

Modern Chinese Religion II

1850–2015

VOLUME 1

Edited by

Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements | IX |
| List of Contributors | X |

VOLUME 1

Introduction

Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey 1

PART 1

Foundational Transformations

SECTION 1

Economics

The Introduction of Economics in China, 1850–2010 65

David Faure

SECTION 2

Science

Scientism in the Twentieth Century 91

Grace Yen Shen 沈德容

SECTION 3

Medicine

History of Chinese Medicine, 1890–2010 141

Volker Scheid and Eric I. Karchmer

SECTION 4

Aesthetics

Art, Aesthetics, and Religion in Modern China 197

Walter B. Davis

PART 2

State Policy/State Ideology

Buddhism and the State in Modern and Contemporary China 261

Xue Yu 學愚

The Discourse of “Chinese Marxism” 302

Arif Dirlik

PART 3

Histories of Religions

SECTION 1

Rural Traditions

Local Religion and Festivals 371

Thomas David DuBois

Moral Discourse, Moral Practice, and the Rural Family in Modern
China 401

Ellen Oxfeld

Lineages and the Making of Contemporary China 433

Michael Szonyi

SECTION 2

Social and Institutional Change and Religion

Women and the Religious Question in Modern China 491

Xiaofei Kang 康笑菲

New Technologies and the Production of Religious Texts in China, 19th–21st
Century 560

Philip Clart

VOLUME 2

**Charity, Medicine, and Religion: The Quest for Modernity in Canton
(ca. 1870–1937)** 579

Angela Ki Che Leung 梁其姿

Religions and Philanthropy in Chinese Societies Since 1978 613

André Laliberté

SECTION 3

Spirit Writing, Redemptive Societies

**Spirit Writing Groups in Modern China (1840–1937): Textual Production,
Public Teachings, and Charity** 651

Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川

Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century 685

David Ownby

SECTION 4

The Three Teachings: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism

Buddhist Institutional Innovations 731

Ji Zhe 汲喆

**The Hidden Tradition: Confucianism and Its Metamorphoses in Modern
and Contemporary China** 767

Sébastien Billioud

Daoism from the Late Qing to Early Republican Periods 806

Xun Liu 劉迅

SECTION 5

Christianity

**Anti-Modern Theology and Pre-Modern Practice: Catholic Indigenization
from Below in Modern China** 841

Richard Madsen

**Protestantism and Modern China: Rejection, Success, Disaster, Survival,
and Rebirth** 867

Daniel H. Bays

**Miraculous Modernity: Charismatic Traditions and Trajectories within
Chinese Protestant Christianity** 884

Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye

SECTION 6

Contemporary Trends

**The Revival and Development of Popular Religion in China,
1980–Present** 923

Lizhu Fan 范麗珠 and Na Chen 陳納

The Commodification of Religion in Chinese Societies 949

Adam Yuet Chau 周越

Bibliography 977

Index 1077

Local Religion and Festivals

Thomas David DuBois

It can be challenging to grasp the big picture of China's lived religious traditions. Not only does Chinese belief freely combine elements from Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, but the ideas expressed in scriptures are often only tangentially related to the rituals and practices performed in homes and villages.

Scholars have advanced a number of theories and typologies to illustrate how these different levels coexist and interact to create a coherent whole that we may call Chinese religion. Half a century ago, C.K. Yang produced one of the most influential explanations of this difference when he divided Chinese religion into institutional and “diffused” varieties. The former consists of identifiable sects and teachings; the latter is the mix of practices and beliefs that exist outside of formal institutions.¹ Others have drawn the line at the presence of written texts, with scriptures being the hallmark of elite, institutional religion, from which the oral, performed religion of the masses derived.² Another division comes at the point of legality. The Chinese imperial state formalized a specific definition of proper (*zheng* 正) religious practices, texts and cults, with everything else categorized either as illicit (*yin* 淫), or heretical (*xie* 邪). Legal religion was thus largely a product of the state order, while those practices and texts classified as heretical became a haven and gathering point for anti-state activity, particularly when combined with apocalyptic predictions.³ Each of these definitions have merit, but they all share a common trait in that they focus on a knowable quality of religion as being institutional, textual or

1 C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese society* (Berkeley, 1967).

2 Marcel Granet, *The religion of the Chinese people* (New York, 1975).

3 On the legal regulation of religion, see the parallel volumes edited by Kwang-Ching Liu, *Orthodoxy in late imperial China* (Berkeley, 1990), and Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Hon-Chun Shek, *Heterodoxy in late imperial China* (Honolulu, 2004), as well as Zhao Yifeng, *Mingdai guojia zongjiao guanli zhidu yu zhengce yanjiu* (Beijing, 2007). On the teachings themselves, see Li Shiyu, *Xiandai Huabei mimi zongjiao* (1948; repr. Taipei, 1975); “Tianjin Zailijiao diaocha yanjiu,” *Minjian zongjiao* 2 (1996), 121–69; and “Tianjin Hongyangjiao diaocha yanjiu,” *Minjian zongjiao* 2 (1996), 169–210; Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion: dissenting sects in late traditional China* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), and Ma Xisha and Meng Huiying, *Popular religion and shamanism*, Chi Zhen and Thomas David DuBois, tr. (Boston, 2011).

legal, and then define by default everything else, often the religious experience of the great majority of the people, by the *absence* of that quality.

It is much more productive to think of Chinese lived religion not as popular or folk, but as *local* religion; it is the religion of a *place*. Chinese religion has three levels of geography: national, regional and local. Just as a common grammar and vocabulary connect regional dialects of the Chinese language, lived religion is based around an evolving core of beliefs and practices that are shared by Chinese communities everywhere. This core evolved out of a variety of sources: the sacerdotal traditions of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism (as well as historical teachings such as medieval Manichaeism), the historical influence of state promotion or suppression, and the integration of local beliefs and cults into a larger pantheon. This living religious culture gives rise to and is expressed in regional variation. Again like dialect, regional religious cultures are a function of communication: they are shaped by geography and the historical flows of population.

Unlike language, however, religion also has a third level of creative variation at the level of local community. In a way, this very local level of variation is also a function of communication. Scholars have explained Chinese rural society as a patchwork of interlinking *spheres*. These spheres are the size of a personal network—they connote how far one might travel to buy and sell goods, find brides for sons and otherwise engage in necessary social interactions beyond the village.⁴ Recent improvements in communication and transportation notwithstanding, the geography of everyday life for most Chinese peasants has historically been a very small, but also very intimate world of walkable villages and markets. Local society developed not only its own variations on general customs and traditions, but also an affective sense of community. Either alone or in conjunction with surrounding communities, villages create their own religious culture, formulating unique traditions, prayers, and rituals. Local ritual also has a role in expressing and demarcating the community itself. A community that gathers to perform a ritual is also expressing its boundaries and its internal hierarchies of membership and status. Religious life also reflects local pride, as individual communities vie with their neighbours to organize

4 Thomas David DuBois, *Sacred village: social change and religious life in rural north China* (Honolulu, 2005), pp. 24–29; Ishida Hiroshi, “Kyū Chugoku nōson ni okeru shijōken to tsūkon ken” 旧中國農村における市場圏と通婚圏, *Shirin* 63.5 (1979), 102–126; Lin Meirong, “You jisi quan dao xinyang quan: Taiwan minjian shehui de diyu goucheng yu fazhan,” in Zhang Yanxian, ed., *Zhongguo haiyang fazhan shi lunwen ji* (Taipei, 1988), 3.95–125; Nakamura Tetsuo, “Seimatsu kahoku ni okeru shijōken to shūkyō ken,” *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 40.3 (1974), 1–26.

the largest ritual, along with the best performances, and most lavish banquets. Like politics, ritual is always local.⁵

This chapter will briefly describe Chinese religious life in its most basic form, as well as the ways that this standard template is expressed in regional and local variation. It begins by using local sources to examine the calendar and performance of ritual activities, and the relationship between ritual and the structure of local, especially village, society. From there, it uses Japanese ethnographic sources from the 1930s to paint a picture of local religious life in Republican-era Hebei, and closes with an examination of the historical forces that have transformed local religion during the twentieth century.

