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Davis/Society and the Supernatural in Song China

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I

Introduction

This book takes its title seriously. Its overwhelming concern is the relation of Chinese society with the supernatural and with the experience of the supernatural as an aspect of social relations. More specifically, it focuses on the experience of the supernatural in its most palpable and dramatic form—the descent of gods, ghosts, or ancestors, and their habitation within a human body. It focuses, in other words, on what we call “spirit-possession” and what Chinese writers of the Song period (960–1276) denoted by the term “*pingfu*.”¹ I understand this experience both to be occasioned by a crisis in social relations and to be in itself an occasion for a transformation of these relations.

Spirit-possession is necessarily a social experience. It has been succinctly defined as a “trance of identification,” and this identification—of the subject with a spirit—cannot be made except in the company of others.² Moreover, far from being a sign of the private anguish of mental illness, spirit-possession was a means of avoiding it. Spirit-possession was both a role assumed in public and a shared and universally recognized idiom that allowed an individual person to convert emotion into culture, and symptoms into symbols.³

In an article written several years ago, Piet van der Loon asked us to examine and expose the “shamanic substrate” of all Chinese religions.⁴ Yet what is exposed by any such examination is the weakness of “shamanism” as a description of either China’s indigenous religion or the “substrate” of her religions. If there is a common basis of Chi-

nese religious practice, then that basis has more to do with forms of trance associated with spirit-possession than with shamanism. Moreover, if spirit-possession—and particularly the possession trance of the spirit-medium (*wu*)—has informed the religious practice of Daoist and Buddhist priests, then the textual and ritual traditions of China's two organized religions have done just as much over the course of centuries to transform the practices of her spirit-mediums. By the Song dynasty, it becomes as difficult to talk about the “substrate” of Chinese religion as it is to trace the “origin” of a particular religious practice, belief, or divinity.

Recent attempts to unearth the “shamanic substrate” of Chinese religion employ the term “shamanism” in such a loose way that it becomes almost meaningless, and therefore useless, as a category of historical and cultural analysis. In a chapter on the shamanic substrate of the Chinese Buddhist figure Mulian, Stephen Teiser relies on those authorities who identify shamanism and spirit-possession as more or less the same thing:

Some scholars have tried to make historical and typological distinctions between two forms of mediumship, defining the first as mere “spirit-possession” and the second as true “shamanism.” See, for example, Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 58, 499–507. But this distinction does not appear valid even for Central Asian spirit-mediumship, to which the distinction was first applied. As Ioan M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, pp. 55–56, writes, “the Tungus evidence makes nonsense of the assumption that shamanism and spirit-possession are totally different phenomena, belonging necessarily to two different cosmological systems and to separate stages of historical development.”⁵

Yet the Tungus evidence makes nonsense of no such thing. The analysis of the central funerary rituals of the Gold of Manchuria reveals that the Tungus shaman is master of the spirits in his journey to the underworld. He employs his auxiliary spirits as his guides, his servants, his means of transportation, his interlocutors. He converses with them and occasionally even imitates them, yet in all cases the subject of trance—the shaman—coexists with the guardian spirits.⁶

Possession, in contrast, is a trance of identification in which the persona of the divinity is substituted for, and does not coexist with, that of the subject. The possessed subject does not converse with or imitate the divinity; he (or she) is the divinity! Although it is true that

shamanism and possession are both representations of trance behavior, these representations, as Gilbert Rouget has demonstrated, oppose and contradict each other at every point of comparison:

The difference between shamanism and possession trance thus seems to rest on three factors: the former is a journey made by man to visit the spirits, the latter is a visit by a spirit (or divinity) to the world of men; in the former the trance subject gains control over the spirit embodied within him, in the latter the reverse is true; and lastly, the former is a voluntary trance whereas the latter is an involuntary one.⁷

It seems perverse to deny any typological distinctions between shamanism and spirit-possession when such distinctions are so stark. A strong case could be made, though I will not make it here, that such distinctions do in fact correspond to, and indeed reflect, differing ecological, sociological, and cosmological systems. To invoke “shamanism” as the substrate of Chinese religion is nothing but a substitute for the serious analysis of everything that is not Buddhism or Daoism, and is not much better than the use of the term “animism” by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographers. My point here is not to deny that Central Asian shamanism had some influence on China’s indigenous religion, but only to note that the search for it will go, for the most part, unrewarded,⁸ whereas the evidence of spirit-possession in middle-period China is overwhelming.

