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# A Question of Control: Licensing Local Ritual Specialists in Jiangnan, 1850-1950 \*

Vincent Goossaert \*\*

One of the most pressing questions facing religious organizations in China today, especially the Buddhist and Daoist associations, concerns state attempts to control/manage unlicensed priests who operate at the grassroots level, often below the radar of the local authorities. These vernacular<sup>1</sup> priests are totally embedded in local society and tend to resist top-down campaigns for religious and ideological reform (ritual standardization, politicization etc.). This is hardly an entirely new phenomenon, however, and while some scholars have discussed the contemporary situation,<sup>2</sup> our understanding of its import would benefit from

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<sup>1</sup> I use vernacular as a broad category encompassing all specialists that do not belong to the elite strata, its 官話 culture and supra-local networks.

<sup>2</sup> Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, "Daoism in China Today, 1980-2002," in *Religion in China Today*, ed. Daniel L. Overmyer, Issue 174 of *The China Quarterly* (2003): 413-427.

a modern historical perspective centering on the strategies used by clerical elites, local community leaders, and government officials in attempting to bring this aspect of communal religion under various sorts of order or control, as well as on alternative orders in which vernacular priests themselves are partaking.

This article will consider various types of vernacular specialists, such as at-home Daoist masters (*huoju daoshi* 火居道士), lay Buddhist monks, Confucian priests 禮生, diviners (*yinyang sheng* 陰陽生), actors and musicians, storytellers, and spirit-mediums, with the primary focus on the first of these types. My primary geographical focus is on Jiangnan as a local system, but I also draw examples and comparisons from other areas. I will first consider late Qing practices as seen in newspaper reports, local gazetteers, archives, manuscript sources, and ethnographic writings, and then new policies of registering, monitoring, and in some cases banning vernacular priests enacted during the Republican period. One key actor in these processes was the Heavenly Master Zhang (Zhang tianshi 張天師), who was himself involved in licensing vernacular Daoist priests and diviners, while also working with the late imperial administration and subsequently Republican-era clerical associations.

My interest in these issues goes beyond the mere question of laws on religious specialists and their enforcement in modern China. Rather, it stems from an interrogation on the various modes of regulating local society, that include top-down policies, but also internal regulation from within local society, and the complex interrelations between these modes. Vernacular priests, along with local cults and various sorts of social formations (territories, lineages, guilds, voluntary associations, etc.) are all part of local ritual systems that develop their own regulations. Such regulations aim not only at banning immoral/deviant 邪 practices, which was the aim of state laws, but also at controlling innovation, at guaranteeing the quality and authenticity of ritual

services (against imposters among other things), and ensuring that competition does not threaten established situations and local embedded hierarchies. In such contexts, access to rights to perform rituals was typically limited to people with the proper credentials and guaranteed by contracts. Such rights and contracts, like in any other trade, were an economic as well as a religious issue, involving buying licenses and protecting monopolies. Looking at such regulations and their formalization offers a significant contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of local society, but also raises the issue of the extent to which state agents (imperial, Republican, and PRC) and local elites at the local level were willing to recognize and, if asked, to enforce contractual relationships and rights established from within local society. Regulations of local ritual were thus played out in the triangle between state agents, local elites, and clerical leaders<sup>3</sup> — even though the role of local elites does not appear clearly enough in the documents I have been able to collect so far. I argue that in late imperial times, local civil officials rarely intervened directly, and most of the enforcement of both state and local regulations was delegated to clerical officials. This situation changed during the Republican period, with more direct management assumed by local civil authorities, but the model of indirect rule has by no means disappeared.

## 1 • Clerical Hierarchies and Rights to Perform

Buddhism and Daoism were characterized in most of China, and in Jiangnan in particular, by a hierarchical organization that encompassed symbolic, ritual, and economic hierarchies. On top were elite clerics, formally

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<sup>3</sup> Paul R. Katz, "Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy beyond the State: Standardizing Ritual in Chinese Society," *Modern China*, 33.1 (2007): 72-90.

recognized by the state and based in central temples (major monasteries, large urban temples).<sup>4</sup> Below the elite layer was a much larger stratum of local temple managers and home-based clerics, ministering to the common folk, without large symbolic or material resources but with established rights over temples and/or well-delimited territories. While it is well known that the majority of Daoists were (and are) home-based, and called *huoju* 火居, or *sanju* 散居, we need to keep in mind that Buddhists at the village level were also quite often priests (some of them married) working from home rather than from a temple.<sup>5</sup> Among them, the married *xianghua heshang* 香花和尚 of the Hakka world and the Shijiao 釋教 priests of Taiwan are better known. In Jiangnan, Buddhist priests (married or not) working primarily for funerals within their area are called *yeheshang* 野和尚 in the literature, a common derogatory term for uncouth Buddhists – *yedaoshi* 野道士 was also used.<sup>6</sup> Those I met in Suzhou in 2012 were simply

<sup>4</sup> On the notion of Daoist central temples in Jiangnan, see Vincent Goossaert, "Bureaucratie, taxation et justice. Taoïsme et construction de l'État au Jiangnan (Chine), XVIIe-XIXe siècles," *Annales HSS*, 4 (2010): 999-1027.

<sup>5</sup> A brief historical introduction to the Buddhist married specialists in Tam Wai-Lun, "Exorcism and the Pu'an Buddhist Ritual Specialists in Rural China," in *Exorcism in Daoism: A Berlin Symposium*, ed. Florian C. Reiter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), pp. 137-39. On married Buddhist priests in Beijing, see Ju Xi 鞠熙, "Beijing de xiaceng simiao yu shequ gongong kongjian 北京的下層寺廟與社區公共空間," paper presented at the international conference "Temples and Local Communities in Urban China," Beijing, 29-31 October 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Che Xilun 車錫倫, "Jiangsu Changshu diqu de 'zuohui jiangjing' he baojuan jianmu 江蘇常熟地區的'做會講經'和寶卷簡目," *Henan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 河南教育學院學報(哲學社會科學版), 6 (2009), pp. 2-3, defines them as unordained Buddhist ritual specialists who do funerals. The turn of the twentieth century Shanghainese novel *Guanchang xianxingji* 官場現形記 by Li Boyuan 李伯元 (1867-1906) (in *Li Boyuan quanji* 李伯元全集, vol. 2. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), chap. 38, p. 523 confirms that local people called *yeheshang* the Buddhists without the moxa burns on the scalp that characterized ordained monks and nuns. It is important to distinguish the local priests from both vagrant clerics (such as those discussed in Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: the Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990]) and from amateur practitioners (usually called "lay Buddhists" in the literature).

called (by others) *heshang*.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast to the elite Daoists and Buddhists, who were registered with the state, and thus had privileges that they transmitted through their lineages, most Daoists were not registered, usually not organized in lineages (they transmitted their practice to sons or disciples and knew the transmission lines over a few generations, but these transmissions were not embedded in a larger lineage with genealogies, ancestor worship, and common property) and operated wholly below the radar of the state. *Huoju* Daoists and married *heshang* were banned by Qing laws.<sup>8</sup> Official sources such as the local gazetteers rarely mention the vernacular priests, even though they do appear here and there either in the polemical literature (where vernacular Daoists are categorized often not as Daoists but as spirit-mediums, *shiwu* 師巫) or in anecdotes<sup>9</sup>; even then, such mentions only make full sense when illuminated by present-day ethnography of these specialists. Thus, vernacular Buddhists and Daoists, at the same time as they belonged to a hierarchical clerical system, also were part of a galaxy of vernacular ritual specialists, including musicians, spirit-mediums and diviners, none of them really recognized by the state.