Calendar and Liturgy

The basic structure of Chinese ritual evolved organically over millennia, taking in influences from ancient agrarian and ancestral traditions, the imperial state and canonical teachings. Chinese and Western scholars have traced this “big picture” of Chinese religious evolution, noting how major intellectual transformations such as the emergence of Daoism and Buddhism as imperial religions, the arrival of Manichean beliefs from Central Asia, and the community rituals promoted by the late imperial state, were all manifested in local religious life.⁶

Local sources known as gazetteers show that for the past few centuries, religious life throughout China has been built largely on the same basic calendar of ritual occasions. Regions or communities might vary this calendar by adding

5 Responding to an earlier debate about what holds Chinese religion together and what pulls it apart, anthropologist Maurice Freedman referred to a “substrate” that underlies all local expressions of Chinese religion. John Lagerwey compared variation to jazz riffs on a common melody. Maurice Freedman, “On the sociological study of Chinese religion,” in Emily Martin and Arthur P. Wolf, eds, *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (Stanford, 1974), p. 34; John Lagerwey, *China: a religious state* (Hong Kong, 2010).

6 On territorial cults see Lagerwey, *Religious state*, pp. 19–55. On Manichaeism see Ma Xisha “The syncretism of Maitreyan belief and Manichaeism in Chinese history,” in Ma and Meng, *Popular religion*, pp. 3–24. On medieval Buddhism and Daoism see Edward L. Davis, *Society and the supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu, 2001); Paul Katz, *Demon hordes and burning boats: the cult of Marshal Wen in late imperial Chekiang* (Albany, NY, 1995); and Stephen F. Teiser, *The ghost festival in medieval China* (Princeton, 1988). On Confucian family rituals see Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and family rituals in imperial China: a social history of writing about rites* (Princeton, 1991). On imperial community rituals see Joseph P. McDermott, “Emperor, elites, and commoners: the community pact ritual of the late Ming,” in Joseph P. McDermott, ed., *State and court ritual in China* (Cambridge, England, 1999), pp. 299–351.

their own rituals or through interpreting existing occasions according to local lore and with local customs, but the skeletal calendar of events is remarkably similar across the country and over time.

The following calendar, taken from a late 18th century guide to a county in northwestern Shanxi province is fairly typical:

TABLE 1 *Festivals in mid-Qing Ganzhou* 甘州⁷

| Date* | Festival or activity |
|-----------|---|
| 1st month | <i>Yuandan</i> : Spring festival (i.e., Chinese New Year) activities. Send greetings to family and neighbors, worship the multitude of spirits. Lanterns, entertainment (社火) and theater. |
| 3rd month | <i>Qingming</i> : Everyone worships at ancestral graves. Magistrate performs ritual for City God, followed by commoners. |
| 4/8 | Merchants organize entertainment and theater. |
| 5/5 | Homes decorated with willow branches. Families eat millet and wine. |
| 6/6 | Summer sacrifice. Families worship at ancestral graves |
| 7/15 | <i>Zhongyuan</i> , autumn sacrifice. Families worship at ancestral graves. |
| 8th month | Autumn festival. Families eat moon cakes and carve melons to look like the moon. |
| 9/1 | Families eat date cake, climb to a high place to recite poems |
| 10/1 | Sacrifice in family temples. Burn “winter clothes” for ancestors |
| 12/8 | Prepare <i>zhou</i> to entreat the spirits, scatter ice in fields to pray for smooth new year. |

* dates given in the form of lunar month/day

A similar calendar could be found almost anywhere in China. The most important occasions—*yuandan* 元旦, *qingming* 清明, *zhongyuan* 中元, and the Autumn Festival—would be celebrated everywhere in China, and in roughly

7 *Ganzhou fuzhi* 甘州府志, *juan* 16 (1779). Gazetteers are reproduced in Ding Shiliang, Zhao Fang, and Bai Yuxin, eds, *Zhongguo difangzhi minsu ziliao huibian* (Beijing, 1991).

the same manner. Some of the local festivals exhibited variations on common themes. For instance, the one held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month was most likely a variant of common rain rituals. We may also bear in mind the ritual activity that this source may be leaving out: some of the more peculiar local rituals may not have come to the compiler's notice or might have been considered too unseemly for inclusion.

Both in Ganzhou and elsewhere, most rituals would have followed a standard three-part format, consisting of welcoming, entertaining and seeing off the spirits. Welcoming the spirits (*ying shen* 迎神) generally consists of a procession, in which the god's presence, embodied in a tablet or physically manifested in a sedan chair, is brought to the site of the ritual. Entertaining the spirits (*gong shen* 貢神) consists of various elements such as individual or collective presentation of offerings, including offerings of spoken prayers or written memorials asking for help or protection. These offerings are followed by the performance of a peak ritual, often one that features a transformative moment, such as the expulsion of evil or making a passage into the underworld (often symbolized by crossing a bridge). Finally, the deities are entertained with scripture chanting, puppet shows or opera. Seeing off the spirits (*song shen* 送神) returns the deities (often including those from neighboring or allied communities) in procession to their own temples.⁸

As with the calendar, this basic three-part format is not so much a canon as a platform upon which local ritual is elaborated. Within this structure, there is wide scope for local variation. The entire ritual sequence may be as short as a single event or as long as a series of rituals spread over many days. Local rituals also vary slightly in substance, in the type of scriptures that are read, the music that is played, the order of the procession, or the nature of the sacrifices offered. Despite this diversity, almost all local ritual finally represents a variation on this basic three-part liturgy.⁹

The following extended ritual sequence from Julu 巨鹿 county in the Xingtai 邢台 region of southern Hebei provides an instructive example of local variation on the basic three-part liturgy:

8 Outlined in Daniel Overmyer, *Local religion in north China in the twentieth century: the structure and organization of community rituals and beliefs* (Leiden, 2009).

9 The *Minsu qiyi congshu* series, which has been published out of Taiwan since 1991, currently includes over eighty monograph-length ethnographic studies of local ritual life.

TABLE 2 *Ritual Sequence in Xingtai, Hebei*¹⁰

| | |
|---------|---|
| Evening | Inviting the gods and opening the scriptures 請神開經 |
| Day 1 | |
| am | Sealing the wind and fetching water 禁風取水 Inviting the earth and city gods 請土地城隍 |
| pm | Issuing the documents 發文 Hoisting the pennant and invoking the masters 揚帆啟師 |
| evening | Inviting the Five Ancients 請五老 Dividing the lanterns 分燈 Welcoming the phoenix [palanquin] 迎鑾 Setting up the ten quarters on a grand scale 大立十方 |
| Day 2 | |
| am | Inviting the great Yang 請太陽 Inviting the Heavenly Master 請天師 |
| pm | Inviting the Heavenly Master 請天師 |
| evening | Inviting the Heavenly Master 請天師 |
| Day 3 | |
| am | Wishing for longevity 祝壽 Worshipfully presenting the memorial 拜表 |
| pm | Dispatching the pardon 放赦 |
| evening | Greater chant of the imperial Jiao 御醮大韻 Dispensing food [ritual] 施食科 Great escorting away of the gods 大送神 |

This particular sequence shows both variation and that which remains constant. In this case, the invitation rituals are drawn out over two days. They begin with the ritual of “inviting the gods and opening the scriptures”, and culminate in the arrival of the deity in the “welcoming the phoenix” palanquin. The peak of the ritual sequence is reached on the third day, which consists of both supplication (the prayer for longevity, and the presentation of a written

10 From Jones, pp. 88–91, summarized from Yuan Jingfang, *Hebei Julu daojiao fashi yinyue* (Taipei, 1988).

memorial) and *jiao* 醮, a ritual of exorcistic origins. As is generally the case, the ritual sequence ends with a procession that escorts the gods home.

Distinguishing what makes the Xingtai ritual sequence unique points to one factor behind regional variation. In his study of local ritual across north China, Stephen Jones notes that within Hebei, Xingtai is exceptional for maintaining a connection to Quanzhen 全真 Daoism. Compared to other parts of the same province, Xingtai had more ordained Daoists with a greater knowledge of an extensive scriptural tradition; as of the mid-1990s, Daoists and laity maintained active contact with the Quanzhen White Cloud Temple (*Baiyunguan* 白雲觀) in Beijing. From this unique tie derives the preponderance of identifiably Daoist elements, such as the “walk of the Northern Dipper”, in the rituals.¹¹ It is also seen in the inclusion of an elaborated *jiao*, which is rare in Hebei, but common in the south and southeast. Thus, while the iteration of ritual in Julu is structurally similar to local ritual anywhere in China, the proximity to the particular ritual specialization of Quanzhen Daoism has added elements that distinguish it even from similar rituals performed in other parts of Hebei.