For the Song, the *Yijian zhi*, or *Record of Hearsay*, by Hong Mai (1123–1202) includes close to two hundred descriptions of spirit-possession. For purposes of analysis, these descriptions can be organized along the lines of ritualized and nonritualized possession. The accounts of ritualized or religious possession can be further broken down into three groups:

1. Cults of possession proper, exemplified above all by village spirit-mediums who would become possessed by an earth-spirit or other tutelary divinity (occasionally these spirits might stray from the trees or stones in which they were thought to lodge and, as incubi, possess women who, if they were not cured, might become in turn recruits for spirit-mediums);
2. Exorcisms by Daoist priests or Buddhist monks employing or directing one or more boys who would become

possessed by the spirit afflicting the patient or by a tutelary divinity of the exorcist; and

3. Rites for the dead during which relatives of the deceased (wife, son, grandson) would become possessed by the deceased and converse with the living.

Nonritualized possession includes all those cases where someone becomes harassed and ultimately possessed by a divinity or demon in the context of family life. In these cases the subject is considered to be suffering from an exogenously caused illness, and the family normally calls in an exorcist who may be a spirit-medium, Daoist priest, or Buddhist monk. The *Yijian zhi* is particularly rich in accounts of nonreligious possession, and these accounts present an exceptional view of family relations and private life in the Song.

The chapters of the present volume are organized around the exegesis of cases of ritualized and nonritualized possession in the Song. The point of this example of microhistory, however, is not simply to understand spirit-possession and exorcism in their own right.⁹ Nor is it simply to demonstrate how fundamental these phenomena were to Chinese religion and society at a particular time. Rather, my aim is to examine the religious interactions and social functions of the Daoist priest, Buddhist monk, Ritual Master, and spirit-medium in local society during the twelfth century, and to present a description of Song religious life richer than any available to date. In so doing, I also hope to say something significant about the major themes that have emerged in the historiography of the culture and religion of the Song dynasty. The remainder of this chapter is taken up with a discussion of these themes.

Historians, Sinologists, and the Song Dynasty

For several years—perhaps for as long as I have been studying middle-period China—I have been dissatisfied with current explanations for the great transformation of Chinese culture that scholars believe to have crystallized in the Song dynasty. In particular, I am uncomfortable with the view that the Song elite, not to mention the society in general, can best be understood (a) from the perspective of what

was to become in later centuries the dominant ideology—namely, Neo-Confucianism, and (b) by focusing on those individuals who were particularly strong in articulating that ideology.

In its extreme form, such a view is often conceived negatively, in terms of the decline of Buddhism and Daoism. According to this thesis, these intellectually moribund, socially ineffectual, and politically irrelevant religions lost the allegiance of the Song elite to a new and vibrant reformulation of the classical tradition; moreover, it was this elite that would for all intents and purposes define, from the Song on, the social, cultural, and political direction of Chinese society. Thus it was the Confucian, whether in office or out, who would be the repository of value in this society and—if one follows the implications of some recent interpretations—the embodiment of the sacred or holy as well. Scholars may disagree as to when this became a reality, but all appear to subscribe to its inevitability. The decline of Buddhism and Daoism and the success of Confucianism were, ostensibly, ensured in the Song by (1) the examination system, which channeled the intellectual talent of the empire into government service by means of a Confucian education; (2) the sale of monk and priest certificates of ordination and the (consequent) moral decline of monastic or clerical integrity, offices, and institutions; (3) the intellectual assault on Buddhism and Daoism by Neo-Confucians; and (4) a new syncretic tendency, primarily defensive and apologetic, that diluted the intellectual substance and power of those religions and confirmed the fact that their philosophical vibrancy had peaked long before.

For almost forty years, this view has both informed the historiography of Song China and to a great extent determined historical inquiry. It is still evident in some of the recent and best work of Song historians and is proverbial wisdom in almost any textbook of pre-modern Chinese history. The thesis owes its remarkable vitality to many factors, only a few of which I mention here: first, an abiding, essentialist, and largely nonrational conviction that Chinese civilization and culture are synonymous with something called “Confucianism”; second, a tendency to define religion as a matter of individual belief rather than as a community of behavior; and third, a complete failure to consider the enormous evidence preserved in the Daoist and Buddhist canons and in the miscellaneous writings of Song literati.

There is, however, another approach, that takes a noticeably hos-

tile attitude to the victors of the first (the Neo-Confucians) but that, paradoxically, concludes by leaving their victory fully intact. This is the approach of European sinology, which has had the difficult task of helping us grasp more easily the complexity of China's arcane religious traditions. Despite, or perhaps because of, these sinologists' very success, their understanding of these traditions is often narrowly textual—an "unfolding" of (to borrow a word from their adversaries) or, at best, an endless dialogue with, an equally unexamined construct known as China's "shamanic substrate."