Yet, lack of registration with the state certainly did not lead to utter deregulation and unrestrained competition. Within local society, and notwithstanding a lack of formal state authorization, these specialists could not work and act purely as they wished. One first major type of regulation they were

<sup>7</sup> Fang Ling (oral communication, September 2012) met married Buddhist priests in Hangzhou who described themselves as *huoju heshang*.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "Counting the Monks: The 1736-1739 Census of the Chinese Clergy," *Late Imperial China*, 21.2 (2000): 40-85.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1906), *Youtai xianguan biji* 右台仙館筆記 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), #209, where Yu Yue discusses different types of vernacular priests and confuses Daoists and spirit-mediums.

subjected to, at least in Jiangnan, was a system of territories or parishes. The division of both urban and rural areas into territories, each of which "belonged" to a family of ritual specialists having a hereditary monopolistic right to perform rituals or be hired for ritual services within the territory, was a widespread phenomenon. In Jiangnan, these territories, or parishes, were called *mentu* 門圖/徒 or *menjuan* 門眷.<sup>10</sup> The term *mentu* was already used with that specific meaning of "clientele" (rather than the more common meaning of "disciple") by the Tang period; this suggests that members of such clienteles may at some point have been considered as lay disciples of the cleric who owned the right to perform for them.<sup>11</sup> But, by the modern period, this notion of discipleship seems to have become very vague at best. They were an asset (a family owned the monopoly over all people living within a territory, or over a set list of families) and could be exchanged, rented out, sold, or mortgaged (not unlike the practice of contemporary physicians).

The better-known use of the term *menjuan* concerns providers of ritual services who intervened during weddings and funerals, notably musicians and opera actors, but also sedan carriers and female attendants at weddings. In northern and central Zhejiang, these providers were typically members of the *duomin* 墮民, "fallen people," a specific sub-type of outcasts, *jianmin* 賤民, proper to this area. *Duomin* have existed since the early Ming all over the area,

<sup>10</sup> The three terms have different nuances (*mentu* 門圖 being strictly geographical, *mentu* 門徒 and *menjuan* referring to personal bonds) but they refer to the same broad practice, and were quite often used interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> *Mentu*, defined as the groups of laypeople Buddhist clerics regularly visited at their homes, were banned by an imperial edict in 714. Zhai Hao 翟灝 (?-1788), *Tongsubian* 通俗編 (1751, *Xuxiu siku quanshu* edition), 20.10a-b, makes a direct connection between the Tang-period *mentu* and eighteenth-century *menjuan* in Jiangnan (quoting Gu Yanwu's 顧炎武 [1613-1682] *Rizhilu* 日知錄, which however does not use the word *menjuan*).

with a particular concentration around Shaoxing.<sup>12</sup> To some extent comparable to the *yuehu* 樂戶 of Shanxi, who also made a living providing entertainment-cum-ritual services (opera singing and prostitution) and had contractual monopolies over territories, they were both despised (and the 1723 imperial abolition of their *jianmin* status did not result in genuine emancipation) and considered a necessary part of local festive life. This system, whereby ritual services (in the large sense) were contracted on a long-term, hereditary basis between local families and outcasts, reminds one of the Indian *jajmani* system.<sup>13</sup>

The right to collect fees and donations from "their" families at each major holiday was the *duomin's* only asset, and they fought for it.<sup>14</sup> As a result, elite families saw them turn up at every family event, and tried to resist their demands when they seemed "excessive," while recognizing that these people indeed were entitled to something. This led to numerous complaints to officials, and to proclamations by the latter, limiting (but, we should note, not banning altogether) the amount these people (that officials described as musicians and professional funeral workers) could ask.<sup>15</sup>

But, such monopolistic rights were not owned only by outcasts. A local scholar wrote that in the Shanghai area, all of the "six trades 六色人或六局

<sup>12</sup> Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination & Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), chap. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Harold A. Gould, "The Hindu Jaymani System: A Case of Economic Particularism," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 14.4 (1958): 428-437.

<sup>14</sup> Yu Wanjun 俞婉君, "Shaoxing duomin fuyiquan 'menjuan' de tianye diaocha 紹興墮民服役權 '門眷' 的田野調查," *Minjian wenhua luntan* 民間文化論壇, 6 (2004): 79-83; Yu Wanjun, *Shaoxing duomin* 紹興墮民 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Such proclamations are commonplace in the epigraphical records and the collections of official texts. One instance that does use the term *menjuan* is "南沙善政," *Shenbao* 申報 (Shanghai: Shenbaoguan, daily, 1872-1949), 1875.04.29. Articles from the *Shenbao* are cited with the Western Gregorian calendar date as yyyy.mm.dd.



(of ritual and entertainment)" had a *mentu* organization (their own territories). These trades were: musicians 樂人, fireworks and firecrackers specialists 炮手, bride helpers 喜娘 (which also was the primary role of female *duomin*), carriers (of sedans, coffins...) 腳班, Buddhists, and Daoists.<sup>16</sup> Troupes of musicians in Shanghai were called *mentu* when they became professional, showing that whereas amateurs were free to perform as they wished (a rule also observed among other types of ritual specialists),<sup>17</sup> when performance became a profession it had to be regulated in terms of access and exercise.<sup>18</sup> Various late Qing Jiangnan township gazetteers list slightly different types of ritual specialists as having a parish system: one, for a township near Shanghai, lists Buddhists, Daoists, and musicians<sup>19</sup>; another for a place near Jiaying, lists Buddhists, Daoists, and spirit-mediums.<sup>20</sup>

A parish system was thus in operation for vernacular Buddhist and Daoist clerics. One scholar who has done fieldwork among the *duomin* found that their contracts were very similar to those of the *yeheshang* and *yedaoshi* (her term)

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Sichun 張思蕊, quoted in Jiang Jie 江捷, "Tangming zhi ming jiqi lishi shuoyuan 堂名之名及其歷史溯源," *Xiqu yanjiu* 戲曲研究, 77 (2008), p. 253.

<sup>17</sup> Amateurs were also as a rule of a higher social standing than professionals — a theme I intend to explore more fully in another paper.

<sup>18</sup> Qi Kun 齊琨, "Yinyue wenhua neiying jizhi (shang) 音樂文化內應機制 (上)," *Zhongguo yinyuexue* 中國音樂學, 1 (2006): 61-73.

<sup>19</sup> *Zhuli xiaozhi* 珠里小志 (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2004. *Shanghai xiangzhen jiuzhi congshu* 上海鄉鎮舊志叢書, vol. 7), p. 24. This description of religious specialists' parishes immediately follows a discussion of the organizations of workers in the textile industry, showing how both are understood as aspects of the socio-economic makeup of local society.

<sup>20</sup> *Puyuan suozhi* 濮院瑣志 (1820), discussed in Richard Von Glahn, "The Sociology of Local Religion in the Lake Tai Basin," in *Religion and Chinese Society*, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong/Paris: Chinese University Press/EFEQ, 2004), p. 789.

specialized in funerals.<sup>21</sup> In northern Zhejiang and southern Jiangsu, families were registered with a given cleric (sources most often refer to Buddhists) called their *menjuan* cleric, who was responsible for providing funerary rituals for them, keeping records of the deceased in these families, and following up with memorial services for ancestors. The earliest records I have found date from the Ming: a late fifteenth-century description of Suzhou similarly explains that each Buddhist sublineage (*fang* 房) had a number of families as their "parish" (*mentu*) to whom they had a monopolistic right to minister (other clerics performing for these families could be sued); on festival days, Buddhists visited "their" families and gave them printed prayers and scriptures to be burned for their ancestors, in exchange for substantial set amounts of donations.<sup>22</sup> An eighteenth-century author discussing Hangzhou customs wrote that every single family had a *menjuan* (his own was a monk of the Tianchang monastery 天長寺) who would come immediately in case of untoward death to chant the appropriate scriptures: to him, this was the equivalent of the *yingfu* 應付 (on duty to answer calls) monks.<sup>23</sup> They kept genealogical registers of the families they were responsible for.<sup>24</sup> The parish system, like many elements of grassroots religious culture and organization, is little discussed in literary and official sources, but the occasional casual mention suggests that readers were entirely familiar with it. For instance,

<sup>21</sup> Yu Wanjun, "Shaoxing duomin fuyiquan," 83. These clerics, like the *duomin*, visited their patrons during festivals, offering them icons, texts, prayers, etc. in exchange for gifts.

<sup>22</sup> (*Hongzhi*) *Wujiang xianzhi* (弘治) 吳江縣志, j. 6, quoted in Wang Jian 王健, *Lihai xiangguan: Ming Qing yilai Jiangnan Susong diqu minjian xinyang yanjiu* 利害相關：明清以來江南蘇松地區民間信仰研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010), pp. 56-57. Very similar remarks in later gazetteers in the Jiaying area, including (*Guangxu*) *Pinghu xianzhi* (光緒) 平湖縣志 (1886), 2.50b-51a and (*Guangxu*) *Jiaying fuzhi* (光緒) 嘉興府志 (1878), 34.11a.