Performance

Rituals may be performed by invited professionals, local experts, or by members of the community. There are many types and grades of specialization, many of which overlap with each other. For example, the Daoist-influenced ritual traditions in Julu do not necessarily require the participation of formally ordained Daoist priests. Rather, the specialized scriptural and ritual knowledge has been absorbed by lay people and local specialists.¹² In a similar way, local communities absorb the particular expertise of other ritual specialists: Buddhist monks, the lay ritual masters known as *lisheng* 禮生, the diviners known as *yinyang* 陰陽 masters, and spirit mediums. The same holds true for other specialists such as musicians, members of theatrical or operatic troupes,

11 The Northern Dipper rituals are described in two valuable studies: John Lagerwey, *Taoist ritual in Chinese society and history* (New York, 1987), pp. 74–75; Donald S. Sutton, *Steps of perfection: exorcistic performers and Chinese religion in twentieth-century Taiwan* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 127, 168, 173.

12 Jones, *In Search*, pp. 88–91; Lagerwey, *Taoist ritual*, pp. 74–75; Sutton, *Steps of perfection*, pp. 127, 168, 173.

and professional mourners who do not perform ritual as such, but are influential giving shape to local ritual life.¹³

Within this panoramic picture of Chinese ritual, certain features and tendencies distinguish regional variations on common themes. For example, northern Shanxi province is known for a type of extended ritual called *sai* 賽. These rituals are performed on the same kinds of occasions at which most village ritual is carried out throughout China, particularly at the spring festival. What distinguishes *sai* is their scale. While most rituals are organized by a single village, *sai* are arranged by clusters of villages, who pool resources to fund days of ritual, theatre and feasting. A relic of a much older type of temple organization, *sai* and their rituals and operas provide a glimpse of a living tradition that has otherwise disappeared. The large scale, and elaborate organization of these events have made it possible for communities to preserve highly specialized ritual expertise and traditions that would otherwise have been lost. But the rituals are more than living museums. As generations of *lisheng* masters passed on texts and practices, they developed a tradition of ritual and theatrical performance that was unique to the area.¹⁴

Jiao are large, communal rituals that feature prominently in local religious life in south and southeast China, and occasionally in various pockets elsewhere. *Jiao* resemble *sai* in many ways: both are large, elaborate rituals often organized by networks of villages, and requiring the expertise of specialized professionals who are brought in from the outside. Unlike *sai*, however, *jiao* derive from Daoist offerings, to which have been added elements of state religion and local spirit medium cults. Even if they are not performed exclusively

13 On *lisheng* see Liu Yonghua, "The world of rituals masters of ceremonies (*lisheng*), ancestral cults, community compacts, and local temples in late imperial Sibao, Fujian" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2005); on Mulian operas see David Johnson and Beata Grant, eds, *Ritual opera, operatic ritual: "Mu-lien rescues his mother" in Chinese popular culture* (Berkeley, 1989); Guo Qitao, *Ritual opera and mercantile lineage: the Confucian transformation of popular culture in late imperial Huizhou* (Stanford, 2005). In addition, there are a number of outstanding studies by ethnomusicologists Stephen Jones, *Ritual and music of north China*, 2 vols (Farnham, England, 2007, 2009), *In search of the folk Daoists*, and Beth Szczepanski, *The instrumental music of Wutaishan's Buddhist monasteries: social and ritual contexts* (Surrey, 2012).

14 Huang Zhusan and Wang Fucui, "Shanxi sheng, quwo xian, renzhuang cun 'shangu shenpu' diaocha baogao," *Minsu quyì congshu* (1994); David G. Johnson, "Temple festivals in southeastern Shanxi: the *Sai* of Nan-she village and Big West Gate," *Minsu quyì* 91 (1994), 641–734; David Johnson, *Spectacle and sacrifice: the ritual foundations of village life in north China* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), p. 315, lists many of the major ethnographic studies of *sai* and *nuo* theatre.

by Daoist priests, *jiao* often retain elements such as possession, and ritual travel to the underworld that reveal strong links to Daoism and an earlier mediumistic tradition.¹⁵

Yet despite the addition of an unusual level of expertise and complexity, both *sai* and *jiao* are still variations on the same themes seen elsewhere. Neither has a single, set liturgy, and even the names themselves are not fixed. For example, the term *jiao* is used throughout China often to refer to very different events and practices. The 1924 gazetteer of Luchuan 陸川 county in Guangxi, for example, describes *jiao* essentially as village festivals: “Each winter, people everywhere donate money to hold a *jiao* for peace and protection (*ping’an jiao* 平安醮). When people or their animals get sick, they often invite a *wu* 巫 (shaman) or Daoist to come and hold a *jiao*, in order to expiate evil and bring good fortune.”¹⁶ In contrast, the 1937 gazetteer of Laibin 來賓 county, also in Guangxi, describes a much more complex nine-day event, involving a variety of specialized ritual masters, as well as knife rituals, and blood sacrifice.¹⁷

Ritual and Community

Ritual is a social activity. The content of ritual expresses the needs, desires and fears of a society as a whole, and of component groups such as villages and families. The planning, performance and funding of ritual also provide an occasion to remind the community of its structure and values, who belongs and who does not, who is important and who is marginal.

The two most fundamental ritual communities are those based on family and territory (i.e. village or neighborhood), with a variety of associational communities in between. What these various types of ritual community, rural and urban, geographic and voluntary, all share is some sense of belonging and mutual welfare, and a sense of community (or at least commonality). Local ritual expresses community in two ways: first, through what the rituals ask for and, second, in how they are performed. The boundaries of communities freely overlap, and what happens in one affects the others. In this sense, all local ritual is in some way communal ritual.

Otherwise similar communities might differ quite substantially in their religious lives, often for practical reasons. For instance, neighbouring villages might agree to vary the dates of their festivals in order to avoid competition

15 Davis, *Society and the supernatural*; Lagerwey, *Taoist ritual*.

16 *Luchuan xianzhi* (1924).

17 *Laibin xianzhi* (1937).

over musicians and ritual specialists, and so that both communities can come and see each other's activities. Smaller villages might learn to cooperate simply out of necessity. But an equally important reason is that ritual variation is a way of establishing identity. When families and villages perform unique activities, these activities become uniquely meaningful.

Traditionally, the four rituals (*si li* 四禮) of capping, weddings, funerals, and ancestor reverence (*guan, hun, sang, ji* 冠婚葬祭) were the family's core ritual occasions. The first three are fundamental rites of passage for individuals, but also moments of importance for the family as a whole. The fourth ritual aims to secure the postmortem welfare of deceased ancestors, but is even more closely associated with the welfare of the living clan. While the capping ceremony was practiced only by the sons of the literati elite, the marriage, funerary, and ancestor reverence rituals were vital to families of all stations, and retain their significance in rural society today.

The public ritual life of the family is inseparable from that of the community. Occasions that require a formal ceremony, funerals in particular, provide an opportunity for other villagers to seek blessings, make offerings, and repay vows. The scale and ostentation of celebratory rituals or "red occasions" (*hong shi* 紅事) such as weddings reflect the wealth of the families involved; people will often contract as large a banquet and the best entertainment (both for deities and for the assembled guests) as can be afforded. By contrast, the two occasions involving death known as "white occasions" (*bai shi* 白事) have both moral and ritual significance. Whereas wedding ceremonies are a statement of a family's wealth and status, death and post-mortem ritual reflect additionally on its commitment to norms of filial piety. The social pressure exerted on such occasions was historically so intense that families would bankrupt themselves to pay for the most lavish funeral ceremonies. Funerary ritual, moreover, continues long after the body is buried. Families mourn their ancestors at different points in the year, such as the "grave sweeping" day of *qingming* and the autumn sacrifices held on *zhongyuan*. Like funerals, this extended regimen of postmortem ritual is both a family affair and concern of the larger community, not merely in terms of a family's reputation, but also as protection against the intrusion of vengeful ghosts. Even the most drastic changes, such as the destruction of graves to free up agricultural land, and enforcement of regulations requiring cremation over burial, have failed to weaken the significance of these rituals in rural society.