In its extreme form, the sinological view sees the patronage or hostility of the state as the only mechanism for change in China's unbroken religious traditions. Thus it posits a fateful split between the bureaucratic class of early imperial China and Chinese religions,¹⁰ a parting of the ways that was exacerbated by an unholy alliance between Confucianism and Christianity. In the name of Confucius, "the Philosopher of the Chinese," the Jesuits of the sixteenth century denied the religious reality of the state cults and decried the religious validity of Daoism as an "aberrant belief" (*mixin*).¹¹ In the meantime, the bureaucratic class, reeling from the fall of the Ming, which it blamed on sectarian revolt (i.e., religious fervor), took refuge in "Han Studies," which, among other things, sought to excise Daoist books from the imperial library; to force the abandonment of the Daoist canon, which had until then been a necessary confluence of imperial patronage and literati involvement; and generally to deny the Chinese their entire religious patrimony.¹²

Those historians today who ignore the Daoist and Buddhist canons are, in more ways than one, the heirs of this grand repression. In the nineteenth century, Confucians and Christians ultimately joined hands to defeat the Taipings, who, in the name of the Christian God, did the work of the bureaucratic class by laying waste to hundreds of Daoist temples. This Confucian-Christian iconoclasm continued among the Reformers of 1895, Christian warlords in the South, and proponents of the New Life movement in the Republican period. The Cultural Revolution was merely the final blow: "Ce qui, au XVI^e siècle, n'était qu'un vœu pieux a fini par se réaliser: la religion chinoise, comme notre religion antique, a pour ainsi dire cessé d'exister, et le monde n'en a rien su."¹³

In statements like these, the sinologist sees himself as the guardian and caretaker of Chinese culture, which has been in decline since the

end of the Ming. Like the historians of Confucianism, moreover, he claims, quite explicitly, to represent the “real China.” Over and against “le pays officiel”—the state and its Confucianism—he places “le pays réel”: “la religion” and, more specifically, “the unique, local structures which express themselves in regional cults and nonofficial religion” (i.e., Daoism).¹⁴ And like the Confucian historian again, the sinologist may find in his real China some of his most cherished Western values: autonomy, liberty, even science and democracy.¹⁵

Instead, I would like to suggest that we abandon the linear and teleological view of the Tang-Song cultural transition as a succession of metaphysical systems and as a way station in the Confucian elite’s march to social and moral preeminence in the Ming and Qing dynasties. We should not immediately replace this thesis with another, equally comprehensive one, but with a tension in which the categories Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism find themselves in a very different configuration.

I characterize this tension as a tension among three groups placed along a vertical axis. At the top we find a group broadly defined to include the emperor, the court, and the bureaucratic and religious hierarchies (civil and military officials and their families, Daoist priests, and Buddhist monks); at the bottom are village spirit-mediums and Buddhist acolytes, local landowners (large and small), tenants and servants, and sub-bureaucratic servicemen and functionaries. In the middle I place a new and expanding group of lay Daoist exorcists called “Ritual Masters” (*fashi*), Esoteric Buddhist monks, doctors, ritual experts and religious specialists (*shushi*, *xiangshi*, *daoren*, etc.), and those who passed one or more of the examinations but were without official posts (*shiren*). At times the tension between the three hierarchically arranged groups can and will be drawn along urban and rural lines, at other times along the lines of state and local society, or along those of written and martial culture. However we characterize the tension among the groups for purposes of analysis (more on this shortly), the three groups themselves are best conceived of as overlapping or embedded sets, and there are many circumstances in which a member of one group may become a member of another.

The point of this scheme is not an exhaustive or even accurate representation of hierarchies of status or class in Chinese society of the Song period. Rather, the point is to avoid both the inevitable contradictions that arise from the analysis of Chinese culture and society in

terms of the categories of the “Three Teachings” (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) and all prejudicial statements that assume, rather than demonstrate, a necessary relationship between a particular cultural category (e.g., Confucianism), and a particular social category (e.g., officialdom). To take just one example, bureaucratic officials and Daoist priests belonged to the same social milieu in the Song. To be a Daoist priest (*daoshi*) was, above all, to be a “literatus” (*shi*) trained in the classical language and to hold an “office”—that is, to be an administrator of the divine world who dealt with that world by bureaucratic procedure and endless paperwork.¹⁶

This book focuses on relations between one particular cross section of the three groups outlined above: Daoist priests (group 1), Daoist Ritual Masters and Tantric exorcists (group 2), and spirit-mediums (group 3). I have described the relations among the groups as a tension precisely because these relations were simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic. On the one hand, we will see the Daoist Ritual Master as an officiant of village spirit-mediums, but also as a traveling exorcist serving an elite, urban clientele; we will see officials as lay exorcists and Daoist exorcists as clerical officials; and we will see increasing ritual exchange, interaction, and accommodation among priests, exorcists (both Daoist and Buddhist), and spirit-mediums. On the other hand, we will find a fierce and protracted conflict with magistrates and “official” and “clerical” exorcists on one side and spirit-mediums and local society on the other. This conflict, which is explored in Chapter 3, is the more obvious theme, and the one that presents itself more easily to historians. Symbiosis is, however, the more difficult and important theme, and deserves not only more attention but a considerably greater degree of analytical subtlety and imagination.

