many cases, though, membership in a religious group considered heterodox was sufficient to warrant punishment, even if no political activities were involved.

Persecutions and rebellions are symptoms of escalating tension between these sects and their social and political environment. While the new religious movements of the sixteenth century were apparently not regarded as heterodox—in any case, the existing laws against heterodoxy were not applied to them—their successors during the Qing dynasty clearly bore the label of heterodoxy. It seems that these changes were not due to a different perception by the authorities alone; there were also certain developments within the sects themselves that made them suspect to the government. One aspect was millenarian expectations connected with the figure of Maitreya, the future Buddha. The expectation of Maitreya's advent had a long history in Chinese popular culture. As it had often been part of rebel ideologies, it was considered heterodox, and the authorities therefore paid particular attention to sects propagating these beliefs. Although Maitreya appears also in *baojuan* of the sixteenth century, the context there is not millenarian. Only during the Qing dynasty did millenarianism gain some prominence so that the expectation of Maitreya's appearance came to be used as propaganda during rebellions. Thus, it appears that the degree of heterodoxy increased in the course of time. Another internal change was the formation of extended sectarian networks whose leadership was often hereditary. While this development started as early as the Ming dynasty, sect networks proliferated during the Qing. They were a cause of concern for the government, as they formed large underground organizations that could be used by ambitious leaders to prepare rebellions.

These changes in the development of sectarian movements, from the late Ming to the early nineteenth century, are evident even if we cannot exclude the fact that the character of the sources distorts the actual situation to some extent. We can rely on a great number of official reports concerning the Qing sects that, quite naturally, paid more attention to those perceived as politically subversive than to the many inconspicuous religious groups that without doubt existed at the same time. The Ming sects, in contrast, are known primarily through their scriptures, sources that provide a different kind of information than that generated by the investigations of officials. However, even if we take into account a certain bias in the sources when comparing Ming and Qing sects, it is evident that the traditions founded in the sixteenth century underwent considerable changes during their further development. It is, therefore, worth trying to explain some of these changes.

2. Rewards and Costs of Sect Membership

The following considerations make use of the rational choice theory of religion, which has been made popular by Stark and Bainbridge. While I do not subscribe to some of their central assumptions concerning the nature of religious beliefs, I do think that their theory is useful for explaining some mechanisms in the development of religious movements. Here, it is neither possible nor necessary to present their theory in detail. Instead, I shall concentrate on the core of the theory, which proposes that humans as a rule behave rationally in that they seek to obtain rewards and to avoid costs,[6] and that this rule also applies to the field of religion. Thus, human behaviour is central to the development of religious movements, and so to explain such developments demands considering the factors influencing human behaviour. While behaviour obviously depends on many factors, including values and beliefs on the one hand and external factors such as political or economic constraints on the other, in most cases there is an element of choice. Some people choose to join a religious community, while others do not. Thus, to explain the growth and expansion of a religious movement means to understand why people join and support it. According to rational choice theory, the general answer would be that they join it to obtain certain rewards from membership that they either cannot obtain otherwise or only at higher costs. The theory postulates that they would make another choice if they were able to gain the same overall reward at lower costs. Rewards provided by membership in religious communities can be of various kinds such as opportunities for social exchange, mutual support, and entertainment. As these are rewards that are not specific to religious groups but can in principle be obtained from any social community, I shall call them mundane rewards. There is, however, another kind of reward that is only provided by religion: salvation from the misery of endless rebirths in a world of suffering, faith in the love and compassion of a deity, or the promise of attaining a future life in a heavenly paradise. These I shall refer to as religious rewards.[7]

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[6] Compare Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 27. I do not want here to enter into a theoretical discussion of these concepts, as the aim of this paper is not to criticize this theory—which would be a different article—but to illustrate it.