Apart from the family, the village forms the most fundamental community. Like families, villages come in many different forms and types, are shaped by their environment and change over time. Even within the same region, villages can vary greatly in size, composition, internal diversity, and rate of inward

and outward migration. Two neighboring villages—one small and intimate, another large, bustling and fluid—would have very different ritual needs and organizational patterns.¹⁸

Village ritual ranges in purpose from the broad to the highly specific, and combines the needs of the community as a whole with those of its individual members. The large, regularly performed rituals, such as the *yuanyuan* 元宵 offerings performed on the 15th day of the first lunar month, are occasions for the entire community to express gratitude for the peace and blessings of the previous year, and to ask for continued protection for the year to come. But these rituals also serve a second purpose: while the ritual itself is performed in the name of the community, individuals can also take advantage of the occasion to seek benefits for themselves and their families, or to consult with assembled specialists, such as spirit healers or divination experts. This dual function is evident in the manner through which village ritual deals with death. The *zhongyuan* ritual, held on 15th day of the seventh lunar month, marks the midpoint of the year, and the transition of the calendar from *yang* to *yin*. This transition is also the beginning of what is commonly known as the Ghost Month, a time in which spirits return from the underworld. Ghost month rituals address all aspects of death: they welcome friendly spirits, pray for abandoned souls, and establish a defence against harmful ghosts. *Zhongyuan* is more than a symbolic exercise. Since vengeful spirits bring sickness and misfortune, they represent a tangible danger to all. While families privately welcome home their own deceased ancestors, the community also gathers to appease and protect against other, less welcome spirits.¹⁹

Beside the ritual life of family and village, ritual also featured prominently in the wide variety of voluntary associations, particularly before 1949.²⁰ Occupational ritual made its way into the daily work of all manner of

18 Willem A. Grootaers, "Temples and history of Wan-ch'üan (Chahar): the geographical method applied to folklore," *Monumenta Serica*, XIII (1948), pp. 209–316; "Rural temples around Hsuan-hua (South Chahar): their iconography and their history," *Folklore Studies* 10.1 (1951), 1–115; and Grootaers, Li Shiyu and Wang Fushi, *The sanctuaries in a north Chinese city: a complete survey of the cultic buildings in the city of Hsüan-hua (Chahar)* (Brussels, 1995). Also DuBois, *Sacred village*, pp. 15–24.

19 David K. Jordan, *Gods, ghosts, and ancestors: folk religion in a Taiwanese village*, 3rd ed. (San Diego, 1999).

20 The Party-led associational life after 1949 also had its own rituals, but obviously not of the sort discussed here. The recreation of associational life since the 1990s is beyond the scope of this chapter.

skilled specialists, from criminals to carpenters.²¹ Such rituals were secrets of the trade. The *Classic of Lu Ban* (Luban jing 魯班經), named after the semi-legendary master carpenter, shows the prominence of ritual in every aspect of the carpenter's craft, including the ritual acts that accompanied selecting a building site, or calculating auspicious days for construction. Ritual gave shape to the guilds that formed around every conceivable occupation: merchants, sailors, carpenters, nightsoil carriers, rickshaw pullers, and prostitutes. Guilds were based around a pseudo-familial hierarchy, and guild ritual mirrored that of the family, even to the point that a guild expressed its internal hierarchy in rituals of reverence to their craft's divine patron.²²

Other voluntary associations were strictly devotional. Either as individuals or in groups, members of devotional societies expressed special gratitude to a particular deity by traveling to worship at his festivals, shrines or holy places. Over millennia, China's five holy mountains (泰山 Taishan, 華山 Huashan, 衡山 Hengshan, 恆山 Hengshan, 嵩山 Songshan) became sites of imperial and popular pilgrimage, and in the process accumulated a thick lore of stories and cultural significance. Mount Tai, preeminent among the five, was originally seen as the home of the Great Emperor of the Eastern Marchmount (Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝) and his celestial subordinate Yanluo 閻羅, the guardian of the underworld. Yet over time, the mountain became more closely associated with Yanluo's daughter, Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君, who herself underwent a transformation from mischievous young girl into the matronly figure known popularly as Grandmother Taishan (Taishan niangniang 泰山娘娘).²³ Like all of the matron deities (with whom she is often conflated), Grandmother Taishan cares particularly for the problems of women, and is most commonly approached by women who wish to or are preparing to bear children. Hence her nickname is "child-giving matron" (*song zi niangniang* 送子娘娘). For this

21 David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and secret societies in early and mid-Qing China: the formation of a tradition* (Stanford 1996); Wang Ermin, "Mimi zongjiao yu mimi shehui zhi shengtai huanjing ji shehui gongneng," in *Zhongguo yanjiuyuan jindai shi jikan* 10 (1981), 33–59. By virtue of their access to the forces that affected *fengshui* in homes, builders easily fell under suspicion of being possessors of evil magic. Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers: the Chinese sorcery scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

22 Klaas Ruitenbeek and Lu Ban, *Carpentry and building in late imperial China: a study of the fifteenth-century carpenter's manual, Lu Ban jing* (Leiden, 1996); John Stewart Burgess, *The guilds of Peking* (New York, 1928); William T. Rowe, *Hankow: commerce and society in a Chinese city, 1796–1889* (Stanford, 1984).

23 Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, gender, and pluralism in the cult of the goddess of Taishan," in Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, eds, *Culture and state in Chinese history: conventions, accommodations, and critiques* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 182–204.

reason, not to mention the sheer enjoyment of making the trip and enjoying the scenery, pilgrims have been coming to Taishan on their own and in groups since at least the Tang dynasty, as well as to other holy mountains, temple complexes and other sacred sites across China. Villages, as well as voluntary and devotional societies often raised funds and served as a support network for their members to go on these journeys.²⁴

Among the most important forms of religious associations are those in the tradition of lay teachings that official historical sources label “White Lotus” (Bailian jiao 白蓮教). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, dozens of these teachings sprouted up across China, each with its own scriptures, networks and clergy.²⁵ Despite this diversity, teachings in this tradition all shared an evolving core of beliefs that integrated Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, along with an eschatological tradition that had at least the potential to lead to millenarian violence. Primarily because of this capacity to militarize, such lay teachings movements were vilified by the imperial state, tarred with the same stock charges of heresy and illicit behavior.²⁶ Reflecting a long-standing concern with unauthorized religious organization and spurred on by his personal experience with religious militarism during his rise to power, the first Ming emperor enacted a law against these groups, ordering death or exile for any “teachers and shamans who call down heterodox gods, write charms, chant incantations over water, perform spirit writing and pray to

24 Ye Tao, *Taishan xiangshe yanjiu* (Shanghai, 2009); Brian Dott, *Identity reflections: pilgrimages to Mount Tai in late imperial China* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds, *Pilgrims and sacred sites in China* (Berkeley, 1992).

25 Classic studies of the so-called White Lotus include Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi* (Beijing, 1992), and Hubert Seiwert, “Popular religious sects in south-east China: sect connections and the problem of the Luo Jiao/Bailian Jiao Dichotomy,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 20 (1992), 33–60. See also note 3.

26 Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus teaching in Chinese religious history* (Leiden, 1992), has forcefully argued that even the name White Lotus teaching was a pejorative used by the state. It was certainly an inaccurate one, since no teaching with that particular name ever existed. On the tendency to violence, see Shao Yong, *Zhongguo huidaomen* (Shanghai, 1997); Susan Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China: the Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813* (New Haven, 1976) and *Shantung rebellion: the Wang Lun uprising of 1774* (New Haven, 1981); Richard Shek, “The revolt of the Zaili, Jindan sects in Rehe Jehol, 1891,” *Modern China* 6.2 (1980), 161–96, and “Millenarianism without rebellion: the Huangtiandao in north China,” *Modern China* 8.3 (1982), 305–36; and Suzuki Chūsei, “Shinchō Chūki ni okeru minan shūkyō kassha to sono sennen ōkoku undo e no keisha” 清朝中期に於ける民間宗教結社とその千年王国運動への傾斜, in Suzuki Chūsei, ed., *Sennen ōkoku teki minshu undō no kenkyū: Chūgoku, Tōnan Ajia ni okeru 千年王国的民衆運動の研究: 中国・東南アジアにおける* (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 151–350.

sages... or call themselves the White Lotus Society of Maitreya... or learn heretical techniques, or hide pictures of heterodox gods or gather in groups at night to burn incense."²⁷ Nevertheless, such groups did thrive throughout China, both because of the inability of the imperial state to police local religion in the countryside, and because in many areas these groups represented a far more potent and meaningful form of organized religion than Buddhism or Daoism.²⁸

Communal Values and Social Structure

The basic dynamic of both individual and communal religious life centers on requesting and repaying acts of divine favour. On an individual scale, people ask the spirits to protect their families, for safety for an upcoming journey, or success in business or on examinations. The most common requests have been for health and healing. Anthropologists who collected 500 prayer slips from a Canton temple in 1924 found that all but 16 contained a prayer to heal the writer or a relative.²⁹ In return, the supplicant promises to make a donation to a temple or ritual, chant a certain number of prayers or scriptures, or to perform some visible act of piety, such as going on a pilgrimage. Requests are often presented in a written text. This act may be as simple as writing down the wish on a piece of paper, which is sent to the deity by burning it. More formal methods involve a set text, which is composed in formal language, and printed on yellow paper to resemble an imperial petition. In the style of administrative documents, a space is left in the document for the text of the wish, and the name and address of the petitioner.³⁰

Although the earthly nature of the requests made to deities, and the contingent nature of repayment, may give the impression that Chinese religion is a simple exchange of services between human and divine realms, the content of vows is also a clear public expression of morality. One cannot ask ordinary

27 *Daqing huidian*. Translation from Joseph Esherick, *The origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 42. On Ming religious policy more generally, see Zhao Yifeng, *Mingdai guojia zongjiao guanli*.