Symbiosis and antagonism are prominent themes in the historiography and ethnography of Daoism. They may be seen, in fact, to emerge out of two quite distinct views of the nature of Daoism and of its relation to “popular religion.” One of these views I associate with the work of Michel Strickmann; the other, with that of Kristofer Schipper.

Strickmann’s rather consistent views on the nature, origin, and function of Daoism are found throughout his wide-ranging work. They have never been so forcefully argued, however, as in his unpublished study, “Magical Medicine: Therapeutic Rituals in Medieval China.” Here Strickmann maintains that “Daoists ancient and modern all agree that the basic *raison-d’être* of Daoism was to supplant the local cults with

which China teemed: to replace ‘shamanism,’ ‘spirit-possession,’ ‘ecstatic religion.’ Whichever of these terms one chooses, such rites were the long-established means of responding to disease, disaster and the shadowy world of the spirits.”¹⁷ These rites attempted to “coax or cajole” the gods by “wild music,” “lascivious dancing,” and “copious sacrifices.” They were the established pattern of curative ritual in ancient China, a pattern to which the Daoists hoped to put a definitive end. “The first step in the Daoist program . . . was to unmask the so-called ‘gods’ worshipped by the people,” to show that these gods were not gods at all but spirits of the dead—ghosts or demons—which in fact caused the diseases they were meant to cure or which brought upon their votaries delirium, madness, and premature death. In Strickmann’s reading, what the Daoists sought to rectify was not simply the rites and sacrifices of popular religion but, more fundamentally, a kind of false consciousness. He concludes:

From all this it is clear that Daoism really amounted to a religious reformation in the China of Late Antiquity. Here the standard histories of China, which have neglected Daoist primary sources, have got it quite wrong. The chief rival of early Daoism was not Buddhism, and not even the so-called “Confucian” State. Rather, it was the despised and neglected “nameless religion” of the people, the scores of local deities and the hundreds of practitioners who invoked and embodied them. For Daoists, the distinction between their own faith and these cults was and remains quite simply a matter of life against death: the celestial Dao against the ill-omened, unhallowed dead and everything connected with them.¹⁸

Kristofer Schipper appears to accept Strickmann’s formulation of the problem, while finding the essence of Daoism somewhere else entirely:

Daoism always situates itself in relation to Chinese popular religion and not in opposition to Buddhism or Confucianism. The antagonism is systematic. Daoism denounces popular cults and shamanism with an insistence that in the end appears suspect. Doesn’t this need to separate itself betray a fundamental ambivalence? Doesn’t it translate the likely confusion of two aspects [of Chinese religion] only seemingly contradictory? Even before Daoism had become, by assimilation of local cults, the religion of townspeople in the Song period, the distance that separated the two had already been breached. The revelations of Highest Purity Daoism, among other examples, recognized as their patron

saints the Mao brothers, local divinities in the region of Danyang, and put into practice a form of mediumism that while difficult to identify precisely, seems very close to vernacular shamanism. The actual situation of Daoism confirms this *rapprochement*. Often on the occasion of community festivals, two forms of rituals unfold simultaneously: that of the Daoist priest in a sacred space inside the temple, and that of the magical Masters, *fashi*, who practice outside the temple in public. The ritual of the *daoshi* is in the classical language; that of the *fashi* in the vernacular. An entire range of complementary oppositions differentiate the Daoist black-hats from the shamanistic red-hats, but the links between them are numerous.¹⁹

This was written in 1983. Since then Schipper has elaborated on the complementary oppositions differentiating the black-head from red-head priests, and on the *rapprochement* between Daoism and popular cults.²⁰ In his strongest formulation to date, Schipper has defined Daoism as “the written tradition of Chinese indigenous cults.”²¹ To him, Daoism was never “a religion that became institutionally defined by attaining autonomy from its social background of local cults.”²² It was and is, rather, the “specific and articulated expression of Chinese religion, of its *shehui* or ‘assembly of the Earth God.’”²³

There is a great deal to unpack in such statements. Here I want only to point out that the conclusions of Strickmann and Schipper appear to offer two contradictory assessments of the nature of Daoism. Where Strickmann sees Daoism as a kind of new dispensation that sought to permanently replace the old, eradicating its shamans and local cults, Schipper sees Daoism as a sublimation of shamanism and as a structuring expression of its cults.

Strickmann’s view, it seems to me, is deeply colored by the apocalypticism of the late fourth- and fifth-century texts with which he worked. Little consideration is given to the rhetorical nature of these texts. The Manichaean struggle that imbues the *Luxiansheng daomen kelüe*—one of Strickmann’s foundational texts—embodied a precise rhetorical strategy to win the favor of an emperor who had good reason to be suspicious of Daoism, having just defeated the Celestial Master-inspired rebellion of Sun En. This text, therefore, seeks not only to distance Daoism from popular religion in the strongest terms but also to distance it from the actual state of affairs and contemporary practice of Celestial Master Daoism itself.²⁴ Who is to say that the actual state of affairs of Daoism should not be as much a part of what

Daoism was or is as the highly pressured definition given by those who sought to reform it? Perhaps, as Schipper surmises, the insistence with which Daoism denounces popular cults is suspect and betrays a fundamental uneasiness about its origins.