<sup>23</sup> On the *yingfu* category, see Goossaert, "Counting the monks," 44.

<sup>24</sup> Xu Fengji 徐逢吉, *Qingbo xiaozi* 清波小志 (1734. *Congshu jicheng edition*), 2:32.

a seventeenth-century novel has a monk referring to the rich patron for whom he is performing a funeral as "my hereditary *menjuan*."<sup>25</sup>

That parishes remained in place is confirmed by late Qing records. The famous scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1906) stated that his family (who lived in Deqing, half-way between Hangzhou and Huzhou) did not keep genealogical records, but that the records (called "records of the other world" 陰冊) were maintained in good order (that is, until the destructions of the Taiping War) at the Yueshan monastery 越山寺, which was holding his family's *menjuan* rights.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, an 1887 gazetteer of Tongxiang (between Hangzhou and Jiaxing) explains that all families had a *menjuan* Buddhist temple taking care of them and their dead, that sent them during the 11<sup>th</sup> month a nominal memorial document to be burnt for each of their ancestors.<sup>27</sup> This was also observed by Fei Xiaotong.<sup>28</sup> The term for patrons of the ritual providers, *zhugu* 主顧, was the same for the *duomin* and the clerics.

My colleague Fang Ling interviewed a Daoist in Hangzhou who mentioned that, up to the Republican period, the *menjuan* clerics also informally cooperated with the local *yamen*; since they were called each time someone had died in their parish, they had a look at the circumstances of the death (*menjuan* Daoists thus

<sup>25</sup> Qingxidaoren 清溪道人 (17<sup>th</sup> cent.), *Chanzen houshi* 禪真後史, chap.12: 適聞壁外念誦者, 乃是賣墳地的議單。這賣主是小僧世代門眷, 本城有名的諫議大夫鄭坤的孫子鄭柳。

<sup>26</sup> Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1906), *Chaxiangshi sanchao* 茶香室三鈔 (*Xuxiu Siku quanshu* edition), 17.18a-b.

<sup>27</sup> (*Guangxu*) *Tongxiang xianzhi* (光緒) 桐鄉縣志 (1887), 2" 風俗, " 8b. A similar description for nearby Jiaxing in Zheng Fengqiang 鄭鳳鏘 (ca. 1860s), *Xincheng suozhi* 新塍瑣志 (in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng* 中國地方志集成, *Xiangzhen zhi zhuanji* 鄉鎮志專輯, vol. 18), 1.3b.

<sup>28</sup> Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, *Jiangcun jingji* 江村經濟 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002), p. 78. Fei does not use the term *menjuan*.

had some medical knowledge), and reported to the *yamen* if they considered that something fishy had happened.

In other parts of Jiangnan, vernacular priests owning parishes did not necessarily have exclusive responsibilities for funeral services, but nonetheless had a monopolistic right to perform within their territory. This, using either the term *mentu* or *menjuan*, is attested among both Buddhists<sup>29</sup> and Daoists. During the early nineteenth century, a temple leader bought and gave to the Buddhist cleric managing the temple a *menjuan* of six hundred families so that he had a secure income.<sup>30</sup> Owning a parish was an economic necessity; it was also a status marker for respectable clerics. In Suzhou, it was indeed a requisite among Daoists to have a parish: the 1937 charter of the Suzhou branch of the Daoist association banned anyone who either was not an ordained *daoshi*, or did not possess a *mentu* from performing rituals.<sup>31</sup> Suzhou Daoist priests I interviewed told me that before the 1950s all priests, except those based in the largest temples (which had their own revenues) had a *mentu*, but this system has now disappeared.

Whereas Daoists' (and married *heshang*) *mentu* were most often the property of a family, for celibate Buddhists, the property was rather invested in a sublineage (*fang*). Large Daoist and Buddhist monasteries in Jiangnan were divided into a number of *fang* (up to twenty or more for the largest monasteries) which all had their own property including parishes.<sup>32</sup> Presumably, the most

<sup>29</sup> Wang Jian, *Lihai xiangguan*, 56-57, discussing a Ming source on Suzhou, and a late Qing one for a township near Shanghai.

<sup>30</sup> Wang Jian, *Lihai xiangguan*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Huang Xinhua 黃新華, "Minguo nianjian Suzhou daojiao kao 民國年間蘇州道教考," *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教, 4 (2008), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> On the *fang* organization in Jiangnan Buddhism, see Zhang Xuesong 張雪松, "Ming Qing yilai Zhongguo fojiao fayuan zongzu tanxi 明清以來中國佛教法緣宗族探析," *Furen zongjiao yanjiu* 輔仁宗教研究, 19 (2009): 127-150.

prominent monasteries were not part of the system, because their monks were not supposed to spend their time doing funerals at patrons' homes, and because they had large land endowments that provided sufficient income — yet, we do read about some such monasteries having parishes.<sup>33</sup>

From the available sources, the parish system seems to have been well established in the core Jiangnan area (the old prefectures of Suzhou and Songjiang in Jiangsu and Hangzhou, Huzhou, and Jiaxing in Zhejiang). How far geographically it extended is not clear, but it existed in Changzhou, to the south of Nanjing.<sup>34</sup> In Anqing, the then capital of Anhui province, seventeen leading Daoist families had a territory of their own in the city; only the celibate Daoists of the main temple (the Youshengguan 佑聖觀) had the right to perform anywhere.<sup>35</sup> A comparable practice existed in Shangyu (a smaller city between Hangzhou and Ningbo).<sup>36</sup> Outside of Jiangnan, similar situations also obtained in places such as Wuhan,<sup>37</sup> and Liancheng (Fujian), where the City God temple Daoists had a monopoly over the whole city, and the rest of the county was divided into several parishes.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "騙竊神奇," *Shenbao*, 1883.05.18, re. the Shilin chansi 獅林禪寺 in Suzhou.

<sup>34</sup> Qin Dexiang 秦德祥, "Changzhou daojiao jiqi yinyue 常州道教及其音樂," *Zhongguo yinyue* 中國音樂, 3 (1997): 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> Zhan Shouzhen 詹壽禎, "Anqing daoguan de jianzao yu chuanshuo 安慶道觀的建造與傳說" and "Anqing daojiao tanzhu ji keshi 安慶道教壇主及客師," *Anqing wenshi ziliao* 安慶文史資料, 25 (1994):108-112 & 116-118.

<sup>36</sup> Xu Hongtu 徐宏圖 & Shi Yuanshi 石元詩, *Zhejiang sheng Shangyu xian Lingbao zhai tan keyiben huibian* 浙江省上虞縣靈寶齋壇科儀本彙編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mei Li 梅莉, "Cong Minguo nianjian Hankou de sici dengji kan difang zhengfu dui huojia daoshi de guanli 從民國年間漢口的四次登記看地方政府對火居道士的管理," *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 道教研究學報, 4 (2012): 251-286.

<sup>38</sup> Wei Deyu 魏德毓, "Ming yilai Zhengyi pai daojiao de shisuhua: dui Minxi huojia daoshi de diaocha 明以來正一派道教的世俗化——對閩西火居道士的調查," *Shehui kexue* 社會科學, 11 (2006): 153-160.

The logic beyond the parish system was to balance and protect the interests of established clerics, by providing them with guaranteed income and protecting them against competition and dumping, but also to some extent, those of the customers. Such reasoning is not unique to China and a similar logic was at work in other countries, such as the Japanese *danka* 檀家 system, or the *danggol* parishes possessed by Korean shamans.

Because owning a temple or a *mentu* was a privilege, it created a clerical underclass composed of those who had none (or had a small one that did not suffice to make a living) and could only, or mostly, work when hired to fill out the number in a troupe (led of course by a cleric who has the right to perform). For instance, an early nineteenth-century source describes Daoists gathering each morning at one gate in Suzhou waiting for a day job of helping to perform small rituals, in stark contrast to a few rich and influential elite Daoist families in the same city.<sup>39</sup> The situation was still basically the same in the early 1950s: the Daoist association counted two types of Daoists, the temple-based ones (道房道士) who hired the others (called 奔赴應, a variant of the term *yingfu* we have seen above) on a day job basis (they only had to bring their own costume); the former were naturally richer and more respected.<sup>40</sup> Descriptions of Shanghai Daoism also oppose the *yuandao* 院道 (Daoists having rights in a given temple) to the home-based, even though some of the latter may be part of a temple troupe.<sup>41</sup> In various parts of China, those Daoists with an established

<sup>39</sup> Gu Zhentao 顧震濤 (18/19<sup>th</sup> century), *Wumen biaoyin* 吳門表隱 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 2.23.