28 DuBois, *Sacred village*, pp. 152–185; Li Shiyu, *Xiandai Huabei*; Pu Wenqi, "Tiandimen diaocha yu yanjiu," *Minjian Zongjiao* 2.12 (1996), 211–59.

29 Clarence Burton Day, *Chinese peasant cults: being a study of Chinese paper gods* (Shanghai 1940), p. 13.

30 Kristofer M. Schipper, "The written memorial in Taoist ceremonies," in Emily Martin and Arthur Wolf, eds, *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (Stanford, 1974).

spirits (evil spirits being another matter) to perform an act that is wicked or unjust, such as inflicting harm on an innocent party. Like individual vows, collective requests express the orthodox needs and values of the community for protection, good weather and bountiful harvests. As with the household, the most important vow is the one made implicitly in the first lunar month when the community meets to thank Heaven and Earth for the blessings of the previous year, and to pray for continued protection in the coming one. Like individuals, communities also gather to make vows collectively during times of special need. In the countryside, the most important reason for doing so are crises related to agriculture, particularly the prayer for rain (*qiuyu* 求雨), which is still performed regularly each spring across the drier areas of northern China.

Ritual both represents community and continuously reconstitutes it. The task of planning, funding and executing ritual activities draws people and groups together in a common project, and binds them with a sense of collective welfare. The banqueting and drinking that usually follow are an opportunity to renew friendships. And the enterprises of inter-village ritual networks are a way of cementing other sorts of cooperation between communities. During the 1930s, Japanese scholars showed how villages which shared an irrigation system also created a network of shared rituals to the dragon king (*longwang* 龍王). The custom of sending the deity on procession through each of the villages reflected and enhanced the ties that bound them. John Brim observed something similar in the New Territories of Hong Kong where ritual alliances were organized around such common concerns as irrigation networks, crop watching, or defence against pirates or bandits.³¹ Practical alliances were solidified through the building of a temple in open country and the holding of an annual “tour of inspection” in which the image of the god would be carried in a lavish procession to each of the constituent villages. For Brim, the significance of these processions is that they maintained alliances during periods *between* crises when there was no immediate need for joint organization. By far the most extensive research on this phenomenon has been Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman’s massive fieldwork project to chart the dense network of ritual alliances that link villages in the Putian plain of Fujian. As with the Dragon King processions in the north, many of these alliances are based on active agricultural cooperation, while others are artefacts of formerly significant

31 Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, power and the state: rural north China, 1900–1942* (Stanford, 1988), pp. 31–35.

collaborations, such as self-defence networks, that have long since fallen into disuse. In these cases, the alliances remain simply by virtue of custom.³²

The most intimate link between ritual and social identity is that within individual communities. Anthropologists working in Taiwan during the 1970s demonstrated how neighbourhood shrines were markers of community, an idea that Stephen Sangren later illustrated in the case of living rituals.³³ As a point of pride, villages would identify themselves with their own unique ritual performance, and compete to present the best theater, longest procession, flashiest performance, loudest fireworks, and most elaborate banquets. Among many others, Adam Chau and Stephen Jones have each dealt extensively with these aspects of local religious life, notably the showmanship, spectacle and effervescent euphoria of what Chau calls “red-hot sociality.”³⁴

Ritual also presents a clear visual embodiment of the community itself. The procession that welcomes and sees off the deities might physically trace the boundaries of the community, marking out its composition by, for instance, visiting certain houses and passing by others. The order of the procession is itself a clear representation of status, although the relevant criteria may vary. Community leaders need not perform the actual ritual, a task better left to specialists. Instead, they might carry the palanquin, walk at the head of the procession, or stand at the front as sacrifices and prayers are offered in the community’s name. But these are not rigid rules, nor must ritual necessarily stratify the community in order to represent something essential about it. For example, part of a multi-village procession I witnessed in the Guangdong region of Leizhou 雷州 included a group of sign bearers with the characters Qi, Chu, Yan, Wei, Han, Zhao 齊楚燕魏韓趙, corresponding not to surnames in the village, but rather to six of China’s ancient kingdoms. By marching in procession with the signs together, they were metaphorically expressing the message that individual parts together comprise a stronger whole. The place of prominence went to a group of men wearing decorous black robes and straw hats who walked near the head of the procession and were the first to bow

32 John A. Brim, “Village alliance temples in Hong Kong,” in Martin and Wolf, eds, *Religion and ritual*, pp. 93–104; Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual alliances of the Putian plain* (Leiden, 2010).

33 Donald DeGlopper, “Religion and ritual in Lukang,” in Martin and Wolf, eds, *Religion and ritual*, pp. 43–69; Stephen Sangren, *History and magical power in a Chinese community* (Stanford, 1989); Wang Mingming, “Place, administration and territorial cults in late imperial China: a case study from south Fujian,” *Late Imperial China* 16 (1995), 33–79.

34 Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous response: doing popular religion in contemporary China* (Stanford, 2006).

and offer incense in reverence to the deity. These men were neither the elite of the village nor representatives of its families or neighbourhoods; they were simply the oldest men, some of whom were actually on the poorer edge of the community. In this case, what was being represented was not status as much as a communal expression of respect for old age.³⁵

An equally important expression of hierarchy comes not from the performance of ritual, but in the financial and social considerations that surround it. The most obvious display of stratification within the village comes in the financing of common welfare projects, of which ritual is one of the most important. Donations for a major construction project, such as the repair of a bridge or temple, are often recorded on a stone stele that sometimes lists names and amounts in detail. In the same way, the costs of a ritual fall to village households to cover, with the different amount contributed by each becoming a matter of public record. Financial contribution is a vital expression of village solidarity. In close-knit communities (and not all are), contributions to village ritual carry such significance that the record might be altered, even to the point of adding shadow donations in the name of the poorest families to spare them the shame of being left off the list.³⁶ The largest donors receive not only prestige, but also in some cases, the right to a place of prominence either at the ritual itself or in the drinking and feasting that inevitably follow.

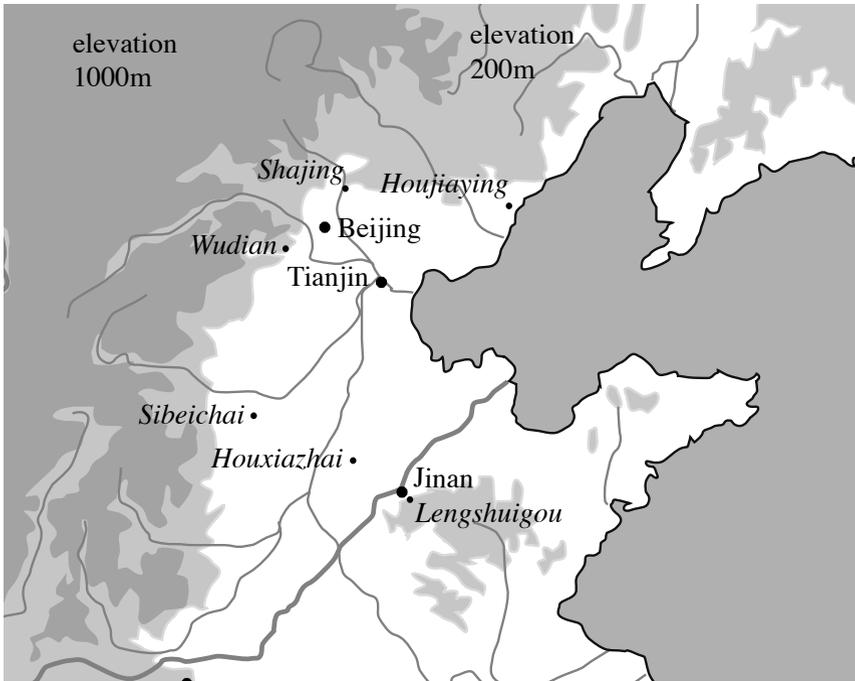
Ritual and Community: Views from Republican North China

During the 1930s and early 1940s, teams of Japanese ethnographers fanned out across north China to conduct surveys of rural life. The most detailed of these is the *Chūgoku nōson kankō chōsa* 中國農村行慣調查, a massive record of life in six villages in different parts of Shandong and Hebei. The largest village was Lengshuigou 冷水沟, a 370 household suburb of Ji'nan. The smallest was the poor mountain village of Wudian 吳店 with one-sixth the population and little arable land. Each of the villages had a vibrant religious life. More than any other source, these surveys reveal the intimate connection between the structure of ritual and local community during the Republican period.³⁷

35 Fieldwork in Leizhou, Guangdong, May 2010.

36 DuBois, *Sacred village*, pp. 39–63.

37 *Chūgoku nōson kankō chōsa* 中國農村行慣調查 (Tokyo, 1981), hereafter cited as CN, volume, page. This source has been used by numerous scholars of village society, including Cong Hanxiang, *Jindai ji lu yu xiangcun* (Beijing, 1993), Ishida, “Kaihōzen no kahoku,” and Duara, *Culture, power*.