[7] The notion of "religious rewards" roughly corresponds to what Stark and Bainbridge call "compensators" (*A Theory of Religion*, 36). However, the concept of "compensator" is theoretically ill-founded since it implies that it is only a "postulation" of reward and not a real reward. However, to be relieved of the fear of rebirth in hell does not compensate for any tangible rewards that cannot be obtained, but is itself a most real reward for someone who lives in fear of hell. I should add that in later publications Rodney Stark seems to have dropped the concept of "compensator" and replaced it by "otherworldly rewards." See Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of*

Turning to the new religious movements of the Ming, we can ask what kind of reward they had to offer that induced people to join them. As to religious rewards, it appears that they were fairly similar to what other religions—Chan and Pure Land Buddhism, and Daoism—had to offer. Patriarch Luo claimed that following his teachings would bring liberation from the cycle of birth and death. It was a promise of salvation described as returning to the "Native Place" where the original unity with the Absolute—variously called "Emptiness" (*zhenkong*), "Mother" (*mu*), or "Limitless" (*wuji*)—would be realized. Although the symbols used differ, to some extent, from traditional Buddhism the religious goals were strongly influenced by Buddhist ideas. Enlightenment through realization of one's unity with the Absolute was very similar to enlightenment by realizing one's own Buddha Nature and abandoning all distinctions, as taught in Chan Buddhism. Accordingly, Daniel Overmyer summarized that "in general his [Patriarch Luo's] teachings are a popularization of lay-based Ch'an Buddhism with a strong emphasis on the human mind as the source of all because it is equated with the emptiness that is the primordial nature of all things."[8] If this was the case then why would people turn to Patriarch Luo's teaching? Chan Buddhism combined with Pure Land teachings was available everywhere. Why should one prefer Patriarch Luo's promise of returning to the "Native Place" to the prospect of reaching Amitābha's Pure Land?

Lack of historical sources, of course, does not permit us to answer these questions on an individual basis. We simply have no information about the motivations of individuals for joining Luo Menghong's community. However, on the basis of rational choice theory it is possible to make some suggestions. If Luo's teachings and those of conventional Buddhism offered similar religious rewards, then the choice between them may well have depended on other aspects. Perhaps there were additional rewards not equally available from both; perhaps there were also differences in the costs to be incurred.

First, some of the mundane rewards that could be obtained by joining either a conventional Buddhist community or a sectarian community will be considered. Entering the Buddhist *saṅgha* certainly brought some material benefits. Under normal conditions monks and nuns could expect to be materially sustained by the order and by the contributions of lay believers which secured them food and shelter without hard labour, while enjoying tax-exemption and a certain degree of respect from the populace, even if the so-

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Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 88.

[8] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 92.

cial status of the common clergy was not very high. For the brighter and more ambitious among them, there was also the chance to get a classical education and to gain some status and power as leaders of the *saṅgha*. These were mundane rewards that could make clerical life highly attractive. It is, therefore, easy to understand why during the Ming dynasty—as in earlier dynasties—the number of people who wanted to become monks was so great that the government attempted to restrict ordination and to limit the number of clerics. The policy was not very successful because during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the government was forced to sell additional ordination certificates to fill the empty coffers of the state. In any case, the fact that people were prepared to pay money in order to gain the status of a monk shows that this status was much sought after. In other words we may suppose that it was not just the prospects of gaining religious rewards that attracted people to a clerical life.

The mundane rewards that could be obtained from the new religious movements were less obvious. In some cases, however, we have clear evidence that membership in sectarian groups did provide more than religious contemplation and the hope for salvation after death. During the Wanli era (1573–1619), a sectarian group belonging to the Luo tradition gained thousands of members in Shandong. Its leader was Hou Biao, who transmitted the scriptures of Patriarch Luo. The local congregations of his sect were said to amount to three thousand. The source further relates that each member of the sect "contributed one *fen* of money that was sent to the congregation head. When there was a mishap in any congregation that could not be handled, they helped with the congregation money. Countless people relied on the teachings of the Luo sect because of such benefits."[9]

From this account we see that people were attracted not only by the religious teachings of the sect but also by the material support that the congregations provided in case of need. Some sects seem to have acted as mutual help associations. This is quite obvious in the communities of canal boatmen, mentioned in sources of the eighteenth century, who also belonged to the Luo tradition and whose origins can be traced back to the Ming dynasty. These congregations maintained cloisters for ritual purposes that also functioned as hostels. As most of the members were sailors who had no family to return to when they were out of work during the winter season, the cloisters provided accommodation to them as well as to the old and sick who could not work any more. The congregations usually owned a piece of land,