<sup>40</sup> Huang Xinhua, "Minguo nianjian Suzhou daojiao kao," 34.

<sup>41</sup> Zhu Jianming 朱建明 and Tan Jingde 談敬德, *Shanghai Nanhuixian Zhengyi pai daotan yu Dongyuemiao keyiben* 上海南匯縣正一派道壇與東嶽廟科儀本 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2006), p. 13.

hereditary position carrying monopolistic rights (over temples and/or territories) were clearly distinguished from those without such a position (very often called "guests" *keshi* 客師) whom they employed on a regular or ad hoc basis.<sup>42</sup>

## 2 · Licensing and the Zhang Heavenly Master

Regulating the right to perform rituals and granting hereditary monopolies was one powerful means local society resorted to when dealing with the messy abundance of and competition between ritual specialists. Under the parish system, ritual specialists had a more or less secure income, and people had a more or less guaranteed access to ritual services; providers and recipients of ritual services knew (and presumably trusted) each other. But, that did not prevent the existence of all sorts of other specialists offering their services. Another means for controlling them was to resort to higher authorities who issued licenses. Whereas Buddhists (and Quanzhen Daoists) had to rely on an ordination 傳戒 system that worked well for licensing elite clerics but not so for village priests (most village Buddhists and Quanzhen Daoists were not ordained), the majority of Daoists had another licensing authority.

With the exception of Quanzhen clerics, all Daoists were under the authority of the Zhang Heavenly Master and the clerical administration he ran at Longhushan 龍虎山, staffed by a number of elite Daoists titled "ritual officials," *faguan* 法官.<sup>43</sup> One of the most important functions of the Zhang

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<sup>42</sup> Qian Tiemin 錢鐵民 and Ma Zhenyuan 馬珍媛, *Wuxi daojiao keyi yinyue yanjiu* 無錫道教教科儀音樂研究 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1999), p. 5; Zhan Shouzhen, "Anqing daojiao tanzhu ji keshi."

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "Bureaucratic Charisma: The Zhang Heavenly Master Institution and Court Taoists in Late-Qing China," *Asia Major*, 3rd series, 17.2 (2004): 121-159.

Heavenly Master institution was that it served as the Zhengyi 正一 Daoists' sole nation-wide training and ordination center — a function it partly recovered with the ordination staged there in 1991. Ordination was a crucial part of the Zhang Heavenly Master's way of deploying a bureaucratic organization over the Daoist clergy, and it was also a major way for late imperial Daoists to acquire legitimacy.

The Longhushan ordination ritual, in direct continuity with medieval Daoist liturgy, is based on the conferral of liturgical registers, *lu* 籙, which give the ordinand a rank (*zhi* 職) within the spiritual hierarchy of the universe. The details of the various ordination ranks, each with their specific registers, are described in an important manual titled *Tiantan yuge* 天壇玉格, of which there exist numerous versions.<sup>44</sup> At the top of the complex hierarchy of ranks were the Qingwei Lingbao 清微靈寶 ordinations; Daoists initiated in vernacular traditions were also welcome and ordained, but at a lower rank and with a pledge to practice "orthodox Daoism" only. Ordinations conferred by the Zhang Heavenly Master as well as the selection of particularly promising young Daoists for internships at Longhushan and promotion to *faguan* positions<sup>45</sup> did not necessarily take place at Longhushan, as either the Heavenly Master himself or prominent *faguan* also occasionally organized ordination tours in various provinces, with Jiangnan being by far the area most often visited. Throughout the Ming and Qing periods, Heavenly Masters traveled through the country and held ordinations along the way, a practice which the state, notably beginning in

<sup>44</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "The Heavenly Master Ordination System in Modern China: A Preliminary Study of *Tiantan yuge* 天壇玉格," (in a volume edited by Lai Chi-tim, forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> "天師至蘇緣由," *Shenbao*, 1877.05.05 describes such a session of examining Daoist novices by the Heavenly Master in Suzhou.



the Qianlong period, tried hard to curtail.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the misgiving of local officials, the Heavenly Master institution's efforts at licensing and controlling vernacular clerics was based on its recognition by the Qing regime that renewed the Heavenly Master's mandate to control the whole Daoist clergy.<sup>47</sup> In his preface to the authoritative 1658 edition of the *Tiantan yuge*, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Heavenly Master Zhang Hongren 張洪任 (1631-1667, titled Heavenly Master in 1651) insists that his initiative of ordering the ordination system runs closely parallel to the imperial enterprise of setting up a civil bureaucracy. He first claims that the system of Daoist registers was initially set up by Zhang Daoling in imitation of the imperial bureaucratic organization; he then entrusts eminent Suzhou Daoist Shi Daoyuan 施道淵 (1617-1678) with making the *Tiantan yuge* widely available throughout China so that it can exclude self-promoting Daoists, and ensure that all ranks are granted according to merit, "just like in the imperial civil service." This was one of the most ambitious projects to regulate vernacular priests ever formulated, but it certainly worked as a template for others.

This preface thus clearly puts the *Tiantan yuge* at the center of a revival of an older project, whereby the Heavenly Master headquarters at Longhushan was envisioned to be at the core of a vast bureaucracy controlling and disciplining the whole Daoist clergy. We have other sources documenting attempts to enact this project, with Daoist officials from Longhushan on official missions to control vernacular Daoists. The Longhushan ordinations' logic of licensing is spelled out most clearly in an ordination certificate obtained in 1704 by a

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<sup>46</sup> Goossaert, "Bureaucratic Charisma," n. 54.

<sup>47</sup> See the nomination edicts for Zhang Yingjing 張應京 (?-1651, titled 52<sup>nd</sup> Heavenly Master in 1636) and his son the 53<sup>rd</sup> Zhang Hongren in Lou Jinyuan 婁近垣 (1689-1776), *Longhushan zhi* 龍虎山志 (1740. Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1996), 8:89.

Hakka Daoist priest from southern Hunan, granted by the 54<sup>th</sup> Heavenly Master, where the recipient is licensed against a pledge not to ever engage in "heterodox mediumistic rites."<sup>48</sup>

The 1658 preface also betrays a high sensibility to Daoists usurping the Heavenly Masters' authority and prerogatives over granting titles and ranks (just as the civil bureaucracy was highly concerned with usurpation, faked seals, and forged documents); the Longhushan monopoly on conferring registers and selling Heavenly Master talismans was guaranteed by the state and actively enforced. It plays up an ideal of meritocracy that constitutes the shared vision of imperial and Daoist bureaucracies, and that has been at the core of the Zhengyi ordination system since the early medieval period — even though the Longhushan actually sold titles.

This vision fits perfectly with what we know of the operation of the Heavenly Master institution in Qing society. The Heavenly Master headquarters ran a highly bureaucratic structure that nominally extended over the whole empire, but was most operative in the Jiangnan area, where a dense network of Daoist temples (notably the City God temples 城隍廟) and elite Daoists had maintained very close links with Longhushan since at least the Yuan period.<sup>49</sup> In this area, central Daoist temples regularly sent young Daoists to serve in the Longhushan administration; there, they processed a regular flow of requests

<sup>48</sup> "Tianshi fu zhishi ting gei Zhangxi tan Kang Sheng Yilang zhaopiao" 天師府知事廳給漳溪壇康勝一郎照票, in Liu Jinfeng 劉勁峰, ed., *Gannan zongzu shehui yu daojiao wenhua yanjiu* 贛南宗族社會與道教文化研究 (Hong Kong: Guoji keji xuehui, Faguo yuandong xueyuan [École Française d'Extrême-Orient] & Haiwai huaren ziliao yanjiu zhongxin, 2000), p. 263.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent Goossaert 高萬桑, "Qingdai Jiangnan diqu de Chenghuangmiao, Zhang Tianshi ji daojiao guanliao tixi 清代江南地區的城隍廟、張天師及道教官僚體系," *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究, 1 (2010): 1-11.

for ordinations (for priests and laypersons), canonizations for local gods,<sup>50</sup> and appeals in legal cases, all this in a bureaucratic format basically identical to (in some cases, entirely fused with) that of the imperial bureaucracy.<sup>51</sup>

My concern here is not the ritual aspects of ordination and the complex system of ranks that gave it order; rather, I deal here with how ordination practices entailed licensing and social control. The evidence concerning the Heavenly Master's supervision over vernacular Daoists is extremely scattered and piecemeal, but a number of surviving documents, notably manuscripts in the collections of Daoists and archival records, shed light on these processes.