MAP 1 Location of survey villages.

Prayer for Rain

The prayer for rain (*qiuyu*) was one of the most common collective vows, and demonstrates the complex relationship between community and ritual practice. Although most common in the drier North, this ritual is still practiced throughout China, although not always in the same way. A 1933 gazetteer describes the ritual of Tongzheng 同正 county (now part of Fusui 扶绥), Guangxi:

In Bozhi Village of Lüda Mountain, there is a big tree that is the residence of the God of Thunder (Leishen 雷神). When there is drought, the head of the village temple donates money to prepare the seven sacrifices, and hire a *wu* [shaman] to perform a Prayer for Rain. Anyone whose body (four limbs and five sense organs) is not whole, is pregnant or widowed must remain at a distance of one hundred paces. The meat from the sacrifices is divided into three parts, two of which are given to the temple's head. The third part they wrap in lotus leaves and throw into the wild while

banging gongs. The old folks say this custom dates back to the time the village was founded.³⁸

Certain elements of this ritual, such as the custom of giving a portion of the sacrificed meat to forest spirits, are unique to Guangxi. Other aspects, such as the responsibility of all villagers to maintain purity during the ritual and a customary method for dividing up the expenses, are fairly universal. Like the ritual calendar, the well-known format of the prayer for rain is not a set script, but a base for individuation.

The Japanese surveys of north China show how individual villages each developed their own customs for when and how to perform this ritual. Each of the six villages held the ceremony often if not necessarily regularly. Most performed it in the fifth or sixth lunar month, some on the same date each year, and some only when drought made it necessary. In these villages, the decision to perform the ceremony had to be approved by the entire community.

In each of the six villages, the ceremony commenced with a procession, in which the statue of the local god, usually the Dragon King, was ceremonially taken from the temple and carried, on a palanquin or sedan chair, around the village. In one village, the Dragon King was carried first to the center of the village and then to each of two temples. In two others, it was taken to each house in the village so that the inhabitants could offer incense. Having passed through the village, the procession then would go off to fetch water, often from some outside source, such as a river or well in a nearby community. One procession walked 12 *li* to a deep spot in a nearby river, another to the well at a temple 20 *li* away. Lengshuigou assembled an elaborate procession to a nearby natural spring, and brought back both water and a crucian carp (鯽魚, *jiyu*)—a pun on the phrase “bring home a heavy rain”. Other common elements included walking barefoot as an expression of humility, and the symbolic use of willow branches. In two villages, participants wove willow branches into hats in order to inform the spirits of their intentions (as well as to keep the sun off their heads!). In another, villagers stuck willow branches in the jug of water that they brought back from the river. One procession was led by a large circle of woven willow branches; the villagers would hold up these branches when the procession stopped at their door.

The procession was an evident expression of where the lines of community were drawn. One procession selectively bypassed the homes of the very

38 *Tongzheng xianzhi*, 1933.

poor or those “who had no concern with the prayer”, possibly a reference to the village landless. Generally, the privilege of walking in the procession was reserved for villagers, with the exception of one village too small to perform the ceremony with its members alone and another which allowed leaders from a neighbouring village to join. One village required at least one male from each household to be represented in the procession. Even in the cases of villages in which participation was voluntary, five of the six still restricted participation to men so that the women of the household could wait at home to offer incense as the palanquin passed.

The actual prayer for rain followed. Each of the villages maintained a state of purity by abstaining from *hun* 葷 or impure foods, particularly meat, onions, chives and garlic, and often from bathing or engaging in sexual intercourse as well. The ceremony itself also varied widely. Some villages had no organized ritual, and simply left the temple open for three days, allowing villagers to come burn incense and *ketou* as they pleased. Other communities conducted elaborate and physically taxing ceremonies. Villagers in one village followed their procession with an all-night vigil at the temple. In another, villagers kneeled and sat in the temple of the Jade Emperor (Yühuang 玉皇) for each of the three evenings while the three former Daoists who lived in the village burned incense and chanted the Northern Dipper (Beidou 北斗) and Three Officers (Sanguan 三官) sutras. Most villages included a written supplication for rain to the dragon king, sometimes with clearly delineated terms of when rain was required and what would be offered in return, and sometimes with a general statement that the village was suffering and needed rain.

If rain did indeed fall, villages responded with a ceremony of thanks (*xieshen* 谢神) with costly sacrifices or a temple play as an expression of gratitude.³⁹ Of the six villages, Lengshuigou held the most elaborate *xieshen*. In addition to the customary sacrifices and temple play, Lengshuigou reassembled the procession that had just a few days earlier gone to fetch water at the spring. In the course of three successive one-day journeys, this procession would travel over 60 *li* and pass through 31 neighbouring villages, from which it collected money and sacrifices on behalf of the Jade Emperor. Each of the villages anticipated the *xieshen* procession and welcomed it by burning paper money and offering sacrifices of fish, pork and chicken.⁴⁰

39 A temple play represented a significant expense, around 1,000 *yuan* for a four-day performance.

40 For descriptions of this ceremony in the Japanese materials, see CN I: 104, 220; III: 65, 153; IV: 31, 38, 356, 433, 436; V: 28, 411, 440.

Religious Life in Republican Shajing Village

Of the six villages surveyed, the most detailed account of local religious life comes from Shajing 沙井. Located near the present site of the Beijing Airport, Shajing of the 1940s was a relatively small community of 72 households, yet maintained an elaborate set of ritual traditions.⁴¹ Villagers recounted no fewer than 29 regular ritual activities over the course of the year in addition to the normal custom of burning incense in village temples on the first and 15th of every lunar month. These regular functions are listed according to lunar calendar date in the table below:

TABLE 3 *Annual festivals of Shajing village*⁴²

| Date | Festival or activity | Location and participants |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1/1 | New Year/ <i>yuandan</i> | Family sends formal greetings to family and friends. Sacrifice to all gods and ancestors |
| 1/10 to 1/15 | (F) Worship at Wudao temple | Village temple festival |
| 1/2 | Worship Caishen | Family, burn incense and sacrifice in temple or home |
| 1/8 | Worship stars | Family |
| 1/15 | Shangyuan | Family, coincides with Wudao temple festival |
| 1/16 | Worship Caishen | Family, burn incense and sacrifice in temple or home |
| 1/20 | Worship Huashen | Families engaged in cotton cultivation burn incense and sacrifice in temple or home |
| 1/25 | Worship Liangceng | Family |
| 2/1 | Sacrifice to Sun | |
| 2/2 | "Dragon sticks head out" | |
| 2/19 | (F) Worship Guanyin | Village temple festival, families, especially those with a particular disaster, sacrifice and burn incense. |
| 3rd month | Qingming | Family, common descent group repair graves of ancestors |

⁴¹ CN I: 90, 98.

⁴² Source: CN I: 130, 143, 152, 210–11, 235, 260–62, 265–67.