Schipper's view, in contrast, is deeply colored by years of fieldwork on the actual state of contemporary Daoism and on how Daoism fits in with "Chinese religion in its entirety." When Schipper talks about what Daoism is, he is often talking about what Daoism has become, and he occasionally describes what Daoism was in terms of what it is, or identifies "the enduring aspects of Daoism" as the most salient ones historically. Moreover, when Schipper speaks about the rapprochement and complementarity of the *daoshi* and the *fashi*, this is not exactly analogous to Strickmann's contrast between Daoists and "possessed mediums." To refer to red-head priests as "têtes-rouges chamanistes" is either a sleight-of-hand or requires a lengthy historical explanation. Schipper admits elsewhere that when one talks about *daoshi* and *fashi*, one is talking about two traditions within Daoism.²⁵ In any case, the rapprochement and complementarity that characterize the modern-day relationship between these two figures took a millennium to work out.

If immersion in the texts of Six Dynasties Daoism and prolonged observation of Daoist priests in contemporary Chinese society produce very different notions of Daoism's nature and function, both these views capture an essential truth about Daoism's historical development and its relation to its rival—what Strickmann (following A. R. Stein) refers to as "the nameless religion" and what Schipper (following Piet van der Loon) refers to as "le substrat shamanique." Daoism's antagonistic and symbiotic relationship to its rival is particularly evident during the Song dynasty, a period that is, not coincidentally, exactly at the midpoint of Strickmann's and Schipper's respective periods of expertise. The Song was a time when Daoism still aspired to define imperial ideology, still managed to capture the attention of large portions of the official and literati class, and still served as a marker of social distance as great as any Confucian *paideia*. Yet the Song was also a time when, as Schipper remarked above, Daoism became, by assimilation of local cults, the religion of the townspeople. It is, in fact, the assimilation of local cults by Daoism that produced the Daoist Ritual Master (*fashi*, or red-head priest) who, I will argue, mediated between Daoism and the possessed mediums of local cults and village religion.

The Chinese of the Song period were the beneficiaries of a major shift in the center of gravity of their religious institutions, especially of the *she*, or biannual religious celebrations held at the altar of the earth-spirit. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the nature of the *she* would shift away from a spring and autumn festival dedicated to various nature or agricultural spirits—a festival exclusive in membership, dominated by a few local families, and overlaid first with Buddhist (sixth-eighth centuries) and then with Confucian (ninth-tenth centuries) activities. The center of gravity moved to a basically urban festival dedicated to one of hundreds of new anthropomorphic or human deities on the god's "birthday"—a festival open in membership, paid for by solicited contributions, dominated by those who could afford the most, and accompanied by processions, theatrical performances, and especially by large-scale Daoist or Buddhist liturgies of renewal and exorcism.²⁶

To participate in these new celebrations, generally called "*shehui*," the surrounding towns and villages would bring their own gods (and their spirit-mediums) to serve as subordinate deities (and as subordinate priests) in the rituals. In the urban *shehui*, members of the urban elite (both official and mercantile), together with the clerical elite (Daoist or Buddhist priests), were confirmed in their power in the city and in their control over the hinterland. It is in the urban *shehui* that we can locate the structural context for the symbiosis or rapprochement among Daoist priests, Ritual Masters, and spirit-mediums. The participation of the smaller towns and villages of the hinterland in these urban celebrations established a natural hierarchy in which all these practitioners could be seen to be working together, in succession or simultaneously, inside and outside the temple. This hierarchy was reproduced throughout those areas, particularly in the South, where cities, market towns, and villages were tied together by commercial exchange, and it continues to define the relations among Daoist priests, red-head priests, and *tangki* (spirit-mediums) on Taiwan and elsewhere today.

The emergence of the urban *shehui* after the tenth century did not mean the disappearance of the rural *she*. In the landlocked and mountainous villages, newly opened up by an expanding population and adventurous landlords, a particularly archaic name—"congci"—came to designate the altar of the earth-spirit. Here unpredictable and highly sexed spirits were worshipped—the "Spirits of the Five Penetrations"

(*wutong shen*) and their ilk, akin to the *nats* of Burma and the *jinn* of Islamic Morocco. These spirits were invariably embodied by a spirit-medium who, as we shall see, was defended by the villagers against all attempts from inside or outside the village to encroach upon his or her autonomy.