Let us look at archives first. I have unfortunately not found any relevant archival material from Jiangnan yet, but the Qing-period archives from Baxian 巴縣 (modern-day Chongqing city) have a set of pieces dated 1883 documenting the Heavenly Master's efforts at licensing priests, and the resistance he met.<sup>52</sup> On that date, a circular was sent from Longhushan to all local Daoist officials (more on them below), reaffirming the Longhushan's ambition to control ordinations and root out heterodox practices and promotions among Daoists contrary to procedures. Following this circular, the prefectural Daoist official 道紀 reported to the magistrate, explaining how difficult this policy was to implement in practice. In a following report to the magistrate, the prefectural Daoist official details why this request from the Heavenly Master lands him in trouble: the Heavenly Master considers all vernacular Daoists' ordination ranks 道職 as invalid, and wants them all to undergo a new ordination, for a hefty fee. In yet another report to the

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<sup>50</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "The Heavenly Master, canonization, and the Daoist construction of local religion in late Imperial Jiangnan," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 20 (2011): 229-245.

<sup>51</sup> Goossaert, "Bureaucratie, taxation et justice."

<sup>52</sup> The documents are published in Wang Jianchuan 王見川 & Vincent Goossaert 高萬桑, eds., *Jindai Zhang tianshi shiliao huibian* 近代張天師史料彙編 (Taipei: Boyang, 2013).

magistrate, the prefectural Daoist official tells how the Heavenly Master's request for vernacular Daoists to undergo ordinations with him created violent reactions, with local Daoists adamantly rejecting the idea of paying the requested fee. One of the most fascinating aspects of these Baxian documents is that they show that the Heavenly Master exerted some sort of hierarchical authority not only above Daoists but also above *yinyang* masters 陰陽先生, as they were involved along with the Daoists in this licensing policy.

This was not an isolated case: an undated administrative letter, *zhawen* 札文, sent by the 62<sup>nd</sup> Heavenly Master Zhang Yuanxu 張元旭 (1862-1925, titled 1904) to Shangrao (eastern Jiangxi) local officials asked them to investigate the status of local Daoists: his main concern was that some Daoists did not have a proper rank, *fazhi* 法職, or one that did not match their register, *lu* 籙.

The concern of the Zhang Heavenly Master when licensing clerics was dual: theological (to ensure that all performing clerics were duly registered with Heavenly authorities) and fiscal (that they had paid their dues to Longhushan). Even if hostile reports focus on the latter and dismiss the former, while documents issued by the Daoists themselves do the opposite, it seems that like any serious religious bureaucracy, the Longhushan was pursuing both aims simultaneously.

When the Heavenly Master himself, or his *faguan*, were traveling around, and arrived in a given county, they as a rule took residence in the largest Daoist temple, and summoned all Daoists in the area, checked their ordination documents, and requested all those deemed not to be in order to re-ordain with him (for a fee). Even when no ordination was needed, a payment from the local Daoists was expected, so that they remain on the lists. Some reports also mention that the Heavenly Master or his *faguan* were examining and taxing the *yinyang*

masters at the same time<sup>53</sup> — even though it is not clear to what extent the Heavenly Master could force them to ordain. *Faguan* sent on tours of inspection not only examined ordination documents, but also the behavior of local Daoists, and could possibly even evict a Daoist from a temple; such a dispute is documented in 1880s Anhui.<sup>54</sup> In 1889, a *faguan* was sent from Longhushan to Shanghai to inspect whether novices were passing themselves as fully ordained *fashi* 法師, and if so, to sue them in court. The local Daoist official told him he was taking care of it and sent him off.<sup>55</sup>

On occasion, unlicensed vernacular priests could be denounced to the Longhushan authorities. In 1902, the Heavenly Master wrote to the Shanghai magistrate asking him to take action against a Cantonese Daoist active in Shanghai who had not bought his title and rank 不捐法銜 (不捐道職); even though this Cantonese priest protested that he was performing in private settings, the magistrate nonetheless pressed the charge and forced him to pay.<sup>56</sup> Here, the various modes of regulation of vernacular specialists seem to come together: whether it is through the acquisition of a parish or the obtainment of a title and rank, the right to perform rituals for a living is an asset that is purchased from clerical or lay leaders under certain conditions.

Buying a high-ranking title could be a very good protection, but it also brought more attention, and higher standards. Consider for instance the case of Mao Fengchi 毛鳳池, a Shanghai Daoist who had a few years before bought a title of Daoist official from a Longhushan official, and, in 1880 found himself accused (in front of the mixed court of the Shanghai French concession) of

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<sup>53</sup> "鄂垣近聞," *Shenbao*, 1883.01.02.

<sup>54</sup> "道士求官," *Shenbao*, 1887.07.04.

<sup>55</sup> "節查道士," *Shenbao*, 1889.01.21.

<sup>56</sup> "上海縣署瑣案," *Shenbao*, 1902.05.27 and "上海縣署瑣案," *Shenbao*, 1902.05.30.

"desecrating Daoism." This came about because, as a result of a dispute with fellow Daoists, the magistrate explored his position and found that he was affiliated with the Shengzhen *daoyuan* 昇真道院.<sup>57</sup> This *daoyuan*, said the magistrate, was just another name for a "Buddha shop" *fodian* 佛店, and *fodian* were illegal: Mao was ordered to close it down.

*Fodian*, a pejorative label, designated entrepreneurial ritual service centers, typically opened by a cleric or a spirit-medium in a rented store or apartment. That included many Daoist *daoyuan* 道院 and *daoguan* 道館. They were illegal in Shanghai and presumably elsewhere, but nonetheless extremely common. Lai Chi-tim has also documented the home-based Daoists in Guangzhou, called *namo xiansheng* 喃無先生: in 1936 there were over such 270 "shops," called *namo daoguan* 喃無道館 where patrons could meet the Daoists to organize a ritual.<sup>58</sup> Presumably, because fast expanding cities such as Shanghai could not maintain a parish system that more settled areas put in place, there were no *mentu*, and so more room for entrepreneurial ritual specialists to find patrons. Moreover, some *daoguan*, especially in Shanghai, and as early as the 1870s, had a very pronounced entrepreneurial character, promoting cults and retreats and personalized services, thus prefiguring the storefront ritual services shops that have become commonplace in Taiwanese cities. Before 1949, a Shanghai proverb went: "every street has a Daoist spirit-writing hall, every alley has a home-based Daoist ritual shop" (路路見道堂, 條條有道房).<sup>59</sup> These shops

<sup>57</sup> "驅逐道士," *Shenbao*, 1880.10.27.

<sup>58</sup> Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou shi 'Namo daoguan' de lishi kaojiu 民國時期廣州市'南無道館'的歷史考究," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊, 37 (2002): 1-40 and *Guangdong difang daojiao yanjiu: daoguan, daoshi, ji keyi* 廣東地方道教研究: 道觀、道士及科儀 (Hong Kong 香港: Chinese University Press 中文大學, 2007), chap. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Chen Yaoting 陳耀庭, "Shanghai daojiao shi 上海道教史," in *Shanghai zongjiao shi* 上海

tended to be distinguished by their geographical origin, as they served different migrant communities.<sup>60</sup> The abundant denunciatory literature late Qing officials and journalists devoted to *fodian* was partly motivated by certain practices they engaged in (notably organizing female adepts), but also by their development outside the familiar and well-regulated space of parishes.