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[9] Qu Jiusi 瞿九思, *Wanli wugong lu* 萬歷武功錄 [Record of military exploits of the Wanli era], vol. 1; quoted in Ma Xisha 馬西沙, *Qingdai Bagua Jiao* 清代八卦教 [Eight Trigram Teaching of the Qing] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue chubanshe, 1989), 19.

which secured some income and was also used as burial ground for deceased members.[10] These material rewards certainly contributed to making the religious communities attractive to boatmen who in this way found a substitute for the family support they were often lacking. It should of course be kept in mind that the religious aspects of the sect were also rewarding. These men belonged to the very lowest level of society and the misery of this life was not just a metaphor; the promise of betterment in a future life could at least provide spiritual consolation. Thus, both the mundane and the religious rewards made it a rational choice for them to join one of these congregations.

Evidently the value of these and other rewards that could be obtained from sect membership was not the same for everyone. Persons who lived in better conditions than the canal boatmen, who were wealthy and could rely on the support of their families and extended social relationships, had little reason to join a sectarian community to secure material support; nor would they choose a clerical career to earn a livelihood. People belonging to the middle class of merchants, low officials, or land owning peasants would usually not join a religious community primarily for material reasons. If some of them became monks, the religious rewards were probably more important than the mundane ones.

As has been mentioned, the teachings of Patriarch Luo were, in some respects, similar to those of official Buddhism and offered the same kind of religious rewards. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries many members of the Luo movement, and other scripture-producing sects, belonged to the middle classes. We shall, therefore, now reconsider the question of why some people turned to the Luo teaching instead of joining the Buddhist *saṅgha*. One reason, of course, was the restriction of the number of monks imposed by the government. Not everyone who wanted to be a monk was allowed to enter the order, and not everyone was prepared to pay for an ordination certificate. Still, there were other costs connected with the status of monk. They had to live a celibate life and observe the rules of the *vinaya*, to forsake wealth and many worldly pleasures. If it was only the religious rewards offered by Buddhism, then more or less the same could be obtained at lower costs by turning to religious teachings such as those of the Luo movement. The new religions of the Ming dynasty were lay movements that offered an opportunity to live a religious life without submitting to the restrictions imposed by clerical precepts. To some extent this explains why

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[10] Memorial by Cui Yingjie 崔應階, Qianlong 33/11/30 (1768), in: *Shiliao xunkan* 史料旬刊 [Historical materials published every ten days], Beijing 1930-1931, no. 12, 407a-410b. On the Luojiao among the canal boatmen, see Daniel L. Overmyer, "Boatmen and Buddhas: The Lo Chiao in Ming Dynasty China," *History of Religions* 17 (1978): 284-302.

they were attractive to members of the middle and occasionally even the higher classes looking for religious rewards.

There was, of course, still the possibility of joining a conventional Buddhist lay community instead of one of the new religious movements. Without any doubt, most middle class people who wanted to obtain religious rewards from Buddhism without paying the costs of a monastic life in fact turned to common Buddhist lay communities. But others preferred one of the new religious movements. There was certainly some competition for members between them and the lay Buddhists. What could have made the new religions more appealing than the existing lay communities? The answer has to take into account that not all people made the same choice. Rewards and costs did not have the same value for everyone. For some, the new religious movements offered rewards that for others may have been of little value. This is most evident in the case of religious teachers. People such as Luo Menghong, Li Bin (alias Puming, died 1562), or Han Taihu (alias Piaogao, 1570–1598), the founders of the Yellow Heaven Teaching and the Vast Yang Teaching, succeeded in establishing themselves as leaders of religious communities. Within their communities they had an exalted status as teachers revealing the extraordinary insight they had attained through their enlightenment. Had they been members of Buddhist lay communities, they would have been ritually subordinated to monks and hardly been accepted as teachers. Hence, sectarian communities offered opportunities to religiously active laypersons that were not available in Buddhist lay communities. This not only applies to the famous founders of new religious movements but also to the leaders of the countless small religious groups that existed and proliferated all over the country.