By the twelfth century, the contradiction between what I see as the centripetal forces of commercialization and urbanization (forces represented in the urban *shehui*) and the centrifugal forces of demographic and geographic expansion (forces represented in the proliferation of rural *she*) gave new intensity to the old conflict between Daoism and local cults. The Spirits of the Five Penetrations and similar deities of natural villages became the particular bêtes noires of Daoist priests and Daoist Ritual Masters. These “gods” head the list of any Daoist demonology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, while the Daoist ritual texts are replete with methods for destroying their altars and the “black magic” of their spirit-mediums. Whereas the villagers thought that these gods brought them life and prosperity, the Daoist knew that they brought only disease, madness, and an early death. In exorcisms the Daoist priest attempted to impose this interpretation on his clients. This interpretation was shared by the official and literati class, and many members of this class linked hands tightly with Daoism and Daoist exorcists in the attempt to eradicate these “demons.” I should add parenthetically, however, that even these gods of the village *she* felt the gravitational pull of the urban *shehui*. In the twelfth century, in some areas, the Spirits of the Five Penetrations were reinterpreted so as to better fit the theological expectations of Daoists, officials, and the rest of the literati. Safely transformed or redefined, these gods garnered their own urban temples and *shehui*.

Themes of the Book

All this may be said to constitute the structural backdrop for the themes of symbiosis and antagonism, of ritual convergence and social conflict, that pervade the chapters of this book. Chapter 2 examines a significant body of textual material in the Daoist canon, numbering in the thousands of pages, that is attributable to scores of Daoist lineages that were active in South China during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The concern of these lineages was overwhelmingly therapeutic and exorcistic. In addition to a historical and textual study of the

Rites of the Celestial Heart, the Rites of the Five Thunder Gods, and other ritual complexes identified with the new lineages of the twelfth century, this chapter analyzes how these lineages represented a significant break with the orthodox and classical lineages of Daoism and with older, dominant Daoist notions of religious community, sin, and healing. Each of these lineages was defined by a particular method or rite (*fa*), and their practitioners were addressed as Ritual Masters (*fashi*) or Ritual Officers (*faguan*).

These Ritual Masters are examined in Chapter 3. The twelfth-century Ritual Master was a lay (nonclerical) or clerical exorcist who mediated between the Daoist priesthood on the one hand and village spirit-mediums on the other. Chapter 3 examines the Ritual Master's mediating function in terms of the nature of his recruitment, ritual practice, divine pantheon, and working relationship with priests and spirit-mediums. Thus it demonstrates that the Ritual Master was a product of the great historical confrontation between Daoism and local cults, and that he represented a new vernacular culture that stood between the classical, literary culture of priests and officials and the largely martial culture of village spirit-mediums and their cults. This chapter also demonstrates the popularity of the new Daoist lineages among the Song bureaucratic elite. The Rites of the Celestial Heart, the Rites of the Five Thunder Gods, and so forth found fervent devotees among officials and their sons, some of whom actually practiced these exorcistic rituals in the course of their official duties. The Daoist Ritual Master and the Song magistrate linked hands in the twelfth century not only in curing their patients and subjects of demonic obsessions but in ridding them of their demonic cults as well, particularly the cults and temples of local spirit-mediums. The confrontation between Daoist and "official" exorcists and local cults was a unique episode in a more global strategy to suppress spirit-mediums by the representatives of the Song state. This chapter concludes by taking up the strategies and local alliances that permitted the spirit-medium to contend with the pressures of external control, and by considering the elements in the relation between the state and religion that actually mitigated and counteracted the state's repressive policies. One of the many elements working against a European-style inquisition was the fact that the Daoist exorcist had entered into a profound and lasting ritual relationship with the spirit-medium himself.

Chapter 4 looks at the cult to the Black Killer, a god who was hon-

ored by the first Song emperors as a guardian of the dynasty and as a guarantor of its possession of the “Mandate of Heaven.” In the twelfth century this fierce martial deity would become one of the central divinities of the new therapeutic lineages of Daoism, yet its tenth-century priest already reveals all the characteristics of the twelfth-century Ritual Master.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examine the exorcist at work in local society. Chapter 5 analyzes the most characteristic therapeutic ritual of the Daoist exorcist, the Rite of Summoning for Investigation, and demonstrates that this rite was not an exorcism at all but a ritual of spirit-possession in which the demon afflicting the patient was encouraged to possess either the patient himself or a young male surrogate acting as a spirit-medium. These rites are shown to have been particularly compelling because of how they intersected two other institutions in the Song—the judicial trial and the theater.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the focus shifts to Buddhism and to a complex of esoteric therapeutic rituals performed by a class of monks who were in many ways counterparts of the Daoist Ritual Master. These Tantric rituals, like the Daoist ones, involved the possession of a child-medium. In fact, even the Daoist priest and the lowly spirit-medium were performing similar rites, and it is the purpose of a long analysis here to demonstrate that not only the rites but the devotional cults of the four major figures in the Song religious landscape—the Daoist priest, Ritual Master, Buddhist monk, and village spirit-medium—were all converging in the twelfth century.