It was assumed that the numerous clerics from outside of the city who moved in, along with other migrants, to serve the ever-expanding ritual needs of the city's many communities could not (at least at first) find a place in the city's existing temples and should work their way up in the ritual system by opening shop in a rented room. But that an established cleric, supposed to work from an officially recognized temple, should run one was considered blurring the lines of clerical hierarchies. And we see both clerical (Heavenly Master and clerical officials) and civil authorities very committed to maintaining these hierarchies by keeping specialists firmly within their categories (elite, licensed vernacular, outsider). In an 1894 story, we also see how standards and pressure on officially recognized clerics were high. A Daoist from a major temple in Hangzhou, who was also the county Divination official or *yinyangxue* 陰陽學 (on which see below), was expelled from the temple because of sexual misdemeanors. He opened a private branch temple on his own, and the county Daoist official denounced him to the magistrate. A mediator intervened and prevented this from turning into a full-fledged trial, but the Daoist had to forfeit his right to perform rituals in the city as a result.<sup>61</sup>

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宗教史, eds. Ruan Renze 阮仁澤 & Gao Zhenong 高振農 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1992, pp. 353-438), pp. 426-28.

<sup>60</sup> Zhu Jianming and Tan Jingde, *Shanghai Nanhuixian Zhengyi pai*, pp.1-3.

<sup>61</sup> "虎林消夏錄," *Shenbao*, 1894.07.17.

### 3 · Clerical Enforcers of Regulations

Parishes and licenses from the Heavenly Master both made very good sense as systems for regulating vernacular priests. But, in actual practice, such regulating systems inevitably ran into all sorts of conflicts, and needed enforcers. In some cases, people might have gone directly to the magistrate's yamen, but the legal validity of the local regulating systems was not waterproof. The natural recourse was rather the clerical officials.

The Qing clerical administration followed the Ming model.<sup>62</sup> The central Daoist administration, Daolusi 道錄司, its Buddhist equivalent, Senglusi 僧錄司,<sup>63</sup> as well as a Tibeto-Mongol equivalent (the Lama yinwuchu 喇嘛印務處) were headquartered at Peking, with eight clerics each, all ranked in the scales of civil service. There were local Daoist and Buddhist, as well as Divination 陰陽學 officials at each level of administrative geography: prefecture (*daoji* 道紀 – *senggang* 僧綱 – *zhengshu* 正術), subprefecture (*daozheng* 道正 – *sengzheng* 僧正 – *dianshu* 典術), and county (*daohui* 道會 – *senghui* 僧會 – *xunshu* 訓術).<sup>64</sup> These local clerical officials, however, were neither ranked nor paid. They were not provided with an office, either: they fulfilled their functions in the

<sup>62</sup> Goossaert, "Counting the Monks," 41-45. On the Daolusi in Beijing, see Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800-1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), pp. 59-62.

<sup>63</sup> On the late Qing Senglusi, see Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 136; Yang Jian 楊健, *Qing wangchao fojiao shiwu guanli* 清王朝佛教事務管理 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> A fourth parallel administration, devoted to medicine, *yixue* 醫學, existed alongside these three; Angela Ki Che Leung, "Organized Medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and Private Medical Institutions in the Lower Yangzi Region," *Late Imperial China*, 8.1 (1987): 134-166. I cannot explore here to what extent their practices of licensing doctors resembled those of Daoists, Buddhists, and diviners.



temple or monastery where they stayed — the Divination officials seem to have had their own office, though. The Qing statutes have it that each time a position was vacant, a competent cleric should be nominated from among the existing clergy. Actually, in many places, the position was attached to the abbotship of a major temple or monastery. Moreover, in the case of Daoists, the Daolusi administration doubled with that of the Zhang Heavenly Master on Longhushan who was nominally head of Daoism and also had Daoist officials under his command. In practice, some local Daoist officials also held positions in the Longhushan hierarchy and conducted their administrative and liturgical affairs with both local civil officials and the Longhushan.<sup>65</sup>

During the Qing period, it appears that in many places, and some local gazetteers admit it frankly, the positions were not filled and nobody cared about them, which points to sharp differences between counties, some with an established Buddhist and Daoist elite connected to the state, and other without such elites and channels between the vernacular clergy and the state. A survey of the Buddhist and Daoist officials listed in the administrative geographical section of the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (1725) shows that, of 1582 documented jurisdictions (counties, prefectures), 497 had a functioning local Daoist official<sup>66</sup> — among whom 59 were located in City God temples, and 20 in Eastern Peak temples 東嶽廟.<sup>67</sup> This proportion, at 31% for the whole empire, climbed as high as 55% for the combined provinces of Jiangsu, Anhui

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<sup>65</sup> "Ershi guanzhi 二氏官職," in Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869-1928), *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 1374.

<sup>66</sup> This is an underestimate, for several reasons (incomplete data in the source, and Daoist officials who were actually concurrently responsible for several jurisdictions).

<sup>67</sup> Even when the local Daoist official (if the position existed in practice) was not posted at the City God temple, the latter was still, in most cases, staffed by Daoists.

and Zhejiang. This shows that in richer Jiangnan, there was a larger pool of elite Daoists who could fill these offices and play intermediaries between local officials, local elites, and local populations. The proportion for Buddhist officials was higher, but the trend was the same.

The local Daoist officials were also required by law to control the behavior of local clerics but, in Qing practice, most officials felt competent enough to solve cases implicating clerics and temple affairs without referring at all to clerical authorities. Most litigation involving Daoists had to do with disputes around temple property, and accusations of immoral behavior on the part of temple managers (the lawsuits were as a rule initiated by members of the temple community); in a minority of cases, magistrates asked the local Daoist officials for their opinion but in any case adjudicated on their own — often but not systematically in favor of gentry claimants and against clerics. So Daoism enjoyed a low level of institutional independence, even though under usual conditions, temples and monasteries were left alone by officials. Officials very rarely intervened in the clerical communities, letting them be self-governed, unless a serious crime was reported; nomination to the position of manager of one of the largest temples usually required their approval, but cases where they actively participated in such processes are few and far between.

Unfortunately, no archive of the Daoist clerical administration exists, but newspaper reports allow us to glimpse into how local Daoist officials played a role in the control of vernacular clerics. I shall set aside here some of their roles, such as organizing rituals for the local state or dealing with temple managers' complaints about their resident clerics, in order to focus on the question of licensing and rights to perform. While it is not clear how systematically Buddhist and Daoist officials issued licenses 執照 to local priests, they occasionally did and

thus sorted out bona fide local priests from outsiders.<sup>68</sup> While the management of complex systems of rights for vernacular priests was largely a question of the Daoists negotiating between themselves, it often was the elite Daoists' role to adjudicate conflicting claims and disputes. For instance, an 1882 newspaper report discusses the Suzhou prefecture Daoist official who requested the Jiangsu governor's help in imposing his authority over home-based vernacular Daoists and his capacity to regulate their right to practice. According to this report, some amateur Daoists were performing rituals for people without taking payment (only meals), thus causing a loss of income for fully professional clerics; the Daoist official requested the governor to enforce his own regulation that "*huoju* Daoists are not allowed to take ritual jobs outside (their turf) 伙居道士不得在外包攬經懺." <sup>69</sup> Presumably, such local clerical officials (and there is no reason why Buddhist officials did not behave similarly), made vernacular priests pay for the right to exercise and a guarantee of their parish; occasional reports mention such financial pressure.<sup>70</sup>

Now, Buddhist and Daoist local officials were not the only part of the local administration in charge of controlling and licensing vernacular ritual specialists; this role was also played by another official, largely ignored in the scholarly literature but nonetheless important: the local Divination official (*yinyangxue* 陰陽學). In late Qing Jiangnan sources, notably the *Shenbao*, the *yinyangxue* official is described as being in charge of diviners but also itinerant Buddhists

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<sup>68</sup> "金陵瑣事," *Shenbao*, 1876.10.28 for Nanjing. The late imperial local state in all its forms systematically favored local clerics against outsiders.

<sup>69</sup> "嚴禁伙居," *Shenbao*, 1882.04.30.