Also, for common members, the sects may have been more attractive than lay Buddhist communities—for they could obtain religious rewards more easily, that is, at lower costs. Patriarch Luo stressed this point in his teaching when he remarked:

> These scriptures in five books of mine contain the marvellous law in countless sentences, but only two sentences or four sentences suffice to return home. These scriptures in five books of mine contain countless sentences. [However] salvation [lit. "to return home"] is easy to attain without wasting energy and time. If the wise men listen [to these sentences] one single time, their heart will be thoroughly enlightened and they will never stumble. Foolish men may listen to them even thousands of times but they will only regard it as idle talk.[11]

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[11] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao* 巍巍不動太山深根結果寶卷補註開心法要 [Precious Scroll about Deeply Rooted Karmic Fruits, Majestic and Unmoved like Mount Taishan, Enlarged and Explained to Open the

Here it is clearly stated how easy it is to attain liberation from the cycle of rebirths and the threatening horrors of hell. Everyone can "return home" by simply applying the essence of his teaching, which is contained in only two or four sentences. This remark probably refers to a mantra or *dhāraṇī* to be ritually recited although there is no unambiguous evidence for this practice during the early phase of the movement. In any case Patriarch Luo insisted that his way to salvation is easy to follow as there is no need for common Buddhist practices:

> Whether one is a monk or layperson: meditation, observing *vinaya* rules, reciting sūtras, vegetarianism, pilgrimage to sacred mountains, repairing monasteries, erecting pagodas and Buddha statues, offerings to the Buddha, melting the images of demons in fire, printing sūtras, making images: such practices are like playing with puppets.[12]

That is, all conventional Buddhist practices are without any effect. It is only Luo's teaching of Non-Action (*wuwei*)—which abandons such outer religious actions—that can bring liberation from the wheel of birth and death. In this way, salvation "is easy to obtain, without wasting energy and time." We could add here: "and without wasting money." Compared with conventional lay Buddhism these were, in fact, lower costs although—as we shall see—sect membership was not for free. However, all things being equal, it would certainly have been a rational choice to follow this teaching if one wished to attain salvation.

This explanation does not mean that in every single case the choice was made on exactly these grounds. We have no information about individual motives for joining Luo's community. Still, the example illustrates that religious choices do not need to remain completely unexplained. So far, we have observed that joining a sectarian community could offer some rewards that were either not available in conventional religious groups or only available at higher costs. These included mundane rewards, such as material support of fellow members or social recognition as teacher or master, and religious rewards, such as methods of reaching spiritual liberation for sect members, who were assured of their salvation.

Mind to the Essence of the Dharma], *Wubu liuce jingjuan* 五部六冊經卷 [Five Books in Six Volumes] 13–16 (Taizhong: Minde Tang, 1980), *juan* 1, ch. 1, 45f. Compare Randall Nadeau's translation in "Popular Sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch'ing and his Religion of Non-Action" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1990), 146.

[12] *Poxie xianzheng baojing* 破邪顯正寶經 [Precious Scripture about the Refutation of Heterodoxy and Manifestation of Orthodoxy], in *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集 [A first collection of *baojuan*], ed. Zhang Xishun 張希舜 *et al.* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), 2:248f.

Though in some respects the costs for such religious rewards were lower than within conventional Buddhism, they were higher in some other respects. Sectarian communities were in a questionable legal position. Ming legislation threatened membership in popular religious communities with severe punishment. During the sixteenth century this law does not seem to have been applied to the new religious movements but, nevertheless, it made them objectionable. We know from Patriarch Luo's writings that he had to face opposition from his surroundings, in particular from official Buddhism.[13] Not everyone would have been prepared to join a community that was easily suspected of heterodoxy. Opposition from the Buddhist clergy, officials, and literati clearly increased the costs of membership and also affected the development of sectarian movements, as will be explained below.

The mundane rewards that could be gained in sectarian groups were of various kinds and not equally distributed among all members. For sect leaders, their position could be—and often was—a source of income. Religious teachers usually received money from their followers; some of them explicitly demanded financial contributions, and others may have been voluntarily supported by their followers. Patriarch Luo had been an ordinary soldier before he started his religious career. After his enlightenment, he became a professional teacher who died as the leader of an extended community. His followers honoured him with a thirteen-storied pagoda after his death, which suggests that he did not die as a poor man. Later sectarian leaders, such as Wang Sen and Yao Wenyu, who were of humble origin, succeeded in amassing enormous wealth. At the same time, their position secured them power and status within their organizations. During the Qing dynasty the wealth of some sect heads was such that they could gain officially recognized status by purchasing official titles and government offices.[14] These clearly were rewards that made the profession of sect leader highly attractive.