TABLE 3 *Annual festivals of Shajing village (cont.)*

| Date | Festival or activity | Location and participants |
|-------|--|---|
| 4/8 | (F) Worship Buddha, Puxian and Wenzhu | Village temple festival for three deities. Families sacrifice to Buddha. |
| 5/5 | Duanyang ⁴³ | Family |
| 5/13 | “Single Blade festival” (Dandao hui) | |
| 6/6 | 6/6 feast | |
| 6/24 | (F) Worship Guandi | Village temple festival, families sacrifice and burn incense to all gods in both temples |
| 6/25 | Worship Longwang | In Guanyin temple. If weather is dry, village holds prayer for rain |
| 7/7 | Seventh Night | |
| 7/15 | Hungry Ghost festival | |
| 7/30 | (F) Worship Dizang Pusa | Village temple festival, families, especially those with particular hardship, sacrifice and burn incense. |
| 8/1 | Eat “call the wind cake” (<i>lai feng gao</i>) | Family, to pray for good winds |
| 8/15 | Moon festival | Family, in home |
| 9/17 | Worship Caishen | Family, burn incense and sacrifice in temple or home |
| 10/1 | Cold clothes festival | Family delivers winter clothes to graves of ancestors |
| 12/8 | 12/8 Day | Family, eat <i>laba</i> soup |
| 12/23 | Worship stove god | Family, at home |

(F) Indicates a function of the Five Festivals Society

Some of the most prominent religious activities of Shajing village also highlighted divisions within it. In particular, participation in the activities of the Five Festivals Society (Banwuhui 辦五會, literally the “Five Society”) was a very public mark of elite status in the village. The Five Festivals Society assembled five times each year, once on each of the major village festivals, for a small ceremony and a vegetarian banquet. Membership in the Five Festivals

43 The story of this festival as understood by Shajing villagers is presented in CN 1: 265.

Society and the right to participate in its ritual activities were restricted to Shajing villagers. Members of other villages, as well as resident outsiders such as the village schoolteacher, were never invited to attend, because these activities had “nothing to do with them”. Villagers who had moved away were also excluded. However, although the activities of the Five Festivals Society were ostensibly open to all families in Shajing, only 30 of the 72 households in the village actually participated. For many, the entrance fee of at least 35 *yuan* was prohibitively high. However, many who could afford to participate did not do so simply because they had neither spare time nor interest.

The Five Festivals Society maintained a distinct hierarchy of membership. During the feast, members either sat at one of two tables or else ate standing. Although there was supposedly no stipulated seating pattern, respondents knew clearly which members of the community would sit and where. Similarly, while some households were charged 35 *yuan*, others were charged 70 *yuan*. It was known which villagers would pay more, presumably on the basis of wealth, and these received a different sort of invitation from the temple custodian. This distinction was certainly common knowledge throughout the village. Finally, three members were chosen to perform the simple incense burning ritual on behalf of the society. These three rotated each year from seventeen families of the Virtuous Society (*shan hui* 善會) list, a smaller group within the ranks of the Five Festivals Society.⁴⁴

The Five Festivals Society performed its exclusive functions on days of significance to the village and in its public space, but this is not tantamount to saying that the rituals of Shajing misrepresented the community as consisting of only its most wealthy members. It is true that certain of the informants did occasionally paint the festivals of the society as communal functions, stating that “all villagers” participated. However, these were not the only rituals practiced in Shajing, and others, such as the prayer for rain, presented a very different view of the community. The prayer for rain was performed frequently, almost every year, and involved groups of villagers in various capacities. Like the decision to raise funds for temple repair, the decision to hold this ritual was made by the village head and a council of village elites (*huishou* 會首). And, the day that the prayer was to commence was chosen by a “Daoist” (*dao shi* 道士), who in this case was not the temple custodian (*lao dao* 老道), but most likely a professional specialist.

The Shajing surveys focus primarily on the religious activities of the community rather than the private life of the family; still, it is clear that the great majority of the festivals were not functions of the community as a whole, but rather of individual families worshipping in the same public space. The ritual

44 CN I: 130–31, 135–36, 145, 173.

life of the household, while naturally concerned with the welfare of the family, was nevertheless inseparable from the religious identity of the village. Shajing peasants took their private concerns to the collection of gods in the village temples. These gods represented the full range of particularistic concerns extending from wealth to childbirth to protection from insect infestation.⁴⁵ Similarly, they enjoyed the general protection offered by village rituals, as well as the specific benefits of rituals such as the prayer for rain. Even in this quintessential community ritual, the role of the family as the primary beneficiary is evident in the custom of stopping the procession in front of each house so that residents could burn incense before the dragon king statue.

The Transformation of Local Ritual over the 20th Century

This section will briefly introduce the effect that some of the major political and social changes of the past hundred and fifty years have exerted on local religious life. The most evident sort of change is political. Over three successive regimes, the Chinese state in its different guises has exerted ever greater pressure on local religion, particularly in terms of its ability to suppress particular practices and organizations. An even greater change has derived from the transformation of rural society itself. Having suffered through a sad litany of war, natural and manmade disaster, and disastrously overzealous state planning, the Chinese countryside emerged in the 1980s a very different place than it had been a century earlier. The complete restructuring of rural society, transportation, education, commerce and demography has exerted a more profound influence on local religious life than any government campaign.

The Qing dynasty inherited its policy towards religion largely unaltered from the preceding Ming dynasty. It approached religion with the dual concerns of promoting proper social values, primarily the importance of hierarchy within local society, and keeping the religious sphere under control by eradicating heresy, sorcery, millenarianism, illicit cults and evil practices. However, the Qing also inherited an administrative structure that was very light on the ground, and poor at enforcing its will on local society. This is not to say that the Qing had no impact on local religion. As noted in the previous section, officially-promoted religious practices, such as the Confucian rituals that the first Ming emperor had intended to become the mainstay of village religion, were absorbed into local practice. Still the impact of Qing policy towards local religion was limited. It was difficult, if not impossible, to police the ban on

45 CN I: 90, 210.

heresy, and most groups did not even come to the state's attention until they had become a security challenge. Even at the height of their power, the Qing had only limited ability to police religion even in the suburbs of their own capital. Policing belief (orthodoxy) was even further from the realms of possibility: James Watson famously demonstrated that much of the state's concern had been with the maintenance of a cosmetic image of compliance in form and practice (orthopraxy).⁴⁶

Towards the end of the dynasty, new voices began calling for reform of China's spiritual culture. The most prominent voices were those calling to root out the beliefs and practices that might once have been termed heretical or illicit, but now had a new name: superstition. Although the term for superstition was in fact a new word (one of the many neologisms introduced from Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the shift from heresy to superstition was more than nominal. For centuries, imperial authorities had suppressed certain religious practices at least in part because of their spiritual power. Even as imperial officials despised the unfortunate beliefs of the ignorant masses, they also gave magical claims sufficient credence as to prepare countermeasures for the soldiers who might face them in battle.⁴⁷ In contrast, the call to eradicate superstition utterly dismissed any spiritual efficacy of popular belief, or even of religion altogether. Rather, the main crime of popular belief was that it retarded national development. The emblematic slogan, first voiced during the brief Wuxu 戊戌 reforms of 1898 (and repeatedly thereafter), was the call to replace village temples with schools. The notional opposition of religion (especially popular religion) and modern science and national salvation reached a tipping point with the disastrous uprising of the Boxers (Yihetuan 義和團), an anti-Christian movement whose members claimed that possession by popular deities made them invulnerable to bullets. It was the defeat of the Yihetuan, combined with the humiliation of the

46 James Watson, "Standardizing the gods: the promotion of T'ien Hou 'Empress of Heaven' along the south China coast, 960–1960," in David Johnson, A. Nathan, and E. Rawski, eds, *Popular culture in late imperial China* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 292–374. The journal *Modern China* devoted a special issue to assessing the legacy of this seminal theory: "Standardization, orthopraxy, and the construction of Chinese culture—a critical reappraisal of James L. Watson's ideas," *Modern China: an international quarterly of history and social science* 33.1 (2007).

47 When preparing to face the Li sect, the magistrate of Tianjin took the prudent step of smearing his cannon with dog blood to counter any potential magical abilities; see DuBois, *Sacred village*, p. 111. On the whole, the imperial state took the magical efficacy of ritual very seriously; see Kuhn, *Soulstealers*.

doddering conservative faction within the imperial circle that finally prompted a radical change in official attitudes.⁴⁸

The call to reform religion intensified as the dying dynasty gave way to a young Republic. The deep cultural iconoclasm of the May Fourth period was particularly unforgiving towards religion, with literary figures such as Ba Jin and Lu Xun leveling ridicule equally against the hypocrisy of local Confucian paragons and the blind superstitions of the rural masses. Policy pointed in the same direction. Reformers frequently voiced the two main objectives of eradicating wasteful and backward local customs (such as folk healing, spirit possession, and elaborate funerals) and refashioning existing religious traditions to support the spiritual rebirth of the Chinese nation. Even as scholars of the new folklore movement fanned out into the countryside to document local festivals, rituals and songs, an equally strong political tide sought to transform the spiritual culture of the countryside. One year before the announcement of Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement, the Guangxi provincial assembly announced its own "regulations for the reform of popular customs" 廣西省改良風俗規則. This list of 39 rules typifies the sort of reform envisioned by this generation. It included such provisions as a cap on wedding and funeral expenses, including a ban on burying valuables with the deceased. Much of local religious life, including welcoming spirits and holding *jiao* (*yingshen jianjiao* 迎神建醮), carrying out improper sacrifices (*fengsi yinci* 奉祀淫祠) and hiring shamans (*wuxi* 巫覡) were banned, with no other explanation than labeling them as "evil customs" (*louxi* 陋習).⁴⁹ Putting such plans into practice was another problem. Not only were these restrictions difficult to enforce, but also, as Poon Shuk-Wah and Rebecca Nedostup have both shown, measures such as the confiscation of temple property were deeply intertwined with a web of political and economic motives that were entirely separate from the ideals of spiritual reform.⁵⁰ Moreover, however desirable these ambitious reforms might have seemed on paper, the political reality was that they could never be uniformly enforced. Even after the Kuomintang consolidated power in its new capital of Nanjing, the regime was scarcely more able than the Qing to exert its will over much of the countryside. Arguably the most dramatic changes to local

48 Vincent Goossaert "1898: The beginning of the end for Chinese religion?" *Journal of Asian Studies*, 65.2 (2006), 307–35, makes the point that the religious policies proposed in 1898 were part of a much longer-term move to social reform.