Chapter 8 takes up Daoist and Buddhist funerary rituals that became in the Song, contrary to much scholarly opinion, a necessary staple of filial expression for the bureaucratic elite. This chapter offers a detailed analysis of the historical development of the Daoist Retreat of the Yellow Register and the Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land. It demonstrates that the structure and purpose of these Daoist and Buddhist mortuary rituals were converging in the Song. The central event of these rites, moreover, turns out to have been the possession of a child-medium (in these cases often a son or grandson of the deceased who transmitted the words of his dead relative or family member). I see in these rituals (1) a co-optation of the traditional ancestor seance of the spirit-medium by the Daoist and Buddhist priesthood; (2) a reinterpretation of archaic Chinese funerary rites that employed someone known as the “corpse-representative”; and, most impor-

tantly, (3) a structural convergence with the Rites of Summoning for Investigation. Rituals for the dead were, in fact, exorcisms. In a final example of convergence, these Buddhist and Daoist rites for the dead also came to be performed at the conclusion of the previously examined therapeutic rituals, as a way of satisfying an ancestral spirit who had afflicted a descendant.

Chapter 9 offers an outline of the “syncretic field” of Chinese religions and locates the practitioners and practices within this field.

Methodological Issues

The major methodological innovation of this work lies in its juxtaposition of religious texts (the ritual literature of the Daoist and Buddhist canons) with the miscellaneous writings of Song literati, especially Hong Mai’s *Yijian zhi*.²⁷ A second generation of post-war Daoist scholars is turning increasingly to the texts of Tang and Song Daoism, and thanks to their efforts we are now able to locate many of these texts within a precise matrix of time and space.²⁸ To this matrix I hope to add a deeper sense of social milieu. My own approach to these texts takes very seriously some of the comments made by John Lagerwey in a review of the principal categories of Daoist ritual texts—namely, those that concern the “offering” (*jiao*), “merit” (*gongde*), and “methods” (*fa*).²⁹ Lagerwey’s remarks all emphasize in one way or another that “a Daoist liturgical text is not a Daoist ritual.” He argues first that “all liturgical material in public collections such as the *Daozang* (Daoist canon)—whether imperially sponsored or privately compiled—are farther removed from real performance than are the manuscript texts in possession of hereditary priests.” Next, he insists that these materials “would be incomprehensible—and hence useless—if we could not compare [them] with their living counterparts,” and finally, he provides numerous reasons why “the gap between texts and performances is even greater in the case of Daoist ritual than that of Chinese opera,” and therefore can only loosely be compared to a theatrical script.³⁰ The gap is particularly formidable in the case of the “method” texts (those devoted to small-scale rituals to solve specific problems, such as exorcisms) that are the principal texts used in my study. According to Lagerwey, the method texts are the most laconic with respect to the rituals to which they refer, and vary not only from region to region but from priest to priest.³¹

Given the fact that this work focuses on a period in the remote past for which we cannot roam the countryside collecting manuscripts or observing ritual performances, are our efforts to use or understand the ritual texts of the Daoist canon condemned to futility? Fortunately, I believe, the close reading and the creative use of the literary anecdotes that make up Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi* can bring us as close to historical fieldwork as we will ever get in using a text of pre-modern China. The *Yijian zhi* is not a scientific, Western-style ethnology. It is, however, unique in the genre of "miscellaneous notes" for its overwhelming concern with the ritual practices and religious expectations of both the lower and upper strata of Chinese society. This concern represents neither the eccentric tastes of the author nor the timeworn obsession of literati with the strange and extraordinary. If one isolates only those anecdotes in the *Yijian zhi* that concern Hong Mai's family, we find that its members included lay initiates in Daoist mysteries, apprentices to spirit-mediums, guardians of Daoist texts, demoniacs, habitual employers of Daoist and Buddhist exorcists, and devotees of Daoist and Buddhist divinities. Although this family boasted numerous high-degree holders, officials, and erudite classicists, its feet were firmly planted in the rich soil of China's religious traditions. Such easy commerce between Song literati and China's religious patrimony was, I believe, more typical and revealing of Song culture than the defenders of an exclusivist Neo-Confucianism are wont to admit.

Although we find useful discussions about—and occasional insights into—the nature and compilation of Hong Mai's massive work, attempts to characterize it as a whole have been less than satisfactory. To state, for example, that "the simple, sometimes monotonous, structure of the tales and their frequent repetition of the same themes testify persuasively to their origin as folktales"³² seems to me an utterly fallacious inference; to accept that "by identifying his informants, Hong Mai places himself squarely in the *zhiguai* ['strange tale'] tradition"³³ may blind us to serious and substantive differences; to quip that the *Yijian zhi* was "the 'Ripley's Believe It or Not' of the late twelfth century"³⁴ only trivializes a very complex work.