The fact that religious teachers were professionals who made a living as sect leaders does not necessarily imply that they were impostors. Though there were charlatans among them, there is no reason to doubt that most of them believed in their message. To note that religious professions and organizations also have economic interests does not call into question their religious beliefs. Economic interests are a factor in most religions, including

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[13] Compare *Poxie xianzheng baojing*, 75-78, translated in Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 113. For later criticism of the Luo movement by Buddhist monks, such as Mizang Daokai, Hanshan Deqing, and Yunqi Zhuhong, see Overmyer: "Boatmen and Buddhas," 287-289.

[14] Purchase of offices was common for members of the Liu family and other leaders of the Eight Trigrams (*bagua*) network during the eighteenth century; see Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 414-422.

conventional Buddhism and Christian Churches. We cannot ignore the economic aspects if we are to understand the dynamics of religions. Ming and Qing sectarianism is a good example because the economic dimension of sect activities is quite obvious and it was, above all, sect leaders who controlled the material resources.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that quite a number of individuals attempted to enter this profession and became religious entrepreneurs.[15] Usually, the founders of new sects had previously been disciples of other teachers. If they were successful in proselytizing there was a certain temptation to establish themselves as leaders of independent sectarian groups. This not only enhanced their religious prestige and power but also gave them a greater share in the financial contributions of sect members. Instead of channelling most of the contributions through the sect hierarchy to the principal leader, independent teachers could maintain control of these financial resources. Patriarch Luo's writings already provide indications of disciples starting their own business as is evidenced by his complaints that some former disciples propagated his teachings outside his school to seek worldly profit.[16] Schismatic tendencies were common in most sectarian traditions. Splits within a founding sect frequently occurred after the death of a sect founder or charismatic leader when senior disciples competed for succession as leader resulting in numerous independents groups. Another factor contributing to the splitting of sects was geographical distance. Thus, the groups belonging to the Luo tradition in the south seem to have abandoned all formal bonds with those in the north.

The mundane rewards sect leaders could gain depended to a large extent on the number of their followers. Thus, these religious entrepreneurs competed to gain new members from a limited pool of potential converts. In particular among the middle classes, from where the new religious movements of the sixteenth century recruited quite a number of their followers, they had to compete not only with each other but also with conventional Buddhism and Daoism. Since only a small number of people would be willing to join any religious community, competition for them restricted the possibilities of attracting converts. Therefore it was difficult for religious teachers who established new communities to gain a sizable share in the market. It was still more difficult to gain a large following from the middle classes as

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[15] For religious entrepreneurs, see Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 168-178.

[16] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan* 正信除疑無修証自在寶卷 [The Precious Scroll about the Realization of Self-Reliance without Cultivation, Which Rectifies Belief and Removes Doubts], ch. 25, in *Baojuan chuji*, 3:321-323, translated in Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 234f.

the limited demand for religious goods was sufficiently satisfied by traditional religions and sects that were already established in the market. To attract great numbers of followers was much easier for sect leaders who responded to the religious expectations of the lower classes representing the majority of the population. As early as the sixteenth century some sectarian groups that derived from the Luo tradition consisted mainly of members who belonged to the lower ranks of artisans, peddlers, peasants, and unskilled workers. Thus, the new religious movements became socially diversified. Not surprisingly the expansion into different social milieus also brought about a diversification of sectarian teachings as they had to respond to different religious demands.

3. Changing Social Composition of Sects

Some of the changes the new religious movements were undergoing from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries may be attributed to the different social milieus from which they recruited their members. I shall, therefore, briefly consider the social composition of the sectarian movements. In their formative period, the new religions of the sixteenth century were addressing an audience that evidently had some degree of education. Unlike most earlier sects, the new religious movements such as the Luo Teaching, the Yellow Heaven Teaching, and the Vast Yang Teaching, strongly relied on scriptures and produced their own scriptural traditions. Most successful in this regard was Patriarch Luo whose writings, summarily known as "Five Books in Six Volumes" (*Wubu liuce*), became very popular and were widely distributed. Even during his lifetime they were printed thrice (1509, 1514, 1518), and until the end of the Ming dynasty there were at least twenty-four more printings and new editions.[17] This shows that Luo's scriptures were in high demand in social milieus where reading books was common. People who printed and bought books certainly did not belong to the lowest level of society. These scriptures circulated widely and were read not only by the members of closed sectarian communities but also had a broader impact on religious life more generally. Thus the famous Buddhist monk, Zhuhong (1535–1615), found it necessary to prohibit his followers from reading Patriarch Luo's "Five Books in Six Volumes."[18] Evidently Luo's writings were popular in