49 Pingle 平樂 *xianzhi* (1940). *Zhonghua minguo fagui huibian: neizheng* 3 (Shanghai, 1933).

50 Poon, Shuk-wah, *Negotiating religion in modern China: state and common people in Guangzhou, 1900–1937* (Hong Kong, 2011); Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious regimes: religion and the politics of Chinese modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

religious life were not those prompted by government initiative, but rather by the effect of insecurity. The pressures of constant war, overtaxation, bandit predation and natural disasters impoverished areas like the north China plain, transformed the structure of village life, breaking down traditional bonds of community and enhancing the appeal of millenarian movements such as the Way of Penetrating Unity (Yiguandao 一貫道).⁵¹

The 1949 founding of the People's Republic and return of some semblance of stability to the countryside initially weakened the hold of apocalyptic teachings and violent secret societies, but the calm did not last long. The new government supported essentially the same combination of education and anti-superstition as had been proposed by reformers over the past decades, though they were in a much better position actually to put their ideas into practice. This promise of progress and stability led observers inside and outside of China to predict (yet again) the imminent end of religion. "With the advancement of science and education in China, the Chinese masses learn that fulfilment of human desires does not come from chasing away evil spirits and praying to benevolent deities. Modern medicine is fast replacing the God of Medicine, and rural school children go to the temple of Wench'ang, God of Literature, not to pray but to play."⁵² But in the end, change would not come from stability alone, if at all. Although Mao had earlier admonished cadres that "it is for the peasants to destroy the gods themselves", it became clear that the new government now planned to move aggressively against certain aspects of folk religion.⁵³ Beginning with the 1951 campaign to "suppress reactionaries" 鎮壓反革命, the government made increasingly severe moves against religious groups it found threatening. Although these campaigns nominally focused on the Catholic Church, and the apocalyptic sects that had been energized during the war with Japan, the chill was felt throughout other areas of religious expression. At the same time, the cultural foundation of "new China" grew increasingly aggressive against the past. The destruction of religious artifacts and architecture that culminated in the "destroy the four olds" 破四舊 campaign of 1966 (and continued for the next decade) took an equal toll on the performance of religion in public life.

51 On the destabilization of rural areas during the occupation see Duara, *Culture, power*. On the rise of Yiguandao during this period see DuBois, *Sacred village*, pp. 128–51.

52 Wing-tsit Chan, *Religious trends in modern China* (New York, 1953), p. 153.

53 Mao Zedong, "Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan" (1927). Marxists Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm> Downloaded March 12, 2015.

At the same time, the structural transformation of town and country broke apart traditional bonds and the religious communities they engendered. The power of large extended clans was forcibly broken, and even nuclear families were transformed as children were educated in the values of the new society. Over the course of the 1950s, natural geographic units such as neighbourhoods and villages were transformed into work-based collectives that were newer, more socially anonymous and fluid, and generally much larger than the communities they replaced. Even if the political atmosphere had allowed for somewhat more open religious practice, these new communities did not have the same emotional bonds as had existed in “natural” villages. Yet the story was not merely one of destruction. Especially in the countryside, devoted religious groups continued to perform traditional rituals in secret, while traditional ritual services evinced a surprising longevity, even as payment was changed from cash to work points.

The social policies of the period leading to and including the Cultural Revolution were on the whole felt less strongly in the countryside than in the cities. While cities were subject to a constant barrage of campaigns and eventually Red Guard violence, rural areas were relatively more able to retain more of their traditional structures, at least in memory, if not in fact. With the gradual loosening of policies towards religion during the 1980s, the countryside was able to rebuild a public ritual life more quickly, and with less state interference than the cities. One of the major changes remained the structural transformation of the villages themselves. Collectives were disbanded and villages again became the fundamental unit of rural life, but the new villages were often ones with new boundaries and inhabitants. Villages consciously recreated religious resources such as physical temples or the transmission of ritual knowledge both as a way of reviving ritual protection and as a way of rebuilding community life through public activities. This includes the attempt to reconstruct a sense of identity in villages that, particularly since the 1990s, have been weakened by outward migration, relocation or urban sprawl.

In most rural communities, ritual continues to provide much the same combination of spiritual protection and social meaning that it did before 1949. At the same time, there has been a genuine transformation of substance. Local society has become much more integrated with regional, national and even transnational communities. Transportation and communication have opened communities that would once have been far more geographically isolated, leading, at one level, to a certain flattening of local distinctiveness. Through television, personal experience, and now the internet, ritual performers can see events performed throughout China. Their clients often compel performers to alter their rituals to do them “right,” meaning bigger, more lavish, and

the way they are performed on television. One notable example is the village sectarians I encountered in Cangzhou, who recently made the decision to wear Daoist robes during their rituals. The idea and the design for the costumes themselves came from watching a historical drama.⁵⁴ Although the need to fit audience expectations has always shaped the performance of ritual, the increasing commodification of local religion and especially the lure of tourist dollars has raised the stakes considerably. The chief Buddhist and Daoist centers have become major tourist draws, as has any sort of ritual life that can be marketed as ethnic.⁵⁵ In a sign of policies coming full circle, it is now local governments who are on the lookout for unique festivals that can be “revived” (perhaps in a form that never in fact existed historically) in order to entice tourists, or to market the event as “intangible cultural heritage” (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan* 非物質文化遺產).⁵⁶

Conclusion

As we learn ever more about the historical and contemporary practice of local religion in China, the need to revise C.K. Yang’s division of institutional and diffused religion becomes increasingly evident. To be fair to Yang, his image of institutional religion referred to an ecclesiastic structure, i.e., something that Western readers would recognize as a church, which was clearly the minority of the Chinese experience with religion. Yet just as clear were rules and structures that governed the experience of lived religion. The content of ritual life and personal obligation were sketched out by custom, and policed internally by community expectations, and externally by law. The flow of information, including both an evolving corpus of oral and written literature, and practical

54 Stephen Jones sees this same phenomenon in how local musicians in northern Shaanxi have adapted their repertoires to a hybrid “big band” style to meet the expectations of their audiences. See *Ritual and music of north China*, vol. 2, *Shaanbei* (Farnham, England, 2009), pp. 143–53.

55 Tim Oakes and Donald S. Sutton, *Faiths on display: religion, tourism, and the Chinese state* (Lanham, 2009); Xiaofei Kang and Donald S. Sutton, “Recasting religion and ethnicity: tourism and socialism in northern Sichuan, 1992–2005,” in Thomas David DuBois, ed., *Casting faiths: imperialism and the transformation of religion in east and southeast Asia* (Basingstoke, England, 2009), pp. 190–214.

56 An Deming and Yang Lihui, “Chinese folklore since the late 1970s: achievements, difficulties and challenges,” *Asian Ethnology* 74 (2015); Chen Zhiqin, “For whom to conserve intangible cultural heritage: the dislocated agency of folk belief practitioners, and the reproduction of local culture,” *Asian Ethnology* 74 (2015).

knowledge such as ritual forms, traveled along tiered tracks that created nodes of specialization and localized tradition.

With this in mind, we may better appreciate the transformation of local religion over time. Indeed, much has remained the same since the late imperial period. Religion remains both a personal concern and a community project. Public ritual is still a form of performance, one that displays both piety and status. Finally, religion remains both friend and foe of those in power, whether local elites or representatives of the Chinese state. At the same time, these parameters give focus to the real impact of rural China's massive and ongoing transformation. Although religion remains a function of community, processes such as migration, war and collectivization have dramatically transformed the landscape of identification in which community is formed and lived. Public ritual remains a stage, but with increased mobility and all manner of virtual participation, that stage and its audience have become vastly larger and more complex. Finally, while state concern over religion, both to inculcate values and morals and to police the edges of subversive behavior, the shape of the state, and the tools at its disposal are quite unlike anything imagined in the imperial period.