Given a rigorous definition of the folktale, I believe that very few of the anecdotes in the *Yijian zhi* can be said to so derive. The anecdotes of the *Yijian zhi* range from hagiography to high-placed gossip, from reportage to the generic reconfiguration of the events related, from outside to inside styles of narration. The distinction between out-

side and inside styles of narration—between what G. Genette calls “heterodiegesis” and “homodiegesis,” respectively³⁵—is a distinction between narrative postures. It has been elaborated on by John Winkler.³⁶ In heterodiegesis, the narrator is outside the story; he or she is a purveyor of fiction, a sheer storyteller. Not many of the anecdotes of the *Yijian zhi* are heterodiegetic. In homodiegesis, the narrator does not tell a story but tells what happened and belongs to the same world as the characters, whatever part he or she played or did not play in the events. In homodiegesis, there are degrees of insidedness. The narrator may claim to know something directly because he or she was there at the events (intradiegesis), or he or she may know something from others who were there (extradiegesis).

In the *Yijian zhi* the degrees of insidedness are even more attenuated and refined. Extradiegetically, Hong Mai may also know something from a colleague, kinsman, friend, or neighbor of someone who was there, or he may know something because he read a private account of someone who was there—a diary, perhaps, or commemorative poem. One distinction between the “strange tale” (*zhiguai*) tradition and the *Yijian zhi* is that in the former homodiegetic techniques (“I saw this,” “I heard this from . . .”) serve the largely heterodiegetic end of sheer storytelling, whereas in the latter the homodiegetic aim of telling what happened is, on occasion, shaped by heterodiegetic forms.

Any attempt to say something significant about the character of the *Yijian zhi* as a whole emerges only from a sustained analysis of its individual anecdotes and from the strength of the interpretive use to which that analysis is put. This book focuses on a well-defined group of homodiegetic narratives that concern spirit-possession and therapeutic ritual. In all cases we must be sensitive to those occasions when Hong Mai’s reasons either for telling what happened or for declining to name an informant or participant serve distinctly political or social ends. We must also be sensitive to the weight of literary genre on a particular attempt to tell what happened—the weight of the “demon story,” say, on an account of an exorcistic ritual. This is by no means easy to sort out because the structure of the “demon story” itself had long been determined by the structure of exorcistic ritual.

Yet the evidentiary status of the *Yijian zhi*, its usefulness as a document of social history, does not ultimately rest on our ability to distill

the prejudicial or the generic from any given anecdote. The *Yijian zhi* is primarily a record of subjective experiences, a document of private life that contrasts with such public documents as historical biographies, eulogies, and grave inscriptions, all of which mark out a lifetime in terms of the objective symbols of bureaucratic and family advancement. This still begs the question, however, because most of the anecdotes in the *Yijian zhi* do not record the subjective experiences of Hong Mai or his family, but the experiences of others that were reported to him or that he otherwise obtained. On what basis, then, can we trust the factualness of the anecdotes in the *Yijian zhi*?

In terms of the subject of this study—namely, the social history of spirit-possession and exorcism in the twelfth century—we can begin to establish trust by juxtaposing a carefully arranged sequence of anecdotes with a large body of canonical ritual texts that refer to exactly the same events. Almost every anecdote I have selected records ritual processes that can be confirmed down to the smallest detail by independent sources. Even those elements that appear to us as quite fantastic—elements that are often related to the representation of the behavior of demons—become decidedly less so in light of the canonical texts. For example, when demons are described in the anecdotes as appearing as objective entities, this usually corresponds to the precise moments in the ritual texts when the demons are visualized by the priest, and when demons are described as speaking, this corresponds to the moments in the texts when they possess the patient.

Now, if the *Yijian zhi*, or at least the anecdotes from it that I employ, are consistently correct about extremely esoteric matters of ritual, should we not also take seriously their evidence about the setting of these rituals—that is, the social relations of the priests, monks, and other exorcists, and of the families who hired them? It is difficult, if not impossible, to settle the question of factualness definitively. But in addition to building up trust by comparing anecdotes and canonical ritual texts, the anecdotes I have chosen appear to be believable based on everything I know and can learn about Song society. For instance, thanks to the work of social historians such as Patricia Ebrey and Gudula Linck, we have learned that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a woman's legal, economic, and personal ties to her natal family persisted long after marriage and with greater intensity than in earlier or later dynasties. Can it therefore be an accident that the issue

raised over and over again in the cases of psychosomatic illness in the *Yijian zhi* is precisely the trauma that women experienced when trying to maintain these ties in the face of separation?

In this work, I have wherever possible translated rather than paraphrased or simply referred to the anecdotes that are important for my subject. I have done so for a very precise reason. In the paraphrase, the historian tends to discard what seems superfluous (supplemental), so that what is included serves the overarching, teleological narratives of history and historiography. Paraphrase, in other words, tends to close off interpretation and fails to release what Joel Fineman finds to be the unique potential of the anecdote to “effect the real” and to provide “an opening to history.”³⁷