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[17] For a list of known editions of the *Wubu liuce*, see Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "*Wubu liuce* kanke lüebiao"《五部六冊》刊刻略表 [An overview of editions of the Five Books in Six Volumes], *Minjian zongjiao* 民間宗教 1 (1995): 161-172.

[18] *Yunqi gongzhu guiyue* 雲棲共住規約 (Rules and Agreements for Communal Living at Yunqi), quoted in Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 203.

certain religious milieus that belonged to mainstream late Ming society. They significantly influenced the evolving sectarian literature that circulated openly in the capital and was not confined to marginalized or clandestine communities. The scriptures of the Vast Yang Teaching, some of which copied the titles of Luo's writings,[19] were printed in the Imperial printing office and supported by members of the aristocracy and high officials.[20] There is no doubt that these new religious movements had followers who belonged to the middle and occasionally even the upper classes.

In these social milieus religious teachings suspected of heterodoxy would not have been very appealing. People who lived in easy circumstances had little reason to join religious groups propagating millenarian teachings about the coming of a new era when the present social conditions would be completely changed. To be sure, millenarian beliefs were part of popular religious traditions; but they seem to have been attractive mainly to the less privileged who were dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions. As millenarianism, that is, the expectation of a complete change brought about by supernatural forces, implied the end of the present social and political order, it was always considered a heterodox teaching and, accordingly, repressed by the authorities. Members of the middle classes would usually keep their distance from teachings associated with the risk of being persecuted with its attendant loss of wealth, status, or even life. It is to be expected that the new religious movements attracting this type of audience did not promote beliefs regarded as heterodox.

Judging from sixteenth century *baojuan*, the new teachings did in fact contain little that was objectionable to the authorities. Patriarch Luo in his scriptures explicitly castigates some popular sects that he considers heterodox, such as the White Lotus and the Maitreya Teachings. These were sectarian traditions mentioned in the Ming legislation against heterodoxy and Luo Menghong evidently did not want to be in any way connected with them. It is true that in other early *baojuan*, including scriptures of the Yellow Heaven Teaching, the figure of Maitreya, commonly associated with millenarian beliefs, plays a certain role. However, in Yellow Heaven scriptures

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[19] The title *Hongyang kugong wudao jing* (The Vast Yang Scripture on Awakening to the Way through Bitter Toil) is almost identical with Luo's autobiography *Kugong wudao juan* (Scroll on Awakening to the Way through Bitter Toil), and the *Hongyang tanshi jing* (The Vast Yang Scripture on Sorrow for the World) is clearly modelled after Luo's *Tanshi wuwei baojuan* (The Precious Scroll on Non-Action and Sorrow for the World). There are even verbatim quotations from Luo's writings; see Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 321f.

[20] Support by high officials is reported in the opening sections of all early Hongyang scriptures, which are translated in Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 323f.

his position is not very prominent and, more importantly, the context is not millenarian. Maitreya is used as a common symbol connected with the third cosmic period, but he is not expected as a future saviour or ruler of the empirical world.[21] As Daniel Overmyer has observed, the ethical values of the early *baojuan* are conventional and reflect popular understandings of Confucian and Buddhist teachings.[22] Had these teachings been perceived as subversive the authorities would not have tolerated them.

Even in the sixteenth century, however, the developing sectarian traditions were not homogeneous. Not all sectarian groups recruited their members from the middle classes. As the new religious movements grew in membership some teachers turned to the large reservoir of the lower ranks of society. In these milieus they did not compete with orthodox Buddhism but with various forms of popular religious traditions. The latter included sects that continued millenarian and eschatological beliefs deeply rooted in popular religious culture since antiquity. Other competitors were cults with a preference for personal deities and rituals securing worldly benefits such as health and prosperity. Sectarian teachers belonging to and working in these milieus had to respond to the existing beliefs and expectations shaped by these popular religious traditions.