<sup>70</sup> "沙市郵音," *Shenbao*, 1883.04.09.

and Daoists, spirit-mediums,<sup>71</sup> musicians, storytellers, and prostitutes<sup>72</sup> (indeed, successive Guangxu-period *yinyangxue* officials for Shanghai county indeed included Daoists and brothel managers; one condition was that they had to be locals). Here we find again the continuum of ritual/entertainment trades: people hired for family events such as weddings and funerals that we already met when discussing trades that had parishes (*mentu/menjuan*) above. While keeping in mind that many people combined several of these roles (Jiangnan vernacular Daoists being as a rule also musicians and actors, and quite often diviners as well), this also makes good sense of the fact that the Heavenly Master was himself supervising the *yinyangxue*.

The numerous *Shenbao* reports discussing the role of the *yinyangxue* officials in Shanghai and other places in Jiangnan show how the management of these ritual specialists was delegated to him: when local constables arrested a vagrant cleric or a spirit-medium they would send him to the *yinyangxue* official and considered the problem to have been dealt with. The *yinyangxue* official dealt with specialists basically by selling them licenses to practice. As a result, he could often act quite predatorily (meeting the same kinds of accusations of excessive fees leveled at the Zhang Heavenly Master); but, if he overplayed his hand and extorted too much money from ritual specialists, the latter filed charges against him at the magistrate's *yamen*, and the *yinyangxue* official could be sacked — the fine line between licensing and racketeering being in some cases

<sup>71</sup> Jiangnan area spirit-mediums are referred to in our sources (beside generic terms such as 巫覡), as 仙人, 跳童子, and 看香頭.

<sup>72</sup> Articles in *Shenbao*, 1880.10.02, 1881.03.05, 1885.01.28, 1886.04.23. In some cases, the Shanghai *yinyangxue* official tried to collect licensing fees from doctors ("設計劫人," *Shenbao*, 1886.07.10) and midwives ("敲詐被押," *Shenbao*, 1893.05.27), even though there was a separate administration for doctors.

somewhat blurred.<sup>73</sup> In 1881, the Shanghai magistrate sacked several *yinyangxue* officials in a row, all of them being denounced as extremely greedy.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the *yinyangxue* official routinely sent to the magistrate's *yamen* those ritual specialists who had not paid their due, and they would not be welcomed very warmly there.

At the same time (and as in the Heavenly Master's case), the *yinyangxue* official was not only collecting fees, but also enforcing orthodoxy, and we see him deferring to the *yamen* such cases as storytellers singing "immoral" pieces, clerics who opened *fodian*,<sup>75</sup> or spirit-mediums with (in his view) dubious practices. In 1892, the Taiwan prefectural *yinyangxue* official issued a proclamation aiming at separating the orthodox from the deviant and requiring all diviners and spirit-mediums to register with him, against a pledge to never again engage in deviant practices and, in exchange for that, his protection.<sup>76</sup> This is exactly the language and procedures used by the Heavenly Master and other Daoist officials. *Yinyangxue* officials acted on these principles, such as the Shanghai one who prevented ceremonies organized by spirit-mediums within Buddhist temples,<sup>77</sup> denounced temples that welcomed women overnight,<sup>78</sup> or disrupted the activities of a type of ritual scroll performers called *nian xianjuan* 念仙卷.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "鬻良為賤," *Shenbao*, 1886.10.04 (on a case where the *yinyangxue* official tries to extort protection money from a Buddhist monk he accuses of sexual misbehavior; see also several follow-up articles).

<sup>74</sup> Articles in *Shenbao*, 1881.01.10, 1881.03.05.

<sup>75</sup> Daoist and Buddhist officials were also active in the same role.

<sup>76</sup> "劍潭幻影," *Shenbao*, 1892.07.16.

<sup>77</sup> "佛力無邊," *Shenbao*, 1893.08.05.

<sup>78</sup> "稟禁寺院私建香會," *Shenbao*, 1905.11.17.

<sup>79</sup> "不僧不道," *Shenbao*, 1894.07.25.

Why the *yinyangxue* official was in charge of vagrant Buddhists and Daoists (and not only the local Buddhist and Daoist officials, even though they were also involved), and whether this was a common pattern or a singularity of the Shanghai area is unclear. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of his management of vernacular ritual specialists is his dealings with the spirit-mediums. The *yinyangxue* officials were prompt to denounce spirit-mediums to officials and to remind everyone that this was an illegal activity, but they also "managed" and thus protected them, creating a space for them to operate fully openly.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, while they were certainly among the most entrepreneurial and least corporately organized ritual specialists, spirit-mediums nonetheless shared concerns with the other ritual specialists; we even find attempts at defining "parishes" among Shanghai spirit-mediums, and the *yinyangxue* officials were involved in such arrangements. In one 1897 report, one spirit-medium accuses another of performing within his territory; they both go to the *yinyangxue* official, who checks his files and punishes the second who had not paid his license 票據.<sup>81</sup> In a similar dispute over territories, which ended up this time at the magistrate's yamen, the latter asked the spirit-mediums to show their license 執照 granted by the *yinyangxue* official.<sup>82</sup>

That ritual specialists should rule themselves with minimal intervention of local officials who mostly limited themselves to endorsing local people as headmen should not come as a surprise. This was how the vast majority of late imperial society was managed. Beggars, for instance, were organized along

<sup>80</sup> "押遷佛店," *Shenbao*, 1895.11.21, where the *yinyangxue* handymen protect a *fodian* run by a spirit-medium being investigated by the magistrate's runners.

<sup>81</sup> "妖巫互鬪," *Shenbao*, 1897.10.29.

<sup>82</sup> "閘北——妖術宜禁," *Shenbao*, 1909.09.23.

rather similar lines: they had exclusive territories, registered memberships, and rights to collect certain amounts from local shops (thus relying on negotiated, regular payments rather than occasional gifts or fees), in exchange for overall respect of commonly agreed rules, and for providing services to the local yamen (serving as occasional free labor, helping with policing the streets).<sup>83</sup> Beggar leaders did not have the official titles and status enjoyed by Daoist, Buddhist and Divination officials, but they played comparable intermediary and controlling functions. From a more economical perspective, we can also observe that late imperial Chinese local society tended to favor arrangements that limited competition and offered consumers and providers (in the largest sense, to include beggars who offered protection against wanton annoyances) regular long-term payments in exchange for an encompassing guarantee to deliver services, rather than open competition and segmented transactions. Systems such as parishes limited competition between clerics or temples of the same tradition (certainly the most acute form of competition), but other rules limited competition between different types of clerics, such as "Buddhists do not do *jiao* 醮 (for temple communities), Daoists do not do funerals."<sup>84</sup> Judging from the current highly commercialized society such as 2012 China, where ritual and other services are purchased on a one-off, individual basis, where customers take advantage of competition between providers at every occasion, this seems rather counter-intuitive, but it must have been effective at ordering society, and bringing the benefit of ritual services across society, including the poorer classes.

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<sup>83</sup> Lu Hanchao, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially chap.5.

<sup>84</sup> (*Tongzhi*) *Anji xianzhi* (同治) 安吉縣志 (1874), 7.6a, which mentions this rule together with the parish system.

## 4 • Republican Changes

We have seen that the late Qing management and regulation (both top-down and locally negotiated) of vernacular ritual specialists in Jiangnan, as well as some other parts of China, was characterized by complex systems where ritual labor was divided between a large array of specialists, each having customary rights and duties, notably within parishes where they enjoyed a monopoly. While the local state did not expressly recognize these rights, and actually nominally outlawed some of these specialists (notably spirit-mediums), local officials chose to delegate the management of these systems (which they probably often did not understand well anyway) to clerical officials, notably local Buddhist, Daoist, and Divination officials, the last two categories being themselves under the higher authority of the Heavenly Master. These officials ran their own licensing procedures and enforced rights and duties, in a grey, semi-official arena.

Changes to such regulations of vernacular ritual specialists during the Republican period arrived from several directions. First, institutional changes wiped out the grey, semi-official arena by eliminating the licensing agencies. Buddhist and Daoist local officials were dismissed overnight with the advent of the Republican regime. Their role was to some extent gradually taken over by the new Buddhist and Daoist associations that appeared as early as spring 1912. But, these associations often had an elitist, reformist outlook that was altogether hostile to vernacular priests, much more so than the traditional elites (such as the Heavenly Master administration officials) who had a clear sense of hierarchy but wanted to encompass vernacular priests in their ordering of society, not ban them.<sup>85</sup> The power of the Heavenly Master to license clerics also declined,

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<sup>85</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "Republican Church Engineering: The National Religious Associations



because he was no longer affiliated with the state, even though the 62<sup>nd</sup> Heavenly Master Zhang Yuanxu and then his son Zhang Enpu 張恩溥 (1904-1969, titled 63<sup>rd</sup> Heavenly Master in 1924) were very active in and around Shanghai during the Republican period, where they personally ordained large numbers of local Daoists.<sup>86</sup> They also headed a series of Daoist associations in the Jiangnan area, but I have not been able so far to find evidence of how these associations went about licensing local clerics, besides the mere fact of issuing membership cards.