We may illustrate this development with one of the sects connected with the Luo movement. During the sixteenth century Yin Ji'nan (1527–1582) became the leader of a sect in Zhejiang called Wuwei Zhengjiao (Orthodox Teaching of Non-Action). Yin Ji'nan not only used Luo Menghong's "Five Books in Six Volumes," he was also declared to be a reincarnation of Patriarch Luo. Thus, the connection of his sect with the Luo movement is quite obvious. On the other hand, Yin Ji'nan's teachings also show the influence of other religious traditions. While in Luo's writings we find polemics against the Maitreya teaching, Yin Ji'nan adopted prevailing beliefs in the sequence of three cosmic periods ruled by Dīpaṁkara, Śākyamuni, and Maitreya. He also used the popular symbol of the Unborn Venerable Mother

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[21] For a discussion of the role of Maitreya in the *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan* (Precious Scroll of the Tathāgata Puming on the Understanding of Non-Action) and the *Pujing rulai yaoshi baojuan* (Precious Scroll of the Tathāgata Pujing about the Key [to Salvation]), two sixteenth century scriptures of the Yellow Heaven Teaching, see Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 300-311. For a different interpretation compare Richard Shek, "Millenarianism Without Rebellion: The Huangtian Dao in North China," *Modern China* 8 (1982): 305-336.

[22] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 206. See also Daniel L. Overmyer, "Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch'ing Pao-chüan," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 219-254.

(Wusheng Laomu), which does not appear in Luo's scriptures.[23] Although this sect saw itself as the "orthodox" continuation of Patriarch Luo's *wuwei* Teaching, it in fact enriched this teaching with symbols and ideas current in popular religious milieus.

Yin Ji'nan's sect is not the only case where the transformation of Luo's teachings under the influence of other popular traditions can be observed. A scripture of the early seventeenth century lists a line of seven patriarchs as successors of Patriarch Luo.[24] One of them is Sun Zhenkong to whom the *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* (Precious Scroll on Zhenkong's Cleaning of the Mind) is attributed. The scripture emphasizes belief in Amitābha and conventional Buddhist practices such as reciting the Buddha's name, vegetarianism, and moral behaviour, and employs the symbols of the Unborn Mother and the Dragon-Flower Assembly; the latter originally belongs to the Maitreya tradition.[25] It appears that the figure of Maitreya and symbols connected with it were so widespread in popular religious milieus that even sects that traced their origin to Patriarch Luo could not avoid using them. This does not imply that the interpretation of these symbols was always the same. In some cases the symbol of Maitreya may have stood for the expectation of the near advent of Maitreya and millenarian hopes, while in others Maitreya could be understood in a more orthodox way as the future Buddha and successor to Śākyamuni. And yet, since Maitreya beliefs had been prominent in past rebellions, including the so-called White Lotus uprising at the end of the Yuan dynasty, sects promoting belief in Maitreya were always suspected of heterodoxy and outlawed by Ming legislation. The more prominent the figure of Maitreya was in sectarian teachings, the less acceptable they were to a middle-class audience. It appears, therefore, that the adoption of Maitreya symbolism by some sects of the Luo tradition reflects a certain shift in their social composition.

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[23] *Taishang zushi sanshi yinyou zonglu* 太上祖師三世因由總錄 [Combined Account of the Vitae of the Most Exalted Patriarchs in Three Generations], *juan* 2, 29a-30b (edition of 1875, preface dated 1682). For details about Yin Ji'nan, see Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 251-255.

[24] *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* 佛說三皇初分天地嘆世寶卷 (Precious Scroll Preached by the Buddha on the Three August Ones' Sorrow for the World when Heaven and Earth First Parted), quoted by Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū* 增補宝巻の研究 [A study on precious volumes, revised and enlarged] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975), 330-332.

[25] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* 銷釋真空掃心寶卷, *juan* 1, in *Baojuan chuji*, vol. 18, 522. For Sun Zhenkong and this scripture, see Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, 313-315, and Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 243-245.