The office of *yinyangxue* officials was also closed down (as early as 1910 in Jinshan county, near Shanghai), thus dispensing with the traditional buffer between vernacular ritual specialists and the state. When the Baoshan (also near Shanghai) county assembly voted to disband the *yinyangxue* office in 1912, it linked the decision to its drive to eradicate spirit-mediums, basically equating the two.<sup>87</sup> By contrast to the situation of Buddhists and Daoists, no modern association emerged to take over the role of the imperial-era Divination official; diviners did attempt to organize, but certainly did not want to have any truck with spirit-mediums. In many districts, local assemblies required *yinyangxue* officials to hand over to the local police their lists of spirit-mediums;<sup>88</sup> they also required lists of temples and clerics from the Buddhist and Daoist officials before dismissing them. None of this was much used, presumably, and while serious

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in 1912 China," in *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 209-232.

<sup>86</sup> Zhu Jianming & Tan Jingde, *Shanghai Nanhuixian Zhengyi pai*, p.73; Chen Yaoting, "Shanghai daojiao shi," 413-15; Wang & Goossaert, eds., *Jindai Zhang tianshi shiliao huibian*.

<sup>87</sup> "示諭各市鄉文(禁止巫覡造謠及陰陽學藉詞索費)," *Baoshan gonghe zazhi* 寶山共和雜誌, 4, 1912, 31.

<sup>88</sup> Articles in *Shenbao* on 1910.07.06, 1910.08.03, 1910.09.28, 1910.10.19, 1910.11.08, 1912.09.10.

census of temples would begin in 1928, no census of vernacular ritual specialists was ever done as far as I am aware. Thus, the years 1910-1912 witnessed a rather brutal shift from a model where intermediaries (Buddhist, Daoist, and Divination officials) managed the local religious scene, to one where the new institutions (police forces, civil affairs bureaus of cities and counties) were supposed to take over, but without the inner knowledge their predecessors had. As a result, it is probably fair to say that spirit-mediums and other vernacular ritual specialists were less regulated during the Republican-period than before; without any regulating institution between them and a hostile local state, they just laid low and developed freely. Various descriptions also hint at increased competition among vernacular Buddhist and Daoist priests.

Changes in attitudes were as important as changes in institutions. Vernacular ritual specialists bore the brunt of the anti-superstition campaigns. It is not the place here to retell this larger story,<sup>89</sup> but I would like to draw attention to several campaigns of eradicating *huoju* Daoists. In 1930s Guangzhou, the local government twice attempted to ban them as not religious but merely "superstitious" workers: the Daoist association (managed by celibate, monastic Daoists) offered no support, and they had to create their own ad hoc association to unite and petition the government explaining that they were real Daoists. They explained that they were formerly licensed by the Heavenly Master through the main central temple (and seat of the local Daoist official) in the city, the Xuanmiaoguan 玄妙觀; but this temple was turned into a school

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<sup>89</sup> Vincent Goossaert & David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Poon Shuk-wah 潘淑華, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China: State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900-1937* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011); Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009).

soon after 1912, and the elite Daoists that thus protected vernacular priests had disappeared<sup>90</sup> — a story found in many other places.

There was also specific hostility among Republican-period elites to the local modes of regulation that characterized the late Qing. To be sure, late imperial officials perpetually oscillated between supporting elite Buddhists and Daoists and disclaiming all their efforts at self-management. When local elites alerted them to parish systems, they tended to take a dim view of it. For instance, the Huian (Quanzhou area) magistrate struck down, in a proclamation dated 1909 and prompted by protests of local gentry, all Daoist claims over territorial monopolies.<sup>91</sup> Such hostility of local officials and elites to territorial monopolies further increased under the Republican regime. For instance, during the Republican period, Daoist territorial monopolies were specifically targeted by local authorities in Wuhan.<sup>92</sup> In Baoshan, just north of Shanghai, the county assembly voted in 1912 to ban all *mentu* for ritual specialists, musicians, and female servants.<sup>93</sup> The decree enacting this ban specifically related it to anti-superstition campaigns and reforms to wedding and other family rituals; it said that while the legislator's hope was for the ritual specialists to eventually disappear, present laws did not allow for an outright suppression of ritual professions, but at least it guaranteed that citizens were free to hire, or *not* hire, whomever they chose.<sup>94</sup> The decree further claimed that *mentu* rights were linked

<sup>90</sup> Lai Chi-tim, "Minguo shiqi Guangzhou shi" and *Guangdong difang daojiao*, chap.5.

<sup>91</sup> Zheng Zhenman 鄭振滿 & Kenneth Dean 丁荷生, comp., *Fujian zongjiao beiming huibian: Quanzhou fu fence* 福建宗教碑銘彙編·泉州府分冊 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2004, 3 vols), #782.

<sup>92</sup> Mei Li, "Cong Minguo nianjian Hankou sici dengji."

<sup>93</sup> (*Minguo*) *Baoshanxian xuzhi* (民國) 寶山縣續志 (1921), 5:9b-10a.

<sup>94</sup> "覆議永革禮人樂人女引等門圖刪去拘罰字樣案移文," *Baoshan gonghe zazhi* 寶山共和雜誌, 6, 1913, 131.

to the corvee duties 當差 that these ritual specialists were obligated to perform for the local magistrate when the latter was going out in an official capacity — such, presumably, as musicians having to accompany the magistrate and play at official functions for free, in exchange of which they could enjoy recognized *mentu* rights over a section of the local population. The whole imperial system (including official rituals and corvee labor) being gone, so should the *mentu* go.

The attitude of the clerical associations was more complex. In some places, local branches of the Daoist associations maintained the "old rules": we have seen that the Suzhou association in a 1937 ruling banned Daoists without a *mentu* from performing. Similarly, in its 1937 charter, the Yueqing county (just north of Wenzhou) Daoist association made it compulsory for Daoists to respect the *mentu* and qualified as an offense to cross boundaries.<sup>95</sup> As during the Nanking decade, these local Buddhist and Daoist associations had taken a real role in a corporatist approach to managing local society, we may assume that local authorities more or less endorsed this continuation of the Qing system (or did not care enough to actively intervene). But, by the 1990s, the Yueqing local government had listed the *mentu* among the "bad customs" to be eliminated, so as to "respect the choice of patrons."<sup>96</sup> Very interestingly, in the name of market freedom, the traditional regulations gave way to open competition.

Today, with the increasing vogue of recycling imperial models of governance, we witness to a certain extent a return of this idea that official Daoists and Buddhists holding positions in their respective associations are

<sup>95</sup> Archival document seen by Qi Gang, to whom I am very grateful. That the *mentu* system was common in the Wenzhou area is confirmed by a newspaper report who talks of the local Daoist official there who "had a very large *mentu*." "吹笙臺秋籟," *Shenbao*, 1895.10.05.

<sup>96</sup> "Yueqing shi daoxie jiaqiang dui Zhengyipai daoshi de guanli 樂清市道協加強對正一派道士的管理," *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教, 3 (1994): 12-13.

entrusted with licensing and controlling the vernacular priests in their locales (and indeed, to a certain extent, spirit-mediums who work with them) and that this need not be dealt with directly by local officials who have other priorities — unless the situation gets out of hand and foreigners become involved. Local branches of the Daoist association license vernacular priests by selling them membership cards and having them attend the occasional training session where they are given explanations about how to improve their practice; but, in some places (such as Suzhou), membership fees (and training) are not collected regularly, and ever less frequently as the association has more profitable sources of income elsewhere.

Such indirect rule of local society is unquestionably a long-lasting model. But the specifics of this model, with the end in many parts of Jiangnan of the religious territories, still need to be reinvented.